

British Council Northern Ireland



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2025-26

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

<http://nireland.britishcouncil.org/about/equal-opportunities-diversity>

Signature:

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026
PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

- 1** In 2025-26, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

British Council Northern Ireland Work

The British Council continues to build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through work across our three pillars of arts and culture, education and the English language.

We work in two ways – directly with individuals to transform their lives, and with governments and partners to make a bigger difference for the longer term, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

We connect the best of the UK with the world and the best of the world with the UK. These connections lead to an understanding of each other's strengths and of the challenges and values that we share. This builds trust between people in the UK and other nations which endures even when official relations may be strained.

We work on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2024-25 we connected with 80 million people directly and with 791 million overall, including online and through our broadcasts and publications.

1) EDUCATION

Education - Schools

We bring an international dimension to teaching and learning in schools with international links, professional development opportunities, curriculum resources, classroom support and awards.

Through our global network and portfolio of schools' programmes, we connect our school sector to others throughout the world to achieve two outcomes:

- 'Enriched education' - Sustained collaboration between us and other countries on professional development, curricula and system reform, and

policy dialogue, which provides improved educational outcomes for young people

- ‘Global citizenship increased’ – Young people and educators demonstrate an increased capacity in the skills, understanding and outlook required to work in a global economy and contribute responsibly to society, locally and globally.

Both of these outcomes contribute to a more prosperous and secure society.

These endeavours are supported by many of our programmes some of which are summarised below: -

Schools Online - a one stop global portal for teachers around the world to find school partners, explore teaching resources and establish international links for professional development.

Language Assistants - work in primary and secondary schools, including sixth form and further education colleges to support language learning and inter-cultural understanding.

International School Award - a globally recognised accreditation which helps schools to enrich learning and improve teaching by guiding international learning activities, from introducing international education into the curriculum to embedding it within a school's culture.

Education - Higher/Further Education

As an international cultural relations organisation, the British Council promotes and supports the exchange and mobility of students, scholars and academics around the world. We use our expertise in higher education to build trust and understanding with other countries by:

- supporting the development of policy and practice in the UK and internationally
- building partnerships between institutions
- promoting the mobility of academics and students

Supporting the development of policy and practice in the UK and internationally

We contribute to the development of a global academic community by providing platforms to discuss higher education globally and promoting innovative research.

We believe that engaging the UK sector in working with policy makers and practitioners and their counterparts in other countries strengthens both nations.

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[Going Global Conference](#): each year leaders in higher education, business and government attended the British Council's annual Going Global conference. The conference took place in **London**

from 28 to 30 October 2025. More than 450 leaders in higher and tertiary education from 50 countries, business and government attended.

Building partnerships between institutions

We focus on developing education partnerships with institutions between the UK and their counterparts in other countries. Partnerships are a powerful mechanism to engage the UK internationally and to build connections, understanding and trust.

We help UK institutions to internationalise by providing market analysis and intelligence, developing research partnerships, and providing on the ground support for higher education partnerships.

We provide opportunities for higher education leaders to exchange knowledge and establish collaborations and list them under the [opportunities](#) page.

Promoting the mobility of academics and students

We encourage international study and support the exchange and mobility of students, scholars and academics around the world because we believe that experiencing another country first-hand provides an unparalleled opportunity for individuals to understand and engage with people from different cultures, share ideas and work to solve global challenges.

We manage a number of mobility grants and scholarships aimed at UK academics, scholars and students, details of which can be found on our [International Mobility](#) page.

Our work aims to support the capacity and capability of governments, institutions and individuals in the UK and other countries to take an active role in developing their country, their community and themselves.

Some of the more popular outward mobility programmes open to higher education students in Northern Ireland are:

Study USA

[The Study USA Programme](#) offers undergraduate students an opportunity to study business and management for one academic year at universities and colleges in the USA with the purpose of producing graduates with an international, business-oriented perspective.

SCIENCE

We work in partnership with the NI Science Festival to help internationalise the festival and enhance its global connections and reach.

2) ARTS

Our work in arts aims to promote the UK's diverse culture, creativity and innovation overseas. We work across various art forms and with the best of UK talent to develop artistic programmes and opportunities for collaboration in Northern Ireland.

Working jointly with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland through international work, we support and promote Northern Ireland's creative output.

The Artists' International Development Fund is an annual programme jointly funded by the British Council and Arts Council Northern Ireland. The aim of the programme is to support individual international developmental opportunities for talent and artistic excellence from Northern Ireland and, thereby, enhance Northern Ireland's international artistic development, reputation and standing.

British Council is a major partner in a number of festivals that occur in Northern Ireland throughout the year such as the Belfast International Arts Festival, and Outburst Queer Arts Festival.

3) ENGLISH and EXAMS

English teaching has been at the heart of the British Council's cultural relations work since 1943. What we do in English creates opportunities for millions of people around the world through education, mobility and international engagement. In Northern Ireland there are five British Council accredited English language centres.

The following initiatives have been developed to aid the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations:

- **LGBTQIA+ community for British Council colleagues**

The British Council prides itself on both its cultural relations and inclusion agenda, and one of the ways to incorporate this into our working life is the setting up a new voluntary led Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Other (LGBTQIA+) group. **LGBTQIA+ Community** aims to support colleagues identifying as LGBTQIA+ no matter where they live and work by fostering a support network and by raising a voice for LGBTQIA+ issues within the British Council. The group welcomes participation from all British Council LGBTQIA+ colleagues and allies. Each region has a regional lead who organises events and social meet-ups locally.

- **Disability Advisory Panel**

The British Council Disability Advisory Panel is made up of people with significant personal and professional experience of disability and act as a 'critical friend' to the Diversity Unit and other teams on request.

Further information about the Disability Advisory Panel can be found on our internal intranet.

- **Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei)**

The British Council UK is subscribed to membership of the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) 'the UK's leading employer network covering all aspects of equality and inclusion issues in the workplace'.

Whilst for cost reasons our membership is UK rather than global many of the resources available will have international applicability. Any staff member can sign up for access to a range of webinars and other online events.

- **Business Disability Forum**

British Council (via the Wellbeing team) is a member of the Business Disability Forum, another fantastic resource. It's a not-for-profit membership organisation that 'exists to create a disability smart world by linking businesses, disabled people and government.' The website hosts a knowledge hub, resources and toolkits and a regular events calendar which staff can access.

- **Disability Confident Employer**

The British Council is a Disability Confident Employer which provides a step towards increasing the low numbers of disabled people within the organisation by helping us recruit and retain disabled people and people with health conditions for their skills and talent.

A self-assessment template and a matrix have been completed by colleagues in the Diversity Unit and HR with the support of the Disability Working Group.

- **Mental Health Charter & Every Customer Counts**

British Council NI is a signatory of the *Mental Health Charter* for Northern Ireland employers and service providers. The Charter, jointly produced by the Equality Commission, Action Mental Health, Disability Action, Mindwise, Mental Health Foundation and Inspire provides a framework for working towards mentally healthy workplaces. As signatory to the Charter and its 5 commitments we undertake to promote positive mental health initiatives which will be beneficial to the organisation, employees and the whole community in Northern Ireland.

- **'Every Customer Counts' Commitment**

British Council Northern Ireland has signed up to the Equality Commission's *'Every Customer Counts' Commitment* which demonstrates our commitment to promoting accessible services to our customers and that we welcome reasonable adjustment requests. We completed a self-

assessment tool to establish how open our services currently are to disabled people and identify how we could make improvements.

- **Living Library**

The British Council's Living Library is designed to promote dialogue between staff and encourage them to learn from and understand each other and engage directly in our rich diversity in a very direct way, led by what we are curious about and interested in. The library provides an excellent opportunity for intercultural learning and understanding of our incredible diversity. Staff may never have spoken in any detail to someone with particular experiences, or from a particular cultural or linguistic group. 'Living books' are given by members of staff who relay stories or accounts of their lives and backgrounds (or aspects of them). This includes their experiences, knowledge, struggles, achievements, interests, perspectives and aspects of their identity.

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Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2025-26 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

JAM Card

British Council Northern Ireland is a JAM Card friendly organisation (<https://jamcard.org/>) and we are signed up to a second three-year subscription. JAM Card is a discreet device used by people with learning difficulties, disabilities or communication barriers. JAM Card provides the means to identify people with communication barriers and hidden disabilities to give them quality customer care based on their needs. JAM (Just a Minute) Card allows people with learning difficulties, autism and communication barriers to display their card to ask for Just A Minute of patience in customer service situations. By supporting the JAM Card we show that we are supporting people with disabilities and demonstrates our commitment to being an inclusive organisation.

We plan to avail of further disability training through JAM Card in the future.

Marking of International Days:

- **Black History Month (October 2025)**

We celebrate BHM each year to highlight the important role that black people have played in British and global history which often goes unrecognised.

The theme for Black History Month UK 2025 was “Standing Firm in Power and Pride,” a powerful tribute to the resilience, strength, and unwavering commitment to progress that defines the Black community across the globe. This year, the theme highlighted the profound contributions made by Black people be they leaders, activists, or pioneers who have shaped history, while also looking towards a future of continued empowerment, unity, and growth.

To support our anti-racism commitments, we ran a series of three global learning sessions focused on race-related issues across different regions in 2025. This included sessions hosted by our Deputy Chief Executive and Race Champion, and Deputy Global Head, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which focused on anti-racism learnings from each of the Sub-Saharan Africa, Wider Europe and East Asia regions. The aim of the session was to help improve our understanding about very different types of racism/s and its impact, through engaging with regional-specific challenges and cultural contexts.

We also ran a fun-filled Black History Month Quiz for all staff.

