

Equity, Diversity and Belonging strategy 2024-2027



Introduction

We're proud to share our Equity, Diversity and Belonging Strategy 2024–2027. This strategy is based on the views and needs of our members, staff and stakeholders. This strategy has been carefully co-created with people with direct experience of, or insights into, the discrimination and disadvantages faced by members and the communities and individuals they work with. And it's been enhanced through consultation with our members, staff and stakeholders.

This document contains:

1. **our equity, diversity and belonging (EDB) vision**
2. **introductions from Odeth Richardson and Steve Ford**
3. **background on where we are today**
4. **what equity, diversity and belonging mean to us**
5. **our strategic priorities and aims**
6. **our actions and how we will report on progress.**

Supporting this strategy, on our website you can also find:

- how we developed the strategy
- a summary of the consultation recommendations
- frequently asked questions.

If you need further help, please email us at:

yourviews@rcot.co.uk

1. Our equity, diversity and belonging vision

This is what we're working towards

By 2027, RCOT will be recognised as a bold, progressive advocate of equity and social justice.

We put equity, diversity and belonging at the heart of everything we do. We actively oppose discrimination, demonstrate effective allyship and are transparent and accountable. We work with members, volunteers, learners, staff, partners, stakeholders and the wider profession to create a sense of belonging to the diverse, authentic and empowering culture we are building together. Our work supports the wellbeing of people accessing occupational therapy and contributes to health equity for all.

2. Introductions from Odeth Richardson and Steve Ford

Odeth Richardson **Chair, BAOT/RCOT Council**

I believe that every member has a crucial role to play and it's vital that everyone, and I mean everyone, feels welcome and heard within our professional body. My priority is to help engage with all our members and ensure that equality and inclusion is at the heart of all the work we do for you.

I'm incredibly proud of the way we've co-created our Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB) Strategy. It's been shaped and guided by a wide range of voices and perspectives across the profession, including members, staff and public contributors.

We're learning from past mistakes, and we'll continue to learn, develop and change along the way. We might not always get it right, but we'll take action and we'll learn and adapt as we go.

Delivering occupation-focused, person-centred intervention is at the heart of what we do. We can only do that well by recognising that each of us is unique and influenced by our environments and experiences. That's why it's essential that, as occupational therapists, we work hard to show leadership in this area.

We believe we've created a bold, ambitious strategy that recognises the challenge of becoming an anti-discriminatory and anti-racist organisation; an organisation that not only meets but exceeds our legal obligations and works hard to deliver our organisational values and professional standards.

Of course, words alone are never enough. So, we'll keep working with our members, staff and stakeholders, both to deliver this strategy and continue to learn.

For us, equity, diversity and belonging aren't optional extras that only affect certain people. These issues affect everyone, both within and beyond our profession – and we are all responsible.

Steve Ford

Chief Executive, RCOT

Occupational therapy helps you live your best life at home, at work – and everywhere else. Occupational therapists help people of every race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, class and ability to do the things they need or want to do. Yet, as a profession, we don't currently reflect the population we serve.

Every experience of racism, discrimination and injustice is unacceptable and inexcusable. Yet our staff, members and learners continue to have negative experiences.

Every voice has a right to be heard. Yet many in our profession remain unheard and under-represented.

It's clear that as an organisation, we've got things wrong in the past and that change has been slow in coming. We take responsibility for our part in the longstanding and perpetuated discrimination within the profession.

We've got a long way to go. We might not always get it right. But we are committed to anti-racism and anti-discrimination in every context.

Our Equity, Diversity and Belonging Strategy will guide us on our journey to creating a culture of authenticity and belonging, where everyone is welcomed, celebrated, supported, recognised and valued. Where everyone feels they belong as their true and authentic selves. I'm really proud that it's been created from the views and voices of our members, stakeholders and staff.

Equity, diversity and belonging is all our responsibility. I promise to always champion equity, diversity and belonging, to oppose discrimination, and demonstrate effective allyship.

Together, we'll create an organisation and profession that we can all be proud of.

3. Where we are today

The UK population is diverse. Occupational therapists work every day with people of different race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, class and ability. But as a profession, we've historically lacked diversity.

Occupational therapists, learners, the people who receive our services and our staff, continue to have negative experiences. There are many voices and experiences that remain unheard and under-represented. This impacts everyone's sense of belonging, health and wellbeing.

In 2020, our members spoke up louder than ever before. This brought into sharp and uncomfortable focus that we weren't meeting the needs and expectations of members, staff and stakeholders. We understand that we made mistakes and took too long to acknowledge them. We weren't showing the leadership that our members deserved. We were slow to listen, advocate, act and evolve. All of this affected the trust that some of our members had in us.

More widely, there is a lack of equity, diversity and belonging support within our profession. And we know that we're not seen as the first port of call for those needing advice, support or further learning. We weren't providing the resources and services that members needed. We haven't been seen as a diverse workplace, and this meant that we didn't feel equally welcoming, inclusive and safe for all our members.

