

Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service

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

Contact:

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Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan	As above ☒

Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:
(ECNI Q28):

[Equality and Disability – Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service](#)

The report on our most recent Five-Year Review of Equality Scheme can also be found at the above link. Our Equality Scheme is due to be reviewed again by 30th June 2031.

Signature:

28 August 2026

This report has been prepared adapting a template circulated by the Equality Commission. It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and disability duties. This report reflects progress made between April 2025 and March 2026.

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Chapter 1 Summary Quantitative Report

(ECNI Q15,16,19)

Screening, EQIAs and Consultation

1. Number of policies screened (as recorded in screening reports). (see also Chapter 6)	Screened in	Screened out with mitigation	Screened out without mitigation	Screening decision reviewed following concerns raised by consultees
2			2	No concerns were raised by consultees on screening published in 2025-26
2. Number of policies subjected to Equality Impact Assessment.	0			
3. Indicate the stage of progress of each EQIA.	Title and Stage N/A			

4. Number of policy consultations conducted	0
5. Number of policy consultations conducted with screening presented. (See also Chapter 2, Table 2)	0

(ECNI Q24)
Training

6. Staff training undertaken during 2025-26. (See also Chapter 2, Q6)

Course	No of Staff Trained	No of Board Members Trained
Equality Screening Training	27	
Equality Impact Assessment Training		
Total	27	

eLearning: Making a Difference

Part 1 – All Staff	201
Part 2 – Line Managers	11

(ECNI Q27)
Complaints

7. Number of complaints in relation to the Equality Scheme received during 2025-26

Please provide detail of any complaints:

0

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(ECNI Q7)

Equality Action Plan (see also Chapter 3)

8. Within the 2025-26 reporting period, please indicate the number of:

Actions completed:	1	Actions ongoing:	3	Actions to commence:	0
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(ECNI Part B Q1)

Disability Action Plan (see also Chapter 3)

9. Within the 2025-26 reporting period, please indicate the number of:

Actions completed:	3	Actions ongoing:	1	Actions to commence:	2
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Chapter 2 Section 75 Progress Report

(ECNI Q1,2,3,3a,3b,23)

1. In 2025-26, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved. Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

Table 1 below outlines progress to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations¹.

¹ This includes as a result of

- screening / Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs)
- monitoring
- staff training
- engagement and consultation
- improvements in access to information and services
- implementation of Equality and Disability Action Plans.

In most cases, it is not possible to ascribe developments and changes to one single factor. New initiatives are not necessarily an outcome of screenings or Equality and Disability Action Plan implementation.

As mainstreaming progresses and the promotion of equality becomes part of the organisational culture and way of working, the more difficult it becomes to ascribe activities and outcomes to the application of a specific element of Equality Scheme implementation.

Table 1:

	Outline new developments or changes in policies or practices and the difference they have made for specific equality groupings.
Persons of different religious belief	NIBTS continues to source neutral affiliated venues for donation. An analysis of our Donor Sessions indicates that currently NIBTS is using 199 venues. 89 of the venues being with no perceived religious affiliation, 70 perceived to have a Protestant affiliation and 40 perceived as having a Catholic affiliation. Looked at another way it might conclude that there are 89+70 venues at which Protestants should feel at ease and 89+40 at which Catholics should feel at ease to donate blood.
Persons of different political opinion	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.
Persons of different racial groups	NIBTS introduced Anti-HbS (Sickle Cell) testing for donors in June 2025, enabling the provision of HbS-negative blood for patients with sickle cell disease (SCD) in Northern Ireland, in line with current clinical guidelines. SCD is a genetic condition predominantly affecting individuals of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, South Asian, and Central/South American ancestry. Although it is more common in people from these populations, it is not a racial trait but rather an evolutionary adaptation linked to geography and where malaria has historically been prevalent. The introduction of donor HbS screening has improved the availability of appropriately matched HbS-negative blood for patients with SCD in Northern Ireland, enhancing the safety and quality of transfusion support.

	NIBTS has actively engaged with a range of communities over the past year to raise awareness of blood donation and encourage greater participation from different racial groups. Activities included presentation at the Muslim Community Health & Fitness Fair, collaboration with Queens University students to promote blood donation among the student population and engagement with a local mosque and an Indian Community Centre to increase awareness and encourage donor registration. These initiatives support NIBTS's commitment to building a more diverse donor pool.
Persons of different age	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.
Persons with different marital status	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.
Persons of different sexual orientation	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.
Persons of different genders and gender identities	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.
Persons with and without a disability	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.
Persons with and without dependants	There have been no new developments or changes in policies or practices.

Equality Portal

Over the past year, development has continued on the SharePoint Equality Portal. New content includes a range of screening guidance documents for example guidance for screening the procurement of a service. Screening evidence has been added, such as up-to-date data on regional interpreting service statistics and signposting to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership interactive map-based data on Children and Young People in NI.

In addition, clients can now access clear information on how to book foreign language and sign language interpreting services.

Quarterly Equality Forum meeting papers are also now hosted on the Equality Portal. This supports version control and good governance, and ensures members can quickly access the most up-to-date papers.

