



Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

First year highlights and impact report



Contents

Welcome from Professor Nicola Ranger, RCN General Secretary and Chief Executive	5
Delivering Change: Our Impact in 2024-2025.....	6
Timeline of Activity.....	12
Delivering Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: the structures behind the strategy.....	14
Our Strategy Commitments	18



“

Equity, diversity and inclusion practice is integral to delivering dignity and high-quality patient care; achieving safer and better outcomes for all patients and communities.

Welcome from Professor Nicola Ranger, RCN General Secretary and Chief Executive

We are proud to share this report with you — a reflection of the Royal College of Nursing's continued commitment to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at every level of our work.

Chaos has replaced consensus in the EDI space. Around the world, we are witnessing growing polarisation, political shifts and rising tensions that challenge the progress many of us have worked hard to achieve in EDI. In some countries, hard-won rights are being eroded. In others, space for open and honest conversations is shrinking. Against this backdrop, our commitment to equity is not only a professional responsibility — it is a moral imperative.

Here at the RCN, we believe that equity is not optional. It is essential to delivering high-quality care and achieving better outcomes for patients. Our health and care systems can only thrive when they reflect, respect and actively engage the diversity of the people they serve — and the people who work within them.

That's why EDI is not a standalone issue. **It is a golden thread that runs through everything we do.** From the way we develop our policies and elect our leaders, to the training we offer, the conversations we start, and the support we give — it all matters. It shapes the experiences of our members and staff. It strengthens teams, builds trust and drives real change across workplaces, communities and the wider profession. It matters most perhaps in every instance where care is delivered to patients. Equity, diversity and inclusion practice is integral to delivering dignity and high-quality patient care; achieving safer and better outcomes for all patients and communities.

This report outlines the many ways we are embedding EDI into the fabric of the RCN — not as a one-off initiative, but as a lasting commitment. We have taken bold steps: investing in anti-racism work, supporting inclusive leadership, championing equity at the ballot box, and creating practical tools that empower members to speak

up and take action. More than that, it takes us into new territory. Our work in this arena means that we are required to recognise the systemic and structural nature of inequality, disadvantage and the harm caused all forms of discrimination. This will require deeper thinking, bolder leadership and clearer language to be able to envisage and share a powerful vision for a truly inclusive future for all of us.

There is more to do, much more. I firmly believe we are on the right path — and that our diversity is one of our greatest strengths.

Together, we will keep learning, listening and leading.

**Because equity is our clear ambition.
Diversity is our underused asset.
And inclusion is our future.**

Delivering Change: Our Impact in 2024-2025

Our first Group Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy was published in May 2024. It provides a coherent response to the challenges of our time. It also offers an important moment to align our focus in placing equity and inclusion at the heart of all our activity at both a strategic and operational level.

The EDI Strategy is a living document and aims to ensure that the RCN Group works tirelessly to build an organisation where inequity, discrimination, and racism are eliminated within the organisation and proactively challenged on behalf of our members externally as a part of the College's fabric.

At the centre of this ambition is ensuring that everyone has the freedom, opportunity, and space to belong within the College and be represented in our governance structures.

Our EDI Strategy commits us to advocating more clearly and more successfully for all people in our membership. We promised to be more diverse in our leadership and governance and drive change forward. We promised to use our powerful, political voice on the widest range of issues that affect the greatest number of our members. And we will continue to fight with conviction to change the working environments of nursing staff, as well as lift the standards in their professional union.

The strategy sets a clear direction of travel towards delivering EDI across the RCN Group and serves as a catalyst for change and reform; identifying 5 priorities for action across the RCN Group.

Over the last year, the RCN Group has been working hard to set up the structures and operating arrangements that will support and embed successful delivery of the EDI strategy

Our first EDI annual report focuses on how we have organised the delivery of the strategy, organising the work and assigning clear accountability for activity.

The EDI strategy identifies 5 strategic priorities which are summarised below.

1. Leaders taking accountability for EDI

This is the first of our annual reports so that our members and other stakeholders can have transparency about the work that is being done to implement the strategy and ensure what they wanted to see delivered is achieved.

