

NHS

**North West
Ambulance Service**
NHS Trust



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report 2025-26



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Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), established under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires public bodies, including NHS organisations, to consider how their policies, services, and decision-making processes impact people who are disadvantaged or face inequality. It encourages active engagement with diverse communities to ensure services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all individuals.

The general duty obliges us to have due regard to three key aims:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation,
- Advancing equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Fostering good relations between these groups.

In addition to the general duty, the PSED sets out specific duties that require public bodies to publish equality information annually and to set and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

This annual report serves as evidence of our compliance with the PSED for the reporting period 2025/26. It outlines the actions we have taken to meet our legal obligations and illustrates how equality, diversity, and inclusion are embedded in our work. Furthermore, it reflects progress against our current three-year (2024-27) EDI objectives – referred to as our Priorities.



FOREWORD

LISA WARD KAM
DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE &
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Equality, diversity and inclusion remain central to who we are and what we stand for at North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

Over the past year, we have continued to make meaningful progress in creating a workplace and service that is fair, inclusive and reflective of the diverse communities we serve. This report sets out the progress we have made, the challenges we continue to face, and the actions we are taking to ensure every colleague and every patient is treated with dignity, respect and compassion. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this vital work.

The last 12 months have been marked by continued change across both the NHS and NWAS. Throughout this period, our commitment to building a culture where people feel safe, supported and able to thrive has remained unwavering.

During 2025–26, the collective efforts of the teams across the trust and Staff Networks have contributed to tangible impact. This includes nurturing a more compassionate and inclusive culture, improved disability confidence and accessibility through enhanced reasonable adjustments and Access to Work processes, stronger staff voice, and continued progress in addressing health inequalities through targeted public health and community engagement initiatives. Leadership development during the year had a strong emphasis on inclusive and compassionate behaviours, supporting cultural improvement across the organisation.

Having made great progress, we know that there is still more to do. We continue to see disparities in the experiences of Black and minority ethnic staff, disabled colleagues, women and LGBT+ staff, and we remain focused on improving sexual safety, psychological safety and confidence in speaking up. Tackling discrimination in all its forms remains a priority, and this will continue to drive our ambition to become an anti-racist organisation.

Together, we will continue to build a fairer, safer and more inclusive NWAS for all.

Our NWEAS

North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NWAS) covers a vast area of around 5,400 square miles, serving over seven million people in Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cheshire, and Glossop.

With a team of approximately 8000 employees in diverse roles, supported by 1000 volunteers, NWAS provides 999, NHS 111, and patient transport services.



Strategy, Vision and Priorities

Our vision remains clear - to deliver the right care, at the right time, in the right place, every time. The NWAS Strategy 2022–2025 set out how we would realise this vision through three aims:

- Provide high-quality, inclusive care
- Be a brilliant place to work for all
- Work together to shape a better future

By working to meet these aims, we strengthened our focus on reducing health inequalities, improved the diversity of our workforce, and focused on creating a culture where everyone feels safe, valued and able to contribute.

Over the course of this year, work has taken place to refresh our Trust Strategy for the next five years. The 2026–31 Strategy aims to build on the progress made in the last few years and sets out four clear ambitions:

- Providing outstanding, inclusive care
- Building a safe, supportive and inclusive culture
- Delivering a responsive care model through partnerships
- Embedding continuous improvement and innovation for a sustainable future

Equality, diversity and inclusion are central to each of these aims, shaping how we design services, support our workforce and measure success.

The strategy was shaped through a structured co-production and engagement process, including workshops with senior leaders and system partners, consultation with our Patient and Public Panel, and impact assessments were undertaken to ensure our direction reflects the diverse needs of the communities we serve.

Delivery of the strategy is enabled through four integrated strategic plans:

- Quality Plan
- People & Culture Plan
- Clinical Response Plan
- Future Sustainability Plan

Together, these plans translate our ambitions into action and ensure that inclusive care, equitable access, fair workforce processes and sustainable decision-making are embedded across all areas of delivery.



Workforce Demography

This section of the report presents an overview of our workforce demographics, based on data extracted from the NHS Electronic Staff Record system as of 31 March 2026.

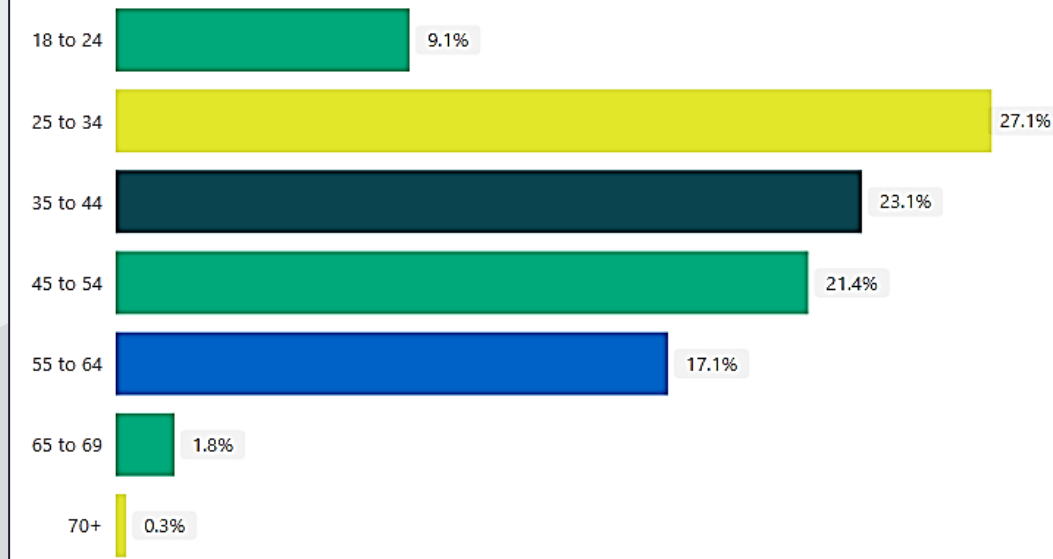
Our total workforce headcount increased to 8006 this year, from 7795. The demographic profile of the Trust shows increases in representation across all key workforce characteristics when compared with 31 March 2025.

Age

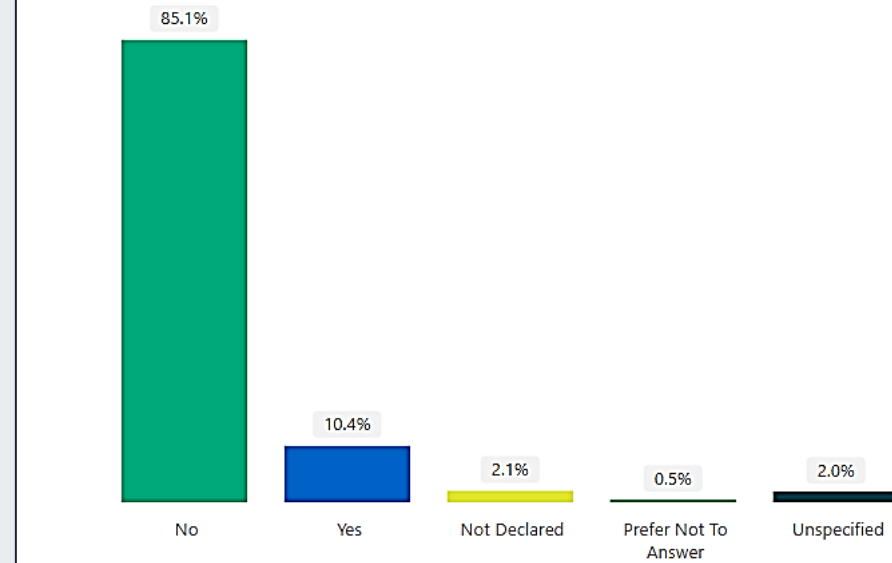
The majority of staff were aged between 25 and 54, representing 71.6% of the workforce. Staff aged 18–24 accounted for 9%, a decrease from 10% in the previous year.

Representation among those aged 55–64 increased to 17.1%, up from 16% in 2025. Staff aged 65 and over remained a small proportion of the workforce at 2.2%, though this reflected an increase from 1.5% in 2025.

