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NHS Bolton NHS Foundation Trust

Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) 2026 Findings



Improving care, transforming lives...for a better Bolton

Introduction

Creating a culture of inclusion remains a strategic priority for Bolton NHS Foundation Trust and is fundamental to delivering our Trust Strategy, Our Way, and People & Culture priorities. We are committed to creating an organisation where every colleagues feels valued, respected and able to contribute fully, recognising that an inclusive workforce is essential to delivering outstanding care and improving outcomes for the diverse communities we serve.

The principles of *Our Way* underpin our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, helping to create a culture of belonging, compassion, respect and continuous improvement. Through this approach, we aim to ensure that all colleagues are treated fairly, have equitable access to opportunities and are able to fulfil their potential.

National evidence continues to demonstrate that disabled colleagues and those with long-term health conditions experience inequalities across recruitment, career progression, workplace experience and access to development opportunities. Disabled staff are also more likely to report experiencing bullying, harassment and discrimination within the workplace. Addressing these disparities is critical to improving staff experience, retaining talent and ensuring that the NHS benefits from the contribution of a diverse workforce. Our work is informed by the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, NHS People Promise and NHS Staff Survey findings, which highlight the importance of creating working environments where all colleagues can thrive.

Locally, this work is delivered through our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Plan 2025 – 2027 and supported by our wider commitment to improving staff wellbeing, inclusion and belonging. During 2025/26, we have continued to strengthen our approach to disability inclusion through improvements to workplace adjustments, inclusive recruitment, staff network engagement, leadership development and support for neurodivergent colleagues and those with long-term health conditions. We continue to work closely with our Health & Accessibility Staff Network to ensure lived experience helps shape services, policies and organisational decision-making.

This report presents our latest Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) results and highlights areas where progress has been made alongside areas where disparities remain. Whilst improvements have been achieved across several indicators, particularly workforce representation, recruitment outcomes, reasonable adjustments and Board representation, we recognise that further work is required to reduce inequalities in staff experience. The findings continue to inform delivery of our EDI Plan and support our ambition to become a genuinely inclusive organisation where we lead by example, where everyone can belong, and where we are always improving.

Terminology

The Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) is a national framework that enables NHS organisations to measure and monitor the experiences of disabled staff and those with long-term health conditions compared with non-disabled staff. Throughout this report, the term disabled staff reflects the definitions used within nationally mandated NHS datasets and WDES reporting requirements. Data presented within the report has been sourced from the Electronic Staff Record (ESR), NHS Staff Survey and NHS Model Health System.

Reporting Methodology

This year, Bolton NHS Foundation Trust has adopted the NHS Model Health System approach to WDES reporting wherever possible. This means that many indicators are now presented as a relative likelihood ratio, rather than solely reporting percentages for disabled and non-disabled staff separately.

A ratio of 1.0 indicates parity between disabled and non-disabled staff. A figure above or below 1.0 indicates the extent to which one group is more or less likely to experience a particular outcome. Presenting indicators in this way provides a clearer understanding of equality of experience, allows easier comparison with peer organisations, and helps focus attention on reducing disparities rather than simply describing differences between groups.

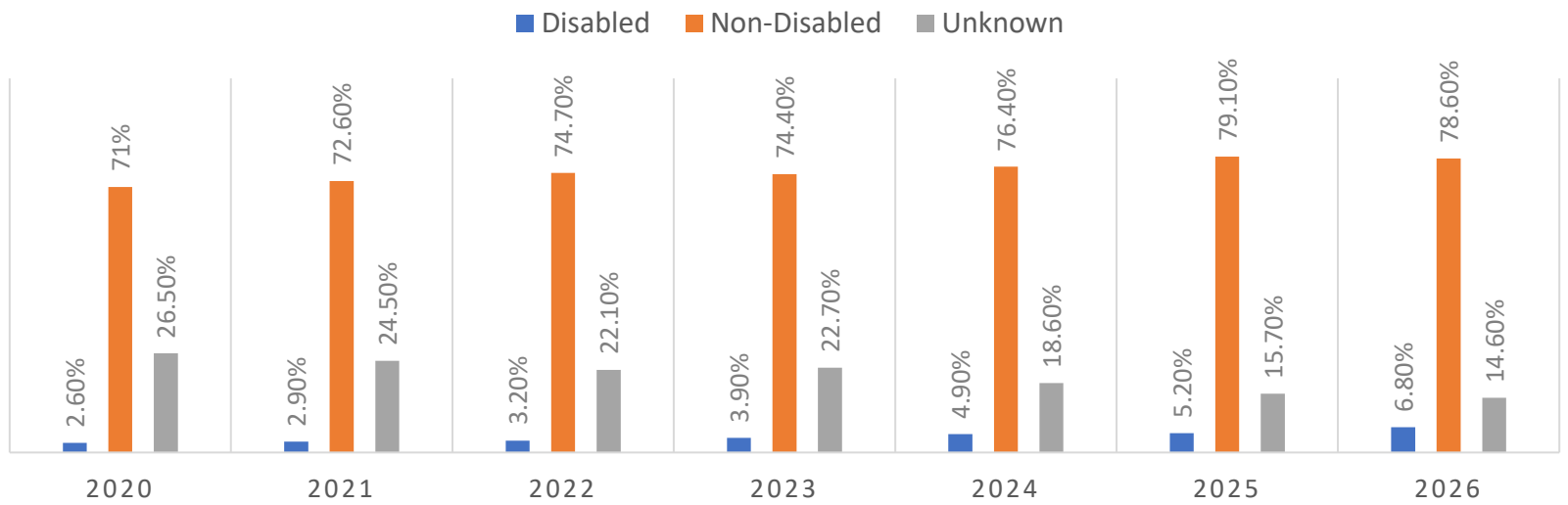
Key findings – Comparisons

KEY
Green fill = a significant improvement/significantly better than peers/target
White fill = no significant movement/not significantly different than peer
Red fill = a significant worsening / significantly worse than peer group
Significance is 5%or greater difference
↑ = increase ↓ decrease ✓ = improved ✗ = worsened/worse than peer

