

EDB Strategy annual progress report

2024



Introduction

We’ve made significant progress in implementing our Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB) Strategy and action plan since launching them in 2023–2024.

With a vision to be a bold advocate for equity and social justice by 2027, we have worked hard to embed EDB into everything we do – our operations, culture, policies and initiatives. In this report, we present our key achievements during 2024, focusing on progress with our action plan, internal activities, member engagement and future aspirations. You can read our EDB Strategy and action plan at www.rcot.co.uk/EDBstrategy.

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Highlights in 2024

- **2024 actions:** We completed 100% of all the scheduled actions for 2024, with significant progress on long-term actions.
- **Member engagement:** Our EDB Insight and Reflection sessions addressed member concerns by providing support, solidarity and a safe space for sharing knowledge and having discussions – benefiting over 650 members.
- **Toolkit and resources:** Our new EDB Critical Self-Awareness Toolkit, supported members' personal and professional growth – reaching 1,400 downloads by December 2024.
- **Support during geopolitical events:** We responded proactively to 2024's UK summer riots by creating support resources and hosting Reflection sessions for members.
- **Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs):** We worked collaboratively with EAGs to develop policies and strategies and to deliver programmes and projects.
- **Governance:** We enhanced Council election and trustee recruitment processes to make them more inclusive and accessible.
- **Staff networks:** Our staff networks offered targeted support and facilitated extensive engagement to improve workplace inclusivity.
- **Broader engagement:** We worked with other organisations in the sector to advance EDB and address challenges faced by members.

Our 2024 achievements underscore our commitment to embedding equity, diversity and belonging in all aspects of our work. Through collaboration with members, proactive initiatives, and a steadfast focus on what matters, we will develop a diverse, equitable, welcoming and inclusive occupational therapy profession.



Action plan progress

We have a three-year action plan to support our EDB strategy. In the plan, we committed to 44 main actions from 2024–2027– each action assigned to the relevant EDB strategic priority.

In 2024 we made significant progress by completing all the actions set for the year while adding new actions and starting work on long-term actions.

In the tables below, we've summarised the progress on all actions that were set to start in 2024.

**100% of 2024
EDB actions
completed**

EDB strategic priorities

1 Accountability and commitment

Main action	Timeline	Progress
Establish a support framework for staff who have experienced discrimination and harassment.	2024–2025	2024 actions completed
A member of RCOT's Senior Leadership Team to sponsor each of the staff diversity networks to promote allyship and improve leadership visibility.	2024	Completed
Collaborate with expert advisory groups and volunteers to define, plan and deliver a schedule of activities to raise better understanding of diversity and lived experiences.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed
Hold drop-in sessions to raise awareness and create a better understanding of our EDB Strategy.	2024	Completed
Put in place a process that enables us to identify and produce EDB related position statements to reflect the views of the members and needs of RCOT.	2024–2026	2024 action completed
Align our Workforce Strategy with our EDB Strategy.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed

2 Effective leadership

Main action	Timeline	Progress
Senior Leadership Team will be accountable for the delivery of the EDB Strategy action plan.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed
Review our policies and introduce a standardised process to ensure EDB sits at the heart of everything we do.	2024–2025	2024 actions completed
Create a Health and Wellbeing Strategy and action plan, using insights from our Health and Wellbeing staff survey.	2024–2025	2024 action completed

3 Diverse and thriving profession

Main action	Timeline	Progress
Analyse staff and volunteer diversity data to identify gaps, under-representation and develop an action plan.	2024	Completed
Extensively share our EDB Strategy, its purpose, actions and accountabilities with members, staff, volunteers and stakeholders.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed
Embed the consideration of potential suppliers' approach to EDB into our procurement process, inform and guide staff to implement the approach.	2024	Completed
Carry out a volunteer survey to gain a deeper understanding of our volunteer community background and experiences.	2024	Completed

4 Learning, development and confidence

Main action	Timeline	Progress
Collaborate with expert advisory groups to produce resources and plan to promote OT as a career to those groups currently under-represented in the profession.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed
Collaborate with expert advisory groups to produce resources and plan to promote OT as a career to those groups currently under-represented in the profession.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed

5 Safe and inclusive culture

Main action	Timeline	Progress
Review our brand, marketing and communication processes and approach to ensure we are inclusive by design.	2024	Completed
Identify appropriate accessibility standards and apply these across our brand, marketing and communications.	2024–2025	2024 actions completed
Collaborate with expert advisory groups to produce resources and plan to promote OT as a career to those groups currently under-represented in the profession.	2024–2026	2024 actions completed

