Annual Report on Equality Objectives December 2024

Jo Milsom, Deputy Principal

Introduction

The Public Sector Equality Duty places a statutory duty on public bodies to consider how our functions will affect people with different characteristics and to monitor the impact of what we do, having due regard for the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. There is also a specific duty to publish one or more Equality Objectives (EOs) at least every 4 years and provide information annually regarding compliance with the general duty.

This report sets out progress made to date against our Equality Objectives (EOs) during the academic year 2023-24, identifies further areas for action and next steps. The current set of EOs were set and approved in March 2021 with progress reported annually in December. EOs are set separately for staff and students, with three strands for each group. Since 2021, progress has been made on all EOs, though none have been fully achieved. At each reporting period, the EOs have been reassessed, with minor adjustments introduced to address specific groups or issues more effectively. Student data in the report is compared against other students in the college, rather than national cohort data, as we are seeking to ensure that all groups of students experience similar outcomes from their education with us, rather than comparing ourselves against other FE institutions. Therefore, in most cases this report refers to 'gaps' in outcomes for students in different groups, rather than absolute data. It is also important to note that this work represents a journey in which the positive outcomes we seek will not usually materialise quickly but will result from consistent and sustained actions over a long period of time.

1. **Local Context**

   Gathering demographic data for the local community presents challenges, as our students span various age groups, often travel significant distances to attend courses, and may enrol at locations outside their immediate area. Consequently, drawing direct comparisons between college demographics and the local community is difficult. Moreover, in certain areas of interest, such as the Protected Characteristics categories, data is not consistently collected from young people at other educational stages, making comparisons impossible. Despite these limitations, we are committed to reflecting the diversity of our communities from both staff and student perspectives. The data below aims to provide insight into the local context and demonstrate our dedication to ensuring equal experiences and opportunities for all, regardless of Protected Characteristics.

   In terms of ethnicity, the most recent census data for Oxfordshire (2021) indicates that in the districts of Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire 15% and 19% of secondary school aged pupils are from ethnic minorities, although some other districts, notably the city centre and Cherwell, have much higher rates at 55% and 29% respectively. For the last two years college data for students on Study Programmes (therefore aged 16-19, or up to 24 with an EHCP) was around 17%, so broadly in line with the immediate communities around our main campuses. Data for all college students in 2023-24 shows that around 33% (a 3pp increase on the previous year) are from ethnic minorities - given that our adult provision has a naturally wider geographical spread and a strong focus on ESOL and basic skills, this seems more in line with the wider demographic. Appendix A includes student the student data set.

The census data indicates that across the whole county 18% of the population is from an ethnic minority (an increase of 1.4pp since 2011), and more widely the Southeast region is slightly higher at 21.2%. At the end of the 2023-24 academic year the staff body was made up of around 16% of people who defined their ethnicity as something other than White British, this is an increase of around 3% on the preceding two years. However, when including all 'white' categories this reduces to 8.9%, which is around 2.5pp more than the previous year.

In terms of wider disadvantage, whilst not a recognised protected characteristic with the Equality Act, we also use the equality objectives to drive success for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. Data provided by Oxfordshire County Council suggests that within Abingdon there is significant disparity between household incomes for example in Abingdon Caldecott ward it is estimated that 24% of children live in low-income households, whereas in some other wards the deprivation rate is as low as 2.6%. Likewise in the Witney area financial deprivation is relatively low, however there are pockets of higher deprivation – Witney Central has up to 16% of children living in low-income families, whereas elsewhere in the town the rate is 5.4%. This means it is somewhat difficult to understand whether the population of students in the college is reflective of the local community – in 2023-24 around 11% of full time 16–18-year-old students applied for and qualified for financial support from us. For adult learners this becomes even more difficult because they are more likely to travel from further afield. (source: Oxfordshire Insight |)

In relation to other protected characteristics, it is not possible to find suitable data to demonstrate the local context in the same way as this data is simply not recorded or made available currently. However, the 2021 census did include an optional question on sexual orientation for those over 16 and this suggests that around 3.25% of the adult population identify with an LGBT+ orientation. College data shows 4% of college staff identifying in this category and 15% of staff choosing not to declare this information. Census data around disabilities indicates 17.8% of people identify with a disability in the UK – this compares with 6% of college staff, although it is not known what proportion of disabled people in the country are able to work, so this is not a direct comparison.

UK Census data about religion (an optional census question which around 94% of residents answered) shows that around 46% of the population identify as 'Christian'- this year 38% of college staff identify in this category, around a 6pp decrease from the previous 2 years, however we still have much lower rates than nationally for other religions such as Muslim, Hindu, Sikhism. Furthermore, around one quarter of staff have not shared their religion data with us.

Appendix B shows the current data held for all staff based on declared data of Protected Characteristics.

2. **Our Equality Objectives**
The current Equality Objectives for students are:

Strand 1: That all students achieve equally, regardless of ethnicity	• Ensure that Study Programme students of minority ethnic heritage are supported to remain and achieve at college - increase retention and achievement across all minority heritage groups, but particularly WB Caribbean, Irish and Gypsy/Irish Traveller to within 3pp of overall college average for their age group and learning aim. • Ensure that all adult learners (including subcontracted) of minority ethnic heritage achieve in line with the college average for their age group and learning aim, increasing retention and achievement to within 3pp of overall.
Strand 2: That all students achieve equally, regardless of disability	• Ensure that Study Programme students with dyslexia and dyscalculia are supported to achieve qualifications in maths and English to ensure their future progression in education and employment - increase achievement to within 3pp of the average for their age group and learning aim • Ensure that students with Autism are supported to re-engage with their education post pandemic, attend college and achieve their qualifications at the same rate as their peers. • Ensure that adult learners with Mental Health needs are supported to remain and achieve on their course, increasing achievement to within 3pp of the college average for their age group and learning aim.
Strand 3: That students from other disadvantaged Groups achieve at least as well as their peers	• Ensure that Study Programme students who are Looked After Children, Young Adult Carers or are receiving Free Meals are supported to achieve as well as their peers - improve retention and achievement to within 3pp of college average for age group and learning aim.

The current Equality Objectives for staff are:

Strand 1 - That the workforce is reflective of the community and the student population	• Ensure that staff data is as complete as is possible and that staff feel comfortable to disclose their Protected Characteristics before comparisons are made to community and student profiles. • Aim to reduce the number of staff who have not completed their PC data by 10pp by 2023. • Aim to decrease the number of staff who have selected 'Prefer Not To Say' by 3pp by 2023 across all PCs, with particular emphasis on religion/belief and sexual orientation as these are the largest areas where staff select this option.
Strand 2 - That all staff have equality of opportunity to fulfil their potential	• Ensure that the College attracts and appoints a diverse workforce and that staff are able to fulfil their potential by removing barriers to productivity and ensure this is monitored and reported on. Increase the number of applications from men, those with a disability and those from minority ethnic backgrounds by 3pp. • Increase appointments of those from Asian, Black, Mixed and 'other' ethnic backgrounds to be proportionally in line with those from 'White' backgrounds compared to applications..
Strand 3 - That all staff have job satisfaction	• Report annually on the Staff Satisfaction survey by each of the Protected Characteristics to gauge satisfaction levels and identify trends. • Increase completion of staff survey to at least 50% of all staff • Increase the satisfaction of staff in minority groups to within 3pp of all other staff across at least 75% of questions. • Increase satisfaction levels of male staff to within 3pp of all other staff on the subjects of feeling valued and staff development.

