

British Council Northern Ireland



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties  
Annual Progress Report 2024-25

Contact:

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:  
<http://nireland.britishcouncil.org/about/equal-opportunities-diversity>

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Brisbane", is centered within a rectangular box.

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 2024 and 31 March 2025**  
**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 2024-25, 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 **Nigeria, from 26-28 November 2024 and will take place in London in 2025**. The focus was on sustainable, scalable and equitable partnerships in tertiary education.

### **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.

## 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 2024)**

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 2024 was [Reclaiming Narratives](#). 'This theme underscores a commitment to showcasing the untold success stories and the full complexity of black heritage, as well as correcting historical inaccuracies. It is about taking control of our stories and honouring our heroes while challenging the narratives that have often overlooked the contributions and achievements of black individuals both in the UK and globally'.  
#ReclaimingNarratives.

We remain committed to delivering on specific actions identified to support anti-racism and wider inclusion. We asked all countries and major departments to identify a relevant anti-racism action for their equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) action plan. This started with a conversation about what race means in each context.

To support further understanding, some actions staff were asked to consider included:

- **Windrush events:**

A morning and afternoon events took place on **Monday 7 October** organised by UK-based Minority Ethnic Working Group (MEWG) colleagues to recognise Windrush narratives and the impact of Windrush as a signifier of multicultural UK.

- **Engaging with our history:**

Staff were encouraged to explore **a paper on how British Council is engaging with and learning from recent colonial history (see appendices)** which was drawn from the work undertaken last year by a cross-organisational Decolonisation Working Group. Some of the actions set out helped to shape our wider learning, including a new series of sessions focused on race-related issues across different regions.

- **Inclusive leadership:**

Through the [#FosteringInclusion campaign](#) we were invited to reflect on our leadership styles and our own teamworking.



- How does your leadership style actively support the progress and positive experiences of people you manage, acknowledging challenges of black colleagues and those from other marginalised backgrounds?
- As a leader, how have you shared your learnings about race equality with others and what positive changes have been recorded as a result?
- We launched an **Inclusive Recruitment Guide** (see appendices)
- **Enhancing our understanding:**
  - Some of the case studies in the British Council's **Race equality guide** focus on assumptions and stereotypes. We consider within our context: where do these hold and what can be done to challenge them?
  - Staff participated in the Black History Month quiz on 29 October
  - Staff were encouraged to join the **EDI Book Club** which during BHM were reading *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi which follows the lives of two half-sisters from Ghana and their descendants over eight generations.
- **Acknowledge and celebrate:**
  - Staff used Black History Month themed artwork, read books by black British authors and listened to black British podcasts.
- **International Women's Day (8 March 2025)**
  - To mark IWD we held some Gender Toolkit training sessions. The Gender Toolkit is designed to help colleagues embed gender mainstreaming and think about transformative activities when planning and delivering country activities.

- **World Mental Health Day**

To mark World Mental Health Day 2024, our global wellbeing team launched a new mental health resource: the **Wellness Action Plan** (see appendices).

The tool was originally created by the mental health organization Mind, adapted for use by the British Council, and is available in a fillable PDF format.

The tool can be used as:

- A self-reflection exercise of our own wellbeing habits and stress responses.
- A conversation aide to build understanding between a line manager and a team member.
- A way to make a plan between a line manager and a team member to thrive at work, after returning from a period of illness.
- A great exercise to do at a team away day, and to start meaningful conversations.
- A resource we can share with family members, especially teenagers, to encourage a proactive wellness planning approach.

- **International Day of Disabled People (IDDP) 3 December 2024**

We held an online panel discussion to mark the IDDP, hosted by a British Council teacher and EDI coordinator, a panel of guests with disabilities explored topics related to this year's United Nations theme: "Amplifying the leadership of persons

with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future". Through the personal views and experiences of members of the panel, the discussion touched upon areas including how best to raise awareness of the rights of those of us with disabilities and how we can ensure our inclusion in all aspects of society.

## **Staff Training**

### **1) Inclusive Delivery training session - January 2025**

The session focused on inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments and was tailored to the specific needs of our teams and aligned with the nature of our work. It drew on the **Accessible Visits and Events Toolkit** and aimed to support colleagues in building practical knowledge and skills for inclusion.

Learning outcomes included:

- Exploring the inclusive project lifecycle with an emphasis on disability inclusion and identifying opportunities to embed inclusive practices throughout.
- Identifying practical ways to implement accessibility and inclusion in our work and event delivery.
- Clarifying the responsibilities of line managers in supporting team members through inclusive approaches and reasonable adjustments.
- Applying relevant resources and tools to ensure inclusive planning, delivery, and evaluation.

