



# NHS Midlands and Lancashire (ML) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report

**2024-2025**

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# Foreword

**Welcome to the NHS Midlands and Lancashire (ML) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report for 2024-2025. This year, we have continued to promote equality, diversity and inclusion across our organisation, and have made great progress in establishing a centralised EDI action plan that will help us foster a culture of inclusivity and celebrate diversity for 2025 and beyond.**

Our EDI annual report for 2024-2025 showcases our ongoing commitment to making ML an inclusive and diverse workplace. It also highlights the progress we have made collectively in advancing the EDI agenda during what has been a time of uncertainty and change within ML and the wider NHS.

Throughout this year, we have continued to meet our legal equality duties and complete mandated equality reporting to better understand the representation and experiences of our workforce. We have completed Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) and Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) reporting and have developed action plans in collaboration with our Disability and Ethnic Diversity Staff Networks to address disparities. Whilst we are pleased that our workforce has a higher representation of disabled and ethnic diverse staff this year, when compared to 2023, we recognise there are still improvements to be made in the experiences of our staff from these protected characteristic groups.

We are proud of the progress we've made this year in recognising and celebrating our diverse workforce, including the establishment of our Health and Wellbeing and Mental Health (Let's Talk) Staff Networks and continuous engagement with EDI staff networks. Our staff networks, chairs and members have all played a pivotal role in the development of EDI initiatives such as the wellbeing passport, reasonable adjustment process, hidden disabilities scheme and development of EDI awareness training.

The establishment of the ML EDI Subgroup has also helped to place EDI at the centre of decision making during 2024-2025. The EDI subgroup, which is chaired by our EDI Board Advisor, Qadeer Kiani, and includes membership from all our staff networks, is now formally part of our governance arrangements.

To help us further embed inclusive practices that ensure our people feel supported and valued, this year we developed a comprehensive EDI action plan that will help us to meet our legal and mandated duties, adopt best practice, and monitor progress against organisational EDI targets and development objectives. In doing so, the EDI action plan aims to improve the experiences of our staff and enhance our current EDI related processes, allowing us to review our EDI progress as an organisation. Progress made against the plan to date has been detailed in this report, and further updates will be provided in our annual report for 2025-2026.



**Adam Burgess-Evans,**  
**Director of People Services**



**Victoria Rankin,**  
**Associate Director of OD and Culture**

# Introduction

**At NHS Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit (MLCSU), we specialise in providing partner support to health systems across the country including Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), NHS England, provider collaboratives, primary care providers, hospital trusts, local authorities, and other public bodies.**

As of September 2024, ML had a strong and resilient workforce of over 1650 highly skilled professionals and subject matter experts providing support to multiple NHS organisations covering one quarter of England's population.

During 2024-2025, ML entered a period of notable change. In January 2024, the NHS England (NHSE) Executive Group approved a review of Commissioning Support Units (CSUs) to ensure they continue adapting to the evolving NHS landscape and meet the needs of the changing health and care environment. The CSU Strategic Review, which has been developed by NHSE and the four CSUs in England, aims to enable a transition towards a resigned CSU operating model and formally started in March 2024.

As part of the CSU Strategic Review, Michael van Hemert was appointed as the single Managing Director to lead the four CSUs in May 2024. Work is now underway to develop a revised operating model that emphasises collaboration and building scale across the organisations. There will also be a new executive leadership structure that is currently in the process of being established.

The CSU Strategic review involves multiple phases, and a series of task and finish groups and internal workstreams have been established to review capabilities and offers and make recommendations to NHSE for consideration. This means that there will be a single overarching business plan for 2025/2026 which incorporates individuals plans for each CSU.

In addition, but separate to the CSU Strategic Review, ML started several Management of Change programmes in March 2025 to amend its operating model and staffing structures to address the financial challenges of 2025-2026. The programmes have been approved by NHS England and affect nine teams across the organisation.

March 2025 also saw the announcement made about the coming together of NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care which will affect all partners across the NHS as we move into 2026 and beyond.

This report sets out our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work for the financial year of 2024-2025. It outlines our evidence for complying with our legal and mandated equality duties such as the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) 2011. It also highlights the progress we have made in implementing EDI initiatives and establishing a centralised EDI plan for 2025-2026 during what has been a period of significant change for both our ML workforce and the wider NHS.



# Our Equality Duties

As a public body and NHS organisation, ML has a range of legal and mandated reporting duties relating to equality. These duties, and the steps we take as an organisation to demonstrate our commitment to them, have been outlined below.

## Legal Duties

All public bodies have a legal duty to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) within it.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires decision makers to show 'due regard' to its three general aims:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.



The three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) need to be considered when making decisions and devising policies. This includes planning and decision-making processes.

Under the PSED, public organisations such as ML are required to understand and consider the potential impact of its activities on people with protected characteristics. Where these are not immediately apparent, it may be necessary to carry out some form of assessment or analysis to understand them.

## Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

At ML, we have established several processes to ensure that we, alongside our partners, consider equality and human rights within decision making processes and day-to-day work. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are a primary tool for demonstrating how we and our partners have demonstrated 'due regard' and met our legal equality and human rights duties.

EIAs can be carried out for the following:

- Changes in service – commissioning or decommissioning.
- Policy development or policy review.
- Strategy development or strategy review.
- Change in work practices, policies, and procedures.

The list below provides a snapshot of some of the EIAs conducted by ML for 2024-2025:

- Appraisal Form
- Environmental and Sustainability Policy



- DHSC Smart for Life
- Health and Safety Policy
- Health and Safety Handbook
- Nugget Review
- Joint Pharmaceutical
- Everyday Excellence
- ML Building Bennett House

More information about how ML meets its legal equality duties is available on our website <https://www.midlandsandlancashirecsu.nhs.uk/statutory-notice/equality-and-inclusion/>

## NHS England Mandated Reporting

### The Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)

The WDES is an improvement tool that allows organisations to measure the experiences and opportunities of staff with disabilities in the workplace. At present, this standard is mandated for NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts and includes requirements to collect and publish workforce and workforce training data.

ML is not currently required to submit WDES data, although this may change in the future. ML conducted the WDES in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Our WDES findings for 2024/2025 are published on page 17 of this report.



### The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)

The WRES is an improvement tool that allows organisations to measure the experiences and opportunities of staff from ethnically diverse groups. At present, this standard is a requirement for NHS commissioners and NHS healthcare providers including independent organisations. This includes:

- Requirements to collect and publish workforce and workforce training data (see section on workforce data).
- The need for ML to publish an annual WRES report on our website. Our WRES findings for 2024-2025 are published on page 19 of this report.

### The Accessible Information Standard (AIS)

The AIS places a duty on NHS organisations to meet the communication needs of patients. This includes:

- Requirements to collect information about patient communication needs and produce information in accessible formats such as Easy Read, large print or braille.



# Our Workforce

Workforce diversity monitoring is an important means of demonstrating, implementing, and promoting equality of opportunity. It provides a demographic picture of diversity within organisations and can help to identify barriers that prevent access to employment and career development for certain groups of people, and to develop solutions such as positive action plans or alternative policies and practices. It also promotes visibility of equality groups, and this can make people feel more comfortable in the workplace.

NHS organisations routinely ask their employees to provide demographic information when they join or undertake staff engagement and learning activities. In January 2019, ML started to use Electronic Staff Records System (ESR). This system allows for diversity monitoring information to be updated at any time by an individual member of staff.

Please note that for the purposes of workforce profiling, the data used is from the latest available period which is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024. This reporting period differs from the workforce data collected as part of the Gender Pay Gap, Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) and Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) which is the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2024.

As of September 2024, ML has a strong and resilient workforce of over 1650 highly skilled professionals and subject matter experts, many of them leaders in their field.

As an organisation, we monitor our workforce against the following protected characteristic groups:



Age



Disability



Gender  
Reassignment



Marriage  
and Civil  
Partnership



Pregnancy and  
Maternity



Race



Religion and  
Belief



Sex



Sexual  
Orientation

## Workforce profiles

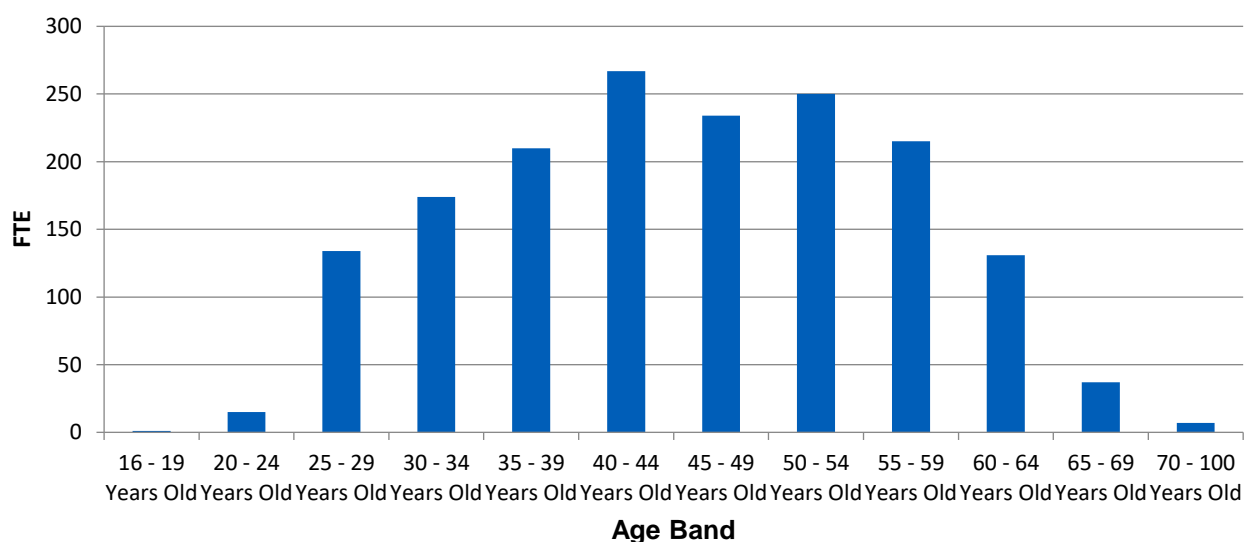
The following charts show a breakdown of our workforce by protected characteristics. Data as of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2024 on Age, Disability, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity, Religion or Belief, Marriage and Civil Partnership, and full and part-time employees is provided.

Pregnancy and Maternity and Gender Reassignment have been omitted due to some numbers being small (less than 10) to ensure individual staff cannot be identified from the data, in line with the UK Data Protection Law.



## Age

**ML Workforce by Age Band**

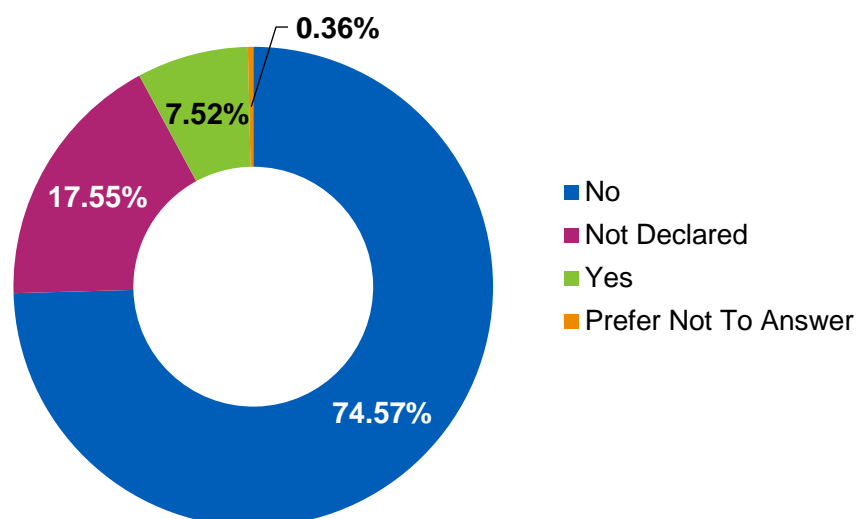


### Analysis:

- The largest proportion of ML staff are aged at 40-44 (15.9%), closely followed by staff aged 50-54 (14.9%) and 45-49 (14%).
- There are lower rates of staff aged 25-29 at 8% and those aged 60-64 at (7.8%).
- There are notably lower rates of staff aged 16-19 (0%), 20-24 (0.9%) and 70-100 (0.4%).