Where changes resulted from screenings, these will be listed in Chapter 6, the mitigation report.

The following changes resulted from EQIAs: N/A

(ECNI Q4,5,6)

2. During the 2025-26 reporting period

(a) were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within...?

	Yes/No	Details
Job descriptions	Yes	For all new posts, the Job Description includes the following: “Assist the organisation in fulfilling its statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and under the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Staff are also required to support the organisation in complying with its obligations under Human Rights Legislation.”
Performance objectives for staff	Yes	Completion of Equality e-learning is a mandatory objective for all staff. Staff appraisals document completion of this and set any additional needed targets.

(b) were objectives and targets relating to Section 75 integrated into...?

	Yes/No	Details
Corporate/strategic plans	Yes	The organisation’s obligations in respect of Section 75 were appropriately referenced within the organisation’s corporate plan and business plan.
Annual business plans	Yes	

(ECNI Q11,12,17)

3. Please provide any details and examples of good practice in consultation during the 2025-26 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. 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:

Table 2

Policy publicly consulted on	What equality document did you issue alongside the policy consultation document?	Which Section 75 groups did you consult with?	What consultation methods did you use? AND Which of these drew the greatest number of responses from consultees?	Please tell us about anything you feel worked particularly well / not so well in this consultation.
	☐ Screening template ☐ EQIA report ☒ none			
	☐ Screening template ☐ EQIA report ☒ none			

(ECNI Q21, 26)

4. In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies?

No

Please provide any details and examples:

Service or Policy	What equality monitoring information did you collect and analyse?	What action did you take as a result of this analysis to address any inequalities observed?	Which Section 75 equality groups benefited from these changes specifically?
N/A			

(ECNI Q22)

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

Policy previously screened or EQIAed	What were the inequalities identified in the screening or EQIA?	Did the equality monitoring data you collected show that these inequalities had changed in 2025-26? (Please tick)	Please tell us more about these changes and why you think this has happened.
N/A			

(ECNI Q25)

6. 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:

The organisation avails of the joint Section 75 training programme that is coordinated and delivered by the BSO Equality Unit for staff across all 11 partner organisations. The following statistics thus relate to the evaluations undertaken by all participants for the training:

Screening Training Evaluations

The figures in bold below represent the percentage of participants who selected 'Very Well' or 'Well'. Participants were asked: "Overall how well do you think the course met its aims":

- To develop an understanding of the statutory requirements for screening: **100%**
- To develop an understanding of the benefits of screening: **100%**
- To develop an understanding of the screening process: **94%**
- To develop skills in practically carrying out screening: **94%**

(ECNI Q29)

7. 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)

During the reporting year, supported by the BSO Equality Unit, the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service commenced the Five-Year Review of its Equality Scheme. The organisation adopted an approach and methodology developed by the Equality Unit that is closely aligned with the Equality Commission's guidance and that is based on the principles of collaboration, proportionality, and making maximum use of limited resources.

Much emphasis herein was placed in identifying and discussing learning and good practice across partner organisations at quarterly Equality Forum meetings. This involved presentations from individual partner organisations and Forum discussions.

We will continue to encouraging staff to complete their equality and diversity information through awareness communication, detailing the importance in the organisation having this information to strengthen our ability to support staff by our policies and initiatives.

Appendix – Further Explanatory Notes

1 Consultation and Engagement

(ECNI Q10)

targeting – We did not undertake any public consultations or pre-consultation exercises during the year.

(ECNI Q13)

awareness raising for consultees on Equality Scheme commitments - During the year, in our quarterly screening reports we raised awareness as to our commitments relating to equality screenings and their publication.

(ECNI Q14)

consultation list - During the year, we reviewed our consultation list every quarter.

2 Audit of Information Systems

(ECNI Q20)

We completed an audit of information systems at an early stage of our Equality Scheme implementation, in line with our Scheme commitments.

Chapter 3

Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-2028

What we did between 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026

If you need this document in another format please get in touch with us. Our contact details are within this document. Our Equality and Disability Action Plan 2023-28 can be found on our website at: [Equality and Disability – Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service](#)

Equality Action Plan 2023-2028: What we will do to promote equality and good relations

Action 1: Donor Services (by end of March 2026)

What we will do: Donor Review – Complete a strategic review of donor services to ascertain the needs of donors and the accessibility of services.

- Review donor complaints process to ensure its easily accessible.
- Identify donor complaints which are submitted which have suggestions to improve accessibility for people with all types of disabilities.
- Review the donation process, documentation and procedures to ensure that the needs of donors with disabilities has been considered and are being met where possible. Specifically review the management of Genetic Haemochromatosis donors.
- Review the donation process, documentation and procedures to ensure that the needs of donors whose first language is not English have been considered. Identify any areas for improvement.
- Review current monitoring data collected for donors and consider the scope for widening this in order to inform this review.

What we are trying to achieve: Access to the blood donation services is streamlined and more accessible to all.

Performance Indicator and Target: Identification of trends and volume of complaints via donors – development of quarterly reports; develop further KPI's following analysis of information from donors; to include KPI's for

Genetic Haemochromatosis donors; as we do not ask about language in our donor profile we will require time to develop KPI's to gauge the number of donors and their needs throughout the strategic review.