Aligning with Commitment 2: Publish an EDI annual report to members highlighting activity and outcomes. This will include any benchmarking activity in support of the transformative anti-racism work.

2. Ensuring advocacy for all member voices

The RCN's Cultural Ambassador (CA) Programme continues to play a vital role in challenging bias and supporting fair treatment in the workplace. Originally launched in 2014 in the West Midlands as a small pilot in a single NHS trust, it has since grown significantly. Today, nearly 40 NHS organisations across the UK have embraced the programme, with more than 500 trained Cultural Ambassadors now active in health settings.

These ambassadors are highly skilled nursing staff who use their insight and training to identify and address cultural bias and discrimination in disciplinary processes and workplace practices. The programme has proven so effective that it is now gaining interest beyond the NHS — including from universities and other sectors.

In 2024, we also piloted a new inclusive leadership initiative called Changing the Conversational Culture (CCC).

This programme focuses on helping leaders build their self-awareness and confidence when working across difference. A key feature is the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) assessment, which provides personalised feedback and development plans, supported by expert facilitators.

Looking ahead, the RCN is exploring opportunities to expand these programmes even further. We are also preparing to launch a new one-day masterclass on tackling workplace incivility in summer 2025 — giving nurses and leaders practical tools to challenge disrespectful behaviours and build healthier, more inclusive working environments.

Aligning with Commitment 18: Implement a comprehensive outreach campaign to increase promotion and consider expansion of the Cultural Ambassador programme.

3. Facilitating support and collaboration across all communities

On 11 December 2024, we hosted our first full-day Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Conference, marking a significant milestone in our journey to embed inclusion across the organisation.

Under the theme *Being the Change*, the event offered members a unique space to reflect on what it means to communicate across difference — a vital skill in today's diverse workplaces. This was the first opportunity since the pandemic for many to come together, learn, and share their experiences in person.

The programme combined theory, practical tools, and personal storytelling across four interactive sessions — all designed to help attendees take confident, informed action to promote equity in their own settings.

A total of 72 delegates attended, including 52 RCN members and 20 non-members, representing:

- 22 NHS Trusts across England
- independent health and social care providers
- universities and local councils
- Northern Ireland and all regions of England
- key partners such as NHS Employers and the Royal College of Midwives.

What we heard from delegates

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive — every respondent said the event met or exceeded their learning expectations.

Delegates told us they left the day with tools and confidence to:

- start honest conversations with colleagues
- share learning through team meetings and forums
- strengthen their roles as EDI advocates
- influence teaching, revalidation, and everyday practice
- build or grow local EDI groups and initiatives.

This annual event is just the beginning. It shows the real appetite across the profession for inclusive, values-driven leadership — and we're proud to be part of that change.

Aligning with Commitment 24:
Develop a branded series of EDI events through webinars, conferences and seminars that support members to build their EDI knowledge and confidence.

“

I'm very satisfied with the time and money I invested — it was worth every penny and so much more besides.

4. Encouraging diverse representation in governance

In the lead-up to the 2024 regional and country board elections, all 9 England regional boards and the 3 country boards (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) were invited to consider how they could use positive action to improve the diversity of their elected representatives.

Positive action is a lawful and proportionate way to address barriers faced by people with protected characteristics — such as race, sex or sexual orientation. It allows organisations to take steps that reduce disadvantage, meet different needs and increase participation.

To support this, boards were offered the option to adopt a constraints model, enabling them to prioritise candidates from underrepresented groups if needed to reflect the diversity of their membership.

Two boards opted to formally adopt the model, introducing a positive action provision for members from the global majority. This meant that in specific circumstances, candidates from these communities could be appointed to ensure more balanced and representative boards — even if they did not receive the highest number of votes.

To widen access and engagement, boards also introduced a range of supportive measures, including:

- targeted communications to encourage diverse applications
- outreach through existing EDI networks
- tailored support through the nomination and application process.

Importantly, in both regions that adopted the constraints model, members from the global majority went on to win their seats outright, demonstrating strong engagement and support from their peers — and showing that when barriers are reduced, representation follows.

This approach marks a meaningful step forward in our work to ensure RCN governance is more reflective of the diverse profession we represent. We are currently exploring other models and areas of best practice in terms of widening participation.