Metric	2026	Compared to 2025	Compared to Peer Average (peers are defined as Acute, Acute Specialist, Ambulance, Community, Integrated Care Board (ICB), Mental Health)
1. Disability Declaration Rates	6.8%	↑ ✓ (+1.6%)	✓ EDI Plan 2027 Target 6.7% → 0.1% better
2. Relative likelihood of non-disabled staff being appointed from shortlisting compared to disabled staff	0.97	↓ ✓ (-0.08)	✓ Peer 1.12 → 0.15 better
3. Relative likelihood of disabled staff entering performance management compared to non-disabled staff	1.92	✗ ↑ (+1.92)	Peer data unavailable
4a. Relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from patients/public compared to non-disabled staff	1.37	✗ ↑ (+0.02)	✗ Peer 1.25 → 0.12 worse
4b. Relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from managers, compared to non-disabled staff	1.73	✓ ↓ (-0.47)	✓ Peer 1.84 → 0.11 better
4c. Relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues, compared to non-disabled staff	1.23	✓ ↓ (-0.57)	✓ Peer 1.54 → 0.31 better
4d. Relative likelihood of non-disabled staff reporting harassment, bullying or abuse compared to disabled staff	0.96	✗ ↓ (+0.05)	✗ Peer 1.0 → 0.04 worse
5. Relative likelihood that organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression (non-disabled to disabled)	1.10	✓ ↓ (-0.04)	✓ Peer 1.13 → 0.03 better
6. Relative Likelihood felt pressure from manager to come to work, despite not feeling well enough (Disabled to Non-disabled)	1.24	✓ ↓ (+0.39)	✓ Peer 1.46 → 0.22 better
7. Relative Likelihood Satisfied with the extent to which organisation values their work (non-disabled to disabled)	1.25	✗ ↑ (+0.07)	✓ Peer 1.39 → 0.14 better
8. Employer made reasonable adjustment(s) to enable employee to carry out work (Disabled Staff only)	75.17%	✓↑ (+1.97%)	✓ Peer 74.17% → 1% better
9. Relative Staff Engagement scores	1.09	✗ ↑ (+0.01)	✓ Peer 1.10 → 0.01 better
10. Percentage of Board members who are Disabled	5.88%	✓↑ (+5.88%)	✓ Peer 5.28% → 0.6% better

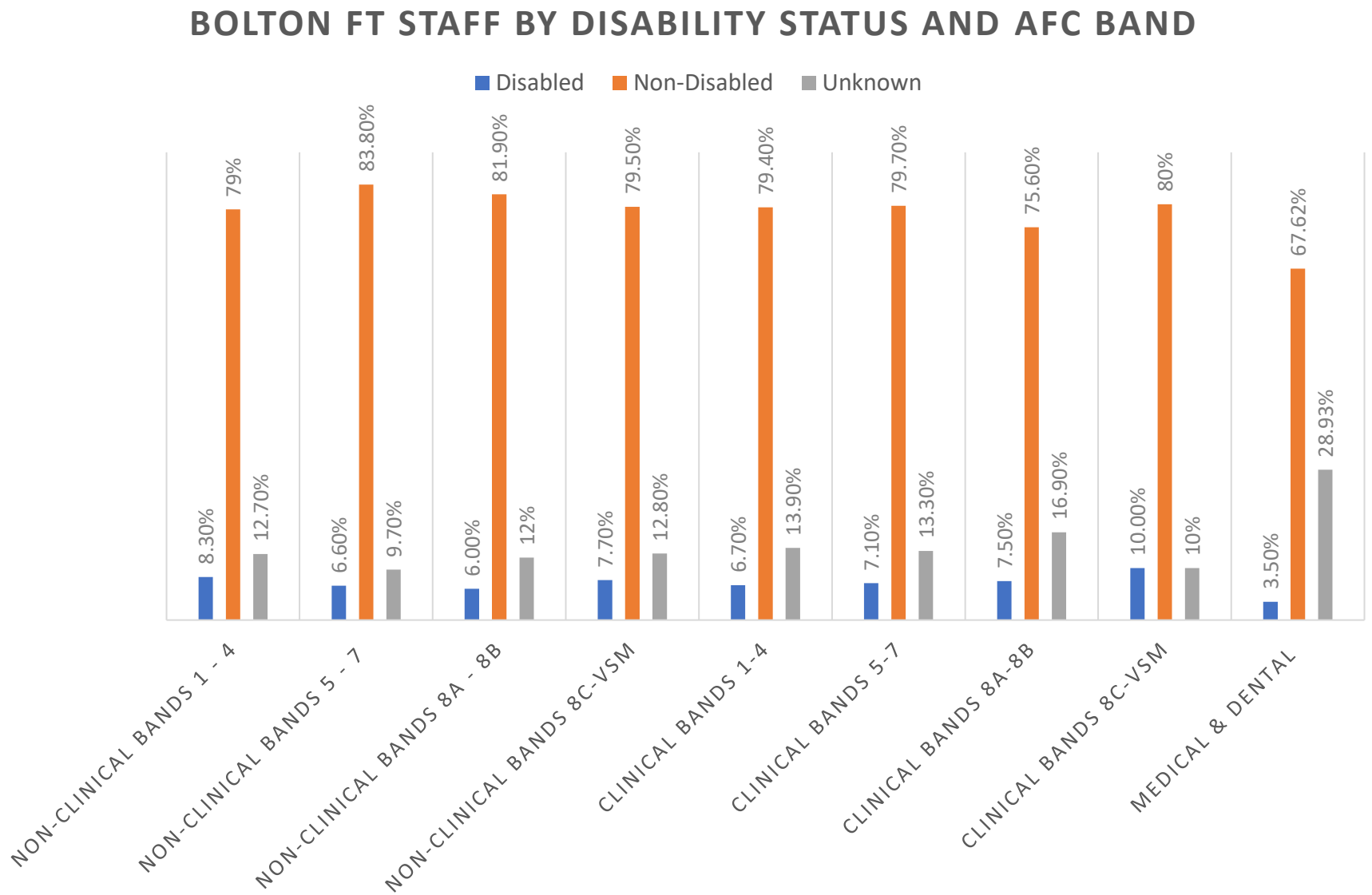
WDES indicator 1: Overall Disability Declaration Rates