What we did over the last year:

NIBTS has completed a review of its complaints procedure in line with statutory changes taking effect from 1 January 2026 to comply with the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman's (NIPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for Health and Social Care. The review focused on strengthening the accessibility of making a complaint and having a robust system with clear accountability and procedural arrangements in managing and tracking complaints. In line with this NIBTS is undertaking an equality screening exercise of this new procedure in order to identify and address any potential impacts on Section 75 groups.

As part of the review, NIBTS has committed to introducing a range of accessible ways for service users to raise a complaint, including in person, by telephone, by email, through an online form on the NIBTS website and in writing. Additionally, NIBTS has committed to making appropriate reasonable adjustments to ensure that everyone, including people with disabilities, can access the complaints process. This includes proactively checking whether the service user who wishes to complain requires support to do so; offering alternatives to writing a complaint and assisting service users in recording their complaint where this is a barrier; providing accessible information about the complaints process in a range of languages and different formats suitable for those with a visual impairment if requested; providing interpretation and/or translation services for those who need them, including promoting the availability of this service and highlighting that it is free of charge for the service user; helping the service user to access independent advocacy relevant to the issues being raised in the complaint.

As part of organisational learning and service improvement NIBTS has committed to producing robust reports on complaints received, including complaints performance statistics and a summary of trends, outcomes, learning and service improvement actions. This will enable the organisation to identify recurring themes, address root causes and implement improvements to reduce the risk of similar issues occurring in the future.

The review has focused on ensuring that the NIBTS complaints process is accessible to all service users, including people with disabilities and that complaints will be used as a valuable source of feedback to identify barriers to accessibility and inform continuous improvements to the service we provide.

This work is in progress.

Action 2: Donor Services (by end of March 2026)

What we will do: Engagement - Engage with a range of organisations from across a number of diverse groups to ensure a diverse spectrum of voices and offer a range of engagement opportunities:

- To include wider promotion of FAIR project & partnership with the Rainbow project.
- To develop partnership with local minority groups to ensure we hear their voices. Listening exercising to be done with these groups.
- To include engagement with the UK Genetic Haemochromatosis Society and primary and secondary care providers to promote awareness of blood donation within this community.

What we are trying to achieve: Better engagement of people from all groups helping with shaping our service;

Better understanding of the FAIR project within our local LGBTQ community; Improved relations with our LGBTQ community; Better representation in all of NIBTS engagement of Ethnic minority groups; Better engagement of people with Genetic Haemochromatosis and their care providers.

Performance Indicator and Target: To get a better understanding of what our current engagement level is within Section 75 and seek to improve upon this. In order for us to specify clear targets this will require us to have completed our surveys and listening exercises.

What we did over the last year:

NIBTS continue to ensure that engagement materials and communications encourage participation from people across diverse communities.

In the last year we have delivered outreach initiatives with a range of groups including engagement with religious communities in partnership with Queens University Belfast students. We continued our engagement with schools and workplaces across Northern Ireland to raise awareness of blood donation and encouraged participation from a broad range of communities. We supported Belfast Pride through targeted social media activity to improve engagement with the LGBTQ+ community.

We will continue to explore opportunities to develop and participate in engagement activities that promote inclusive access to blood donation.

This work is in progress.

Action 4: Medical Team (by end of March 2026)

What we will do: Policy Development - Develop a Gender Identity Policy in relation to Donors

- Scope best practice in other Blood Transfusion Services, Engage with gender identity groups and individuals, Develop, screen and consult on policy.

What we are trying to achieve: Needs and dignity of donors who identify as transgender, non-binary and intersex are better met.

Performance Indicator and Target: Policy in place providing clear advice and support for Donors and Staff
Feedback from donors indicates their needs and dignity have been better met.

What we did over the last year:

NIBTS is currently upgrading its donor management system to eProgesa. Unfortunately, the Go-Live date has been delayed until November 2026. This new system will provide improved functionality for the collection and management of donor data, including gender identity information. It will also align with The Executive Office's Guidance for Ethnic Equality Monitoring in the Public Sector. A new policy on Gender Identity in relation to donors, developed in line with JPAC (Joint UKBTS Professional Advisory Committee) guidance, has been drafted alongside conducting a screening exercise and will be issued alongside the eProgesa rollout. At present, we do not routinely ask donors about their gender identity. However, where a donor discloses during their pre-donation assessment that their gender differs from their sex assigned at birth, we manage the case on an individual basis to ensure an inclusive and respectful experience for all donors.

This work is in progress.

Action 5: Human Resources (by end of March 2026)

What we will do: Training - Equality Diversity & Good Relations e-learning to be offered as mandatory training to all staff.

What we are trying to achieve: Increase staff awareness of Equality Diversity & Good Relations.

Performance Indicator and Target: 75 % of staff completed the e-learning training.

What we did over the last year:

To date, 201 BTS staff have completed Making a Difference eLearning, which is 89% of all our staff

We completed this action.

