**RCN Group Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**

**RCN Foundation Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan**

**December 2024**

**Introduction and background**

In 2022, the RCN Foundation developed a three-year Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan. In the introduction to that Action Plan, we made a commitment that the Foundation would aim to remove discrimination, exclusion and barriers from the work we delivered. Through our work and the way in which we operate, we aimed to respond to, and positively influence, equity, diversity and inclusion, as well as to create an inclusive culture for the Foundation and its beneficiaries, within which individuals and the professions can participate, contribute and thrive.

The Action Plan included a clear set of objectives and key performance indicators in relation to our governance and grant-making. These included objectives relating to the diversity of our Board of Trustees and Advisers, as well as those who reviewed grant applications on our behalf, the number of grants to individuals from the global majority and undertaking targeted communications to encourage underrepresented groups to apply for grant funding. These objectives were underpinned by baseline data for the Foundation in these areas in order to measure whether or not progress had been made. There was also a recognition that this Action Plan should have a particular focus on race and ethnicity. This was based on evidence from the Workforce Race Equality Standard, which highlighted the continued and persistent prevalence of race discrimination faced by NHS staff.

The Action Plan enabled us to move positively forward in our EDI journey. Our targets for diversifying the ethnic makeup of our Trustees and Advisers were met through a concerted and targeted approach to recruitment. We also implemented a pro-active programme to recruit and support a Trustee under the age of 30 years.

A Grants EDI Framework was also established, which set out the detailed action to be undertaken to address EDI targets in the context of our grant-making. As with the overall Action Plan, there has been significant improvement in making our grant-making more equitable, responsive and reflective of the communities that we serve. We recognise that in some areas. There needs to be further progress, for example, in making grants to individuals living or working in areas of high health inequality and deprivation.

However, this work, over the past three years, has provided helpful data and learning, all of which will be used for this next iteration of the Foundation’s EDI Plan.

**The RCN Group EDI Strategy**

In 2024, the RCN, RCNi and the RCN Foundation agreed a Group-wide *EDI Strategy* which you can find here [Our equity, diversity and inclusion strategy | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-uk-pub-011-613). The EDI Strategy makes a firm commitment to taking the actions necessary to ensure and encourage greater equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the work and operations of the three entities.

The strategy is clear that whilst this is a Group-wide initiative, “both RCNi and the RCN Foundation will progress their individual and bespoke equity, diversity and inclusion action plans and initiatives.” The rationale for this is that the Foundation, as a charity and a grant-maker, has a different remit to the RCN. As a charitable entity, our focus is on supporting any and all nursing and midwifery staff that need our help and not only those who are members of the RCN. We also understand the positive difference that we can make through our grant-making, ensuring that we influence the individuals and organisations that we fund to actively encourage them to embed EDI practice within their work.

Our first EDI framework and plan, which included benchmarking information and clear targets, ran from 2022-24. This plan therefore marks the continuation of the Foundation own EDI journey, setting out our aims and activities for the period 2025-28. Whilst this plan focuses on combatting discrimination in its many forms and the potential barriers it creates for our beneficiaries, we will also have a distinct and targeted focus on anti-racism practice across all areas of our operations and activities. A number of surveys and studies of health and care staff, including data from the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard and *The Courage of Compassion* from The King’s Fund, have consistently highlighted that racism is a key issue for staff from the global majority. Within this context, support to our nursing and midwifery colleagues from the global majority will be a key feature of this plan.

**Terminology**

The RCN Group EDI Strategy provides some helpful definitions to the terminology used, which are also used in this Action Plan.

***Equity***

Equity recognises that to reach equal outcomes individuals need different levels and kinds of support. Equality means each individual or group is given the same resources or opportunities.

***Diversity***

Diversity is the range of people in an organisation or profession. For example, this means people of different age, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality and people with disabilities. Representation of the diversity of people in an organisation or profession refers to how those different perspectives, experiences, and issues are understood, and are making meaningful contributions at every level.

***Inclusion***

Inclusion is about a sense of belonging to – and being valued by – an organisation or profession. It is the recognition of how well the thoughts, contributions, presence and perspectives of different people are actively valued and integrated into a working environment. An inclusive workplace is characterised by active cultures, processes and practices which enable individuals and groups to perform at their highest levels as a result of being psychologically safe, free from discrimination, properly supported, empowered to collaborate and inspired to innovate.

