

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **18 September 2025**
By **Human Resources Manager**
Title of Report **Annual Human Resources and Health & Safety Report for the year 2024 - 2025**

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Note the update on the Authority's key work areas in Human Resources during 2024-25**
 - 2. Agree that it is satisfied that the Authority's Health and Safety activity over the last 12 months complies with its Health and Safety policy.**
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I. Introduction

- I.1 This report highlights key areas of work in Human Resources (HR) carried out in the year ending 31 March 2025, for the Policy and Resources Committee to note. The report also sets out the Authority's management of Health and Safety matters in the year ending 31 March 2025. As set out in the Authority's Health & Safety Policy it is Member's duty to ensure that health and safety is effectively managed throughout the organisation and to ensure that there are in place comprehensive corporate Health & Safety (H&S) policies and that their effective implementation is achieved. The Committee is invited to assure itself through this report of the effectiveness of the Authority's Health & Safety arrangements.
- I.2 The HR team are responsible for all of the organisation's HR and H&S activities, with payroll support from Brighton and Hove City Council and administration of the pension scheme by Hampshire County Council.
- I.3 The HR team also oversees the management of health and safety for the organisation, with strategic and best practice advice provided externally by our Health and Safety Consultant Jon Wayte, formerly the Advisor for the Peak District National Park Authority. Our internal NEBOSH qualified Health and Safety Advisor manages the day-to-day health and safety performance.
- I.4 The report covers:
 - Recruitment activity and turnover
 - Health and Safety
 - Wellbeing
 - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
 - Learning and Development
 - Working Together – HR with other National Park Authorities

- Priorities for 2025/2026
- 1.5 In addition to the area of work above, the HR team work closely and effectively with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and managers, playing a key role in all organisational issues and individual case management.
- 2. Recruitment activity and turnover**
- 2.1. As at 31 March 2025, the budgeted FTE for the Authority was 144. The SDNPA staff turnover rate was 7%, The average 2024/25 turnover rate for other National Park Authorities (NPAs) was 13%.
- 2.2. 10 employees left the organisation. The reasons given included retirement, personal circumstances, travelling and new job opportunities.
- 2.3. It is recognised the organisation’s size and structure limits the opportunities for career progression. To address this we have continued to introduce career grades where appropriate, continued investment in career development and training of staff. We have a successful full development package to grow and develop our own, particularly in Planning. This year we have been successful in recruiting to 5 vacant posts in Planning which, with the exception of 1 role (which remains on hold), are up to full complement.
- 2.4. In 2024/25, 25 appointments were made as follows:
- 7 permanent and temporary internal appointments, 5 of which have resulted in promotions and development opportunities. This includes a new Director post.
 - 18 external appointments - All other appointments were made following resignations, external funding for projects, retirement and internal promotions of existing staff. This includes the CEO and Interim Director recruitment.
- 2.5. We continue to work on improving and developing our recruitment processes, through development of our Applicant Tracking System as well as the wider recruitment process. Recruiting of posts is primarily done via a tailored approach. Adverts are placed directly on the SDNPA website, social media and targeted external sites. This method delivers a successful cost-effective way of recruiting, which avoids inflated hourly rates or finders fees that agency recruitment would incur.
- 2.6. To enhance this tailored approach to advertising, we work with an advertising agency “Web Recruit”, as part of the wider Working Together Project across all National Parks where 14 National Park Authorities are using this service. Web Recruit provides data driven advice on where to advertise, as well as coordinating social media campaigns on platforms such as LinkedIn.
- 2.7. Posts within the Senior Leadership Team have been made using a recruitment agency to ensure the following:
- Critical posts are filled in a timely manor
 - maximum reach by conducting “headhunting”, alongside advertising, which reaches out to high performers / passive candidates who might not be actively considering a career move
 - Candidate management
 - Robust vetting of candidates
 - Support promoting diversity
- 2.8. SDNPA offers a wide range of benefits as part of its employment package:
- Local government pension scheme

- Health cash plan that also includes counselling and wellbeing discounts
 - Access to Health and Wellbeing portal and webinars
 - 27 days annual leave, increasing to 30 days, plus bank holidays
 - Professional development
 - Flexible working
 - Cycle to work scheme
 - Car sharing
 - Use of pool cars for official business
 - Regular staff events / activities, which support the SDNPA's Purposes and Duty
- 2.9. These benefits support SDNPA in attracting candidates by demonstrating it's an employer of choice, as well as helping to retain existing staff.
- 2.10. Work on two additional staff benefits has commenced. There is an Electric Vehicle Salary Sacrifice Scheme and Heat Scheme, which will be a capped interest-free green home improvement loan, available to staff on a first-come, first-served basis. These are expected to come into effect from April 2025.

3. Health and Safety

- 3.1. The Health and Safety (H&S) Policy sets out how the Authority will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the provision of a safe and healthy workplace and working environment for employees and appointed volunteers and as far as is reasonably practicable to ensure the health, safety and welfare of members of the general public and anyone else who may be affected by the activities of the Authority. The policy includes the key responsibilities for H&S at the SDNPA and the framework for managing H&S.
- 3.2. The Authority continues to place importance on ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of its staff, volunteers, contractors and the public who engage with our sites and services. Our approach is guided by compliance with statutory health and safety requirements and by the implementation of the authority's own health & safety policies, risk assessments and training. The compliance has been evidenced through the health and safety audit carried out by Brighton & Hove, which provided a substantial assurance rating. This outcome provides the Committee with assurance that the Authority is compliant with its statutory obligations and that a robust system of monitoring and improvement is in place.
- 3.3. South Downs National Park Authority continues to be supported by Jon Wayte, the former Peak District National Park Authority Health and Safety Advisor, who now acts as an external consultant. His ongoing involvement ensures we receive strategic and operational guidance and remain up to date with legislative changes and best practice. Jon regularly attends our Health and Safety Committee, supports the work of the committee, and produces a quarterly H&S bulletin for staff.
- 3.4. Health and safety support to Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) has continued, including site visits, audits, and development of localised H&S arrangements. These audits assess the availability and quality of key documentation (e.g. risk assessments, COSHH records, safe systems of work) and inspect the physical working conditions, including fire safety, work equipment, vehicle use and PPE. Regular checks are also made on cleanliness and housekeeping standards across the site with the team.
- 3.5. Regular workplace audits also take place at the area offices and all audits typically take account of:
- Key safety related documentation are in place, including safety policies and associated procedures, COSHH assessments, safe working method statements and risk assessments, incident reports/records and follow-up/action reports.

- Physical conditions and work activities, which include workspaces, access and egress (safety and fire), building conditions, work equipment, vehicles and the use of PPE (personal protective equipment).
- 3.6. This year a key focus has been on the introduction of health surveillance for the ranger teams. These checks were introduced to ensure our ongoing compliance with the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 and Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005. Specifically, audiometric (hearing) testing and HAVS (Hand and Arm Vibration Syndrome) assessments were carried out. HAVS is a condition caused by regular and frequent use of hand-held power tools and can result in permanent damage to nerves, blood vessels, and joints. The assessments were conducted by an occupational health nurse, providing a professional and confidential service to staff. Results will be regularly monitored, and retesting will be scheduled as appropriate to ensure any health trends are identified and managed proactively. These checks support our efforts to identify and manage potential risks before they affect health, and feedback from staff has been positive.
 - 3.7. To support our Safeguarding Policy trained Designated Safeguarding Officers deliver training sessions to all staff members. These sessions aim to embed our safeguarding processes and policy across the board, ensuring that all staff are well-informed and capable of addressing safeguarding concerns. The training also provided a platform for staff to ask questions about safeguarding and understand how it could impact their day-to-day duties.
 - 3.8. Risk assessment reviews remain an essential part of our health and safety focus. This year, the review was aimed at tasks and tools across ranger teams. The assessments have been updated to reflect current working practices and to highlight any additional control measures required. These updated assessments are available on the intranet.
 - 3.9. In October/November 2024 SDNPA's internal audit team assessed our health and safety arrangements. We were pleased to receive a rating of **Substantial Assurance**, indicating that controls are well designed and operating effectively. Only minor recommendations were made, including strengthening contractor management procedures (by improving the recording of contractor inductions and formalising the process), updating our Health and Safety Policy to include a signed statement of intent from the CEO (completed), and exploring a benchmarking approach to compare our performance with similar organisations. Work on this is ongoing in collaboration with Jon Wayte, with engagement from other National Park Authorities.
 - 3.10. Quarterly Health and Safety Committee meetings continue to provide a strong governance framework. These meetings review incidents, near-misses and follow-up actions, and also consider items related to safeguarding and staff wellbeing. The Committee structure reflects the wider organisation, with representation from all directorates and key functions including HR, facilities, volunteers, OMT and UNISON. Reps gather feedback from staff and feed this into the committee for discussion and resolution. Several working groups have also been established following committee meetings.
 - 3.11. A new incident protocol was introduced at South Downs Centre (SDC) this year. It includes a rota system to ensure a designated duty manager and duty officer are present on site during working hours. This system is designed to support front-of-house staff in managing challenging or potentially threatening interactions with members of the public. Early feedback suggests this has provided reassurance and strengthened incident response capabilities.
 - 3.12. Reporting of incidents, near-misses and follow-up action continues to improve. An analysis of incidents recorded in 2024/25 can be found in appendix I. There was an increase in the number of incidents largely due to improved awareness and reporting practices. No incidents were reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), which indicates that while incidents do occur, they are of low severity.
 - 3.13. SDNPA has a positive health and safety culture, which is supported by the following:
 - The H&S Committee is chaired by a member of OMT.

- There is a health and safety standing item on the OMT agenda following the committee meetings. At these meetings, OMT support recommendations made by the H&S Committee.
 - Regular health and safety communication and reminders are sent to staff via Update and meeting minutes are publicised on the intranet.
 - Communication of H&S matters to all staff has been enhanced through the carousel on the intranet landing page, which is updated every quarter after each committee meeting to reflect the most relevant topics for all staff.
 - A standing health and safety item has been included at team meetings.
 - In the 2023 staff survey 95% of staff agreed that SDNPA keeps them safe as possible at work and we plan to roll out a further H&S survey to staff in 2025/26 to ensure that this positive view is maintained.
- 3.14. As in previous years, a substantial portion of the authority's budget for training was invested in job-specific Health & Safety training. This investment reflects our commitment to ensuring that all staff are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties safely and effectively.
- 3.15. To enhance the efficiency and management of training, we have implemented an automated system that keeps track of everyone's training records and sends reminders automatically. This system offered several benefits:
- Efficient tracking: By maintaining up-to-date records of all training activities, we can easily monitor staff compliance with required H&S training.
 - Forecasting training budgets: The automated system allows us to track future costs more accurately, facilitating better forecasting and allocation of the training budget.
 - Planning training sessions: The system enables us to plan the timing of training sessions, which can potentially save money for the authority, this way we can group sessions together, optimising resources and reducing costs.
- 3.16. To ensure the safety of our volunteers, all new volunteers receive H&S induction appropriate to their role and are directed to the content on this webpage: [Volunteer information - Safety \(google.com\)](#) and current volunteers attend any necessary H&S training. They are made aware of all relevant risk assessments during tasks by the ranger team and supplied with the correct Personal Protective Equipment. Any incidents are reported and monitored through the H&S committee meetings. These meetings are attended by the Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead.

