

# Skills for Care and the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard

## Our experience and action plan



### What informed your decision to join the SC-WRES, and how did you think it would help your organisation?

As custodians of the SC-WRES, we thought it was important that we expect the same from ourselves as the local authorities participating. Skills for Care already had an EDI strategy, which has evolved into a Belonging Strategy. A key benefit was having an assurance framework that provided a structured, data-informed approach. While we believed we were taking the right actions, we did not previously have a robust framework to evaluate or benchmark our progress against.

We had been thinking about joining the process for a while, and we took about 18 months to prepare the ground to enable us to start using the data we had for improvement. We undertook considerable preparatory thinking about how to align the SC-WRES with the wider strategic work. There was robust leadership from our CEO, Deputy CEO, and the People Team, which provided vital senior endorsement to push forward the work.

We believe that the People Team has a key role to play as they have a sense of what is going on across all departments and can avoid duplication of effort. Because they are centralised, they can take action that reaches out to all parts of the organisation, which is especially important in a network/matrix structure like ours.

### What were your reactions to the findings, and how has this led to improvement?

As a small to medium sized organisation, we have a headcount of around 200, with an average 12-month voluntary turnover of approximately 7%, which is low. We were aware of the issues of senior progression, alongside the low turnover throughout the organisation, including at senior level. So, we expected some of the data to be difficult to hear. Indicator 9 (senior manager roles) was not a surprise, as the lack of diversity was visible. It was, however, still sobering to see the data.

The shortlist indicator 2 was confronting and worrying, as it showed that candidates are twice as likely to be offered from the shortlist if they were White. It did spur us not to rest on our laurels, but to work on our “Recruiting for Diversity Principles”, and the positive approaches we already started. We see ourselves as providing sector leadership on the SC-WRES and on the workforce, so we are committed to acting on findings and promoting a collaborative approach.

## How did you build a participative approach?

We emphasised the fact that the whole organisation needs to be involved in delivering SC-WRES and remain committed to being transparent about the data and actions taken. We positioned the work as a collective effort to be undertaken collaboratively across all teams. Our aim was to ensure that the teams felt a genuine sense of ownership, working in partnership rather than viewing the work as an HR-led or imposed initiative. Colleagues across the organisation were encouraged to reflect on what the process meant to them individually and within their teams before the data was collated.

We put a lot of thought into how we could share the data results sensitively and decided that, rather than sending a blanket email with sensitive data, we would share it with team leaders/managers first and enable them to discuss with their team members. This process was important so that colleagues could also provide feedback on the findings. We also wanted to ensure that colleagues were aware of the resources and support available for their well-being.

Our People Team attended the SC-WRES local authority Community of Practice sessions, where Global Majority colleagues shared how difficult it was to hear the results of the data. Some managers stated that they wanted to reach out directly to their Global Majority colleagues for support, but we made them aware of the need to be careful to avoid making the group feel hyper visible as a result. It is crucial to consider building the skills of team leaders to efficiently facilitate and support this work.

## How did you work with your wider networks?

We worked closely with and benefited from the advice of our Global Majority network, critical friends, and external reference groups. We are thinking about the support of these wider networks going forward to enable a more task-and-finish approach to implementation to sustain focus.

We were challenged on why the programme focused on a single protected characteristic rather than addressing all of them. We underlined that the actions taken have wider benefits and contribute to improving equity across all protected groups. For example, reviewing and reducing essential criteria in job descriptions helps prevent individuals from self-excluding unnecessarily, which contributes to fairer access and opportunity.

We are working on ways of educating our people managers (particularly those who make recruitment decisions) about the difference between positive action and positive discrimination so that they are confident in how to practice inclusively and within the law. The first step is that we, the People Team, understand what our positive action principles are and where we apply them.

## **Have there been any challenges to implementing the SC-WRES in your kind of organisation?**

The data exercise was so useful as a benchmark and provided many new insights reflected in our plan. For many of the indicators, the data were easily available, but some were harder to respond to. For two of the indicators (on pay bands), the payroll and HR systems were not linked; this involved a manual “overlay” of payroll data with data from our HR system. Also, the CPD data is currently monitored manually using Excel spreadsheets, and we are working on ways to bring this into the HR system to make it more of an automated process. We had very small numbers for disciplinary data, which posed hurdles and as professional qualifications are not a requirement of most of our roles, the Fitness to Practice indicator did not seem relevant to our workforce.

Our colleagues do not, in the main, interact directly with the community and hence indicator 6, which refers to community-level abuse, was difficult to apply. Even though we are a different type of organisation from local authorities, we felt able to apply the approach, but it does rely on significant commitment from people working together across the organisation to make it happen. Even if you only have data for a small number of indicators, the learning and exercise itself is productive. We are fortunate that we do have a system that captures EDI data and information about roles, but many organisations do not have this. There may be a challenge for very small organisations without such HR or data analytics capacity to assist.