Age Band - all employees (31 Mar 2026)



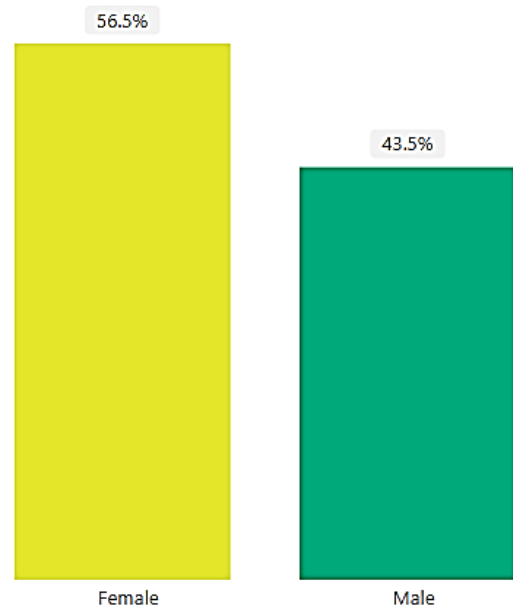
Disability - all employees (31 Mar 2026)



Disability

Disability declaration increased by 0.93 percentage points, rising from 9.41% in 2025 to 10.34% in 2026. This is the largest numerical increase among the reported characteristics and reflects a greater proportion of staff identifying as disabled.

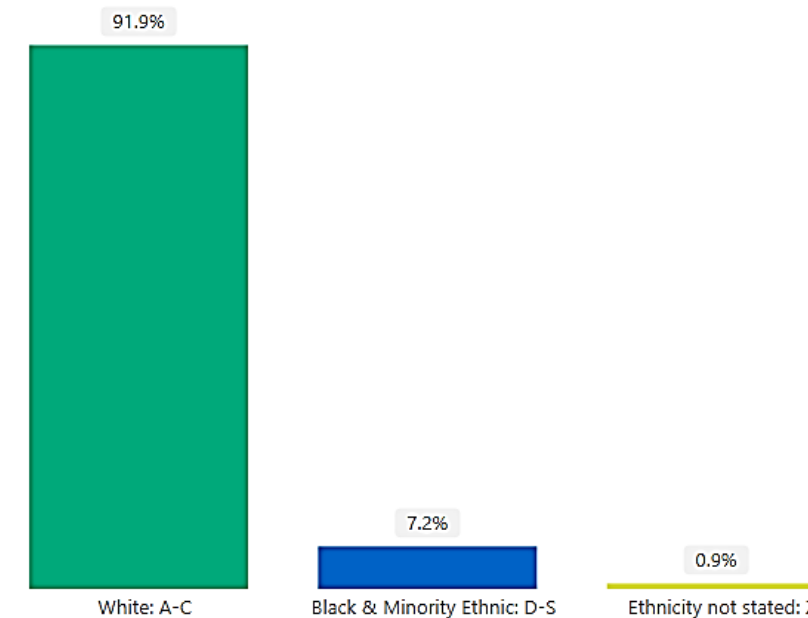
Gender - all employees (31 Mar 2026)



Gender

Female representation increased by 0.39 percentage points, rising from 56.19% in 2025 to 56.58% in 2026. This change indicates a small but measurable uplift in the proportion of women across the workforce, maintaining a consistently strong level of female representation.

Ethnicity - all employees (31 Mar 2026)



Ethnicity

The proportion of colleagues from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds increased by 0.49 percentage points, from 6.67% to 7.16%. This represents a clear year-on-year increase in ethnic diversity within the workforce.

Religion and belief

Just under half of staff identify as Christian, while 24% state they have no religious belief with around 13% choosing not to disclose their religion. Smaller proportions identify as Muslim (3.5%), Hindu (0.3%), Buddhist (0.1%), Sikh (0.1%), or Jewish (0.1%).

Sexual orientation

LGBT+ identification increased by 0.63 percentage points over the year, from 8.65% to 9.28%, indicating continued growth in the number of colleagues who identify as LGBT+.



Statutory and Regulatory Equalities Reporting

The Trust is required to monitor and publish data in relation to the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES), Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), and workforce pay gaps (gender, ethnicity and disability). Equality and diversity reporting remains a core component of how NWAS demonstrates transparency, accountability and a commitment to continuous improvement, in line with statutory and regulatory requirements.

The summaries presented for WDES, WRES and pay gap reporting are based on data extracted as at 31 March 2025 and were submitted in subsequent months in accordance with national reporting timelines. Data covering the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 will be published later in 2026.

Full reports can be found on the NWAS website.

Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)

The WDES enables NHS organisations to understand the experience of disabled staff and those with long-term conditions and helps inform improvements for these staff groups.

Disability declaration rates continue to rise, with 9.4% of staff having declared a disability as at the end of March 2025 (Metric 1). This represents an increase from 7.8% in 2024 and is almost double the rate recorded in 2022 (5.0%). This sustained improvement is likely linked to continued promotion encouraging staff to update their disability status on the Electronic Staff Record (MyESR), alongside ongoing engagement initiatives led by the Disability Network.

Progress has also been made in recruitment outcomes (Metric 2). The relative likelihood of non-disabled staff being appointed from shortlisting, compared with disabled staff, was 1.17. This marks an improvement on 2023/24 and represents the closest the organisation has come to its target figure in the past five years, indicating that disabled candidates are now more likely to be appointed than in previous years. Between April 2024 and March 2025, 716 disabled applicants were shortlisted (703 in 2023/24), with 113 disabled candidates appointed during the year (108 in 2023/24).

However, challenges remain in relation to the formal capability process (Metric 3). Disabled staff were almost four-and-a-half times more likely than non-disabled staff to enter the performance capability process, representing a significant deterioration compared with the previous year. A detailed review of data from the current and previous WDES years showed that while disabled staff make up 9% of the workforce, they accounted for 21% of performance capability cases.

Notwithstanding this disproportionate representation, the actual number of cases remained in the low double-digits. The deep dive identified a number of recommendations, which are being progressed collaboratively with corporate and operational teams and the Disability Network.

Findings from the NHS Staff Survey which inform the WDES, highlight mixed experiences for disabled staff. Around one-third reported satisfaction with how the organisation values their work, compared with approximately 35% of non-disabled staff (Metric 7). Although overall satisfaction levels for both groups remained broadly consistent with the previous year, the gap between disabled and non-disabled staff widened after narrowing in 2023.

Encouragingly, over 70% of disabled staff reported that reasonable adjustments had been made for them, representing a significant increase on the previous year (Metric 8). Since the launch of the Reasonable Adjustments Policy, training has been delivered to managers to support the effective handling of adjustment requests.

Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)

WRES data enables the Trust to compare the experiences and outcomes of staff from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds with those of White staff, and to identify areas where differences exist and action is required to improve equity across the organisation. There has been year-on-year growth in the number of staff from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, with overall representation almost doubling since 2019. As at 31 March 2025, there were 77 more BME staff employed than at the same point in March 2024 (Indicator 1).

Despite this progress, inequalities within recruitment outcomes persist. White applicants were nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to be appointed than BME applicants, representing a deterioration compared with the previous year (Indicator 2). This is despite increases in the number of BME applicants and shortlisted candidates during 2024/25.

A range of actions are underway to address these disparities. Job descriptions and person specifications have been reviewed, particularly for entry-level and high-volume recruitment roles such as ICC Call Handlers and EMT Apprenticeships, to ensure requirements are relevant, accessible and inclusive. Work has also been undertaken to improve the diversity of interview and assessment panels.

In addition, the Positive Action Team has improved processes to track and monitor the progress of BME applicants throughout the recruitment journey. This will support a clearer understanding of where applicants may be disproportionately exiting the process and inform further targeted interventions.

The indicator measuring entry into the formal disciplinary process continues to highlight a significant disparity (Indicator 3). BME staff were more than two-and-a-half times more likely to enter the formal disciplinary process than their White colleagues, representing the greatest disparity recorded since reporting began. A detailed analysis identified approximately 180 formal disciplinary cases during the reporting period, a substantial increase from 92 in the previous year. Of these, 29 cases involved BME staff (up from 15), meaning BME staff accounted for 16% of all formal cases despite comprising approximately 7% of the workforce. Three-quarters of these cases involved staff working within the Integrated Contact Centres (ICC), where the majority of BME staff are employed.

To address this, a dedicated Task and Finish Group was established to undertake further detailed analysis of disciplinary data and develop a targeted action plan. This work is being led by the ICC, with support from the HR Business Partnering Team.

Just like the WDES, the WRES data is partly based on responses in the NHS Staff Survey, and these figures relate to the 2024 survey. Staff survey results showed a positive shift from BME colleagues in perceptions of equality of opportunity. Following a decline in 2023, the proportion of BME staff who felt the organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion increased by 5.6% in 2024 to 45.6% (Indicator 7). Notably, the gap between BME and White staff reduced by half, from 12% to 6%.