Aligning Commitment 29: Improve diverse participation – including assessing accessibility for participation and developing best practice guidance – at our operational and governance activities by using positive action to address chronic under- representation and explore other models.



5. Creating an inclusive workplace for all members

Here at the RCN, we recognise that meaningful progress on equity and inclusion begins with shared understanding. We have a vital role in supporting all our members to confidently engage with these concepts — and in creating safe, respectful spaces where honest conversations can take place.

To support this, we've taken steps to clarify the language and definitions we use. Our updated EDI webpages now include a dedicated section outlining key terms and principles, helping to build a common foundation for learning and action across the organisation.

Looking ahead, by the end of 2025, we will launch a fully developed Inclusion Toolkit. Designed for everyday use, it will offer practical guidance, resources and scenarios to help members navigate workplace challenges, build inclusive practice, and advocate effectively for equity.

This toolkit is part of our commitment to ensuring every member is equipped to turn EDI principles into everyday action.

Aligning with Commitment 28: Develop an EDI toolkit for members which identifies key language and terminology as well as accessing support for achieving equity and inclusion outcomes.

We continue to play a vital role in supporting members with the knowledge and tools needed to understand and engage with equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in meaningful ways.

During consultation for the EDI strategy, members consistently told us that having honest conversations is a key first step towards creating inclusive workplaces and delivering better outcomes for patients. Responding to this, we have prioritised practical resources that help members reflect, learn and take action.

At RCN Congress 2023, we committed to becoming an anti-racist organisation. To support this commitment, and help members begin their own journeys, we partnered with NHS England to create *Talking to Talk: Advancing Race Equality in Nursing and Midwifery*.

This resource is designed to empower individuals to take personal action in advancing race equity in their practice. It includes:

- a clear breakdown of the case for advancing race equality
- insights into key topics such as bias, discrimination and structural inequality
- practical steps that individuals and teams can take to help shape a health care system where opportunities are fair and inclusive for all.

Importantly, the resource is framed as a starting point. It encourages members not to remain neutral in the face of bullying, discrimination or incivility, and equips them with practical techniques to support and complement existing organisational work.

As the emergent Anti-Racism Sub-committee of the EDI Committee forms and progresses its work, these tools will be reviewed and expanded to reflect emerging priorities and member needs. Throughout 2024, we've worked closely with the original proposers of the anti-racism resolution passed at Congress to ensure momentum is maintained and the organisation is held accountable.

Tackling workplace incivility and promoting everyday inclusion

We recognise that incivility in the workplace — including rude, dismissive or exclusionary behaviour — can significantly damage team relationships, undermine trust, and ultimately impact the quality of care.

To address this, the RCN developed the *Let's Talk... Inclusion Toolkit*. This interactive resource helps members to:

- start and guide meaningful conversations around equity and inclusion
- understand and navigate issues such as microaggressions, psychological safety and allyship
- learn how to speak up, support colleagues, and take practical action.

It includes real-world scenarios across areas such as ethnicity, disability, gender identity and pregnancy, with suggestions for how to respond effectively and sensitively.

Together, these tools are helping members across all care settings to build more inclusive teams — and move from awareness to action.

Timeline of Activity

Throughout 2024, alongside building a new structure that provides clarity and accountability, we have seen many examples of early delivery of strategy commitments. The section below provides a summary of the activity against the broader priority and specific commitment.

May 2024

Launch of EDI Strategy

- The first RCN Group-wide EDI Strategy is published. It sets out 5 strategic priorities.
- The first RCN Group-wide EDI Strategy is published. It sets out 5 strategic priorities and 37 long-term commitments.

July 2024

EDI Committee re-established

- Reintegration into RCN governance structures.
- Diverse representation from members and external advisers.

Summer 2024

Project management approach adopted

- Structures developed: 8 workstreams and a Programme Board.
- Delivery responsibilities distributed across the organisation.

September 2024

Mehvish Shaffi-Ajibola appointed as EDI Committee vice chair.

October 2024

Data and analytics workstream begins

- Work begins on EDI data collection across the 4 nations.
- Data fields identified and CRM integration planning starts.