Equality Action Plan - Conclusions

- We completed 1 action (Action number 5).
- We did some work on but didn't complete 3 actions (Actions number 1, 2 and 4).
- We didn't do any work on 0 actions.
- All of the actions in our action plan are at regional and at local level.
- Our action plan is a live document. If we make any big changes to our plan we will involve people in the Section 75 categories. We will tell the Equality Commission about any changes.

Disability Action Plan 2023-2028: What we will do to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

Action 1 Human Resources and BSO Equality Unit - by end of March 2026

What we will do: Awareness Days - Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with specific disabilities and conditions.

What we are trying to achieve: Promoting positive attitudes. Increased staff awareness of a range of disabilities and conditions.

Performance Indicator and Target: Two Awareness Days profiled every year. >50% of staff taking part in the evaluation indicate that they know more about people living with disabilities and conditions as a result of the awareness days.

What we did over the last year:

We are committed to promoting positive attitudes to disabled people and encouraging their participation in public life through measures that we have detailed in our Disability Action Plan. A key aspect of our commitment to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people is to raise awareness of specific disabilities with our staff. We do this by hosting Disability Awareness Days throughout the year which are facilitated by experts with knowledge and expertise in a particular field of disability. This year we held two Disability Awareness Days, one covering Neurodiversity and one covering Chest, Heart and Stroke conditions.

Our first Awareness Day covered Neurodiversity and was held on 3 December 2025 which is the UN International Day of People with Disabilities. We wanted to highlight and celebrate this important day with all our workplace colleagues who may/or may not be disabled. This awareness session focused on Autism and ADHD and was led and facilitated by staff from Specialisterne, which is a not for profit organisation specialising in Autism and ADHD.

In preparation for the event staff from Specialisterne held a co-design session with staff from BSO and other partner organisations, who identified as Autistic or as having ADHD. This co-design approach ensured the Awareness Day was informed by lived experience and tailored to reflect the perspectives and needs of neurodivergent colleagues in the workplace. This helped Specialisterne develop an awareness session which focused on the Neurodiversity information needs of staff attending, in relation to working with or managing a colleague who may be neurodivergent.

This session was not recorded, however Specialisterne produced an aide-memoire of the session which was made available to all staff through the Equality Unit Portal.

Our second awareness session was held 24 March 2026 and focused on Chest, Heart and Stroke Conditions. This awareness session was facilitated by members of staff from the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke organisation, who have a wealth of knowledge and expertise on Chest, Heart and Stroke Conditions.

The awareness session provided information to line managers and colleagues on how to manage a chest, heart and stroke condition and how to help staff stay in employment. The awareness session also provided advice on the prevention of chest, heart and stroke conditions.

A copy of the Chest Heart and Stroke's presentation was posted on the Equality Unit Portal for information for staff who were unable to attend the awareness event on the day.

We completed this action.

Action 2 Senior Management with support by BSO Equality Unit -by end of March 2026

What we will do: Create and promote meaningful placement opportunities for people with disabilities-promoting positive attitudes and encouraging participation in public life

What we are trying to achieve: People with a disability gain meaningful work experience. People with a disability are successful in applying for paid employment after they have completed a placement.

Performance Indicator and Target: At least 1 placement offered every year. Feedback through annual evaluation of scheme indicates that placement meets expectations. At least 1 placement participant is successful in applying for paid employment within 12 months of completion of their placement.

What we did over the last year: Disability Placements

During this year, the Framework for Disability Placements was finalised and signed off in the BSO, who lead on this joint initiative for BSO and partner organisations. Further consideration was given to safeguarding issues and it was agreed that having in place Adult Safeguarding Arrangements will be a prerequisite for hosting placements. This has pushed back timelines for commencing placements into 2026-27, until participating

organisations have a policy, champion and reporting arrangements in place and staff have been trained at the appropriate level.

We did not complete this action.

Action 3 Human Resources and BSO Equality Unit - by end of March 2026

What we will do: Tapestry - Promote and encourage staff to participate in the disability staff network and support the network in the delivery of its agreed priorities.

What we are trying to achieve: Staff with a disability feel more confident that their voice is heard in decision-making. Staff with a disability feel better supported.

Performance Indicator and Target: Increases in Tapestry membership or in participation at meeting.

What we did over the last year: Tapestry

Tapestry, the staff disability network, met in July 2025. Subsequently, the chair resigned due to competing work commitments and a number of active members moved on to new employers. In the absence of a chair, secretary and treasurer, face-to-face meetings were paused. Tapestry has continued as a network via email and staff queries, advice and support requests continue to be responded to.

We completed this action.

Action 4 Donor Services - by end of March 2026

What we will do: Personal & Public Involvement (PPI) Project - Encourage people with disabilities to attend NIBTS Personal and Public involvement (PPI) events and get involved in donor focus groups:

- Develop promotional material in accessible formats
- Distribute through disability organisations and on the NIBTS website.

What we are trying to achieve: Better engagement of people with a disability in shaping our service. Improved accessibility and increased blood donations from people with a disability.

Performance Indicator and Target: Wide range of disability groups targeted. Increased participation of people with a disability in PPI events and donor focus groups.