3. Student Data

In terms of student demographics, the ethnic diversity of study programme students has remained roughly the same as last year, although there has been an increase over a longer period. There has been an increase in diversity of adult provision, although this has slowed in recent years and seems to have settled at around 33%, slightly increased this year. There has been a significant increase in the number of study programme students declaring an additional learning need and these now account for 53% of learners, compared to 42% three years ago. The number of students with EHCPs has increased by about 20pp in the same period – however as the total number of study programme learners has also increased across this period, those with EHCPs represent 17% of the total now, compared to just under 20% in 2021-22. Adult learner data indicates a similar proportion of learners declare additional learning needs on their application each year – around 15%.

Ethnicity
Overall retention rates were higher for learners from minority ethnic backgrounds than for those from White British (WB) background at 93.9% (vs 92.6% for WB) and achievement is very close at 85.3% for those from minority background, and 85.7% for those of 'White British' heritage. However, this obscures the differences between age groups; study programme students from ethnic minority backgrounds achieved at 0.5pp better than their WB peers overall, but this is weighted towards lower-level learners with those at entry level and level 1 achieving 12pp and 2.6pp higher than their peers respectively, and those at levels 2 and 3 performing behind their peers by 1.4pp and 2pp respectively.

For adults, overall achievement for the minority ethnicity group is 2.7pp lower, which an improvement from last year when the achievement gap was 4pp. however, unlike with the younger age groups, 19+ learners with minority ethnic backgrounds performed better at level 3 where they outperformed their peers by more than 12pp, and less well at lower levels with an achievement gap at entry level of 3.1pp, 0.5pp at level 1 and 3.6pp at level 2.

Looking more specifically at different minority groups, those where we have the largest cohorts (eg White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, African and some mixed Asian backgrounds) have performed well against peers and there are no achievement gaps for these groups within the 16-18 age group. However, the largest minority group is 'White Other' (132 enrolments) and this group have achieved 3.5pp lower than their peer group – this is also a significant reduction from the previous year.

For adult learners there are significant achievement gaps across several specific groups of learners, for example African 11.2pp below, Arab 9.2pp below, Pakistani 15.1pp below. Whereas others have outperformed their peers – Chinese 4.7pp above, Indian 1pp above, Irish 3pp above and White Black Caribbean 6.1pp above, although these cohorts tend to be smaller in numbers.

Learning Difficulty/Disabilities
Overall achievement for students aged 16-18 with declared Learning Difficulty or Disability (LDD) is more or less the same (0.3pp higher) as the whole 16-18 cohort, and this remains true at all levels of study, except Level 2, where achievement for students with declared LDD is 1.4pp lower than their peers, however this gap has reduced by 1.1pp from last year. Overall students with Education, Health & Care Plans achieved around 6pp higher than their peer group, although this does vary within levels – at level 2 students with EHCPs achieved 3.7pp lower than their peer group, but at level 3 they achieved almost 11pp better.

Achievement gaps for different category of need are closing, even for dyslexia, which has proven a challenge for several years. In 23-24 students aged 16-18 with dyslexia achieved around 3.4pp higher than their peer group, although the size of the cohort declaring dyslexia is around 1/3 smaller than the previous 2 years - this may be related to a declining trend in diagnosing dyslexia or in people declaring their needs.

For adults, those with a LDD achieve lower at every level than their peers by between 1.4 and 3.7 pp, with the greatest achievement gap at level 2, which is the same as the previous year. However, the achievement gap for those with Autism has reduced and is now just 0.5pp (a 1.5pp reduction) and for those with Aspergers' achievement was 100%, although the number of enrolments in this category is low. Furthermore, for students with dyslexia the achievement gap is now 7pp and there are 143 enrolments in this category. In terms of disabilities there persists a challenge with those with diagnosed mental health conditions where the achievement gap continues to increase, for 2023-24 it is 11.2pp, a 0.5pp increase from last year and a continuation of a trend over the last 3 years.

Disadvantaged Groups
The picture for study programme learners in other disadvantaged groups is mixed; some categories are difficult to track as information may not be shared and the status of a young person or their family may change, and some groups have very small numbers of students. We broadly look at those who are Looked After by the local authority – ie in the care system in some way - known as LAC, those who we know are carers for a member of their family (YAC), those in receipt of free meals in college and those who have an allocated social worker due to safeguarding concerns or other statutory processes (not including disability as they are accounted for above).

There was a retention issue with LAC learners where in several cases the young person was moved to a location outside of the local area and as a result left in the middle of their course – as a result, retention was 80%, 13pp below that of their peers. In turn this impacted achievement for this group, which at 72.1% was 13.7pp below that of their peers.

There is an achievement gap of around 4pp for those young people with caring responsibilities, and again as with last year this is mostly an issue at Level 1, with achievement at other levels being much more in keeping with peers. However, whilst we aim to eradicate the achievement gap entirely, this is a significant improvement on last year, when the gap was almost 18pp. A similar picture emerges for those in receipt of free meals with a 7pp gap which is mostly focused at level 1 and 2.

Progress against Equality Objectives - Students

	Objective	Where were we? (2020)	Where are we now? (2024)	New emerging concerns & comments
Strand 1: That all students achieve equally, regardless of ethnicity	• Ensure that Study Programme students of minority ethnic heritage are supported to remain and achieve at college - increase retention and achievement across all minority heritage groups, but particularly WB Caribbean, Irish and Gypsy/Irish Traveller to within 3pp of overall college average for their age group and learning aim.	WB Caribbean 20.5pp below (40 enrolments) Added for 2023: Gypsy/Irish Traveller 8pp below in 2022 (16 enrolments)	WB Caribbean 2.7pp above (43 enrolments). Was 3.9pp below in 2023. Gypsy/Irish Traveller 11.3 pp above (10 enrolments). Was 34pp below in 2023. **Objective achieved**	'White Other' emerging as a potential area for concern.
	• Ensure that all adult learners (including subcontracted) of minority ethnic heritage achieve in line with the college average for their age group and learning aim, increasing retention and achievement to within 3pp.	19+ ESOL 5.5pp below 19+ Basic Skills 18.5pp below	19+ ESOL achievement 88.9%, 0.7pp below peers (an reduction from previous year) 19+ Functional Skills achievement is 69.4% however this is 2pp above peer group and 2pp improvement on previous year. **Objective achieved**	

Strand 2: That all students achieve equally, regardless of disability	• Ensure that Study Programme students with dyslexia and dyscalculia are supported to achieve qualifications in maths and English to ensure their future progression in education and employment - increase achievement to within 3pp of the average for their age group and learning aim.	GCSE and Functional Skills 16-18s: Dyslexia 14.4pp below Dyscalculia 32.4pp below (2020)	Across the 16-18 cohort students with dyslexia achieved 3.4pp better than their peers. In 2023-24 there were less than 10 enrolments to students with dyscalculia, therefore the data is not reliable for such a small group. In the previous year there had been no achievement gap for students with dyscalculia. **Objective Achieved**	
	• Ensure that students with Autism are supported to re-engage with their education post pandemic, attend college and achieve their qualifications to within 2pp of their peers	16-18 Autism 2.9pp decline on previous year and 1.8pp below college average (328 enrolments)	16- 18 Autism is the same as the whole cohort for 2023-24 (314 enrolments) and those with Aspergers' (a sub diagnosis of Autism with just 31 enrolments) achieved 18.1pp higher than their peers **Objective Achieved**	