4. Wellbeing

- 4.1. HR proactively monitor the recording of sickness absence and contact managers regularly to ensure that accurate recording has taken place.
- 4.2. Sickness data for 2024/25 can be found in appendix 2. Detailed absence statistics are reviewed by the Health and Safety Committee and reported to OMT every 6 months.
- 4.3. The organisation provides a high level of support to employees with health or mobility issues by working closely with the individual, their line-manager, our occupational health provider and Facilities. 'Reasonable adjustments' have been made in a number of cases, to support the individual, ensuring that they can continue to work well. Changes include to working hours, duties and the provision of specialist working equipment.
- 4.4. Our Health Cash Plan available to staff and Members offers a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits, resources and access to an employee assistance programme.
- 4.5. There is a dedicated health and wellbeing hub on the intranet with links to health and wellbeing resources and promotes health and wellbeing activities.
- 4.6. Health and Wellbeing training courses are available through ELMS for all staff and cover a wide range of topics, examples include: e-mail stress, bullying and harassment, drug and

alcohol awareness, stress management, healthy lifestyles, couch to 5k and building personal resilience.

- 4.7. Following the successful Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) training last year, we are now facilitating regular catch-up sessions for MHFAs to support each other and share ideas, strategies and activities to support staff with their wellbeing as well as developing the staff engagement programme. We have continued to monitor the number of trained MHFAs and are looking to train additional staff, particularly at OMT level in the coming year.
- 4.8. During Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2024, we arranged several activities and events for staff to network with colleagues and develop their wellbeing. Activities included Lunchtime outdoor games, a Ranger quiz, afternoon tea, wellbeing craft session, online tea break and a 'wear it green' day highlighting the importance of looking after your mental health. This year's topic was 'Moving more for our mental health' so activities also included several walks and a 5k run. As the week coincided with an All-Staff Event, we collaborated with the ASE team to enable more staff to access the activities.
- 4.9. We have placed high importance on ongoing communication with staff, by providing monthly wellbeing e-mails, highlighting wellbeing resources and tips for maintaining good mental health. This has also been well received and staff are engaged and sharing their own wellbeing ideas in the wellbeing hub.
- 4.10. We have hosted a number of external professionals to run Lunch & Learn sessions on topics such as Neurodiversity and Hearing Loss. Other events included a screening of a film on Soil Health. These sessions are not only informative but bring staff together for networking opportunities and were followed up with additional information in our monthly wellbeing Wednesday communications. Other topics covered in these emails were stress management, men's and women's health, sleep, heart health and eating disorders.
- 4.11. Other events during the year included My Whole Self Day where we celebrated differences and connections and Mental Health Awareness Day where staff had an opportunity to meet some of the MHFAs during an afternoon tea break with cake.
- 4.12. Work is progressing to set up a new Culture and wellbeing group. This group will replace the former Wellbeing group and Culture and change group and will lead on staff wellbeing events and activities as well as considering matters related to the culture and values of the organisation. The first meeting is scheduled for May 2025.
- 4.13. There is a standing Health and Wellbeing item at all Health and Safety Committee Meetings and at all team meetings.

5. **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

- 5.1. Towards the end of 2024/25, on 20 February 2025 we presented a report to the P&R Committee – "Diversifying the SDNPA workforce through the Recruitment Process". This report focussed on the following:
 - Challenges we face in being able to recruit a more diverse workforce relating to the protected characteristic of race
 - Work carried out in 2024/25 to attract a more diverse pool of candidates
 - Ensuring that the selection process is robust, impartial and avoids any bias
 - Further initiatives to be explored in 2025/26.
- 5.2. At this meeting the Committee noted the challenges to the Authority diversifying its workforce and endorsed the Authority's commitment to diversifying its workforce and the actions set out in this report. The Committee report is attached at **Appendix 3** and details work that has formed an important part of our EDI work in 2024/25.

- 5.3. At the end of 2024/25 we have started to work closely with our Comms and Engagement team to review the recruitment page on our website. In 2025/26 we will be publishing a more accessible web page that will contain a wealth of information about the recruitment process to make the application process as easy and transparent as possible and to ensure that all applicants know what to expect during the application and selection process, that will benefit all applicant, particularly neurodivergent candidates.
- 5.4. Historically our data monitoring of applicants has included gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and age, this has now been expanded to also include other protected characteristics (see appendix 4 for current demographics and appendix 5 for EDI data collected for applicants and successful candidates).
- 5.5. The data in appendix 5 is monitored to ensure that there isn't a significant discrepancy in the characteristics of people who have applied for posts and those who are appointed. We have reviewed how we collect recruitment data annually. 2024/25 data showed an increase in applicants and appointed candidates who declared a disability but there was only a small increase overall in diversity. We however hope that the initiatives we reported in appendix 3 will make a positive impact in increasing diversity over the next few years.
- 5.6. During their induction all new staff are now signposted to our mission statement on our website and our EDI Policy. They are also required to complete our e-learning EDI module.
- 5.7. To attract a wider range of applicants, to support our staff and promote a better work-life balance, we have adopted blended (or hybrid) working which allows staff to work from home, the offices and other remote locations. We have suitable IT systems to enable remote working and participation in video conferencing and webinars and provided laptops to all staff. We have moved to a more flexible working day that is not limited to traditional working hours.
- 5.8. We have an EDI hub on our intranet so that staff can access learning resources and webinars. This also includes a "knowledge nugget" section where staff can share experiences and broaden the knowledge of their colleagues.
- 5.9. We have an EDI Steering Group with staff from all levels of the organisation and a Member representative, Melanie Hunt. This is a really useful forum for staff to share ideas and any concerns can also be shared confidentially through the Employee Forum.
- 5.10. We have introduced mandatory training through an EDI digital learning platform consisting of change programmes that will drive employees and members to take positive actions to improve diversity and inclusion at SDNPA. Employees and Members obtain feedback into how inclusive they are personally, using a suite of digital diagnostic tools. This feedback generates a personalised action plan for users to follow and in doing so embeds inclusive behaviours at work, ensuring colleagues are valued, respected and feel that they belong.
- 5.11. Not only do learners receive personalised feedback about their strengths and areas for development, but with built-in analytics, we will be able to gain insight into the inclusion strengths and risk areas at SDNPA which will be valuable in identifying any future training needs.

6. Learning and Development

- 6.1. The organisation's learning and development plan includes health and safety, core skills and role specific training. Training was delivered through a combination of virtual and 'in person' events as this model has shown to be successful since the pandemic.
- 6.2. In 2024/25 core skills training included:
 - Bullying and Harassment/Unacceptable behaviours training for all staff
 - Safeguarding awareness training for all staff
 - Assertiveness Skills
 - Building Personal Resilience
 - Presentation Skills

- Report Writing
- Time-management
- Management training for all staff with a line management responsibility continued from the previous year
- Inclusive Teams and Inclusive Leader training provided by Pearn Kandola, also continued from the previous year
- Planning for non-planners
- Carbon Literacy

6.3. We continue to modify all courses so that they are relevant to our organisation and signpost staff to SDNPA specific policies and procedures.

6.4. We have successfully delivered on line workshops to all staff to embed new policies. Safeguarding training has been rolled out to all staff and this year we ran training sessions on how to deal with unacceptable behaviour and sexual harassment. This was to support our revised Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy and the new duty under the Equality Act 2010 will require employers to take “reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment of their employees. It was delivered by a training consultant with a strong background in conflict resolution with ACAS and the HR Manager. It was really well received by staff with very positive feedback given. Staff commented on the positive approach of SDNPA in supporting staff and not tolerating any incidents of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. Staff also felt confident in how to identify and report such incidents.

6.5. The following table shows the number of days’ training carried out in 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. The average number of days offered to staff in 2023/24 was 3.2 days per employee which is similar to the previous year despite the increase in the cost of training.

Year	Core Skills	Role Specific	Health & Safety	Total no of days	Average no of days per employee
In 2022/23	69.5 days	135.5 days	116.5 days	321.5 days	2.2 days
In 2023/24	263 days	60 days	154.5 days	477.5 days	3.4 days
In 2024/25	230.5	89 days	169 days	488.5 days	3.2 days

6.6. In addition, the organisation also supported several employees through professional development and further education courses and funded professional memberships for 33 employees.

6.7. A substantial share of the training budget is allocated to health and safety training, which is monitored and implemented within the HR team, by the Health and Safety Advisor. This year Health and Safety training included Manual Handling courses at both the SDC and SSCP as well as enabling 37 employees to be qualified first aiders.

6.8. Our e-learning system ELMS which was designed by SDNPA and introduced in 2017, has proven to be useful resource whilst staff were working remotely. ELMS houses a comprehensive induction programme, ensuring that all information is easily accessible, and all key training is covered by new starters.

6.9. Last year a certification reminder system was implemented on ELMs ensuring when Health and Safety courses are due to expire, the employee and their manager are given three months to arrange refresher training – this has proved successful with outstanding training being reduced.

6.10. A programme of certification reminders and monthly certification reports is being set up for all ELMs required learning and staggered throughout the year so as not to become

overwhelming for staff, so far these include:

- Data Protection Essentials
- Fire Safety
- Cyber Security
- ICT User Policy

- 6.11. ELMS is being utilised by all 15 National Park Authorities. This has allowed us to share training resources with the other NPAs and has also greatly reduced the licence costs for each NPA.
- 6.12. An ELMS external working group with representatives from the other National Park Authority has also been set up to share ideas.

7. Working together with other National Park Authorities

- 7.1. The SDNPA HR team works closely with the other National Park Authorities, and during 2024/25 we have attended quarterly meetings with the HR managers of all other National Park Authorities. There are also online and e-mail communication tools in place to share policies, practices, issues and ideas.
- 7.2. The NPAs share some HR services across all UK parks which has a joint benefit in respect of both cost savings and cross organisational understanding.
- 7.3. Our e-learning system ELMS which is being used by all 15 National Park Authorities, led by SDNPA continues to be the most successful example of a shared service. A majority of the Parks are also using the system to train and induct their volunteers.
- 7.4. We also use Web Recruit, a shared approach to recruitment advertising and most recently led the initiative to provide a Health and well-being platform that is being used by all the NPAs and which is now incorporated into our E-Learning System.

8. Priorities and actions for 2025/26

Key Priorities for HR in 2025/26 include:

- Reintroduction of apprenticeship programme;
- Health and Safety Survey and resulting action plan;
- Continue developing our recruitment strategy to ensure that our recruitment process is inclusive;
- Review of Induction Process;
- Line Manager guidance to ensure consistency and good communication;
- New Pay Policy;
- Continuing review of HR Policies and Procedures; and
- Embed new culture and wellbeing group to build on our existing work in promoting internal health and well-being.

9. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No

Implication	Yes*/No
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Delivery of an efficient HR service contributes to the effective running of the organisation and the Authority overall, achieving value for money.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	Human Resources and Health & Safety supports work across all PMP and Corporate Plan Objectives
Links to other projects or partner organisations	NA
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	NA
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	There are no social value implications in this paper
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	<p>The HR function delivers an equalities act compliant services through recruitment, training and workplace adjustments. We have an equalities policy and all staff completed the Equality and Diversity ELMS training module.</p> <p>The Authority focuses on protecting the health, safety and welfare of <i>all</i> staff, members and volunteers. Reasonable adjustments are made to provide a safe working environment for all, through regular DSE assessments provision of necessary work place equipment and dynamic risk assessments. Reasonable adjustments will be made for individuals with disabilities with advice from occupational health.</p>
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Human Rights implications in this paper
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Crime & Disorder implications in this paper.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	The health and safety work that has been carried out and our future health and safety plans take into account the latest health and safety legislation and guidance. The support provided by our external H&S Consultant allows us to adopt 'best practice' for NPAs
Are there any Data Protection implications?	The HR Team has due regard for the Data Protection Act 2018 and all collection and processing of personal data is compliant

10. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

There are no risks arising directly from this paper although key HR risks are captured in the corporate risk register.