Following the training we designed a document for the Study USA team which set out the key principles of the Accessible Visits and Events Toolkit and tailored them to the Study USA programme. We are actively promoting the programme to students from the deaf and blind communities in Northern Ireland, and we will use our adapted toolkit document to ensure that all events are accessible. We will continue to refer to the toolkit as we progress through the process of recruiting disabled applicants to the programme and when accessibility checking the US colleges where the students may eventually be placed.

Following the training, we are conducting an audit of the UK Region internal online platforms to ensure compliance with the digital accessibility standard. We have also started to use the guidance on using alt text and WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool to make changes where necessary.

### **2) Revised organisation-wide mandatory EDI training**

New mandatory EDI training was rolled out globally with new content and providing staff with a more accessible experience.

### **3) September EDI induction**

This induction was designed for all staff regardless of their backgrounds or prior knowledge of EDI. The sessions were held monthly across different time zones, ensuring accessibility for all team members worldwide and to give participants the opportunity to delve into the British Council's EDI strategy, explore our EDI action plan, familiarise ourselves with EDI planning tools, and discover key resources. Whether newcomers to the field or seasoned British Council colleagues, these sessions empowered participants to actively contribute to the British Council EDI strategy and the EDI Plan. Participation was mandatory for Cultural Engagement central team and recorded through performance

objectives.

### **Fostering Inclusion campaign**

In September 2024, we launched ***Fostering Inclusion***, the third phase of our global culture campaign, 'Together We Thrive' which aimed to help us create a friendly and inclusive environment where everyone feels welcomed and included by:

- Increasing our understanding of inclusion
- Nurturing inclusive team environments
- Creating opportunities for diverse voices to contribute

A series of videos featuring staff who described what inclusion means to them were circulated globally. Staff were encouraged to come together in groups to complete an activity from an inspiration pack (*see appendices*) and to connect with the organisation's 'Culture Champions' to get advice and additional guidance on Fostering inclusion.

### **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.

### **Internal Monitoring**

In 2024, we undertook a targeted data campaign to improve the completion of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) profiles on MyHR. Through email reminders and engagement with team leads using dashboard intelligence, we significantly reduced "not given" rates, for example, Minority Ethnic (ME) non-disclosure dropped from 34% to 14%, and disability from 11% to 5%. Non-disclosure for religion, belief and sexual orientation has been reduced to the point of no longer displaying in reports. Despite this progress, ME representation still stands at 0%, and disability representation at 10%, highlighting ongoing underrepresentation. Due to small recruitment sample sizes, our analysis of recruitment bottlenecks was limited, and a broader data approach was recommended, leading to a commissioned think piece from HR.

This HR-led think piece, due in February, will explore key EDI metrics across UK data, including selection ratios, resignation rates, exit interview satisfaction, and internal staff movements by demographic group. Early analysis indicates that UK Nationals perform equally well in recruitment compared to Local and Non-Nationals, a balance we aim to maintain. The Accelerating Leadership Programme, which encourages applications from diverse candidates, supports this goal. However, organisational change poses a risk to sustaining leadership opportunities for underrepresented groups, requiring ongoing attention and action.

Further insights revealed a gender imbalance in UK resignations, with women accounting for 70% of leavers in 2022, compared to 62% of the UK headcount. We will monitor this closely and evaluate the impact of organisational changes on gender equity, sharing relevant findings with the Senior Leadership Team. Persistent challenges in data quality remain, particularly around ethnicity disclosure and low participation in exit interviews. To

address this, we will continue promoting EDI data completion, reinforce the message through induction sessions, and propose making exit interviews mandatory. Improvements in disability data remain a priority, and we acknowledge that this work is ongoing and requires sustained focus.

### **Changes to sex and gender equality monitoring data**

On our equality data monitoring system, we introduced new fields for 'Legal sex' and 'Gender identity'. Clear distinctions between sex and gender will help us effectively collect accurate data for specific purposes and to better understand the diversity of our workforce over time. It will also help to ensure meaningful insights, such as informing policies, facilities and inclusion efforts. This decision reflected input from diverse teams within and outside our organisation. The current 'Gender' field, with options 'female', 'male', 'other', will become 'Legal sex' with options:

- female
- male
- other legal sex.