ADHD Awareness Month (October 2025)

We asked colleagues with ADHD to:

- Share their strengths and struggles
- Recognising the rise in ADHD diagnoses among Older Persons
- Discuss renaming ADHD to reflect a more accurate picture of what it means for those who have it
- Why having a diagnosis helps some people
- Celebrate World Teachers’ Day by looking at how we can promote inclusive classrooms
- Recognise that ADHD is often a co-occurring condition by supporting Dyslexia Awareness Week and asking colleagues to share all the ways in which they are neurodivergent
- Promote Black History Month by sharing lived experiences of people of colour with ADHD
- Debunk misconceptions and myths about what ADHD is

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December 2025)

We ran a webinar aimed at strengthening our collective understanding and practice around Disability Inclusion. The session introduced key concepts and practical tools to help embed access across all stages of our work – from programme planning and development to delivery and evaluation. We explored the use of our Accessible Visits and Events Toolkit, talked through Accessible Grant Calls, and what reasonable adjustments could mean in the context of education programming.

This session was designed to ensure that everyone in Education, regardless of role, feels confident and equipped to contribute to building more inclusive experiences for all.

Staff Training/focus groups:

Gender Action

- Two members of the Leadership Team organised multiple female focus groups conducted in April to June 2025 providing qualitative insight into drivers behind gender disparities identified in the organisation's 2024/25 People Survey. The outcomes of these meetings were analysed with the results of the People Survey and directly informed a set of targeted actions.
- Agreed actions focus on strengthening progression and inclusion for women, including: exploring group mentoring, increasing visibility of female role models, reinforcing career conversations in performance management, and re-establishing structured career planning with the People Function.
- People Survey 2025 results were reviewed in depth across a number of leadership discussions (including the November Strategy Day and follow-up sessions), with input from country teams and the EDI Working Group resulting in a clear set of regional priorities around collaboration and communication, talent management, reducing bureaucracy.
- 2025 People Survey results showed an overall staff engagement has improved, providing a positive context for reviewing gender-related trends.
- Notably, gender disparities have reduced, with more balanced responses across male and female colleagues and a marked reduction in previously identified negative trends among female respondents. This may indicate early positive impact of targeted interventions, including engagement through the Female Focus Group; however, findings should be interpreted with caution given the relatively small dataset.
- Actions identified through the Female Focus Group are being progressed, with a focus on strengthening career development, progression pathways, and inclusive leadership practices.
- Ongoing monitoring is in place, including quarterly review of gender-related trends (e.g. leavers data), to ensure no disproportionate impact and to inform further action.
- Focus for the next period will be on embedding agreed actions and sustaining progress in reducing gender disparities.

Anti-racism – UK through the Four Nations Prism

- A session on anti-racism through the Four Nations lens was delivered to a global audience, supporting broader organisational understanding of race and ethnicity in the UK context.
- The session focused on strengthening understanding of what it means to be anti-racist in the UK, including how racism manifests differently across the four nations, supported by a snapshot of ethnic diversity and consideration of intersectionality with other protected characteristics. It also highlighted examples of anti-racism actions and approaches across UK nations and UK-based teams.

- The session reached over 200 colleagues globally and significantly increased awareness and engagement on the topic, generating active discussion and interest across audiences.
- A number of potential action points were identified to inform next steps and future activity.
- There is clear interest from UK country teams in developing follow-up deep dive sessions for the devolved nations, potentially involving external partners, to further explore local contexts and strengthen applied understanding.

Other action:

Disability Inclusion action

Work has continued to strengthen accessibility in hiring and onboarding processes, including updates to the UKR induction/onboarding guide, which now incorporates a dedicated section on reasonable adjustments, aligned with corporate policy and guidance.

Further external research has been undertaken to inform the development of a separate guide on neurodiversity inclusion, alongside consideration of a broader organisational approach in this area. Findings have been shared with the Diversity Unit to contribute to wider corporate thinking and development.

Socio-economic background action

SEB data collection was rolled out across the UK, supporting organisational efforts to strengthen understanding of workforce diversity data.

- A SEB awareness and engagement session was delivered in collaboration with the Bridge Group and the leadership team.
- The session reinforced the importance of improving SEB data completeness and encouraging consistent participation in data reporting to support more robust EDI insight and analysis.
- It also strengthened understanding of socio-economic disadvantage and its impact on colleagues and stakeholders, including the intersection with other protected characteristics. Using case studies and good practice examples, it highlighted key barriers as well as potential interventions to improve inclusion and access.
- Insights from the session have informed emerging thinking within the wider team, particularly around the Apprenticeship Levy scheme, including exploring how socio-economic criteria could be considered within apprenticeship selection to improve access for individuals from less advantaged backgrounds, as well as shaping approaches to work shadowing and work experience opportunities in the UK.
- The immediate focus remains on encouraging colleagues to complete and update their SEB data on MyHR platform to improve completeness and reliability for future analysis and reporting.

External Monitoring

We have been conducting equality monitoring of participants in Northern Ireland based programmes across the 9 protected characteristics since 2016. This exercise goes beyond our legal monitoring requirements under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and in doing so we demonstrate our commitment to understanding of the level of diversity of programme participants and to taking action to address under-representation to ensure

our programmes are as inclusive as possible. A link to the monitoring form is sent by the programme team at application stage or at the point of the participant being approved and receiving a grant agreement from us. We collate results and benchmark them against NI census data.

ARTS:

The Artists International Development Fund

In 2025/2026, we ran the open call the Artists International Development Fund between June to October 2025. The co-fund established by the British Council and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 2013, annually allocates £50,000 to benefit Northern Ireland's artists and arts organisations and support their ambitions to work internationally. The programme supports early-stage international development opportunities for individual, freelance and self-employed artists and arts organisations based in Northern Ireland and affords recipients the opportunity to spend time building links with artists, organisations, and/or creative producers in other countries.

The grant opportunity illustrates our EDI commitments at the British Council in the provision of a clear and accessible funding scheme in which we encourage applications from all members of Northern Ireland arts sectors including artists from all communities, all backgrounds and those working in all artistic disciplines.

In the context of those both making applications and in terms of successful awardees, data supports the reach of the scheme where applicants represented multiple ethnic groups, LGBTQIA+ artists, d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists, Irish language heritage projects, artists of diverse age groups (where emerging is related to career progression) and balanced gender statistics.

Working in partnership with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, we ensure an accessible application process, that includes the offer of support to applicants through provisions in other formats tailored to individual requests e.g., large print, braille, audio, Easy Read and British /Irish Sign Language. Much of this is delivered through the arts and disability organisation, University Atypical. In addition, British Council and Arts Council of Northern Ireland staff offer advice and guidance to any interested applicants. Alternative language versions can also be requested – also demonstrating our commitments to remove barriers for applicants.

More on the **Artists International Development Fund** for Northern Ireland can be found here: <https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/opportunities/artists-international-development-fund>

North Star

A commitment of our arts programmes to equality policies was made in 2025/2026 financial year with supported grant funding for *North Star*, an immersive performing arts project conceived as part of the Belfast 2024 creative programme by Belfast Ghanaian artist, Kwame Daniels.

North Star is a boundary pushing production, rooted deeply in Black cultures and developed in Northern Ireland with diverse communities of artists and through an outreach programme including engagement with 100 pupils from four schools.

Through our MoU partnership with Belfast City Council, *North Star* will feature in the June 2026 programme at the Irish Arts Center in New York inspired by the historic 1845 visit of legendary abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass to Belfast and showcases the rich diversity of Belfast's Black, Asian and minority ethnic creative talent. The creative team

includes Grammy Award winner Kaidi Tatham, Northern Irish-Ghanaian artist, Winnie Ama, rap performer, Leo Miyagee and award-winning Northern Ireland~South African poet, Nandi Jola.

North Star is a modern celebration of Belfast's anti-slavery heritage, highlighting the creative excellence of Northern Ireland's Black creative communities and connecting historical human rights issues from the past with current issues around social justice and inclusion in Northern Ireland. Our financial support for *North Star* touring firmly aligns with our commitments to promoting equality, embracing diversity, and fostering inclusivity in our British Council Arts programme and work in Northern Ireland.

<https://irishartscenter.org/event/north-star>

Supporting Caribbean~Northern Ireland connections with Fighting Words NI

Working in partnership with Fighting Words NI, the registered literature led youth charity in Northern Ireland (NIC105751), we allocated grant funding in 2025/2026 financial year to support *Project Fusion Junction*, a creative collaboration bringing together young writers, illustrators, musicians, and designers aged 14–18 from Northern Ireland, Trinidad & Tobago, and Jamaica to co-create a multimedia graphic novella over a 12 month period.

Fifteen young participants from each country are taking part in the programme, which will include both online and in-person creative residencies. The resulting graphic novella will be launched at Bocas Lit Fest in May 2026, with accompanying pop-up events in Jamaica and at the Belfast Book Festival in Northern Ireland, June 2026.

Empowering children and young people through the cross-cultural collaboration, *Project Fusion Junction* offers young creatives a platform to tell the stories that matter to them, explore shared and personal themes, and build new confidence and intercultural skills through weekly mentorship, workshops, and creative exchange.

<https://belfastbookfestival.com/festival-programme/Saturday-6-June/Celebration/project-fusion-junction-a-global-launch-with-fighting-words-ni>

Dumbworld Opera & the UK~Poland Season 2025

Dumbworld is an artist led creative production company established in 2009 in Northern Ireland by composer/conductor, Brian Irvine and filmmaker/writer/director, John McIllduff. Through a British Council open call grant, they developed *Sonic Playgrounds* a cross-cultural musical project bridging Belfast and Gdańsk.

Working with Remont Pomp, a music ensemble founded in 2003 at the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities, the project supports young musicians with disabilities.

The ensemble presented performances developed with Northern Ireland composer, Brian Irvine at both the Oh Yeah Music Centre in Belfast and at festivals in Poland in a celebration creative excellence. The benefits of equality policies in British Council creative grant schemes where artists and arts organisations in the UK are encouraged to develop international proposals that centre EDI themes in the development of their collaborations was well illustrated in this project and demonstrates how beneficial it is to actively strive to ensure that fairness and equal opportunity are hard-wired into grant programmes to champion a barrier-free society in which disability arts and the arts in general thrive.