	• Ensure that adult learners with Mental Health needs are supported to remain and achieve on their course, increasing achievement to within 3pp of the college average for their age group and learning aim.	19+ all learning aims - 6.7pp below	19+ learners across all aims 11.2pp below peers, increasing the achievement gap. **Objective not yet achieved**	For 19+ learners with Autism the achievement gap has reduced to 0.5pp (129 enrolments) and achievement has increased by 2.4pp for this group.
Strand 3: That students from other disadvantaged Groups achieve at least as well as their peers.	• Ensure that Study Programme students who are Looked After Children or Young Adult Carers are supported to achieve as well as their peers - improve retention and achievement to within 3pp of college average for age group and learning aim.	LAC achievement 17pp below YAC 15.2pp below	LAC retention 13pp below peers, achievement 13.7pp below overall YAC retention, 2.4pp above peer group, achievement 4.5pp below **Objective not yet achieved**	Retention and achievement for both Looked After and Young Adult Carers varies significantly from year to year, although there have been some improvements across the period monitored from 2020. In general students in disadvantaged groups have achieved less well than their peers although in most cases the achievement gap has reduced in 2023-24.

4. Staff Data

Efforts made in recent years to increase the number of staff willing to share personal information about protected characteristics has had an impact over time but for 2023-24 across almost all characteristics the percentage not completed has increased – this would suggest that new starters are not routinely completing this data, and as the college has seen a significant growth in employees during this period this would have a larger than usual impact.

The college continues to work hard to bring relevant themes into college life through staff support groups, open forum and celebrating a range of global events each month as well as ensuring that adequate time is allocated during staff development to awareness and training on these topics.

In terms of recruitment and selection whilst there has been an increase in applications from minority ethnic groups, these applicants still have less success in our selection processes. For example, the table below shows the percentage of applicants from each category who are successfully appointed to a post:

	% applications	% appointed	% success
Asian	12.4%	2.8%	22%
Black	5.7%	0.9%	15%
Mixed	2.5%	1.1%	44%
Other	0.8%	0%	0%
White British	44.9%	32.9%	73%
White all groups	54.7%	36.7%	67%

In terms of staff satisfaction, there are some positive results in the survey from those in some minority groups – both those who identify as disabled and those who are from minority ethnic backgrounds are more satisfied than the whole staff body, scoring within or over 3pp of the whole college score on 100% of questions. Survey respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ are less happy, only scoring with 3pp of the whole college score on 70% of questions – although this group scores more highly on many questions. The key areas where there is less satisfaction for this group of staff is communication and resources and space for staff and students. Male staff continue to be least satisfied, with this group scoring within 3pp of the whole staff body on just 21% of survey questions – this group are broadly satisfied in terms of whole college communication, strategic direction, understanding their contribution to the organisation and support from their managers, but unhappy about many other aspects.

Progress against Equality Objectives - Staff

		Where were we?	Where are we now? (2024)	New emerging concerns & comments
Strand 1 - That the workforce is reflective of the community and the student population	• Ensure that staff data is as complete as is possible and that staff feel comfortable to disclose their Protected Characteristics before comparisons are made to community and student profiles.	Significant gaps in completion of staff data which varies depending on the PC but was between 37% and 88% completion.	This has improved -there are still variations depending on the PC, but the range of completion is now between 56% and 99%. **Objective not yet achieved**	Some progress has been lost; however Gender reassignment (56%) and religion (65%) have the lowest completion rate
	• Aim to reduce the number of staff who have not completed their PC data by 10pp by 2023.	Marital Status 87.46% Religion 66.45% Ethnic Origin 88.11% Sex Identifier 42.51% Gender Reassignment 38.44% Sexual Orientation 75.90% Disabled 83.71%	Marital Status 87.8% Religion 65.5% Ethnic Origin 85.3% Sex Identifier 99.8% Gender Reassignment 56.4% Sexual Orientation 78.7% Disabled 82.9% **Objective not yet achieved**	A more than 10% reduction has been achieved in, sex identifier, gender reassignment, however the rest have increased by much smaller amounts, or not at all.

	• Aim to decrease the number of staff who have selected 'Prefer Not To Say' by 3pp by 2023 across all PCs, with particular emphasis on religion/belief and sexual orientation as these are the largest areas where staff select this option.	Marital Status 2.44% Religion 7.98% Ethnic Origin 3.09% Sex Identifier 1.14% Gender Reassignment 0.98% Sexual Orientation 4.72% Disabled 0.00%	Marital Status 3.75% Religion 11.8% Ethnic Origin 2.55% Sex Identifier 0% Gender Reassignment 1.9% Sexual Orientation 15% Disabled 3.49% **Objective not yet achieved**	Increase across most categories
Strand 2 - That all staff have equality of opportunity to fulfil their potential	• Ensure that the College attracts and appoints a diverse workforce and that staff are able to fulfil their potential by removing barriers to productivity and ensure this is monitored and reported on. Increase the number of applications from men, those with a disability and those from minority ethnic backgrounds by 3pp.	% applications from minority groups 19/20: Men 6% Disability 5% Minority Ethnic 19%	% applications from minority groups 23/24: Men 3.8% (reduction from 22/23) Disability 5.3% (small increase from 22/23) Minority Ethnic 43.5% (large increase from 22/23) **Objective not yet fully achieved**	Applications from men were lower, however proportionally more men were appointed to posts.
	• Increase appointments of those from Asian, Black, Mixed and 'other' ethnic backgrounds to be	Appointments in 21-22:	Appointments in 2023-24:	

	proportionally in line with those from 'white' backgrounds compared to applications.	Asian 4.35% Black 7.69% Mixed 4.76% Other 0%	Asian 2.8% Black 0.9% Mixed 1.1% Other 0% WhIte British 32.9% White all 36.7% **Objective not achieved**	
Strand 3 - That all staff have job satisfaction	• Increase completion of staff survey to at least 50% of all staff	2022 – 20% staff completed the survey	43% of staff completed the survey **Progress made but objective not yet achieved.**	
	• Increase the satisfaction of staff in minority groups to within 3 pp of all other staff across at least 75% of questions	<u>Data not available until 2023.</u> % staff survey questions where staff in minority group are as satisfied (within 3pp) as whole staff body: Disabled 45% BME 97% LGBTQ+ 30% Men 39%	% staff survey questions where staff in minority group are as satisfied (within 3pp) as whole staff body: Disabled 100% BME 100% LGBTQ+ 70% Male 20% **Objective partially met (for some minority groups)**	Rising dissatisfaction amongst male staff

	• Increase satisfaction of male staff to within 3pp on 'feeling valued' and 'staff development'		77% of male staff completing the survey agreed that they felt valued (an increase of 3pp from 22/23), and 80% that they had access to sufficient professional development (8pp increase from 2023). 81.8% of all staff completing the survey felt valued, and 84.7% had sufficient access to development. **Objective not met**	

5. Conclusion

Many of the issues the equalities work seeks to address are challenging and will gradually change over a longer period than we can reflect in these annual updates, however it remains useful and important to reflect on the data at regular intervals in order to ensure we are focused on delivering relevant and useful interventions, training and awareness raising. We must continue to focus on creating an environment where staff can feel comfortable to share their personal data with us, however we must also acknowledge and continue to address issues highlighted by this report – such as LGBTQ+ staff and male staff levels of dissatisfaction, and the low proportion of applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds who are successful at job interviews.

