



# EDI Annual Report

## **2025-2026**



BUILT THE NHS

BUILT THE NHS

RIGHT  
• Reject racist lies  
• Refugees are not to blame

HEARTBEAT OF HEALTH CARE

IMMIGRANTS BUILT THE NHS

Royal College of Nursing  
The voice of nursing  
INTERNATIONAL

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INTERNATIONAL NURSES ARE THE HEARTBEAT OF HEALTH CARE

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## Foreword

**Over the past year, we have continued to deepen our investment in creating a more equitable, diverse and inclusive organisation for every one of our members.**

**As your professional body and trade union, we are proud to be working with you towards our collective ambition of becoming an anti-racist, anti-discrimination organisation which is outspoken and proactive on issues of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in every facet of our work.**

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We're living and working in a complex and worrying climate, characterised by instability and unrest on the world stage and growing hostility, incivility and intolerance at home.

Your collective voice reflects the full diversity of the nursing profession, strengthening the voice of nursing and giving it greater weight, legitimacy and authority.

We're living and working in a complex and worrying climate, characterised by instability and unrest on the world stage and growing hostility, incivility and intolerance at home. The level of social division we are witnessing today is having a profound impact on the experiences of our members, our patients and our profession.

In a landmark ruling in April 2025, The UK Supreme Court ruled that the terms ‘sex’ and ‘woman’ in the Equality Act 2010 refer to biological sex. Following this, we issued a statement affirming our commitment to being an anti-discrimination organisation that is committed to listening, inclusion and safety for all our members.

We held a series of member engagement events during that Summer, starting at Congress to better understand your perspectives. As our members, you shared a wide range of perspectives and concerns. However, a focus on how we as trusted professionals deliver safe and compassionate care to all, upholding dignity and respecting human rights; is what fundamentally unites us as professionals.

We will continue to push for clarity on behalf of our members, and I urge you to contact us if you need help and support if you are experiencing harassment or discrimination.

We’ve strengthened our casework activity to better identify, record and

respond to member experiences of all forms of discrimination.

Last year, calls to our RCN helpline from members experiencing racism in the workplace rose by 55%. These are not abstract statistics – they are the lived experiences of our colleagues, and they demand a decisive response.

And our revised *Nursing Workforce Standards* now require that nursing staff are treated with dignity and respect and work in cultures where equity, diversity and inclusion are embedded.

We’ve widened participation in our EDI Committee to bring in broader representation and expertise, and the creation of our new anti-racism subgroup marks another significant step forward in turning our ambitions into action.

We’ve also expanded our EDI learning offering to include interactive webinars covering topics such as disability, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and gender equity as well as practical learning around allyship.

When we published our EDI strategy in 2024, we knew it would take long-term commitment.

The plans you’ve shaped are now becoming reality.

I want to thank every member and colleague who has contributed to this progress. You enable us to be bolder and better informed as we continue building an RCN that truly reflects, represents and supports every one of our members.

There is much work still to do, but we will continue to match your commitment with the action, transparency and determination that this work and our members, profession and the patients we serve demand and deserve.

**Professor Nicola Ranger**

General Secretary and Chief Executive

## Delivering Change: Our journey so far

Our first Group Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy was published in May 2024. We have committed to producing an annual report on its progress and impact since that time. Our second report therefore highlights our ongoing activity to strengthen our foundations and build on what we have learned in this space. Ultimately, it provides you – as a member of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) – with the assurance that we are continuing to prioritise this activity across our structure. It demonstrates that we are holding ourselves accountable for our EDI work in an open and transparent way.

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.

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

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

**Our EDI Strategy  
commits us to advocating  
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## Delivering equity, diversity and inclusion: the structures behind the strategy

### The delivery model for the strategy

#### 1. EDI Programme Board

Established in 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 eight workstreams (see below)
- 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 eight 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 four nations).

Workstreams cover:

1. equity, diversity and inclusion
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

The EDI Committee was created in July 2024 and includes representatives from the RCN’s Trade Union, Professional Nursing, Nursing Support Worker, and Student committees, as well as the RCN Foundation and external EDI experts. It:

- provides strategic advice, member insight, and challenge
- is chaired by Professor Arun Verma, with Mehvish Shaffi-Ajibola as Vice Chair.

Deciding to work with recognised external experts who lead the Committee remains a deliberate choice. It is central to supporting the aim of elevating the focus on EDI in a tangible way through their remarkable insights and leadership skills.