<https://www.britishcouncil.pl/en/programmes/uk-poland-season-2025/events/sonic-playgrounds>

Outburst Queer Arts Festival, 13-17 November 2025 : Celebrating a Decade of Vital LGBTQIA+ Arts Connections

In a visible commitment to equality, British Council supports the annual schedule of events for the Outburst Festival international delegation to bring an understanding of the unique context for queer arts in Belfast, and to share the impacts and challenges from international contexts to catalyse new opportunities together.

Established in 2006, Outburst Queer Arts Festival has grown from a small grassroots festival of performance, visual arts, literature, film and music in Northern Ireland, to an award-winning organisation that commissions and showcases local and international queer arts events and builds capacity for professional and emerging queer artists and writers to make vital new work and take part in international networking, discussions and workshops.

Since 2015, we have worked in a creative partnership with the Festival to explore what LGBTQIA+ culture means to artists and audiences around the world. Each year, we support Outburst to invite international delegates to the festival resulting in new connections, projects and ways of working. Through our partnership, Outburst has worked with hundreds of artists, producers and writers in over 33 countries across four continents building artistic networks.

A diverse creative programme and visit in November 2025 was led by the Festival's Artistic Director, Ruth McCarthy and developed alongside our British Council Arts colleagues in Northern Ireland, the wider UK and internationally to support individual LGBTQIA+ artists and LGBTQIA+ led arts organisations to visit and engage with their counterparts working in Northern Ireland.

Outburst festival delegates have gone on to develop their own queer arts festivals and initiatives in Brazil, Argentina, Jamaica and Nepal. International artists at the Festival also join the British Council international symposium, an annual gathering and sharing from Northern Ireland artists with delegates from countries in 2025 including France, India, Ireland, Turkey, Lebanon, Poland, Greece, Romania and the UK. It is a British Council supported safe space developed to explore, question, challenge and celebrate international and Northern Ireland LGBTQIA+ experience through the arts.

What started as a research project with the British Council has grown into a powerful network through which queer artists and makers have connected and developed projects, partnerships and friendships, many of which are ongoing. As well as the annual festival delegation, British Council support extends to residencies, publications, touring, co-commissions, artist exchanges, university partnerships, training programmes and much more.

Outburst is intersectional, queer and feminist, so the arts network they have co-developed has a strong emphasis on exploratory arts and writing around gender and sexuality that looks beyond representation, identity and EDI themes alone. The Festival aims to reflect the depth and quality of queer work and thinking, acknowledging the diversity of queer lives, experiences and challenges that go beyond global north and western queer narratives.

The aim of the British Council supported delegation is to learn from queer arts workers and artists in international contexts and build creative support and solidarity with Northern Ireland artists to challenge homophobia and transphobia through creative practice and festival making in contexts that are free from discrimination.

Derry-Londonderry UK/Kenya Season connections in 2025

The UK/Kenya Season was a landmark bilateral cultural exchange programme in 2025. Two creative projects were supported with leading Derry~Londonderry arts organisations as part of the Season.

Fair Play Kenya (also known as *Fair Play: Rhythms of the Land*) was a collaborative arts and environmental project developed by the Playhouse in Derry-Londonderry and Amani People's Theatre in Kenya. The project connected young people and artists in Nairobi, Birmingham, and Derry to explore land justice, climate action, and shared cultural futures through storytelling, mobile films and performance. The transnational collaboration was supported by the British Council open call grant scheme providing a catalyst for collaboration and brought together creatives and cultural hubs from the UK and Kenya to work on ambitious projects to lift up marginalized voices, celebrate cultural pride, and spark cross-cultural conversations and social change through creative collaboration.

The Playhouse festival and project showcase took place in Nairobi at the Kenya Cultural Centre, in tandem with international showcases and events at the Playhouse in Northern Ireland across 2025.

<https://british-council.shorthandstories.com/uk-kenya-season-2025/#section-T55jklmLgI>

In a second British Council supported partnership, with the Africa Centre in London, the Nerve Centre and the North West Migrants Forum in Derry~Londonderry that also formed part of the UK/Kenya Season 2025, a film programme platforming new voices from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Reunion Island was screened in Derry in October 2025.

The film showcase by Kenyan partners provided a snapshot of the current film scene of East African cinema and was presented with discussions on topics including the visual language representative of the region and its storytelling. Organisers and speakers included Lilian Seenoi-Barr who made history after becoming Northern Ireland's first black mayor and Dr John Kavanagh, from Future Screens NI and Ulster University. Building on the major UK-wide activities and exhibitions that took place throughout 2025, we hope for Northern Ireland partners to form part of the ongoing British Council legacy programme that will continue to foster collaborations across arts, education and innovation.

Five Films for Freedom screening

The *Five Films for Freedom* screening and panel discussion, held in partnership with the Imagine! Belfast Festival of Ideas and Politics, was conceived as a platform to spark public dialogue around LGBTQIA+ issues through the power of film. Initiated in November 2025, the collaboration aimed to align with the festival's mission of encouraging underrepresented voices in political and cultural debates. We ran two events over two days, the first at Queen's Film Theatre (QFT) in Belfast and the second at Black Box Belfast in March 2026. The QFT event featured a lunchtime screening of three short films followed by a panel discussion and audience Q&A. The Black Box event showed three further LGBTQ themed films. The chosen venues ensured full accessibility, and all promotional efforts were inclusive, particularly targeting LGBTQIA+ communities through both online and in-person outreach.

The events were promoted widely to ensure a diverse audience, with targeted communications to student groups, LGBTQIA+ organisations, and equality and diversity initiatives. Promotional activity included social media campaigns, student radio, and listings on festival and venue websites, all designed with accessibility in mind. The panel discussion featured four speakers from diverse backgrounds, filmmakers, academics, and festival organisers, who brought a range of perspectives to discussions on the impact of queer cinema, challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ communities, and how media visibility affects rights globally. The themes centred on how the arts can facilitate difficult conversations, foster empathy, and promote social change.

Key outcomes of the event included amplifying marginalised voices and raising awareness about the *Five Films for Freedom* campaign, which provides free access to LGBTQIA+ short films worldwide. The panellists encouraged audience engagement and highlighted the importance of allyship, representation, and global solidarity with LGBTQIA+ communities. The events not only embodied the British Council's values of openness, inclusion, and cultural exchange but also served as an example of how film can be used as a tool for activism, education, and cross-cultural understanding.

Looking ahead, we are in talks with partners like the Belfast Film Festival to continue the event as an annual fixture, potentially expanding into a full LGBTQIA+ film festival each March. Such a development would provide a sustainable platform for underrepresented stories and ongoing community engagement. Ultimately, the 2026 screenings contributed to a more inclusive society by encouraging active participation, fostering dialogue on LGBTQIA+ issues, and promoting global access to diverse narratives, reinforcing both internal and external commitments to equality, empathy, and human rights.

EDUCATION:

PEACEPLUS

As a major driver of the project, we prioritise giving equality of opportunity and seek to promote the opportunities this project presents across the island of Ireland, involving varied communities. Through CONNECT, we aim to reach around 3,500 people from different communities and backgrounds engaged in regional-level projects and relationship-building activities. The project places particular emphasis on providing support to those most marginalised within our communities, including, but not limited to, women; older people; migrants and refugees; people living with disabilities; members of the LGBTQIA+ community; ethnic minority communities; and those affected by the legacy of conflict.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations have been embedded into the programme from the outset. During the design phase, we undertook early engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs) working directly with marginalised and under-represented groups across the island of Ireland. This engagement helped identify barriers to participation, inform programme design, and ensure that activities are responsive to the needs and experiences of diverse communities. The programme has also been informed by the British Council's EDI and Gender Appraisal Tool, which was used to assess potential equality impacts, identify opportunities to strengthen inclusion, and ensure that gender and wider diversity considerations have been integrated into programme planning and delivery.

To support equitable access to opportunities, all programme outreach and communications, as well as staff and participant recruitment activities, are being

delivered through channels and networks across the island of Ireland. This includes leveraging the networks of project partners, community organisations, educational institutions, local authorities, festivals, media stakeholders and civil society organisations to maximise awareness and participation. Particular effort is being made to promote opportunities through trusted community-based organisations that work directly with groups who may face barriers to engagement, helping to ensure broad geographic reach and meaningful participation from diverse audiences.

EDI principles have also been embedded within programme procurement processes. Award criteria for commissioned partners and suppliers include a dedicated methodology question requiring applicants to demonstrate how they will design and deliver activities that engage a diverse range of beneficiaries. Suppliers are expected to outline practical approaches to inclusive participation, accessibility, outreach and engagement with under-represented groups, ensuring that equality considerations are reflected throughout programme delivery.

In the project launch event held on 25 February 2026 at Monaghan Peace Campus, considerations for safety, accessibility and inclusion were at the forefront of event planning and delivery. This included the appointment of designated British Council safeguarding contacts and ensuring that the venue was fully accessible to participants with additional requirements. To support preparations, we utilised internal British Council tools, including the Safeguarding Risk assessment tool, the Venue Checklist for Small-Scale Events and a Checklist for Trips and Events, helping to ensure compliance with British Council safeguarding and accessibility standards and the creation of a welcoming and inclusive environment for all participants.

We were proud to engage the South Asian Dance Academy from ArtsEkta, the organisation that also leads on the Belfast Mela festival, to perform at our project launch event. This cultural dance performance reflected the ethnic diversity and multiculturalism of Northern Ireland and Ireland and represented one of the many communities that we aim to engage and include throughout the lifetime of the project. The inclusion of diverse cultural expressions within programme activities reinforces our commitment to ensuring visibility, representation and belonging for all communities.

In our stakeholder engagement and through the three strands of the project – Communities, Festivals, and Media CONNECT – we have sought to tailor completed and upcoming activities to the varying needs and experiences of the different groups involved. A co-design and participatory approach has been central to programme delivery, ensuring that participants are not only beneficiaries of activities but are actively involved in shaping them.