6 Safe and inclusive culture

Main action	Timeline	Progress
Extensively share our EDB Strategy with members, staff, volunteers and stakeholders.	2024	Completed
Promote and share updates on the delivery of EDB work to members, staff, volunteers and stakeholders.	2024–2026	2025 actions completed Ongoing
Provide quarterly reports to Council on the progress of this action plan, enabling them to be accountable for its delivery.	2024–26	2024 actions completed
Redesign our process for capturing diversity characteristics so that we can collect baseline data and monitor diversity within our membership.	2024	Completed
Review and revise our internal process for capturing diversity characteristics and increase the number of staff that submit diversity data.	2024	Completed
Set up a Carers expert advisory group.	2024	Completed
Explore an anonymous system for gathering insight on member experiences of discrimination so that we can better understand our members' experiences with respect to EDB.	2024	Completed



EDB at RCOT

Since the launch of our EDB Strategy and action plan, we adopted a mantra that ‘EDB is the thread that runs through everything we do’, and in practice that has meant adopting a unshakeable commitment to embed our core EDB values in our policies, strategies, programmes, projects and activities.

Governance

- **Board of Trustees EDB skills gap analysis:** At the end of 2024, we carried out an assessment of EDB risks and opportunities for the RCOT Board of trustees. The assessment highlighted areas of improvement which will be taken forward to enhance the impact of our EDB Strategy.
- **Recruitment and election processes:** We updated the recruitment and election processes for Council members to make sure that EDB considerations are central to the processes. We defined key inclusion principles that will underpin both processes.



Policies and guidelines

We're reviewing and updating our internal policies and guidelines so that they align with and support our EDB objectives. Since the EBD Strategy was launched, we have introduced and updated the following policies:

- **EDB guidelines for writing policies and reports in RCOT (new):** guidelines for how we embed EDB when writing policies and reports in RCOT.
- **Inclusive Language Guide (new):** to help staff understand and use more inclusive language and consider the impact of the language on the wellbeing and health of others.
- **Leading compassionately during incidents and crises (new):** guidance for people managers: a shared approach to help all people managers to provide compassionate leadership and support colleagues in those times of need.
- **Menopause Support policy (new):** a new policy to raise awareness of menopause transition and provide information and support for colleagues who are affected.
- **Bullying and Harassment policy (updated):** updated to strengthen anti-discrimination and comply with the new Worker Protection Act (2024).
- **Recruitment policy (updated):** updated to drive up diversity and ensure equity and fairness of opportunity for all applicants.
- **Probation policy (updated):** updated to include EDB considerations so that the probation process and assessment accounts for individual needs and differences – especially those relating to protected characteristics.
- **Other updated policies:** Procurement policy, Learning and development policy, Flexible working policy, Policy development policy, Sickness absence policy.



Strategies

We have embedded EDB into all our key strategies:

- **Occupation Therapy Workforce Strategy (2024–2035):** Our Workforce Strategy seeks to develop occupational therapy into a thriving, diverse and inclusive profession that welcomes and provides equitable opportunities for success to all regardless of background or characteristics.
- **Advancing Occupational Therapy: Research and Innovation Strategy (2025–2035):** In our Research and Innovation Strategy we recognise the historical context and existing inequalities in research and make suggestions on how they should be addressed.
- **Volunteering Strategy (2024–2027):** We have developed our strategy to ensure that volunteering opportunities at RCOT are inclusive, relevant and accessible, and that volunteers feel valued and understood.
- **Health and Wellbeing Strategy:** We are developing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy to promote wellbeing to help prevent stress and create a positive working environment where all staff are valued, belong, and can be their best selves and reach their full potential.

'As we progress through our (Workforce Strategy) action plan, we'll support the development of occupational therapists and support workers, especially those from underrepresented communities.'

- Odeth Richardson, BAOT/RCOT Chair of Council



Projects

Here are some examples of how we've embedded EDB throughout activities across RCOT.

- **EDB learning needs analysis:** We carried out a learning needs assessment to understand where we are as an organisation and what learning will be needed to fully support our EDB objectives.
- **New Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system:** We have designed the new CRM with EDB considerations so we can collect the right data to enable us to provide personalised services to our members, partners and collaborators.
- **Website accessibility:** We prioritised and designed accessibility into our new website so that it can serve people with various needs and comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 (WCAG 2.2). You can read more about these design choices in a blog written by our Head of Digital Channels, Anna Faithfull – available on [our website](#).
- **RCOT Communities platform:** EDB has been the central driver behind the RCOT Communities platform. The platform will enable members to form or join networks in which they will foster inclusion and a sense of belonging.
- **Future of OT profession:** Our work informed a strategy designed to increase awareness and uptake of occupational therapy as a career, particularly among underrepresented groups.