This change reflects how the data is used for formal and legal purposes, such as calculating tax rates and allowances, pension benefits and retirement age. There will be a new field called 'Gender identity', with options (these are not mandatory):

- man
- woman
- intersex
- non-binary
- trans man
- trans woman
- other gender identity
- no gender identity
- prefer not to say

### **Gender Disparities: Women's Experiences and Interventions**

The 2024/25 UKR/PER People Survey results reveal a notable gender disparity, with female respondents expressing more unfavourable views than their male counterparts across various categories. While the small team size may affect the representativeness of the data, these findings echo broader organisational trends identified in the *Women in Leadership Think Piece*. Although female representation at the SMP+ level reached 50% due to previous efforts, it has since declined to 43%, highlighting the need for renewed and sustained focus on gender equity in senior roles. Organisational survey data further reveals that senior women report more negative experiences around leadership support, decision-making, recognition, and well-being, alongside higher rates of bullying, discrimination, and workload concerns. Notably, women also rate their line managers less favourably and experience higher voluntary turnover, despite performing well in selection and performance evaluations.

External research supports these patterns, pointing to persistent gender biases in leadership, greater work-life conflict for women, and disparities in perceived fairness and experiences of harassment. Though organisational MyHR data does not indicate structural barriers to women's advancement, it does highlight a 3.53% gender pay gap among senior managers. To address these issues, the UKR Leadership Team was

encouraged to explore targeted interventions, including establishing a women's focus group, enhancing inclusive leadership training, promoting mentorship programmes, clarifying career pathways, and increasing role flexibility. Celebrating successful female leaders and supportive managers can also help shift culture and improve outcomes.

## **ARTS:**

### **Outburst Queer Arts Festival**

The Outburst Queer Arts Festival serves as a vital platform for showcasing LGBTQIA+ and queer arts and culture, particularly emphasizing the historically underrepresented Northern Ireland context. With slower progress in LGBTQ+ rights compared to the rest of the UK, Outburst not only highlights local artists but also brings in international voices to foster cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. The initiative is built around promoting creative collaboration, supporting marginalised communities, including disabled LGBTQIA+ artists, and creating space for the exploration of identity, shared challenges, and diverse artistic expression.

A key component of the project is its partnership with the British Council, which annually invites 10 to 15 international LGBTQIA+ arts professionals to attend the festival in Belfast. This Queer Arts Development Network allows for meaningful engagement between local and global queer artists, especially those from regions where LGBTQIA+ expression is heavily restricted. In 2024, artists from countries like Jordan and Turkey were supported through grants to overcome financial and societal barriers, enhancing representation and inclusion. The festival also made efforts to improve accessibility, including the participation of a delegate from the disability arts organisation Unlimited, thereby addressing intersectionality in queer representation.

The 2024 edition saw further institutional backing with the awarding of a £250,000 grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, recognizing Outburst's role in amplifying radical queer and feminist art from both local and international artists. This funding supports Outburst's broader mission to inspire social change through creative expression and strengthen the global queer arts network. British Council's longstanding collaboration was highlighted as a contributing factor to the success of this new grant, particularly through their ongoing efforts in supporting global connections and cultural diplomacy.

Additionally, strategic collaborations through British Council programmes such as EUNIC London and the EU Bespoke Brokers LGBTQIA+ initiative facilitated deeper links with European partners, notably with Finnish artists and institutions. These partnerships underline our commitment to EDI in arts programming and strengthen long-term international artistic exchange. Through inclusive symposiums, workshops, and curated festival experiences, Outburst continues to champion underrepresented voices and provide a model of queer cultural exchange that is equitable, creative, and globally connected.

### **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 2024, the collaboration aimed to align with the festival's mission of encouraging underrepresented voices in political and cultural debates. The event took

place at Queen's Film Theatre (QFT) in Belfast in March 2025, featuring a lunchtime screening of five short films followed by a panel discussion and audience Q&A. The chosen venue ensured full accessibility, and all promotional efforts were inclusive, particularly targeting LGBTQIA+ communities through both online and in-person outreach.

The event was 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 theme 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 panel encouraged audience engagement and highlighted the importance of allyship, representation, and global solidarity with LGBTQIA+ communities. The event 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, organisers are in talks with partners like the Belfast Film Festival to establish 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 2025 screening 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:**

### **Diwali celebrations in Belfast organised by ImageNation NI**

The event embraced the theme "Folk Dances of India," immersing guests in India's rich cultural heritage and uniting communities across Northern Ireland. The evening was made even more special by the presence of distinguished VIPs, including Stormont's Junior Minister Pam Cameron; Assistant PSNI Chief Constable Bobby Singleton; Federica Ferrieri, Honorary Consulate of Italy to Northern Ireland; Jonathan Stewart, Director of British Council Northern Ireland; Commissioner Monica Fitzpatrick from the Equality Commission Northern Ireland; Colin Caughey from the Human Rights Commission Northern Ireland; Miss NI 2024 Hannah Johns and Jahswill Emanuel.