Within Communities CONNECT, initial activities focus on bringing together people from different backgrounds and communities to collaborate, build relationships and identify needs within their local contexts. These insights will directly inform the workshops, training opportunities and residential programmes that follow. Within Festivals CONNECT, representatives from festivals across the island convened through a co-design focus group to shape the programme for Day 3 of the Festival Makers Conference 2026, while additional focus groups are currently informing the design and delivery of future activities within this strand. In Media CONNECT, further and higher education institutions, alongside local media-focused community organisations from Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, have contributed to the development of the toolkit that will form the basis of future media training programmes.

This co-participatory and collaborative approach helps ensure that participants from backgrounds which are often marginalised are meaningfully included in the shaping and

design of project activities. It also enables programme delivery to remain responsive to participant needs and experiences while fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. By embedding accessibility, inclusion, participation and co-creation throughout the programme lifecycle, CONNECT seeks not only to increase engagement from diverse groups but also to ensure that participants have genuine opportunities to influence and shape the activities, relationships and outcomes that emerge from the programme.

Language Assistants Programme

1) Monthly EDI Teaching Packs

We continue to develop and distribute monthly EDI teaching packs to all Language Assistants. These resources encourage assistants to engage with a wide range of EDI themes and support inclusive discussions and activities within their host institutions and local communities. To further promote awareness, the monthly EDI themes are also incorporated into British Council email signatures used in outgoing communications.

2) 120th Anniversary Podcast: Culture Shock and Mental Health

As part of the British Council's 120th anniversary celebrations, the team developed a podcast exploring culture shock, wellbeing and mental health. The podcast highlights participant experiences and provides practical guidance for managing the challenges associated with living and working in a new cultural environment. This resource will be shared with the incoming cohort during the summer as a preparation tool to support their transition and promote positive wellbeing throughout their placement.

3) Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Applicants

We have introduced a new self-assessment questionnaire for applicants to the English Language Assistant (ELA) and Modern Language Assistant (MLA) programmes. The questionnaire encourages applicants to consider whether they are able to fulfil the requirements of the role, either independently or with reasonable adjustments in place. This initiative aims to improve transparency, support informed decision-making and ensure applicants have a clear understanding of the expectations of the programme.

4) Engagement with University and Further Education Partners

To strengthen our understanding of participant support and suitability assessment processes, we conducted a survey with our university and further education (FE) partners. The survey explored the support institutions provide to outgoing English Language Assistants, how they assess participant suitability for the programme, and the processes they have in place for identifying and supporting individuals with additional needs.

We also gathered information on the actions institutions take when a participant requires additional support or where concerns are identified regarding their suitability for the programme. The findings will help us identify examples of good practice, strengthen collaboration with partner institutions and ensure participants receive appropriate support before departure and throughout their placement experience.

5) Safeguarding Training and Team Upskilling

Several members of the team will be undertaking additional safeguarding training during the coming months. Following completion, they will deliver mini upskilling sessions to

colleagues, ensuring safeguarding knowledge, awareness and best practice are shared across the wider team and embedded within our day-to-day work.

6) **Additional Requirements Disclosure for Modern Language Assistants**
We have reintroduced the Modern Language Assistant questionnaire, which invites participants to disclose any additional requirements they may have. This is particularly important as some of our partner organisations do not routinely collect this information. By gathering this information directly, we can ensure that relevant details are communicated to host schools in advance, enabling appropriate support, reasonable adjustments and preparations to be put in place where required. This contributes to a more inclusive experience for participants and helps schools to better support assistants throughout their placement.

Widening Participation of the Study USA programme

The Study USA programme continues to widen participation and strengthen equality, diversity and inclusion. Equality monitoring is used to identify under-representation and guide practical actions that remove barriers and broaden access.

Community Background Partnerships with cross-community organisations have been established to reach under-represented groups. Expanding the range of subject areas available on the programme has attracted a more diverse applicant pool and improved balance across community backgrounds, supporting reconciliation and mutual understanding.

Disability The number of applicants declaring disabilities continues to rise, with a high proportion identifying as neurodiverse. Support measures now include streamlined medical approval processes with home institutions, staff training on neurodiversity, accessibility audits of application materials and procedures, and adapted promotional materials targeted at deaf and blind students.

Practical reasonable adjustments are routinely provided to enable full participation. In one recent case involving a wheelchair-using student, comprehensive adjustments were put in place: placement at a fully accessible campus with nearby sports facilities; funded travel for a parent companion (including flight upgrades to accommodate medical and sports equipment); hotel accommodation and car hire for the companion; airport assistance; and a dedicated contact line for the family. These measures ensured the student could travel safely and settle successfully.

Socio-Economic Background Monitoring of socio-economic background has been introduced. A universal bursary has been secured for all students, and the participation fee has been removed so that every participant takes part on equal financial terms. Targeted outreach to disadvantaged communities and additional application questions on educational background help identify and encourage applicants from lower-income households.

Other Equality Measures

- Blind shortlisting and standardised evaluation rubrics reduce the risk of bias.
- Reasonable adjustments are offered during the selection process.
- Interview criteria give weight to non-academic achievements such as resilience, leadership and life experience.
- Targeted promotion takes place through diverse student societies, community groups and specialist schools.

PART A

- Diverse alumni role models are used at events, and wellbeing support is embedded throughout the programme.

Targeted Outreach

Further partnerships are being developed to increase participation among under-represented groups, particularly male students from a Protestant community background. These include links with PeacePlayers NI, Monkstown Boxing Club, the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, and the Irish Football Association.

Collectively, these actions embed inclusion across outreach, selection, placement and ongoing support, broaden access to international opportunities, and promote social mobility and lasting social value.

3

Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2025-26 reporting period?
(tick one box only)

☒ Yes ☐ No (go to Q4) ☐ Not applicable (go to Q4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Several practical changes to practice and procedures were implemented in 2025-26 as a direct result of Equality Scheme commitments and monitoring. Examples include:

- (1) enhanced reasonable-adjustment processes and case management for Study USA participants (including comprehensive support for a wheelchair-using student);
- (2) introduction of a self-assessment questionnaire for Language Assistant applicants to identify support needs early;
- (3) updates to the UKR induction/onboarding guide with a dedicated reasonable-adjustments section;
- (4) roll-out of socio-economic background (SEB) data collection and awareness sessions;
- (5) continued use of blind shortlisting and standardised evaluation rubrics to reduce bias. These changes improve accessibility and inclusion for disabled people, people from different socio-economic backgrounds, and other Section 75 groups.

3a

With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

3b

What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? (tick all that apply)

- ☐ As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy (please give details):

- ☐ As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise (*please give details*):
- ☐ As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact (*please give details*):
- ☐ As a result of changes to access to information and services (*please specify and give details*):
- ☐ Other (*please specify and give details*):

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

- 4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2025-26 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)
- ☐ Yes, organisation wide
 - ☐ Yes, some departments/jobs
 - ☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
 - X No, has already been done
 - ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The job descriptions and person specifications for advertised vacancies contain a statement of British Council Northern Ireland's commitment to its equal opportunity and good relations obligations under Section 75.

The following text appears in the role profile of all advertised vacancies: -

OUR EQUALITY COMMITMENT:

Valuing diversity is essential to the British Council's work. We aim to abide by and promote equality legislation by following both the letter and the spirit of it

to try and avoid unjustified discrimination, recognising discrimination as a barrier to equality of opportunity, inclusion and human rights.

As an Equal Opportunities Employer, all job applicants are required to complete an Equal Opportunity and Diversity Monitoring Form. Provision of this information is voluntary and assists the British Council in its commitment to a policy of equal opportunity and the development of positive policies to promote equal opportunity in employment. The British Council welcomes applications from all sections of the community as we believe that a diverse workforce gives added depth to our work. We aim to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the basis of gender including transgender, marital status or civil partnership, sexual identity, religion and belief, political opinion, race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin, work pattern, age, disability or HIV/AIDS status, socio-economic background, spent convictions, trade union activity or membership, on the basis of having or not having dependants, or any other irrelevant grounds.

The British Council monitors all stages of our recruitment and selection process to ensure there is no potential for unjustified discrimination on irrelevant grounds. Our monitoring data is externally analysed each year, and recommendations are published and acted upon. All information supplied is treated in strict confidence and no identifying details are attached to it. It helps us to monitor and evaluate the success and application of our equal opportunity policy and diversity strategy and to compile anonymised statistics which are included within our formal reporting structures.

A specific requirement relating to Community Background is requested within the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Monitoring Form for applicants applying for posts that have the potential to be based in the Northern Ireland office whereby applicants are encouraged to declare their Community Background, regardless of which location they are applying from. We monitor the Community Background of our job applicants and employees in order to demonstrate our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity in employment and to comply with our duties under the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

An additional section is attached to the British Council application form for internal and external vacancies. This section states that the British Council operates a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria for a vacancy. All disabled applicants are asked to confirm whether reasonable adjustments are required (and to specify the nature of those adjustments) at application stage.

The British Council has a Core Skills dictionary which sets out the skills which are required most often in roles throughout the British Council. They include a requirement for team leaders to coordinate a diverse team with awareness of equality and diversity impact as part of project specifications. The Dictionary also specifies that in all communications with internal and external audiences, staff must demonstrate an awareness of a diverse audience in speaking and writing.

All staff worldwide are required to ensure their behaviour is consistent with our policies.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- ☐ Yes, organisation wide
- ☐ Yes, some departments/jobs
- ☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- ☒ No, this has already been done
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Senior Managers' leadership role is critical to embedding our EDI principles by becoming involved in diversity initiatives and projects. They ensure that Equality Impact Assessments of key policies, programmes and services are carried out as required. In general, senior managers champion EDI, promote the merits of a good work-life balance and initiate activities to back this up. SLT must have an EDI deliverable in the performance plans.

All staff are also encouraged to dedicate a performance management objective to Equality Diversity and Inclusion and spend time thinking about what EDI means to them, their experiences and how they can improve their knowledge of EDI as well as how to put this into practice in the workplace. Staff are also encouraged to commit time to looking in detail on the intranet at our EDI Policy, Diversity Strategy and the British Council's approach to equality and diversity as well as discrimination legislation.