What we did over the last year:

This action was not progressed during the reporting period due to a prolonged staffing vacancy. A new postholder has now been appointed and will take up the role in the autumn. Once in post, we will review this action to ensure our approach is effective in engaging with people with disabilities.

We did not progress this work.

Action 5 Human Resources with support by BSO Equality Unit – by end of March 2026

What we will do: Reasonable Adjustments - Provide disability awareness training for managers with a focus on reasonable adjustments. Produce a reasonable adjustment guide.

What we are trying to achieve: Provide training. Issue guidance/signpost to information.

Performance Indicator and Target: Clear advice and support for managers and staff. 75% of feedback post training indicates an increase in knowledge in dealing with reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities.

What we did over the last year:

Over the last year, we delivered awareness training to managers across our organisation on reasonable adjustments. A total of 92% of managers attended the training. The training covered the legal responsibilities around reasonable adjustments, recognising when reasonable adjustments may be required, having supportive conversations with employees, types of reasonable adjustments to consider, the role of Occupational Health and resources and support available. Initial feedback from participants has been positive, with managers reporting increased confidence in supporting staff and applying reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

Additionally, the HSC has regionally developed a Disability Toolkit with practical and accessible information as a supportive resource. This resource promotes a consistent approach across the region and provides managers with the tools and confidence to effectively support staff with disabilities and those that require reasonable adjustments. This resource has been adapted and publicised across our organisation.

We completed this action.

Action 6 Human Resources – by end of March 2026

What we will do: Accessibility - Undertake an audit of our website to review accessibility:

- Ensure relevant contact details are available and up to date
- Review feasibility to provide key information in British Sign Language

What we are trying to achieve: Accessibility to our information is easily available to all Section 75 groups.

Performance Indicator and Target: Relevant contact details are up to date. Determined feasibility of key information being available in Sign Language actioned.

What we did over the last year:

The NIBTS website is currently going through a redesign. Currently this is at the technical stage and is with the IT department for back-end development.

This work is in progress.

(5) Additional Measures

- We always include Disability on our list of things to talk about at our quarterly Equality Forum with our partner organisations.
- We report on progress against our Disability Action Plan to our Board and Senior Management Team (the people at the top of our organisation) every year.

(6) Encourage Others

- We include questions relating to the two duties in our equality and human rights screening form. The screening form is completed for all policies and decisions.

(7) Monitoring

- We hold quarterly Internal Equality & Disability meetings with all relevant departments and senior officials with decision making abilities to discuss progress on work and identified issues, whilst also encouraging and support any work in this area.

(8) Revisions

- During the year we reviewed our Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28.

Disability Action Plan - Conclusions

- We completed 3 actions (Actions 1, 3 and 5).
- We did some work on but didn't complete 1 action (Action 6).
- We didn't do any work on 2 actions (Actions 2 and 4).
- All of the actions in our action plan are at regional and at local level.
- Our action plan is a live document. If we make any big changes to our plan we will involve people with a disability. We will tell the Equality Commission about any changes.



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service

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31 August 2026

Chapter 4



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service

Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28

October 2023

Northern Ireland Blood
Transfusion Service (NIBTS)

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We will consider any request for this document in another format or language.

Please contact us at:

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Introduction

As Chair and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service we are committed to promoting equality and good relations. For people with a disability, we recognise that we have to do more to promote positive attitudes and to encourage their participation in public life.

We want to make sure we do this in a way that makes a difference to people. We will put in place what is necessary to do so. This includes people, time and money. Where it is right to do so, we will include actions from this plan in the yearly plans we develop for the organisation as a whole. These are called 'corporate' or 'business' plans.

We will also put everything in place in the organisation to make sure that we do what we have to under the law. This includes making one person responsible overall for making sure we do what we say we are going to do in our Equality and Disability Action Plans.

We will make sure we let our staff know of what is in our plans. We will also train our staff and help them understand what they need to do.

The person in our organisation who is responsible for making sure that we do what we have promised to do is Verity Cochrane. When you have any questions you can contact her at:

Name: Verity Cochrane

Title: Head of HR & Corporate Services

Address: Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service (NIBTS)

Headquarters (City Hospital Complex), Lisburn Road, Belfast
BT9 7TS

Phone: 028 9053 4677

Email: verity.cochrane@nibts.hscni.net

Who we are and what we do

The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service is part of health and social care in Northern Ireland.

We do things like:

- Supply blood and blood products to hospitals
- Process and test blood
- We receive and test blood samples from antenatal clinics.

How people can be involved in our work

The main way in which people can be involved in public life positions in NIBTS is via the Agency's Non-Executive Board positions. The role of such post-holders is primarily to oversee the running of the Agency. These posts are advertised publicly by the Department of Health (DoH) and appointments are made through the DoH.

Additionally, people can participate in our Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) events which seek to help in shaping our service.

What the law says

NIBTS has to follow the law under **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**. It says that in our work we have to promote equality and good relations. We have to treat people fairly and based on their needs and to make things better for staff and people who use our services. It also says that we have to build better relationships between different groups of people.