Year	Headcount			Percentages		
	Disabled	Non-disabled	Unknown	Disabled	Non-disabled	Unknown
2020	144	3982	1485	2.6%	71.0%	26.5%
2021	167	4226	1428	2.9%	72.6%	24.5%
2022	187	4414	1309	3.2%	74.7%	22.1%
2023	240	4542	1323	3.9%	74.4%	21.7%
2024	306	4729	1153	4.9%	76.4%	18.6%
2025	329	5031	1001	5.2%	79.1%	15.7%
2026	420	4836	900	6.8%	78.6%	14.6%



- In 2026, the Trust employed 6,156 staff, of whom 6.8% (420) had declared a disability, up from 5.2% in 2025, exceeding the Trust's EDI Plan target of 6.7%.
- The most recent Staff Survey found that 30.4% of staff reported having a long-lasting health condition or illness, suggesting there remains an opportunity to improve confidence in disability disclosure – although noting that the questions are not the same.
- Disability representation has increased steadily from 2.6% in 2020 to 6.8% in 2026, with number of staff who have declared a disability rising from 144 to 420 over the period.
- The proportion of staff whose disability status is recorded as unknown has fallen from 26.5% in 2020 to 14.6% in 2026, suggested increased confidence in disclosure and improved data quality.
- Despite continued improvement, almost 1 in 7 staff (14.6%) still have an unknown disability status, highlighting an ongoing opportunity to encourage disclosure and strengthen workforce data.

WDES indicator 1



- Representation is evident across all staff groups and pay band clusters, ranging from 6.0% to 10.0% across most clinical and non-clinical groups.
- Senior clinical roles (Bands 8c – VSM) have the highest representation at 10.0%, indicating disabled staff are represented at senior levels in clinical areas.
- Medical & Dental staff have the lowest representation (3.5%) and the highest proportion of unknown disability status (28.9%), suggesting under-disclosure may be affecting reported representation.
- The proportion of staff with an unknown disability status remains 14.6% (900 staff), highlighting an ongoing opportunity to improve disclosure rates.

WDES indicator 2

Relative likelihood of Disabled staff compared to non-disabled staff being appointed from shortlisting across all posts

** figure above 1 indicates a higher likelihood of non-disabled staff being appointed from shortlisting than disabled staff*

Year	Relative likelihood of Disabled staff compared to non-disabled staff being appointed from shortlisting across all posts *
2020	1.57
2021	1.57
2022	1.04
2023	1.05
2024	1.04
2025	1.04
2026	0.97

- The Trust's score improved from 1.04 in 2025 to 0.97 in 2026, meaning disabled applicants were slightly more likely to be appointed from shortlisting than non-disabled applicants.
- This is the first time the Trust has achieved a score below 1.0, indicating that there is no longer a recruitment disadvantage for disabled applicants at the appointment stage.
- The Trust has made significant progress over time, reducing the ratio from 1.57 in 2020 and 2021, to 0.97 in 2026, demonstrating sustained improvement in equitable recruitment outcomes.
- The 2026 result is better than the peer average of 1.12 by 0.15 points, suggesting the Trust's recruitment practices compare favourably with similar NHS organisations.
- Continued monitoring will be required to ensure recruitment outcomes remain equitable and that positive progress is sustained across all staff groups.