### **Skills for Care action plan feedback**

Skills for Care’s action plan is informed by an inclusion lens showing how SC-WRES aligns with wider work on workplace culture in their People Plan. There is an emphasis on the value of bringing a more robust accountability framework to their anti-racism and belonging work.

Skill for Care is a data-rich organisation, and we were able to respond to most of the indicators. We found the exercise useful to address data quality issues (low disclosure of ethnicity data) while increasing data availability in general on racial disparities. We are taking a collaborative approach involving all our workforce advisory groups and other stakeholders in the spirit of transparency and shared ownership, while regularly reporting on findings and progress. There is a commitment to supporting colleagues voice via the support and growth of networks and by gaining feedback on specific topics, such as recruitment.

The plan is informed by an understanding of the legal framework for EDI and the scope for using levers such as equality impacts assessments and positive action to amplify the impact of the SC-WRES.

## Indicators 1 and 2

Responses build on Skills for Care's strength in inclusive recruitment with efforts to refresh our resources, such as "Recruiting for Diversity Principles". This will have benefits for the whole sector. They identify further action to improve inclusive hiring strategies, such as being sensitive to language and terminology and improving communication of opportunities to networks.

The plan includes positive actions aimed at challenging and addressing structural barriers to create a more diverse organisation. This includes guaranteed interviews for applicants from minoritised ethnic backgrounds who meet all essential criteria, helping reduce the likelihood of all-white shortlists. Also, removing educational requirements unless strictly necessary.

There is a helpful focus on increasing knowledge of the legal framework for EDI and the boundaries for positive action to support managers' understanding and confidence. This will be a valuable resource for the sector, as there is a frequent gap in knowledge.

## Indicator 3

While low numbers limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions, this indicator can be considered holistically by examining managers' capability in addressing performance concerns early. This will help to foster a learning environment grounded in open and honest appraisals and resolution.

## Indicator 4

We noted that indicator 4 was seen not to apply to the type of workforce and roles that Skills for Care employs, where professional qualifications are not a requirement for most job roles. This provides important learning for the portability of the indicators to other parts of social care.

## Indicator 5

There was a positive data result for access to CPD (showing greater access for Global Majority colleagues), and the plan shows curiosity about what might sustain this result. The actions focus on strengthening oversight of access to personal development plans, where career discussions and CPD needs are identified, to ensure access remains equitable and free from bias. The plan also considers the quality of CPD and the EDI offer and aims to widen opportunities. Colleagues feedback on these issues would also add value.

## Indicators 6 and 7

The plan addresses data gaps in this area by adding questions about bullying and harassment into a colleague survey. It may also be useful to understand what the barriers and enablers might be reporting for different colleagues and to ensure that support mechanisms are robust and linked to the wellbeing and belonging offer.

## Indicator 8

The data showed a positive result for indicator 8 (Global Majority colleagues were less likely to leave). This has created an awareness of how workplace discrimination may be a factor in leaving. Actions aim to make better use of exit and stay interviews as a window into wider experiences affecting belonging, linking to belonging activities like health and wellbeing passports. The plan also addressed top-down commitment to a well-being strategy to support all colleagues to flourish and not just survive workplace culture. Part of this includes a strong focus on the value of colleagues' voice, networks and opportunities for senior leaders to connect with the diversity in their workforce.

## Indicator 9

Skills for Care acknowledges low senior turnover as the context of the plan but articulates an active role for the senior leadership team in supporting the work and responding to the concerns of colleagues. There is consideration of how to embed EDI action in the portfolio and culture of the senior team by setting shared Leadership Team and Senior Management Team objectives. This is helpfully specified in terms of:

- Education: continual learning and development to reinforce their roles as diversity champions.
- Recruitment: enhancing efforts to recruit more candidates from underrepresented groups.
- Advocacy: each leader will commit to championing an employee network to foster inclusion.

There is scope for reflection on implicit barriers at the senior level, which can exist in terms of narrow job descriptions or assumptions about who fits senior roles. Our People Team need to consider opportunities for colleagues to gain practical leadership opportunities via stepping up or shadowing within or outside the organisation.

Training interventions form a key part of the plan, and it will be important to consider how the skills gained by colleagues can be sustained in the workplace and the connection between training and Belonging Strategies.

Given the breadth of stakeholders in the plan, it will be key to find realistic ways to organise feedback and a communication plan to work with the complexity of inputs. There could have been a stronger focus on evaluation approaches and how impact across different areas can be integrated.

The plan shows how, even in an organisation where awareness of inclusive workforce issues is part of core work, the SC-WRES provides useful challenge and reflection.