November 2024

EDI Programme Board meets for the first time

- Board formally takes operational responsibility for strategy delivery.
- Workstream leads assigned and governance links established.

December 2024 First Annual EDI Conference

- Theme: Being the Change.
- 72 delegates attend, high satisfaction rates and practical outcomes.
- Let's Talk...inclusion resource launched and webpages updated.

January 2025 RCN Institute of Excellence formally launched

- Aligns education, research, and engagement to support strategy.
- Five academies established to evidence and embed EDI impact.

March 2025 New Chair appointed to EDI Committee

- Dr Arun Verma becomes Chair.
- Workstream leads scheduled to appear before Committee.

March 2025 UK Joint Reps Conference – EDI briefings delivered

- Integration of EDI training across activist types begins.

Spring 2025 Public policy research completed

- Survey and interviews with internationally educated nursing staff.
- Policy recommendations prepared for government engagement.

Summer 2025 Inclusive leadership programme piloted

- New incivility masterclass to be launched.
- Training refresh to embed EDI into casework, supervision, and accountability will commence.
- Implementation of supervision updates and new KPIs.
- New workplace EDI toolkit to be launched.

Ongoing activity throughout 2025

- Positive action pilots: Used by regional boards to improve governance diversity.
- Case management system enhancements: Equality data integration and PowerBI reporting in use.
- Anti-racism commitments: Resources updated and embedded in training, policy, and activism.
- Employment relations work: Tools developed to address migrant worker exploitation.
- Member engagement: Eight deliverables defined; ongoing review of rep training.
- Policy advocacy: Continued push for legislative change, including support for Equality (Race & Disability) Bill.

“

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all members enjoy the highest levels of satisfaction and confidence in the RCN as their trade union and professional body.

Delivering Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: the structures behind the strategy

To turn the vision of the 37 commitments of the EDI Strategy into lasting action, the RCN Group has invested in building a robust delivery infrastructure. These structures ensure that responsibility is shared, action is co-ordinated, and progress is measurable. Below is a breakdown of the key components of our delivery model.

1. EDI Programme Board

Established: November 2024 and chaired by the Executive Team sponsor for EDI, the Programme Board holds overall operational accountability for the implementation of the EDI strategy.

Its role includes:

- providing strategic direction
- overseeing delivery across all 8 workstreams
- ensuring alignment with the RCN's broader organisational strategy
- reporting into RCN Council and Executive Team
- maintaining links to the EDI Committee for member-led insight and scrutiny.

2. Workstream model

The strategy has been operationalised through 8 themed workstreams, each focused on a specific area of delivery.

Each workstream is led by a senior staff lead who is accountable for driving progress and reporting outcomes.

Each workstream includes:

- a named senior lead with authority and accountability
- staff from across departments, with relevant expertise
- member representatives and subject experts (where appropriate)
- geographic and functional representation (for example, across the 4 nations).

The 8 workstreams are:

1. Governance
2. Staff learning and development
3. Data and analytics
4. Case work and case management
5. Employment relations
6. Member engagement
7. Public policy
8. The RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence

Each workstream follows a structured plan, using a consistent reporting template to capture actions, milestones, risks, and outcomes.

3. Project management approach

To ensure clarity, accountability, and coordination, the delivery of the strategy is supported by a project management methodology.

This enables:

- effective decision making – having clarity on the roles and expected behaviours of the different stakeholders and governance groups
- control of scope – effective project management methods will ensure that task and project parameters are clear and explicit, saving time and money
- clear understanding of what's being delivered – our project management approach ensures that there is both clarity and consensus on what will be delivered from the start
- better problem resolution – risk management processes ensure risks can be anticipated and prepared for to ensure that the strategy activity remains on track.

This approach is designed to give members, stakeholders, and leadership confidence that delivery is on track and outcomes are being achieved.