WDES indicator 3

Relative likelihood of Disabled staff compared to non-disabled staff entering formal performance management

**A figure above '1' indicates that Disabled staff members are more likely than non-disabled staff to enter the formal capability process.*

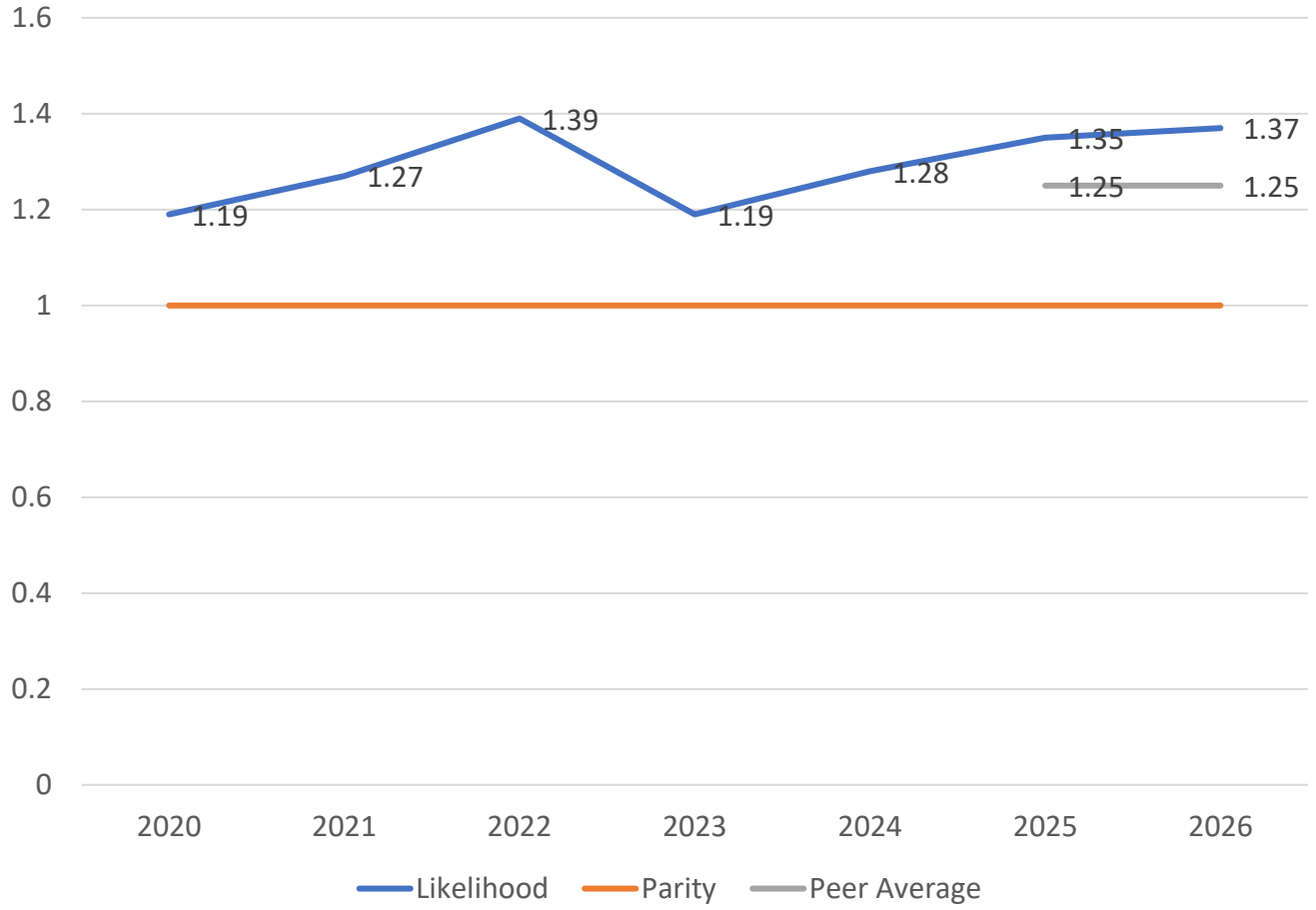
Year	Relative likelihood
2020	0.00
2021	0.00
2022	0.00
2023	0.00
2024	0.00
2025	0.00
2026	1.97

- The 2026 relative likelihood score is 1.97, indicating that disabled staff were almost twice as likely to enter formal performance management processes compared with non-disabled staff. However, this result is based on very small numbers: 1 disabled staff member and 6 non-disabled staff members entered formal performance management during the reporting period.
- While the relative likelihood appears high, the actual rates were 0.24% for disabled staff and 0.12% for non-disabled staff.
- No reportable value was recorded between 2020 and 2025, meaning a meaningful trend cannot yet be established.
- Given the small numbers involved, findings should be interpreted with caution. The Trust will continue to monitor this indicator to identify whether a sustained pattern emerges over time.
- Peer comparison data is not currently available for this indicator.

WDES indicator 4a

Relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from patients/public compared to non-disabled staff

A figure above "1" would indicate that Disabled staff members are more likely to experience harassment, bullying or abuse from patients, relatives or the public compared to non-disabled staff.