Marketing and Communications staff play a pivotal role in communicating our EDI commitment to our audiences by ensuring all images used in communications reflect diversity. They also must ensure access to our communications for disabled people and speakers of minority languages and implement changes to address inequalities.

Facilities staff must create the environment in which all customers and colleagues can feel safe and secure by ensuring all refurbishment projects incorporate communication of a clear message of inclusion and accessibility to a wide range of people, for example, disabled people and people with young children. In the Northern Ireland office, Disability Action have supported us in addressing access issues and ensuring personal evacuation plans are in place for anyone who might need additional support in the event of an emergency.

The British Council Disability Working Group comprises of seven staff from across the UK who give 5% of their time to the group. They meet about six times a year and help us to take forward the disability related action points in our Integrated Equality Scheme and to generally keep disability on the corporate agenda.

The Disability Working Group includes disabled and non-disabled colleagues from across Cultural Engagement and English and Exams (and beyond) with

lived experience of disability and/or direct experience of mainstreaming disability inclusion in their areas of work.

The four organisational priorities for disability inclusion are:

1. Processes and practices
2. Adjustments for colleagues
3. Meet digital accessibility standards
4. Adjustments for partners and customers

Programme staff ensure that every participant attending our events feel welcomed and valued by checking all venues for accessibility issues. We also ensure that equality monitoring data (as a minimum in the areas of gender and age) for customers is carried out to identify under- and over-represented groups and results are discussed and acted upon in relation to the local context and local demographics. Programme staff also provide catering at all events that meets the diversity of participants.

For all Northern Ireland staff, if they have a particular examples of how they have promoted equal opportunities and good relations in an aspect of their work, this is championed throughout the Northern Ireland office and fed to our UK Diversity Team.

- 6 In the 2025-26 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? (*tick all that apply*)

- ☒ Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- ☒ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- ☐ Yes, in some departments/jobs
- ☐ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- ☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2025-26 report
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The British Council values are aligned with our vision, purpose, strategic pillars and offers. Our values help us create the culture we need to deliver effectively.

The British Council's three corporate values are at the heart of what we do and how we work. They are: 1) We are open and committed: Our belief in what we do translates into a deep and long-term commitment to the people

we work with and the places where we work. We tackle challenges and take responsibility with openness and honesty to bring about positive change 2) We are expert and inclusive: Inclusion is at the heart of everything we do. By involving everyone in the conversation we learn from each other and bring together all of our experience, knowledge and expertise to do the best work that we can. 3) We are optimistic and bold: We believe in the potential of young people to create a better world. Inspired by this optimism, we are positive and creative, and we focus on what works. We are not afraid to make bold choices to shape a better future for everyone.

The British Council's [Corporate Plan](#) outlines the organisation's commitment to continue to enable the people of the UK to share their culture and way of life with over 600 million people and partners throughout the world, through the programme areas of Arts, Cultural Engagement, and English. Promoting equality of opportunity and good relations is integrated into this intention. We set diversity targets in our Corporate Plan through the Diversity Assessment Framework (DAF). The UK DAF target for 2025/6 was four out of six.

We run mentoring programmes for women and have taken steps towards more flexible deployment to help colleagues appointed locally to develop and progress into more senior roles.

We have adopted more flexible deployment to broaden opportunities for locally appointed staff and maximise the diversity of our workforce.

EDI is mainstreamed into our Northern Ireland Country Plan. The Annual Corporate Plan outlines targets, successes to date and proposed outcomes against targets.

We contribute to the UK government's commitment to international development support for stability, economic development, reduced inequalities and good governance in developing, fragile and conflict-affected countries around the world, including those vital to the UK's strategic interests.

In arts we promote our innovative digital offer including the continued development of unique digital projects using our disability arts and diversity expertise.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2025-26 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:	0	Actions ongoing:	11	Actions to commence:	0
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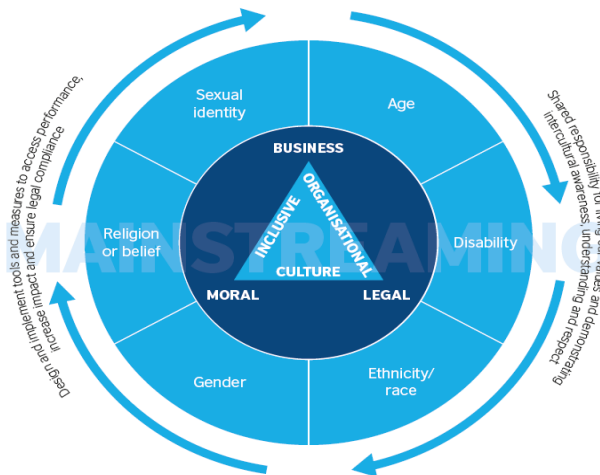
Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

1) Ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is mainstreamed into our current practices (ongoing)

- Celebration of key diversity days throughout the year

- A document entitled “Building EDI into your work” is used by all staff to integrate EDI into everyday work, split by job type. See appendices.
- EDI Planning Tools: A “Guide to Mainstreaming Equality and Diversity in Project Development and Delivery” is used by all staff. This is a checklist for staff to use as guidance about how to mainstream equality and diversity principles and issues into the development, delivery and review of programme work in a more systematic and comprehensive way (see appendices)
- EDI Planning tools: For smaller one-off events, we use the checklist entitled “Questions to Support Inclusive Activities” (see appendices)
- EDI is further mainstreamed into event management using an accessibility checklist (see Appendices). All venues for British Council events are checked for accessibility and related services. The British Council policy clearly mandates they will react to specific needs which includes those requiring or requesting Personal Readers, Infra-red or induction loops, Guiders, Braille, Lip Speakers, Temporary wheelchair access lifts, and Sign Language Interpreter. In addition, there is an anticipatory duty across the following categories: Mobility, Hearing impairment, Visual impairment, Learning disabilities and difficulties, mental health and severe disfigurement. Consideration is made for religious or cultural request such as the availability of rooms for prayer and special dietary needs.
- Brand guidelines ensure documents and formats are fully accessible.
- Staff are encouraged to have an EDI objective in their performance portfolios (this has become mandatory for SLT) and a bank of example deliverables has been circulated to all Northern Ireland staff together with a self-assessment checklist
- Ongoing EDI training is rolled out annually
- Screening of all new or significantly amended policies and case studies are circulated
- Web accessibility guidelines in use: [Web Accessibility Guidelines](#)
- An EDI checklist for Northern Ireland staff captures all routine EDI related activity to adhere to in all aspects of staff’s work.
- An induction document for new starters focuses on all aspects of EDI.
- Staff refer regularly to our Equality Policy which contains useful resources across all EDI categories (see appendices).

Our mainstreaming chart which forms part of our EDI strategy is as follows:



2) Monitor data and data accuracy across all protected characteristics for staff within British Council Northern Ireland (ongoing)

The British Council's global people data system **MyHR** is a centralised, global database for all of our HR information and includes instant access to accurate and up-to-date information supported by simplified and standardised processes. MyHR also gives us a clear picture of our global workforce and ensure all our HR work is delivered in a secure, compliant and risk-controlled manner. The new system enables users to:

- access, update and manage personal data securely
- book and manage leave easily
- search for colleagues, see the organisational structure and access accurate, up-to-date data in real time
- access the Employee Service Centre (AskHR) for HR advice and system issues
- receive timely automated reminders and guidance relating to specific global processes
- any time access via the MyHR mobile app

Steps are continually taken to encourage staff to complete their personal data on the myHR system via a series of email reminders. Improvements were made to the system as a whole for assessing equality monitoring data for staff across all job bands. This has ensured that equality monitoring data is appropriately collected, kept up to date with as much consistency as possible, held as confidential sensitive data, and easily retrieved in a format for reporting purposes. We will continue to encourage staff to update this data on an ongoing basis.

NOTE: The MyHR database does NOT contain data on community background for Northern Ireland staff. Community background data is requested on an adhoc basis from our HR department and stored securely in a protected file. Only the Equality Manager has access to this data and therefore staff are unable to view or change this data.

3) Improve communication on EDI updates, news and best practice to all British Council Northern Ireland staff (ongoing)

A dedicated Equality Manager in the Northern Ireland office communicates with staff to increase awareness of EDI issues. Staff are kept up to date with key EDI issues and dates on an ongoing basis mainly via the physical EDI Toolkit and electronically via the EDI specific Microsoft Teams page for colleagues in the Northern Ireland office. The Teams folder contains all corporate and Northern Ireland specific EDI documents. There is also a range of documents on event management and ideas on how to mainstream EDI into everyday work. There is also a section on useful resources including accessibility guides for venues across Northern Ireland, links to interfaith calendars and international diversity days, lists of nearby places of worship for staff and visitors, and links to EDI training courses. This is a very useful tool and helps keep all important EDI documents in one accessible place. The Teams folder will continue to be updated on an ad hoc basis.

The Equality Manager sits on two wider EDI working groups across the UK to exchange information and ideas on how to embed EDI into working practices.

Colleagues subscribing to the British Council global EDI mailbase are kept informed of ongoing issues and there are staff Bulletin notices and global staff talks around a range of EDI topics throughout the year. Further communication and training schedules are planned in 2025-26.

EDI has become a routine item at monthly all-staff meetings in the Northern Ireland office at which time staff are provided with a monthly update of equality related issues.

4) Revise EDI training plan for all British Council Northern Ireland staff (ongoing)

Aside from the various EDI related webinars throughout the year, virtual Teams training sessions took place in the Northern Ireland office this year (see Q2 for more details).

The training plan is being revised for 2025-26 which will include a mixture of virtual and face-to-face training activity.

5) Reasonable Adjustments - record and monitor annual data on number of reasonable adjustment requests received and actioned (internally and externally). Remain vigilant of issues affecting disabled staff and customers and ensure an accessible environment (ongoing)

Staff are encouraged to use the corporate Accessibility checklists when planning small and large scale events.

