

Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report 2025-26

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National Convener/Chief Executive foreword

Inclusion and equity are not an aspiration at CHS – they are a commitment rooted in who we are and how we work. We recognise that excellence is only possible when every individual is valued, included and empowered to thrive. This Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report reflects our ongoing dedication to embedding fairness and respect into every aspect of our work.

Mainstreaming equality is more than a compliance requirement; it is a cultural norm. By proactively identifying barriers, challenging inequity and designing systems that work for everyone, we create an environment where diverse perspectives drive better decisions and positive outcomes for children and young people.

Central to this work is our organisational culture. Culture includes how we make decisions and how we treat one another. Our aim is to build a culture that is genuinely inclusive – where dignity and respect are non-negotiable, where every voice is heard, and where people feel they belong. It is our belief that equality must live not only in our policies, but also in our everyday behaviours and shared values.

While we are proud of the progress made, we are clear about the work that remains. Achieving a truly inclusive organisation is a continuous journey. It requires accountability, humility and a willingness to listen, learn and adapt. This report serves as both a reflection and a roadmap – setting out where we are, where we aim to be and the collective effort required to get there.

I am grateful to every colleague who has contributed to this important work. Together, we will continue to strengthen our culture and to build an organisation where everyone belongs wholeheartedly and has the opportunity to succeed.

Introduction

The [Equality Act 2010](#) requires public authorities to adhere to the general [Public Sector Equality Duty](#), which Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) is firmly committed to fulfilling. This duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

CHS continues to uphold this requirement and aims to continue our progress in demonstrating the vision and values of the Equality Act. To assist the performance of this and to ensure transparency of progress towards meeting these equality objectives, CHS is required to publish equality outcomes at least every four years alongside information that demonstrates progress toward this duty.

The general equality duty applies to the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership, with regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination in employment

Since 2020, CHS has also recognised care experience as a 10th protected characteristic and seeks to ensure continuous review of our practice, policies and procedures to incorporate this commitment in all we do.

The CHS values enable the National Team and Panel Community to drive improvement, hold each other accountable and ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect.



As set out in the CHS [Strategic Outlook 2024-27](#), our purpose is to ensure hearings make child-centred decisions which respect and protect children’s rights and support children to thrive. This cannot be achieved without a strong culture that views and upholds commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Culture improvement is a journey and taking deliberate steps to change behaviours and norms will take time, but we are committed to leading, learning and improving as an organisation. Progress against our commitments seeks to result in a more inclusive experience for volunteers, for colleagues and for the children, young people and families in the hearings system.

Cross-functional collaboration

The [CHS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) is aligned to the organisational plans and vision. In this strategy, a transformed CHS is acknowledged, with new teams established in 2023-24 to focus on raising voices of those with lived experience, fostering a culture that leads to positive outcomes, and developing our colleagues and volunteers in how they support the hearings system. CHS's Equality Outcomes highlight alignment to organisational aims and areas of focus in creating safe, respectful and inclusive environments.

Equality Outcomes 2025-29

CHS's Equality Outcomes for 2025-29 serve as a commitment and action plan to drive forward the EDI agenda. The Equality Outcomes seek to build upon the foundation of our CHS values while striving to embed and mainstream EDI.

The Equality Outcomes for 2025-29 are:

1. Training and development

- i. We will implement appropriate training and development for our Panel Community and staff in line with their responsibilities to ensure they are able to conduct their duties to a high standard in supporting children, families and our people.
- ii. We want to ensure that everyone who engages with CHS, especially children and young people, can fully engage and participate.
- iii. Recognising that accessibility challenges exist for marginalised groups, we will promote inclusive language and provide accessible communication to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics.

2. Inclusive culture and increased awareness of EDI

- i. We will build an inclusive culture based on respect by increasing awareness of EDI across our community through engagement with stakeholder advisory groups and EDI networks.
- ii. We will continue to review internal policies and practices with the input of young people and volunteers to assess the impact on protected characteristics and ensure EDI is considered in all our work.
- iii. We will invite feedback from children, volunteers and National Team colleagues to monitor our drive towards an inclusive culture in line with CHS values.