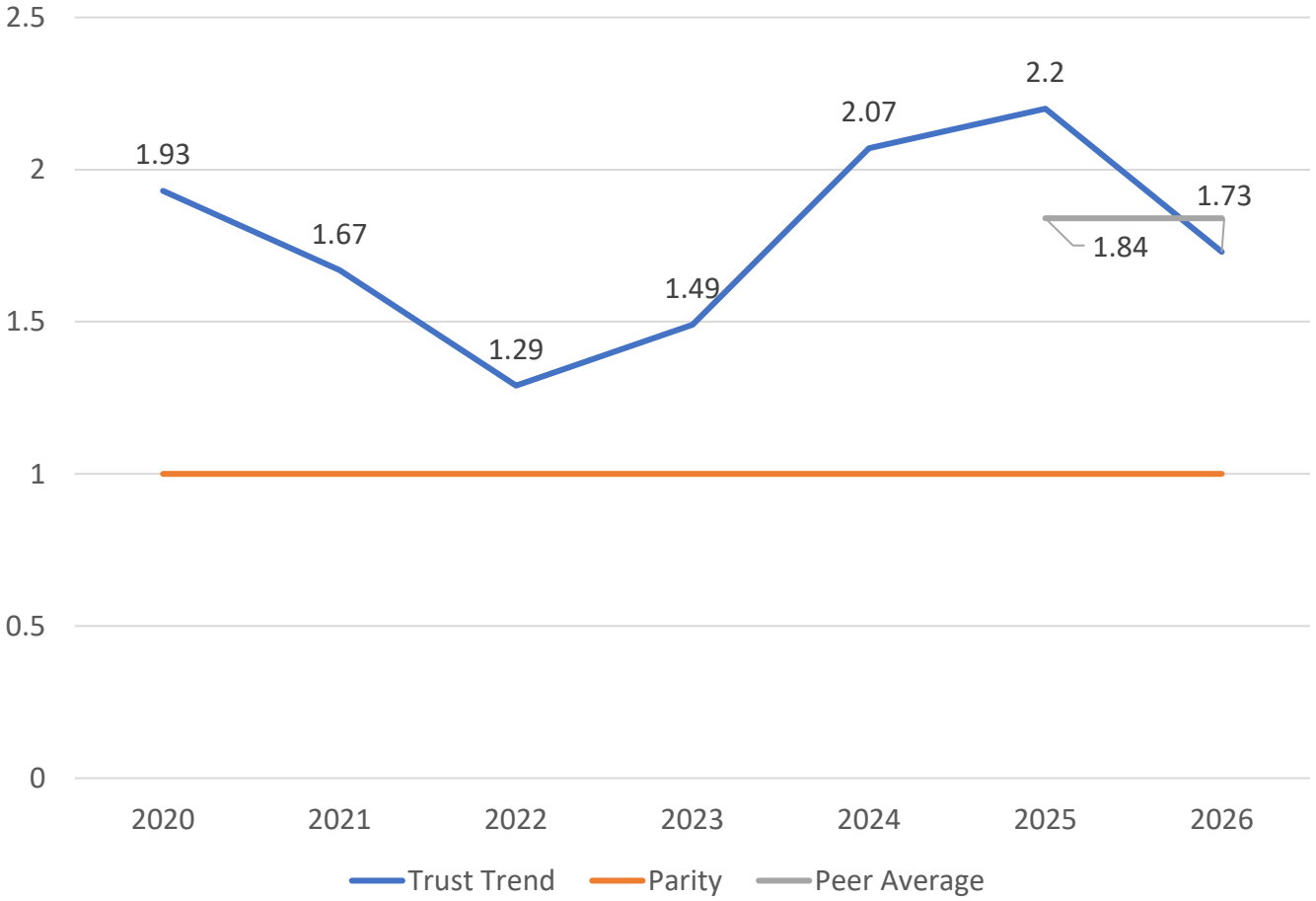


- Disabled staff are 1.37 times more likely than non-disabled staff to experience harassment, bullying or abuse from patients, relatives or the public.
- The score increased slightly from 1.35 in 2025 to 1.37 in 2026.
- The Trust's score is 0.12 points worse than peer average (1.25).
- Further work is required to understand the causes of this disparity and reduce negative experiences for disabled staff.

WDES indicator 4b

Relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from managers, compared to non-disabled staff

A figure above "1" would indicate that Disabled staff members are more likely to experience harassment, bullying or abuse from managers compared to non-disabled staff.