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Appendices: Appendix 1. Data analysis for incidents 2024/25
Appendix 2. Data analysis for sickness absence 2024/25
Appendix 3. Paper submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee on 20 February 2025 - Diversifying the SDNPA Recruitment Process
Appendix 4. EDI Demographics of SDNPA employees – 2024/25
Appendix 5. EDI statistics – Recruitment in 2024/25
SDNPA Consultees: Chief Executive; Director of Planning; Director of Landscape and Strategy; Director of Growth and Organisational Development; Head of Finance and Corporate Services; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services
External Consultees: Health and Safety Consultant – National Parks Safety Service
Background Documents: [2022/23 Annual Human Resources and Health & Safety Report submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee by the HR Manager in July 2023 \(Report PR23/24-06 page 141 Agenda item 14\)](#)
[2023/24 Annual Human Resources and Health & Safety Report submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee by the HR Manager in September 2024 \(Report PR24/25-05 page 159 Agenda item 13\)](#)
[Diversifying the SDNPA workforce through the Recruitment Process paper submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee by the HR Manager in February 2025 \(Report PR24/25-22 page 167 Agenda item 12\)](#)

Data analysis for incidents 2024/25

This analysis focuses on incidents that occurred during 2024/25 across all areas of SDNPA and compares this data with previous years, it also highlights notable trends across 7 years of data.

A total of 51 health and safety-related incidents were reported across the organisation during the period from April 2024 to March 2025. This includes 36 accidents and 15 near-miss incidents. This figure represents a slight increase compared to previous years, largely due to improved awareness and reporting practices. This total represents a 38% increase from previous year.

Near misses have remained relatively stable in recent years, with a slight increase from 13 to 15 this year. The data suggests a need for ongoing promotion of near miss reporting and because of that, encouraging a stronger reporting culture around near misses remains a key area of focus, as it helps identify and mitigate risks before harm occurs.

Year	Total number of incidents	Number of accidents	Number of near misses
2018/19	67	49	18
2019/20	57	39	18
2020/21	28	6	22
2021/22	34	23	11
2022/23	39	28	11
2023/24	37	24	13
2024/25	51	36	15

Fig 1 Table showing accidents Vs Incidents for the last 7 years

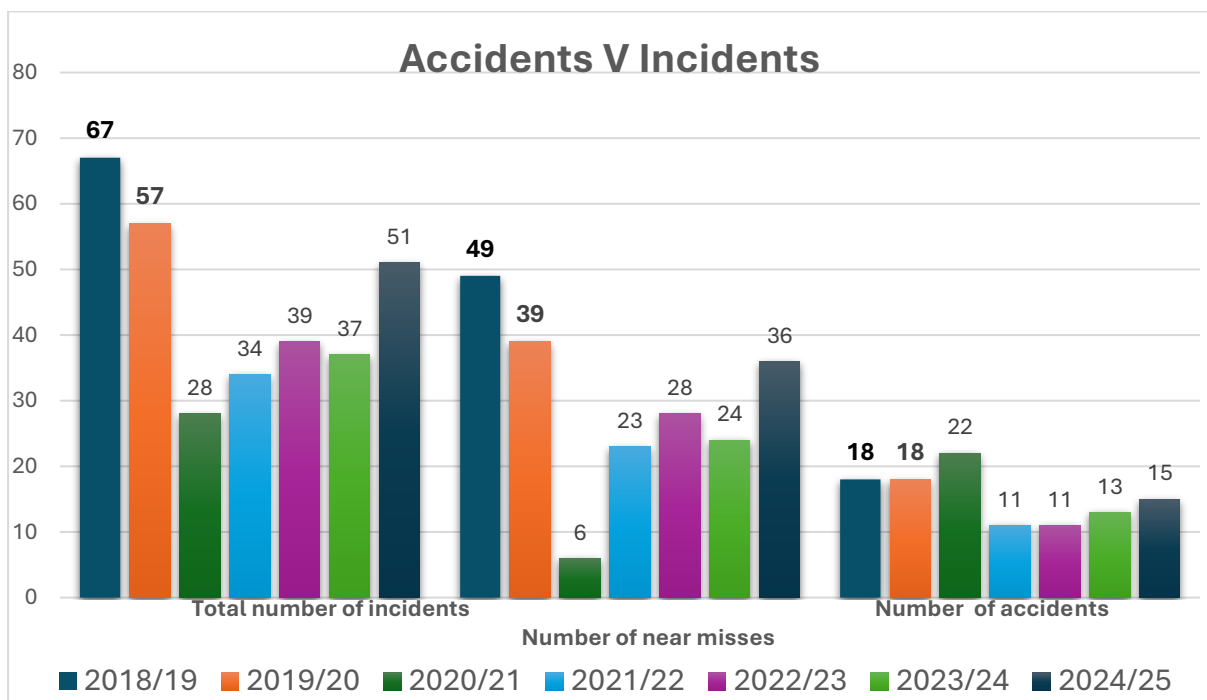


Fig 2. Bar chart displaying accidents Vs Incidents for the last 7 years

When examining the breakdown by incident type, slips, trips and falls, cuts and grazes, and SDNPA vehicle damage were the most commonly reported type of incidents. These categories remain

broadly consistent with patterns seen in prior years, though each saw a slight increase compared to 2023/24.

The “Other” category include a small number of sensitive or complex events, for which we maintain confidentiality while ensuring robust internal response. While specific details cannot be shared, these incidents highlight the range of challenges staff may encounter. We continue to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place and that staff involved receive the necessary guidance and support required.

The two recorded incidents of break-ins and stolen property underline the need for ongoing assessment of site security, particularly at more remote workshop locations. In response, measures have already been taken to enhance on-site security, including the installation of a barrier to restrict access via secluded routes. We continue to work closely with Brighton and Hove City Council to identify further opportunities for improvement at the affected site.

The two recorded incidents of verbal abuse reinforce the importance of equipping staff with the skills and confidence to manage challenging interactions. In response, SDNPA provided training sessions covering bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment and also handling aggressive and challenging customers. This training forms part of our wider commitment to supporting staff wellbeing and ensuring a respectful, safe working environment for all.

Overall, while the increase in recorded incidents may initially seem concerning, it likely reflects a combination of improved reporting culture and a greater number of interactions with the public. The consistency in types of incidents compared with previous years suggests that our key risk areas remain broadly the same, and that ongoing preventative work, particularly around manual handling, slips/trips, lone working, and vehicle safety, remains a priority.

Type of incident	Number of incidents
Near miss	15
Slips/Trips/Falls	5
Bumps/bruises	3
Heat stroke	1
Verbal Abuse	2
Strain/Sprain	3
Cuts/Grazes	5
Minor burns	4
Damage to property (non vehicles)	1
Ill health (faint)	1
Damage to property (vehicles)	5
Other	4
Break in/stolen SDNPA property	2
Total	51

Fig 3. Table showing number of incidents reported per type

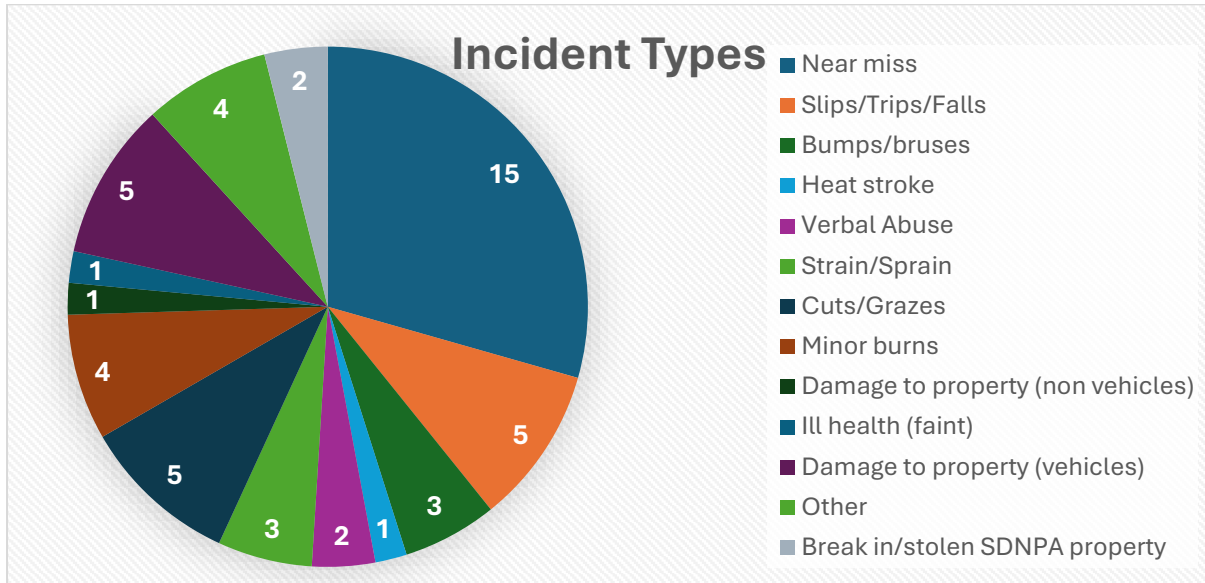


Fig 4 Pie chart - Incidents by type

In terms of the distribution of incidents across the organisation, it reveals a concentration of reports in Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) and South Downs Centre – (SDC). SSCP recorded the highest number of incidents at 19, accounting for over one-third of all reports (37%). These figures likely reflect both higher footfall and operational activity levels in these locations, as well as the diverse nature of work carried out, including public interaction, given that most of the reported incidents for that area were related to members of the public. It is worth noting that these incidents are not examples of staff actions creating risk but instead reflect our increased presence and visibility in a ever more popular location such as SSCP, where staff are readily available to provide help. In many ways, these figures can be seen as a positive indicator of public engagement and operational responsiveness.

The Eastern Downs reported 11 incidents, while significantly fewer incidents occurred in the Western Downs (4), and Central Downs (2). This variation may suggest differences in work activity, staffing levels, or reporting practices.

Area	Number of incidents
Eastern Downs	11
Western Downs	4
Central Downs	2
SDC - Midhurst	15
SSCP	19
Total	51

Fig 5 Table showing number of incidents reported per area

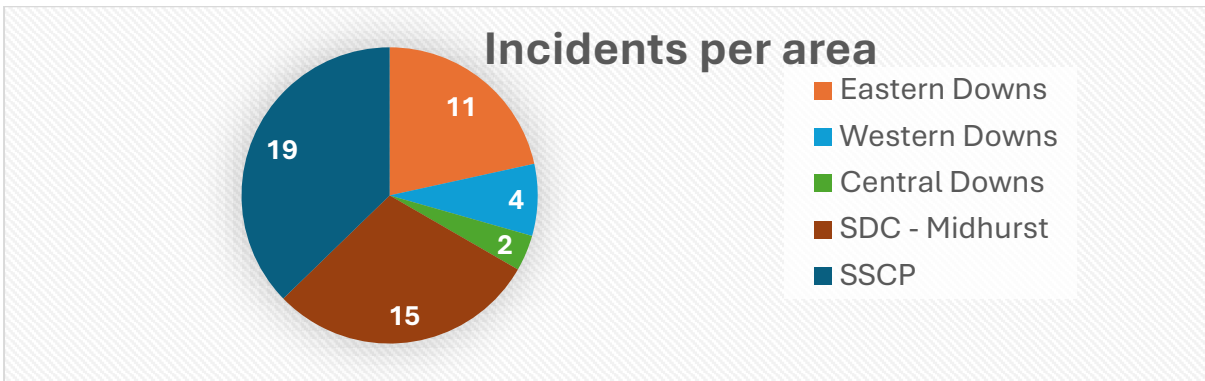


Fig 6. Number of incidents reported per area

Out of the 51 recorded incidents this year, the majority (33) involved employees, representing approximately 65% of all reports. This is consistent with previous years and reflects the day-to-day exposure of staff engaged in operational roles and visitor-facing

Volunteers accounted for 5 incidents (10%), a relatively low proportion, which may reflect either a lower exposure to hazards or potential underreporting. Ongoing encouragement of incident reporting among volunteers remains important to ensure risks are appropriately managed and addressed.