We regularly use a Reasonable Adjustments log for staff to log all reasonable adjustments requests, either internally from staff or externally from programme or events participants. This acts as a reference point for

staff to ensure consistency in our approach to providing reasonable adjustments and cost implications thereof.

We have a formal global Reasonable Adjustments Policy for staff with disabilities.

We continue to ensure all external communication is as accessible as possible. The Northern Ireland website is built for accessibility and usability with a clear visual hierarchy – making it easy for the user to navigate through the website content - this includes making text readable and understandable and having content appear and operate in predictable ways. We use good font size and colour contrast combinations, which is helpful for users with colour-blindness and other visual impairments and have included captions and alternatives for our audio and visual content, for those with hearing/vision difficulties.

We use inclusive language throughout the website – for example, we use ‘people first’ language which keeps the individual as the most essential element. Characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, racial group or ability are only used when relevant. We avoid idioms, jargons, and acronyms: which can exclude people who may not have specialised knowledge of a particular subject and impede effective communication as a result. An accessible language guide is available for all staff.

We have collated and disseminated a range of Accessibility Guides to staff to ensure all documentation and online activity is as inclusive as possible. We ensure all staff are aware of and adhere to [Web Accessibility Guidelines](#)

We also have a webpage dedicated to visitors to British Council Northern Ireland who may have accessibility needs - <https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/about/access-british-council-northern-ireland>. We also hope to develop a dedicated EDI webpage on the British Council Northern Ireland website to showcase our EDI activity and our commitment to EDI.

6) Action to help make progress towards the protected characteristics targets, particularly in senior management (ongoing)

We run coaching and mentoring programmes for **women** and have a corporate target of 50% female representation at senior leadership level.

As a means of increasing the number of disabled staff across the organisation, recruitment teams have specifically addressed the issue of broadening access to those with disability by establishing contracts with specialist diversity recruiters (such as Employability, Equal Approach, Diversity Jobs) using accredited diverse talent specialists, working across a range of diverse strands including; Disability, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, Religion, Generational, Transgender, Obesity, Education, Class, Working Parents and Carers. This has broadened access not only to those with disability but groups across the range of protected characteristics. In line with the British Council EDI strategy these efforts shall continue until targets have been met to address areas of under representation and remove any possible barriers to equality of opportunity. By respecting and valuing

diversity we are more likely to attract talent and fresh perspectives, nurture creativity, innovation and flexibility and new opportunities and sources of support, so we remain relevant and dynamic and achieve greater reach and impact.

All staff are encouraged to declare their disability on the online HR portal and as a result there has been an increase in the response rate and a reduction in the number of staff choosing the 'Prefer not to Say' option.

When advertising for vacancies, British Council recruitment processes ensure reasonable adjustment is actioned for candidates with disability or special needs. We also display the 'positive about disabled people' logo on all recruitment advertisements and our web pages, and offer a guaranteed interview to all disabled applicants meeting our recruitment criteria.

We also consider opportunities for disabled people to work for the British Council Northern Ireland for example through work experience or internship programmes. We are seeking to find ways to roll this out locally in consultation with Disability Action NI. The corporate target of disabled staff is 7%.

In terms of ethnicity, we have made several developments over 2025-26, including:

- the development of an **Inclusive Recruitment Guide** (see appendices)
- learning and development programmes designed to promote anti-racism – such as diverse leadership, upward mentoring and anti-black racism programmes
- launching the new Accelerated Leadership Programme which is part of the deliberate efforts to diversify our leadership
- an internal statement and high-level actions shared with the Global Leadership Team on engaging with and learning from recent colonial history – they are discussing this with their teams as they feel relevant
- a requirement for all countries to set out locally relevant actions on anti-racism as part of the Diversity Assessment Framework, captured within EDI action plans. This will strengthen our organisational accountability.
- Locally-tailored anti-racism actions include:
- Georgia's anti-racism plan, focused on learning from external partners
- Venezuela and Argentina running training that explores racism in different local contexts
- several operations such as Myanmar and Israel making anti-racism a focus of their programmes

- many other countries and departments tailoring our internally available anti-racism training to their own contexts
- in the UK, a targeted follow up on the disclosure of ethnic minority data, which has improved total disclosure by nine per cent in the last quarter. Better data allows us to monitor our success.

Our Anti-Racism hub contains a wealth of Anti-Racism and Black Lives Matter Resources.

Our anti-racism vision is for the organisation to become anti-racist in its culture and in its practices. We will strive to give colleagues and everyone we engage with the opportunity to achieve their potential, regardless of race, ethnicity or background. We will aim to dismantle barriers across our organisation and build a more inclusive and representative workplace and leadership that embraces diversity, calls out discrimination and puts equality at its heart. Our priorities are as follows:

1. Improving our learning and understanding about racism/s and its impact
2. Supporting a more inclusive organisational culture that prioritises anti-racist actions and behaviours, leadership development, and improved ways of listening to and acting on colleagues' feedback and concerns
3. Human resource (HR) policies and practices that are reviewed, revised and undergo equality screening and impact assessment (ESIA)to ensure they promote inclusion and anti-racist principles
4. A greater diversity of nationality and race in our global leadership
5. Programmes, products and services that are deliberately anti-racist and inclusive in their development and delivery, consistent with our commitment to decolonise our work.

Within the Northern Ireland office specifically, we seek ways to increase the percentage of ethnic minority staff which is currently low (although reflective of the low percentage in the local population) but this is a group which we target when recruiting. We have created a recruitment network list which is a list of relevant organisations across all the protected characteristics which we will target when recruitment opportunities are advertised as a way of ensuring that our pool of candidates is as diverse as possible.

The age profile of staff will continue to be regularly monitored to ensure there are no barriers to staff in the 51+ age group.

7) External Monitoring – monitoring of customers from the protected characteristic groups taking active part in programmes and activities offered by the British Council Northern Ireland (ongoing)

A questionnaire covering all section 75 protected groups is sent to all external customers across a number of programmes. The data is recorded on a central spreadsheet and patterns and trends identified. Some

underrepresentation was identified among boys, with a higher uptake of girls participating in many of our programmes, thus presenting an opportunity for us to target boys. We have also seen a greater participation rate in our education programmes amongst grammar schools over secondary schools which we will find ways to address. We will continue to monitor our customers throughout 2025-26 and will address any underrepresentation as it arises. We will continue to take action to increase participation among the following target groups:

- Males/non-binary/boys schools
- Older participants, married with dependents
- Mix of religious belief and ethnic origin
- Participants with disabilities
- Protestant community background/non-Catholic maintained schools
- Non-heterosexual participants
- Secondary schools

8) Recruitment and induction – encourage job applications from a diverse audience and an understanding of EDI from the outset (ongoing)

The Disability Advisory Forum offers a recruitment audit service that assesses the accessibility recruitment processes and procedures offering support and guidance where needs have been identified. This is also an avenue which should be further explored and disseminated to staff. As part of the general HR process, all line managers are required to perform exit interviews on all staff who leave the organisation. This highlights any EDI related issues that may be raised and action taken.

All new staff, both permanent and temporary receive comprehensive induction training which includes an explanation of duties/responsibilities as they apply under Section 75. All new staff are given a copy of our Equality Scheme and EDI training is carried out during induction process as part of the general HR procedures. All new staff are also given a copy of the booklet “Welcome to the British Council” which contains full information on our EDI Policy.

We will seek to establish contact with specialist diversity recruiters in Northern Ireland using accredited diverse talent specialists, working across a range of diverse strands including; Disability, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, Religion, Generational, Transgender, Obesity, Education, Class, Working Parents and Carers. This will broaden access not only to those with disability but groups across the range of protected characteristics.

9) Inclusive Procurement - ensure all suppliers are aware of our EDI policy and they too have similar policies. Ensure the diversity clause appears in the main body of contracts. (ongoing)

In addition to building in reference to diversity to the supply of contracted goods and services across the reporting period, the British Council's standard contract template has been commissioned and overseen by the Legal team. The team has ensured that the contract includes specific reference to Equality Legislation and the British Council's own policies - including a link to our Policies website, which includes the Equality Policy. This template is used by colleagues across the organisation for procurement of goods and services. The template itself can be found on the Contracts Portal, with a copy uploaded to the departmental EDI SharePoint site for ease of reference.

The two specific clauses are:

"British Council Requirements" means the instructions, requirements, policies, codes of conduct, guidelines, forms and other documents notified to the Partner in writing or set out on the British Council's website at [Policies for Consultants](#) or such other web address as may be notified to the Partner from time to time (as such documents may be amended, updated or supplemented from time to time during the Term);"

"Equality Legislation" means any and all legislation, applicable guidance and statutory codes of practice relating to diversity, equality, non-discrimination and human rights as may be in force from time to time in England and Wales or in any other territory in which, or in respect of which, the Partner performs its obligations in this Agreement;"

The Equality Manager is part of a wider EDI working group to look at the inclusivity of our procurement processes and how they can be improved.

10) External promotion of British Council EDI strategy externally to stakeholders (customers, audiences, students, candidates, alumni, partners, programme participants, etc) (ongoing)

Our dedicated [EDI Webpage](#) explains our approach that EDI is central to everything we do.

Marketing and Communications staff play a pivotal role in communicating our EDI commitment to our audiences by ensuring all images used in communications reflect diversity. They also ensure access to our communications for disabled people and speakers of minority languages and implement changes to address inequalities

To improve our EDI performance internally and externally, our senior level **Diversity Champions** usually occupy a board or executive level position and take on this role in addition to their existing senior leadership role. Diversity Champions have a range of formal, structured and specific responsibilities with the expressed aim of driving improvements in organisational diversity performance generally, or in a specific area and operate in the Champion role in the context of the corporate strategy.

Diversity Champion activities are consistently aligned with the needs and strategic objectives of the British Council and require the Champion to develop a deep understanding of the relevance of EDI to our core work and stakeholders - and the varying ways in which it impacts our people and service delivery. They help to promote EDI and raise awareness of related issues and drive the changes required to embed EDI across the British Council: to engage staff and customers. Another benefit is that they leverage EDI benefits in terms of employee engagement, enhanced reputation and support our ambition to become a market leader in the services we deliver worldwide.