Working with other organisations

Our success in making occupational therapy a diverse, inclusive and welcoming profession depends on our ability to partner with other organisations. In 2024, we collaborated with many organisations including:

- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- Health and Care Professions Council
- National Guardian's Office



Staff networks

As part of our commitment to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and empowering workplace, we have established five dedicated staff networks that enable staff to connect with peers who share similar experiences, exchange ideas and engage in discussions that promote diversity, equity and inclusion across RCOT. The five staff networks are: Ethnos, Disability, LGBTQIA+, Parenting and Menopause.

In 2024, our staff networks organised events, workshops and other activities, such as:

- blogs to mark various months – South Asian Heritage Month, Black History Month, Pride Month, Disability Pride Month
- events with RCOT members invited as guest speakers
- working with member groups – for example, organising and attending an informal London Pride OT outing with the LGBTQ+ Expert Advisory Group
- delivering education sessions on various topics to RCOT staff
- supporting policy development, including the Menopause policy and Flexible Working policy
- hosting an EDB Insight session for members and staff to learn more about menopause.

'Ethnos network has enabled me to be a better ally and given me the confidence to ask questions in order for me to learn to become stronger when challenging other's prejudices. It is a friendly, welcoming and informative community which is supportive and non-judgemental'

– Anne Keen (member of staff)



Other internal EDB learning sessions

As well as the events hosted by staff networks, we hosted various other educational sessions for RCOT staff.

- **Understanding privilege:** increased staff awareness of systemic advantages that certain individuals or groups may experience due to factors such as race, gender, ability or socio-economic class.
- **Unconscious bias:** helped staff identify and mitigate implicit biases that can influence decision-making, professional interactions and workplace behaviours.
- **Cultural competency:** enhanced staff's ability to communicate and work effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through this session we emphasised the importance of awareness, knowledge and skills in building meaningful relationships across cultural differences.
- **Stereotypes:** explored the nature of stereotypes and how they can have negative impact on individual and group dynamics, and how that can play out in the workplace and in teams.
- **Microaggressions:** explained how to identify and deal with different types and categories of microaggressions.



EDB for members

In 2024, we worked with and for members to create a welcoming, diverse and inclusive culture that fosters belonging in the profession and contributes to health equity for all.

Supporting and building knowledge for members

Insight and reflection sessions

During and after the UK riots in summer of 2024, we hosted **Reflection sessions** for members who had been impacted by the riots and violence. We provided space for members to share and reflect on their experience and discuss how to protect and support each other to cope and build resilience.

We hosted EDB **Insight sessions** for members to learn about various topics relating to EDB. We hosted four insight sessions (584 members signed up)

- **Allyship in times of global conflict:** To start a conversation exploring the meaning of allyship during global conflicts.
- **What is antisemitism?:** To increase understanding of Jewish people and antisemitism in the UK.
- **Tackling and challenging anti-Muslim hatred together:** To build understanding of anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia in the UK.
- **OTs supporting menopause for World Menopause Day:** To explore how occupational therapists can support people experiencing menopause and take care of themselves.

EDB toolkits

We are developing toolkits to support members to actively engage with various EDB topics.

- **EDB Critical Self-Awareness Toolkit (Sep 2024).** 1,494 downloads (Sept–Dec 2024)
Supports members to engage in critical reflection and self-assessment related to EDB – including an exploration of the four stages of EDB competence.
- **Equality, Diversity and Belonging Toolkit (draft).** A comprehensive, evidence-informed toolkit to support all members of the occupational therapy workforce and staff in fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

Examples of feedback from members on the EDB Critical Self-Awareness Toolkit:



"It's a great toolkit. Myself and colleagues from my team meet monthly to facilitate team conversation using the toolkit resources as a guide."



"Thanks for sharing the toolkit – I love how straightforward this is to pick up and use, and how it gives a very safe structure for exploration and learning."

Regional meetings

We value direct engagements with members to discuss equity, diversity and belonging (EDB). In 2024, we were invited to speak on EDB topics and share our EDB Strategy across various forums. We engaged with members on EDB at the following regional events and in organisations: Northern Ireland, North Wales, South Wales, NHS Sussex, Brighton and Hove Independent Living Service, Specialist Section – Major Health Conditions, Brent Occupational Therapy Services and the Professional Associations Research Network.