The ‘Other’ category which includes members of the public, contractors and members, accounted for 13 incidents (25%). As previously highlighted, a significant number of these occurred at Seven Sisters Country Park, particularly by members of the public.

The high volume and footfall at SSCP inevitably increase the likelihood of such minor incidents. This reinforces the importance of maintaining visible staff presence, good signage, preventative maintenance, and clear public guidance to reduce risks to visitors. This data also underscores the dual responsibility the authority holds, not just for its workforce but also for safeguarding members of the public.

Status	Number of incidents
Employee	33
Volunteer	5
Other (includes members, contractors and public)	13
Total	51

Fig 7. Table showing number of incidents reported per status

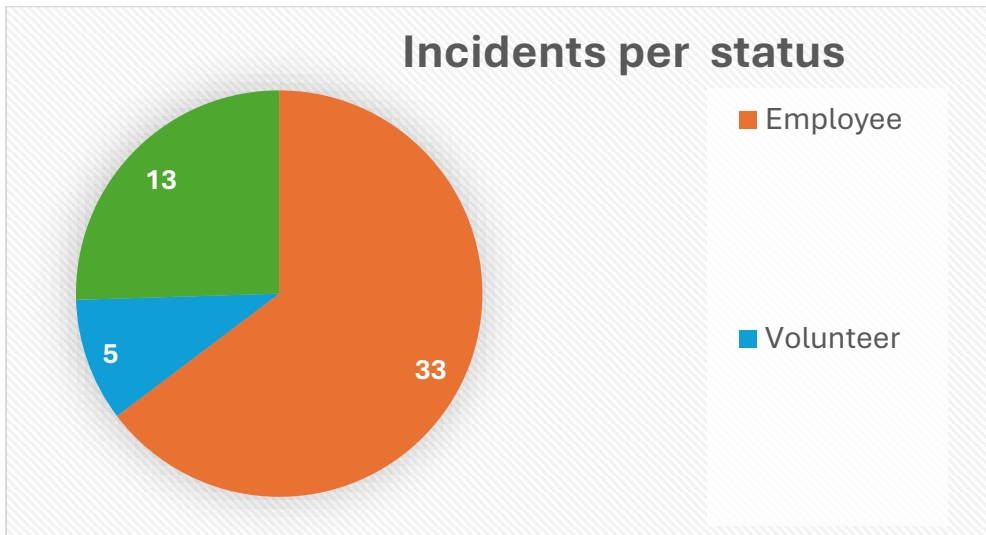


Fig 8. Pie chart showing number of incidents per status

Considering the nature of the SDNPA’s work, which encompasses a wide range of outdoor and potentially hazardous activities including the use of power tools, working at height, lone working, and manual handling, the total number of reported incidents this year (51) remains proportionally low. This is particularly notable given the varied roles across the Authority and the ongoing operational pressures across multiple teams.

When viewed in the context of the total work hours, the scope of tasks, and the public-facing nature of many activities, the incident rate demonstrates a strong and proactive safety culture. Importantly, no incidents were reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), which indicates that while incidents do occur, they are generally of low severity. This continued absence of RIDDOR reportable events is a positive reflection of the effectiveness of our current safety procedures and the awareness demonstrated by staff and volunteers alike.

Data analysis for sickness absence 2024/25

In 2024/25 there has been an overall increase in sickness absence but this has been affected by a few members of staff with significant periods of long term absence. Short term absence levels overall have remained fairly consistent over the last 4 years.

The table below (table 1) shows average number of days sickness over the last 4 years.

Table 1 - average number of days sickness over the last 4 years

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Average no of days	4.48	4.5	4.3	5.7
Average no of days (exc long term)	3.53	3.3	2.5	3

The table reports average number of days including and excluding long-term absence (absence period lasting more than 4 weeks).

Table 2 below shows a comparison of sickness absence for SDNPA and other NPAs.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
SDNPA (av no of days)	4.48	4.5	4.3	5.7
NPAs (av no of days)	4	4.75	4.8	5.8

We have also included in the table below (table 3) details of sickness absence per illness over the last 4 years.

Table 3 – number of days lost to sickness absence over the last 4 years

Category of sickness	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Back and neck	18	6.5	<5	15.5
Allergic reaction	12	0	<5	<5
Surgery / medical appointments	<5	35	0	0
chest/respiratory	23	27	44	22
cough/cold	96	102	86	154
digestive/stomach	48	42	53	59.5
ear, eye, nose and mouth	14	<5	24	34.5
Genito-urinary	31	<5	0	8

Category of sickness	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
headache/migraine	16.5	24	18	19.5
Heat Exhaustion	0	0	0	0
Musculo-skeletal	78	31	133	5.5
non-work related injury	0	31.5	0	<5
Other	34.5	20	8	0
Major illness (e.g. cardiac/MS/ME)	<5	27.5	94	237
Pregnancy-related	<5	0	0	0.5
MH – Anxiety	15.5	0	59	14
MH - Depression	0	101.5	13	0
MH - non-work related stress	32	7.5	37	179
MH - work related stress	0	0	0	0
MH – fatigue	<5	1.5	0	0
Viral infection	13	14.5	7	32.5
work related injury	12	0	0	0
Covid	204	193	52	41.5
	658.5	667.5	630	826

Days lost to major illness and non-work related stress were high however, in all these cases, these numbers are increased by the circumstances of a limited number of individuals with long-term absences. In all cases they have been fully supported by the organisation.

There were no reported cases of work related stress on 2024/25.

Coughs, colds and gastric conditions continues to be the most commonly reported reason. There has been a significant increase this year in sickness recorded as coughs / colds. This could be caused by staff returning to work when they are still infected. There also may be cases of covid included in the reported figures as there is no longer the requirement to test so may not have been identified.

In response to this the issue was reported by the H&S committee to OMT and a message was communicated to all staff that no individual should come into the work place while they are infectious and, only if well enough to do so, should work from home to protect vulnerable staff and also staff with vulnerable relatives. This approach was fully supported by OMT.

Agenda Item 12**Report PR24/25-22**

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
 Date **20 February 2025**
 By **Human Resources Manager**
 Title of Report **Diversifying the SDNPA workforce through the Recruitment Process**

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to

- 1. Note the challenges to the Authority diversifying its workforce; and,**
- 2. Endorse the Authority's commitment to diversifying its workforce and the actions set out in this report.**

I. Introduction

- I.1 On 19 September 2024 the Policy and Resources Committee considered a report highlighting key areas of work in Human Resources (HR) carried out in the year ending 31 March 2024. The Committee discussed the recruitment process in relation to the lack of diversity of applicants as evidenced in the data provided in the report in September (see background document), particularly relating to the protected characteristic of race. This report presents a more in-depth consideration of the actions that have been or are being taken by the Authority to address the challenges in this area. Members of the committee are also invited to share their experiences of actions which have successfully furthered diversification of the workforce through recruitment.
- I.2 Diversifying the workforce through recruitment is only one aspect of the Authority's wider work in the area of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) which the Authority is committed to delivering on as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- I.3 In 2021, we began monitoring and reporting on our recruitment data as we identified this as an important issue and it now allows us to track our progress and success. Data is updated annually and will be presented to the committee in the next HR report in September 2025. **Appendix I** shows EDI data that we have been collecting over the past 3 financial years.
- I.4 Ensuring that our workforce is representative of wider society is a challenge facing all Protected Landscapes, and the environmental sector more broadly. This was noted at the English National Parks conference last year at Newcastle where the theme was equality diversity and inclusion.
- I.5 There are challenges we face in being able to recruit a more diverse workforce:
 - The field of applicants we are recruiting from and can realistically expect applications from lacks diversity, particularly in the characteristic of race.
 - Ensuring that advertised career opportunities are reaching a diverse field of applicants.
 - Ensuring a robust, impartial selection process that aims to eliminate potential bias.

- The Authority's workplace locations are difficult to access by public transport, requiring most staff to have their own vehicle which can limit the field of applicants for a role.
- 1.6 Taking into account these challenges, we have made significant changes to our recruitment process and procedures to encourage attracting and retaining more diverse employees.
- 1.7 It is worth noting that the Authority encourages and supports internal progression. Whilst this in no way guarantees internal applicants will be successful, it does often make them strong candidates. This means some vacancies will be filled by existing staff if they perform best within a competitive recruitment process.
- 1.8 It is also important to note that diversity should not only consider race but all protected characteristics outlined by the Equality Act 2010 and other groups e.g. socio-economic. The SDNPA workforce currently has varying levels of representation across all 9 protected characteristics and other groups. In recruitment during the last 12 months the Authority has been successful in attracting diverse candidates under a number of the protected characteristics, particularly the characteristics of sex, disability, age profile and sexual orientation.

2. Attracting a more diverse pool of applicants

2.1 We have already implemented the following to attract a more diverse pool of applicants:

- An Applicant Tracking System (ATS) which has a more accessible easier application process and replaces the need to complete an application form. This has already significantly increased number of applications
- Gender and ethnicity checking of language in adverts
- Our adverts include an EDI organisational statement, which promotes our approach to equality.
- A guaranteed interview scheme for applicants with a disability who meet the essential criteria for the post
- Adjustments are made to the interview process to accommodate applicants with physical and learning disabilities
- We offer virtual interviews
- Advertising of roles on the EDI platform "Diversifying"
- Advertising salary bands, benefits and that the Authority offers flexible working
- When using external recruitment agencies, we ensure diversity is a priority of their searching criteria
- We use a broad range of advertising media including national websites and social media to ensure our positions are advertised as widely as possible
- Recording and monitoring EDI data to support the evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken.

3. Ensuring that the selection process is robust, impartial and avoids any bias

3.1 We have made the following changes to our recruitment process:

- Person specifications are scrutinised to ensure there are no unnecessary requirements included, which could prevent or restrict those who can apply
- Introduction of anonymised applications on the ATS so that recruiting managers do not have access to personal information (e.g. name, age, photo).
- The Pearn Kandola Inclusive Leader and Teams training modules are mandatory for all staff and challenges unconscious bias
- We use a scoring framework at both the shortlist and interview stage which is linked to the requirements of the person specification

- Interview questions are role focused and competency based, with responses to interview questions and any tasks being scored to ensure all stages of the process are objective and measured fairly and consistently
- All candidates are asked the same questions, with any deviation from these only to ask supplementary questions based on their answers.
- Shortlisting and interview panels must consist of a minimum of two people to ensure balance and fairness, incorporating diversity wherever possible. This also needs to be balanced to ensure the appropriate key members of staff are involved.
- Panels must agree on the final candidate selection based on the scoring results or if someone automatically qualifies for an interview under the guaranteed interview scheme.
- HR attend interviews that include internal candidates to provide a neutral perspective, whilst also ensuring a fair and consistent selection process is followed.
- We strive to foster an interview environment where candidates feel comfortable so they can showcase their true abilities.

4. Further initiatives to be explored this year

4.1 We are continuing our review of the recruitment process by exploring the following initiatives and monitoring their effectiveness and suitability:

- Promotional materials at careers fairs.
- Use of targeted Facebook advertising where appropriate with the aim of increasing the diversity of the field of applicants.
- Working with the advertising agency, Web Recruit, to identify other advertising platforms to increase diversity in applications.
- Further information on our vacancies page to include staff experience of working for the National Park Authority, the range of opportunities and diverse roles that can be undertaken and further promotion of benefits on offer.
- Working with the Communications team to collate a library of photos that we can provide to Web Recruit that reflect diversity and inclusion.
- Investigate if we qualify to use any accreditations such as the Disability Confident logo.

5. Working with Other National Park Authorities

5.1 Attracting a more diverse workforce is an issue shared by all National Park Authorities and across the wider environmental sector. Officers meet regularly with the other NPA HR Managers and at a recent meeting we were asked to share our challenges, actions that we are all taking and any learning points. This is currently being collated by another NPA and we will update the committee in the annual report presented in September 2025.