Responses relating to experiences of discrimination from managers, team leaders or colleagues showed little change from the previous year for both BME and White staff (Indicator 8). While perceptions among White staff have remained broadly stable over the past five years, responses from BME staff have fluctuated, with 12.4% reporting experiences of discrimination in 2024 compared to 8.6% in 2020. Findings from the latest staff survey (2025) show an improvement for BME staff, with fewer reporting experiences of discrimination compared to the 2024 results. As a result, there is now virtually no difference in the proportion of BME (9.25%) and White staff (9.23%) who report experiencing discrimination.

Pay Gaps

Pay gap reporting supports transparency in reward practices, promotes fairness and inclusion, and enables the organisation to identify and address disparities.

Gender Pay Gap

Female representation within the NWAS workforce has continued to increase over several years. As at 31 March 2025, 56.19% of staff were female, compared with 53.13% in 2024.

Female representation increased across the lower, lower-middle and upper pay quartiles. There was a slight reduction in the upper-middle quartile compared with the previous year. The most notable growth was in the lower quartile, where female representation rose to 59.89%, an increase of 2.26%. Women continue to make up the majority of staff in the two lower pay quartiles and remain the majority, by a smaller margin, in the upper-middle quartile.

The mean (average) hourly gender pay gap was -7.63%, a marginal increase from -7.27% in 2024. While the gap remains notable, this is the second-lowest mean figure reported since 2020. In contrast, the median hourly pay gap widened to 12.68%, representing the highest level recorded since reporting began.

Ethnicity Pay Gap

As at 31 March 2025, 6.7% of the workforce identified as BME, 92.3% as White, and 1% did not declare their ethnicity.

Analysis of pay quartiles shows that nearly 15% of staff in the lower and lower middle quartiles were BME. This remains higher than representation in the upper middle and upper quartiles, although BME representation has increased across all quartiles.

The mean hourly pay gap between BME and White staff was -4.38% (£0.86), with a median gap of -6.28% (£1.14). Despite increased BME representation in higher pay quartiles, both the mean and median pay gaps widened by approximately 1.7% compared with the previous year.

Disability Pay Gap

There was a significant increase in disabled staff representation across all four pay quartiles in 2025 compared with 2024. Disabled staff representation was relatively evenly spread across the quartiles, with approximately 9–10% of staff in each quartile declaring a disability.

The mean hourly pay rate for non-disabled staff was £0.13 (0.71%) higher than for disabled staff. While this difference warrants continued attention, it remains smaller than the pay gaps observed in the gender and ethnicity data. Conversely, the median hourly pay rate for disabled staff was £0.25 (1.29%) higher than for non-disabled staff.

This is only the second year in which ethnicity and disability pay gaps have been reviewed. At this early stage, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the data. However, these pay gaps will continue to be monitored annually.



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Priorities 2024-2027



This year we have continued to deliver on our three-year EDI priorities which were agreed by the Board in July 2024 and set our direction through to March 2027. These priorities guide our work and reflect our commitment to fostering a fairer and more inclusive working environment for colleagues, while ensuring our services meet the diverse needs of our patients and communities.

- **Priority 1: We will embed fair and inclusive recruitment and progression processes to improve the diversity of the workforce at all levels.**
- **Priority 2: We will educate and empower our workforce and leaders to promote a positive psychologically safe culture, to support a reduction in the experience of bullying, harassment, discrimination and an improvement in retention.**
- **Priority 3: We will reduce health inequalities for our patients.**

Progress against each of the EDI priorities is monitored through the Diversity & Inclusion Group, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive, with assurance provided through the Trust Management Committee and formal oversight by the Board.

This section of report highlights progress against each priority during 2025–2026.

Priority 1: We will embed fair and inclusive recruitment and progression processes to improve the diversity of the workforce at all levels

Improving the diversity of our workforce, and ensuring it reflects the communities we serve, remains a central focus of our recruitment approach. During 2025/26, we continued to implement a range of targeted measures and initiatives to address barriers to entry into NWS, particularly those that may discourage applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds. This has included proactive engagement with communities and groups currently under represented within our workforce, encouraging individuals to bring their talent, experience and expertise to roles across the Trust.

At a strategic level, in response to the WRES Indicator 2 data, this year we established the BME Recruitment Action Group, bringing together a multi-disciplinary cohort of key stakeholders to review our current recruitment processes and practices - including outreach engagement activity, application processes, shortlisting, assessment, and interview stages. Through structured and reflective discussions and by learning from the experiences of other NHS organisations, the group has been focused on identifying practical steps which can be taken to improve the likelihood of more staff from BME backgrounds being appointed in NWS. candidates.

EDI monitoring of 2025/26 recruitment data

This year, the Trust received 18,180 applications for roles advertised across the organisation, with around 4450 being shortlisted for assessment/interview, and 780 candidates were appointed.

Gender: Female applicants represented the majority at each stage of the recruitment process, making up 54% of applicants, 54% of those shortlisted, and 55% of new starters. Male representation remained level across the stages, with 45% of applicants and those shortlisted, and 44% of new starters.

Ethnicity: White applicants represented 53% of all applicants, increasing to 76% at the shortlisting stage and 85% of those appointed. In comparison, BME applicants made up 45% of applicants but were underrepresented in later stages, accounting for 22% of shortlisted candidates and just 11% of new starters. This is a slight improvement from the previous year where 10% of new starters were from BME backgrounds. The proportion of individuals who chose not to disclose their ethnicity remained low, rising slightly from 2% at application to 4% at the point of appointment.

Disability: 12% of applicants identified as having a disability, with representation increasing to 17% at shortlisting and 14% at appointment stages. Disability representation has increased across all stages compared to the previous year (2024/25: Applications 10%, shortlisting 13%, appointments 11%).

Strengthening our recruitment approach

Recruitment across NWS is coordinated through the HR Hub, which works in close partnership with recruiting managers to ensure that EDI principles are embedded throughout the recruitment and selection process for all roles across the Trust.

The Trust has also engaged in collaborative working with other NHS organisations to share learning and best practice to benchmark approaches to improving EDI outcomes. This has enabled NWS to consider examples of good practice and successful initiatives implemented elsewhere, helping to inform local improvement plans and future priorities.

A refresh of the Recruitment and Selection Policy was completed this year, with a specific focus on strengthening measures to reduce bias and improve equality within recruitment processes. This has included the mandatory requirement for interview panels to be gender diverse as a minimum, and include BME and disabled panel members where possible. In addition, we revised the process for assessing pre-employment checks, ensuring that decisions to withdraw offers are not based on the checks alone. Applicants are now given the opportunity to provide a supporting statement where further consideration is required.

To further support fair recruitment practice, Recruitment and Selection training has been mandated for all new leaders. This ensures that managers and leaders involved in recruitment are equipped with the knowledge and understanding required to undertake objective, inclusive and values-based recruitment activity.

In addition, a review of the leadership recruitment process has been undertaken this year, which aims at reduce the risk of unconscious bias and promotes greater fairness and consistency in decision-making in the recruitment of leaders.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, further work will be undertaken to improve inclusive recruitment, including:

- Review of interview panel composition and assessment processes
- Introduction of a suite of training packages for managers involved in recruitment
- on effective, inclusive and fair recruitment.

Leadership recruitment

In 2025/26, we introduced a refreshed and more inclusive approach to leadership recruitment, led by the Learning and Organisational Development team. The revised process applies to all direct line-manager and Band 8+ roles and embeds fairness and inclusion at its core, supporting our ambition to improve workforce diversity. The approach also represents a shift towards assessing candidates' full capability and potential, rather than relying solely on observed behaviours.

To promote transparency and equity, candidates are now provided with outlines of simulation exercises 48 hours in advance of assessment. The role of "Room Leads" has been introduced to support equitable participation and ensure a consistent experience for all candidates throughout the process.

The refreshed approach has received consistently positive feedback from both successful and unsuccessful candidates, as well as recruiting managers:

"As a neurodiverse member of staff, I would never have got this far in the process had the changes not been made. I can now see a clear future for my development and progression within NWAS."

"The calibre of candidates coming through since the changes were introduced has been exceptional. The difference is clear."

Early positive impacts of the revised process have been observed following the leadership restructure within paramedic services – where representation of Senior BME Paramedics increased from 2% to 4% at the end of the recruitment campaign.

Careers Support Initiatives

The Positive Action and Widening Access Teams, when working both collaboratively and independently, play a key role in promoting awareness of career opportunities at NWAS across communities throughout the North West. Through positive action work, the primary focus is to address underrepresentation within the workforce, with current efforts concentrated on improving the representation of individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Widening Access Team works more broadly, for example engaging with individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and young people through outreach in schools and colleges to promote our career opportunities.

The team also delivers pre-employment programmes and provides support to internal staff seeking to progress within the organisation.

