

The development of the PPN equality, diversity, and inclusion audit tool: What it is and how to use it?

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There are a host of initiatives within the National Health Service (NHS) to increase the diversity of the workforce. The Psychological Professions Network (PPN) is funded by NHS England to enable a membership network and a platform for discussion, consultation, and development across the psychological professions. Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are key priorities for the NHS workforce, and the PPN South-East (PPN SE) commissioned a project aimed at exploring the facilitators and barriers to increasing the diversity of the workforce. As part of this project, following stakeholder consultation, the PPN SE EDI Audit Tool was devised to aid the development of effective and accountable EDI action plans based upon increasing the diversity of expert by experience involvement, students/trainees, and the NHS workforce. The aim of this paper is to provide a rationale for the Audit Tool, and detail step by step instructions explaining how to complete it, to help with accountability and planning for Psychological Training Programmes, Higher Education Institutions, Professional Bodies and NHS Trusts.

Keywords: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, Audit, Guidance.

Introduction

THE National Health Service (NHS) needs to ensure that the workforce is more diverse and that there is an emphasis on respect and curiosity for all (D'Ardenne et

al., 2013). In support, the NHS People Plan (NHS England, 2020) details the importance of ensuring that the 1.3 million people who work in the NHS feel a sense of belonging

within the values of positivity, compassion, and inclusivity. The NHS Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) improvement plan (NHS England, 2023), builds upon the NHS People Plan, by proposing that appropriate actions are taken to address explicit and implicit acts of work-based prejudice, discrimination, and stigmatisation within the organisation. It details six 'high impact' actions including the importance of measurable EDI objectives, ensuring inclusive recruitment processes, and creating a safe working environment. The protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, provide the basis for enabling these inclusive actions.

The Psychological Professions Network (PPN) is an organisation, funded by NHS England, to provide a collective voice, via a membership network, for psychological professionals, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), NHS Trusts and other stakeholders within NHS Commission psychological health care. The PPN is a national organisation, divided into seven regions, to ensure that the positive influence of all aspects of health and care through psychological knowledge and practice. One of the PPN's key visions, in line with the NHS EDI improvement plan (NHS England, 2023), is to ensure a more diverse psychological workforce that are more representative of the people they aim to provide psychological treatment to.

One of the PPN regions, the Psychological Professions Network South-East (PPN SE), commissioned a Widening Participation Project that began in January 2021 and ended in March 2023. The project comprised five key objectives:

1. To develop a reference group or network(s) to steer this work.
2. To review and map existing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) work across the psychological professions.
3. To create platforms to share and co-ordinate learning.
4. To identify gaps across the psychological professions for under-represented groups entering the field and create immediate actions to address these.

5. To make short-term and long-term recommendations for future work into widening participation within the psychological professions.

This project began with stakeholder groups comprising Expert by Experience Consultants, Trust Leads, Education Providers, and member of the PPN project team. This group met several times over the course of the project to provide consultation, views, and direction to the project. As part of this project, following this extensive stakeholder consultation, the project team developed the PPN SE EDI Audit Tool to provide guidance on some of the key actions that can be taken to improve diversity within a structured, accountable framework. The aim of this paper is to describe the PPN SE EDI Audit tool and explain how to utilise it meaningfully and effectively within a host of organisations who are involved in the delivery of NHS commissioned care.

The PPN SE EDI audit tool

The Audit Tool (PPN – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) is designed primarily for Psychological Training Programmes, Higher Education Institutions, Professional Bodies and NHS Trusts and was initially informed and adapted from the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Positive Practice Guide (Beck et al., 2019). Importantly, as the BAME Positive Practice Guide focuses on the clinical interventions with clients from a range of diverse race and cultural backgrounds, the PPN SE Audit Tool enable self-evaluation, accountability, and monitoring of the implementation of a host of EDI initiatives focusing on students, the workforce, and experts by experience.