Their attendance underscored the event's importance in promoting diversity and cross-cultural understanding.

Belfast Live: [Belfast City Hall radiates with culture and unity at Diwali 2024](#)

## **PEACEPLUS**

In March 2025, the British Council was selected by the Special EU Programmes Body to deliver a project under the PEACEPLUS programme. With a contract value of €2,08 million over the next four years the CONNECT project is a strong collaboration between the UK and EU Regions delivered from British Council offices in Northern Ireland and in Ireland in partnership with local community and voluntary organisations; PeacePlus will allow the British Council to facilitate collective action and advance opportunities for collaboration across the island through community engagement, media, and the arts. The project will commence 1 July 2025.

The overall objective of the project is to build strong, resilient relationships between diverse communities across Northern Ireland and Ireland. By promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity, and mutual respect, the project seeks to create opportunities for people to participate, learn, and cooperate with each other by building mutually beneficial connections and celebrating the diversity, distinctiveness, creativity and innovation of NI and the border counties of IRL. The expected change is a more united and shared society where individuals from different backgrounds can live, learn, and socialise together free from prejudice and intolerance. Activities are built around three main pillars: Communities, Festivals and Media.

### **UK-Ukraine School Partnerships Programme**

Five schools from Northern Ireland are currently taking part in the UK-Ukraine School Partnership Programme. In February 2025, staff attended a residential training and networking event in Poland alongside 15 UK and 15 Ukrainian schools.

The UK-Ukraine School Partnerships Programme is part of the broader UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership, a long-term commitment to deepening cooperation, it also builds strong, resilient relationships between schools from different community backgrounds across Northern Ireland promoting partnership working, cultural diversity and mutual respect.

### **Albanian Alternative Pathways Visit**

British Council Northern Ireland hosted an inward visit 19-21 February 2025 twenty-two delegates from Albania included -

- Representatives from Local Youth Councils in Northern Albania
- Representatives from the National Youth Agency Albania
- Representatives from Local Government and young MPs/policy makers Albania

The delegation explored good practice and built connections with Northern Ireland partners. They met with Government and stakeholders working in innovative youth projects and policy work including representatives from the Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland, Good Relations Office at Belfast City Council and South Belfast Alternatives NI. The delegation was particularly interested in youth engagement and learned about innovative interventions for young people that promote community cohesion, they also benefitted from a visit to Parliament Buildings and heard from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. They also visited Monkstown Boxing Club and heard about their capacity building and empowerment programmes. As part of the visit, delegates were also given a political tour of Belfast.

### **China Stakeholder Group**

Judging for the Confucius Institute's annual school poster competition, celebrating the Year of the Snake, took place on 18 November 2024 at the Ulster University Belfast campus. The event was supported through social media promotion, including tweets and a public acknowledgment of the British Council's role in the judging panel at the annual

Confucius Institute conference, which brought together representatives from schools, universities, and the Chinese Consulate (*see attached post on X, featuring CD Northern Ireland at the poster exhibition*).

Our logo featured on all winning posters, which were reproduced and distributed across schools in Northern Ireland—visibly reinforcing our commitment to cultural inclusion and making a positive contribution to wider society. We also promoted a specially developed British Council schools pack for the Year of the Snake, which we promoted throughout Northern Ireland schools and with the Confucius Institute at Ulster University.

This work contributes to promoting intercultural awareness, strengthening connections between communities, and supporting long-term peace and prosperity. It reflects the British Council's mission to build trust and understanding between people in the UK and around the world. Our involvement demonstrates allyship with the Chinese community living in Northern Ireland and a commitment to fostering meaningful engagement between China and Northern Ireland.

### **Language Assistants Programme**

- **Safeguarding & Welfare Support**

- We have launched a comprehensive mental health guide for every destination country, giving tailored advice and support resources.
- A new 'Who to Contact' guide breaks down the respective roles of the British Council and our international partners in responding to safeguarding and welfare incidents.
- We have introduced a Traffic Light System that categorises welfare and safeguarding cases by severity, to ensure appropriate and timely intervention and so assistants have a clear picture on who to contact in different scenarios.