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. The Committee itself is currently undergoing significant transformation with a focus on widening access to governance roles. Over the last year, the Committee set up the first anti-racism subgroup with member representation from across the UK.

The Committee took the decision to open up six seats to a wider group of members by competitive recruitment. We have been delighted at the response and welcomed a number of new members onto the Committee in March 2026.

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. Over the last year, we have been giving considerable thought about how we can most accurately evaluate the impact of our activity in this area. We recognise that complex, structural issues may not be amenable to simplistic measure and continue to work hard to establish meaningful metrics that convey the full detail and texture of the interventions we develop and their long-term impact across many areas. As the strategy matures, so will our ability to better understand and tell the story of our long-term impact in this space.

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.

## Key progress areas: May 2025 - May 2026

The EDI strategy identifies five strategic priorities, and, in this report, we outline the progress we have made across each area of activity.

### Leaders taking accountability for EDI

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*Aligning with Commitment 1:*  
**Revise our equality monitoring and data capture by collecting data on all protected characteristics across all countries in the UK.**

To support leaders to take accountability for EDI there has been extensive work focusing on improving our monitoring and data capture of the protected characteristics held of our members. This forms a critical step in building a clear and accurate picture of the demography of our members and where any inequities are across all protected characteristic areas. It means that for the first time, we will be able to accurately predict and better understand how key decisions impact our members based

on their protected characteristics and intersecting identities. These changes will enable us to understand if there are groups of members who receive poorer outcomes from the RCN as a result of their protected characteristics. A tremendous amount of work has taken place thanks to collaboration across many teams within the RCN including data and analytics, information governance, digital and communications to ensure that the RCN now has the capability to capture and store this data safely and securely. Our focus will shortly turn to how we can ensure that constructive use is made of this data in sculpting better quality decisions and driving more accurate insight into the impact of change and wider decision-making on the full diversity of our membership.

*Aligning with Commitment 3:*  
**Embed equity impact analysis within decision making.**

A large part of the strategy demands that we embed equity impact analysis

within decision making. From our first year of operation, we focused on building skill and expertise in preparing equity impact analysis (EIA). Our next phase focuses on creating and rolling out important learning and development for both members and staff in this area. For those members in governance roles, we have developed learning that supports members to embed scrutiny and interrogation of equity impact analysis in their decision-making process. This will be rolled out from April 2026. For our staff, we have improved the support and practical guidance available to them to complete better quality and more comprehensive EIAs.

*Aligning with Commitment 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.**

With our work on anti-racism and the development of a member-led anti-

racism subgroup of the EDI Committee, we demonstrate our early and ongoing activity to commitment five of the EDI strategy. The development of a multi-year anti-racism action plan, which is transformative and long-term in nature, has begun in earnest.

The newly formed anti-racism subgroup will continue to work closely with the RCN to ensure that this important work is guided and informed by member lived-experience.

**Aligning with Commitment 6:**  
Develop our case management system to enable reports exposing patterns of discrimination in case data to better challenge employers and support members.

Over the past year, we have undertaken a UK-wide comprehensive review and redesign of how operational staff are supported to respond to discrimination in casework. This has included the development of a new ecosystem bringing together practical guidance, accessible resources, and a structured training programme. We have now trained 95% of officers and senior officers across the UK, significantly strengthening competence, consistency, and capability in handling

discrimination concerns. This work provides sustainable infrastructure to support culturally competent, person-centred practice and strengthens our ability to identify, address, and act on discrimination across our casework.

Overall, our records show that 63% of all caseworkers are having and recording these vital conversations with members to ensure that we uncover and confront the scale of workplace discrimination. We are working hard to support our accredited workplace representatives with the skills to hold these conversations too as the figure recorded for holding these conversations is at 43%. Our officer and senior officer cohorts have a 72% rate of completion of this activity.

Across Wales, there has been a significant push to increase the number of discrimination conversations held with members up to a high of 92%.

In Northern Ireland, the recording of protected characteristics of members involved in employment relations cases continues to improve as do the number of discrimination conversations carried out. Protected characteristics questionnaires (PCQ) are completed by members in all cases where discrimination is suspected. Senior officers meet with the Legal Team on a monthly basis to discuss completed PCQs to determine if a legal opinion is required.