For students whilst there has been some progress with specific groups within 16-18 age group, where achievement gaps have been reduced or removed – this work needs monitoring to ensure this is a new standard. Progress for adult learners is much slower and there remain some significant achievement gaps for specific groups of learners. These remain at the heart of our quality improvement planning and quality assurance work.

The Student Body in 2023-24

Ethnicity
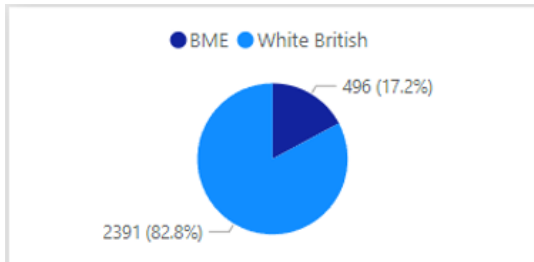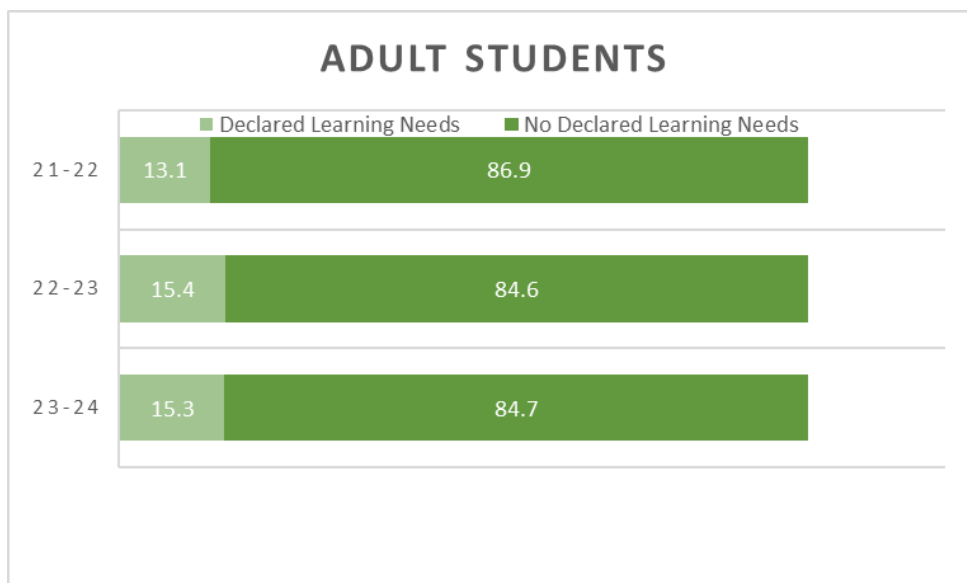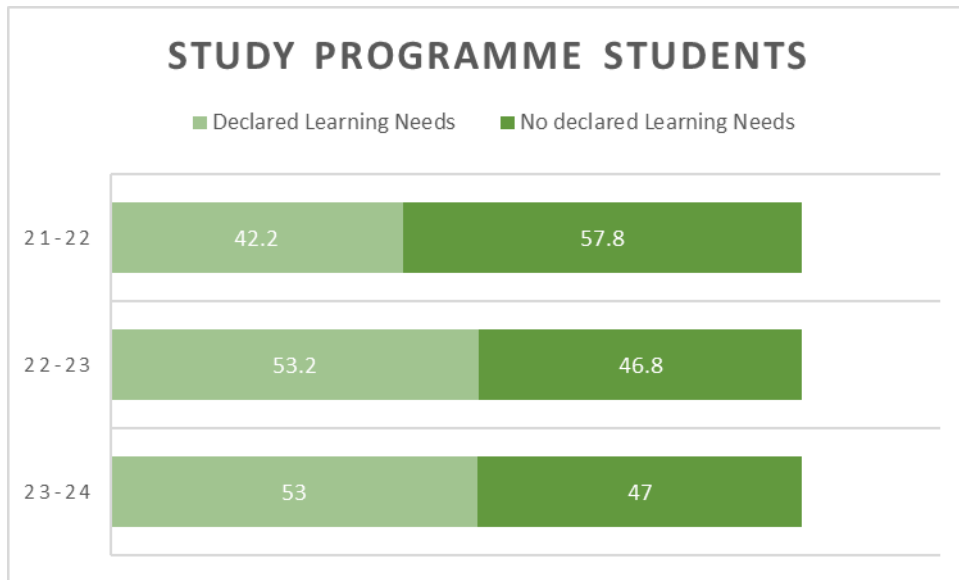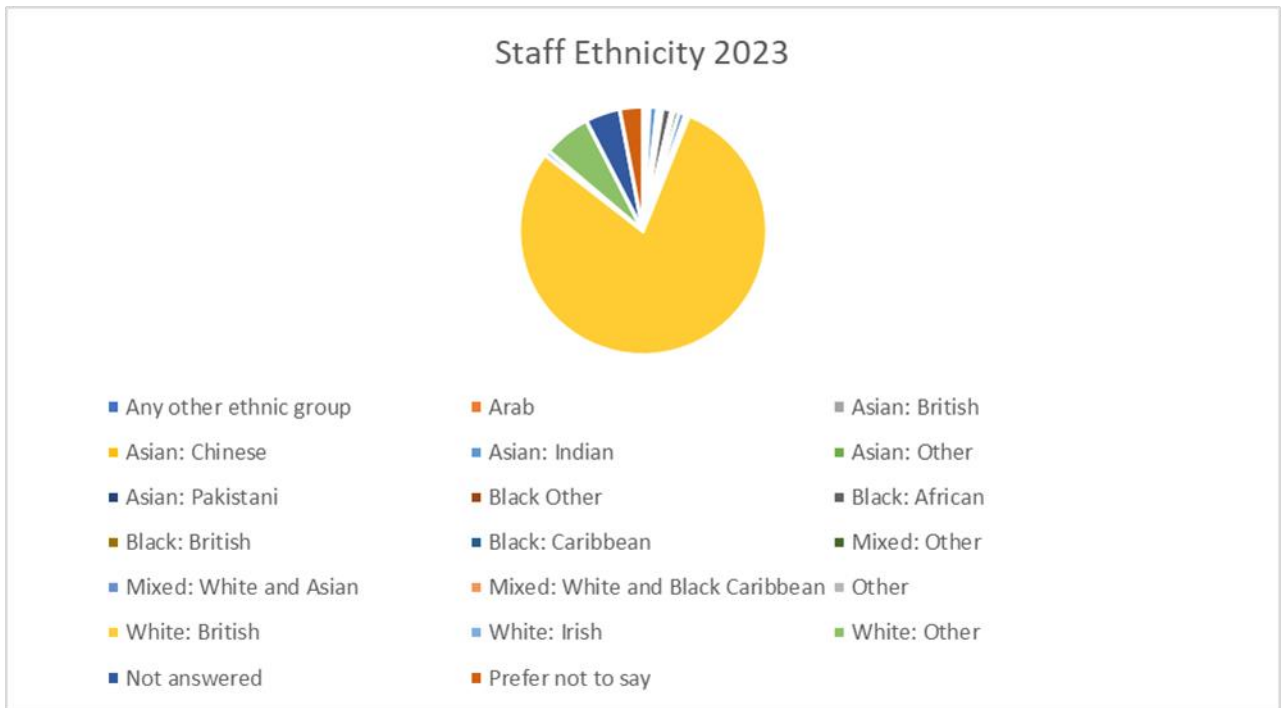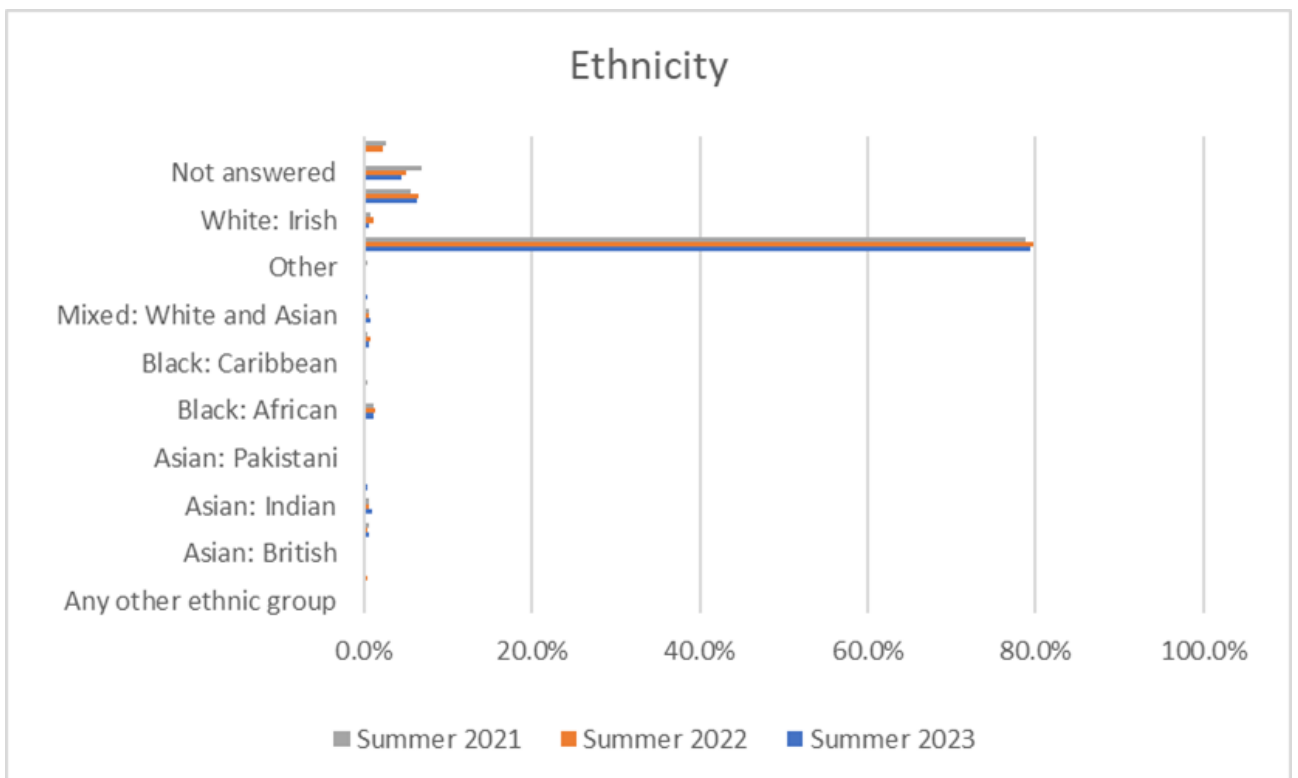
Study programmes: All learners:
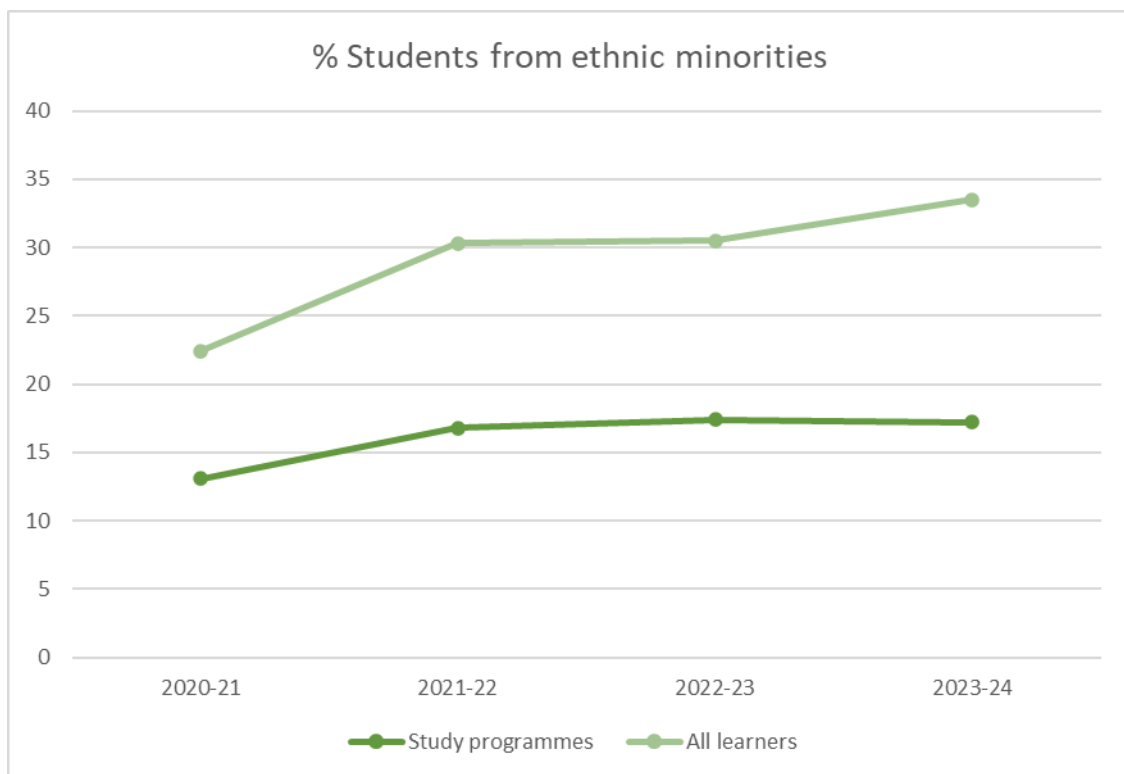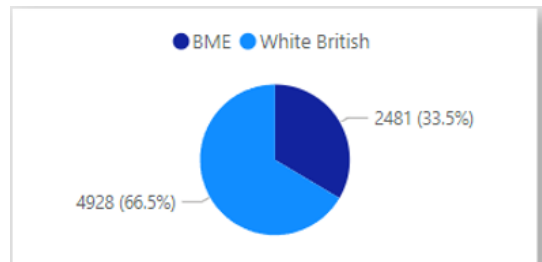
Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