4. Member involvement and governance oversight

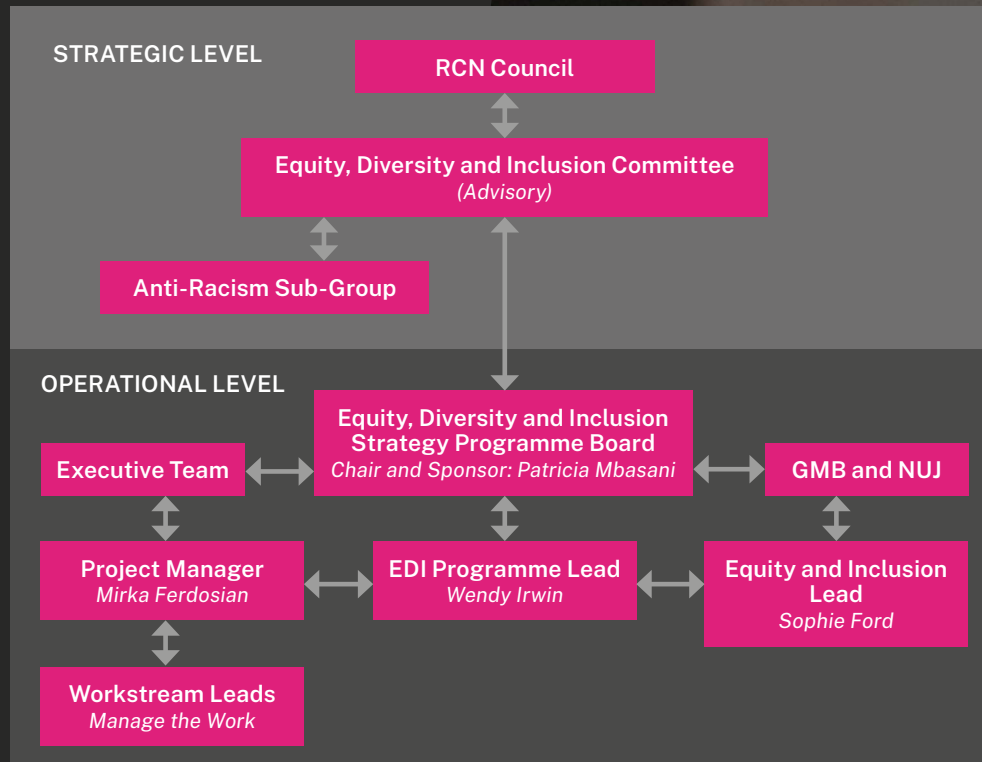
EDI Committee:

- was reinstated in July 2024.
- includes representatives from RCN's Trade Union, Professional Nursing, Nursing Support Worker, and Student Committees, as well as RCNi, the RCN Foundation, and external EDI experts
- provides strategic advice, member insight, and challenge
- is chaired by Dr Arun Verma, with Mehvish Shaffi-Ajibola as Vice Chair.

The Committee plays a crucial role in ensuring that EDI remains member-led, and that progress is regularly scrutinised and shaped by those with lived experience.

Council and executive oversight:

- The EDI Committee reports directly into Council.
- Regular updates ensure leadership ownership and visibility across the organisation.





5. Co-production and co-design

A core feature of the delivery model is the co-production approach. Each workstream is built to include voices from across the organisation and membership, ensuring diversity of thought and experience.

This includes:

- collaborative planning of actions and priorities
- joint development of resources and tools
- inclusion of lived experience in designing member-facing initiatives.

6. Measuring progress and impact

To ensure transparency and learning, the structures include a clear focus on measurement and evaluation.

This includes:

- annual reporting to members and stakeholders
- EDI data dashboards tracking engagement, representation and impact
- new KPIs that embed EDI into operational performance
- mechanisms for collecting feedback and adjusting delivery accordingly.

“

Each workstream is built to include voices from across the organisation and membership, ensuring diversity of thought and experience.

Our Strategy Commitments

Leaders take accountability for EDI

1. Revise our equality monitoring and data capture by collecting data on all protected characteristics across all countries in the UK.
2. Publish an EDI annual report to members highlighting activity and outcomes. This will include any benchmarking activity in support of the transformative anti-racism work.
3. Embed equity impact analysis within decision making.
4. Conduct regular data collection, analysis, and reporting across all protected characteristics in all countries in the UK.
5. Review our structures, policies and processes to effectively design out racism and all forms of discrimination as part of our anti-racism and broader anti-discrimination commitments.
6. Develop our case management system to enable reports exposing patterns of discrimination in case data to better challenge employers and support members.
7. Apply consequences and follow the established complaints process across membership, boards, branches, committees,

and Council if our Respect Charter is not upheld by an individual or community.

