



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Workforce Strategy 2025-2028

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Executive Foreword

We recognise that Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are essential values for our staff, our organisation and our working environment, where everyone is treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. This strategy sets out our ambition to foster a culture of inclusivity where all individuals can thrive, regardless of their background or personal characteristics.

The healthcare sector has one of the most diverse workforces, and NHS Highland is no exception. We serve a wide range of communities across the Highlands and Argyll and Bute, and it is essential that we harness this diversity. To deliver high-quality, person-centred care, we must value the diversity of thought, experience, and perspective that each individual brings to the table. In this regard, a truly inclusive workforce leads to better outcomes for both our staff and the populations we serve.

To guide our progress, this workforce strategy outlines five key priorities: Accessibility, Training, Engagement, Legislation and Policies, and Data. These priorities are designed to tackle existing barriers, enhance education and awareness, promote greater engagement, ensure compliance with equality legislation, and build a robust evidence base to drive decision-making. Each of these priorities will contribute to an environment where discrimination has no place, and where equality and fairness are embedded in every aspect of our operations.

Importantly, this strategy is a living, evolving plan. Over the next three years, we will implement a series of initiatives and actions, supported by measurable objectives and clear accountabilities. Our success will be evaluated through a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), ensuring that we are transparent in our progress and responsive to the feedback of our colleagues.

We know that the true measure of our success will be the experience of our people. I am confident that, by working together, we will enhance our approach to diversity, tackle inequalities, and ensure that every individual within NHS Highland feels safe, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. Through this strategy, we reaffirm our commitment to being a leader in equality, diversity, and inclusion—not just within NHS Scotland, but in the communities we serve.



Gareth Adkins

Director of People and Culture

NHS Highland

April 2025

Introduction

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion matters greatly to NHS Highland and plays a key role in demonstrating who we are, what we do and what we stand for. Our workforce is at the heart of everything we do, and they deserve to be treated equally, with dignity and respect, and without fear of prejudice, from the organisation, colleagues and patients.

There is no place in NHS Highland for any form of discrimination and we want to be recognised as an organisation that values Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our workforce, for the people who use our services and in the local communities we serve. We recognise the value a diverse workforce brings in offering different perspectives in how we deliver high quality, safe, effective, person-centred care and maintain a healthy, vibrant, and inclusive culture throughout our organisation.

The NHS Scotland Values are at the heart of everything we do:

- Care and Compassion
- Dignity and Respect
- Openness, Honesty and Responsibility; and
- Quality and Teamwork

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy supports our ambition in the NHS Highland Together We Care Strategy to –

“Strive to create an inclusive workplace where all colleagues can expect to be treated with compassion, dignity and respect and where difference of any kind is valued and celebrated.”

To ensure that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is at the heart of what we do, this strategy will be supported by a workplan detailing short, medium and long term objectives, outlining how we will drive forward this important work over the next three years.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy forms an integral part of NHS Highlands overarching aim to promote inclusion of staff, patients and volunteers. As such, there are several crossovers and interdependencies spanning existing and future outcomes focusing specifically on the following strategies and plans:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2027
- Employability Strategy 2025-2028
- Together We Care Strategy 2022-2027
- Anchor Plan
- Argyll & Bute Carers Strategy 2024-2027
- NHS Highland Workforce Plan 2022-2025
- Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024
- Equality Outcomes 2025-2029

To date, we have made meaningful progress in our approach to mainstreaming equalities throughout the organisation with specific reference to the following achievements:

- Disability Confident Employer
- Young Persons Guarantee
- Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award
- Carer Positive – Established status
- Promotion of the NHS Scotland Pride Badge scheme
- Development of an online Health Inequalities course
- Development of a new corporate induction with a specific section dedicated to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Launch of an updated public facing website with improved accessibility features

In addition, we have maintained strong partnerships with public and third sector organisations including: Argyll & Bute Council, Highland Council, Police Scotland, Scottish Prison Service, British Deaf Association, Developing the Young Workforce and the Department of Work and Pensions.