Priority

1

Community engagement and partnership working

As part of our approach to increase the diversity of our workforce and inspire the future workforce, we actively participate in a wide range of community events to promote the Trust as an employer of choice. We have continued to prioritise events that attract diverse groups or individuals currently underrepresented within the workforce, ensuring our outreach efforts are targeted and inclusive.

Around 90 careers focused events were supported over the past 12 months, including 10 bespoke positive action community engagement events, which were delivered in our target areas for BME engagement in the North West. At these events, many of which are supported by frontline colleagues as Trust Ambassadors, the careers teams provide information, advice and guidance on pathways into the organisation, including apprenticeships, the wide range of career opportunities available and guidance on entry criteria.

During 2025/26, we engaged with more than 1000 partner organisations at both strategic and local levels to promote career opportunities within the Trust and widen access to employment.

We worked closely with Department for Work and Pensions (Job Centres), employability organisations, housing associations, local authorities, and voluntary, community and faith sector partners to raise awareness of roles within the Trust. Through these partnerships, we supported careers fairs, accepted referrals for individual employment support, and promoted opportunities across a wide range of networks.

We shared information on vacancies, recruitment events and digital resources, including Live Chats, support sessions, careers webpages and the Ambulance Academy, and promoted opportunities through regional platforms such as Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Manchester Work & Skills, Rochdale Work & Skills and Preston City Council.

Targeted positive action engagement events were delivered in priority Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community areas, in collaboration with voluntary, community and faith sector partners, including Preston, Burnley, Bury, Bolton, Moss Side, Hulme, Trafford and Toxteth.

We also collaborated with NHS partners to share best practice and deliver joint workforce engagement activity, including work with the Lancashire and South Cumbria Careers Team. In addition, we continued our role as a Pledge Partner with the Lancashire Skills and Employment Hub, supporting collaborative progress across future workforce development, workforce inclusion, skills and productivity, and social value.



Online careers support

In addition to face-to-face engagement, we delivered more than 40 online Support Sessions, attended by approximately 1650 individuals interested in careers with NWS. These sessions provided clear insights into available roles, alongside step-by-step guidance on how to prepare a strong and effective application.

Support Sessions are a central component of our careers engagement approach and play a vital role in helping prospective applicants navigate the recruitment process. They contribute to measurable increases in opportunity and engagement by reducing barriers for individuals who may lack confidence in applying, feel unfamiliar with the recruitment process, or are unable to attend face-to-face careers events. By offering timely, practical guidance, the sessions support candidates to take informed and confident next steps in their career journeys.

During 2025–26, this approach was expanded to cover a wider range of roles. In addition to ICC Call Handler, Ambulance Care Assistant and EMT apprenticeship opportunities, tailored sessions were delivered to support recruitment within the Urgent and Emergency Care and Logistics teams. Outcomes to date demonstrate improved applicant readiness, alongside an increase in both the volume and quality of applications. This successful approach will be further embedded and developed in 2026–27.

We also continued to deploy the Live Chat function on the NWS website this year with 11 sessions delivered. This facility further enhances the engagement offer by giving individuals interested in our careers, direct and real-time access to our careers support staff through a pop-up chat window on the website. Whether linked to specific recruitment campaigns or offering general careers advice, these sessions provide immediate answers, reassurance, and insight for people seeking a career in the trust.

Following the appointment of an additional Positive Action Engagement Officer, we are aiming to strengthen our community presence and create more accessible opportunities for individuals from underrepresented groups to learn about careers within the trust. In 2026/27, we plan to increase our outreach activities in the Merseyside area and southern boroughs of Manchester, as well as keeping on our priorities across Lancashire and other parts of Greater Manchester.

Feedback from Support Sessions:

- “Informative and helpful in completing my application to the best of my ability.” – *ICC Call Handler*
- “Very in-depth, thorough explanations of everything without using hard to understand terms that I didn’t understand. Lovely people, thank you Lisa and Kairen.” – *EMTA pre-advert support session*
- “Experienced facilitators talking us through the role and application process – really helpful, thank you.” - *ACA*

Coaching and 1:1 support

A key pillar of our careers support approach for underrepresented groups is one to one person-centred coaching to support prospective applicants through the recruitment process - both at application and interview recruitment stages. This tailored coaching helps enables applicants to build confidence in applying for roles, craft strong personal statements and prepare effectively for interviews and assessments. This support is not only limited to specific recruitment windows, but is an ongoing offer, ensuring individuals can access guidance whenever they need it.

In 2025/26, around 80 external prospective applicants benefitted from coaching provided by the Positive Action and Widening Access Teams. In addition, more than 30 members of staff received targeted career progression support, helping them build confidence, strengthen applications, and prepare effectively for interviews. This work directly contributes to improved internal mobility and a more skilled, future-ready workforce.

Feedback from applicants receiving coaching support:

“Thank you once again. Your support has meant a lot to me and has helped me move closer to achieving my career goals.” Patient, EMT Apprentice

“This is all thanks to you, if it wasn’t for your guidance, I don’t think I would’ve been able to do this. Thank you so much once again.” Ana, ICC Call Handler

“I’ve passed my interview and my driving assessment. Thank you so much for your help. I couldn’t have got through it without you.” Zeeshan, EMT Apprentice

Priority

1

Applicant tracking and monitoring

A key element of the positive action approach is candidate monitoring which comprises tracking applications from BME candidates through large-scale recruitment campaigns. Priority roles include the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Apprenticeship, ICC Call Handler, and Ambulance Care Assistant roles.

Reporting is undertaken on all applications from BME candidates, which are then assessed to identify unsuccessful applicants at all recruitment stages. These applications are reviewed, and all eligible applicants are offered coaching for future applications.

In 2025/26, tracking was implemented for 11 adverts across priority roles. 285 eligible applicants were offered support via this method, 50 responded and received 1:1 application coaching. 30 people applied in total, 15 were shortlisted and received interview coaching support with 9 receiving conditional offers.

At the time of producing this report, a number of applicants are awaiting outcomes of their application.

Priority

1

Pre-employment programmes

The Trust remains committed to creating fair and inclusive access to employment for individuals who face barriers to entering the workforce, including those experiencing long-term unemployment and social or economic disadvantage. Through close collaboration with recruiting managers and the recruitment team, we continued to deliver targeted pre-employment programmes designed to identify suitable entry-level opportunities and create clear, structured pathways into employment.

These programmes go beyond traditional training. Participants benefit from tailored learning, hands-on experience within real working environments, and personalised one-to-one support to build confidence, develop skills, and prepare for recruitment into identified roles within the Trust. For many individuals, the programmes provide a vital stepping stone from unemployment into meaningful and sustainable employment.

During 2025/26, five ICC Call Handler pre-employment programmes were successfully delivered with nearly 70 participants. The participants represented a wide age range, with 77% from BME backgrounds and 25% identifying as having a disability, demonstrating the continued impact of this approach in widening access and supporting a more representative workforce.

Participant feedback:

“This was the first program that I have ever done in the UK since coming to the UK and this program helped me a lot to understand how the environment works. All the learning platforms were in-depth and I could understand a lot of details which helped me understand and grow as a person in the Care Sector. This program is a great opportunity for a person who is looking for an opportunity to start again in the employment sector. It gives all the detailed training to help and support each individual personally to grow, develop and be interview ready”. ICC Call Handler

Apprenticeships

This year we continued to offer a wide range of apprenticeships, which underpins our approach to workforce growth and development. Apprenticeship opportunities are available across a number of roles, and while some join the trust as apprentices, others take up apprenticeships while already in the organisation to further develop their careers.

This year, there were nearly 180 new starters on the EMT Apprenticeship, with 56% being female, and 7% from BME backgrounds.

Supporting internal progression and career development

During 2025/26, we introduced structured workshops to support staff seeking to progress into different roles within the organisation. The workshops provided practical guidance on the recruitment and selection process, including application preparation, interview readiness and support with role transition. Dedicated time for questions enabled participants to receive tailored advice aligned to their individual career goals and stage of development. More than 150 staff took part in these workshops during the year.

Alongside this, we promoted the Internal Development Programme to support staff aspiring to progress into the EMT Apprenticeship. The programme focused on building the skills, knowledge and confidence required for this career pathway through facilitated learning workshops, personalised development support, and structured reflection and goal-setting. Participants also benefited from practical and theoretical learning opportunities, guidance on EMT driving requirements, and support with maths and English where required to meet entry criteria and sustain continued learning.

Inspiring the future workforce

Healthcare Cadets: Each year, from January to May, structured placements are facilitated for Healthcare Cadets across the trust footprint. These placement opportunities give cadets meaningful hands-on experience within the ambulance service environment, helping them make informed decisions about their future careers and understand the realities in working in healthcare. In addition, cadets receive tailored support to access employment opportunities.