***Anti-racism***

Anti-racism is the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes that promote racial equity in society.

Also worth defining is our reference in this document to the term ‘global majority’. Coined by the educator, activist and leadership consultant Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, global majority is a collective term for people of Indigenous, African, Asian, or Latin American descent, who constitute approximately 85 percent of the global population. It has been used as an alternative to terms which are seen as racialised like ‘ethnic minority’ and ‘person of colour’, or more regional terms like ‘visible minority’ in Canada and ‘Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic’ (BAME) in the United Kingdom. It roughly corresponds to people whose heritage can be traced back to nations of the Global South.

**Priorities in the RCN Group EDI Strategy**

The RCN Group EDI Strategy sets out five priorities under which activity will be undertaken. These provide a useful framework for the Foundation’s work. The five priorities have been reframed to align with the operations and activities of the Foundation, for example, by referring to beneficiaries or nursing and midwifery staff rather than members, and by excluding references to casework. The priorities are set out below and will be used as a framework for delivering the Foundation’s EDI activities.

1. Leaders take accountability for EDI: this priority focuses on leadership at every level and ensures full responsibility for developing and sustaining effective EDI activity within each leader’s area of operation. The actions identified under this priority are designed to support leaders to develop better insight into the needs and experiences of nursing and midwifery staff.
2. Ensuring advocacy for all nursing and midwifery voices: the importance of EDI will be embedded across our work and into every action, initiative or idea generated. The actions identified under this priority seek to ensure that the diverse experiences of nursing and midwifery staff are fully understood and incorporated into working practices that achieve better outcomes.
3. Facilitating support and collaboration across all communities: difference and varied experiences across the nursing and midwifery professions will be actively embraced, recognised and celebrated. The actions identified under this priority will strengthen the RCN Foundation’s relationships with the communities that we serve.
4. Encouraging diversity of representation in governance: we will explore to significantly widen access to the full range of governance roles within the Foundation by removing barriers to participation. The actions identified under this priority are designed to reflect the voices, experiences and perspective of the diversity of nursing and midwifery staff within our governance structures.
5. Creating an inclusive workplace for nursing and midwifery staff: we will promote inclusive, fair and equitable workplace practices. The actions identified under this priority are intended to identify the pro-active initiatives that can be undertaken to promote inclusion and address discrimination and injustice in the workplace.

A plan for how these priorities will be addressed through the Foundation’s specific programme of work is set out below.

**Association of Charitable Foundations – *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: The Pillars of Stronger Foundation Practice***

Alongside our role as part of the RCN Group is an equally important understanding of our role and impact as a grant-maker. We recognise that it is important that we are open and transparent in demonstrating how the grant-making we undertake can shape, challenge and refine the landscape for EDI across nursing and midwifery, and more widely across health and social care.

In considering this, we have also looked to the excellent work of the Association of Charitable Foundations set out in *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: The Pillars of Stronger Foundation Practice* (ACF, 2020), developed with input from over 100 foundations. This sets out nine areas of practice for grant-makers to action which are:

1. Invests time and resources in understanding and defining diversity, equity and inclusion.
2. Produces and reviews strategies that will implement DEl practices.
3. Collects, tracks and publishes DEI data in its own practices and performance.
4. Has a diverse Trustee Board and staff team, both in terms of demographics and experience.
5. Reflects and implements DEI practices in its funding activities.
6. Expresses its DEl commitment, policies and practices publicly.
7. Makes itself accountable to those it serves and supports.
8. Uses its own power to advocate DEI practices.
9. Collaborates with others to promote and implement DEI practices.

These nine areas of practice provide a helpful additional route map for our work on EDI. The actions listed below will therefore reflect these nine areas of practice in order to provide a more rounded and comprehensive approach to embedding EDI excellence across our organisation and its work.