We recognise that people perform best when they are encouraged and supported to be themselves and so we are dedicated to supporting our staff and volunteers across all nine protected characteristics and beyond. NHS Highland is also firmly committed to the ongoing development of the care and services we provide in a way that ensures equality of access.

We have worked in partnership with staff to set out our strategy for further developing our approach to diversity and inclusion. This includes agreeing our Equality Outcomes for 2025-2029 and establishing our ambition as being a leading equality employer.

How We Developed The Strategy

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy supports our organisational strategy [Together We Care](#) and the Scottish Government's [Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures](#), [Fair Work Action Plan](#) and [National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care in Scotland](#).

This strategy was developed collaboratively, with representatives from across the organisation. We reviewed our current Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, including our:

- Corporate objectives and Equality Outcomes
- Approach to impact assessments
- Accreditations
- Existing plans and strategies referencing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Workforce demographic information

We listened to the lived experiences and views of people who work for us and use our services and considered research findings, data and reports relevant to health and employment inequalities.

Specifically, the following approaches were adopted during the development of this strategy:

a) Internal engagement across all organisational tiers and governance structures including:

- The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Group
- Local Partnership Forums
- Area Partnership Forum
- Medical and Dental Bargaining Group
- Argyll and Bute Joint Partnership Forum
- Organisational wide staff consultation via survey
- Drop-in information sessions open to all staff
- NHS Scotland National Equality and Diversity Leads network

- b) A review of organisational workforce equalities monitoring data between 2020 and 2023 to collate past and current trends. This in turn allows for the creation of meaningful outcomes to increase representation and reduce inequalities among staff who share a protected characteristic.
- c) A review of best practice trends focusing on the diversity and inclusion agenda from a local, national, and international perspective. The principal resource for this data stems from the Diversity and Inclusion Leaders Community of Practice online resource; Scottish Government and Equality and Human Rights Commission publications and data from organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

How We Will Deliver The Strategy

This strategy is a long-term commitment to advancing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Realising the ambitions will require collaboration and effort from everyone in the organisation. We are experiencing significant staffing and financial challenges; however, we need to act now to address the potential disadvantages being faced by our current and future workforce.

The details of how we will achieve this strategy will be set out in:

- An overarching Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workplan
- Equality Outcomes
- Individual service and directorate workplans

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Group will support our staff and teams to:

- Ensure their strategic plans align with this strategy and they meet our legal equality and human rights obligations.
- Provide accessible equality evidence, information, and resources.
- Improve access to information, opportunities, and services.
- Build and maintain partnerships with staff and communities and the organisations representing them.
- Lead and coordinate outcome focused programmes of work across the whole organisation to achieve greater equality, diversity and inclusion.

We will measure and report on our progress using a range of information and data. We will also establish staff networks to ensure that all staff have an opportunity for their voices to be heard. We will involve staff and equality groups to understand what we are doing well, and what opportunities we have yet to explore. Wherever possible we will apply shared decision-making approaches and partnership working to deliver these priorities.

Following a range of engagement sessions held with staff, managers and subject matter experts, we have identified five strategic priorities. Each priority will help us understand and act on the experiences and needs of everyone who works for us and uses our services. We will follow the timeline as set out in Together We Care, prioritising objectives into Basic, Better, Best principles over the coming three years.

Our Strategic Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Priorities



Priority 1: Accessibility

Objective: *To create a workplace that is accessible to all, removing barriers to employment, development and progression.*

What We Commit To:

- We will update our approach to conducting and using equality impact assessments as a strategy development tool and to ensure policies and processes are fit for purpose for everyone.
- We will provide information in an accessible format.
- We will ensure staff have a good understanding and awareness of accessibility requirements.
- We will publish and implement the Once for Scotland workforce reasonable adjustments guidance.
- We will strive to follow best practice as set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- We will strive to achieve Disability Confident Leader status.
- NHS Highland will conduct Accessibility Audits across its estate and implement actions where possible to remove barriers.
- We will procure software and hardware that supports accessibility for colleagues.