There are nine different equality groups that the law requires us to look at:

- Gender (and gender identities)

- Age
- Religion
- Political opinion
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Marital status
- Having dependants or not.

There are three good relations groups we need to consider:

- Religion
- Political opinion
- Ethnicity.

We also have to follow the law under the **Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006**, which says that we have to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

This includes people with any type of disability, whether for example, physical disabilities; sensory disabilities (such as sight loss or hearing loss); autism; learning disabilities; dyslexia; mental health conditions (such as depression); or conditions that are long-term (such as cancer or diabetes). Some of these disabilities may be hidden, others may be visible. This also includes people with Genetic Haemochromatosis.

Both pieces of legislation require us to develop an action plan: an Equality Action Plan and a Disability Action Plan. We have to send these plans to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and then report every year on what we have done.

How we reviewed our last plans and developed these new plans

In starting off to develop this plan we looked at what we have done so far to promote equality and good relations, to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage their participation in public life.

As part of our Five Year Review, we asked all teams in our organisation to think through the following questions:

- What has worked well?
- What hasn't worked well?
- What lessons have we learned?
- Did we do what we said we would do?
- Has this made a difference for people in the way we thought it would?

For the new plans, we asked them to consider two questions:

- In your area of work, what are the key issues for people in the equality groupings?
- What can you do to address these issues?

We encouraged our staff to look at a range of sources of information such as:

- our Five Year Review of Equality Scheme
- monitoring data
- new research or data
- equality screening exercises that have been completed
- their professional experience and knowledge
- issues raised in consultations or through other engagement with staff and service users.

We engaged closely with Tapestry, our Disability Staff Network, in the development of our Disability Action Plans. We held a focus group with them to find out what issues important to them as a member of staff with a disability or as a carer they think the organisation should address as a priority.

We also read up on what the Equality Commission says would be good to do. All this helped us think about what else we could do to make a difference.

What we have done so far

This is some of what we have done to promote equality under our previous Equality Action Plan:

- Following Ministerial and Departmental approval in June 2020 NIBTS reduced the deferral period to 3 months for men who have sex with men. Following on from this, during 2020, the FAIR (For the Assessment of Individualised Risk) group assessed the feasibility of developing an individual risk-based approach to donor selection to minimise the transmission of Transfusion Transmitted Infections due to sexual risk factors. The outputs were reviewed by SaBTO in October 2020 and were accepted by all UK Ministers and the report published on 14th December 2020. NIBTS implemented this recommendation in August 2021.
- Alongside the BSO Procurement and Logistics Service, we took action to proactively promote equality of opportunity with regards to our contracts with recruitment agencies. Together with our HSC partners, we included in tender specifications a requirement for bidders to demonstrate how they promote equality with reference to: training their staff; gathering feedback from agency workers; their provisions on making reasonable adjustments for agency workers; and outreach work to attract a diverse range of agency workers. We have collected monitoring data for all nine equality groupings. This enables us to monitor the diversity of agency workers placed with us and, where necessary, to engage with recruitment agencies in relation to the undertaking of measures to address under-representation of specific equality groupings in the cohort of agency workers.

This is some of what we have done to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

- We have held a number of disability awareness days for our staff. Each looked at a different disability. The aim is to increase the knowledge and awareness of our staff including on how to support a person with a particular disability. Since the pandemic the sessions have been held online, improving accessibility for all staff including those who may be disabled. The sessions are recorded and uploaded to the website of Tapestry, our disability staff network.
- We have developed a dedicated scenario on disability as part of our e-learning resource called 'Making a Difference'. It is available to all Health and Social Care staff. All our staff have been asked to complete the programme at induction.

Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

- Together with our partners, we set up Tapestry, a disability network for our staff. Part of the role of this network is to raise disability issues with decision makers in our organisation.
- We have participated in a disability work placement scheme, facilitated by the BSO for all the 11 regional Health and Social Care organisations. We hosted one person. We trained the participant on how to apply for a job in Health and Social Care organisations, including mock interviews.
- We have engaged with primary and secondary care to promote blood donation within the Genetic Haemochromatosis community.

What we have learned so far

Some of the key points we have learned from developing and implementing our action plans are described below.

Disability Placement Scheme

- We learned that it is important to bring people together not just at induction stage but also at the end. Thus, we now run an End of Year event too, to celebrate the achievement with

everyone involved (participants, placement managers, Employment Support Officers, and the facilitators).

- It is vital that participants are reimbursed for their travel cost quickly. Therefore, we have agreed the principle that no participant be out of pocket for their expenses for more than 1 week.
- The work environment plays an important role for many participants so we have built in this aspect into the written information that placement managers provide upfront on the placement offered.
- A high turn over amongst Employment Support Officers poses particular challenges for ensuring consistency in the implementation of the scheme. An internal briefing for new officers before the scheme kicks off should address this issue.

Disability Awareness Days

- Since we moved our days online we have seen a huge rise in numbers of staff attending our events. Also, they come from a wider range of locations.
- Recording the sessions has been a great success. This means staff who can't attend on the day can access the event whenever it suits them.
- There is a huge information need of staff who are carers of a person with a disability, for example of a person living with ADHD or with dementia.
- Staff are interested in learning more about how to support a family member, not just colleagues in the workplace.