6. Raising awareness of career opportunities

6.1 Raising awareness of career opportunities within the SDNPA is also vital and we will be working closely with:

- Learning, Outreach and Volunteering Team – engaging young people, especially those from our target audiences, in pathways to Green Careers through school sessions, career events, work experience and youth volunteering programmes. We also work with local Careers Hubs to support school and college staff to access and promote information relevant to careers with the South Downs National Park.
- Colleges to re-introduce the apprenticeship scheme – to provide entry level opportunities whilst undertaking a mix of practical and classroom training. The purpose is to learn skills that are directly relevant to undertake a particular career, and gain work experience in that area which may not normally be accessible without specific

qualifications etc. We have funding in place now to do this and are ready to re-introduce apprenticeships this September.

- Communications Team – generic marketing throughout the year even when we don't have vacancies to promote the SDNPA as an employer with a commitment to diversity using examples the work we do. These posts would keep our organisation and its opportunities in people's consciousness, as well as provide general promotion of our culture.
- Different partnerships groups we are engaging with to promote ourselves as an employer and the opportunities we have, e.g. Community Works in Brighton.

7. Supporting staff through the induction process

7.1 Supporting diversity and inclusion is essential to ensure that we retain new staff and should therefore also be noted in this paper. This is a key focus of our work in HR and we have the following in place:

- A high level of wellbeing support (which scored very highly in our recent staff survey).
- An internal EDI Steering Group and action plan.
- Inclusive Leader and Teams training for all staff.
- An online catalogue of EDI training courses.
- Wellbeing meetings with new starters.
- Adjustments made to working arrangements to accommodate staff with disabilities.
- Hybrid working and access to work remotely from other area offices.
- Regular staff 121's with managers and the formal PDR process encourage an open dialogue to understand employees' aspirations, training needs, barriers or challenges, putting support in place as appropriate to allow individuals to be their authentic self at work.

8. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Existing budgets cover works described above and future work planned as outlined in this report.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Delivery of an efficient recruitment service contributes to the effective running of the organisation and the Authority overall, achieving value for money.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	Effective and diverse recruitment processes and practices support the work of the Authority across all PMP and Corporate Plan objectives.

Implication	Yes*/No
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Close working with other NPAs on recruitment as similar challenges are shared across the sector.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	NA
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	There are no procurement processes arising from this paper.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	The HR function delivers an Equality Act compliant services through recruitment, training and workplace adjustments. This report sets out ways the Authority strives to exceed the requirements of the Equality Act and further diversify the Authority's workforce. We have an equalities policy and all staff complete the Equality and Diversity ELMS training module and further inclusive leader or team training through Pearn Kandola.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Human Rights implications in this paper
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Crime & Disorder implications in this paper.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Health and Safety implications arising from this paper.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	The HR Team has due regard for the Data Protection Act 2018 and all collection and processing of personal data is compliant.

9. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 9.1 The main risk is that, despite the actions set out in this report, the Authority is unsuccessful in further diversifying its workforce. As has been highlighted, whatever actions are taken, the effectiveness of them ultimately remains restricted by the potential applicant pool for any particular role. The actions above aim to widen the applicant pool for roles as far as possible so as to attract diverse candidates and to ensure a fair and equitable application and interview process for all.

Vicky Paterson

Human Resources Manager

South Downs National Park Authority

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SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Landscape and Strategy; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Head of Finance and Corporate Services
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	2023/24 Annual Human Resources and Health & Safety Report submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee by the HR Manager in September 2024 (Report PR24/25-05 page 159 Agenda item 13)

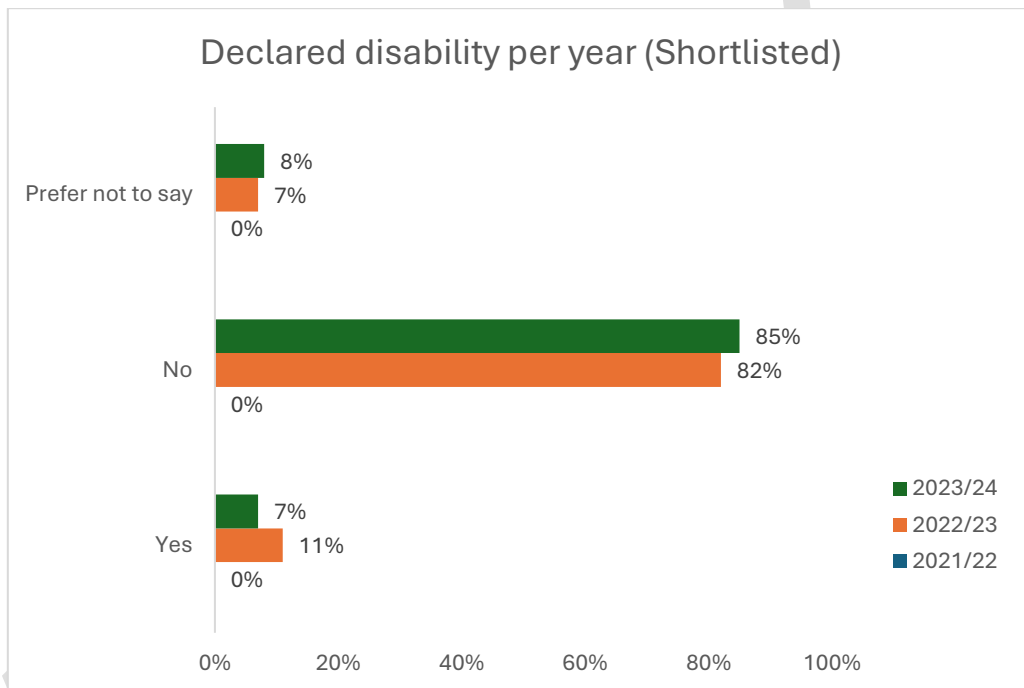
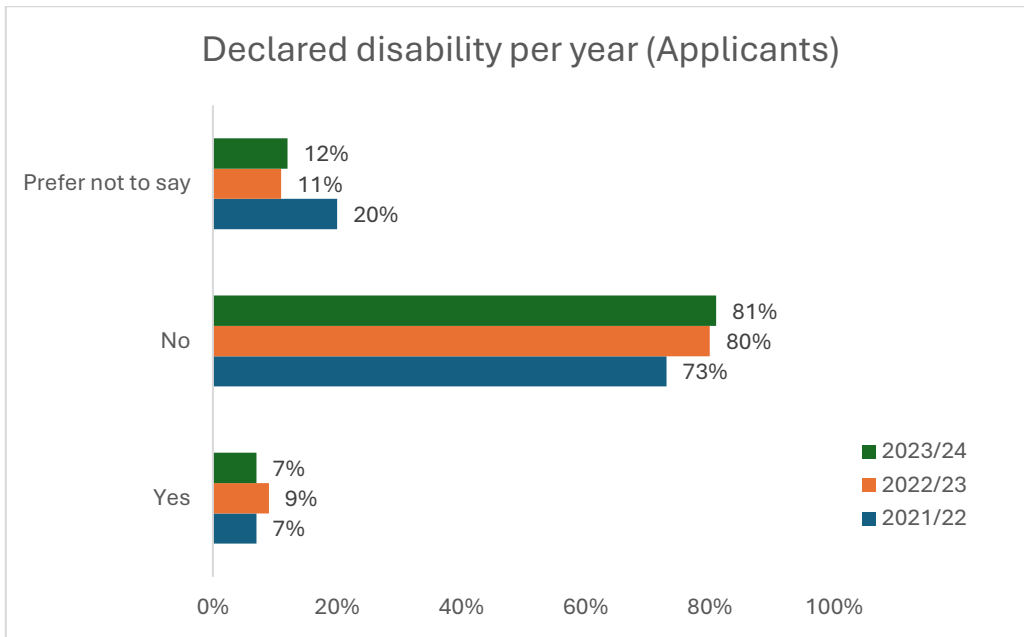
Appendix 3

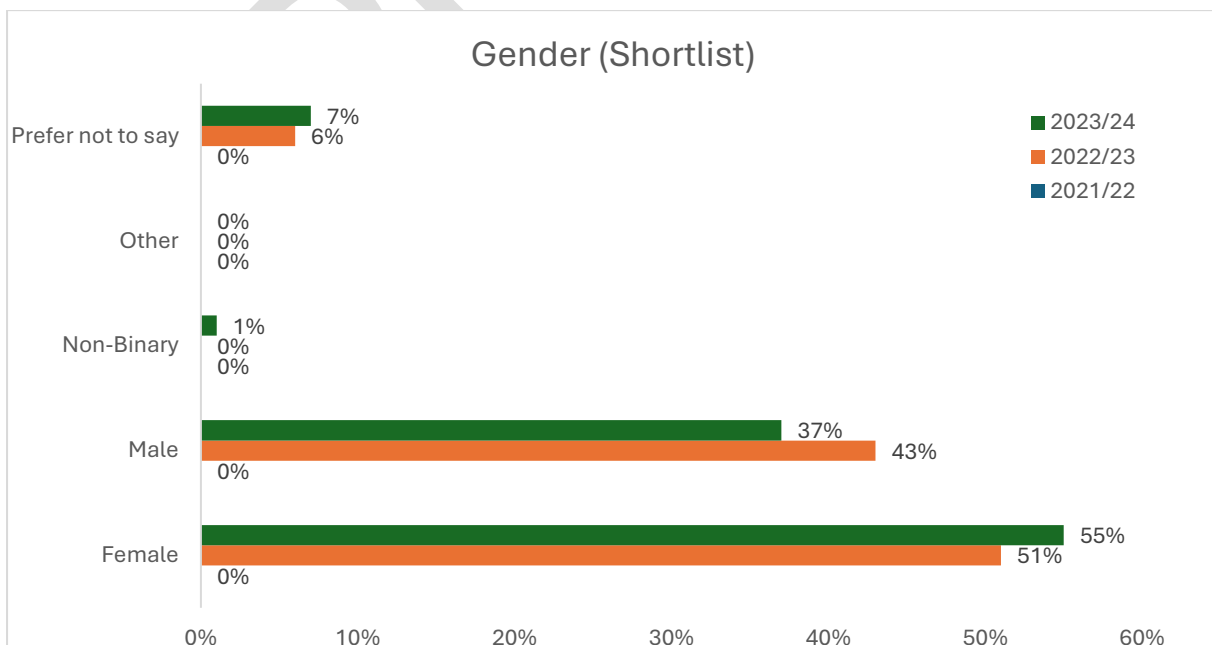
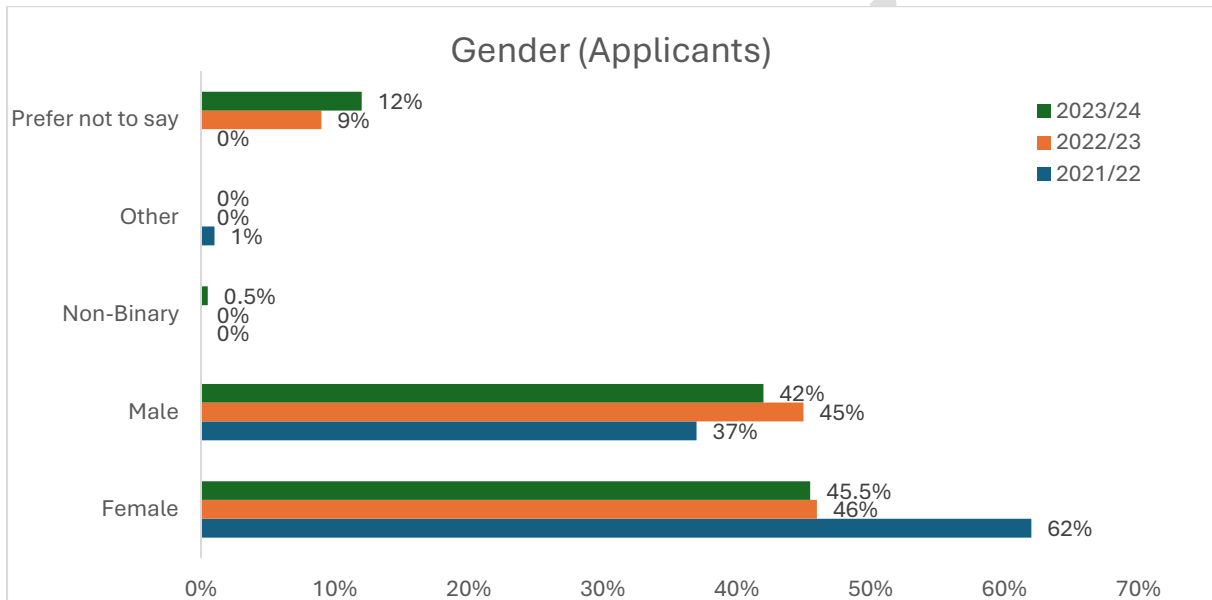
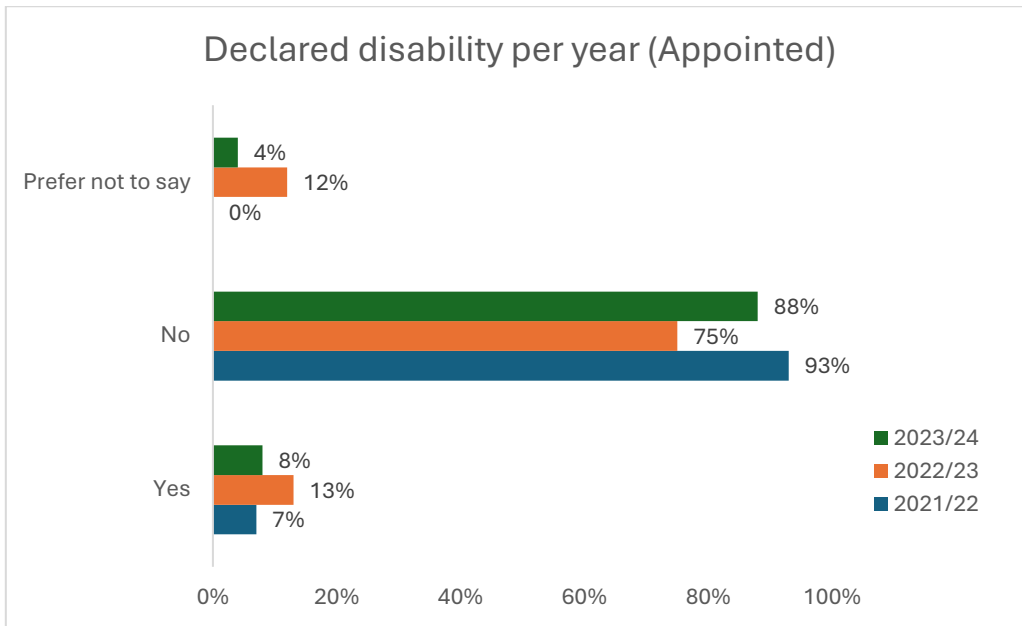
The following table shows the total number of applications, candidates shortlisted, and appointments made for external recruitment, by year.