In January 2026, we welcomed the latest cohort of 45 cadets who are now in development and undertaking their placements within the trust. From the previous cohort of 46 cadets, 26% secured direct employment within the trust, and 74% progressed onto university healthcare pathways.

ParaMEDic: In summer 2025, we piloted a two-day Ambulance Summer School in partnership with The Manchester College and Burnley College. The pilot engaged 31 young people from diverse backgrounds, with participants primarily female and from BME communities. The model was refined between the two events, with the second summer school actively involving local staff and sector management teams to strengthen local ownership and engagement.

Across the two days, participants were introduced to the role and functions of ambulance services and took part in a range of practical activities, including basic life support. Colleagues from operational services, including Integrated Contact Centres, Patient Transport Services and Paramedic Emergency Services, shared their career journeys and responded to questions, providing insight into the breadth of career pathways within the Trust.

Building on the success of the pilot, during 2026/27 we will develop a local engagement model in partnership with the East Lancashire sector management team and Burnley College. This will support the delivery of ongoing ambulance engagement activities, with further sessions planned for May and June 2026.

Careers support for the Armed Forces community

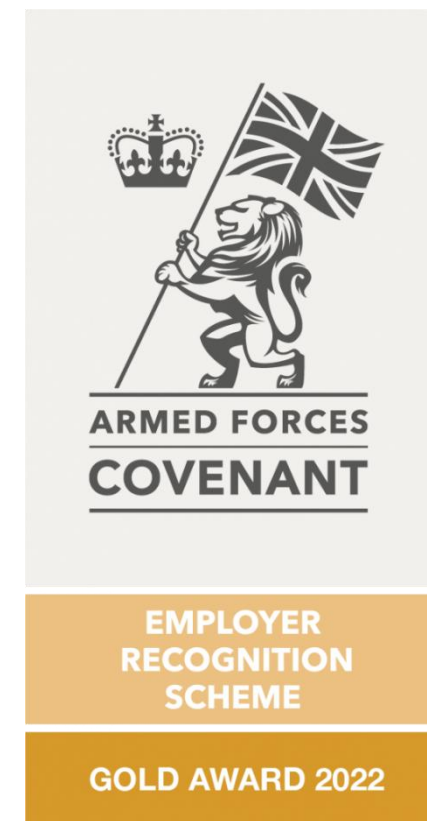
We are a forces-friendly employer and have continued to work with around 30 organisations across the region to support the Armed Forces community. We are committed to demonstrating and advocating support for the defence and the armed forces communities, as signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant. We are also proud to be a recipient of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold award, and pleased to have achieved Veteran Aware status, being recognised as exemplars of the best care for, and support to, the Armed Forces Community.

We have continued to support our staff who are members of the Armed Forces community, including veterans, service spouses and partners, and members of the Reserve and Cadet Forces, and have a thriving Armed Forces Network.

We actively welcome veterans and service leavers into the Trust, recognising their military experience and qualifications within our recruitment and selection processes. This year, more than 30 prospective applicants from armed forces backgrounds were provided with information, advice and guidance on NWAS careers, and 9 individuals accessed in-depth one to one support to apply for Trust roles. From this number, seven applicants received offers of employment within the trust.

Through our partnership with NHS Employers Step into Health programme, we received around 20 referrals of service leavers and have provided them with information and support around transitioning to a career in NWAS.

This year we have continued to attend events engaging with service leavers and veterans, raising awareness of careers opportunities. We have also remained engaged with Armed Forces leads across the NHS and wider public sector through national and local collaborative forums - such as the Gold Award Association, local authority networks, and the National Ambulance Armed Forces Network, to share best practice.



Priority
1



Priority 2: We will educate and empower our workforce and leaders to promote a positive psychologically safe culture, to support a reduction in the experience of bullying, harassment, discrimination and an improvement in retention.

This priority centres on driving positive cultural change across the organisation by strengthening leadership capability and empowering staff to challenge and address negative behaviours.

Cultural objectives

Leaders play a critical role in the delivery of our EDI priorities. In recognition of this, the 2025/26 EDI Annual Plan included a specific requirement for all middle and senior leaders, across both corporate and operational services, to have objectives focused on diversity, inclusion and cultural improvement.

This approach was designed to raise the profile of EDI at an individual leadership level, ensuring equality and cultural improvement were recognised as integral to overall performance and service delivery. EDI or cultural objectives provides a clear mechanism for accountability, encourages leaders to take proactive action to address cultural challenges, and strengthens ownership of the EDI agenda across the organisation.

During 2025/26, significant progress was made in the quality and consistency of objective setting among senior and middle leaders, demonstrating increased engagement and maturity in embedding inclusive leadership responsibilities. Positive progress was also observed among first line managers; however, this remained less consistent, and further development work has been identified. Strengthening objective setting at this level will remain a priority into 2026/27, ensuring inclusive leadership expectations are embedded at all tiers of the organisation.

Learning & Leadership

To educate and empower staff and leaders in cultivating a positive, psychologically safe and inclusive culture, delivery of the Leading with Civility and Respect workshops was increased during the year. These sessions supported leaders to role-model expected behaviours and actively foster respectful, inclusive working environments.

This activity was further reinforced through the launch of a Staff Induction and a bespoke Operational Leadership Induction, ensuring all new starters and newly appointed leaders were onboarded with a clear and consistent understanding of organisational values and behavioural expectations from the outset. The inductions also support leaders understand their role in fostering positive team environments and contributing to a healthy, inclusive culture across the wider Trust.

Throughout the year, we also delivered a programme of Culture Events, each attended by approximately 100 leaders. These events provided opportunities to explore allyship, understand how to effectively support and advocate for under-represented groups, and reflect on leadership responsibilities in strengthening organisational culture across NWAS. This has been further supported by the continued delivery of the Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion module, which has demonstrated high levels of engagement following its launch in the previous year. By January 2026, over 70% of the identified leadership cohort had completed the programme, with a further 112 leaders booked onto forthcoming workshops.

In addition, we launched the Developing Leaders Programme, with 10% of participants in this cohort from BME backgrounds. The programme focusses on building the capability of the future leadership workforce, covering key areas including continuous improvement, emotional intelligence, leadership of self and others, and leading for diversity and inclusion.

Anti-Racist Organisation

Following Board approval of the NWAS Anti Racism Statement, an Anti-Racism Steering Group was established in summer 2025 to provide strategic leadership and oversight of delivery. The Group brings together colleagues from Operations, Corporate Services and the Race Equality Network, ensuring work is informed by lived experience and addresses both interpersonal and structural racism. Initial priorities included the launch of the Anti-Racism Statement during Black History Month 2025, supported by CEO messaging, followed by the development of a clear workplan focused on improving the experience of BME staff, strengthening Workforce Race Equality Standard outcomes, supporting inclusive leadership and addressing population health inequalities.

Sexual Safety

There has remained a concerted focus on building a safe culture, and in particular on improving sexual safety. 2025/26 has seen the launch of both the Sexual Safety and the Professional Boundaries Policies, demonstrating clear commitment, expectations and visibility of routes to speak up. This has been supported through the roll out of national training which has achieved 95% compliance, leadership development and the Trust has been able to demonstrate full compliance with the NHS sexual Safety Charter assurance framework. Staff Survey results are showing an improving picture in relation to staff experience around sexual safety.

NWAS Iftar 2026

Colleagues from across the Trust came together on 7 March 2026 to mark the Islamic holy month of Ramadan at the third annual Iftar event. Held in Stockport, the event welcomed around 200 staff, managers, leaders and volunteers from across the service, who joined Muslim colleagues observing Ramadan to break the fast together.

The Iftar event continued to provide a valuable opportunity for colleagues from diverse teams and backgrounds to come together, deepen their understanding of Ramadan, and share a moment of reflection and community. Events of this nature played an important role in fostering inclusion, celebrating the diversity of the NWAS workforce, and strengthening the connections that underpin compassionate care for the communities served.

Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU)

The Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) function continued to play a vital role in ensuring that all staff and volunteers had access to a safe, independent and confidential route through which to raise concerns. The service supports colleagues to feel confident to speak up about behaviours or practices that could compromise safety, fairness, inclusion or wellbeing. This remains fundamental to the Trust's EDI commitments and to the development of psychologically safe working environments.

FTSU Guardians contribute actively to cultural improvement and patient safety workstreams throughout the year. The team's visibility across the organisation has been maintained through engagement events, staff inductions and regular attendance at forums. A significant development during the year, formally recognised within the Trust's Well-Led Review, was the appointment of an additional full-time Guardian. As a result, the Trust now benefits from two whole-time equivalent FTSU Guardians.