STUDY PROGRAMME STUDENTS

Legend: Declared Learning Needs | No declared Learning Needs

Year	Declared Learning Needs	No declared Learning Needs
21-22	42.2	57.8
22-23	53.2	46.8
23-24	53	47

ADULT STUDENTS

Legend: Declared Learning Needs | No Declared Learning Needs

Year	Declared Learning Needs	No Declared Learning Needs
21-22	13.1	86.9
22-23	15.4	84.6
23-24	15.3	84.7

6. Appendix B – Staff Data
<u>Staff Ethnicity</u>

Staff ethnicity., 2024

College Staff Ethnicity 3-year trend
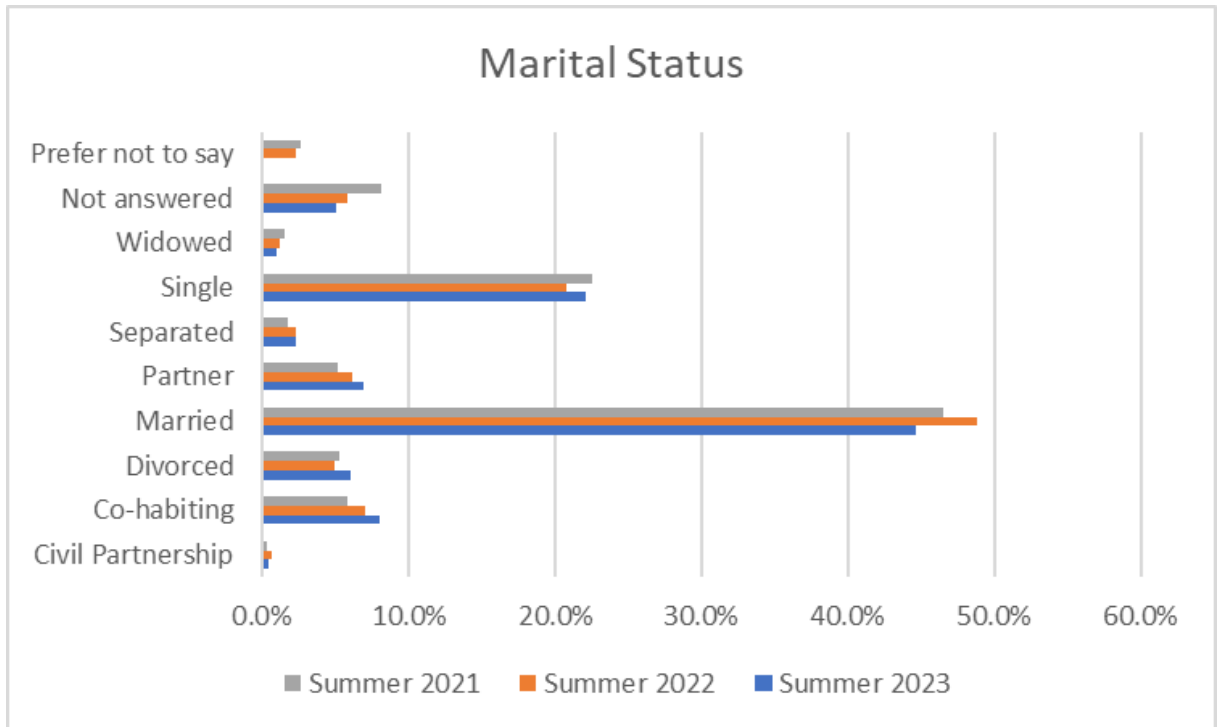
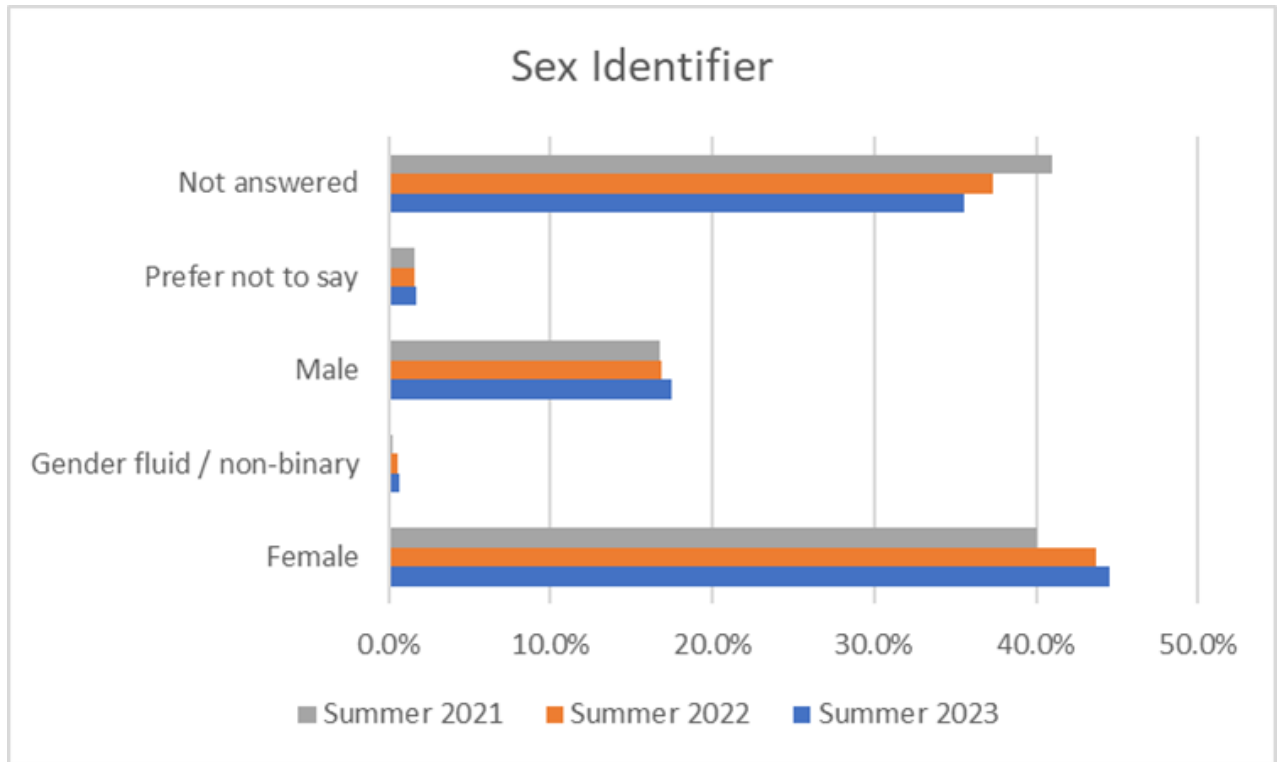Staff Marital status 3-year trend