We have undertaken a UK-wide comprehensive review and redesign of how operational staff are supported to respond to discrimination in casework

## Ensuring advocacy for all member voices

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*Aligning with Commitment 12:*  
**Incorporate EDI into industrial relations activity, including trade union collective bargaining as well as lobbying activity.**

In February 2025 the employment relations and public policy teams worked collectively to respond to the Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry on 'Equality at work: paternity and shared parental leave'.

Our recommendations included increasing statutory shared parental leave pay to at least 90% of earnings for an initial period to encourage higher uptake; implementing awareness campaigns and employer incentives to foster a more supportive environment for parents sharing childcare responsibilities; and extending statutory paternity leave to at least six weeks, paid at an enhanced rate, to align with international best practices.

By addressing financial barriers, cultural stigmas, and structural constraints, the government can create

a fairer, more accessible parental leave system that benefits families, employers, and society as a whole.

*Aligning with Commitment 15:*  
**Provide mandatory learning and development for all members in governance roles to enhance their understanding and capacity on EDI including anti-racism and intersectionality.**

We have developed immersive learning and development for those members who are currently in governance roles within the RCN. This will be rolled out from April 2026. The focus of this learning and development is to build practical skills and insights about EDI to help navigate the complexities of intersectionality and anti-racism and create alignment with our strategic ambitions in this area.

*Aligning with Commitment 18:*  
**Increase promotion and consider expansion of the cultural ambassador programme.**

Throughout 2025 there was a strong focus on expanding the inclusion programmes portfolio to other sectors beyond health care.

This activity included completing the pilot of the 'Changing the conversational culture programme – Inclusive leadership' and developing a brand-new masterclass on workplace incivility.

The cultural ambassador (CA) programme which focuses on ensuring that processes are applied fairly to all staff was delivered to seven corporate customers, adding 57 new CAs, bringing the alumni to over 550 nationally. The spread means that the programme has now been delivered to 49 organisations, including the first university and first local authority. This included our first customer from Wales. In response to CA alumni requests, an annual tools refresher and self-care workshops to enhance the offer to employers and deepen the impact on fairness in the workplace was introduced.

The programme's reach has extended beyond the UK where we are starting to explore and nurture new partnerships.

The cultural ambassador programme continues to deliver significant change inside organisations who invest in the programmes. For example, when surveyed, 94% of CAs said they would recommend the CA programme to

other colleagues and 87% of CAs told us that the CA programme has improved or significantly improved their organisation's approach to equity, diversity and inclusion.

## Facilitating support and collaboration across all communities

*Aligning with Commitment 20:*  
**Develop EDI member networks across various protected characteristics to support the EDI Committee.**

Throughout 2025, there has been a real focus on building some clear principles to guide the development of the member networks. This has been supported by real investment in recruiting dedicated members of staff to support their development and sustainability. An insight day was held with a diverse group of members in December 2025, hosted by the RCN's Activism Academy.

This event saw the Activist Engagement Team conduct 1:1s with 60 members with specific lived experience and it provided an opportunity for members to explore ideas of power and privilege as well as space to share their

thoughts on how the networks could be structured and their scope of activity. A series of information sessions for the four networks will take place at Congress this year. It is anticipated that these sessions will offer further opportunity for insight and awareness raising. The networks will begin their initial activity by the end of 2026.

Across RCN England, there is activity taking place which focuses on supporting a number of different networks at a regional level. This includes the Northern, Yorkshire and Humber regions supporting global majority member networks. RCN Eastern region has been working to support a broader EDI network as well as an internationally educated nurse (IEN) network.

*Aligning with Commitment 21:*  
**Develop a comprehensive learning programme for RCN members covering all the protected characteristics.**

An online learning and development programme is now available on the RCN Learn platform. It covers all of the protected characteristics and deploys innovative learning techniques to engage learners and support reflective practice.



*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.**

The Let's Talk... inclusion webinars have provided a unique and timely opportunity for members to experience a facilitated deep-dive into complex EDI issues wherever they are across the UK. The webinars clarify language, meaning and provide space to think about how this new knowledge is applied in practice. They also provide a unique and safe space to rehearse how

difficult issues can be surfaced and tackled with confidence and clarity of purpose.

The feedback from these sessions highlights the value that members place on this activity with the evaluations showing that 100% of members who attended reporting they were satisfied with the session and that it met their desired learning outcome.

Some of the delegate feedback on how they will apply their learning into practice includes the following insights;

“ Try to be more proactive as advocate for both patients and colleagues

“ Be more open to discussions and networking. Educate myself and read more on these topics and books available

The annual EDI conference was held on the 16 December 2025, and delegates have commented on the immense value it provided. This year, we will be moving to deliver virtual provision so that members are not constrained from participation because of location.