Impact in 2025/26

The Speaking Up Policy was reviewed, updated and renamed during the year to clearly articulate the Trust's commitment to creating a culture in which colleagues felt heard, supported and encouraged to raise concerns. The policy sets out in clear terms, the range of available routes for speaking up, including the Freedom to Speak Up service, HR processes, patient safety mechanisms and relevant national bodies. It also reinforces how insight and learning from concerns raised were used to inform organisational learning and drive wider improvement.

The majority of concerns this year related to inappropriate attitudes and behaviours such as incivility, favouritism and bullying. Insights from these cases continued to support improvements in team culture, leadership behaviours and professional standards. Patient safety remained the second highest theme, highlighting the continued importance of the FTSU function within the Trust's clinical governance framework and its role in supporting action to address health inequalities.

A key achievement this year was been the significant improvement in the timeliness of concern resolution. Faster resolution strengthens feedback loops, improves staff experience and improved psychologically safety.

Equality monitoring

The online form through which staff can Speak Up was enhanced during the year, including the introduction of equality monitoring questions. This will support the development of a clearer understanding of the demographic profile of individuals raising concerns and help identify trends over time.

As equality monitoring has only recently been introduced, the data available to date remains limited, with more comprehensive analysis expected to be possible in 2026/27. Currently, approximately 90% of respondents choose not to provide equality monitoring information. Further work will therefore be undertaken over the coming year to strengthen confidence and encourage greater disclosure of this data.



Priority

2

Reasonable Adjustments

Delivery of the Reasonable Adjustments Training for managers was increased to strengthen leadership capability and ensure managers were equipped with the knowledge and skills required to effectively support team members requesting workplace adjustments. The training was refreshed to incorporate updates on the Wellbeing and Carers Passports, and, in response to participant feedback, the session length was extended from 30 to 45 minutes. During the year, almost 260 staff participated in the training, with over 90% of respondents rating the session as excellent.

In order to improve accessibility and awareness, the training was made bookable via the learning section of MyESR. The majority of sessions continued to be delivered online, with occasional face-to-face sessions delivered at staff away days.

Although the training is not mandatory, strong endorsement from senior operational leaders has supported high levels of engagement. Its continued popularity has generated positive advocacy across the organisation, with managers at all levels proactively booking onto sessions and developing greater confidence in understanding reasonable adjustments and associated support mechanisms available within the Trust.

To further support workplace adjustments, we have continued to promote Access to Work (AtW)- a government scheme that helps individuals with physical or mental health conditions or disabilities to enter, remain in, or progress in employment. The scheme provides funding for practical workplace support.

To increase and understanding of AtW, a dedicated hub was launched on the Green Room this year, providing clear and accessible information about the scheme. This included frequently asked questions, manager guidance, step-by-step referral and escalation routes, and a defined process for workplace adjustments and Access to Work claims. This approach has helped reduced delays, improved clarity, and supported colleagues to access appropriate

Priority 3: We will reduce health inequalities for our patients

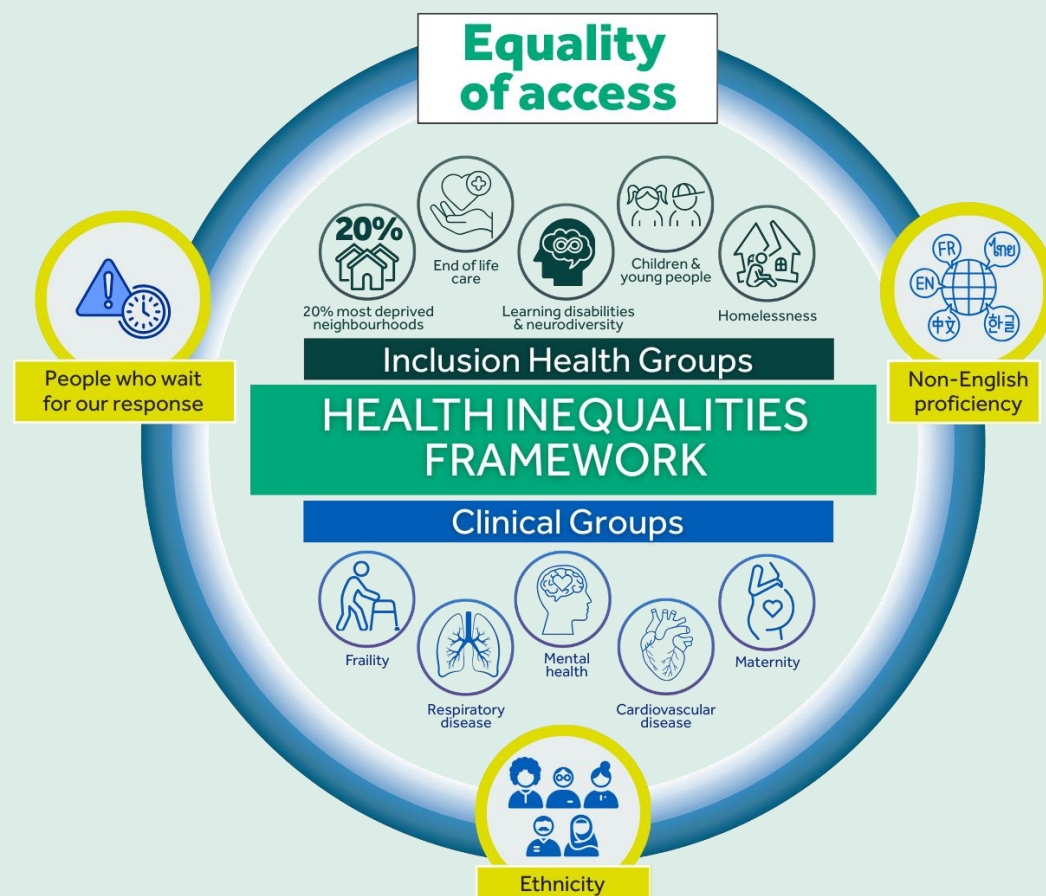
This priority is a key driver for our work to improve public health as well patient experience and community engagement.

Public Health

The Public Health team has collaborated with colleagues across the Trust on addressing health inequalities in line with internal priorities and national policy.

Impact

Health Inequalities Framework: Using internal and external evidence, and consulting with senior clinical and non-clinical leads, front-line colleagues and patients or members of the public, this year we developed the first NWAS Health Inequalities Framework. The framework has informed the development of the new Trust Strategy, and is guiding the definition of priority patient groups, and areas of action to reduce health inequalities.



Data insight: Better quality data and reporting enables identification of population groups at risk of poor access to healthcare, poor experiences of healthcare services, or poor outcomes from it. Last year, we developed our first population health dashboard to analyse 999 data broken down by patient characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity), and by location and index of deprivation.

This year we delivered training sessions and developed resources to support utilisation of the dashboard, for example:

- identifying call reason in areas of high deprivation versus the general population
- identifying calls related to drug overdoses to support referrals to cessation services
- identifying demand areas for sickle cell incidents to enable targeted action.

In 2026/27 we will be working on expanding the dashboard to include NHS 111 data, and will be procuring a new audit tool that will allow for identification of health inequalities.

Improving awareness: Two new training modules were developed to increase staff awareness and understanding of Health Inequalities and Make Every Contact Count. These modules were incorporated into Mandatory Training for all staff and, by February 2026, over 95% of the workforce had completed both modules. The training resources were also shared with other ambulance trusts to support wider sector learning and consistency of approach.

System partnerships: Sickle Cell Disease is a genetic condition which affects the red cells in the blood, can cause extreme pain and organ damage, and is a condition with considerable health inequalities.

Working in collaboration with colleagues from London Ambulance Service, the Sickle Cell Society UK and the Trust's Clinical Audit team, the Public Health Team and the Race Equality Network delivered an awareness webinar as part of Sickle Cell Awareness Month in September 2025. Building on the learning from the webinar, further work was initiated to improve both clinical care and patient experience for people living with Sickle Cell Disease. This included the development of a new referral pathway to the regional specialist unit and the design of a dedicated training module to strengthen staff knowledge and confidence in supporting patients with the condition.

Plans for 2026/27

In 2026–27, we will continue to strengthen NWAS's organisational maturity in identifying and addressing health inequalities affecting our patients and the wider population. This work will include collaboration with the Learning and Organisational Development team to create and source high-quality educational resources that support workforce capability and development. We will further enhance our analytical capability by improving how insights are drawn from data and by supporting leaders to use these insights effectively to drive service improvement.