## Disability

**ML Workforce by Disability Status**



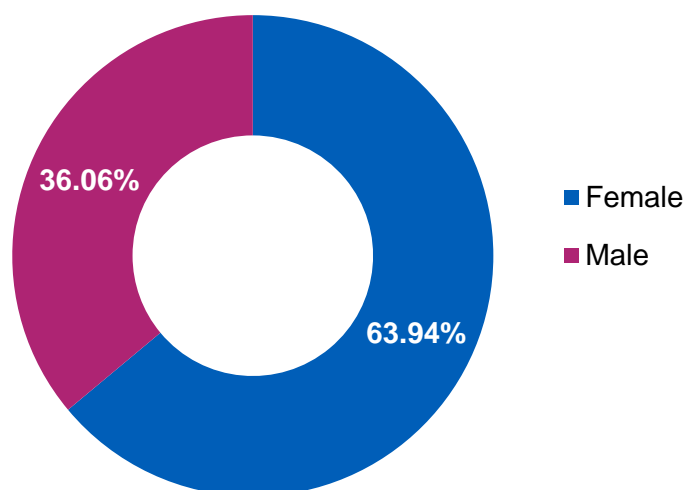
### Analysis:

- 7.52% of our workforce have declared that they have a disability. This is an increase of 1.62% from 2023 data. However, this percentage is likely to be higher as staff who have a disability may have chosen not to declare.

- 17.55% of ML staff have not declared whether they have a disability – this figure is notably high and indicates that the percentage of staff with a disability is likely to be higher than 7.52%. There is a very small percentage of staff who have preferred not to answer (0.36%).

## Sex (Gender)

**ML Workforce by Sex (Gender)**

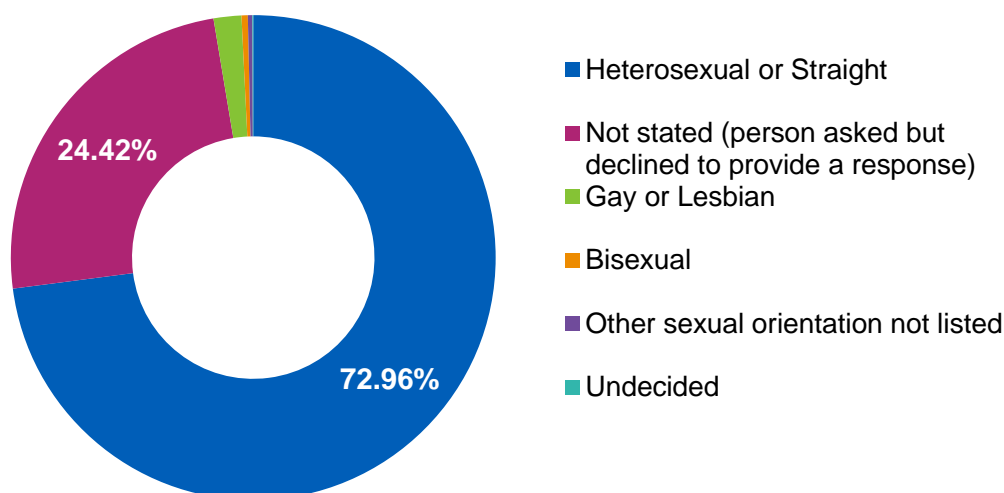


### Analysis:

- Most ML staff are female at 63.9%.
- Our male workforce accounts for 36.1% of our total workforce.

## Sexual Orientation

**ML Workforce by Sexual Orientation**

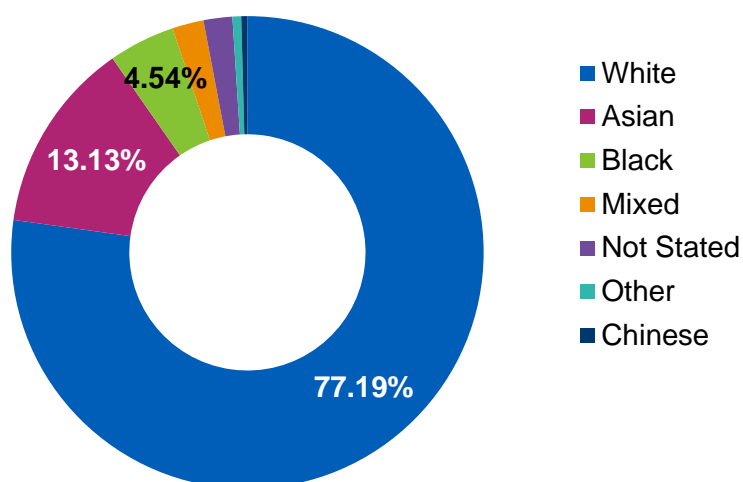


### Analysis:

- 73% of ML staff have declared that they are heterosexual or straight.
- 24.4% of staff chose not to declare their sexual orientation.
- Under 2.6% of staff declared they were gay or lesbian, bisexual or were another sexual orientation not listed. This is a decrease of 2.4% from the previous year's data.

## Ethnicity

ML Workforce by Ethnicity

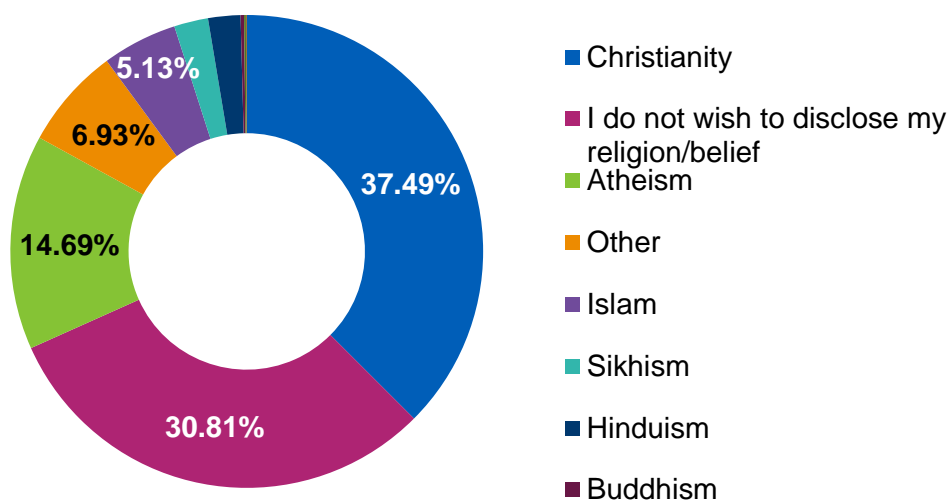


### Analysis:

- 77.2% of our workforce identify as White and 13.1% identify as Asian.
- Under 5% of staff identify as being from other ethnic groups including Black, Mixed, Chinese, other and not stated.

## Religion and Belief

ML Workforce by Religious Belief

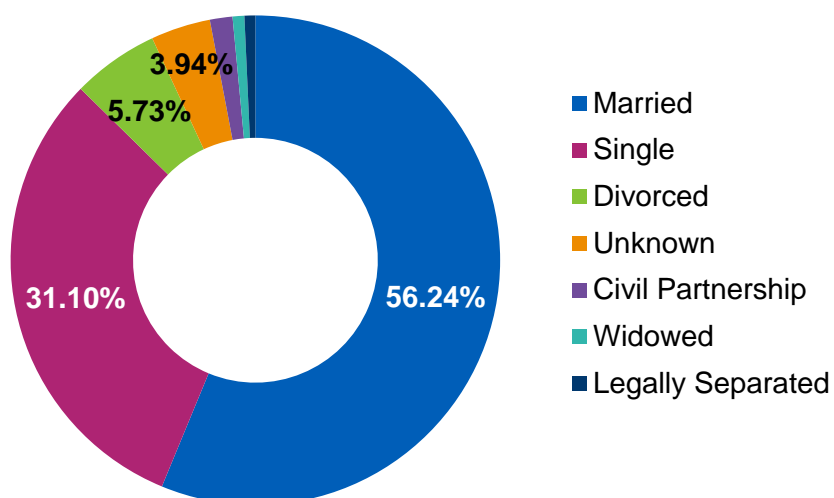


### Analysis:

- Over a third of our workforce are Christian at 37.5%.
- 30.8% of our staff have chosen not to disclose their religion or belief.
- 14.7% of our workforce identify as Atheist and 6.9% identify with another religion or belief.
- There are under 5.1% of staff from all other religions and beliefs including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Undefined, Jainism and Judaism.

## Marital Status

ML Workforce by Marital Status

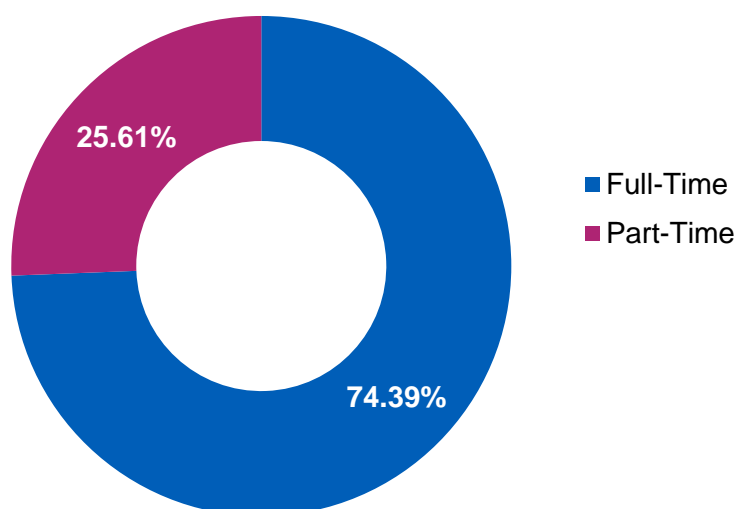


### Analysis:

- Our workforce data shows that 56.2% of our workforce are married.
- 31.1% of our workforce are single and 5.7% are divorced.
- Under 5% of staff are in a civil partnership, legally separated, widowed or have an unknown status.

## Participation

ML Workforce by Participation



### Analysis:

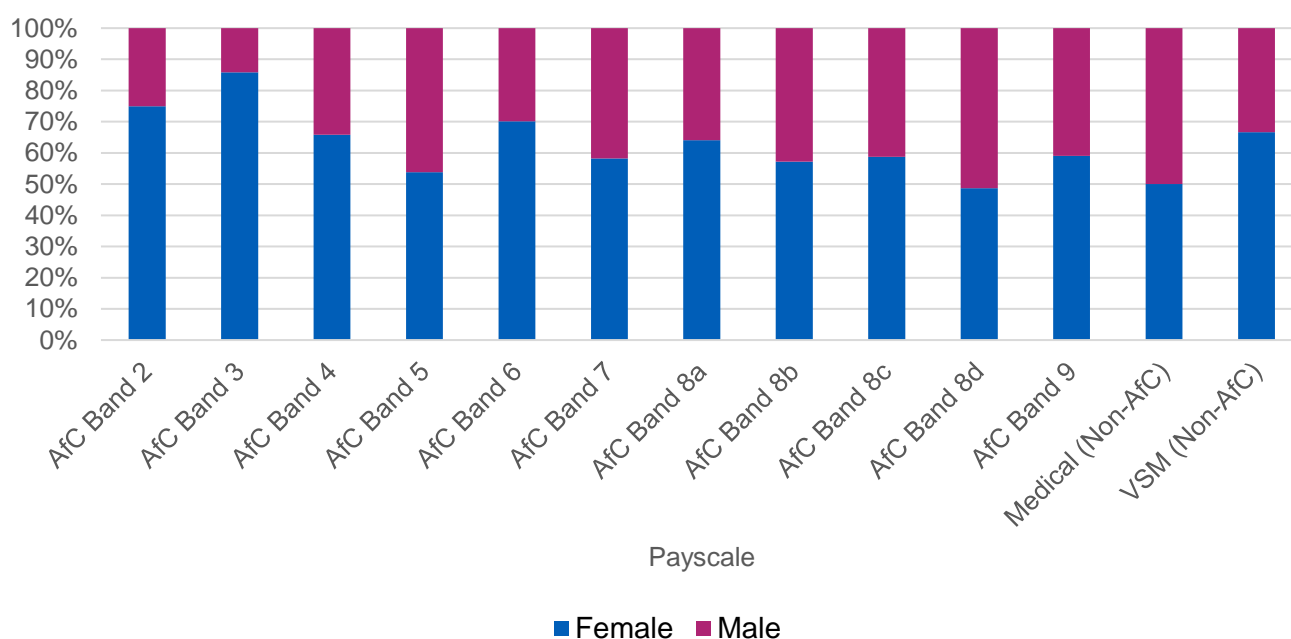
- At ML, most of our workforce work fulltime at 74.4%. A total of 25.6% work part time.
- All staff can request a flexible working arrangement that both enhances their work life balance and fits with the needs of our service delivery.
- We also have a working arrangement called the 9-day fortnight which allows staff to request working their full-time hours of 37.5 hour over 9 days.