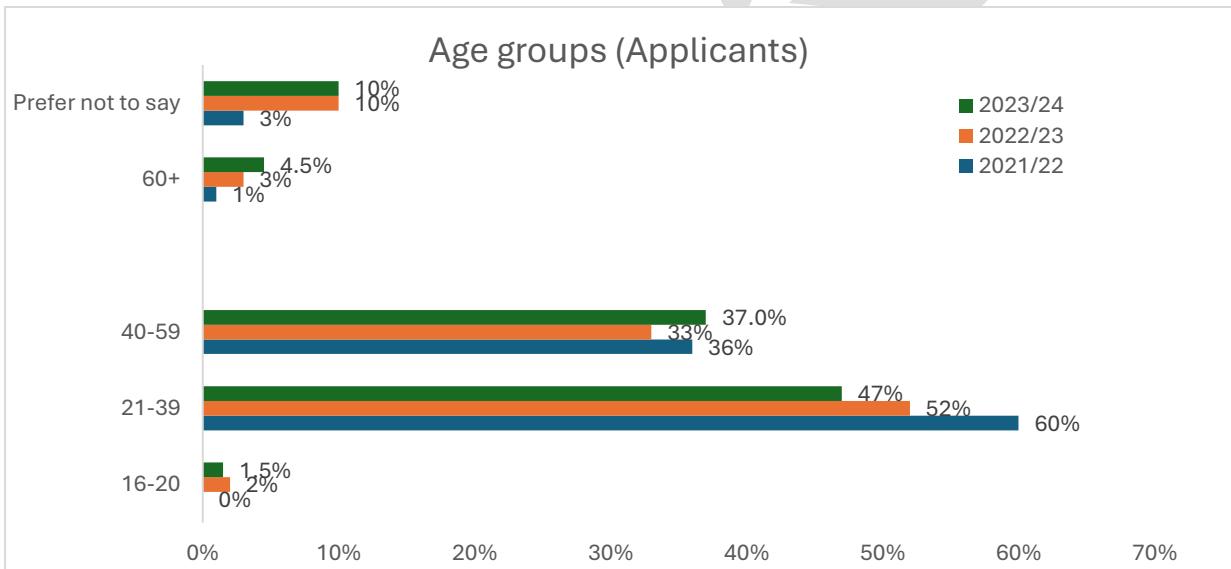
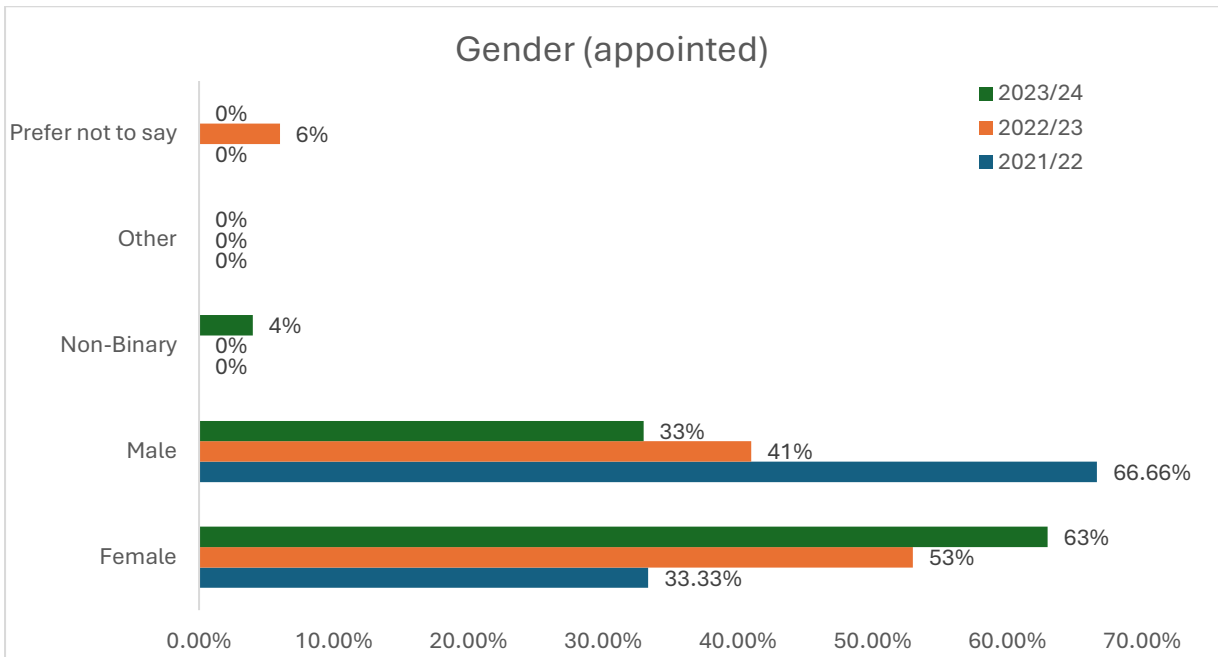
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Applicants	269	328	293
Shortlisted	<i>not recorded</i>	114	99
Appointed	15	32	24

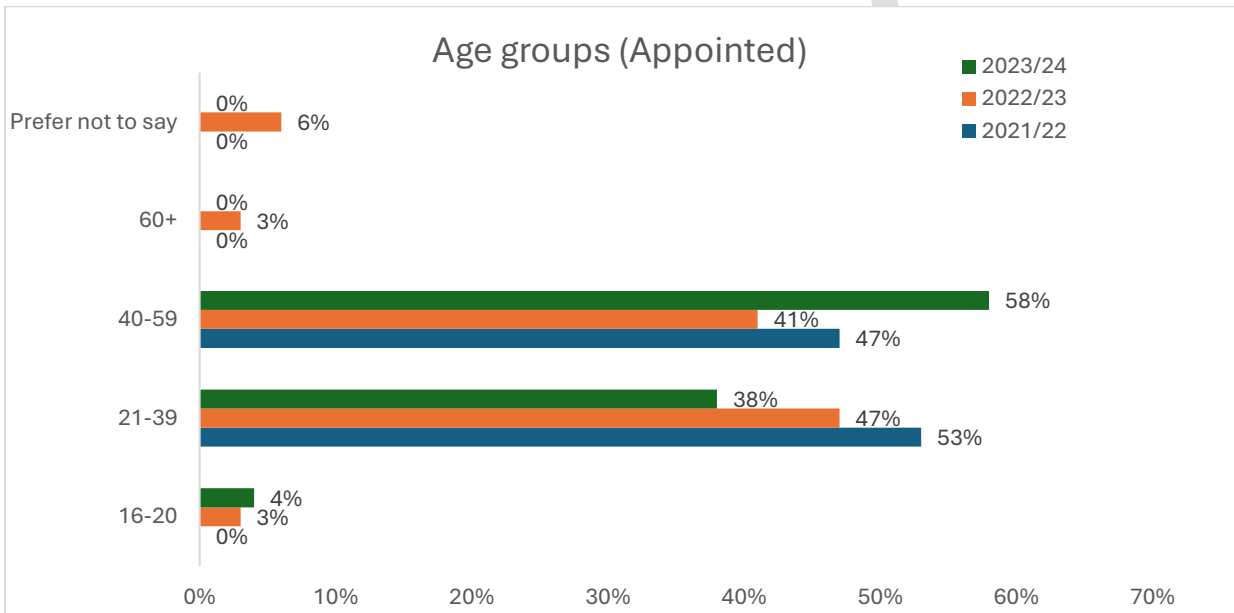
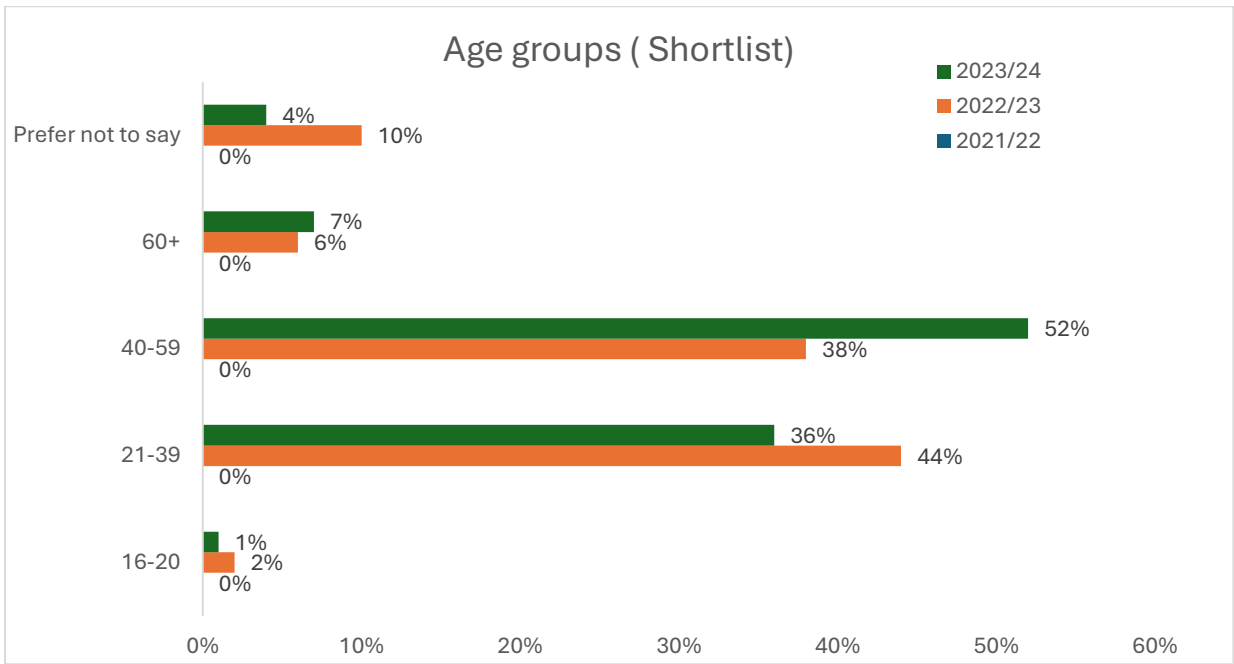
The following bar charts show the percentage of applicants (all), shortlisted applicants and appointed applicants by protected characteristic.