3. Inclusive recruitment and involvement at CHS

- i. We will review our recruitment and selection processes for volunteers and National Team colleagues, aligning these processes with best practice in order to tackle barriers and promote inclusivity.

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- ii. We will seek to understand the barriers and challenges faced by people with protected characteristics to volunteering in our Panel Community, and we will take steps to address these. We will be data-driven in analysing under-representation within our Panel Community.
 - iii. We aspire to be an employer of choice and in doing so we seek to attract a diverse range of candidates for employment roles with our National Team.

Progress (2024-26)

In 2023-24, CHS underwent extensive change to operational practice and organisational team make-up and since then we have progressed our equality outcomes and work across Scotland, building on previous years' development and achievements. This progress is summarised below, focused on each of the outcomes.

Outcome 1: training and development

Training

Mandatory training signals the relevance that CHS places on various topics and over time. The expectation for all employees and volunteers to have an understanding of diversity, inclusive practices, and trauma-informed approaches has grown.

With the growth of CHS, the expectation of all CHS employees, Board Members and volunteers to complete introductory online training on EDI has remained. This training forms part of the induction for National Team colleagues when they join CHS and is mandated to be completed on an annual basis. Mandatory online EDI training is also incorporated into the Pre-service Training programme for all new Panel Members. Additional training is provided to Panel Members involved in recruitment processes, via the Inclusive Recruitment and Selection training, which includes topics related to EDI and unconscious bias.

GOING FURTHER: EDI TRAINING

In 2026-27, the EDI training modules will undergo a review to ensure that content is of high quality for team and volunteer learning. To support this, a confidence baselining assessment will also be shared with the National Team to support appropriate topics for EDI training as well as evaluation of impact of learning.

In recent years, our commitment to being trauma-informed has also strengthened and is now considered a fundamental pillar of training and development programmes. We have partnered with NHS Education Scotland (NES) in integrating the NHS National Trauma Transformation Programme modules for 'trauma-informed' and 'trauma-skilled' into training for all Panel Members and for our National Team. Furthermore, the Senior Leadership Team engaged with NES in a bespoke session to explore organisational approaches to being trauma-informed.

GOING FURTHER: TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING AND SUPPORT

In 2026-27, the trauma training will develop to be aligned to the Care and Justice Act learning and development of volunteers and National Team colleagues. Additional training to strengthen support to the volunteer community will also be provided to enable safer spaces for those who are impacted by their role.

Trauma-informed hearings

As part of the recognition of care-experience as a 10th protected characteristic, CHS is committed to ensuring that the language used in a hearing is child-centred and trauma-informed. Since 2022, CHS has collaborated with [Our Hearings, Our Voice \(OHOV\)](#) as part of the multi-agency Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership group [Language Leaders](#) to develop the 'Language in the Hearing Room' guide. This guide supports Panel Members in using language in hearings that is personalised, balanced, non-stigmatising and inclusive, and was launched as a learning module in 2025. Additionally, in 2025, an animated video, 'Articulate', commissioned in partnership with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and co-produced with SCRA, Language Leaders and OHOV, won a gold award at the Scottish Design Awards.

CHS's involvement in Language Leaders is intended to create environments that help children to feel safe, respected and empowered to be part of the decision-making process. The group continues to influence recognition of the importance of language and how it can support the experience of children and families at hearings.

Lastly, we also implemented a small but impactful change in practice: ‘Chair greeting the child’. Influenced by OHOV and supported by SCRA, this change means chairing Panel Members have been stepping out of the hearing room to greet children before their hearings, enabling children to feel more comfortable and at ease as they go into their hearing room.

Outcome 2: inclusive culture and increased awareness of EDI

Experts by Experience

Demonstrating our value of being child-centred, we remain committed to creating opportunities for children and young people with lived experience of the hearings system to share their views to make a meaningful impact, and to help us improve outcomes for children and young people.

In 2024-25, CHS launched Experts by Experience, a structured, supported and remunerated national participation group made up of young people, aged 14 and 25 from across Scotland, with lived experience of the hearings system. Supported by the Participation team, Experts by Experience seek to drive forward improvements in practice and standards across CHS.