8. Host regular events for members to give feedback to RCN senior leadership across the UK on EDI-focused matters.

Ensuring advocacy for all member voices

9. Build a strong evidence base on EDI which enables influential research and publication of reports on the lived experiences of members – representing all protected characteristics – that seek to prompt systemic change across the breadth of the health and social care sectors in order to improve their outcomes and experiences.
10. Promote the Voice of Nursing on external social justice issues (such as addressing the gender, disability and race pay gaps across the nursing profession and the impact of immigration changes on internationally educated nurses).
11. Incorporate EDI into trade union collective bargaining as well as lobbying activity.
12. Review the impact of all accredited representative roles (steward, learning rep, health, safety & wellbeing reps) in equality issues within workplaces.

13. Influence the development of equality legislation and guidance to strengthen protection against discrimination.
14. Provide mandatory learning and development for all members in governance roles to enhance their understanding and capacity on EDI including anti-racism and intersectionality.
15. Provide mandatory learning and development for all accredited representatives in order to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the wider EDI agenda including intersectionality and anti-racism.
16. Provide learning and development support for branches to engage with the EDI agenda at a grassroots level within workplaces.
17. Campaign on behalf of internationally educated nurses to ensure they are not automatically placed at the bottom of the pay structure by default and overseas experience is recognised and rewarded.
18. Increase promotion and consider expansion of the Cultural Ambassador programme.

Facilitating support and collaboration across all communities

19. Develop partnerships with external EDI networks and advocacy-related groups.
20. Develop EDI member networks across various protected characteristics to support the EDI Committee.
21. Develop a comprehensive learning programme for RCN members covering all the protected characteristics.
22. Agree priorities for each EDI network and associated events.
23. Lobby employers across the health care sector to strengthen their support to internationally recruited nurses and provide comprehensive and ongoing support in relation to pay, terms and conditions.
24. Develop a branded series of EDI events through webinars, conferences and seminars that support members to build their EDI knowledge and confidence.
25. Build a definitive repository of best practice in reducing and eliminating health inequalities in nursing practice and build partnerships with organisations specialising in supporting underserved communities.
26. Ensure that the knowledge and nursing practice offering across the RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence has a defined EDI dimension and promotes the reduction of health inequalities across the 5 academies.

27. Empower RCN representatives to share best practice and learnings in relation to EDI practice to continuously improve practice and outcomes.

28. Develop an EDI toolkit for members which identifies key language and terminology as well as accessing support for achieving equity and inclusion outcomes.

Encouraging diversity of representation in governance

29. Improve diverse participation – including assessing accessibility for participation and developing best practice guidance – at events and in our operational and governance activities by using positive action to address chronic under-representation and explore other models (e.g. reserved seats/constraints models) to sustainably attract the full diversity of RCN membership.
30. Research best practice and develop programmes, policies and positive action practices to increase the diversity of representation in member participation on RCN boards, committees, branches, and in other governance structures.
31. Improve representation within governance roles at the branch level through the development of programmes and interventions aimed at removing barriers to participation and supporting engagement

from the full diversity of our membership and targeting those who are currently under-represented.

32. Implement a comprehensive outreach campaign to increase the diversity of membership across the UK.

Creating an inclusive workplace for all members

33. Develop a defined EDI Nursing Workforce Standard as a driver for delivering safe and effective care.
34. Influence and lobby employers and governments to put in place effective inductions for internationally educated nursing staff, taking account of experience overseas.
35. Promote and build on resources and templates for members to help understand and advocate for inclusion in their workplaces.
36. Develop guidance for members on key cultural and religious events and support their celebration.
37. Provide structured learning and development for RCN staff to support members with equality issues.



Royal College
of Nursing

This document has been designed in collaboration with our members to ensure it meets most accessibility standards.
However, if this does not fit your requirements, please contact corporate.communications@rcn.org.uk

Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London
W1G 0RN
rcn.org.uk

012 110 | May 2025