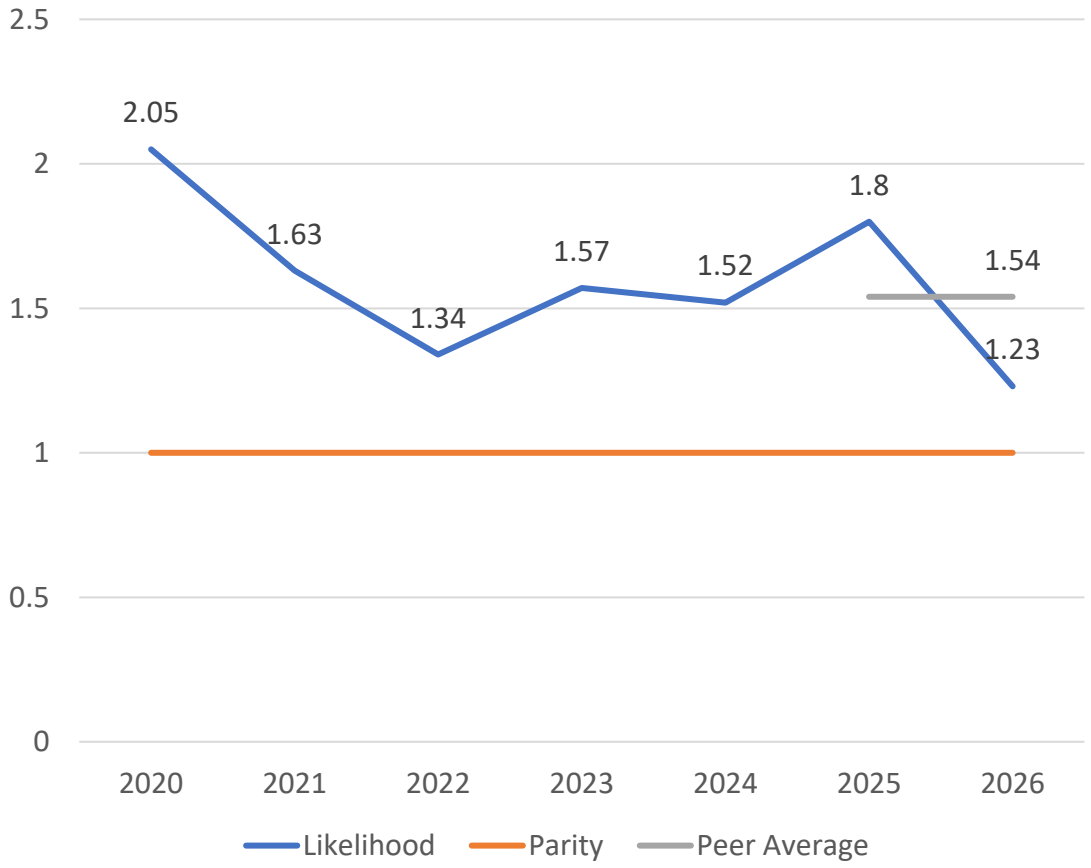


- The relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from managers improved from 2.20 in 2025 to 1.73 in 2026, a reduction of 0.47 points.
- The Trust's score is better than the peer average of 1.84 by 0.11 points.
- Despite improvement, the indicator remains above parity, indicating that disabled staff continue to report higher levels of poor treatment from managers than non-disabled colleagues.
- Continued focus on inclusive leadership, speaking up culture and manager capability will be important to further reduce this disparity.

WDES indicator 4c

Relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues, compared to non-disabled staff

A figure above "1" would indicate that Disabled staff members are more likely to experience harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues compared to non-disabled staff.

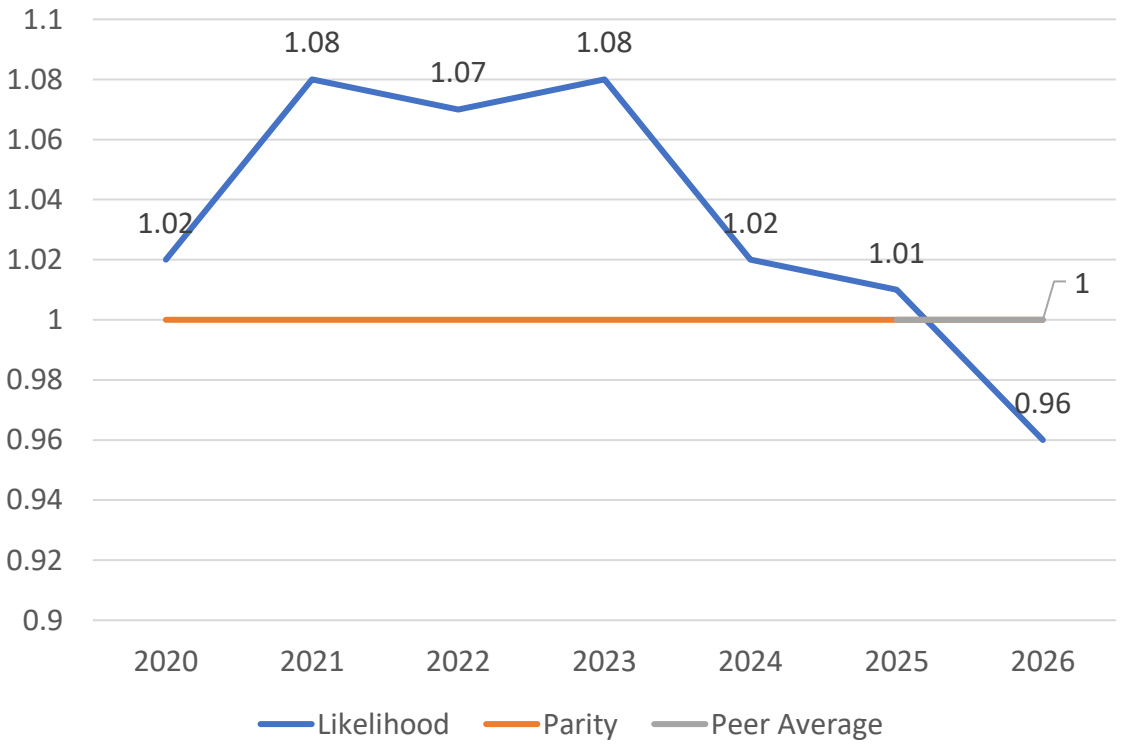


- The relative likelihood of disabled staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues improved significantly from 1.80 in 2025 to 1.23 in 2026, a reduction of 0.57 points.
- The Trust's score is better than the peer average of 1.54 by 0.31 points.
- This is the lowest disparity recorded since reporting began, indicating substantial progress in improving staff experiences.
- Although the gap has narrowed considerably, the indicator remains above parity, suggesting disabled staff continue to experience higher levels of harassment, bullying or abuse than non-disabled colleagues.