# Gender Pay Gap

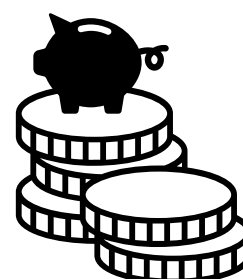
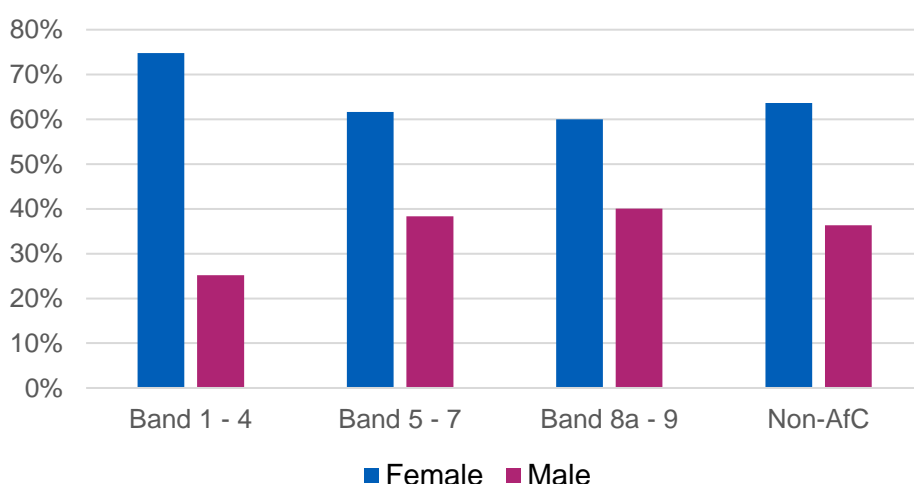
Organisations with 250 or more employees are mandated by the government to report annually on their gender pay gap. The requirements of the mandate within the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, are to publish information relating to pay.

Please note that for Gender Pay Gap reporting, workforce data collected and used for analysis is from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. As of the 31 March 2024, **1750**, people were employed by ML, comprising of **64%** women and **36%** men.

**ML Payscale By Sex (Gender)**



**ML Payscale by Sex (Gender)**



## Analysis:

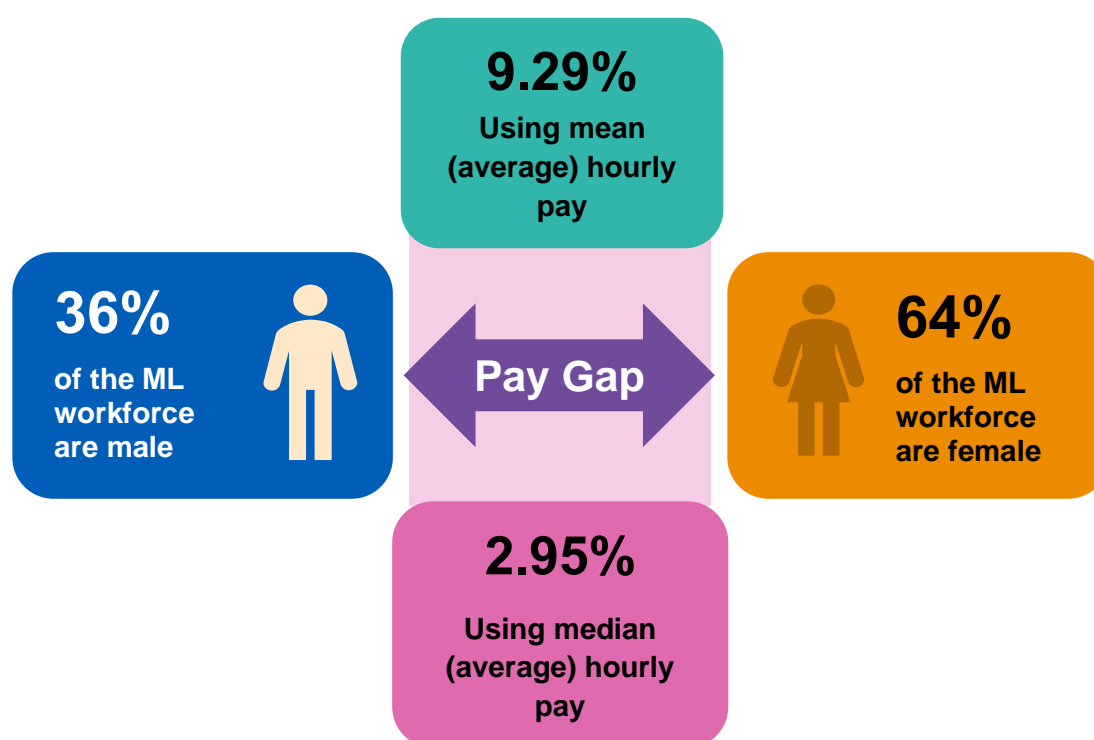
- Organisational data for this year's gender pay gap report shows that there has been a significant decrease in the overall number of employees working for ML.

- We have seen a standstill in the proportion of female employees working in the most senior roles in our organisation, and this has supported an overall decrease in our gender pay gap.
- The impact of organisational change is likely to continue, this poses a challenge in both our understanding of our organisation's gender pay gap over time, and in the actions that we can address it during a period of change.

## Salary Pay Gap

Across the organisation, as of 31 March 2024, the mean gender pay gap was 9.29%. Male employees were being paid an average of £2.25 more per hour than female employees.

The median gender pay gap (which demonstrates the difference between the midpoints in the ranges of hourly earnings) was 2.95% meaning that male employees were paid £0.64 more per hour than female employees.



Pay gap data for 2024 shows that there is a gender pay gap within MLCSU. However, it is important to note that while there is a gender pay gap within our organisation, this is not the same as saying female and male employees are being paid differently for doing the same job (which would be an equal pay issue).

The pay gap for both the average hourly rate and the median hourly rate has decreased compared to data for 2023 (see table 1 and 2 above for comparison) with a decrease of 3.15% for the average (mean) rate and a decrease of 6.5% for the hourly (median) rate.

## What are we doing to close the pay gap?

ML is committed to addressing the gender pay gap and is undertaking a range of actions to reduce the gap and ensure an equal and inclusive workplace. These actions include:

- To continue to invest in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

- To work in collaboration with a range of Commissioning Support Unit functions to make the improvements we are seeking to achieve
- To work with our EDI Board Advisor, appointed in 2023, to ensure MLCSU is an Attractive, Caring and Equitable organisation, where everyone achieves their potential and is supported to thrive
- To provide our workforce with greater flexibility to carry out their role including offering a range of flexible working options
- To have transparency in promotion, pay and reward processes
- To drive a culture that creates a sense of belonging
- To respond to staff surveys results with action and seek to make improvements
- To support the continuing development and growth of our local Staff Networks including the Disability Network, Ethnic Diversity Network, LGBTQ+ Network, Health and Wellbeing Network and Mental Health Network
- To launch a Women's Staff Network in 2025.





# Workforce Reporting

As an organisation, we conduct workforce reporting to identify and address any disparities in the experiences of, and outcomes for our staff and set out action plans to mitigate where disparities exist. This includes Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) and Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) reporting.

Please note that for Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) and Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) reporting, workforce data collected and used for analysis is from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. As of March 2024, ML was an organisation of 1750 people compared to 2051 people in March 2023 – please note that this could impact on WDES and WRES reporting when comparisons are made between 2023 and 2024 data.

## The Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)

The Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) is a set of ten specific measures which allows NHS organisations to compare the experiences, opportunities, and representation of disabled and non-disabled staff in the workplace. Year-on-year comparison of WDES data enables NHS organisations to demonstrate progress against the indicators of disability equality.

Although ML is not required to implement the WDES, we have analysed WDES data and reported on our findings since 2022. Our WDES data for 2024 highlighted several improvements across our organisation in relation to the representation of staff with disabilities and the experiences of staff with disabilities.

### Workforce Representation

80.84% of employees declared their disability status on ESR - this is a **decrease** of 1.56% compared to 2023

6.17% of ML employees declared a disability on ESR - this is an **increase** of 1.19%

3.95% of colleagues at senior levels in ML declared a disability

### Recruitment

Disabled candidates were slightly **more likely** to be appointed from shortlisting compared to non-disabled candidates

### Workforce Experiences

Disabled employees were **more likely** to experience harassment, bullying or abuse from members of the public, from managers, and from other colleagues compared to non-disabled employees

**Fewer** disabled employees reported that they felt ML provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion compared to non-disabled colleagues

78.93% of disabled colleagues said that ML has made reasonable adjustments to support them to carry out their work - this is a slight **increase** of 1% compared to 2023

19.67% of disabled staff reported that they have felt pressure from their managers to come to work despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties - this is a 10% **increase** compared to 2023

Engagement took place in August 2024 with ML Disability Staff Network and ML Staff Side to discuss WRES findings. The WDES action plan will link in with the overarching EDI Action Plan for 2024/2025.

ML's WDES action plan has been developed in collaboration with ML's Disability Network and ML Staff Side colleagues. Colleagues shared feedback and ideas for work that the organisation should carry out over the following year to consolidate and improve upon this year's WDES data findings, and the following recommended actions were co-produced:

WDES Action Number	Action
1	ML to continue to promote self-reporting disability status and other protected characteristic information via the NHS Electronic Staff Record system
2	ML to work with the Disability Network, and Staff Side to evaluate current EDI-related training (including mandatory training) and guidance for managers and assess the wider impact that EDI training has in fostering inclusive culture across the organisation
3	ML to work with the Disability Network on plain language, comprehensive guidance to support staff in relation to making reasonable adjustments when participating in the recruitment process
4	ML to carry out engagement with disabled staff regarding staff survey results relating to the increase in disabled staff reporting that they have felt pressure from their managers to come to work despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties. Engagement will support ML to understand concerns in more detail and develop meaningful actions where necessary
5	Foster a culture where EDI is everybody's responsibility: incorporate EDI objectives into appraisal process, and, to link in with the aims of NHS England's EDI Improvement Plan, implement measurable EDI-related objectives for Board members and senior staff
6	Formulate a comprehensive communications and engagement calendar to support diverse staff at all levels of the organisation to feel seen and heard via publication of blogs, awareness articles, and other communications that celebrate diversity

### Progress made against the WDES Action Plan

Since August 2024, the following progress has been made against the ML WDES Action Plan:

- We continue to encourage staff to disclose their protected characteristic information via the NHS Electronic Staff Record system.
- We have raised the importance and benefits of declaring disability status during EDI Awareness Training delivered between September 2024 – January 2025
- We conducted engagement with our Disability Staff Network in September 2024 to understand their training needs and to develop an EDI Awareness Training package.
- We worked with our Disability Staff Network to develop our reasonable adjustments/wellbeing passport.

- We conducted engagement with our Disability Network in September 2024 on the Workforce Disability Equality Standards (WDES) data insights to develop an action plan that addresses disparities in outcome or experience for our ethnically diverse staff.
- We share EDI awareness days relating to disability as part of our monthly EDI briefings shared across the CSU via Nugget.

It is recognised that some of our WDES action plan deadlines may be moved due to the ongoing CSU Strategic Review and Management of Change programmes that are affecting our people.

## The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)

The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) is a mandated requirement for NHS organisations as set out within the NHS standard contract. The WRES has been developed as a tool for organisations to measure progress against several indicators relating to the experiences, opportunities, and representation of ethnically diverse staff. As part of this, we are required to collect, analyse, and report on our workforce ethnicity data, producing an action plan to address any disparities identified.