**Action Plan**

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| **Leaders take accountability for EDI** | | |
| **What will we do?** | **What change do we expect to see?** | **How will we measure progress?** |
| Consider how EDI relates to the Foundation’s history, mission and current work. | A better understanding of the Foundation’s history and whether there are any lessons to learn from the past that can be put into practice in the future. | Develop a plan to undertake this work with clear timelines KPIs, the delivery of which will be overseen by the Grants Committee. |
| Ensure that the 2024-28 strategy clearly articulates our commitment to EDI practice and that it will be integral to the delivery of this strategy. | An increase in the number of grant-reviewers who are from the global majority which is reflective of the nursing and midwifery workforce.  An increase in the number of grants awarded across the three grant-making priorities to areas of high deprivation and health inequality; or to professionals promoting public health and working with vulnerable groups and individuals. | Measurable grant-making EDI outcomes will be set and reported against within the annual impact assessment framework for grant-making. |
| Undertake an annual audit of grant-making EDI data, identifying trends and recommending actions as needed. Alongside data on protected characteristics, we will also look at the way that funding is allocated, for example by geography and health inequality. | An increase in the number of grant-recipients who are IEN and / or from the global majority which is reflective of the nursing and midwifery workforce.  An increase in the number of grants awarded across the three grant-making priorities to areas of high deprivation and health inequality; or to professionals promoting public health and working with vulnerable groups and individuals. | Measurable grant-making EDI outcomes will be set and reported against within the annual impact assessment framework for grant-making. |
| Produce an annual report of EDI data for the Grants Committee and Board, identifying any actions needed. | Meeting EDI KPIs set out in the Impact Assessment Framework for grant-making. | Measurable grant-making EDI outcomes will be set and reported against within the annual Impact Assessment Framework for grant-making. |
| Publish our EDI statement and commitment to taking action to address inequalities on our website. | A better understanding externally of the Foundation’s commitment to EDI and the actions we plan to take to address this commitment pro-actively. | We will seek feedback from our beneficiaries about our approach to EDI and whether anything could be further improved. |
| Undertake an annual review of progress towards fulfilling our EDI commitments. | For the Foundation’s commitment to EDI to map to the ever-changing need and demographic of the nursing and midwifery professions. | We will undertake annual reporting to the Board on progress against KPIs. |
| Share our approach and progress on EDI with the RCN Group for dissemination and learning purposes. | A better understanding of the Foundation’s contribution to achieving the objectives of the Group-wide Strategy. | Reporting on progress will be made to the governing bodies of the three RCN Group entities. |

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| **Ensuring advocacy for all nursing and midwifery voices** | | |
| **What will we do?** | **What change do we expect to see?** | **How will we measure progress?** |
| Ensure that Equality Impact Assessments continue to be undertaken across all key projects and initiative. | All research/project applications continue to have a tangible, EIA included within the proposal | Interim update and final reports will report on the implementation of the EIA throughout the project/study. |
| Provide training and development for Trustees and Advisers in order to enable them to carry out EDI practices in an effective and informed way. | Discussion and decision-making by the Board and Committees that is better informed by EDI principles. | We will build this into the annual review of performance of the Board and Committees. |
| Ensure that all grant reviewers can demonstrate that they have received mandatory training on EDI to enable them to carry out EDI practices in an effective and informed way. | All grant reviewers will undertake reviews through an EDI lens.  We would aim to ensure that the number of grants awarded to nursing and midwifery staff who are from the global majority which is reflective of the workforce, and who experience neurodiversity and other disabilities. | Through the annual report on education grants, and through reviewing interim and final reports to identify trends. |
| Ensure that grant-making continues to have a pro-active focus on areas of high health inequality and high deprivation. | An increase in the number of grants awarded across the three grant-making priorities to areas of high deprivation and health inequality; or to professionals promoting public health and working with vulnerable groups and individuals at risk of increased health inequality.  Greater engagement with health and care providers in areas of high health inequality and high deprivation to support penetration of grants in these areas  NB The Stakeholder Forum will be a helpful resource. | Through the annual report on education grants, and through reviewing interim and final reports. |
| Ensure that all staff undertake mandatory EDI training every three years. | The RCN Foundation staff receive EDI training every two years. | Through review by the Senior Leadership Team. |