- **Training & Pre-Departure Preparation**

- A new module on Inclusivity in the Classroom has been added to our Pre-departure Teaching English course, better equipping assistants to work in diverse educational settings. Also a Grammar Teaching Course so all assistants enter the programme with the same basics in grammar.
- We hosted an in-person pre-departure event for assistants heading to Latin America, Canada and the French Outre-Mer destinations where we offer additional preparation for placements in higher-risk environments.
- We also created new PowerPoint slides that cover safeguarding, mental health & wellbeing and Diversity & Inclusion abroad to better prepare assistants for the challenges they may face during their time abroad. These slides have been shared with the whole team so that each country team can insert them into their country-specific Pre-departure webinars.
- All assistants now have access to a pre-recorded safeguarding webinar, which provides clear guidance on how to identify, respond to, and report concerns.

### **Wellbeing & Adjustment Resources**

- We've launched a new podcast called **Culture Shock**, which supports both ELAs and MLAs in navigating cultural adjustment and transitioning to life abroad.  
**Language Assistants Culture Shock Podcast**



- **EDI Visibility & Classroom Support**
- Our **EDI team** regularly updates **staff email signatures** in line with **key awareness days** (e.g., Black History Month, Mental Health Awareness Week), linking to **relevant teaching resources** and **classroom activities** assistants can use to promote inclusive learning.

These updates are part of our commitment to ensuring the Language Assistants Programme is inclusive, supportive, and responsive to the real needs of our participants. If you have questions about any of these developments, please get in touch with the team.

### **Good Relations Week – An international conversation**

We hosted an international delegation (17-19 September 2024) from the Baltics during [Good Relations Week](#) and supported the Week by bringing an international dimension to the Week. It was a three-day study visit for experts from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to learn from Northern Ireland's social cohesion programmes, showcasing how the region has overcome historical divides to build more inclusive communities.

[Carl Frampton: Race-linked disorder across Northern Ireland was 'horrible to see' says boxing champ - Belfast Live](#)

This demonstrates our public statement about supporting EDI and British Council leadership demonstrating their commitment to EDI. We used the #GRW2024 hashtag when tweeting about the inward visit.

### **Widening Participation of the Study USA programme**

The Study USA programme, now in its 30th year, was established to support the peace process in Northern Ireland by offering students from across the region the opportunity to study at a US college for one academic year. A core goal of the programme is to enhance diversity and accessibility, ensuring a wide and inclusive applicant base. Annual equality monitoring helps identify trends and imbalances, enabling data-driven interventions that ensure fair access for all. This evidence-based approach underpins ongoing efforts to improve representation and broaden participation.

In 2024, significant progress was made in addressing the imbalance in participants' community backgrounds (Catholic, Protestant, or neither). Partnerships with organisations like the Ulster Scots Agency and RCity helped reach underrepresented communities, resulting in increased participation from those areas. By expanding eligibility across all academic disciplines beyond just business and STEM, the programme attracted a more diverse applicant pool. This change reduced community background discrepancies, showcasing tangible progress toward inclusion and long-term peacebuilding through shared international experiences.

Efforts to support students with disabilities have also been expanded. There has been a steady increase in applicants declaring disabilities, particularly neurodiverse conditions. To accommodate this, partnerships with home institutions have streamlined medical approvals, while new collaborations with RNIB and Action Deaf Youth have helped adapt outreach to blind and deaf students. Accessibility audits, training, and adjustments to promotional materials and event planning have ensured that barriers are reduced. The programme now includes measures such as funding travel companions and ensuring U.S. colleges are accessible, reinforcing a comprehensive inclusion strategy.

Socio-economic background monitoring was introduced in 2024 using free school meals as an indicator. Findings revealed a need to better support students from low-income households. In response, several new initiatives were approved: a £1,000 bursary for all students, removal of the £1,500 participation fee, and plans to subsidise travel to programme events. Maintenance grant data is now collected for all applicants to assess outreach effectiveness. Additional application questions help identify first-generation university students and those from disadvantaged schools, facilitating targeted recruitment and fostering greater social mobility through international education.

Beyond specific demographics, the Study USA programme has introduced a range of broader Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives. These include blind shortlisting to eliminate bias, adjustments in interview processes, and new weightings that value life experience and community involvement alongside academic achievements. Targeted promotion to various student groups, faith-based organisations, and cross-community clubs ensures diverse outreach. Standardised rubrics, expanded school partnerships, and the use of diverse alumni as role models further embed inclusion. These measures ensure the programme remains equitable, relevant, and transformative—empowering participants to contribute meaningfully to society and build lasting social value.