Every experience of racism, discrimination, and injustice, within and beyond our profession, is unacceptable and inexcusable. Becoming an anti-discriminatory and anti-racist organisation, one that is underpinned by focused organisational values and those of our profession, will take time and effort. Getting there

will be challenging, it will take a lot of learning and change. But we're determined. And we'll get there by working together with our members, volunteers, learners, staff, partners, stakeholders and the wider profession.

Equity, diversity and belonging is all our responsibility.

It's not a 'nice to have' or something that only affects people from historically under-represented groups or those with differing needs, identities, backgrounds, and experiences.

We will work to exceed our legal obligations. We know that each of us is unique and that's why our definition of diversity goes beyond that defined in equality legislation.

Society is changing and diversity is rapidly increasing. We need a profession that is culturally intelligent. That reflects, and is well equipped to serve and support, an increasingly diverse population. This strategy provides a foundation for that ambition, and it will evolve as we learn along the way.

We will be bold and progressive advocates for equity and social justice. We'll do it through clear, impactful and meaningful actions, not just words.

How we developed the strategy

Our members' voices are at the heart of this strategy, which sets out our priorities and will inform our action plan for 2024–2027. The strategy was co-created by members, staff and public contributors with direct experience of, or insights into, the discrimination and disadvantages faced by members and the people they provide services to. It's been driven by their insights, together with current best practice, other contemporary factors including legislation, and our professional standards.

In summer 2023, RCOT staff, members and stakeholders were invited to share their thoughts on the draft strategy through a consultation process led by an independent research partner, Enventure. Responses were collected through an anonymous online survey and a series of focus groups. Enventure analysed this data and made a series of recommendations that shaped the final strategy.

Further information on how we developed the strategy, along with a summary of the consultation feedback can be found on our website.

Our legal obligations

Our legal obligations are set out in the Equality Act 2010 for everyone in England, Scotland and Wales and protects people from discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment and victimisation.

The following are characteristics that receive protection under the Equality Act: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Carers are protected by association under section 13 of the Act, which covers discrimination by association.

The Act doesn't apply to Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, equality and anti-discrimination law is not consolidated into one single Act. There are several pieces of legislation, all underpinned by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

We recognise that our members will be expected to adhere to the equity, diversity and belonging or equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies of their employer, and registration bodies, including the Health and Care Professions Council. This

strategy outlines the vision for RCOT and will inform our organisational policies and culture. We want it to complement any wider professional framework that our members operate within, and support the profession to be bold, progressive advocates of equity and justice.

4. What equity, diversity and belonging mean to us

We've carefully chosen and defined our key terminology. Each of these three concepts is vital, so while 'EDB' is a useful shortform, we don't want it to become a meaningless acronym or minimise the individual elements' importance.

Equity

Equity recognises differences and complexity in circumstances, experiences and needs. It means treating people differently to achieve fairness by being flexible and responsive to access, opportunities and resources. Like occupational therapy, equity is about understanding and recognising individual needs. It's about everyone having what they need, to make the most of life.

Diversity

We're all unique. Diversity means recognising, respecting, valuing and celebrating different and intersections in needs, identities, backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. It's the key to breaking down cultural and institutional barriers and fostering a culture of creativity and innovation.

Belonging

For us, belonging is about much more than simply including people. It means proactively welcoming, celebrating, supporting, and empowering every voice, so we're all properly recognised, valued and free to be our true and authentic selves.

5.Our EDB strategic priorities and aims

We have six equity, diversity and belonging strategic priorities that are aligned with RCOT's organisational strategy. These priorities are underpinned by aims that will drive the work we do.

An action plan has been developed to deliver these priorities and aims, enabling us to make progress towards our vision. Example actions are on page XX. The full action plan can be found on our website from end of January 2024.

RCOT strategy: Rise Up

We will rise up to be bold, progressive advocates and champions – raising our profile and voice so that more people understand the power of what occupational therapists do.

EDB strategic priorities

Accountability and commitment

Our members, staff and volunteers understand that EDB is all of our responsibility and that words and good intentions are not enough.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will:

- through our actions, oppose discrimination, demonstrate effective allyship and be transparent and accountable
- demonstrate to the public, our staff, members, volunteers and stakeholders that EDB is part of who we are and how we work.

EDB strategic priorities

Effective leadership

RCOT leadership team and Council visibly champion EDB and this strategy, role model anti-racism and anti-discrimination, consistently demonstrating effective allyship.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will:

- model the change we want to see through our culture, policies, practices and systems
- cultivate an inclusive culture, with health and wellbeing at its heart, to reflect our organisational and professional values.

RCOT strategy: Open Up

We will open up to new opportunities and people – joining forces, forming alliances, and getting more people to see occupational therapy as the solution to their needs.

EDB strategic priorities

Diverse and thriving profession

RCOT understands and works to remove barriers to entry, to open up occupational therapy as a profession to better reflect the diversity of the UK.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will:

- work to ensure that our staff and volunteers better reflect the diversity of the UK
- embed EDB throughout our standards and stakeholder relationships
- build alliances and partnerships with community groups to encourage those from historically underserved communities to see occupational therapy as a solution their needs.