Which Will Result In:

- A workforce that feels supported to realise their full potential.
- Policies and processes that are accessible to all.
- An environment where accessibility is at the fore front of everything we do.
- A workplace that supports people from all backgrounds into employment.
- All staff receive and understand information that we share in a way that is appropriate for them.





Priority 2: Training

Objective: *To continually educate and train staff at all levels on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

What We Commit To:

- We will incorporate equality, diversity and inclusion education into existing training frameworks, recognising that people change behaviour in different ways.
- We will co-design and deliver local equality, diversity and inclusion education and training with people with lived experience.
- We will design educational outcomes that tackle prejudice and promote understanding of other people's circumstances and attributes.
- Working with NHS Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland and others we will contribute to a Once for Scotland approach to equality, diversity and inclusion education and training.
- We will provide our staff with leadership and confidence to understand and actively challenge prejudice, harassment and discrimination.
- We will provide training to promote inclusive recruitment practices.

Which Will Result In:

- Increased confidence in understanding one's own biases, challenging themselves and others, and embracing inclusion.
- Improvement in NHS Highland employee experience.
- A greater awareness of equality legislation and how to successfully interpret and apply it in everyday scenarios.
- Confidence to call out poor behaviours within our organisation.
- People from all backgrounds are encouraged to work for NHS Highland.





Priority 3: Engagement

Objective: *To engage with our workforce and ensure that NHS Highland is aligned with their needs.*

What We Commit To:

- We will establish staff networks to foster inclusion and enable effective engagement.
- We will strengthen informal and formal reporting processes, continue to collect data about informal and formal complaints and routinely ask for feedback about our processes.
- We will listen to people with lived experience.
- We will give staff the information they need to be respectful and appreciative of diverse cultures and backgrounds and to have positive relationships with the people they work with and who use our services.
- We will develop a Diversity and Inclusion calendar that promotes significant dates and activities to celebrate them.

Which Will Result In:

- Platforms for listening and to give staff a voice on what is important to them.
- More accurate reporting of incidents which will enable interventions to be developed.
- A culture where differences are celebrated.
- Events that are important to our colleagues are celebrated and recognised.





Priority 4: Legislation and Policies

Objective: *To build a work culture where all employees feel safe, supported, and valued.*

What We Commit To:

- We will strengthen our implementation of the Public Sector Equality Duty, Fairer Scotland Duty, UN Convention on Rights of a Child and the Equality Act 2010.
- We will review our current process for conducting Equality Impact Assessments and improve reporting and assurance.
- Working with NHS Scotland and others, we will contribute to a Once for Scotland approach to producing equality, diversity and inclusion policies.
- We will take all possible actions in our control to reduce equal pay gaps by sex, disability and ethnicity.
- We will follow inclusive and bias free practices for recruitment, retention and promotion of staff.
- We will support international recruits who choose to join NHS Highland, including guidance and support for managers who recruit international candidates.

Which Will Result In:

- Improved awareness of legislation and policies pertaining to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- A consistent application of policies across the organisation.
- Meeting our statutory duties as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- People from all backgrounds are supported in their employment within NHS Highland.
- Any new policies and processes are developed in conjunction with an Equality Impact Assessment.





Priority 5: Data

Objective: *To hold accurate workforce information to support informed and evidence-based decisions*

What We Commit To:

- We will collect, analyse, share and use equality, diversity and inclusion evidence, to improve our staff experience.
- We will include our equality, diversity and inclusion performance in our corporate reports.
- We will act on our workforce equality data and take positive action to mirror the demographics of the communities we operate in.
- We will inform our colleagues about the importance of recording their equalities information to ensure we create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all.
- Where appropriate we will collaborate with others to review national data, sharing learning and good practice.