Our WRES data for 2024 indicated notable improvements across our organisation in relation to the representation of ethnically diverse staff at board and executive level, and the experiences of our ethnic minority staff. The main highlights are:

### Workforce representation

97.85% of employees self-declared their ethnicity on ESR - this is a slight decrease of 0.5% compared to 2023

20.40% of the ML workforce is ethnically diverse - this is an increase of 1.2% from 2023

6.67% of colleagues at VSM level are ethnically diverse

### Recruitment

White candidates were **more likely** to be appointed from shortlisting compared to ethnically diverse candidates

### Workforce experiences

Ethnically diverse employees were **more likely** to experience harassment, bullying or abuse from members of the public and from other colleagues compared to white employees

Ethnically diverse staff **were more likely** to experience discrimination at work compared to white staff

There has been a **3% increase** across ethnically diverse staff compared to 2023, and a **1% increase** across white staff



## WRES Action Plan and next steps

Engagement took place in August 2024 with ML Ethnic Diversity Network and ML Staff Side to discuss WRES findings. The WRES action plan will link in with the overarching EDI Action Plan for 2024/2025.

ML's WRES action plan has been developed in collaboration with ML's Ethnic Diversity Network and ML Staff Side colleagues. Colleagues shared feedback and ideas for work that the organisation should carry out over the following year to consolidate and improve upon this year's WRES data findings, and the following co-produced actions are recommended:

WRES Action Number	Action
1	ML to promote self-reporting of ethnicity and other protected characteristic information via the NHS Electronic Staff Record system
2	ML to work with the Ethnicity Network, and Staff Side to evaluate current EDI-related training and guidance for managers and assess the wider impact that EDI training has in fostering inclusive culture across the organisation
3	ML to share information with staff regarding its inclusive recruitment processes and procedures (for example, information regarding reasonable adjustments before job interviews and support available when writing job applications and CVs)
4	ML to support staff in skills development and career progression by embedding robust, measurable development plans into ML's appraisal process
5	ML to carry out engagement with ethnically diverse staff regarding NHS Staff Survey results relating to experiences of bullying, harassment, abuse, discrimination to understand more about lived experiences
6	ML to carry out engagement with ethnically diverse staff regarding NHS Staff Survey results relating the provision of equal opportunities for career progression or promotion. Engagement will support ML to understand concerns in more detail and develop meaningful actions where necessary
7	To foster a culture where EDI is everybody's responsibility, ML to incorporate EDI objectives into 121 and appraisal processes, and implement measurable EDI-related objectives for Board members and senior staff
8	ML to establish a centralised data collection process for employees applying for and completing non-mandatory training and CPD. Data collection should include capture of ethnicity to allow for future WRES reporting and analysis

## Progress made against the WDES Action Plan

Since August 2024, the following progress has been made against the ML WRES Action Plan:

- We continue to encourage staff to disclose their protected characteristic information via the NHS Electronic Staff Record system.
- We have raised the importance and benefits of declaring protected characteristic information including ethnicity during EDI Awareness Training delivered between September 2024 – January 2025.

- We conducted engagement with our Ethnic Diversity Staff Network in September 2024 to understand their training needs and to develop an EDI Awareness Training package.
- We conducted engagement with our Ethnic Diversity Network in September 2024 on the Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) data insights to develop an action plan that addresses disparities in outcome or experience for our ethnically diverse staff.
- We share EDI awareness days relating to ethnicity as part of our monthly EDI briefings shared across the CSU via Nugget.

It is recognised that some of our WRES action plan deadlines may be moved due to the ongoing CSU Strategic Review and Management of Change programmes that are affecting our people.



# Staff Experience

ML currently participates in the annual NHS staff survey, which is closely aligned to the NHS People Promise, and our quarterly People Pulse Survey. The NHS staff survey is commissioned by NHS England and is administered by the Survey Coordination Centre. It runs during the autumn (quarter three) with results available in the following spring (quarter four).

All participating organisations in the NHS staff survey use an independent approved supplier. We commissioned Quality Health to administer our survey and provide results data to the Survey Co-ordination Centre on our behalf, to ensure the process delivered full anonymity and transparency. An overview of our NHS Staff Survey result is presented below.

## NHS Staff Survey Results

ML currently participates in the annual NHS staff survey, which is closely aligned to the NHS People Promise, and our quarterly People Pulse Survey. The NHS staff survey is commissioned by NHS England and is administered by the Survey Coordination Centre.

All participating organisations in the NHS staff survey use an independent approved supplier. We commissioned Quality Health to administer our survey and provide results data to the Survey Co-ordination Centre on our behalf, to ensure the process delivered full anonymity and transparency.

The results of the NHS Staff Survey 2024 have now been published nationally. This year, we are pleased to share that we have made some improvements in 7 of the 9 domains. An overview of our NHS Staff Survey results for 2024 is presented below.

**69%** (1071) employees took part in the 2024 survey. This is a 5.6% increase from 2023. However, in 2024 we had fewer ML employees.

**59%** of staff said that ML acts fairly with regard to career progression / promotion, regardless of ethnic background, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or age, compared to 60% in 2023.

**4.2%** of staff said that in the last 12 months they had personally experienced discrimination at work from manager / team leader or other colleagues, compared to 5.5% last year.

**78%** of staff said that think that ML respects individual differences (e.g., cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas, etc) – this is the same as last year.

**85%** of staff said that their immediate manager values their work, compared to 80% last year.

**66%** of staff said that they felt safe to speak up about anything that concerns them at ML, compared to 68% last year.

**70%** of staff said that ML takes a positive action on health and well-being, this is the same as last year.

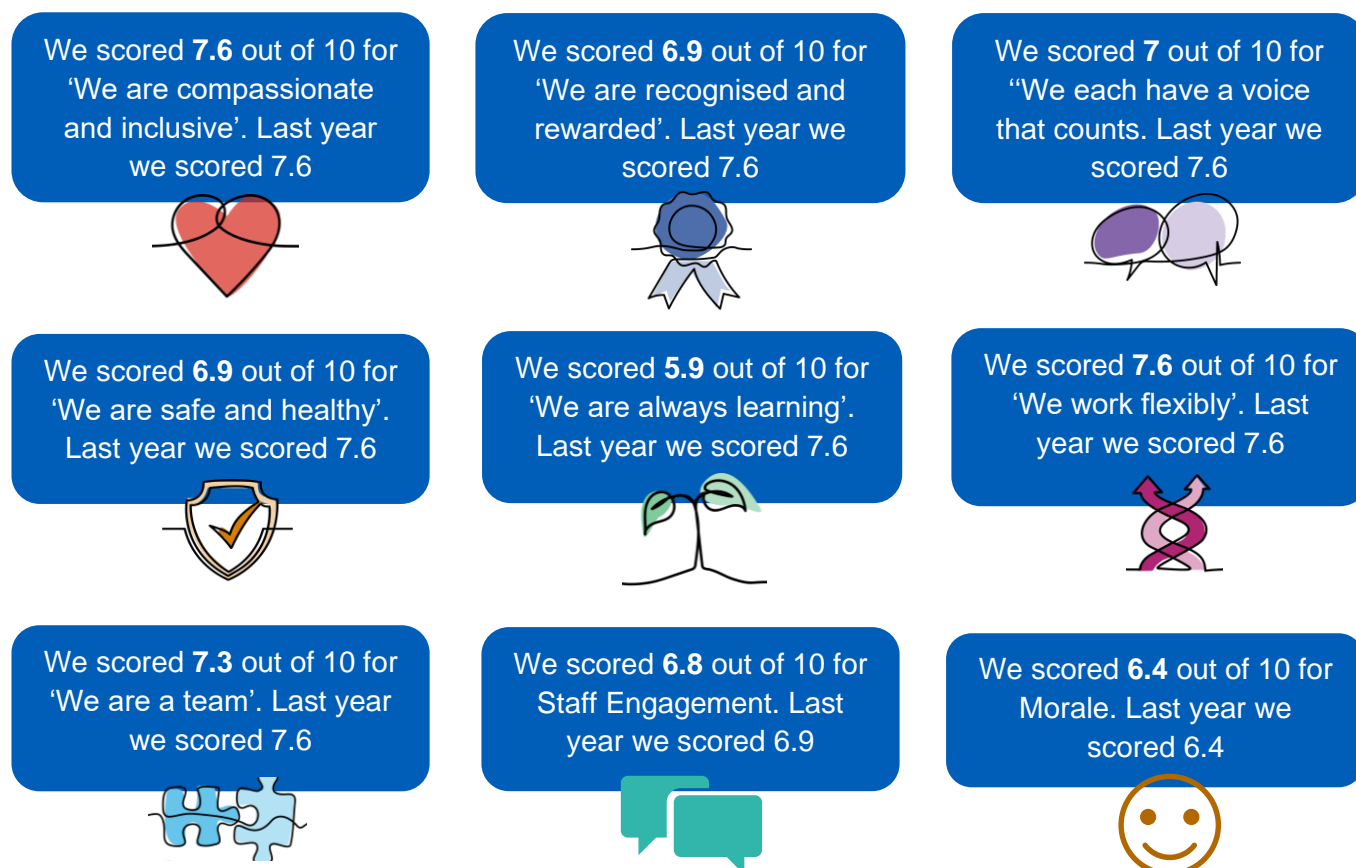
**49%** of staff said that in the last three months they came to work despite not feeling well enough to perform your duties, compared to 51% last year.

**6.3%** of staff said that they had experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work from colleagues, compared to 8.5% last year.





## The People Promise



## Next steps

Last year, we identified three priority areas for everyone in ML to work towards. In addition to these, teams reviewed their results and identified two additional local priorities. A similar approach will be taken this year. However, recognising that the four CSUs are working together much more collaboratively, a CSU 'group' priority will be identified. The priorities for 2025-2026 will be shared later this year, along with local-level results.

As part of the Staff Survey feedback, we will be running sessions for staff to agree the priority areas to help us to maintain our people focus. ML is therefore asking Directors and Heads of Service across our services to:

- Review local survey results and identify key priorities
- Develop action plans tailored to what teams have said matters most
- Engage with teams over the coming weeks—sharing results and involving you in shaping the actions we take.

## ML People Pulse Survey

Listening and responding to our ML people is as important as ever. The ML People Pulse survey is a quarterly survey which allows staff to feedback on their allows, allowing the organisation to explore various aspects of employee experience and culture.

The aim of the quarterly pulse survey is to provide a consistent and standardised approach to listening to our ML people. The survey will run in quarter one, two and four, with the National Staff Survey running in quarter three.



The survey is anonymous and will provide valuable insight to support ML with creating a culture where everyone achieves their potential in an organisation which is Attractive, Caring and Equitable (ACE).

The Pulse Survey, along with the Annual NHS Staff Survey also feeds into our organisation development plan. This year, ML ran the Pulse Survey in quarter two and quarter four. The survey doesn't take place in quarter three as this is when the NHS Staff Survey is launched.

### Quarter Two: September 2024

In Q2, we received 261 responses to the Pulse Survey. There were lots of positive comments, with people sharing that they enjoy being part of ML and are happy at work, they feel supported and have a good work-life balance. Some comments which weren't as pleasing to read, such as people feeling worried and anxious about the future of ML, that there was a lack of consistency from line managers and that as ML continues to evolve, people didn't feel they had the tools to move into more of a consultancy space.

Actions taken following the Pulse Survey results:

- Updating of the Organisational Development (OD) plan for the remainder of 2024/25 to focus on addressing the right issues and ensure work on the plan continues to support our ML culture and all our people having a great experience at work
- Sharing of regular communications on the CSU Strategic Review via internal staff communications and Nugget
- Reminders about the list of resources available to staff on Nugget about navigating change.
- Raising awareness of ML's trained Mental Health First Aiders who can be contacted for support
- Organisation and delivery of the Health and Wellbeing festival which ran from 30th September until Friday 4th October 2024 and included a schedule of sessions to support staff to prioritise wellbeing
- Encouragement to complete NHS Staff Survey from 1<sup>st</sup> October onwards
- Development of 'our leadership way' in underway which will outline the approach our leaders at ML should develop and embed into everyday working life
- Organisation and delivery of the Leadership and Culture festival from November-December 2024 covering topics such as leading through uncertainty, leadership and change management, compassionate leadership and fostering a culture of inclusion.



# Supporting our workforce

As part of our ongoing commitment to creating supportive and inclusive environments for our workforce, ML has a range of policies, initiatives and offers in place.