Appendix 3

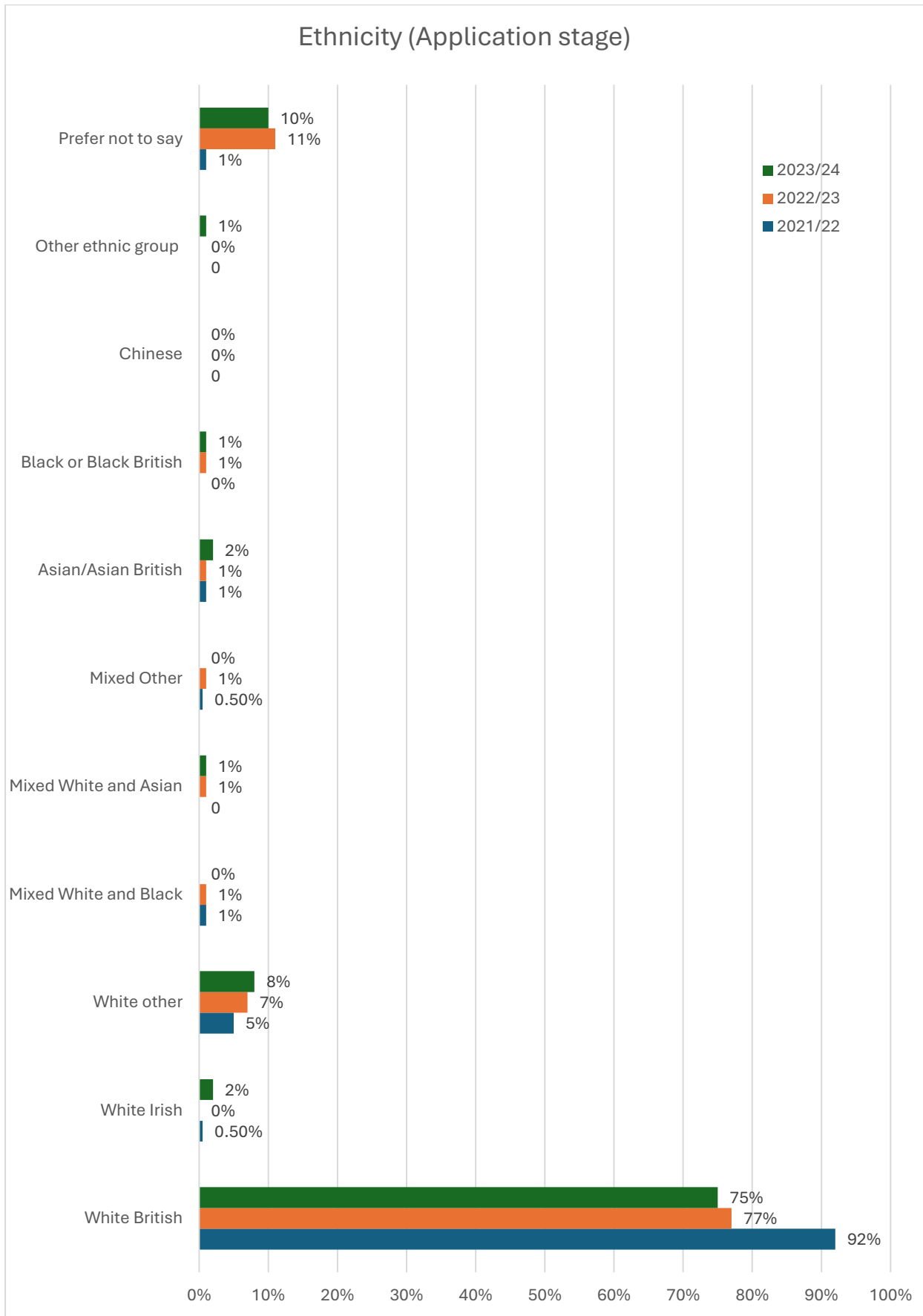


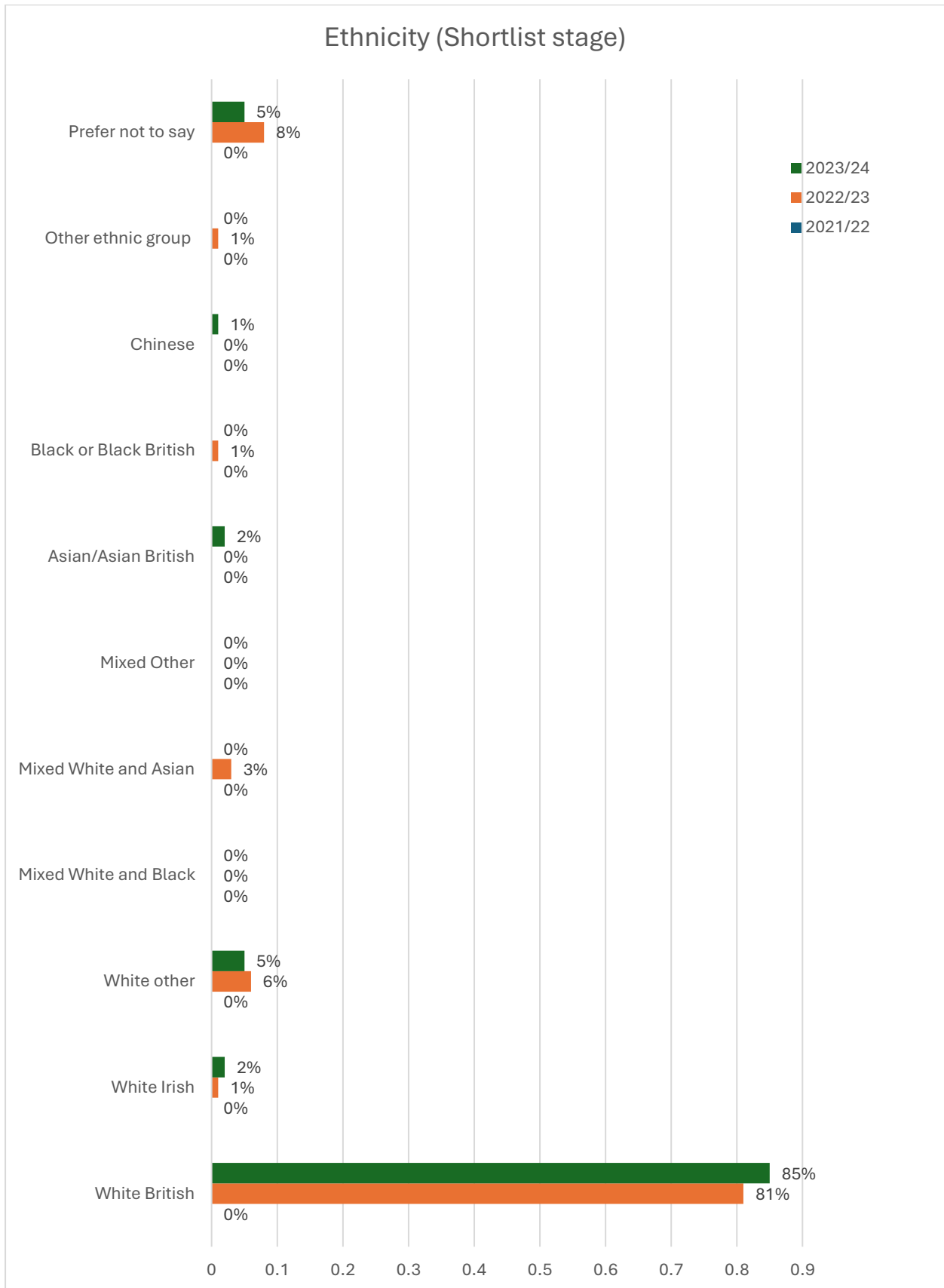




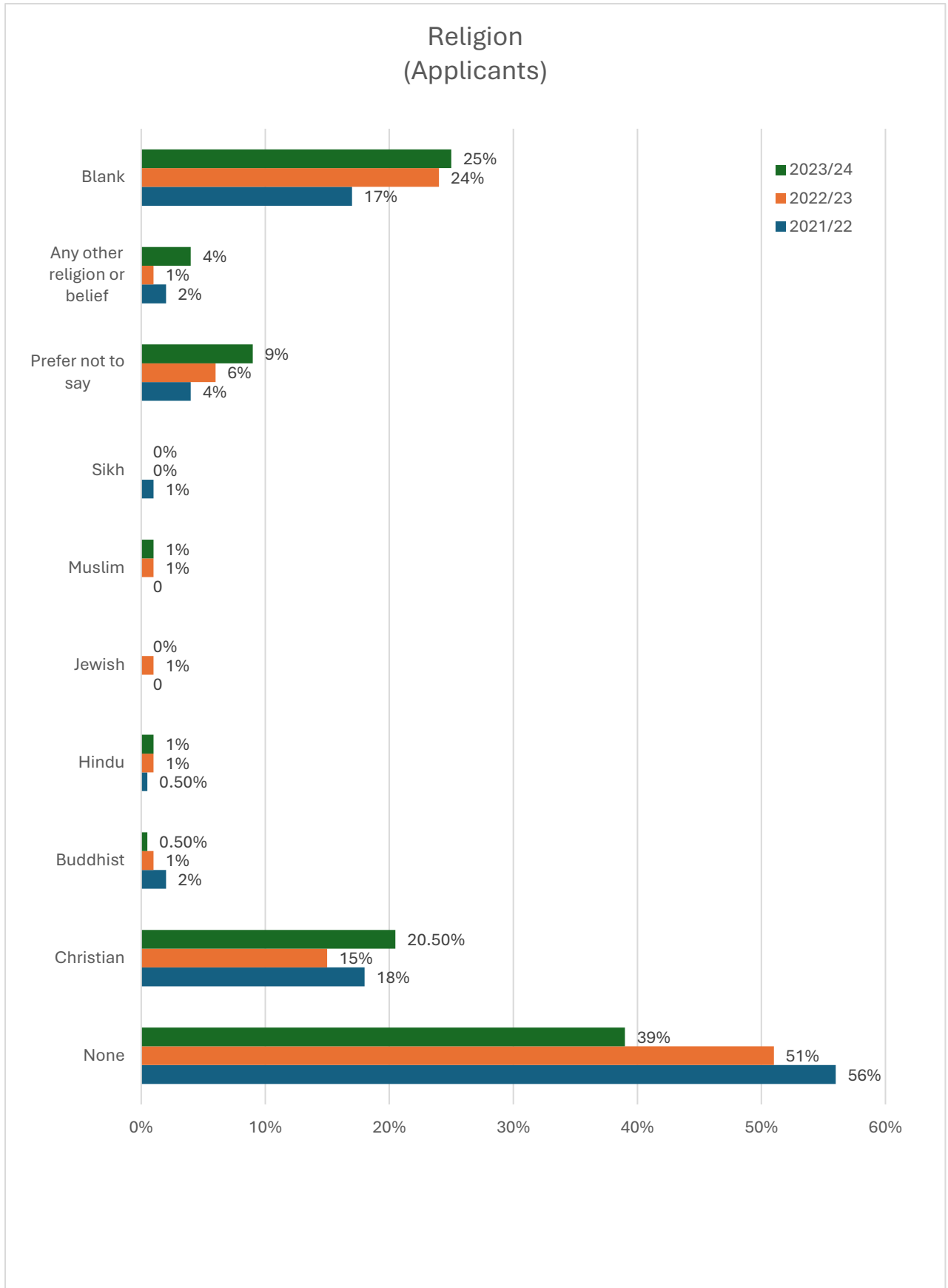


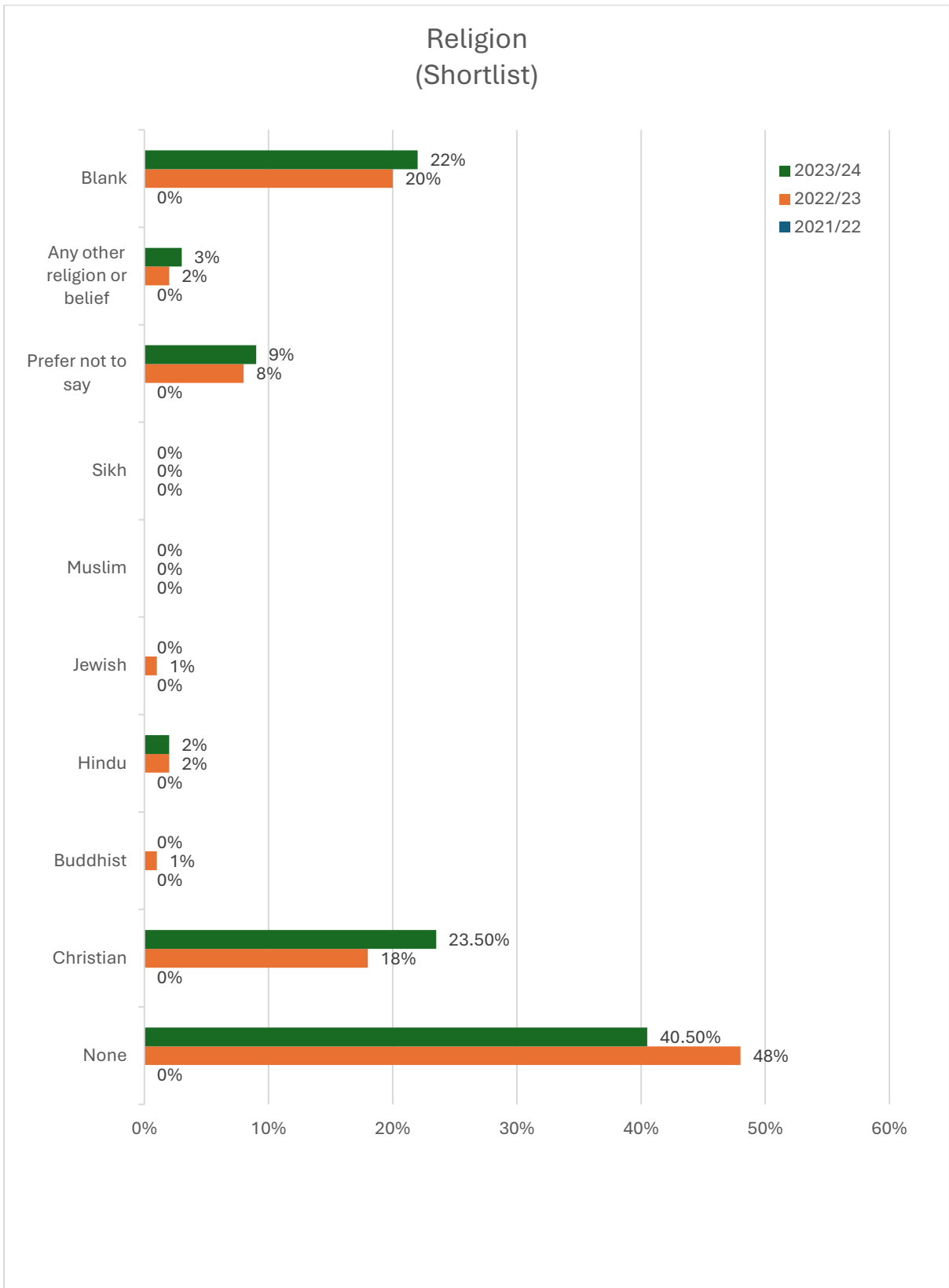
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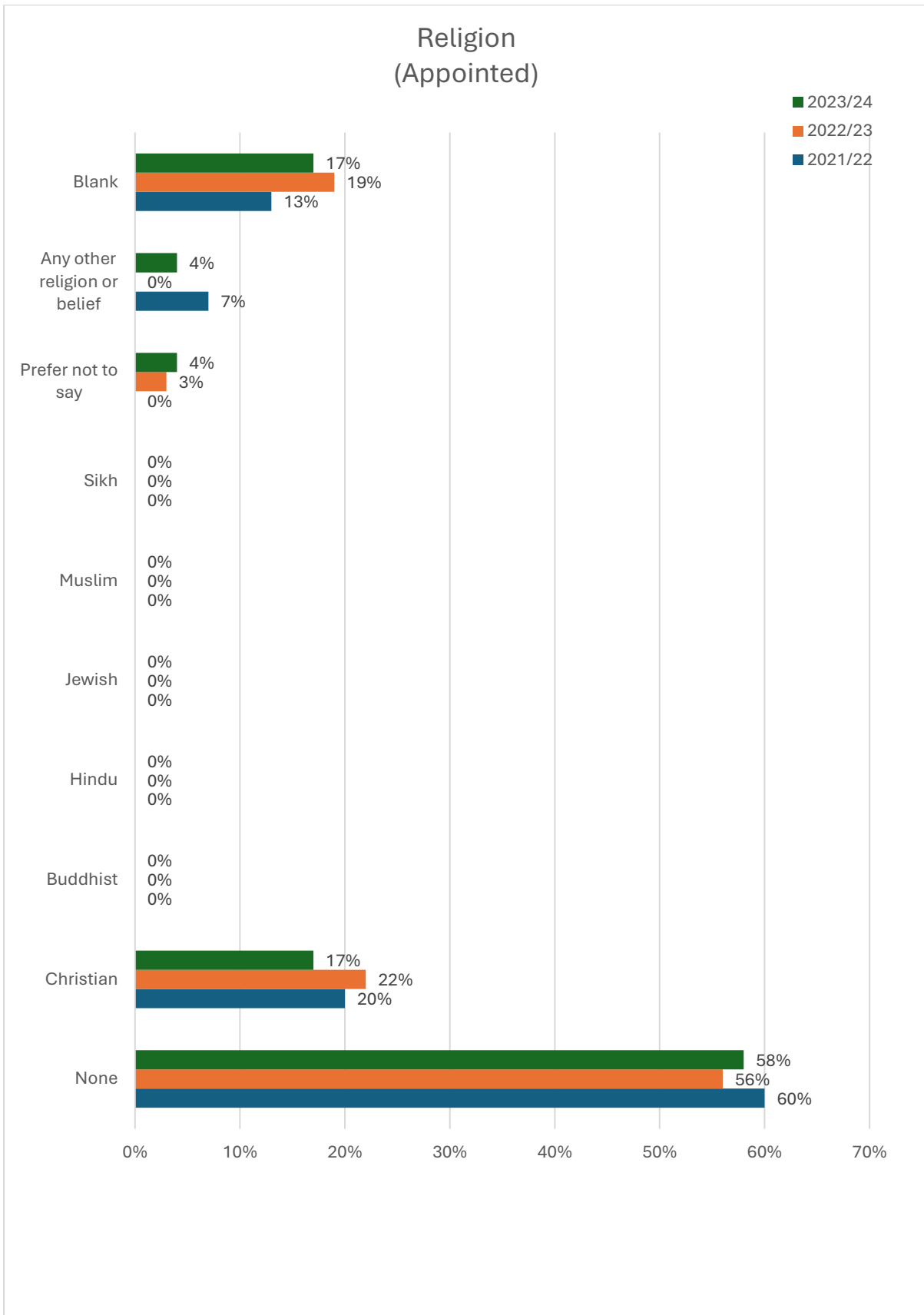












Appendix 3

EDI Demographics of SDNPA employees – 2024/25 – Appendix 4

Religion

Category	% 2022/23	% 2023/24	% 2024/25
Staff holding a religious belief inc: Agnostic, Atheist Buddhist, Christian, Pagan or other	32	31	36
No religion	38	42	42
Prefer not to say	4	12	10
Not responded	26	15	12

Due to low numbers of individuals identifying as holding a certain religious belief this information has been categorised to ensure individuals right to privacy is maintained.

Ethnic Origin

Category	% 2022/23	% 2023/24	% 2024/25
Other Ethnic groups	10	8	10
White British	76	79	80
Not responded	14	13	10

Due to low numbers of individuals identifying as ethnic groups this information has been categorised to ensure individuals right to privacy is maintained.

Sex Identity

Category	% 2022/23	% 2023/24	% 2024/25
Female	56	58	58
Male	34	29	33
Non-binary / other	1	1	0
Not responded	9	12	9

Sexual Orientation

Category	% 2022/23	% 2023/24	% 2024/25
Bisexual, gay man, lesbian, other	5	9	10
Heterosexual	57	46	46
Prefer not to say	4	2	2

Agenda Item 14 Report PR25/26-06 Appendix 4

Category	% 2022/23	% 2023/24	% 2024/25
Not responded	34	43	42

Due to low numbers of individuals identifying as being of a certain sexual orientation this information has been categorised to ensure individuals right to privacy is maintained.

Disability

Category	% 2022/23	% 2023/24	% 2024/25
Disabled	<i>Not previously reported</i>	9	13
No disability		77	76
Not responded, not known or declined to specify		14	11

EDI statistics – Recruitment in 2024/25

In 2024/25 we received 325 job applications through the Applicant Tracking System, 92 people were shortlisted for interview and 20 people were appointed from externally advertised posts. 9 appointments were internal staff, this figure includes internally advertised only posts and posts where other positions were ring-fenced, for example Senior Support Services Officer.

These figures do not include the CEO or Landscape and Strategy Director recruitment as these were facilitated by an agency.

The following table shows the total number of applications, candidates shortlisted, and appointments made for external recruitment, by year.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Applicants	328	293	325
Shortlisted	114	99	92
Appointed	32	24	19
Average number of applicants per vacancy	10	12	17

Although the total number of applicants has remained consistent, this is relative to the number of posts advertised. The average number of applicants per vacancy shows that there has an increase in applications per post.

The following bar charts show the percentage of applicants (all), shortlisted applicants and appointed applicants by protected characteristic.