Staff Religion 2024:
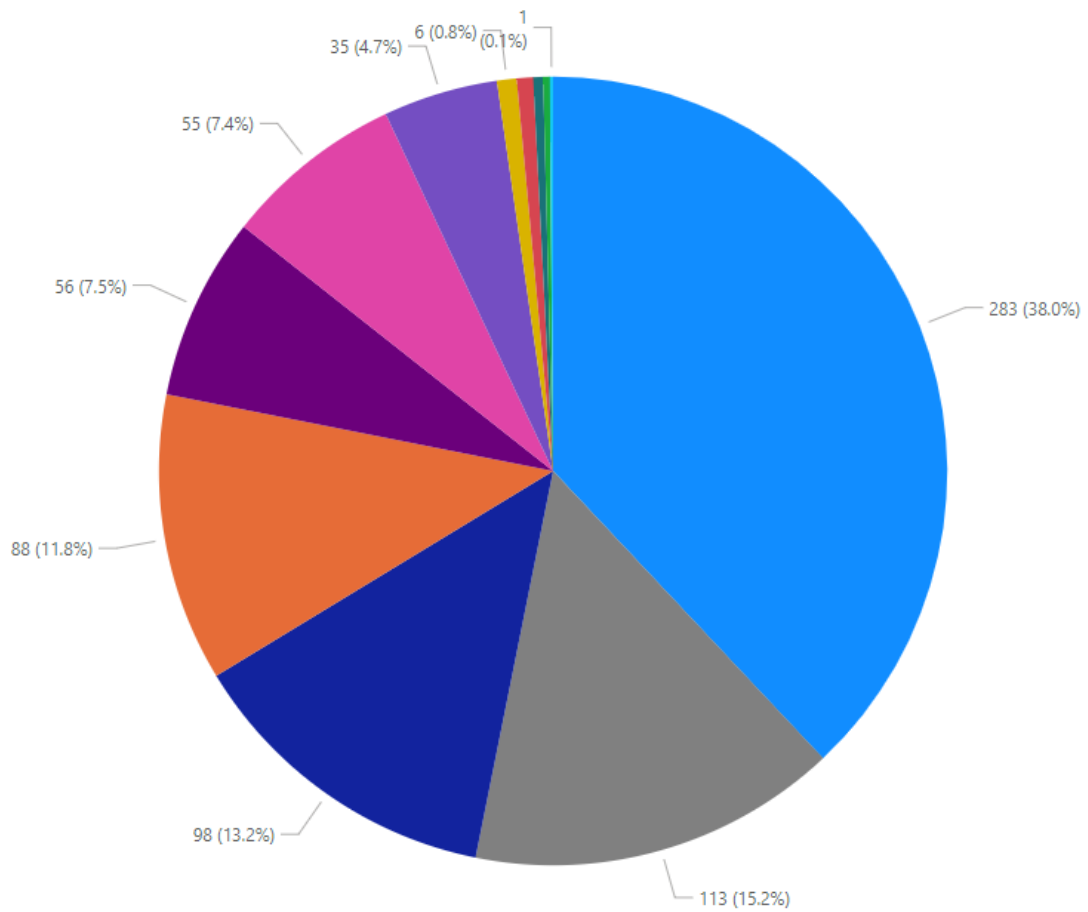
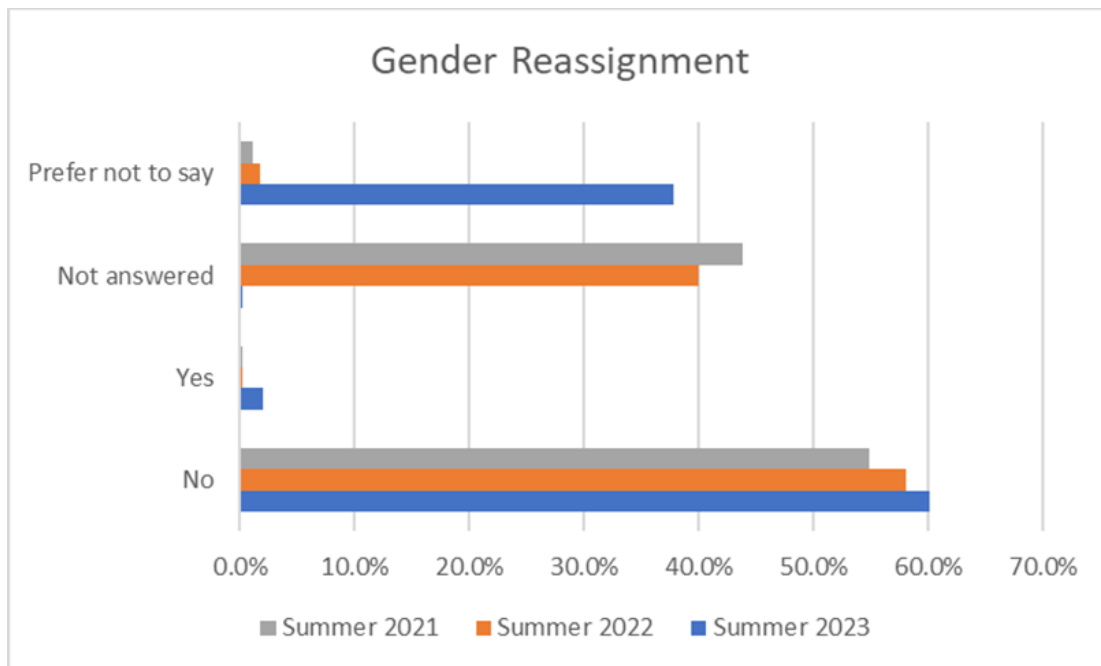Staff Religion breakdown, 2024
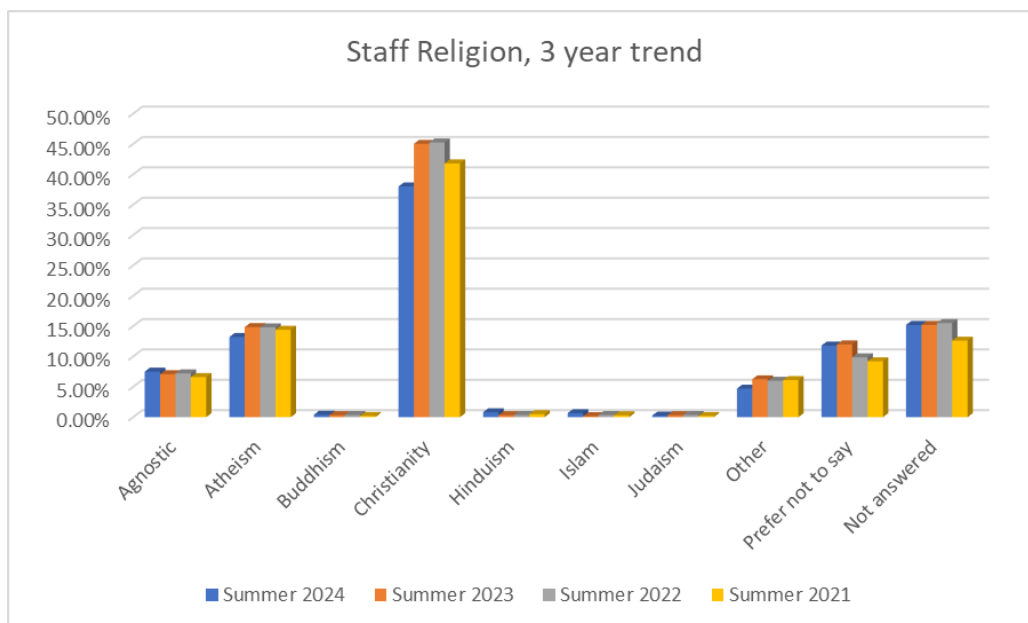
Staff