## Our working environment

We provide a work environment that promotes inclusion and meets the needs of our workforce across our geographical locations, recognising that most of our staff work remotely. Here are some examples of the support we offer to our staff as part of their working environment:

- Policies including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Freedom to Speak Up, Safeguarding Policy, Career Break, Flexible Working and Training and Development, Dignity at Work
- Range of health and wellbeing support including the Employee Assistance Programme and Mental Health First Aiders
- Freedom to Speak Up Champions
- Staff Side Union representatives
- Access to training and development opportunities
- Wellbeing passport and reasonable adjustments
- Benefit and discount schemes.
- Flexible working arrangements.
- Staff Networks



Detailed information on the range of support available for staff can be found on Nugget. Further information about our staff networks is provided on page 30 of this report.

## Health and Wellbeing

At ML, our approach to health and wellbeing focusses on both prevention and self-management, providing access to the right health interventions by:

- creating a healthy and supportive environment
- upskilling our employees and managers
- providing quick and easy access to resources and services

This year, we have continued to provide a range of health and well-being support and initiatives for our staff to enable them to thrive at work. This includes financial, physical, and mental wellbeing support:

### Financial wellbeing

- Free financial wellbeing sessions in partnership with HSBC, covering a variety of different topics including budgeting, checking your credit score and pension essentials.
- Discounts at high street and online retailers including Blue Light Card.
- Salary sacrifice schemes including childcare vouchers, cycle to work and NHS Fleet Solutions.
- Access to our Employee Assistance Programme, Care First, who offer a variety of support and advice relating to debt, households and money, child benefit changes, and the importance of a will.
- We have partnered with Salary Finance, a financial wellbeing provider that provides products, tools, and support to help people become financially happier and healthier by helping them pay less for debt, build savings and learn more about how to manage their finances.

- A range of information and resources on debt, travel costs, financial stress, and everyday savings on Nugget.

### Physical wellbeing

- We have dedicated Health and Wellbeing Champions that raise awareness of the resources available to support staff and promote the importance of maintaining health and wellbeing.
- Health Bites page on Nugget which includes useful hints, tips and recipes for healthy eating.
- Fitness videos and blogs – including Fit in 5 blogs and #DoingOurBit.
- Targeted support programmes including Digital Weight Management and Healthier You – NHS Diabetes Prevention.
- Resources and support on Cancer, Menopause and Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions and stopping smoking available on Nugget.

### Mental wellbeing

- We have qualified Mental Health First Aiders who provide support and signpost to relevant resources.
- Our Mental Health First Aiders are part of our Mental Health ('Let's Talk') Network that raise awareness of mental health conditions and aim to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.
- Occupational health, staff counselling and Employee Assistance Programme.
- Access to the Mental Wellbeing and Resilience policy toolkit which can be used by staff if they are experiencing stress, and by line managers to support staff experiencing stress.
- Staff mental health, wellbeing, and resilience hubs.
- Access to self-help resources and apps including Headspace and Bright Sky.
- Information and support for stress, depression, anxiety, addiction, domestic abuse, and sleep available on Nugget.

### Additional initiatives

- We run various Wellbeing Wednesday sessions covering different areas of wellbeing. These sessions are advertised in the Health and Lifestyle community channel in MS Teams on Nugget. Recordings of previous sessions can be found in the Health and Wellbeing Library.
- Coffee Club is a fortnightly social event open to all ML colleagues, allowing us to gather together virtually for a social catch up. Coffee Club has its own channel within the ML Community pages on MS Teams for anyone to join.
- We provide opportunities for staff to get involved with volunteering, which can be beneficial for both physical and mental health.

### ML Health and Wellbeing Festival 2024/25

This year, ML's OD team organised a Health & Wellbeing Festival which ran from Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September until Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The festival was put on in direct response to staff feedback given in the 2023 NHS Staff Survey.

Each day of the festival started with an opening speech and opportunity to meet with ML's Deputy Managing Director, Janet Budd, or one of the ML Board directors. This was followed by



sessions, talks and workshops spanning a range of varied wellbeing topics with a focus on mental and emotional wellness, resilience, self-care and agile working.

The week saw over 700 attendees across the five days, and provided our people with inspiration, motivation and practical tips and skills to support their health and wellbeing moving forward.

## Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU)

Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) was first introduced in 2015 following the review of Mid Staffordshire Hospital by Sir Robert Francis QC. His [report](#) concluded that much of the scandal within that organisation was due to staff being fearful of speaking up and those that did were not listened to and discouraged from speaking up about the poor care patients received during that time.

ML actively encourages staff to speak up about any concerns or feedback they may have. We have a dedicated Freedom to Speak up Guardian and Freedom to Speak up champions who are available to support colleagues to speak up when they feel they are unable to do so by other routes.

ML's FTSU champions raise awareness of the FTSU agenda across the organisation by being visible and accessible to staff. They are available to actively listen and discuss any issue that staff have in a non-judgemental and supportive manner, signposting and providing support on the speaking up policy and process, including escalation routes and useful contacts. In some cases, our champions may encourage staff to directly contact the FTSU Guardian.

Staff can contact our FTSU Guardians and Champions to raise a concern about anything. This may relate to the following:

- Patient safety
- Practice and process
- Welfare
- Information and security
- Making suggestions, such as improvements to the working environment

## Trade Unions

A trade union (TU) is an organisation that represents people at work. Its main aims are to protect and advance the interest of its members in the workplace. CSUs have a partnership working agreement with recognised trade unions, and at ML we work very closely to ensure that we make any necessary changes in the right way according to all statutory and local requirements/agreements.

Staff Side is the collective group of trade union representatives at ML.

## Learning and development opportunities

ML is passionate about supporting and developing our people and we recognise that learning doesn't just come from attending training courses. In fact, 70% of how we learn tends to come from on the job, 20% from coaching and mentoring – formally or informally, and 10% from training courses. This is commonly known as the 70:20:10 approach to learning.

Throughout 2024-25, we have provided a variety of learning and development opportunities for our people. These have included:



## Mandated Equality Training (ESR)

All ML staff are required to complete mandated Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights training. The training is available through the Staff Portal and monitored on the Electronic Staff Records (ESR).

This year, our compliance rate for mandatory Equality, Diversity and Human Rights training was **97.33%**.

## EDI Awareness Training

During 2024-2025, ML provided EDI Awareness Training sessions for ML staff, held virtually on MS Teams. The training was developed by the Inclusion Team from ML in October 2024 and was informed by engagement sessions conducted with ML Disability Staff Network, Ethnic Diversity Staff Network and Health and Wellbeing Staff Network in September 2024.

EDI Awareness training was delivered from October 2024 until February 2025 and aimed to increase awareness of the needs and experiences of diverse groups including those living with invisible disabilities. It also aimed to give participants a general understanding of unconscious bias, exploring the impact of bias and assumption making, as well as how we can tackle biases to create inclusive environments. Some of the key themes covered as part of this training included:

- Inclusive Decision Making
- Unconscious Bias
- Invisible/Hidden Disabilities
- Case studies

In total, five EDI Awareness sessions were delivered to a total of 55 ML staff. Some of the feedback received as part of the training has been outlined below:

“

Brilliantly delivered, highly informative and engaging. Best EDI training I have attended. Everyone in ML needs to attend this training to support our organisation to be truly inclusive.

Jess and Rachel were really great facilitators - with a session this long and on what can be a sensitive topic, they were fantastic in keeping us all engaged and really stressing the importance of the topic.

”

Additional EDI Awareness Training sessions are due to be scheduled for 2025-2026.

## Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Training

ML also provided EIA Training sessions for staff, held virtually on MS Teams during 2024-2025. The training was developed by the Inclusion Team from ML in October 2024 and was informed by engagement sessions conducted with ML Disability Staff Network, Ethnic Diversity Staff Network and Health and Wellbeing Staff Network in September 2024.

EIA training was delivered from October 2024 until February 2025 and aimed to give participants an understanding of what Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are and how they can be used as tools to support inclusive decision making and ensure that the needs of diverse groups are met. The workshop





provided participants with practical guidance and advice relating to conducting EIAs including what decisions require an EIA, how to assess impact, what types of evidence to use and how to access support. Some of the key themes covered as part of the training included:

- Equality legislation
- Protected characteristic and inclusion health groups
- Types of discrimination
- EIA theory and 'how to' guide
- EIA practice and scenarios

In total, four EDI Awareness sessions were delivered to a total of 28 ML staff. Some of the feedback received as part of the training has been outlined below:

“

The content was very relevant, and it was presented clearly and very easy to understand. All of the content flowed very well, and it was a great session to refresh my learning and build more knowledge about when and how to do an EIA.

The level of information and depth and detail they covered was excellent- very informative and helpful to support all areas of the work I am involved in.

”

Additional EDI Awareness Training sessions are due to be scheduled for 2025/2026.

### Coaching and mentoring

At ML, there is a range of coaching and mentoring offers available to staff. These include access to ML's pool of trained coaches and the NHS Leadership Academy which offers coaching and mentoring opportunities by region.

We also provide development opportunities for our staff who want to become a qualified coach or mento through the Level 5 Coaching Professional Apprenticeship with your training being funded by our apprenticeship levy.

Additional coaching and mentoring resources are available on Nugget, including access to free e-learning courses with the Open University and bitesize modules on the NHS Leadership Academy Learning Hub.

### NHS Elect

Our people also have access to a range of training webinars and courses through NHS Elect membership. The membership to NHS Elect is free, and allows staff to access online courses relating to topics such as:

- Compassionate conversations
- Project management foundation
- Diagnosing the problem
- Boring to brilliant: How to run an engaging online session
- Introduction to human factors
- Getting started with your QI journey
- Building better habits
- Maximising the impact of your CV
- Confidence and assertiveness



- Building an adaptable organisation and team. A book club exploring Kotter's latest research
- Appraisals
- Career planning

To register or NHS Elect membership and to book onto a training webinar or course, staff can visit the [NHS Elect website](#).

### Leadership and Culture Festival 2024-2025

At ML we are working towards creating an ACE culture, that's a culture which is Attractive, Caring and Equitable. Our people are key to our success, so creating an environment where our people can thrive is a top priority for us.

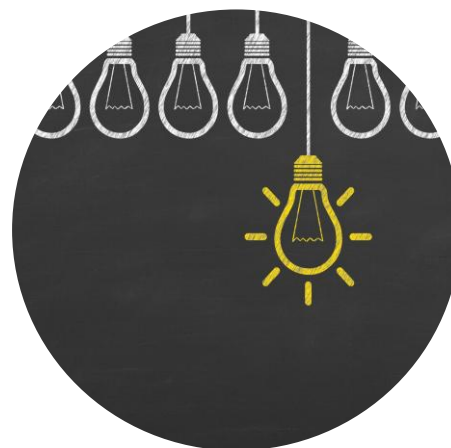
This year we hosted our second Leadership and Culture Festival which took place between 28 November - 4 December 2024. The festival included a range of virtual and in-person sessions and aimed to give our people food-for-thought to support your development of leadership and culture skills and knowledge.

Some of the topics covered as part of the festival sessions included:

- Leading in an agile environment
- Presenting with impact
- Compassionate leadership
- Creating a culture of openness and innovation
- Personal stories of change and resilience

### Staff Benefits - Employee Values Proposition

In 2025, our OD team developed the Employee Values Proposition which is available to our people on Nugget. The proposition lists the range of benefits that are in place for staff at ML including support and resources available. Each benefit is categorised under each element of the NHS People Promise.





# Our Staff Networks

Staff Networks are staff-led communities of purpose. They create a dedicated space for staff to come together to support each other, raise awareness and influence meaningful change in the workplace. A network is usually focused on underrepresented groups, or groups that may face unfair treatment in the workplace and is an important tool in promoting diversity and inclusion. The Networks also engage in celebratory and awareness-building activities that further their purpose.

Supporting our people and their wellbeing by creating a diverse and inclusive organisation, is at the heart of our commitment to developing specific Staff Networks. Following our EDI listening exercise in 2020, ML identified the need to provide supportive and inclusive spaces for our staff to come together to support each other, raise awareness, and influence meaningful change in the workplace. We currently have three networks that staff can join:

- Disability Network
- Ethnic Diversity Network
- LGBTQ+ Network
- Health and Wellbeing Network
- Mental Health Network (Let's Talk Network)



The networks also welcome allies – people who don't necessarily identify as the above but are willing to actively support another person or group to remove external barriers. Allies play a crucial role in making workplaces equitable.