The conference served to enable participants to have insight into the expert navigation of inclusive language and how to operate effectively in the space when mistakes are made. Its dual focus on inclusive nursing practice and creating inclusive workplaces meant that it provided an importance for members to acquire new insights and carefully hone existing skills in this area.

The following sessions have been held online:

8 September 2025	Let's Talk..Introduction to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
15 October 2025	Let's Talk..Anti-Racism
11 November 2025	Let's Talk..Allyship
10 December 2025	Let's Talk..Disability
9 February 2026	Let's Talk..LGBTQIA+ History month
10 March 2026	Let's Talk..Women's History month

The learning outcomes of the event were three-fold:

1. Increasing confidence and competence in using inclusive language and how to approach it.
2. Boosting the ability of participants to improve inclusion in nursing practice and workplace culture.
3. Understanding the importance of civility in creating safe and inclusive workplace environments. The session also deepened and broadened understanding of the negative impact of incivility across all care settings.

Feedback from participants has been extremely positive as the example below demonstrates.

The annual EDI conference continues to represent outstanding value for members, with 90% of participants recording that the event met or exceeded expectations.

Across RCN England, many regions held and participated in events to celebrate Black History Month, South Asian Heritage Month as well as Pride. These events form important moments of both community and remembrance.

RCN London region expanded its yearly Rising Star Awards, creating a standalone event to celebrate the contribution of the global majority nursing community working in London who are transforming patient care across the capital.

*Aligning with Commitment 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.**

The RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence is home to five distinctive academies. It covers activism, leadership, international nursing, nursing practice and workforce which are all deeply informed by a robust approach to nursing research to deliver better outcomes for members.

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The speakers [were] extremely interesting and engaging. What was tough will [cause] me to reflect on my professional practice. I feel the course supported me professionally and left me feeling that we are in good hands.

## Global partnership working

The RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence's International Academy drove equitable global engagement through research, emergency support, and inclusive programme design.

The team developed partnerships covering Gaza/West Bank, Ghana, Malawi, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and UK Overseas Territories (UKOT), focusing on workforce strengthening and equitable access. A new global affiliate model will be launched in 2026 to widen access for partners regardless of geography or resources.

The Institute also supported Sri Lanka during a national emergency by enabling rapid knowledge sharing and peer support. UKOT nurses benefited from new peer support communities reducing professional isolation.

These activities embed equity in global nursing leadership and amplify under-represented voices worldwide.

The Nursing Practice Academy supported several RCN forums to develop impactful national resources addressing gaps in evidence, awareness and professional development.

Examples of this include the Diabetes Forum's neurodiversity resource, Primary Care and Cancer Webinar, and the General Practice Nursing Forum's learning disability resource. These resources have strengthened practitioners' knowledge about how to reduce health inequalities and provide enhanced care to underserved communities and groups.

The RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence significantly improved accessibility across its library, museum, and digital platforms, ensuring equitable access for diverse members.

A new fully accessible library service platform was implemented, alongside website warnings for historic harmful terminology and a comprehensive classification review to eliminate outdated practices.

New user-centred training resources were developed, including personalised one-to-one training guidance and support needs identification.

Implementing a comprehensive Museum Access Plan improved representation of global majority, patient and neurodivergent voices, and informed accessible exhibition design. This has meant that physical

accessibility has been enhanced, shelving has been redesigned and accessible seating has been directly influenced by member feedback.

These changes demonstrate a measurable shift toward inclusive, equitable access to evidence resources.

## Encouraging diverse representation in governance

*Aligning with 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.*

The Governance Directorate have continued to encourage diverse representation in governance. At the end of 2024, constraints were applied to the board elections (for those members joining boards from 1 Jan 2025) in the East Midlands region and Wales. The presence of a board constraint proved useful in

developing an inclusive environment that encouraged a diverse range of candidates to stand for election into governance roles.

In the lead up to the elections to deliver new members of the RCN Trade Union and Professional Nursing Committees for 2027, and in response to a recommendation from the Governance and Culture Reviews, the Governance Team delivered a series of three webinars aimed at underrepresented groups in the governance operating framework. The three webinar sessions were designed to encourage members from the global majority, members with disabilities as well as women to stand for election/appointment to key governance positions. Panels of current governance officer members from these groups led the sessions and talked about their experiences.