#### **Other initiatives:**

- **Mentoring scheme**

This year we introduced a mentoring scheme, the purpose of which is to foster:

- support frameworks for longer-term career development
- an environment of ongoing professional exchange, so you can acquire new skills and share skills that you have
- a stronger culture of cross-team collaboration, modelling One British Council
- stronger organisational networks and career pathways.

- **Leadership Team Rotational Membership**

We successfully ran a pilot within the UK & External Relations Leadership (UKRL) team rotational membership initiative in 2023-2024. The aim of this initiative is to support our efforts in addressing under-representation and enhancing inclusion within our team. It provides UK & External Relations colleagues across all pay bands with the opportunity to join the UKRL team on a rotational three-month basis. Rotational Membership entails attending weekly UKRL meetings and contributing to decision-making processes. This aligns with our broader organisational Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) objective to diversify leadership and foster an inclusive organisational culture.

The next round of our Rotational Membership initiative started in October 2024 and we welcomed colleagues from across all teams to apply. The initiative will continue into 2025.

- **Wellbeing Surgery Sessions**

Quarterly wellbeing surgeries took place throughout the year designed to provide an informal opportunity for anyone to join our UK Director on a Teams call to talk or raise concerns or issues in a safe and confidential environment. Staff were also reminded to avail of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) - a professional support service

## PART A

where staff (and their immediate family members) can access free counselling in any language worldwide, life coaching, support with workplace issues, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) programmes and Mental Health First Aiders who can guide us through the range of services provided by the EAP or to troubleshoot any issues.

## PART A

**3** Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2024-25 reporting period?  
(*tick one box only*)

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

Please provide any details and examples:

**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 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024/5 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 2024-25 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

0

Actions ongoing:

11

Actions to commence:

0

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

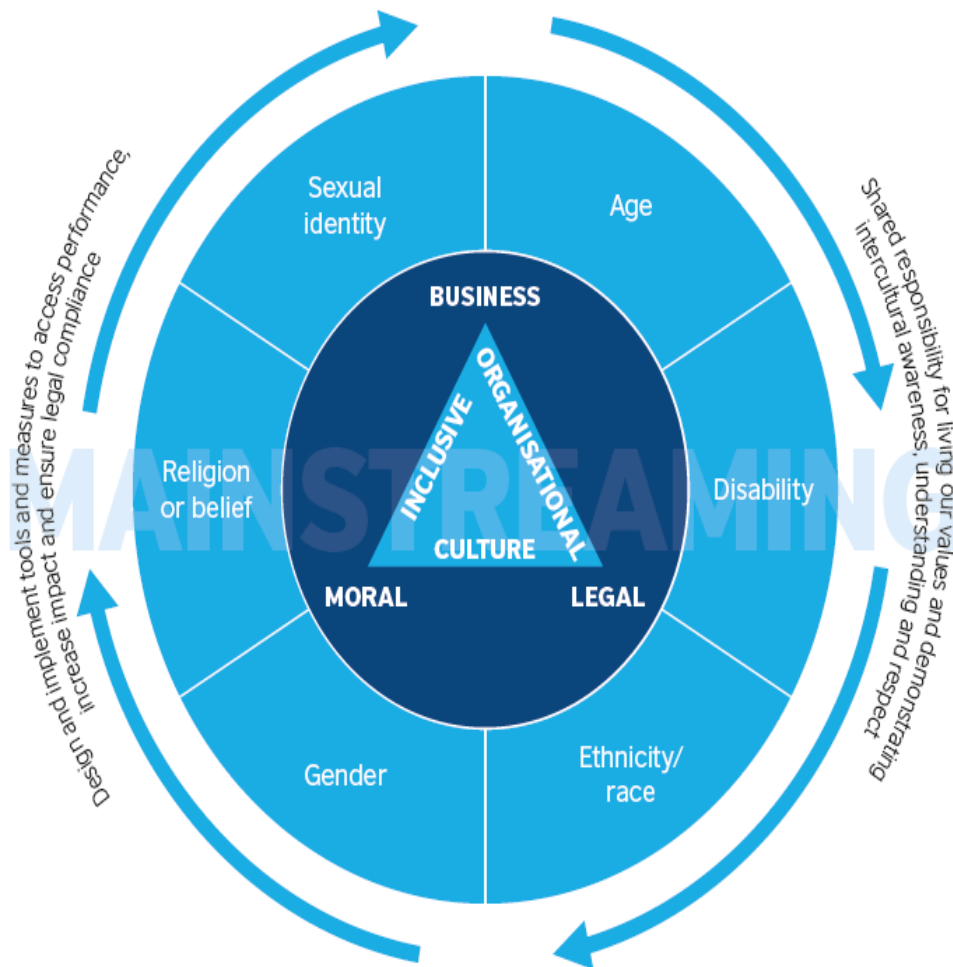
#### 1) Ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is mainstreamed into our current practices (ongoing)

- 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 2024-25.