Locally, we disseminate our commitment to EDI, and the measures we take to address it, at promotional/information events to key stakeholders and customers and also through consultation. We are a JAM Card Friendly Organisation (see Q2) and champion diversity by creating diverse teams and flexing our style to appropriately match others in an inclusive way. EDI Group to seek ways of using our local Accredited Diversity Facilitator to promote our EDI message externally.

11) Ensure all online activity is as accessible as possible (ongoing)

All corporate accessibility guidelines are saved in a dedicated Teams space for staff to access. All communications online are in line with [Web Accessibility Guidelines](#) and [Public Sector accessibility guidelines](#). An Inclusive Language Guide and “Ten Actions for written visual and verbal communication” document (see Appendices) are available to staff.

In April 2024, staff were invited to view three short films by the [British Assistive Technology Association](#) which discussed assistive technology (AT) in school contexts, but which is transferable to workplace inclusion and reasonable adjustments. Staff also viewed the [Essential Guide to the European Accessibility Act](#) what it means for us as an organisation, and how it creates a common baseline for disabled people's digital inclusion through changes in national legislation and regulations. We also joined internal webinars to celebrate [Global Accessibility Awareness Day](#).

- 8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2025-26 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

None

- 9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2025-26 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- ☒ Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- ☒ Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- ☐ Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- ☐ Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

- 10** Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

☒ All the time

☐ Sometimes

☐ Never

- 11** Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2025-26 reporting period, on matters relevant (eg the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

In accordance with the commitments made in our Equality Scheme we recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. We consult as a matter of form on our equality scheme, equality impact assessments action measures and any other matters deemed relevant to Section 75 Statutory duties.

We carry out our consultation in accordance with the principles contained in the Equality Commissions' guidance Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (2010). All consultations will seek the views of those directly affected by the matter/policy, the Equality Commission, representative groups of Section 75 categories, other public authorities, voluntary and community groups, our staff and such other groups who have a legitimate interest in the matter, whether or not they have a direct economic or personal interest. We consider the accessibility and format of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process.

Specific consideration is given to how best to communicate with people with disabilities, including people with learning disabilities and minority ethnic communities. Information is made available, on request, in alternative formats in a timely manner. We ensure that such consultees have equal time to respond.

We provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner. A feedback report is prepared which includes summary information on the policy consulted upon,

a summary of consultees' comments and a summary of our consideration of and response to consultees' input. The feedback is provided in formats suitable to consultees.

Internally, HR visit each region and conduct climate surveys on staff 'wellbeing'. This provides a forum for staff to meet face-to-face with a HR colleague, share viewpoints and outline what 'wellbeing' in its broadest context meant to them as a British Council employee. Follow up communication is circulated to staff outlining next steps and action measures.

Externally, feedback is sought from service users on all our programmes many of which are schools or college programs. The views of participants (children, teenagers and young adults) are taken into consideration directly and indirectly via teachers and program directors and help shape development and direction of future programmes and services.

The British Council offers a number of internships each year to enable a group of interns to see and experience the work of the British Council at first hand and champion the value of cultural relations.

The objectives of the internship scheme is as follows:

- To offer structured work experience placements within a specific business area to a group of interns
- To give a real introduction to the field of cultural relations to a group of interns
- To enable British Council departments to get support and benefit from a different perspective on their work

As part of the Internship programme, interns attend a three day corporate induction before joining a specific department for twelve weeks. They have a line manager and are set specific deliverables during their stay. In addition, they also undertake a group project which they present to staff and stakeholders at the end of the programme.

Work experience programmes are also managed for approximately ten school students a year and approximately five for higher education students. This scheme is co-ordinated by a local manager affording students the opportunity to gain insights into the broad remit of learning and development opportunities available according to their interests.

- 12 In the 2025-26 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**:
(tick all that apply)

- ☐ Face to face meetings
- ☐ Focus groups

- ☒ Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- ☐ Questionnaires
- ☒ Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- ☐ Internet discussions
- ☐ Telephone consultations
- ☐ Other (*please specify*):

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

We have an extensive list of consultees from across a wide range of organisations across all the Section 75 groups. See Appendices for full list.

We ensure accessibility of all documentation by making all documents available in alternative formats on request. All documentation is also accessible on our website.

- 13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2025-26 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

We informed the general public about the availability of this material through press releases where appropriate

- 14** Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2025-26 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

<https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/about/equal-opportunities-diversity>

- 15** Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (as recorded in screening reports):

PART A

7

- 16** Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2025-26:

7	Policy consultations conducted with screening assessment presented.
	Policy consultations conducted with an equality impact assessment (EQIA) presented.
	Consultations for an EQIA alone.

- 17** Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

All ESIAs can be found on the Northern Ireland EDI webpage:
<https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/about/equal-opportunities-diversity>

Name of policy/programme/event
Guidance for International Moves: Same-sex relationships and cohabittees
Project Assurance Powerapp
Homeworking Policy (UK)
Reasonable Adjustments Policy
Travel & Expenses policy
Travel & Expenses policy - Meal Rates section
Introduction of an AI-enabled assistant for transcription and summarised note-taking in internal and external interviews (Metaview)

- 18** Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

☐ Yes ☒ No concerns were raised ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

- 19** Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes X No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

- 20** From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2025-26 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No, already taken place

☐ No, scheduled to take place at a later date ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

We monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures annually and update the action plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to our functions, internal processes, staff and customers. We also monitor participation in our programmes via monitoring questionnaires and we also monitor complaints if they arise.

- 21** In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

X Yes No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Analysis of equality monitoring data within the Study USA programme (collected across all nine Section 75 categories for Northern Ireland programme participants since 2016, and benchmarked against NI Census data) has directly informed targeted actions and adjustments to practice in 2025-26. Key examples include:

- **Community background and gender** – Monitoring identified under-representation of boys and of participants from a Protestant community background on several education programmes. In response, the Study USA team expanded partnerships with cross-

community organisations (including PeacePlayers NI, Monkstown Boxing Club, the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and the Irish Football Association) and broadened the range of available subject areas to attract a more balanced applicant pool.

- **Disability / neurodiversity** – A continued rise in the number of applicants declaring disabilities (with a high proportion identifying as neurodiverse) prompted the introduction of streamlined medical-approval processes with home institutions, staff training on neurodiversity, accessibility audits of application materials, adapted promotional materials for deaf and blind students, and routine provision of practical reasonable adjustments.
- **Socio-economic background** – Newly introduced SEB monitoring, combined with awareness sessions delivered with the Bridge Group, has shaped approaches to the Apprenticeship Levy scheme, work-shadowing and work-experience opportunities, and the removal of participation fees / introduction of a universal bursary on Study USA so that every participant takes part on equal financial terms.
- **School type** – Higher participation rates from grammar schools compared with secondary schools have led to ongoing targeted outreach to secondary schools to broaden access.

These monitoring insights have therefore driven concrete changes to outreach, selection processes, support arrangements and programme design, ensuring the Equality Scheme's monitoring commitments translate into practical improvements for under-represented groups.

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2025-26 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

No changes were made to the Equality Action Plan. Please see Q7 for full details on action measures and current progress.

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

None

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

- 24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2025-26, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

See Q2 for training undertaken in 2025-26.

We have in place a communication and training programme for all staff and continued to ensure that our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties was made clear in all relevant publications.

We ensure that staff are informed of interesting and relevant stories or case study examples of particular issues affecting people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme.

Our training plan for staff achieves the following objectives:

- raised awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, our equality scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme
- provided those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and Equality Impact Assessment) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
- provided those staff who deal with complaints in relation to compliance with our equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate and monitor complaints effectively
- provided those staff involved in consultation processes with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
- provided those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of the British Council Northern Ireland's equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

All British Council Northern Ireland staff and the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee have a copy of the Equality Scheme and were invited to comment on it. All new staff - both permanent and temporary have receive comprehensive induction training which included explanation of duties/responsibilities as they apply under Section 75.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training is incorporated into local Induction Training programmes which covers all legal requirements under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 75 statutory duties.

EDI is an inherent component of regular British Council online training which is a mandatory requirement and which all staff must complete on an annual basis.

The Diversity Unit has created a document which includes tips to help anyone that designs or modifies websites to have web accessibility in mind. When designing a website it is important to realise how people with disabilities use the Web, what difficulties they may face and how to assist them in overcoming those difficulties.

In an attempt to raise office awareness of Diversity, we marked and celebrated some key international diversity days throughout the year and organised regional diversity weeks across our global network that have

helped staff and external audiences engage with diversity issues in a new way.

As the British Council offer so many courses and programmes via web links, they are constantly growing and being updated. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) is available for those designing a website which outlined advice on making the site more easily accessible to older people. Included also is a template for accessibility evaluation reports to assess if needs are being met.

We have produced a document with information for Intranet users who are visually impaired and/or who would prefer to change the appearance of the intranet pages to make them more accessible.

The Northern Ireland office has a dedicated Equality Manager who is specifically responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of their obligations in meeting the requirements of/developments within Section 75 and the commitments of our equality scheme. The Equality Manager is our direct link to other parts of the UK to ensure that our legislative requirements specific to Northern Ireland are incorporated into all policies and processes.

As a means of raising awareness of LGBT issues the British Council created the Five Films for Freedom Campaign. This was the world's first global, digital LGBT film festival initiated by the British Council and the British Film Institute and runs annually in March. The campaign seeks to promote freedom, equality and LGBT rights in 135 countries across the social media network and all staff are invited to a screening of the films annually.

Our Global Diversity Network is made up of two or more representatives from each region, who work with the Diversity Unit in a formalised way. They support their management teams in each region to mainstream equality and diversity in all our practices. They have expertise and understanding of the different cultures and contexts in which they work, so they can ensure our corporate diversity initiatives are meaningful and relevant and can be applied in each region. The GDN share ideas and good practice using a GDN mailbase. This is a mailing list that all staff interested in finding out more about equality and diversity can subscribe to. It is a place for sharing good practice, asking for advice from other colleagues and joining in debates and discussions about topical issues related to global equality and diversity so that we can all learn from each other around equality and diversity.