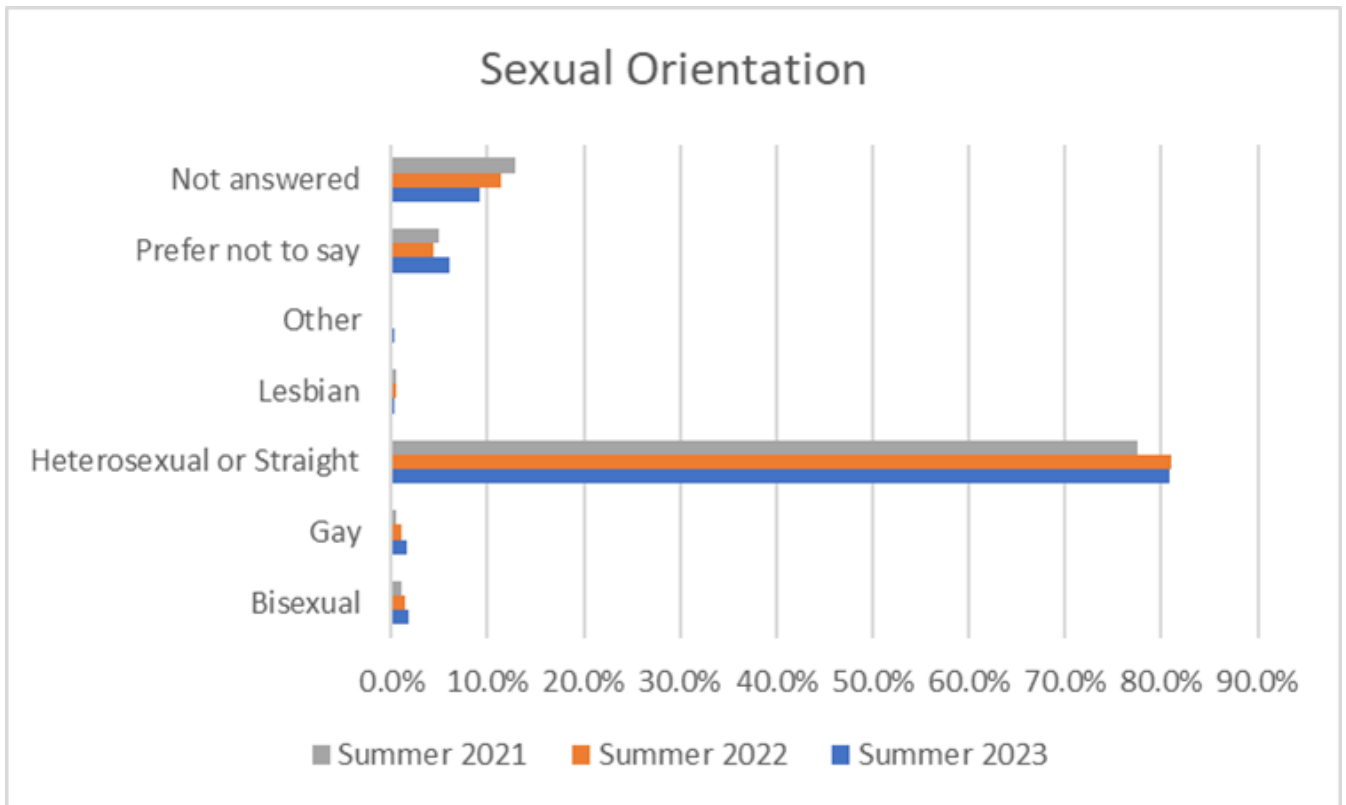Religion 3-year trend
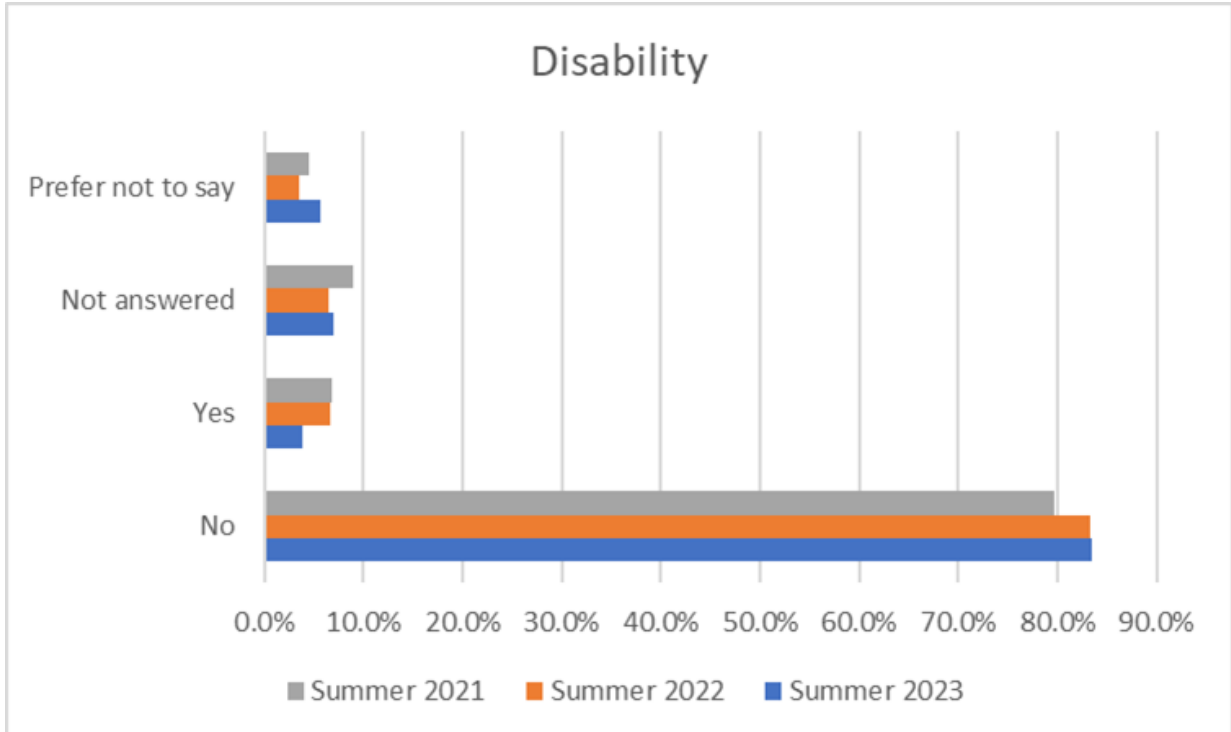
Gender, Sex Identifier & Sexuality

Staff Sex Identifier 3-year trend

Staff Gender Reassignment 3-year trend

Staff Sexual Orientation 3-year trend

Staff Disabilities 3-year trend

Staff Satisfaction 2024- Minority Groups compared to all staff

Staff Satisfaction - Survey 2024