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 2024-25 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 2024-5, 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 2024-25 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](#) and one specifically on How to Make out Work More Accessible in May 2024.

- 8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2024-25 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

None

- 9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

PART A

☐ Yes

X 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 2024-25 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

X 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):

10

- 16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2024-25:

10

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 ESIA's can be found on the Northern Ireland EDI webpage:

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

## PART A

-  ESIA\_Changing how we monitor sex and gender
-  ESIA\_Geographic Directorate\_International Operations\_Rapid Deployment Approach
-  ESIA\_Leadership framework
-  ESIA\_Cultural Engagement\_global\_Grant Management Policy\_November 2024
-  ESIA\_Cultural Engagement\_Research and Insight\_Research Ethics Policy\_September 2024 (1)
-  ESIA\_Global\_Exams\_policy on venue staff scheduling\_October 2024
-  ESIA\_Global\_HR\_Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure\_Feb 2025
-  ESIA\_HR global\_international moves guidance same-sex relationships and cohabittees\_January 2025
-  ESIA\_International Operations\_safeguarding\_safeguarding in crisis management\_Nov 2024
-  ESIA\_Non formal education\_Cultural Engagement\_Youth Connect Live\_April 2024

**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 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes    ☒ 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 2024-25 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:



PART A

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)*

☐ Yes                      X No                      ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2024-25 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 2024-25, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

See Q2 for training undertaken in 2024-25.

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 2024-25, 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 2024-25?

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)*

- **Monitoring**

1) External: We will continue to monitor our external beneficiaries to identify under-representation. We will expand the scope of those being monitored to include on-off events and our new global programmes. We hope to include a question on socio-economic background to establish whether we are reaching participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. We will continue to find ways to increase the diversity of our participants (see Q2 for more details).

2) Internal: UK wide we are making efforts to reach a target of 100% response rate on online HR portal for staff as well as Northern Ireland Advisory Committee (NIAC) and Board of Trustees to record their personal monitoring data.

3) We will continue to monitor the composition of staff in our wider team and implement actions to increase the diversity of staff (see Q2 for more details).

We aim to increase the number of staff with disabilities via our guaranteed interview scheme for disabled applicants.

Our corporate targets are: 50 per cent women; 15 per cent minority ethnic staff and 7 per cent disabled staff in senior roles.

The Equality Monitoring intranet site contains an animation about how and why we carry out equality monitoring at the British Council, plus guidance on carrying out equality monitoring, our 12 top tips to consider before embarking on equality monitoring, and links to the latest UK equality monitoring reports and some of the good examples of equality monitoring carried out in different country offices. See all guides here: [www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/how-we-work/equality-diversity-inclusion/resources](http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/how-we-work/equality-diversity-inclusion/resources)

- **Underrepresentation within protected characteristics**

We will continue to seek to find ways to further increase the underrepresented groups in senior management (women, ethnic minorities and disabled staff).

We will seek to establish contacts 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.

Within the Northern Ireland office specifically, we will seek ways to increase the percentage of ethnic minority staff which is currently low (although this most likely reflect the low percentage in the local population) but this is a group which we could

target when recruiting. The age profile of staff should continue to be regularly monitored and ensure there are no barriers to staff in the 51+ age group.

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.

We also consider opportunities for disabled people to work for the British Council Northern Ireland for example through work experience or internship programmes via Disability Action NI. We also hope to 'road test' some of our events with an external disability expert to gain feedback on how we can ensure all our events are accessible.

- **Reasonable Adjustments**

We will continue to record and monitor data on number of reasonable adjustment requests actioned (internally and externally) using the Reasonable Adjustments Log which will continue to enable us to assess the effectiveness of reasonable adjustments made using a formalised approach.