While it is difficult to measure the outcome or impact, we had higher numbers of people standing for elections and appointments this year.

In addition, the decision to widen participation in key governance roles through the EDI Committee remains ongoing. We are delighted that this activity has yielded some of the highest levels of diverse member

engagement in recent years with more than 110 members competing for six places on the influential EDI Committee as an example of the success of the work in this area.

RCN Wales have undertaken more activity to recognise the excellence in the diversity of members through important work with their Welsh Nurse of the Year finalists. They have worked closely with a broad range of stakeholders to encourage nominations from groups who are seldom recognised in this space and highlight the wealth of skill and excellence held by the diversity of our membership. This activity has involved working closely with the Chief Nursing Officer for Wales global majority group as a critical friend. It represents an example of improving diverse participation beyond our governance structure into spaces that recognise and celebrate nursing excellence.

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*Aligning with Commitment 31:*  
**Improve 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.**

The RCN Activism Academy published their strategy during the summer of 2025, which commits to comprehensively review the mission and purpose of RCN branches, first assessing their current effectiveness. When complete, lead an appropriate renewal programme, including updating branch terms of reference, updating branch roles and role descriptors and developing new learning and networking opportunities specifically for branch leaders.

**We had higher numbers of people standing for elections and appointments this year**

## Creating an inclusive workplace for all members

The RCN Wales Board has focused on supporting its diverse members. In December, the board held the second in a series of member-led roundtables focusing on removing barriers to career progression. The session provided important space for members to identify the nature of the barriers they face such as the persistence of racism and other forms of discrimination; shaping the interventions to tackle this issue.

*Aligning with Commitment 33:*  
**Develop a defined EDI Nursing Workforce Standard as a driver for delivering safe and effective care.**

The RCN Institute of Nursing Excellence supported a major enhancement to UK nursing workforce through a review and update of Standard 12.

Standard 12 promotes equitable, inclusive and psychologically safe workplaces, tackling discrimination, supporting adjustments, ethical recruitment, improved CPD access

and culturally competent practice. Over 3,000 copies were disseminated nationally, with a dedicated checklist supporting implementation.

*Aligning with Commitment 34:*  
**Influence and lobby employers and governments to put in place effective support for internationally educated nursing staff and taking account of experience overseas.**

The employment relations workstream have been a key partner in delivering against national NHS Staff Council activity, NHS Social Partnership Forum and specific national Independent Health and Social Care employers, in particularly reviewing the *NHS Terms and Conditions Handbook*.

*Aligning with Commitment 37:*  
**Provide structured learning and development for RCN staff to support members with equality issues.**

Staff across the RCN collaborated to ensure that we are able to continue to work with competence and confidence to support the full diversity of our membership. In 2025, this activity included:

- embedding the new EDI e-learning for all staff, a co-produced module that represented an entirely new method for creating e-learning based on real-life scenarios
- working in collaboration to provide support to learning & development activity around Equity Impact Assessments (EIA) so that more activity and decisions made by the RCN have fully considered the impact on the full diversity of our membership and staff
- creating and introducing the ‘Everyday EDI’ conversation guide, shared with all staff. This guide supports all RCN staff to be able to reflect and see where EDI fits within their business-as-usual work to identify where their EDI activity is
- creating a new ‘media list’ that pulls together the different resources already available to staff, and introducing a reading group to encourage deeper engagement
- bespoke training for key leaders in RCN England has also been provided which focuses on cultivating safe workplace cultures and behaviours.

## Looking Ahead

During 2026 we aim to have undertaken a review of the current strategy to assess our ability to adopt and reflect new and emerging best practice and amend our approach and activity as necessary. The review will also clarify how the strategy will respond to issues that were not identified during its initial development. This may include responding to violence against women and girls (VAWG) as well as thinking through the rapid adoption and growth of artificial intelligence (AI) across health care contexts. Given our current political realities, the strategy may also need to consider how it actively counters the rise of narratives of division and hate and promote community cohesion across the nursing profession.

In relation to our existing strategic commitments, we will continue to focus on:

- developing country-specific responses and reporting against the EDI strategy. Work is currently underway to support the

development of EDI action plans for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

- ensuring that our data collection and analysis work will be visible through a campaign to encourage members to share their data with us. This data is essential in helping to ensure that the RCN makes better quality decisions on behalf of its members and understands the impact of policies and decisions on the diversity of its membership
- operationalising the anti-racism action plan throughout our structures starting with a significant period of learning and development to support the activity internally. Beyond the initial awareness-raising, it is intended that the transformative nature of this work is supported by a high level of accountability and scrutiny from the anti-racism subgroup of the EDI Committee.