We have found that attendance at awareness day events is greatest when the subject is most relevant to staff. This can be because they have the condition themselves or they know or work with someone who has the condition. We will continue to ask staff which areas relating to disability they would like more information on.

Tapestry – Disability Staff Network

- Staff fora need refreshed and promoted on an ongoing basis.

- For a forum to be effective in its supporting and influencing role, a committed HR presence at senior level is essential as is the timely engagement and consultation on policies/decisions/strategies etc. to inform the development of these.

Disability Champions

- From our partners we have learned that a Champion can be a powerful advocate for the consideration of disability issues in decision-making and its scrutiny.

On a general level, organisational change and staff turn-over can pose a big challenge. It is the personal commitment of staff and leaders to the equality agenda that drives progress. When such individuals leave, actions are at risk of not being taken forward and of ending up merely being rolled over.

What is in the new plans

There are two separate tables below. The first table lists all the actions that we will do to promote equality and good relations. This is our Equality Action Plan.

The second table describes what we will do to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability and to encourage their participation in public life. This is our Disability Action Plan.

In both plans we also say what difference we hope to make and when we will do these actions.

How we will monitor these plans

Every year we will write up what we have done. We will also explain when we haven't done something. We send this report to the Equality Commission. We also publish this report on our website:

[Equality and Disability – Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service](#)

We will have a look at the plans every year to see whether we need to make any changes to them. If we need to, we will write those changes into the plans. Before we make any big changes we talk to people in the equality groupings to see what they think.

When we finish an action we will take it off the plans for the next year. That way we will keep our plans up to date. They will show what we still have to do.

After five years we will look at our plans again to see how we have done. We will also see what else we could do.

Whenever we develop or look at our plans we will invite people who have a disability to help us.

The plans are also available on our website: [Equality and Disability – Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service](#)

[We will send our plans to all organisations and individuals on our consultation list when we have finalised them and also when we have made major changes to them.](#)

To find out whether what we do makes a difference, we will do a number of things, for example:

- For training and awareness events, we ask our staff about what learning they are taking away with them.
- We check summary figures to see whether, for example, more people from a particular under-represented group are availing of a service after promoting it to them specifically.

You can find further information on how we will monitor each action in the plans themselves.

Equality Action Plan 2023-28: What we will do to promote equality and good relations

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Donor Review 1. Complete a strategic review of donor services to ascertain the needs of donors and the accessibility of services. • Review donor complaints process to ensure its easily accessible. • Identify donor complaints which are submitted which have suggestions to improve accessibility for people with all types of disabilities.	Access to the blood donation services is streamlined and more accessible to all.	Identification of trends and volume of complaints via donors – development of quarterly reports Develop further KPI's following analysis of information from donors. To include KPIs for Genetic Haemochromatosis donors.	Donor Service will take the lead. Medical Team will lead on the Genetic Haemochromatosis donors. Quarterly update on complaints. Year of Completion: 2028

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
• Review the donation process, documentation and procedures to ensure that the needs of donors with disabilities has been considered and are being met where possible. Specifically review the management of Genetic Haemochromatosis donors. • Review the donation process, documentation and procedures to ensure that the needs of donors whose first language is not English have been considered. Identify any areas for improvement		As we do not ask about language in our donor profile we will require time to develop KPIs to gauge the number of donors and their needs throughout the strategic review.	

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Review current monitoring data collected for donors and consider the scope for widening this in order to inform this review			
Engagement 2. Engage with a range of organisations from across a number of diverse groups to ensure a diverse spectrum of voices and offer a range of engagement opportunities: - To include wider promotion of FAIR project & partnership with the Rainbow project. - To develop partnership with local minority groups to ensure we hear their voices. Listening	Better engagement of people from all groups helping with shaping our service. Better understanding of the FAIR project within our local LGBTQ community. Improved relations with our LGBTQ community.	To get a better understanding of what our current engagement level is within Section 75 and seek to improve upon this. In order for us to specify clear targets this will require us to have completed our surveys and listening exercises.	Donor Services Medical Team Re Genetic Haemochromatosis engagement

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
exercising to be done with these groups. To include engagement with the UK Genetic Haemochromatosis Society and primary and secondary care providers to promote awareness of blood donation within this community.	Better representation in all of NIBTS engagement of Ethnic minority groups. Better engagement of people with Genetic Haemochromatosis and their care providers.		Year of Completion: 2028
Interpreting 3. Engage with the Polish community and other ethnic groups in Northern Ireland in order to look at interpreting / translation issues during donation sessions and improve access to blood donation services for these groups.	Donors whose first language is not English are facilitated where possible to donate blood, thereby increasing the pool of donors and accessibility to our services.	The use of interpreting service for donors whose first language is not English is in place.	Medical Team Year of completion: 2025