Engagement with partners

To support our commitment to learning and increasing awareness of EDI across the organisation, we continue to engage with stakeholders on inclusive and fair work practices.

In 2025-26, we:

- retained our membership of Onvero (formerly known as the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion – ENEI), which enable us to collaborate and share best practice in EDI matters
- continued to participate in SCRA’s Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group for more inclusive hearings
- re-launched the CHS EDI Working Group, an internal staff group to help shape the design and delivery of how EDI objectives will be brought into meaningful action

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- participated in the Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) Equality Forum and other networking opportunities to contribute to and learn from others

Additionally, the CHS National Team have continued our external promotion and awareness raising of inclusive hearings through our external partnerships via an annually nominated charity. The selected charities are those who align with our own values and are chosen through a vote by members of the National Team. Each year, CHS colleagues organise fundraising activities such as bake sales, sponsored runs, book swaps and other events in aid of our chosen charity.

In 2024, [Who Cares? Scotland](#), Scotland's only national independent membership organisation for care experienced people, was the charity chosen by CHS staff, and fundraising activities and events by the National Team raised a total of £750. In 2025, [Child Poverty Action Group \(CPAG\)](#) was our chosen charity, which works to understand what causes poverty, the impact it has on children's lives, and how it can be prevented and solved. Through the fundraising activities and events by the National Team in 2025, we raised a total of £1,600 for CPAG.

Since 2023, CHS has also participated in Care Experienced week celebrating with the care experienced community by raising awareness, sharing information and participating in events such as the Love Rally.

Outcome 3: inclusive recruitment and involvement at CHS

Reducing barriers and strengthened accessibility support

CHS aims to ensure all trainees and appointed volunteers are provided with inclusive, equitable access to recruitment, training and volunteering activities. CHS supports Panel Community volunteers in a variety of ways, including through wellbeing support, practical and reasonable adjustments, and digital support services – all of which help CHS meet diverse needs and enable accessible volunteering involvement. Ways that we have made progress in reducing barriers include:

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- Strengthening digital capabilities assistance, with personalised one-to-one digital support sessions over the phone and in-person engagement sessions across the country to ensure volunteers with protected characteristics – including age or disability – can access what they need to volunteer well.
 - We continue to work in partnership with SCRA to better support Panel Members in hearing rooms, from physical changes (i.e. mobility changes and ergonomic chairs in rooms), to technology (i.e. upgrading outdated loops that prevented volunteers from using their hearing aids effectively) and we continue to take action on removing barriers to Panel Members attending in-person hearings.
 - In 2025, CHS began the first phase of replacing Chromebook devices with upgraded laptop devices, focused on providing support for those who require additional software and digital tools as part of a reasonable adjustment.
 - In 2025, digital support and training was integrated as part of the renewed Pre-service Training programme and induction sessions for new volunteers to receive face-to-face support in getting set up right.
 - With the 2025 organisational changes and the CHS Learning Academy operating in-house, a nationally coordinated effort to identify, understand, and take swift action to support reasonable adjustments was also put in place for all trainees.

GOING FURTHER: REDUCING BARRIERS

In 2026-27, we will improve processes to better identify learning support needs and adjustments so that we strengthen the available support for volunteers. We will refresh recruitment and onboarding resources to increase awareness of our inclusive practices.

We will also refresh internal processes for digital support, particularly for those with reasonable adjustments due to a disability or those with less exposure to computers (due to age, profession or socio-economic background)

Inclusive recruitment and diversity of our volunteers

CHS strives to have a community of volunteer Panel Members and Panel Practice Advisers who represent Scotland's communities and have diverse views and empathetic experiences.