Other learning material and guides

In 2024 we collaborated with our members to produce learning and development material to help members in their professional practice and equip them with tools to foster inclusivity in all aspects of their professional and personal lives. The following are still in draft, and we will continue to work with members, through EAGs, to develop and publish them in 2025.

- **Inclusive Language Guide:** To help members understand and use more inclusive language and consider the impact of the language on the wellbeing and health of others.
- **HCPC Standards of Proficiency Guide for OT:** We are developing a comprehensive guide for members to provide more information on what it takes and what is required to meet the requirements of HCPC Standard Five.

Expert Advisory Groups

As part of our strategy and approach to EDB, we worked with members to set up Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs) as avenues for direct member participation, contribution and influence on all EDB activities.

Our EAGs

- RCOT LGBTQIA+ EAG
- RCOT BAME OTUK EAG
- RCOT ABLE OT EAG
- RCOT Carers OT EAG

Examples of work they influenced and directly contributed to:

- Career Development Framework
- Future OT marketing campaign development
- Development of RCOT website – Accessibility
- RCOT Research and Innovation Strategy
- RCOT Communities platform
- RCOT EDB Critical Self-Awareness Toolkit
- Events and celebrations



"I was so pleased to see carers on it because we so often get forgotten! Hopefully there is a good carer voice."

- Member, commenting on Carers EAG

How you can get involved

Our EDB efforts will be more impactful if everyone is involved. We welcome all members to get involved in co-designing and implementing EDB-based solutions to develop and grow the profession.

Actively use toolkits: Please actively use the existing toolkits and look out for toolkits that we will publish in the future. We always welcome feedback to help us improve the effectiveness of our toolkits.

Take advantage of CPD and other learning resources: In 2025 and beyond, we will be developing new EDB learning resources. Look out on your CPD portfolio for EDB related content on cultural competency, for example, Guidance for meeting HCPC's standards of proficiency.

Attend EDB Insight and Reflection sessions: We will continue hosting EDB Insight and Reflection Sessions. Please **look out** for sessions throughout the year.

Engage on the RCOT Communities Platform: The RCOT Communities platform was launched in April 2025. We invite all members to join and create the various networks on the platform to advance different EDB causes. You can also join and work directly with EAG, regional and practice networks.

Work with RCOT staff networks: We welcome members who want to work with RCOT staff networks to contact us to explore how we can work together. Email us at hello@rcot.co.uk

Tell us you're interested in EDB: Choose EDB as an area of interest when selecting your marketing preferences on your account on the RCOT website – we'll then send you relevant information.



Looking ahead

We will continue to deliver the EDB actions laid out in the original action plan throughout 2025–2027, with more actions added each year in response to emerging needs and the changing environment in the UK and globally.

We anticipate some challenges ahead but also some opportunities to do more on EDB and amplify the impact of our activities.

Challenges and opportunities

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The politicisation of EDB in the US, with the current administration dropping all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programmes and some legislation, may spill over to the UK. Such developments will have a negative impact on all our activities.• Reduction in health care budgets affecting OT roles, training and development, and the ability to bring people from historically underrepresented groups into the OT profession.• Social unrest in the UK could further isolate and discourage people from historically underrepresented groups from joining the profession.• The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in occupational therapy could further exacerbate existing biases and lead to unequal access and outcomes from OT services.• Data protection and digital compliance requirements may make it difficult to access EDB insights or provide effective reasonable adjustments to those who need them.• Increase in demand for OT services due to climate change related health issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growing global workforce will offer advantages to a profession supported by a professional body that champions equity, diversity and belonging.• An ageing population may lead to an increase in demand for OT services and lead to increased funding and recruitment of more OTs from historically underrepresented groups.• Social unrest in the UK has opened the conversation around important EDB topics like racism, intolerance, social cohesion etc. This presents a good opportunity to address difficult topics and have difficult conversations because people can see the real-world impact of not doing so.• The increased adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in occupational therapy could lead to greater efficiencies and limit human bias if the AI models are built and trained ethically.• New legislation, like the Worker Protection Act, present real opportunities to expand the reach and scope of EDB activities• Increase in demand for OT services due to climate change related health issues may lead to more investment and more opportunities to train and/or recruit OTs from historically underrepresented groups.

We're RCOT, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. We've championed the profession and the people behind it for over 90 years; and today, we are thriving with over 36,000 members.

Then and now, we're here to help achieve life-changing breakthroughs for our members, for the people they support and for society as a whole.

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