## Disability Network

The network was established in June 2022 and has grown to around 40 active members. Monthly Disability Staff Network meetings are held at which agenda items are covered including promotional initiatives, events, and guest speakers. You can join the network by accessing Nugget.

The aim of the Disability Staff Network is that it is a dedicated space for staff to come together to support each other, raise awareness of matters in focus for the network and influence meaningful changes to make workplaces more inclusive.

We also engage in celebratory and awareness-building activities that further the purpose of our network. The network is inclusive and open to allies (anybody who respects, actively supports, and promotes the ethos of the network).

## What have we been working on for the last 12 months?

We have spent the past year establishing the Disability Network and have been listening carefully to members around what their challenges, concerns and priorities are. Examples of priorities network members have identified and have been pursuing include:

- Adoption of the Sunflower Scheme
- Planning events, including marking UK Disability History Month
- Inviting external guest speakers to present about disability matters
- Encouraging the organisation to make Nugget content more accessible

We hold an online meeting each third Thursday of the month on the Staff Network Teams channel. You will be added to the Teams channel, which is an open channel, to share and promote general network information and events.

You will also be added to a dedicated Disability Network closed Teams channel, which is only open to its members, to share and discuss matters specific to the network.

### Who we are



Neil Sansom,  
Chair



Gurpreet Dhatt,  
Executive Sponsor

### Ethnic Diversity Network

ML's Ethnic Diversity Network was established in 2023 and aims to promote equality and diversity across the organisation, supporting staff and their wellbeing by creating a confidential, supportive, and safe space where people can be open and inclusive, nurturing a culture of belonging and trust. The network supports ML to develop policies by creating an environment that promotes fair representation and inclusivity. The network also awareness of issues that members of the community face and identify ways of challenging discrimination, racism, and stereotyping among colleagues.

### What have we been working on for the last 12 months?

This year, the network has had numerous guest speakers, including:

- Janet Budd (the boss!)
- Usman Nawaz - Head of Inclusion and Engagement at Northwest Ambulance Service
- Nandi Simpson - Implementation Director at the NHS Race and Health Observatory
- Audrey Chindiya - Associate Director of Finance at Alder Hey Children's Hospital
- Dr Brighton Chireka - Founder, Medical Director, Executive Leadership Coach, and Transformational Healthcare Leader

A special mention goes to Karen Bonner, MBE, who joined us back in 2023, the talk Karen gave about her experiences, challenges and outlook on life was inspirational and paved the way for future speakers.

The past 12 months brought some disturbing events; the middle eastern conflict, UK riots, continued war in Ukraine and discriminatory language against ethnically diverse public figures. Topics such as the equity charter, condemnation of the riots and how the organisation responds to significant incidents that impact our colleagues, their families and friends, were all discussed. Collectively as a staff network, we responded the best way we could – in strength, unity and positivity to ensure we support those affected by these events.

We have nurtured close working relationships with the disability and the LGBTQ+ and health and wellbeing staff networks, freedom to speak and mental health first aiders and are working together on cross sectional issues and support each other's causes.

Our members have collaborated on the following:

- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Safety Policy and Process
- Unconscious Bias/Invisible Disabilities Training
- WRES Action Plan
- EDI Subgroup
- Health & Wellbeing Festival
- Leadership Forum
- Cross Working with Staff Networks (internal and external)

By bringing speakers and presentations on all the topics listed above to the ED staff network meetings we widen the cultural awareness and understanding of anybody joining our meetings and events.

An important role of the ML ED staff network is being the receiver and transmitter of our colleague's voice. We offer the opportunity for colleagues to discuss issues like the race riots in the UK or the impact of the Middle East conflict in a safe, confidential place and escalate them if necessary.

Through establishing relationships with the ED networks, sharing good practice and creating joint events, we have been able to support the coming together of all four CSUSs.

We have received feedback that, compared to the past, the sheer existence of the networks is a positive development for the organisation.

### Who we are



David Mutori,  
Co-Chair



Pritesh Patel,  
Co-Chair



Irene Schwehla,  
Vice-Chair



Ratna Taylor,  
Executive Sponsor

### LGBT+ Network

ML's LGBTQ+ Network has been running for several years within ML.

Chappell Roan could have been describing the ML LGBTQ+ Network's activities when she wrote the No. 1 hit *"Hot to Go"*. It has been a whirlwind year of engagement, with our network delivering insightful and inclusive talks and proudly representing ML at external events such as Pride.

### What have we been working on for the last 12 months?

Healthy debate and discussion have been at the heart of our planning for regular talks. Highlights included:

- **Jason O'Neil** (Riverdance lead dancer) sharing his experiences and life challenges that shaped him.
- **Phil Samba** discussing what queer men of colour need from health services.

- **Stephen Hart** detailing how a spiked drink changed his life and offering advice on preventing such incidents.
- **Dr Paul Taylor-Pitt** speaking about the ageing LGBTQ+ population, their experiences interacting with NHS services, and how these services could be improved for a more positive outcome. Dr Paul Taylor-Pitt's talk was so impactful that NHS Confed invited him to deliver it again for their teams, recognising the significance of this topic.

Collaboration with other EDI networks has also been a key focus. We engaged with and presented at NHS Confed, NHS Cumbria, and Frimley ICS, where we shared our inclusive work and coached them in supporting their developing networks. We proudly attended **London and Birmingham Pride 2024**, standing alongside fellow NHS colleagues to showcase ML as an inclusive and supportive workplace.

Additionally, we participated in **Health and Wellbeing Week**, sharing a *"Coming Out Life Story"* that highlighted the mental health impact of staying in the closet for an extended period. The support and encouragement from our members, allies, and senior management have been instrumental in our success, and we are truly grateful. Please feel free to contact us and sign up for receiving updates on our program of talks. Add in link to Nugget for staff networks. Here's to an even better 2025!

### Who we are



Garvin Taylor,  
Co-Chair



Ashley Burton,  
Co-Chair



Adam Burgess-Evans,  
Executive Sponsor

### Health and Wellbeing Network

The Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Staff Network was established in August 2024 because of the ML 2024-2025 corporate priorities which identified a need to improve staff wellbeing and provide an additional focus on mental health. This was corporate priority was agreed in response to the analysis of NHS and local staff surveys, absence data and staff engagement sessions.

The HWB Network is a group of dedicated Health and Wellbeing Champions and Mental Health First Aiders, and we aim to support staff engagement, drive forward planning and progress, and ensure ML colleagues views are heard. The network has the following mission statement:

*"We are committed to improving health and wellbeing at work, to enable our people to thrive within an inclusive, compassionate and supportive environment, fostering wellness and a sense of belonging".*

Our goal as a network is to make sure ML employees feel well-informed and supported regarding their health and wellbeing, with easy access to the right resources to remain as well and resilient as possible. We will do this by sharing resources, insights, experiences and ideas from our teams, and highlighting examples of good practice and areas for improvement, to inform and shape organisational plans and activities. The aim is to help ensure ML remains a caring and supportive place to work, where people feel a sense of belonging, and thrive.



The network is supported by Victoria Rankin, OD Director and Liz Miller, Exec Sponsor at Board level, and operates in close collaboration with other Staff Networks (Mental Health, Ethnic Diversity, LGBTQ+ and Disability).

### **What have we been working on for the last 12 months?**

In the last few months, we have:

- Supported the Health & Wellbeing Festival (30th September – 4th October 2024)
  - Joint HWB and Mental Health Staff Networks engagement event: “Your Voice Matters”, promoting the Network and seeking feedback on staff experiences and ideas for improvement
  - Mental Health Staff Network session on mindfulness
- Established a Task & Finish Working Group
- Undertaken a Health & Wellbeing diagnostic, to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, to support the development of the 2025-2026 action plan
- Provided feedback on HWB policies and tools in development
- Established a Menopause Special Interest Group

We have also identified several priority tasks for the remainder of 2024-2025 and established some key objectives for 2025/26, which will be driven through engagement with staff to:

- understand colleague experiences and what matters to them
- see what changes are needed and how these should be prioritised
- generate workable ideas regarding how to make effective changes
- support change together – “doing with, not doing to”

All ML business units are now represented on the HWB Network; however, the network welcomes additional members to ensure more voices are heard and more staff from all backgrounds, teams and roles are involved, to reflect our diversity and better support our colleagues in an inclusive and compassionate environment.

### **Who we are**



Anita Kiernan,  
Chair



Liz Miller,  
Executive Sponsor



## Mental Health Network (Let's Talk Network)

ML recognises the importance of treating mental health the same as physical health and taking care of it all year round. This year, our Mental Health Network was established to provide a voice and safe space for staff to discuss issues and share experiences of mental health. The network empowers underrepresented groups and supports improvements in staff experience by connecting, sharing support and identifying barriers. The aims of the Mental Health Network are as follows:

- To raise awareness of the mental health agenda across the organisation
- To support a proactive preventative organisational approach which focuses on mental wellbeing and resilience against both workplace and personal life challenges
- To improve the overall wellbeing of ML staff
- To ensure an inclusive environment and approach that is representative of the wider organisation and its values
- To foster an environment of trust and respectful challenge which enables the right conversations and actions regarding the mental health agenda.

Membership of the Mental Health Network includes our recognised Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) who have been trained by Mental Health First Aid England, as well as allies from across the workforce who have experience of, or an interest in, mental health awareness.

The Mental Health Network works closely with other staff networks across ML to promote the EDI agenda. Representatives from the Mental Health Network also attend quarterly EDI subgroup meetings.

### Mental Health First Aiders

Our trained MHFAs are a point of contact for our staff to speak to if they or someone they know are feeling generally low, having a bad day, experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. They are not therapists or counsellors, but they can provide initial support and signpost staff to appropriate resources and further support if required.

MHFAs are passionate about the mental health agenda and are always available to assist staff regardless of who they are, or where they are based. A list of our MHFAs and their contact details are listed on our intranet Nugget for staff to reach out directly. There is also a dedicated email inbox managed by our MHFAs that staff can contact for support.

### Who we are



Gail Jones,  
Co-Chair



Emma Thompson,  
Co-Chair



Liz Miller,  
Executive Sponsor



# Our Equality Work

This year, we have remained committed to advancing the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda across our organisation and are proud of the progress we have made in making ML an inclusive and supportive working environment for our workforce. This has included the establishment of a single comprehensive EDI Action Plan and the implementation of various initiatives that aim to raise awareness of the diverse needs of our people.

## EDI Action Plan

The ML Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan brings together legal and mandated equality requirements, NHS England recommendations and overall EDI best practice with a series of Organisational Development (OD) actions that collectively, aim to improve the experiences of our people.

The action plan was developed in June 2024 following a desktop review of ML's current EDI strategy, staff experience data, reports and processes and was formally approved by the EDI Subgroup in July 2024.

The actions set out within the plan require involvement from teams across ML including the Inclusion Team, OD and People Services, as well engagement with our Staff Networks and Staff Side, with target deadlines ranging from 2024 to 2026.

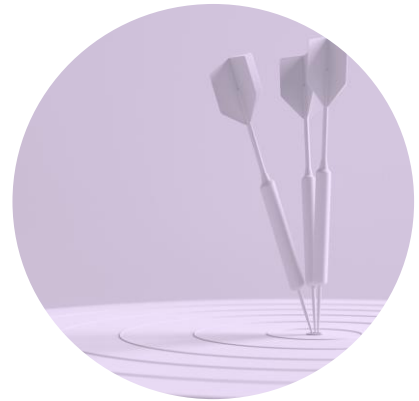
The ML EDI Action Plan contains 37 actions that are grouped under 11 OD objectives. Each action relates to strategic EDI drivers such as legislation, NHSE mandated standards, the NHS People Plan and ML Strategic Objectives. The plan also sets out a variety of key success indicators that will enable us to effectively measure progress against each action.

Successful completion of the actions within the plan will help to ensure that:

- We are meeting our legal and mandated equality duties.
- We are following national EDI recommendations and best practice.
- We are embedding inclusive practices that enable our people to feel supported, valued and empowered.
- We are implementing robust processes that support inclusive decision-making including Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)
- We can effectively track and monitor our EDI progress as an organisation.

Where necessary, actions that have been derived from recommendations such as the NHSE EDI Improvement Plan that relate specifically to NHS Trusts or Integrated Care Systems, have been amended to reflect our remits as an organisation.