An unwavering aim is to continue to strengthen the diversity of volunteers who join CHS so that the decision-makers on children's panels are more representative of the communities they serve. To support this, we have made progress in recent years by:

- Strengthening our offer of support for prospective volunteers with practical assistance during application and continuing inclusive recruitment practices including running online information sessions to strengthen candidate understanding of the volunteer role.
- Targeting recruitment campaigns for our under-represented groups based on better interrogation of our equalities data. This was supported by previous engagement and collaboration with partners, such as CEMVO, and specific Gaelic campaigning in Island communities.
- Enhancing the supportive adjustments for prospective volunteers, trainees and appointed volunteers via digital adjustments, physical enhancements, and supportive, honest discussions about reasonable changes that can be made in the hearing space that enable an inclusive experience where appropriate.
- In 2025, a trauma-informed and inclusive approach was taken to how young people with lived experience were involved in every interview. The Experts by Experience group reviewed questions and designed and recorded a scenario for each candidate to respond to. This enabled greater impact of the group resources in a supportive setting while also allowing for a more consistent interview process that centred the voice of young people.
- In 2025 as part of our continuous improvement, we strengthened our volunteer expectations and commitments in our communications, training and induction materials which centre on CHS values and how we implement a fair, inclusive environment through expected behaviours in and around hearings, within the framework of the National Standards.

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- Continuing to aim to implement mixed-gender panels, as far as practicable.

GOING FURTHER: DEVELOPING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE PANEL COMMUNITY

In 2026-27, we will continue to engage via employers' partnerships to increase the breadth of applications from members of the public. We will review and issue new EDI modules relating to recruitment processes. Lastly, we will develop our data monitoring methodology to influence recruitment and development opportunities, including where it relates to activity on sitting on hearings.

Driven by data

It remains an objective to improve our equality data collection to help us ensure our activities to recruit, train and support volunteers is impactful. To support this, we have made the following progress in recent years:

- In 2024, we reviewed and revised our data capturing form for volunteers on our digital system to align with the Scottish Government Equalities Monitoring questions.
- From 2025, we began an annual request from CHS to volunteers to share equalities data with us, particularly to understand demographic of volunteers who were appointed before 2019.
- From 2025, we have begun asking about hearings experience of prospective volunteers as part of our equalities monitoring and to enable greater understanding of the demographics of our volunteers.

Diversity of our volunteers

Collection of diversity data helps to aid our planning, better understand the needs of our people and benchmark against Scotland's 2022 census. From our collection of equalities monitoring information and that of newly appointed volunteers we know that as of March 2025:

- **Sharing data:** 44.9% of our Panel Community completed the equalities survey, an increase of 11.5% from 2023.
- **Age of volunteers:** The Panel Community who responded is made up of a majority over the age of 55 (31.7% aged 55-64, 24.9% aged 65+). 20.4% of respondents were aged 45-54, followed by 13.4% aged 35-44, 8% aged 25-34, and 1.7% aged 18-24.
- **Gender:** We have a higher proportion of Panel Members who identify as female (74.1%), followed by male (24.4%) and non-binary or other (1.5%).
- **Disability:** 8.5% of Panel Members consider themselves to have a disability. Non-disclosure rates have decreased from 64.6% in 2023 to 53.2% in 2025.
- **Ethnicity:** 8.5% of our Panel Members are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is less than Scotland overall (12.9%).
- **Sexual orientation:** The vast majority of Panel Members identify as heterosexual/straight (91.1%). Panel Members who identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual has increased from 1.6% in 2020 to 5.8% in 2025.
- **Religion:** Similar to the national trend across Scotland, the proportion of Panel Members who identify as having no religion was 48.6% in 2025, comparable to the 2022 census (51.1%). Respondents who declared religious beliefs that were not Protestant, Christian, or Catholic were around 1% per category.
- **Marital status:** Since 2023 we have seen a slight increase in those with a status other than married/civil partnership (64.9%), with 13.3% single, 8.6% separated/divorced, 8.4% in partnership, and 3.2% widowed. Non-disclosure rates have decreased from 64.8% in 2023 to 52.7% in 2025.
- **Caring responsibilities:** We have seen a slight increase in caring responsibilities, with 27.2% caring for child/children, 6.3% caring for an adult, and 2.9% caring for an adult and child/children. Non-disclosure rates have decreased from 64.8% in 2023 to 54.8% in 2025.
- **Experience of the Hearings System:** 8.4% of volunteers who responded declared having experience of the hearings system, an increase of 1.2% since 2023.