WDES indicator 4d

Relative likelihood of non-disabled staff reporting harassment, bullying or abuse compared to disabled staff

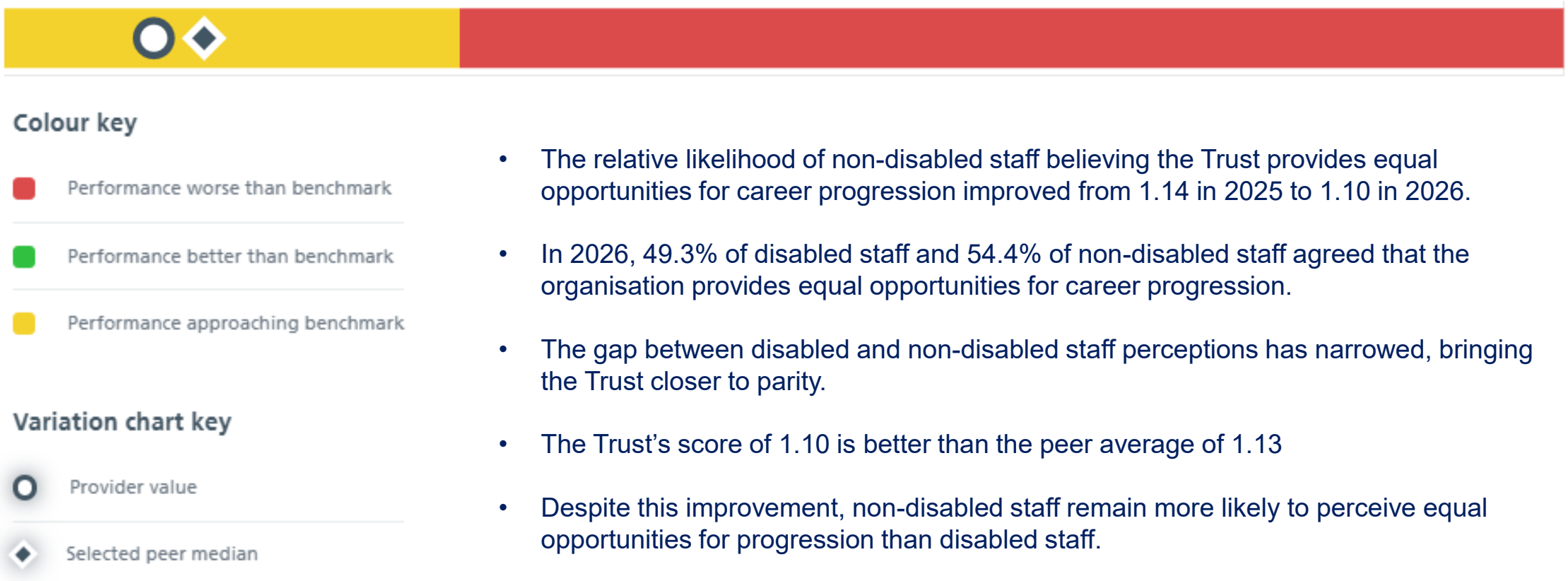
A negative figure indicates a lower degree of Disabled staff members, in comparison to Non Disabled staff members, have experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work and it had been reported.



- In 2026, the relative likelihood of disabled staff reporting their most recent experience of harassment, bullying or abuse was 0.96, compared with 1.01 in 2025.
- This indicates that disabled staff were slightly less likely than non-disabled staff to report incidents, with reporting rates of 53.6% for disabled staff and 55.8% for non-disabled staff.
- The score is 0.04 points below peer average indicating reporting rates are broadly comparable to those seen across similar organisations.
- Historically, this indicator has remained close to parity, suggesting there is no significant difference in reporting behaviours between disabled and non-disabled staff.
- Continued promotion of speaking up mechanisms and confidence in reporting processes remains important to ensure all staff feel supported to raise concerns.

WDES indicator 5

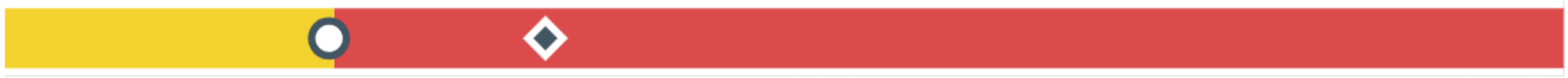
Relative likelihood that organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression (non-disabled to disabled)



- The relative likelihood of non-disabled staff believing the Trust provides equal opportunities for career progression improved from 1.14 in 2025 to 1.10 in 2026.
- In 2026, 49.3% of disabled staff and 54.4% of non-disabled staff agreed that the organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression.
- The gap between disabled and non-disabled staff perceptions has narrowed, bringing the Trust closer to parity.
- The Trust's score of 1.10 is better than the peer average of 1.13
- Despite this improvement, non-disabled staff remain more likely to perceive equal opportunities for progression than disabled staff.

WDES indicator 6

Relative Likelihood felt pressure from manager to come to work, despite not feeling well enough (Disabled to Non-disabled)



Colour key

- Performance worse than benchmark
- Performance better than benchmark
- Performance approaching benchmark

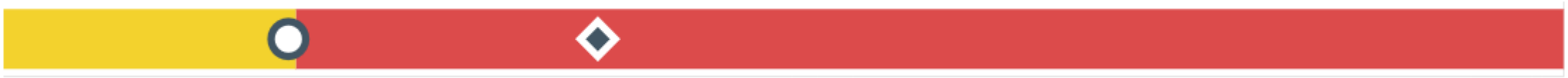
Variation chart key

- Provider value
- Selected peer median

- The relative likelihood of Disabled staff feeling pressure from their manager to attend work despite not feeling well enough improved from 1.59 in 2025 to 1.24 in 2026, a reduction of 0.35 points.
- In 2026, 20.5% of disabled staff reported pressure to attend work when unwell, compared with 16.5% of non-disabled staff.
- While disabled staff remain more likely to experience this pressure, the gap has narrowed considerably over the last year.
- The Trust's score is better than the peer average of 1.46 by 0.22 points.
- This is the lowest relative likelihood recorded since reporting began, indicating a more equitable staff experience than in previous years.