Case work activity remains in focus as a significant priority throughout 2026



with an ongoing review of the data we hold and its application in improving member outcomes. Critically, there will be greater support for neurodivergent members and on accessibility issues through increasing support for reasonable adjustments across the case management portfolio.

Building on these foundations, our focus this year is to extend this ecosystem approach beyond individual casework and strengthen collective and strategic responses to discrimination. In collaboration with the EDI team and wider colleagues, we will deliver a UK-wide webinar series for officers focused on using data, building an evidence base, and taking action, alongside the development of practical resources/guides to help staff identify patterns, challenge inequality, and to help secure better outcomes for members in their workplaces.

Developing our member EDI networks from concept to reality remains a priority for the year ahead. We will focus on building a sustainable governance structure and establishing safe and supportive mechanisms for members to share lived experience.

Developing a working definition of a diverse governance group and an equality impact assessment for the elections and appointments processes remains an important part of our activity to widen and diversify those currently in governance roles.

We will continue to promote our flagship cultural ambassadors programme to organisations who want to make sure that their employment relations systems and processes are equitable and fair for all staff.

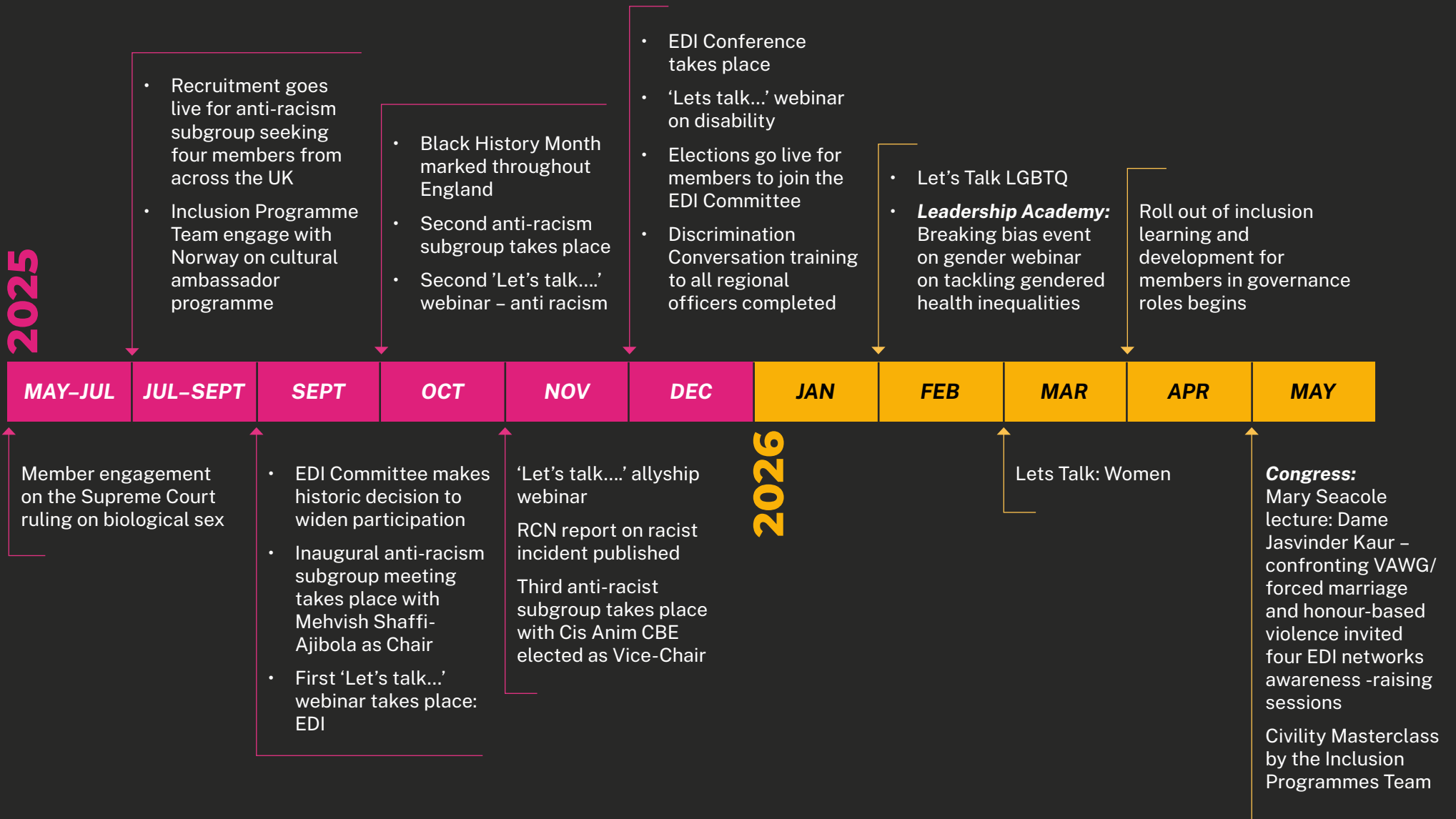
We will also roll out our EDI learning and development activity for members in governance roles throughout the College. Supporting them to better-quality decisions on behalf of all members.