Progress against the EDI action plan is monitored via the EDI Subgroup each quarter.



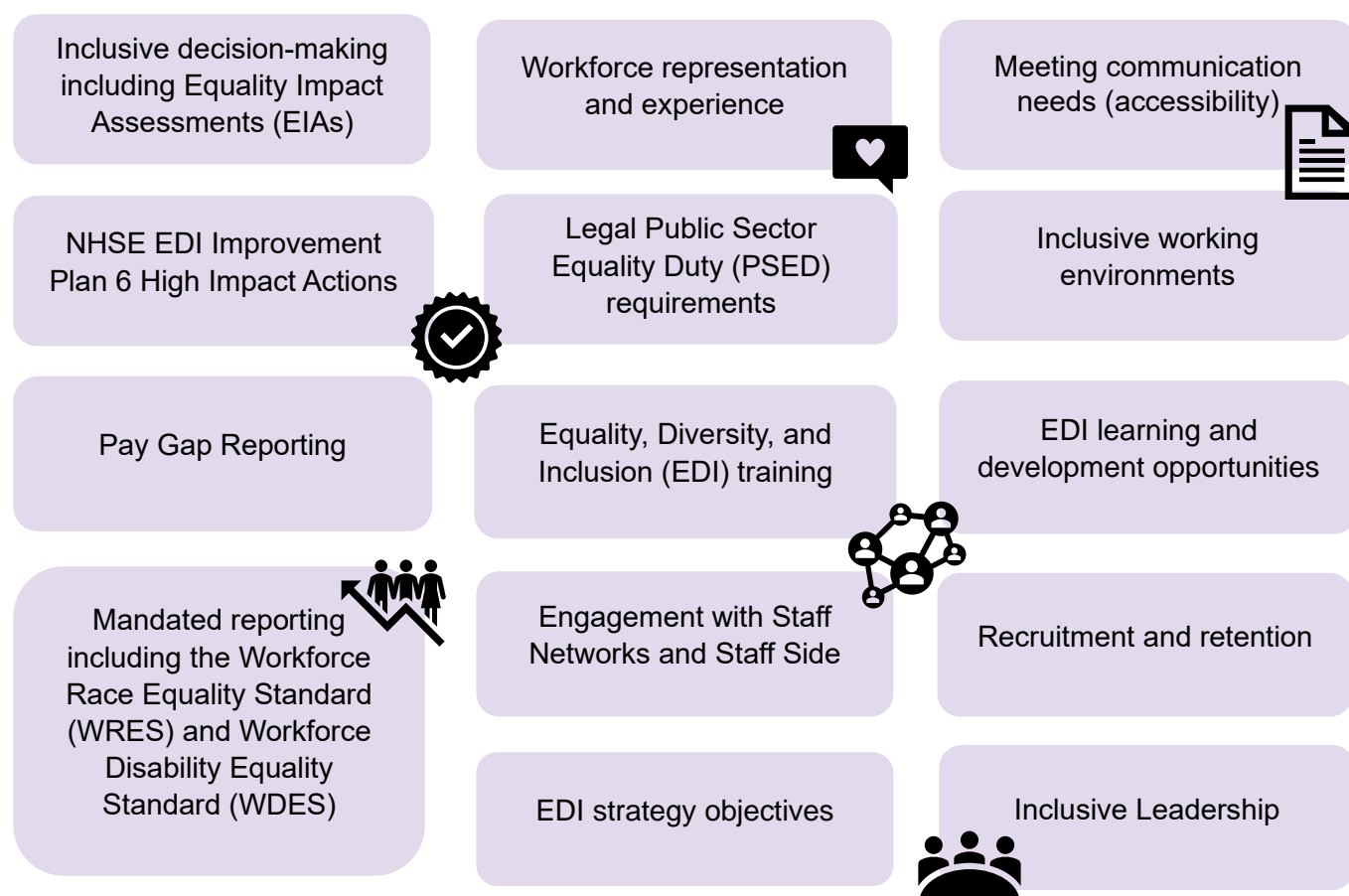


## Summary of actions

Actions within the ML EDI action plan are grouped under the following OD objectives:

1. Address and eradicate discrimination, bullying and harassment.
2. Increase accountability for EDI of all leaders.
3. Sustainably improve positive staff experience of feeling welcomed, included, supported, heard, and respected.
4. Support the levelling up agenda.
5. Ensuring opportunities for development and career progression are equitable.
6. Reduce gender pay gap.
7. Increase diversity amongst senior leaders.
8. Improve staff morale and retention.
9. Contribute to reduced sickness absence.
10. Compliance with national tasks and statutory duties in this area (EDI)
11. Make clear to our people our ongoing commitment to being an organisation that values equality, equity, inclusivity, and diversity.

The 37 actions contained within the plan relate to the following EDI/OD areas:



## EDI Board Advisor

Last year, we appointed Qadeer Kiani as our EDI Board Advisor to advise and support ML on issues relating to EDI.

This year, Qadeer has continued to chair the EDI Subgroup and will be working closely with our staff networks and Associate Director of Culture until June 2025 to ensure our organisational approach to EDI is making a difference.



## Improving Self-Reporting of equality monitoring / protected characteristics on ESR

Equality monitoring is the process used to collect, store and analyse data about people's equality and diversity related characteristics (e.g. sex, ethnicity, disability status, sexuality, marital status, and religious belief). Collating demographic data about our workforce helps us to:

- Understand who is employed by ML.
- Identify if there are any differences in experience between different groups.
- Learn about the underlying causes of any inequalities across our organisation.
- Put actions in place to make sure we promote a fair and inclusive work environment.
- Create policies and programmes that truly reflect and support our diverse teams and colleagues.

ML colleagues can provide or update their demographic information via their NHS Electronic Staff Record (ESR) at any time.

The demographic data provided on ESR is not personally identifiable and can be used to better understand our workplace population and to support us to make inclusive decisions that fully support all staff.

Throughout 2024-2025, we have promoted the importance of keeping demographic information updated via ESR. We ran a communications campaign on our staff intranet and Nugget.

### The power of your data in shaping a more inclusive NHS

Our communications campaign in 2024-2025 highlighted that while providing demographic information might seem like a small and pointless task, it has a significant impact. By knowing the different backgrounds of our workforce, we can:

- Create better policies and programmes that truly reflect and support our diverse teams and colleagues and improve the way we work together.
- Take informed actions to ensure we promote a fair and inclusive work environment.
- Learn about where our representation is not right and where we need to do better.

Examples of some of the improvement actions in ML included:



- A call-to-action from our Staff Networks on areas of need or where there are areas of stigma, unfair treatment, marginalisation or discrimination.
- Enhancing how ML uses more complete and accurate demographic data to make decisions, including as part of recruitment, improvement projects, development or revision of policies and procedures, for progression opportunities and to actively promote understanding and celebrating diversity.
- Using demographic data alongside Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) / Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) insights to inform further organisational improvements
- The provision of an ESR Self-Service Guide to support staff if they needed guidance on how to update their details in ESR.

Workforce data collected on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2025 will indicate whether our campaign for 2024-2025 has resulted in an increase in staff self-reporting their demographic data, including that relating to their protected characteristics.

## EDI Awareness Articles

Each year we raise awareness of the importance of equality awareness days by producing a series of EDI awareness articles each month that we share with our organisation and with our partners.

The articles are written by the Inclusion Team and highlight several significant days of awareness that take place each month. They are shared with staff via monthly internal communications and are also published on Nugget.

The briefings allow us to raise the profile of national awareness days and draw attention to local awareness/celebration events that encourage staff to get involved in equality and inclusion in and outside of their day-to-day work.



## Our Modern Slavery Act Statement

We believe there is no room in our society for modern slavery and human trafficking, we have a zero tolerance for modern slavery and breaches in human rights and we will ensure this is built into the processes and business practices that we, our partners, and our suppliers use.

Each year we review our approach and publish an annual statement outlining the steps we are taking to tackle modern slavery.

We also have a Supplier Code of Conduct Agreement which is used to inform all suppliers who provide goods and services to ML of our ethical standards and provides assurance to our clients that our supply chain is robust. As a supplier of goods or services to ML, any of our suppliers must also comply with the code of conduct agreement.

## What is modern slavery?

Modern Slavery is a violation of a person's human rights. It can take the form of human trafficking, forced labour, bonded labour, forced or servile marriage, descent-based slavery, and domestic slavery. A person is considered to be in modern slavery if they are:

- Forced to work through mental or physical threat.
- Owned or controlled by an "employer," usually through mental or physical abuse.
- Dehumanised, treated as a commodity, or sold or bought as "property."
- Physically constrained or has restrictions placed on their freedom of movement.

## What are we required to do?

Organisations with a turnover of more than £36m must produce a statement for each financial year listing the steps it is taking to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in any of its supply chains or in any part of its business.

As of early 2025, the biggest update to the UK's Modern Slavery policy is the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023, which allows public bodies to exclude suppliers involved in labour market abuses, slavery, and human trafficking from procurement contracts, further emphasizing supply chain transparency and due diligence against modern slavery risks; the act comes into force on February 24, 2025.

## What actions have we taken?

- Each year we review our approach and publish an annual statement outlining the steps we are taking to tackle modern slavery.
- We ensure all our UK workers receive minimum wage and robust immigration checks.
- We ensure our suppliers adhere to the working time directive for 1998.
- We provide safeguarding training for our employees.
- The procurement teams are all Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) or working towards this qualification. As such, they all abide by the CIPS code of professional conduct and have completed a CIPS ethical test which specifically covers modern slavery which is refreshed on an annual basis.
- The NHS standard contracts which the NHS England publish govern how NHS MLCSU engages with its suppliers and requires compliance with relevant legislation, including the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The updates to the NHS Standard Contract for 2024 strengthen our position on Modern Slavery, extending requirements and the option to terminate for breaches of social and labour laws.
- We have a range of internal policies that support our commitment to eradicating Modern Slavery, including:
  - Supplier Code of Conduct
  - Freedom to Speak Up / Whistleblowing Policy
  - Safeguarding Policy
  - Procurement Policy



## Wellbeing Passport and Reasonable Adjustments

We know that by prioritising wellbeing and supporting people to bring their whole selves to work, we will create a culture where our people can thrive. To support our goal of embedding an ACE (attractive, caring and equitable) culture, we have developed a wellbeing passport for any of our ML people to use.

The wellbeing passport will allow for our people to describe what support and adjustments they need to be most effective at work; anything from a preferred communication style to the need for equipment. The passport aims to ensure that there are no barriers in the way of people carrying out their roles, and allows for meaningful, open and compassionate wellbeing conversations to take place.

Initiated by the Disability Staff Network, (and supported by the Health and Wellbeing Staff Network), we are pleased to be able to provide a tool that all staff can use to support their working lives at ML.

The Wellbeing Passport, which is launching in April 2025, has been designed to complement our existing resources whilst supporting us to truly embed a people-centred and compassionate culture. It allows our staff to describe what support and adjustments they need to be most effective at work. This could be anything from a preferred working style to the need for equipment.



## Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme

Hidden disabilities, or sometimes known as invisible or non-visible disabilities, are conditions that are not immediately apparent or obvious to others. These 'hidden' disabilities can be temporary, situational, or permanent. They can be neurological, cognitive, and neurodevelopmental as well as physical, visual, auditory and include sensory and processing difficulties. They can also be respiratory as well as chronic health conditions such as arthritis and diabetes, chronic pain, and sleep disorders.

Examples of what can be declared as a hidden disability, and there can be multiple, include:

- Mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Neurodivergent or cognitive function conditions such as Autism, ADHD, and dyslexia
- Chronic long-term illnesses or disorders such as diabetes, Crohn's disease, cystic fibrosis, and pain conditions like fibromyalgia
- Sensory impairments, for example hearing loss, visual impairments, and sensory processing disorders.
- Cognitive impairments include traumatic brain injury (TBI), dementia, and learning disabilities.
- Autoimmune diseases like lupus, multiple sclerosis (MS), and rheumatoid arthritis
- Other conditions such as epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), and respiratory conditions like asthma.

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower (<https://hdsunflower.com/>) is a simple tool for people with non-visible disabilities to voluntarily share that they have a disability or condition that may not be immediately apparent. Using this communication tool enables colleagues to discreetly indicate that they have an invisible disability and may need additional assistance, consideration, kindness, or simply a little more time. Due to the nature of hidden disabilities, knowing about them and openly communicating them also supports work underway around reasonable adjustments.