- **Gender & Inclusion**

To address our slightly widened gender pay gap due to fewer women proportionally in senior management and more women proportionally in junior management, we will continue to implement the following actions:

- Implement the next phase of talent management and succession planning
- Implement business unit specific action planning in Cultural Engagement and English and Exams
- Investigate why women left senior management in higher numbers and whether this was a one off or part of a wider trend using data from exit interviews
- Investigate whether there are any issues with the way we recruit at junior levels – ie why do we not attract more men at junior level and why is it that those who do apply are less likely to be recruited than a female applicant.
- Look at role profiles to ensure they are accessible and contain inclusive language

- **Diversity Strategy**

We will focus our efforts on maintaining or increasing the Diversity Assessment Framework score of out 5 of 6 indicators. The next deadline for submissions is May 2025.

- **Training & Communications**

- 1) Further staff training has been planned throughout 2025-26.
- 2) We will encourage all staff to create an EDI deliverable in their performance portfolio for 2025/26 and find ways to ensure EDI is mainstreamed across the office.
- 3) We will seek ways of further improving communications with staff on EDI updates. An EDI update will continue to form part of our monthly staff meetings and we will meet regularly with leaders of all SBUs in the Northern Ireland office regarding the impact of EDI on their work programmes in order to re-affirm our commitment to and awareness of EDI responsibilities and Section 75 duties.

- **Consultation**

We will consider a more focussed consultation strategy via our social media channels and possibly focus groups to groups representing the various categories in Section 75 and will continue to revise our consultation list on a regular basis.

- **Organisation-wide EDI objectives:**

- An improved and streamlined approach to EDI action plans, based on feedback received from colleagues
- A revised set of EDI key performance indicators so we are tracking progress in equality, diversity and inclusion in a more holistic way than currently
- Greater attention paid to accessibility, and sanctions and penalties where this is not as it should be, in both web and non-web documentation, with the forthcoming EU Accessibility Act
- Heightened attention to the area of sexual harassment, following changes in UK legislation as well as the ongoing need for us, like all organisations, to continue to learn lessons from our own and others' experiences
- The huge strengths, and the dangers of ignoring the limitations, as AI continues to grow, and we like all organisations will have to navigate our way through the ethics of engaging effectively with it
- A focus on age and ageing, given this has been a somewhat neglected area – and is something we can all relate to
- More attention to the return on investment for EDI (and probably for many other areas of our work) and no doubt somewhat of a battle not to be swayed off course by the politics and media frenzy, but to stick with our steady approach to making EDI part of everything we do, because of the significant moral, legal and business reasons for doing so

PART A

- Higher quality and better triangulated internal EDI data as response rates improve and the data informs decisions where it can
- More understanding of how to balance rights and perspectives as we focus on inclusion, protected beliefs, freedom of speech and expression and the responsibilities that go along with this.

**30** In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2024-25) 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**

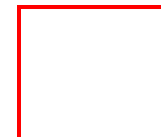
1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:
--

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.
--

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 <sup>i</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>ii</sup>
National <sup>iii</sup>			
Regional <sup>iv</sup>			
Local <sup>v</sup>	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 compiled for Study USA team for us 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Delivered tailored training on inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments, using the Accessible Visits and Events Toolkit.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Created a Study USA-specific guidance document based on the toolkit.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Initiated promotion of the Study USA programme to deaf and blind students in Northern Ireland.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Increased team understanding of how to embed inclusion throughout the project lifecycle.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved clarity on the role of line managers in supporting reasonable adjustments.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enhanced ability to plan, deliver, and evaluate inclusive events and activities.</li> </ul>

PART B

		<input type="checkbox"/> Launched an accessibility audit of UK Region internal online platforms.  <input type="checkbox"/> Began applying alt text guidance and the WAVE web accessibility tool to improve digital accessibility.	<input type="checkbox"/> Greater confidence in recruiting and supporting disabled applicants.  <input type="checkbox"/> Progress toward ensuring digital platforms meet accessibility standards.

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

PART B

4	A global anti-racism hub		All anti-racism and black lives matter resources are consolidated in one accessible space
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.

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		All customers are aware of our equality commitment

PART B

	opportunity across all our activities and programmes		
	The Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan were shared with members of our Northern Ireland Advisory Committee		Advisory Committee members are aware of the requirements of the Equality Scheme

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		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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	involvement in the arts and facilitate the dissemination of artists' work to reach UK and international audiences.			
2				

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.

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

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- 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 2020.

## PART B

- 
- <sup>i</sup> **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.
- <sup>ii</sup> **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.
- <sup>iii</sup> **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments
- <sup>iv</sup> **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level
- <sup>v</sup> **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.
- <sup>vi</sup> **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.