Mandatory continued learning and development will be rolled out from 2026 to all accredited workplace representatives, with refresher training commencing from 2028. There will be a particular focus on supporting our stewards on recording discrimination. This forms a crucial part of strengthening our casework activity throughout 2026 where we will focus on embedding best practice.

We will broaden and deepen our learning and development offer for RCN staff. There will be the opportunity for staff to learn about D/deaf awareness, neurodiversity and a focus on optimising the impact of learning.

Developing our member EDI networks from concept to reality remains a priority for the year ahead

# Timeline of activity



## Closing remarks

As Chair (Professor Arun Verma) and Vice Chair (Mehvish Shaffi-Ajibola) of the RCN Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, we want to share our reflections on the progress made in 2025 and our ambitions for the year ahead.

### Deepening our approach to the EDI strategy

Over the past year, the committee has taken a more rigorous and intentional approach to overseeing the implementation of the EDI Strategy. Rather than treating the strategy as a static document, we have taken time to ‘deep dive’ into each workstream – asking challenging questions about what is working, where more support is needed, and how we measure meaningful progress. This shift has helped us move from aspiration to accountability.

### Building momentum

As we look toward 2026, our focus is on strengthening the foundations laid in 2025. With the EDI strategy guiding our direction, the anti racism subgroup gathering momentum, and new networks taking shape, we are entering a phase of deeper engagement and wider impact across the organisation.

But cultural change is not the responsibility of the committee alone. Every member has a role in shaping an RCN that is inclusive, equitable and reflective of the diversity of our professions. Our commitment as Chair and Vice Chair is to lead with compassion, transparency, courage and collaboration – recognising that the greatest impact comes from shared and distributed leadership.

Together, we can ensure that equity, diversity and inclusion become lived realities for every member of the Royal College of Nursing.



## Reflections from the Chair

### Professor Arun Verma

This past year has been incredibly rewarding as the inaugural Chair of the RCN EDI Committee. I have seen first hand how our collective energy is driving change, and I am proud of the ways we continue to embrace and elevate members' voices at the heart of our work. While we know there is still a journey ahead, I am confident that the RCN is moving in a positive direction – with momentum, purpose and impact at its core.

## Reflections from the Vice Chair

### Mehvish Shaffi-Ajibola

2025 marked my one year anniversary at the RCN, offering a moment to reflect on the journey we're on as a committee and as an organisation. This has been a year of progress, active listening and truly understanding the human impact of our EDI work. The progress matters – and our members' voices matter even more. With the rise in reported incidents of racism, it is clear this work must continue with urgency and compassion. Our aim is simple: to ensure every member, in all their identities and experiences, feels seen, safe and valued. As we move into 2026, our focus remains steady: keep listening, stay human, and keep driving the change our members deserve.