Which Will Result In:

- Robust and accurate reporting of our workforce demographics both internally and externally.
- Our priorities as an organisation are based on accurate data.
- Positive action being identified in under-represented workforce groups.
- Our colleagues trust the organisation with their data.
- Improvements to workforce systems in collaboration with other boards and National teams.



Our Approach to Eliminating Discrimination

There is evidence to suggest that discrimination is still widespread both within society and across NHS Scotland. Discrimination affects many staff members who possess one or more of the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Discrimination is unacceptable, and NHS Highland will deliver on its anti-discrimination commitments, including a firm stance against racism, through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

The actions detailed within this strategy provide the overall framework necessary to address all forms of discrimination in the workplace. NHS Highland maintains a zero-tolerance approach to any form of discrimination, and we will collaborate with our staff throughout the implementation of this strategy to address any concerns that may be raised.

Staff networks will play a pivotal role in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of our staff in the workplace, identifying areas for improvement and action to combat discrimination.

In addition, it is critical that the message conveying NHS Highland's stance against discrimination is communicated clearly and widely, ensuring all staff are aware of the part they are expected to play in relation to addressing discrimination. To support this, we will deliver an anti-discrimination campaign based on three key messages aligned with our strategy:

Everyone Is Welcome

Understanding diversity is a key part of valuing it, and we welcome and recognise the value of different perspectives and will collaborate with staff to raise awareness of and to celebrate diverse backgrounds. We will identify and promote existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training materials for staff and deliver awareness raising events that enhance our sense of community and belonging.

Make A Stand

We strongly encourage all staff members to actively promote and uphold the principles of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. To support this, we will provide relevant training to all employees, aimed at fostering and empowering positive behaviours in the workplace. Tackling inappropriate language is often a key first step, and the initiative “Make a Stand” outlines how everyone can contribute to fostering a more inclusive workplace culture.

No Place For Discrimination

Addressing unacceptable behaviours is of paramount importance, and we strongly encourage staff to raise concerns regarding any form of discrimination within the workplace. We are committed to supporting staff in taking a stand and we will take appropriate action in accordance with our workforce policies. Staff may raise concerns through our confidential contacts service, which offers advice and guidance on how to address such issues. Additionally, concerns may also be raised through trade union representatives, line managers, or the People Services department.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

To measure the success and impact of the strategy, NHS Highland will track the following KPIs:

- **Workforce Diversity Metrics:** % increase in the diversity of new hires, promotions, senior leadership and exec/board roles.
- **Employee Engagement:** Results from regular staff surveys and feedback on inclusion and workplace culture.
- **Employee Relations Data:** Data on the number of cases being raised in relation to discrimination, harassment or victimisation linked to a protected characteristic.
- **Training Completion Rates:** % of staff who complete mandatory D&I training and other professional development programs.

Timeline and Review

- **Year 1:** - Focus on foundational work—develop action plans, establish first cohort of staff networks, education campaigns relating to sharing equalities data, awareness raising on current training provision and research into current practices through staff engagement.
- **Year 2:** - Expand on the foundation by launching leadership development initiatives, grow the number of staff networks in operation, reviewing inclusive recruitment practices and improving staff experience for diverse groups.
- **Year 3:** - Consolidate progress, review workforce diversity, assess the impact of staff engagement initiatives, and refine strategies based on data and feedback.
- **Annual Reviews:** Continuous monitoring and annual review of strategy progress, revising as necessary based on feedback from staff and other stakeholders.

Governance

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Group reports to the People and Culture Portfolio Board. It will provide regular reports to the Area Partnership Forum, Local Partnership Forums, Staff Governance Committee, and other relevant forums.

Conclusion

NHS Highland's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is not only about meeting legal and regulatory requirements but about making a meaningful difference to the lives of our staff, patients, and communities. By focusing on recruitment, cultural competence, leadership, and staff engagement, we aim to create a workplace environment where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive and deliver the best care possible.

This strategy, guided by principles of fairness, respect, and collaboration, will help NHS Highland lead the way in building a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace for all.



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