A key focus will also be placed on improving the quality, completeness and consistency of our data, particularly in relation to ethnicity, to ensure a more accurate understanding of need and variation in patient experience and outcomes. In parallel, we will continue to support the development of preventative interventions aimed at improving health and wellbeing across our communities, with particular emphasis on reducing inequalities for our most vulnerable patient groups.

Patient engagement and experience

The Patient Engagement Team have continued to deliver an extensive annual engagement programme in line with our Patient Public and Community Engagement Framework.

This year we successfully delivered three county-based community awareness events targeted at young people and individuals from deprived areas. These events provided attendees with valuable careers information on our roles and they had the opportunity to learn life-saving skills, including basic first aid and CPR training. More than 250 people have attended these events, 85% of which were young people. Further events are planned for 2026/27.

Patient feedback and experience

Patients who access PTS and paramedic services are invited to provide feedback via the Family and Friends Test, as well as through fuller patient experience surveys. Cumulatively, 5.4% of respondents this year were from ethnic minority communities. From this group, 90.48% said they were 'cared for appropriately, with dignity, compassion, and respect', with 86.58% rating overall experience of the service as 'very good/good'.

We also engaged with 35 under represented community groups and attended 18 events to understand barriers to accessing our services - including cultural concerns, language issues and low service awareness. Through focus groups, provision of multilingual resources, and delivery of CPR training, we have worked to improve confidence and understanding in communities. We also established a Patient Inclusion Group to ensure diverse voices inform service development and accessibility.

Invaluable lived experience continued to be shared by our 246 patient and public panel members. The diversity of the Panel's membership is at 37.4% BME for BME, 35.37% young people and 26.42% identifying as disabled.

Areas of focus for 2026/27 will include the launch of a Help Save a Life card incorporating a QR code to enable access to information in multiple languages, supporting inclusivity and accessibility for diverse communities. In addition, a health literacy project will be completed to strengthen and improve PTS communications, ensuring information is clearer, more accessible and better aligned to the needs of patients and service users.

Priority
3

**VOLUNTEERS
WITH
HEART.**





Staff Networks



Staff Networks continue to play a vital role in shaping the culture of our organisation and contribute significantly to inclusion, belonging and representation across the Trust

This year a new Staff Networks Toolkit was introduced to support and strengthen ways of working across staff networks. The toolkit provided a consistent framework through standardised Terms of Reference, agenda structures, action planning templates, exemplar communications guidance, and a Network Charter outlining shared expectations and responsibilities

In addition, a new digital membership process was developed to improve accessibility and make joining a staff network simpler for colleagues. This approach was actively promoted by the networks themselves and embedded within corporate induction processes for new starters.





ARMED FORCES NETWORK.

The Trust's Armed Forces Network maintained good momentum into its fourth year as a member led Network, continuing the battle-rhythm of an event per quarter, as well as advocating for the armed forces community across the trust's footprint.

The first event of the year was a large-scale celebration of VE80. This took place supported by NWS ambulances from all three operational areas displaying commemorative decals celebrating VE80. The event was well attended from staff across the trust.

Remembrance Day, commemorated on the 11 Nov 2025, was marked by colleagues in over 30 locations, and donations in support of the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal were collected across several dates and sites.

The main event of the 2025/26 calendar was the Network hosting a major Armed Forces community event. This was a celebration of the Network and North West Armed Forces community held at Manchester's National Football Museum in March. Preceded by the AFN hosting an all-Networks committee meeting in the morning, the afternoon's event saw VIPs from across the region attend and take part in a sellout event. The Lord Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, Mrs Diane Hawkins JP LLB, opened proceedings and guest speakers were welcomed from Greater Manchester Police, Royal Blackburn Hospital, Healthier Heroes CIC, Consultant Paramedic Matt House, and NW Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association speaking about the Armed Forces Covenant.

Looking ahead, the Network will continue its strong rhythm of events and advocacy, using the momentum built during this milestone year to deepen engagement and strengthen recognition across the organisation. Advocacy will continue across local and national forums, enhancing partnership working and raising awareness of the needs of the Armed Forces community.



LGBT NETWORK.

The LGBT+ Network has seen continued growth in membership, facilitated in part by a new online joining form that is easy for all staff to access. This has made it simpler for colleagues to join the Network, including those who may not receive information during their induction.

The Network continues to use a hybrid meeting model, allowing members to take part either in person or through Microsoft Teams. In-person meetings are rotated across Trust sites to support wider participation and ensure colleagues from different locations can be involved.

During LGBT+ History Month in February 2026, Network Committee members Sam Roff and Lucy Fletcher produced and shared a powerful video message. Their testimonial highlighted the importance of recognising LGBT+ history, the progress that has been made, and the continuing need for allyship to help achieve equality and inclusion.

The Network also organised a visit to the Adelphi Theatre in Salford to see the play The BBC's First Homosexual. The production was based on newly discovered archive material exploring an attempt to broadcast a radio documentary on homosexuality in 1954. The performance offered an important reminder of how far society has come - and the work that still remains.

Pride events continued to be a key part of the Network's activities. Members attended local Pride events in Blackpool, Liverpool and Manchester. The Network aims to expand its presence at more community Pride events in the coming year to strengthen its reach and help challenge health inequalities affecting LGBT+ communities.

This year also saw the successful launch of the Network's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) space on the CPD and Learning Hub. This includes the learning module Back to LGBT Basics – Plus, with further resources planned to support staff learning and awareness.





DISABILITY NETWORK.

The Disability Network has continued to provide vital support to colleagues with disabilities on workplace challenges, while actively influencing the Trust's EDI work and advocating for disability equity in all decision-making.

The Network has been delivering its targeted action plan aligned to the Workforce Disability Equality Standard, with key priorities being improving awareness and utilisation of the Access to Work scheme, addressing negative trends in performance processes, and supporting managers through enhanced training and clearer guidance on reasonable adjustments and disability-related absence.

The plan also focused on increasing ESR disability declaration rates through myth-busting and improved communication about data use, responding to evidence of stigma and misunderstanding identified through staff feedback. Further actions this year have included strengthening resilience in assistive technology and supporting the relaunch of the Wellbeing Passport to promote positive conversations about support between staff and managers.

This year the Network held a 'A Comfortable Conversation' event with Dr Tim Smith, Associate Medical Director, and supported a Hate Crime awareness event, delivered in partnership with the EDI Lead from Greater Manchester Police and NWAS Head of Violence Prevention Reduction and Security, Natalie Samuels.

To mark Disability History Month 2025 and Network's fourth anniversary, three colleagues were formally recognised as "Allies in Action" - a commendation for their commitment to supporting the network.

Network members have continued to attend meetings and events to raise awareness of disability inclusion and constructively challenge policies and practices to ensure they are equitable for all. The Network has also strengthened its leadership through the appointment of a new Vice Chair, whose operational expertise enhances understanding of frontline challenges.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, the Network will launch Potential, Not Problems – a trust-wide campaign reframing disability as a source of strength and promoting a more inclusive culture. The campaign aims to shift perceptions of disability from being seen as a limitation to being recognised as a source of strength. It focuses on highlighting the talent, resilience, and lived experience disabled colleagues bring to NWAS and reframing conversations from assumptions to understanding, obstacles to opportunities, and ultimately from problems to potential. In addition, a pilot programme delivered by Happy Smiles and grounded in lived experience, will be delivered to provide managers with practical training on disability inclusion, inclusive language, reasonable adjustments and the social model of disability.

The Network also plans to will advance two major initiatives next year - Supporting Staff to Stay in Work will aim to respond to significant barriers experienced by staff who acquire a disability, particularly those temporarily unable to drive due to DVLA restrictions. By providing interim, Trust-funded travel support until Access to Work decisions are processed, the initiative seeks to prevent unnecessary absence, financial hardship, and potential attrition. In parallel, the introduction of the Visual Impairment Protocol will strengthen patient safety and confidence through a consistent, password-based method for verifying ambulance crews when callers are visually impaired.





RACE EQUALITY NETWORK.

The Race Equality Network (REN) continued to play a key role in shaping organisational priorities, championing anti-racism and improving the experience of ethnic minority colleagues.

April and May 2025 were used for planning the year ahead with the Network accessing support from the Strategy Team to align a workplan with the organisational priorities, as well as maintaining key areas of focus as a Network.

Summer 2025 saw a focus on Sickle Cell Awareness month in September with the Network working closely with Public Health colleagues to bring a webinar highlighting the positive work London Ambulance Service colleagues have implemented to improve the experiences of sickle cell sufferers who utilise their services. As the North West has the second largest population of people living with sickle cell in the UK, the Network felt it was necessary to implement something similar to the LAS model in this area. Members of the REN have been working with data and pathway leads to find a workable solution to improve what is already a positive looking picture with regards to the treatment of this group of patients. The Network is represented in the task and finish group which has been set up to work on this.