## MS Teams Background

To promote awareness, visibility and understanding of hidden disabilities, and to help our staff living with disabilities receive additional support and assistance when needed, we launched a hidden disability scheme in October 2024. The scheme involved the development of two Microsoft Teams backgrounds that would allow staff to virtually disclose that they have a hidden disability and was led by our Disability Staff Network and OD team. The backgrounds utilise the recognised Sunflower Icon from the national Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Campaign (<https://hdsunflower.com/>) and can be used any member of staff who feels comfortable sharing that they have a disability.

The template for the MS Teams backgrounds including the hidden disabilities Sunflower icon is now available as a corporate ML template in Nugget, along with guidance and instructions on how to download, personalise and install the background. We hope that by launching this scheme, colleagues across our organisation living with hidden or invisible disabilities are seen, valued, and supported.





# Our Equality Objectives

This year we have continued to work towards our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives as set out within our strategy for 2021-2026.

## Progress made against our EDI objectives

We have made some good progress on the objectives this year but recognise there is more work to be done in the coming months and years. The progress we have made against each equality objective is outlined below:

### 1. Ensure we meet our related equality duties as outlined within related legislation

**Action:** Meet all NHSE/I mandated reporting and review work and publish accordingly.

This year we have continued to demonstrate compliance with the Equality Act 2010, PSED 2011 and NHSE/I mandated reporting. This includes the publishing of our annual report and Gender Pay Gap report.

We have also completed the WRES and WDES. This report provides an overview of the WRES and WDES findings from this year's reports.

**Action:** To demonstrate our due regard in decision making to meet the PSED.

As part of our duty to demonstrate due regard, we conduct EIA internally on any decisions, policies and processes that have the potential to impact on our staff, patients or communities from protected characteristic groups. However, we recognise that we can do more to promote the use and importance of EIAs and will work to increase the promotion of EIAs within our internal communications and on Nugget. We have held several EIA training sessions and EDI Awareness sessions in Quarter 3 for all ML staff.



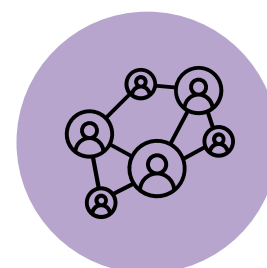
### 2. Improve and continue conversations with our workforce

**Action:** Implement EDI Listening group across the organisation - to target involvement from ethnically diverse staff.

**Action:** Set up and support staff network groups and EDI Champions across equality groups.

As part of our commitment to listening to, and supporting our workforce, we have successfully three EDI staff network groups and appointed a group of EDI Champions. We currently have five networks that our staff can join:

- Disability Network
- LGBTQ+ Network
- Ethnic Diversity Network.
- Health and Wellbeing Network
- Mental Health 'Let's Talk' Network



Good progress has been made on improving conversations with the workforce. There are now five EDI staff network groups (Disability Network, LGBTQ+ Network, Ethnic Diversity Network and two new staff networks have been formed in the last 12 months.

**Action:** To continue promotion of the Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) role.

The Freedom to Speak Up agenda has continued to be implemented and promoted through ML internal communications channels and Nugget. There is a dedicated Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and team of Freedom to Speak Up Champions available to support colleagues to raise concerns when they feel they are unable to do so by other routes.

**Action:** Continue to involve Staff Side representation within decision making.

Staff side continue to have representation and are actively involved and play an integral part within our decision making across ML.

### 3. Improve experiences reported by the workforce

**Action:** Carry out NHS staff survey and share findings with all teams alongside action plan and its progress.

Good progress has been made on continuing to listen to the experiences of the workforce. ML took part in the annual NHS Staff Survey, sharing the results with staff and reporting on findings as part of the annual EDI report.

A quarterly ML People Pulse survey is also conducted which allows staff to tell ML how they are feeling and to explore various aspects of employee experience and culture. The aim of the quarterly pulse survey is to provide a consistent and standardised approach to listening to ML people.

### 4. Create an inclusive culture where staff are free from discrimination

**Action:** To improve staff equality data recording and monitoring on Employment Staff Records (ESR).

Each year, as part of WRES reporting, we monitor our organisational self-reporting ethnicity rate. All staff employed by ML have the option to self-report their ethnicity status at the recruitment stage, and staff in post can choose to self-report their ethnicity at any time via NHS Electronic Staff Record (ESR) system.

This year, a total of 97.85% of ML employees self-declared their ethnicity on ESR, we recognised that this is very high rate, there has been a slight decrease since 2023 of 0.45% this could be due to the decrease in total numbers of staff in ML for 2024.

**Action:** To increase the number of staff who declare their disability status (20.65% did not declare their disability status in 2020).

We monitor the number of staff who declare their disability status as part of the WDES annually. In 2024, 80.84% of employees declared their disability status on ESR and 6.17% of ML employees declared a disability on ESR which is an increase of 3.57% in the number of ML staff self-reporting their disability status.

**Action:** To decrease the number of staff who do not disclose their sexual orientation (33.16% did not disclose in 2020).

Under 2.62% of staff declared they were gay or lesbian, bisexual or were another sexual orientation not listed. This is a decrease of 2.38% from the previous year's data. 24.42% of ML chose not to disclose their sexual orientation, this is a 2.5% improvement on the previous reporting year.

**Action:** To promote equality monitoring update data through staff communications.

Equality monitoring and the importance and benefits of disclosing personal information is promoted across our internal communications channels, on our intranet Nugget and in emails from the Electronic Staff Records (ESR) that encourage staff to update information on ESR.

**Action:** To review ML estates to ensure that the needs of equality groups such as people with disabilities, breast feeding mothers and people with different faiths and beliefs, are met.

All ML estates comply with the requirements of providing reasonable adjustments to staff. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are completed on changes made to ML estates including new estates

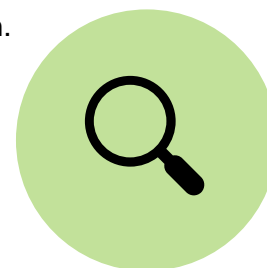
## 5. Recognise and identify impacts on diverse communities in terms of equality and inequality

**Action:** To ensure that EIAs are completed on all projects, policies and decisions that potentially impact on staff/patients/communities.

**Action:** ML teams to have access to EIA support documents and templates. To support Communications and Engagement Team with advice and guidance. Improve our understanding of health inequalities and addressing these.

We currently complete EIAs on a range of decisions made across our organisation. EIA advice, guidance and support contacts are available for ML staff on Nugget.

We have held several EIA Training Sessions and EDI Awareness Sessions during Quarter 3 of 2024-2025. We will be providing more of these sessions to ML staff in 2025-2026 to aim to increase staff awareness of why we need to complete EIAs on any decision making and raise staff awareness for EDI.



## 6. Improve representation of equality groups within the workforce and leadership

**Action:** To implement the WRES and WDES Action Plans and Model Employer Strategy annually.

This year, we have continued to work towards improving the representation of equality groups across ML. We have made good progress with an increase in the percentage of staff who are ethnically diverse or who have a disability across our organisation. However, we recognise that more improvements can be made. Moving forward, we will work towards ensuring that our WRES reports, and action plans are implemented and published on our website. We will also work towards completing the actions within our EDI Action Plan.



**Action:** To increase female representation at Board level (67.43% of overall workforce are female in 2020 and 32.57% of the Board are female).

Since 2020, there has been significant improvement on this objective. As of 31 March 2023, ML had 8 Board Members, three who are female (40%) and five who are male (60%). This is further reported on in the ML Gender Pay Gap Report 2025.

**Action:** To increase the representation of the workforce for:

- 16 - 19 years old (0.16% in 2020)
- 20 - 24 years old (2.5% in 2020)
- 25 - 29 years old (6.23% in 2020)

In 2024, at the time of the data being released there was a slight decrease in the percentage of 16 - 19 years olds across ML at 0.6%, this is 0.8% lower than the previous year 2023. There was also a slight decrease in the percentage of 20 - 24 years old at 0.9%, a decrease from 2023 of 1.18% and an increase of 25-29 years old at 1.77% when compared to 2020.

## 7. Workforce have good awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion

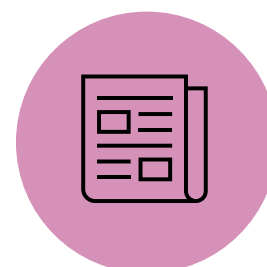
**Action:** To ensure all ML staff complete Equality and Inclusion mandated training with a target of 95% completion rate (compliance was 90.07% 2020).

This year, our compliance rate for mandatory Equality, Diversity and Human Rights training is 96.44% - this is an increase of 6.37% since 2020.

**Action:** To raise awareness of the equality agenda.

Each month, we raise awareness of the equality agenda by sharing a series of EDI awareness articles with staff across ML via our internal communications channels. We also share the articles with our customers.

EDI awareness training and EIA Training was developed and offered to all ML staff in Quarter 3 of 2024-2025 delivered by the Inclusion Team.



# Looking ahead to 2026

As we continue into the next financial year, we recognise that there is a significant period of change ahead for the NHS. For our organisation and workforce, this includes the continuation of our CSU Strategic Review, and Management of Change programmes, as well as the wider changes likely to follow the release of the Government's plans to abolish NHS England.

As a central support system for the NHS, we know that this will lead to notable transformation and uncertainty ahead for both our people and our partners. During this time, our focus will remain on supporting our workforce and providing the highest quality of services to our customers.

Despite the ongoing changes and uncertainty ahead, we will continue to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all we do, and will work towards the following actions during 2025-2026:

1. Continue to implement the ML EDI Action Plan working closely with EDI professionals, staff networks, OD team, People Services and members of the EDI subgroup. This specifically includes:
  - The implementation and monitoring of WDES and WRES actions plans to actively address disparities in experience, opportunity and representation for staff from equality groups.
  - Evidencing due regard to our legal equality duties through the robust application of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on all relevant decisions
  - Reviewing the objectives and actions set out within our EDI strategy for 2021-2026 to inform the development of our future EDI strategy for 2026 and beyond
2. Increase the promotion of EDI and awareness of EIAs internally by offering EDI Awareness and EIA training to teams across ML (postponed in Q4 of 2024 due to work pressures).
3. Provide compassionate support to staff from all protected characteristic groups as part of the CSU Strategic Review and Management of Change, including providing psychological safe spaces for staff to share feedback and ask questions and using inclusive engagement methods.
4. Launch and implement our Excellence Everyday programme – a new programme of work which sets out the compassionate and inclusive behaviours we want leaders to show towards individuals and colleagues. Based on the heart, head, and hands of leadership, with a focus on leading with compassion, curiosity, and collaboration.
5. Ensure that our staff network chairs and vice chairs have sufficient protected time to enable them to fulfil their network roles.



# Conclusion

During 2024-2025, we have continued to strengthen our organisational approach to EDI and have made great progress in establishing a centralised plan for EDI. This report sets out the steps we have taken as an organisation to meet our legal and mandated equality duties, including how we evidence 'due regard' and meet NHSE reporting requirements.

It also highlights the important initiatives that have been developed and implemented collaboratively by our staff networks, OD teams, and Inclusion Team, to raise awareness and support the needs of our diverse workforce. This collaboration and diversity are making our decision making more inclusive and innovative, helping to make positive change in the experiences of our staff.

The establishment of the ML EDI subgroup has further allowed for increased representation of protected groups within our governance and decision-making processes. Our EDI Action Plan also sets out future actions that will see continued collaboration with our workforce and networks, as well as the introduction of more equality related initiatives in 2025 and beyond.

Because of the significance of the changes within ML, and the wider NHS landscape, we acknowledge that progress against our EDI Action Plan may be impacted next year. However, our determination to make ML an inclusive and diverse organisation will remain, and we will strive to implement all the actions set out within our comprehensive action plan while meeting our legal and mandated equality duties.

As we continue into 2025, we recognise that the future remains uncertain and there will be challenges ahead. We know that our Management of Change programmes and CSU Strategic Review, along with the recent announcement about NHS England will leave our people feeling unsettled. Therefore, our primary focus for 2025-2026 will be to support, celebrate and empower our staff, with inclusion remaining at the heart of what we do as we move through these changes together.







## Get to know us or get in touch

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