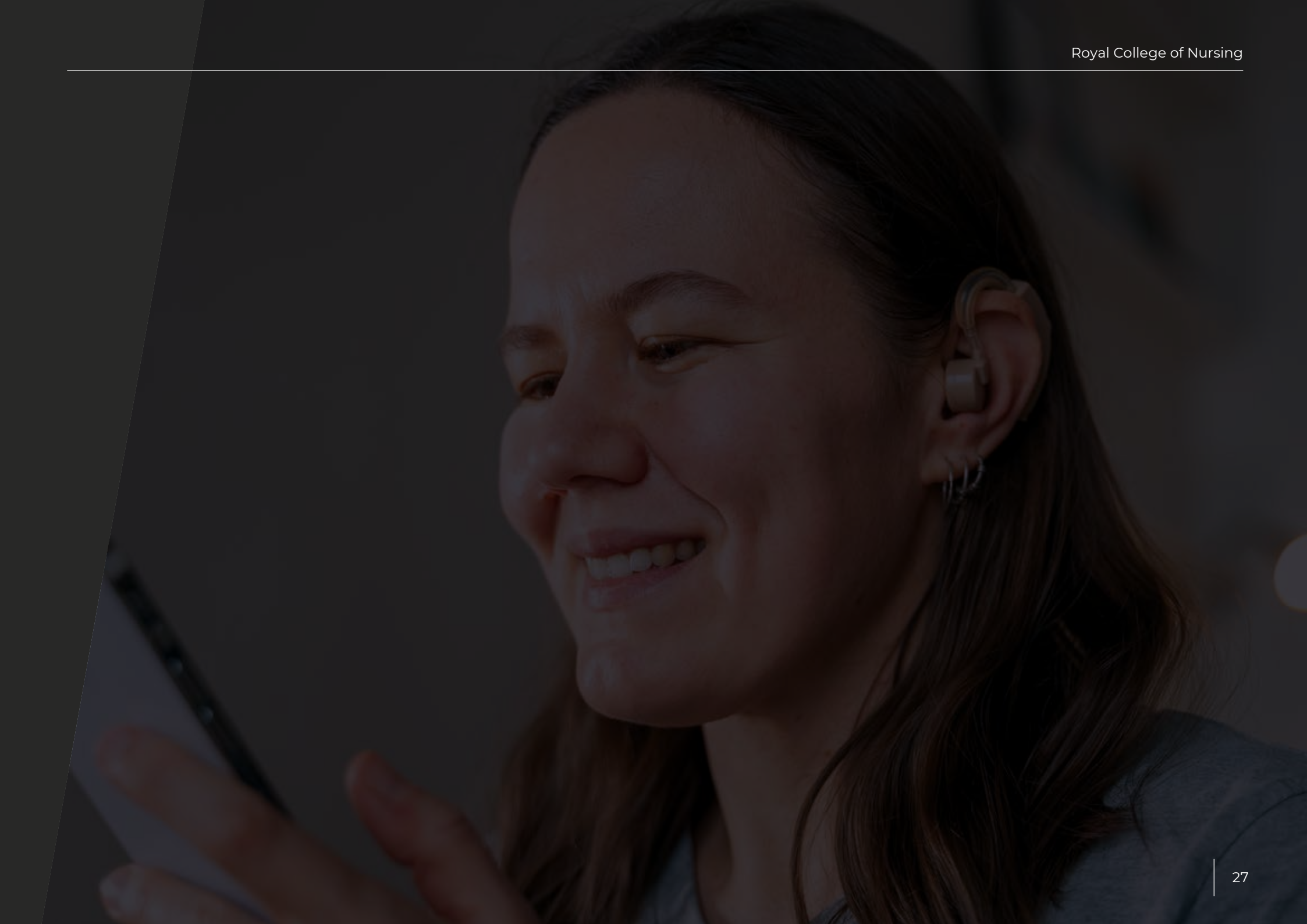
Together, we can ensure that equity, diversity and inclusion become lived realities for every member of the RCN

## Our Strategy Commitments

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.
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 (stewards, learning rep, health, safety and wellbeing reps) in equality issues within the workplace.
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 experienced as recognised and rewarded.
18. Increase promotion and consider expansion of the Cultural Ambassador programme.
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 five academies.
27. Empower RCN representatives to share best practice and learnings in relation to EDI practice to continuously improve practice and outcomes. Develop an EDI toolkit for members which identifies key language and terminology as well as accessing support for achieving equity and inclusion outcomes.
28. 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 (eg reserved seats/ constraints models to sustainably attract the full diversity of RCN membership).
29. 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.

30. 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.
31. Implement a comprehensive outreach campaign to increase the diversity of membership across the UK.
32. Develop a defined EDI Nursing Workforce Standard as a driver for delivering safe and effective care.
33. Influence and lobby employers and governments to put in place effective inductions for internationally educated nursing staff, taking account of experience overseas.
34. Promote and build on resources and templates for members to help understand and advocate for inclusion in their workplaces.
35. Develop guidance for members on key cultural and religious events and support their celebration.
36. Provide structured learning and development for RCN staff to support members with equality issues.





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