The autumn period is centred around Black History Month activities. To mark BHM, the REN supported the launch of the Trust's Anti-racism Statement. In this period, members of the Network also attended the two day NHS Asian Professionals Network Alliance (APNA) conference, which was being held in the North West for the first time, which featured NWAS CEO, Salman Desai as a guest speaker. This was a powerful event which helped the Network further its knowledge around health inequalities and workforce inequalities, as well as celebrate the achievements and contributions of the NHS BME workforce.

In the final quarter of the year, the REN has helped shape the third iteration of the Trust's Reverse Mentoring programme, having been actively involved in the previous two cohorts as well. The Network also supported a special podcast in February 2026 to mark Race Equality Week, with Chair, Senior Paramedic Wes Proverbs sharing his insights on racism and its impact on wellbeing.



WOMEN'S NETWORK.

The Women's Network continued to grow in membership, reach and influence, with 272 active members as of March 2026.

One of the core workstreams for the Women's Network continues to be maternity, which has remained central to Network activities this year. The Network has been collecting data across the organisation relating to staff experiences of pregnancy and maternity, and facilitated a series of online maternity roundtables to capture the experiences of staff.

This work will continue in to 2026/27, with a mission to investigate three clear maternity improvements:

1. Investigate and support with staff having meaningful light duties while pregnant
2. Investigate and improve experiences of return to work after pregnancy
3. Investigate and understand where and how pay issues occur on the run up to and during maternity leave

The provision of emergency sanitary products has been an important part of delivery this year, with the NWAS Charity supporting the aim to continue providing emergency sanitary products across the organisation. The remaining circa. 40 bathrooms with no units currently will have them installed in 2026, and the Network will explore other ways sanitary products can be provided to staff who need them.

The Network's largest event remains International Women's Day, commemorated in March. The hugely successful event was held in-person on the 6th March 2026 in Southport on the theme of 'Give to Gain' and included staff panels, CPD maternity workshops, and presentations on recent research on menstruation and paramedicine. The event was oversubscribed, and thanks to efforts of the Executive Sponsor and NWAS Charity, more places were able to be opened up for attendees.

The Network continues to be an active part of the Sexual Safety Steering Group and continues to engage with the AACE Ambulance Women's Network.

Improving communications has been instrumental this year. In order for members to receive timely updates, a newsletter was launched and the Network developed a LinkedIn presence to replace the X/Twitter social media account.

In 2026/27, the Network will be exploring formalised peer support groups for topics such as baby loss, menstruation, and menopause.

The Women's Network is grateful to all the colleagues who have been a part of the committee in 2025/26. The Network would not be as successful as it has been without the dedication of volunteers. With new committee members, including a new Co-Chair, the Network is looking forward to continue improving and driving positive change.



Chaplaincy for Staff Wellbeing



The Chaplaincy for Staff Wellbeing service continued to provide vital pastoral, spiritual and emotional support to colleagues across the Trust. During 2025–26, the service recorded over 4000 staff interactions, including 260 sustained pastoral conversations and more than 300 one-to-one support sessions, reflecting consistent demand for both immediate and ongoing support.

Chaplaincy provision was delivered across ambulance stations, Emergency Departments, workshops and corporate sites, offering trauma-informed support following significant incidents, bereavements and major events. The service also supported staff and families through key life events, including funerals, memorials and vow renewals, contributing to continuity of care during periods of personal challenge.

A strong commitment to inclusion remained central to the service. The Chaplain worked closely with staff networks, including the Women's and Armed Forces Networks, and provided tailored one-to-one support to colleagues exploring faith, belief and cultural identity. Support extended to staff from LGBT+, race, disability, gender and Armed Forces communities, recognising the impact of intersecting identities on wellbeing. In the context of heightened global tensions, the service also created psychologically safe spaces for staff to reflect on issues of identity, racism and cultural bereavement.

Capacity was strengthened through the introduction of a team of trained volunteer chaplains, expanding the availability of local and accessible support.

Beyond the Trust, the Chaplain continued to contribute sector-leading expertise in trauma-informed practice within faith and safeguarding contexts. This included delivery at national and regional safeguarding events, training for the Methodist Learning Network and Mental Health First Aid instructors, and participation in a regional workshop on Places of Worship, Communities and Counter-Terrorism in January 2026, further strengthening engagement with diverse faith communities and networks.

NWAS Charity and EDI



The North West Ambulance Service Charity continues to play a vital role in enhancing the culture and experience of staff across the organisation. While NWAS provides core services and essential equipment through standard funding mechanisms, the Charity enables additional support and wellbeing initiatives that go above and beyond what is possible through NHS budgets alone.

During 2025/2026, charitable funding supported a wide range of initiatives that strengthened inclusion, supported staff networks, enhanced wellbeing, and contributed to a compassionate and supportive working environment.

The NWAS Charity remains a key enabler of staff wellbeing, helping colleagues feel valued, supported and connected. Over the past year, charitable grants were used to:

- Support activities that strengthen team cohesion and cultural awareness.
- Enhance the working environment for colleagues across both frontline and corporate settings.

These investments reflect the Charity's commitment to promoting a workplace where all staff can thrive.

During 2025–26, the NWAS Charity supported a range of initiatives delivered through staff networks, strengthening inclusion, wellbeing and engagement across the Trust.

Support for the Women's Network included part-funding the Trust's International Women's Day 2026 event, alongside the continued provision of free emergency sanitary products across NWAS sites. Charitable funding also enabled the purchase of period pants for women within the organisation on request, helping to reduce financial barriers and promote dignity at work.

The Armed Forces Network received charitable funding to support the delivery of its annual conference, providing an important forum for engagement, shared learning and recognition of the contribution made by colleagues with Armed Forces connections.

Charitable contributions also supported the work of both the Race Equality Network and the LGBT+ Network, helping to enable community engagement activity, awareness campaigns and events aimed at strengthening inclusion and a sense of belonging across the workforce.

In addition, the Charity supported the 2026 NWAS Iftar by funding additional places, enabling wider participation in the commemoration of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.



Policy Development

In 2025/26, the following policies, procedures and guidance documents relating to equality, diversity and inclusion were approved (either as refresh or new):

- Armed Forces, Reserve and Cadet Forces Policy
- Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure
- Flexible Working Policy and Procedure
- Redeployment Policy and Procedure
- Menopause Policy and Procedure
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Sexual Safety Policy
- Career Break Policy

In order for policies to be signed off, it remains the case that an accompanying Equality & Quality Impact Assessment must be undertaken in a timely and way.



Looking ahead to 2026/27

As we move into 2026/2027, we remain committed to deepening our work on equality, diversity and inclusion as an integral part of delivering safe, high-quality and person-centred care. The progress made over the past year provides a strong foundation, but we recognise that meaningful, sustainable change requires continual focus, leadership, and collaboration.

The coming year will be shaped by the ambitions set out in our Trust Strategy 2026–31, national equality and inclusion frameworks, and the evolving needs of our diverse workforce and the communities we serve.

Following the launch of the Anti-Racism Statement, we will move from commitment to action by working to embed principles of anti-racism in our ways of working and service delivery.

We will continue to advance inclusive leadership and work to improve organisational culture by building the capability required to sustain a compassionate and psychologically safe environment. Developing leaders at all levels will remain a priority, enabling them to challenge inequity, promote belonging and role-model inclusive behaviours.

We will further strengthen inclusive recruitment, building on work already undertaken to improve recruitment practices and address inequalities across the employee lifecycle. This will support fairer access to opportunities, improve representation and help us build a more inclusive workforce.

Improving the lived experience of disabled colleagues will remain a key focus. We will continue to enhance disability inclusion by expanding access to reasonable adjustments and strengthening understanding and confidence across the organisation, ensuring that colleagues are better supported to thrive at work.

Alongside this, we will work to reduce health inequalities for patients through the enhanced use of our expanded Population Health Dashboard. This will provide deeper insight, support more targeted interventions and enable us to improve outcomes for communities experiencing the greatest disadvantage.

Our staff networks will continue to play a vital role as drivers of cultural improvement and as strong voices for staff whose experiences may otherwise go unheard. Their insight, challenge and partnership will be central to shaping our future priorities and actions.

Finally, we will fully implement a new Equality and Quality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process to strengthen assurance across the organisation. By embedding EQIA consistently within our decision-making, we will reinforce our commitment to equality, quality and inclusion, ensuring that impact is understood, addressed and monitored at every level.



FOLLOW OUR EDI WORK ON X: [@NWAMB_INCLUSION](#)

PRODUCED BY THE STAFF EXPERIENCE TEAM
APRIL 2026