

CASE STUDY

Inclusive recruitment and talent management, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

Introduction

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB) have taken an improvement approach to transform how they embed a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, and improve the experiences of ethnic minority staff in their organisation.

Their Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) data shows that since 2020, metric two (the relative likelihood of staff being appointed from shortlisting), has improved significantly. In 2020 White applicants were 1.66 times more likely to be appointed from shortlisting compared to ethnic minority applicants, this reduced to White applicants being reported as 0.8 times more likely (where 1 indicates equity between White and ethnic minority applicants) in 2022.

Context

UHB have over 22,000 staff across multiple sites, with **an ethnic minority workforce of 32.4%**.

Annual collection of WRES data since 2016 had highlighted inequities in recruitment and talent management processes within UHB. Actions to address this were set out in their **2020 WRES report** and included inclusion, unconscious bias, recruitment and selection training, and improved panel representation.

However, the impact of these interventions had been limited. While there had been some progress against metric two in reducing inequality, the progress towards equity was slow. The trust recognised that, **'to tackle the structural racism which exists within the NHS and UHB, changes must be actioned at a strategic and systemic level in the years to come'**.

Furthermore, a global pandemic and the impact of the murder of George Floyd placed a spotlight on the inequalities faced by ethnic minority communities and on people's awareness and understanding of race. For UHB's chief executive, Dr Dave Rosser and the board, this further solidified the need for greater support on race equality.

Interventions

In July 2020, UHB established a **Fairness Taskforce** chaired by the chief executive officer, to oversee actions on race and the wider equalities agenda. Membership includes chairs of all the trust's staff networks, HR representatives, colleagues from areas of the business where ethnic minority staff are either over or underrepresented, members of the executive team and Roger Kline, research fellow at Middlesex University Business School, who acts as a race equality adviser and critical friend to the organisation. A core team, led by the chief executive, meet monthly with the aim of bringing about sustainable cultural change within UHB.

The taskforce has identified several priority workstreams for delivery over a three-year period. The following workstreams have helped progress equity within recruitment and talent management at UHB.

The Reciprocal Mentoring Programme is open to all staff at UHB and participants have ranged from all pay bands, right up to executive board members. The programme partners board and senior leaders with a more junior colleague and provides a two-way relationship, where senior managers benefit from organisational insight from an alternative perspective and partnered colleague receives support, guidance, and development towards their career aspirations. Partnerships last for six months, but many have continued beyond the formal programme, with four hundred staff having been through the process since its launch in 2020.

Reciprocal mentoring is now embedded in the staff annual appraisal documentation and UHB is currently working with the University of Birmingham to discuss the possibility of accreditation of the programme.

The Fairness Root Cause Analysis (RCA) process has been implemented in recognition that inequality should be treated with the same emphasis as patient safety incidents and that improving staff experience is linked to improvements in patient experience and outcomes. Established in 2020 and chaired by Mark Garrick, chief strategy and projects officer, the fairness RCA follows the principles of a clinical RCA process.

All Datix (incident reporting system) reports relating to discrimination and inequality are reviewed fortnightly by the executive lead. Cases requiring escalation are brought to the executive team for examination in greater detail ensuring oversight and awareness of issues. In addition, work is ongoing to support case referrals that come from the Staff Network Chairs, Inclusion Team, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and HR.

The RCA process has embedded accountability for discriminatory practice with oversight at the highest level of the organisation. To date only two cases have required escalation to the executive team.

The Fairness in Recruitment workstream identified a range of actions for implementation to deliver equitable outcomes for ethnic minority and other underrepresented staff groups. The following interventions led to direct improvements in processes and outcomes:

- **Removal of the 'first past the post' system** where job adverts are no longer closed early regardless of the volume of applications received. This change was made based on feedback that early closures of adverts led to a narrowing of the talent pool and reduced the quality of applications from otherwise high-quality candidates.
- Implementation of **scheduled webinars for advertised posts** to improve equity in access to pre-interview information and reduce the risk of familiarity bias as an alternative to individual contact with recruiting managers.



Without the support of the chief executive officer and other board members, this would not have been possible... this needs to be part of core business and not an add on.

RANDEEP KAUR KULAR,
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PROJECTS

- Introduction of **accountable decision records**. Recruiting managers are required to provide justification to Cathi Shovlin, chief people officer supporting their decision to appoint a candidate, and why other candidates were not appointable. Follow up conversations are scheduled to address any concerns and provide scrutiny around the decision making or process.
- The team have increased **centralised recruiting for high volume posts**, thereby reducing the numbers of individuals who are making decisions regarding appointments.
- Piloting a volunteer cohort of **Fair Recruitment Experts** from within the workforce. These individuals support and are part of the whole recruitment journey from shortlisting to interview.

Feedback on the Fairness in Recruitment interventions range from very positive experiences which are considered to have enhanced the recruitment practice, to more challenged feedback where there is some discomfort in the disrupting of the norms. Rapid escalation of issues by Fair Recruitment Experts has been effective in addressing situations where unfairness could be perceived or arise and has resolved situations before any recruitment or offer has taken place.

Impact

UHB credit the above actions, done collectively, in helping to reducing inequity within its recruitment and talent processes.

Overall, the actions have resulted in a reduction in the inequality experienced between White and ethnic minority candidates against WRES metric two. In 2022, UHB reported growth and improvement in representation across clinical roles, although distribution across the pay bands collectively continues to be uneven.

UHB stress the **importance of board and senior leadership commitment** in helping to drive the agenda forward above all else. Anecdotal feedback from teams indicates that visible leadership from the chief executive was key to setting the tone for the organisation – that race equality and development of inclusive practice are an organisational priority.

UHB also acknowledge the importance of **collaborating closely with staff networks**, via the fairness taskforce, and the role the networks play in keeping the organisation heading in the right direction, providing challenge, and 'honest'.

Further information

If you have any questions about the programme, or would like to speak with our team further about any of the resources, then please contact our team via race.equality@nhsproviders.org