An audit tool framework was chosen as it is necessary to audit such work to ensure the compliance to principles of best practice and enhance inclusivity using a systematic approach that enables continuous improvement (e.g. Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP), 2011). The Clinical Audit Cycle (HQIP, 2020) emphasises the requirement to identify the need, define the actual stand-

ard, collect data, and compare performance against the required standard. The cycle then notes the requirement to implement change followed by a continuous process of reviewing and re-auditing. The PPN SE Audit Tool was created with these principles in mind and enables the development of reviewable action plans based on clear expectations, using the key Equality Act (2010) characteristics as the anchor. The decision was made to also include social class, as this was felt to be an important addition relating to EDI in the consultation phase of the project.

How to use the PPN audit tool

This tool is formatted as an excel workbook to enable the user to add any additional standards, create tabs for further Equality Act characteristics and or make amendments whilst completing the audit. The recommendation is that this tool is completed by a team of people and that a team ethos is maintained in the division of actions and accountability.

There are five stages to the tool:

The first stage is to choose the version of the audit tool that is most relevant to the users. Three separate versions have been designed, focusing on improving representation and inclusion amongst three groups, namely the psychological workforce, experts by experience, and students/trainees.

The three versions contain instructions, a glossary and separate tab(s) that are specific to each version:

1. Experts By Experience EDI Audit Tool – it includes one tab for recruitment and involvement.
2. Psychological Workforce EDI Audit Tool – it includes two separate tabs for recruitment and support.
3. Students/Trainees EDI Audit Tool – it includes three separate tabs for improving access to training, adapting teaching, and supporting trainees.

The next stage is to choose which one of the Equality Act (2010) under-represented areas

to focus on. Please note that the expectation is that a separate audit is completed for each of the areas below:

- Age
- Disability
- Race/Ethnicity
- Religion, Spirituality or Belief
- Sexuality
- Gender identity
- Socio-Economic Status/Class.

The third stage is to complete the tab(s) in the audit tool. Each tab has five different columns which must be completed based on the under-represented area you are focusing on:

1. *Standard*

To ensure accountability and enable action planning, the audit tool provides a series of statements within each tab of the workbook. These statements represent the standards you are comparing your performance against and create the basis of the action plan.

2. *Rating*

The aim is for the user to initially evaluate each standard carefully using a Red, Amber, or Green (RAG) rating:

- a) Red = Not Integrated
- b) Amber = Work has begun but further improvement required
- c) Green = Fully integrated.

3. *Evidence*

Once a RAG rating has been assigned, the next column asks the users to provide evidence. In the case of a red rating, evidence is not mandatory unless it is felt a useful addition to guide the actions. To support an amber or green rating, the evidence could include a range of information such details of actions already taken, links to website, minutes of meetings etc.

4. Agreed actions moving forward and by whom

The next column asks the users to create a list of actions. It is important to ensure the inclusion of who is responsible for the delivery of each action and the recommendation is that these responsibilities are shared across the team/service as it is important that ensuring meaningful EDI is everyone's responsibility within an organisation:

- a) If red = determine an action plan going forward to improve
- b) If amber = determine an action plan going forward to improve on the work that has been started
- c) If green = determine how the standard will be maintained or consider how to improve further.

5. Agreed timescale

Next, it is important to determine the timescale for all actions and to ensure that they are realistic and considered within an individual's workload with an ongoing review plan in place:

- a) The users establish a review plan, which entails repeating the process (as agreed on the timescale) to track any improvements until all actions are completed and the standard is rerated as green
- b) Once all actions are completed and a green rating assigned, there need to be follow-up reviews to maintain performance.

During the initial audit, you repeat the process until all protected characteristics are evaluated with detailed action plans in place with review set. This should be an ongoing and dynamic process with continuous improvement forming the basis of the EDI work. To support action planning, please see the PPN SE EDI resource bank (PPN – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) to support ideas and gain inspiration.

Conclusion

To increase the diversity of psychological professionals, there is a need for training programmes, Trusts, professional bodies and indeed the PPN to be accountable for, and have clear planning in place, to achieve this goal. The PPN SE Audit Tool is designed to support this need ensuring accountability and action planning, with clear direction that is provided by standards to enable a team approach to ensure true and meaningful equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives within organisations.

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