RCOT strategy: Lift Up

We will lift up every occupational therapist and support them to be the best they can be throughout their entire career – by offering them the best community, resources and tools that help them to succeed.

EDB strategic priorities

Learning, development and confidence

Our members, staff and volunteers are confident and skilled in championing EDB and challenging inequity, injustice, and discrimination.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will:

- build our members', staff and volunteers' understanding of equity, diversity and belonging and develop skills and confidence to actively oppose discrimination
- build alliances and partnerships with organisations and groups who share our priorities, to support learning and increase EDB awareness of occupational therapists.

RCOT strategy: Build Up

We will build up our organisation and culture to be dynamic, high performing and values-led, using insights and data to inform and drive us to achieve our purpose.

EDB strategic priorities

Safe and inclusive culture

RCOT has an inclusive culture, with health and wellbeing at the heart, that is truly reflective of our organisational and professional values.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will:

- increase representation and celebrate diversity in everything we do and the way we communicate
- assist our members, especially those from historically marginalised and under-represented communities, to be the best they can be, as their true and authentic selves, throughout their career.

EDB strategic priorities

Transparency

RCOT is critically self-reflective, transparent and intentional in communicating our commitment to, and progress with EDB to build trust in our organisation.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will:

- share and celebrate successes and be honest about failings and things we need to change
- understand the diverse needs of those we work with, and use a strong evidence base to provide constructive support, prioritise where and how we act, and measure our progress.

6. Action plan and reporting

We will publish a three-year equity, diversity and belonging action plan, detailing the steps we will take towards realising our vision, by the end of January 2024. We will also publish an annual impact report on our progress and provide regular updates on our EDB-related activities in our communications.

These are some examples of the actions we are committed to over the three years of the strategy.

EDB strategic priority: Accountability and commitment

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will through our actions, oppose discrimination, demonstrate effective allyship and be transparent and accountable.

Action examples

Establish a support framework for staff who have experienced discrimination and harassment.

A member of RCOT's Senior Leadership Team will sponsor each of the staff diversity networks to promote allyship and improve leadership visibility.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will demonstrate to the public, our staff, members, volunteers, learners and stakeholders that EDB is part of who we are and how we work.

Action examples

Embed EDB principles in our workforce strategy.

EDB strategic priority: Effective leadership

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will model the change we want to see through our culture, policies, practices and systems.

Action examples

Review our policies and processes and introduce a standardised process to ensure EDB sits at the heart of everything we do.

Benchmark, identify, adapt and adopt good EDB practices in healthcare organisations and other professions across industries.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will cultivate an inclusive culture, with health and wellbeing at its heart, to reflect our organisational and professional values.

Action examples

Create a Health and Wellbeing strategy and action plan using insights from our Health and Wellbeing staff survey.

EDB strategic priority: Diverse and thriving profession

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will work to ensure that our staff and volunteers better reflect the diversity of the UK and the communities they serve.

Action examples

Analyse our staff and volunteer diversity data to identify gaps and under-representation and develop an action plan to address them

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will embed EDB throughout our standards and stakeholder relationships.

Action examples

Embed EDB strategy principles to inform our pre-registration and early career standards.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will build alliances and partnerships with community groups to encourage those from historically underserved communities to see occupational therapy as a solution their needs.

Action examples

Identify underserved communities our volunteers are working with, and work with our volunteers to explore barriers and identify how RCOT can support in addressing these.

EDB strategic priority: Learning, development and confidence

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will build our members, staff and volunteers' understanding of EDB and develop skills and confidence to actively oppose discrimination.

Action examples

Carry out a learning needs' analysis to identify current levels of EDB awareness among staff including senior leadership

Develop a discrimination, allyship and advocacy toolkit for members, volunteers and staff.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will build alliances and partnerships with organisations and groups that share our priorities to support learning and increase EDB awareness of occupational therapists.

Action examples

Identify health and social care bodies that share similar EDB priorities and work to form collaborative partnerships to share resources and expertise.

EDB strategic priority: Safe and inclusive culture

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will increase representation and celebrate diversity and in everything we do and how we communicate.

Action examples

Proactively work to increase the numbers of our public contributors from diverse and under-represented groups to best support our work.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will assist our members, especially those from historically marginalised and under-represented communities, to be the best they can be, as their true and authentic selves, throughout their career.

Action examples

Set up quarterly EDB meetings to share good practice among members, demonstrate allyship and offer peer-to-peer support.

EDB strategic priority: Transparency

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will share and celebrate successes and be honest about failings and things we need to change.

Action examples

Extensively share this strategy, its purpose, actions and accountabilities amongst members, staff and stakeholders.

Promote and share updates on the delivery of EDB work to all members and stakeholders.

EDB strategic aims

RCOT will understand the diverse needs of those we work with, and use a strong evidence base to provide constructive support, prioritise where and how we act, and measure our progress.

Action examples

Redesign our process for capturing diversity characteristics so that we can collect baseline data and monitor diversity within our membership.

Transcribed into E-text by A2i Transcription Services
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