- 25** Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

Feedback from staff showed that the online mandatory EDI training is clear and informative.

Full details of staff training throughout the year can be found in Q2

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

- 26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2025-26, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

We continue to ensure all external communication is as accessible as possible. The Northern Ireland website is built for accessibility and usability with a clear visual hierarchy – making it easy for the user to navigate through the website content - this includes making text readable and understandable and having content appear and operate in predictable ways. We use good font size and colour contrast combinations, which is helpful for users with colour-blindness and other visual impairments and have included captions and alternatives for our audio and visual content, for those with hearing/vision difficulties.

We use inclusive language throughout the website – for example, we use ‘people first’ language which keeps the individual as the most essential element. Characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, racial group or ability are only used when relevant. We avoid idioms, jargons, and acronyms: which can exclude people who may not have specialised knowledge of a particular subject and impede effective communication as a result. An accessible language guide is available for all staff.

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2025-26?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

No complaints were raised this year.

Section 3: Looking Forward

- 28** Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

The Equality Scheme was reviewed in 2024 and will run until 2029.

- 29** Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? (*please provide details*)

Yes. While we will continue to deliver the full range of Equality Scheme commitments, we will prioritise four high-impact areas in 2026-27, each with clear success measures:

1. **Socio-economic background (SEB) monitoring and inclusion** Expand external equality monitoring to include a socio-economic background question for one-off events and new global programmes. Improve SEB data completeness on the MyHR platform and use the richer data to shape practical interventions, including exploration of socio-economic criteria within Apprenticeship Levy selection and expanded work-experience/work-shadowing opportunities for applicants from less-advantaged backgrounds. *Success measures:* measurable increase in SEB disclosure rates; at least two concrete SEB-informed interventions designed and underway by March 2027.
2. **Neurodiversity inclusion** Finalise and roll out a dedicated neurodiversity inclusion guide (building on external research already shared with the Diversity Unit in 2025-26). Deliver targeted training and continue to track reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent colleagues and programme participants via the Reasonable Adjustments Log. *Success measures:* guide published and promoted to all Northern Ireland staff and relevant programme teams; at least one dedicated training session delivered; continued rise in appropriate adjustments recorded.
3. **Targeted outreach to under-represented community backgrounds and school types** Intensify partnerships and promotional activity aimed at male students from a Protestant community background and secondary (non-grammar) schools, building on 2025-26 links with PeacePlayers NI, Monkstown Boxing Club, the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and the Irish Football Association. *Success measures:* demonstrable improvement in the balance of community background and school-type representation among applicants and participants on key education programmes (monitored against NI Census benchmarks).
4. **Digital and event accessibility compliance** Strengthen compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and prepare for the requirements of the European Accessibility Act. Continue routine use of the Accessible Visits and Events Toolkit and Reasonable Adjustments Log across all events and programmes. *Success measures:* accessibility audit of key UK Region online platforms completed and actioned; zero significant accessibility-related complaints.

These four priorities sit within a wider programme of ongoing work that will continue throughout 2026-27:

Monitoring

- External: continue monitoring programme participants across all nine Section 75 categories, expand coverage to one-off events and new global programmes, and address under-representation as it arises (particularly

males/non-binary participants, secondary schools, Protestant community background, disabled participants, and non-heterosexual participants).

- Internal: work towards higher response rates on the MyHR equality monitoring fields for staff, the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee and Board of Trustees.
- Continue quarterly review of gender-related trends (including leavers data) and community-background monitoring of job applicants and employees.

Under-representation in the workforce Continue efforts to increase the diversity of staff, with particular focus on the corporate targets of 50% women, 15% minority ethnic staff and 7% disabled staff in senior roles. This includes further work with specialist diversity recruiters, the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, and exploration of work-experience/internship opportunities with Disability Action NI. The age profile of staff will continue to be monitored to ensure there are no barriers for those aged 51+.

Reasonable Adjustments Continue to record and monitor all internal and external reasonable-adjustment requests via the formal log, ensuring consistency, cost tracking and continuous improvement of accessibility for disabled staff, customers and participants.

Gender & Inclusion Progress the actions arising from the 2025 female focus groups (group mentoring, visibility of female role models, reinforced career conversations, and structured career planning). Investigate recruitment patterns at junior levels and the reasons for women leaving senior management, using exit-interview data. Ensure role profiles use inclusive language.

Diversity Strategy / Diversity Assessment Framework Maintain or improve the UK Diversity Assessment Framework score (target: at least 4 out of 6, ideally 5 out of 6). The next submission deadline is May 2026.

Training & Communications

- Deliver the revised EDI training plan (mix of virtual and face-to-face).
- Encourage all staff to include an EDI objective in their 2026-27 performance portfolios (mandatory for the Senior Leadership Team).
- Maintain EDI as a standing item at monthly all-staff meetings and continue regular engagement with Strategic Business Unit leads.

Consultation Continue to review and refresh the consultation list and explore more focused consultation methods (including social media and targeted focus groups with Section 75 representative organisations).

Organisation-wide EDI developments We will also contribute to corporate work on streamlined EDI action plans, revised EDI key performance indicators, heightened attention to sexual harassment in light of legislative changes, responsible engagement with AI, greater focus on age and ageing, improved internal EDI data quality, and balancing rights, protected beliefs and freedom of expression.

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The Disability Action Plan was revised, consulted upon and submitted to the Equality Commission in 2025.

Progress against both the four priority areas and the wider programme will be reviewed quarterly through existing monitoring arrangements and the EDI Working Group.

30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2025-26) reporting period?
(please tick any that apply)

- ☒ Employment
- ☐ Goods, facilities and services
- ☐ Legislative changes
- ☒ Organisational changes/ new functions
- ☐ Nothing specific, more of the same
- ☐ Other (please state):

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

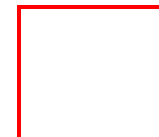
1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:
--

4

Fully achieved

1

Partially achieved



Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on <u>all</u> actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.
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2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ			
Regional ^{iv}			
Local ^v	Identified reasonable adjustments requests and recorded them to the reasonable adjustments log to keep a record of any potential barriers to participation for disabled people.		Identified good practice in providing adjustments for disabled people to participate in our programmes eg provision of fridges in students' accommodation to store medication

PART B

	All written communication online and delivery of presentations were completed in an accessible format		Participants with disabilities were able to participate in events
	Documents entitled “Making online meetings more accessible” and “Tips for making slides more accessible” were compiled and shared with staff (see appendices)		Ensured that online meetings and events were as inclusive as possible for disabled participants.
	Accessibility Guide being utilised for Study USA team when creating documents and running events.		Ensures accessibility and EDI considerations are at the heart of all our activity.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
	Inclusive Delivery session	□ Delivered tailored training on inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments, using the Accessible Visits and Events Toolkit. □ Created a Study USA-specific guidance document based on the toolkit. □ Initiated promotion of the Study USA programme to deaf and blind students in Northern Ireland.	□ Increased team understanding of how to embed inclusion throughout the project lifecycle. □ Improved clarity on the role of line managers in supporting reasonable adjustments. □ Enhanced ability to plan, deliver, and evaluate inclusive events and activities. □ Greater confidence in recruiting and supporting disabled applicants.

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		☐ Launched an accessibility audit of UK Region internal online platforms. ☐ Began applying alt text guidance and the WAVE web accessibility tool to improve digital accessibility.	☐ Progress toward ensuring digital platforms meet accessibility standards.
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2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Time to Talk' days held annually for staff to discuss, share and reflect about mental health and wellbeing and share organisational resources		Increased awareness of organisation's Keep Well Campaign and support offered to staff
2	Celebration of annual international diversity days		Increased awareness of issues facing those from under-represented groups and how we as an organisation can help recognise and address these issues and prevent barriers to participation in our programmes
4	A global anti-racism hub		All anti-racism and black lives matter resources are consolidated in one accessible space

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5	EDI updates at monthly staff meetings		Ensuring EDI is at the forefront of planning of events and ongoing programme activity. Wellbeing updates (addressing mental and physical health of staff) continue to be important as the majority of staff continue to work largely from home.
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2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Section 75 training is provided to all new staff at induction stage		Staff are aware of the requirements by law of the Section 75 duties as a public authority
2	The legal monitoring requirements under the Fair Employment Act 1995 are communicated to staff when discussing the results of the external monitoring of programme participants		Staff are aware of the requirements by law of the Fair Employment Act 1995 as a public authority
	All grant agreements and contracts contain information on our commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity across all our activities and programmes		All customers are aware of our equality commitment
	The Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan were shared with members of our		Advisory Committee members are aware of the requirements of the Equality Scheme

PART B

	Northern Ireland Advisory Committee		
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2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	The Microsoft Teams EDI folder is accessible to all Northern Ireland staff to access up-to-date information and documentation on all EDI issues including disability and reasonable adjustments		Staff to be equipped with knowledge and information to provide customer service excellence and ensure equality of opportunity through programmes and online events

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestonesvi / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Further develop disability related arts projects such as Unlimited Disability Arts Festival, Bounce Festival and University of Atypical to support disabled and deaf people's involvement in the arts and facilitate the dissemination of artists' work to reach UK and international audiences.		Promote positive attitudes towards disabled artists and their work	This is an ongoing arts related activity and dependent on outside agencies and funding.

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2				
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4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		
2		

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Feedback from staff, Business Disability Forum, Northern Ireland Advisory Committee, recruiting managers, Diversity Unit and HR department.

(b) Quantitative

Feedback from customers using event and programme equality monitoring and evaluation forms.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or

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- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

No

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation's annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

The Disability Action plan was revised, consulted and submitted to the Equality Commission in 2025.

ⁱ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

ⁱⁱ **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

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ⁱⁱⁱ **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

^{iv} **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

^v **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.

^{vi} **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.