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Work initially with members of the Polish community in order to identify key barriers and to pilot translation services during donation sessions. Following the pilot evaluate feasibility for extending this service to other languages / sign language.		Use of interpreting service increases for Blood donation services.	
Policy Development 4. Develop a Gender Identity Policy in relation to Donors: • Scope best practice in other Blood Transfusion Services • Engage with gender identity groups and individuals	Needs and dignity of donors who identify as transgender, non-binary and intersex are better met.	Policy in place providing clear advice and support for donors and staff. Feedback from donors indicates their needs and	Medical Team Year of Completion: 2026

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve and who for (ie. which Section 75 category specifically)	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Develop, screen and consult on policy		dignity have been better met.	
Training 5. Equality Diversity & Good Relations e-learning to be offered as mandatory training to all staff.	Increase staff awareness of Equality Diversity & Good Relations.	75 % of staff completed the e-learning training.	Human Resources Department Figures generated annually. End: 2028

Disability Action Plan 2023-28: What we will do to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Awareness Days 1. Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with specific disabilities and conditions.	Promoting positive attitudes: Increased staff awareness of a range of disabilities and conditions.	2 awareness days profiled every year. >50% of staff taking part in the evaluation indicate they know more about people living with disabilities and conditions as a result of the awareness days.	Human Resources Department with support from BSO Equality Unit. End: 2028
Placement Scheme 2. Create and promote meaningful placement opportunities for people with disabilities.	Promoting positive attitudes and Encouraging participation in public life: People with a disability gain meaningful work experience.	At least 1 placement offered every year. Feedback through annual evaluation of scheme indicates that placement meets expectations.	Senior Management with support from BSO Equality Unit. End Mar 2028

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
	People with a disability are successful in applying for paid employment after they have completed a placement.	At least 1 placement participant is successful in applying for paid employment within 12 months of completing their placement.	
Tapestry 3. Promote and encourage staff to participate in the disability staff network and support the network in the delivery of its priorities. Promote it through emails, bulletins, screensavers, discussions.	Encouraging participation in public life: Staff with a disability feel more confident that their voice is heard in decision-making. Staff with a disability feel better supported.	Increase in Tapestry membership or in participation at meetings Tapestry staff survey	Human Resources Department with support from BSO Equality Unit End: 2028
Personal & Public Involvement (PPI)			Donor Services

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
4. Encourage people with disabilities to participate in NIBTS Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) events and get involved in donor focus groups: • Distribute through disability organisations, staff disability network (Tapestry) and on the NIBTS website.	Better engagement of people with a disability in shaping our service. Improved accessibility and increased blood donations from people with a disability.	Wide range of disability groups targeted. Increased participation of people with a disability in PPI events and donor focus groups.	Year of Completion: 2026
Reasonable Adjustments 5. Provide disability awareness training for managers with a focus on reasonable adjustments. Produce a reasonable adjustment guide.	Provide training. Issue guidance / signpost to information.	Clear advice and support for managers and staff. 75% of feedback post training indicates an increase in knowledge in dealing with reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities.	Human Resources Department with support from BSO Equality Unit Year of Completion: 2026

What we will do	What we are trying to achieve	Performance Indicator and Target	By whom and when
Accessibility 6. Undertake an audit of our website to review accessibility: • Ensure relevant contact details are available and up to date • Review feasibility to provide key information in British Sign Language	Accessibility to our information is easily available to all Section 75 groups	Relevant contact details are up to date. Determined feasibility of key information being available in Sign Language actioned.	Human Resources Department Year of Completion 2026

Signed by:

Chair:

Date:

Chief Executive: Karin Jackson

Date:



**Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service**

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Chapter 5: Equality and Human Rights Screening Report



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service

Equality and Human Rights Screening Report

April 2025 – March 2026

These screenings can be viewed on the BSO website under:

<https://bso.hscni.net/directorates/people-and-place/equality-and-human-rights/equality-screening/>

Policy / Procedure	Policy Aims	Date	Screening Decision
Radiation Safety Policy	Within the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service (NIBTS), sources of ionising radiation are used for irradiation of blood components. Since ionising radiation can be hazardous, the NIBTS has a duty to restrict so far as is reasonably practicable the extent to which staff and members of the public are exposed to ionising radiation. The NIBTS will achieve this through a systematic radiological protection programme that explicitly recognises the importance of commitment to the principle of optimisation at all levels in the organisation. This radiation safety policy clearly defines the	Jun-25	Screened out without mitigation

	responsibility, authority and accountability for each component of the radiation protection programme within the NIBTS.		
Transfusion of Newborn Infants and Exchange Transfusion	The transfusion of neonates, infants and children differs in many aspects from transfusion in adults. This policy discusses best practice guidelines for transfusion of neonates and infants, and in particular the management of special transfusion needs such as exchange transfusion (ET) and Fetal Neonatal alloimmune thrombocytopenia (FNAIT).	Feb-25	Screened out without mitigation

No concerns were raised by consultees on screening published in 2025-26

Chapter 6: Mitigation Report



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service

Equality and Human Rights Mitigation Report

April 2025 – March 2026

<i>In developing the policy or decision what did you do or change to address the equality issues you identified?</i>	<i>What do you intend to do in future to address the equality issues you identified?</i>
N/A	