WDES indicator 7

Relative Likelihood Satisfied with the extent to which organisation values their work (non-disabled to disabled)



Colour key

- Performance worse than benchmark
- Performance better than benchmark
- Performance approaching benchmark

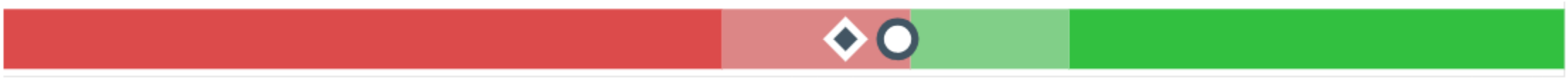
Variation chart key

- Provider value
- Selected peer median

- The relative likelihood of non-disabled staff feeling that the organisation values their work increased from 1.18 in 2025 to 1.25 in 2026.
- This indicates a widening perception gap between disabled and non-disabled staff.
- In 2026, 31.9% of disabled staff reported feeling valued by the organisation, compared with 39.7% of non-disabled staff.
- Despite this deterioration, the Trust performs better than the peer average of 1.39.
- Further work is required to understand and address the factors affecting disabled staff's experience of feeling valued at work.

WDES indicator 8

Employer made reasonable adjustment(s) to enable employee to carry out work (Disabled Staff only)



Colour key

Performance worse than median

Performance better than median

Variation chart key

Each block of colour within these charts represents a quartile.

Higher values more desirable

Lower values more desirable

Provider value

Selected peer median

- 75.2% of Disabled staff reported that the Trust had made reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their work, an increase from 73.2% in 2025.
- This represents a 1.97 percentage point improvement and is the highest result reported since 2021.
- The Trust performs better than the peer median (74.2%), demonstrating positive progress in supporting disabled staff through workplace adjustments.
- While performance has improved, around 1 in 4 disabled staff still report that reasonable adjustments have not been made, highlighting an ongoing opportunity to improve staff experience and workplace support. The EDI Plan has a published target of reaching 80% by November 2027.

WDES indicator 9

Relative Staff Engagement Score



Colour key

- Performance worse than benchmark
- Performance better than benchmark
- Performance approaching benchmark

Variation chart key

- Provider value
- Selected peer median

- The relative staff engagement score was 1.09 in 2026, indicating non-disabled staff continued to report slightly higher levels of engagement than disabled staff.
- The ratio remained relatively stable since 2025 when it was 1.08.
- Staff engagement scores decreased for both disabled and non-disabled staff groups, from 6.57 to 6.11 for disabled staff and from 7.07 to 6.64 for non-disabled staff.
- The Trust's score remains slightly better than the peer median of 1.10.
- Although the disparity is relatively small, disabled staff remain less engaged than non-disabled colleagues.

WDES indicator 10

Percentage of Board members who have declared a disability



Colour key

Performance worse than median

Performance better than median

Variation chart key

Each block of colour within these charts represents a quartile.

Higher values more desirable

Lower values more desirable

Provider value

Selected peer median

- In 2025/26, 5.88% of Board members declared a disability, compared with 0% in previous reporting years.
- This is the first year in which disabled representation has been recorded at Board level and places the Trust slightly above the peer average of 5.28%.
- Disabled representation on the Board is now broadly aligned with workforce representation (5.88% Board compared with 6.82% workforce), although a small gap remains.
- The Trust will continue to encourage disclosure at senior levels, strengthen pathways into leadership roles, and ensure the lived experience of disabled staff informs decision-making across Board and committee structures.

WDES Action Plan

The findings from this year's WDES report have been reviewed alongside the Trust's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Plan 2025-2027. This review has confirmed that the priorities identified through WDES continue to be reflected within the EDI Plan, ensuring that actions to improve disability inclusion remain embedded within the Trust's wider People and Culture priorities and strategic approach to inclusion.

Key areas of focus include:

- **Disability data and disclosure** - Continuing to improve the quality and completeness of workforce disability data, reducing the number of staff recorded as "unknown", increasing confidence in declaration and improving understanding of the experiences of disabled staff through our Count Me In campaign.
- **Inclusive recruitment and career progression** - Building on improved recruitment outcomes whilst addressing remaining disparities in career progression, talent development and perceptions of equal opportunities, ensuring disabled staff have equitable access to development and leadership opportunities.
- **Reasonable adjustments -** Further embedding the Reasonable Adjustments Passport, improving access to workplace adjustments and continuing work towards achieving the EDI Plan target of 80% of disabled staff reporting that their needs are met.
- **Inclusive culture and staff experience -** Reducing the disproportionate experience of bullying, harassment and abuse reported by disabled staff, strengthening speaking up mechanisms and improving disabled staff's experience of feeling valued, respected and included.
- **Inclusive leadership and representation -** Building on the positive progress made in relation to disability representation at Board level and continuing to strengthen pathways into leadership roles for disabled staff.
- **Governance, accountability and equality impact assessment -** Ensuring WDES findings continue to inform workforce planning, organisational decision-making and progress monitoring through the Trust's established EDI governance arrangements.

Progress against these priorities will continue to be monitored through the Trust's EDI governance framework, including the EDI Our People Steering Group, EDI Assurance Group, People Committee and Trust Board. WDES indicators will remain a key measure of progress and will be reviewed alongside the EDI Plan 2025-2027 to ensure sustained improvement in disability inclusion and staff experience.