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| **Facilitating support and collaboration across all communities** | | |
| **What will we do?** | **What change do we expect to see?** | **How will we measure progress?** |
| Ensure that new grant-making programmes are co-designed. | Service users and carers would be included in the stakeholder engagement for the two grant-making programmes over the course of the strategy.  They will be included on review and interview panels for research studies and projects | Testimonials will be included in the annual grants impact report from service users and cares explaining how they work with the RCN Foundation and grant-making. |
| Ensure that all RCN Foundation events and platforms reflect the diversity of our beneficiaries. | Participants who reflect the breadth and diversity of the nursing and midwifery workforce and wider population. | Those attending RCNF events will be asked to complete an evaluation form. |
| Take steps to ensure that our pool of grant reviewers is diverse and reflects the communities we serve. | Grant reviewers who are reflective of the communities we serve. | Through the annual review of the EDI Plan. |

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| **Encouraging diversity of representation in governance** | | |
| **What will we do?** | **What change do we expect to see?** | **How will we measure progress?** |
| Regularly review and seek to enhance the diversity of the Board of Trustees and staff team. | A Board of Trustees and staff team that reflect diversity of protected characteristics, thought and experiences. | Through the annual review of the EDI Plan. |
| Embed EDI principles in Trustee recruitment processes. Ensure that recruitment is undertaken through an open and transparent process. | A Board of Trustees that reflects diversity of protected characteristics, thought and experiences | Through the annual review of the EDI Plan. |
| Embed EDI principles in External Adviser recruitment processes. Ensure that recruitment is undertaken through an open and transparent process. | External Advisers that reflect diversity of protected characteristics, thought and experiences. | Through the annual review of the EDI Plan. |
| Continue to implement the ‘Young Trustee’ initiative. | Representation and input to the Board from nursing and midwifery staff who are from a younger demographic (under 30).  A better understanding of the experiences and views of frontline nursing and midwifery staff. | Through the annual review of the EDI Plan. |
| Ensure that we partner with recruitment agencies whose values, ethos and approach to EDI are consistent with our own. | Alignment on EDI principles between the Foundation and any recruitment agencies with which it works. | Through the annual review of the EDI Plan. |

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| **Creating an inclusive workplace for nursing and midwifery staff** | | |
| **What will we do?** | **What change do we expect to see?** | **How will we measure progress?** |
| Delivery specific grant programmes that support and promote diversity practice in the workplace, such as the RCN Foundation Michelle Cox Award. | Pro-active promotion of diversity practice in the workplace as a result of RCN Foundation-funded activity. | Interim and final reports will report on the progress of the funded work. |
| Use the outcomes of funded research to proactively raise key issues affecting nursing and midwifery with appropriate audiences, particularly as they effect underrepresented groups. | Awareness amongst key audiences of key issues affecting nursing and midwifery and appropriate responses developed to address these issues. | We will monitor activities that are undertaken with regard to specific issues that arise from funded research in relation to the audience they reach and any change that occurs as a result. |

**Final Thoughts**

This plan sets out a number of activities and actions in relation to EDI that we are fully committed to achieving. Whilst some of these may seem to be small scale incremental steps we believe that collectively, they can contribute to bringing about wider change.

Data – gathering, analysing and understanding it – is an important element of this plan. It will strengthen and validate the actions that we take, as well as providing evidence to underpin these actions. However, as a grant-maker whose support touches the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of the nursing and midwifery professions, we will also adhere to the principle that this programme of work is as much about dignity as it is about data. This can only come through identifying and defining the insight that the data provides. Therefore, we will take an insights driven approach to this work.

Finally, this plan represents another step on our EDI journey. We say this intentionally, in recognition that our work on EDI will continue to evolve, need ongoing refinement and address any emerging challenges that arise. The Association of Charitable Foundations rightly described their *Stronger Foundations* work, referenced in this document, as being in “permanent beta”, in need of continual shaping. We recognise that to become a truly equitable, diverse and inclusive organisation, the journey will not be a linear one. Our learning along the way will mean that we may need to revisit issues and challenges that we thought had been addressed.

Our commitment, therefore, is to address EDI on an ongoing and iterative basis and continue to develop our approach over time to ensure that we can continue to support and strengthen nursing and midwifery in the best possible way.