

SECTION 75 OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ACT 1998



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:	Equality and Diversity - About Us - Belfast Met Click or tap here to enter text.
Signature:	A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Damian Duffy".

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2023 and March 2024.

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

- 1 In 2023-24, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

In 2023/2024 Belfast Met continues to commit to providing equal opportunities for all, welcoming a diverse range of students and employees to encourage an environment of inclusion with representatives from a range of various backgrounds and communities, to create a culture of diversity. Belfast Met aspires to be a college of choice for learners, a partner of choice for employers and an employer of choice for talent, creating meaningful impact on the people and communities that we serve.

The Governing Body, Chief Executive and members of the Strategic Leadership Team of the College continue to support the College's commitment to the effective fulfilment of Section 75 Duties, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status and sexual orientation to ensure everyone is treated fairly and equally across the College community.

The College's Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission is submitted to and discussed by the College's Governing Body following approval by the Principal and Chief Executive.

The following section outlines some examples of how equality and diversity is currently promoted and embedded across the College and within each of the College's departments throughout the reporting period. This is aimed at creating and improving awareness and demonstrating the Colleges commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.

Widening Participation

Belfast Met remains dedicated to our widening participation goals; to increase uptake of those students most able, yet least likely, to achieve in a higher education programme of study. Widening access and participation is embedded within the College's overall corporate plan, informs policies and actions and is evident in the admissions criteria. The College actively encourages students from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply and offers support throughout their student journey.

The College's mission to make a fundamental impact on the economic and social success of the city of Belfast links with the strategic aim of reconnecting disconnected people. The

College aims to maintain its reach and help to widen participation, enhance social mobility, build community capacity and create a fairer society.

The College is committed to developing links with organisations who work directly with people who are facing barriers to their educational progression such as young people who:

- Are or have been in care, left or are on the edge of care
- Are carers
- Have a physical disability, learning disability or learning difference
- Have been involved in the Criminal Justice System
- Have a mental health illness
- Suffer an economic disadvantage
- Are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- Are single or young parents

Having a diverse student population impacts positively on everyone's learning and development. Belfast Met is committed to widening participation and actively encourages applications from people from disadvantaged backgrounds and works with them to ensure that they get the supportive interventions they need to be successful in their programme of study.

Centre for Supported Learning

The Centre for Supported Learning plays a crucial role in ensuring equal opportunities for our students with disabilities and additional learning needs. Their primary goal is to create an inclusive learning environment that supports the success and well-being of every student.

Some of the key activities and initiatives the Centre continue to undertake in 2023/2024 include:

Reasonable Adjustments: Working closely with students/other professionals to identify and implement appropriate reasonable adjustments to accommodate individual needs. These adjustments may include physical modifications, assistive technologies, alternative assessment methods, or additional support services.

Implementation of BOOP App: Following the successfully developed and implemented the BOOP App, this innovative online platform specifically designed to support our students with additional needs by serving as an E-Portfolio and virtual learning

environment (VLE). BOOP allows students to create and house their work booklets, access their timetables, receive important notifications, and communicate non-verbally with tutors. It has significantly improved the quality of provision within the Centre and eliminated physical barriers for students.

The Centre for Supported Learning has also developed a bespoke recruitment process to ensure that prospective students are carefully assessed and matched with the most suitable courses within the centre. Our process involves sampling, assessment, and a paper-based application.

In 2023/2024 The Centre for Student Wellbeing continues to support students from backgrounds that may put up barriers to education and learning and helps provide opportunities to help overcome challenges they may face.

With approximately **21,272** student enrolments, Belfast Met is the largest provider of further and higher education in Northern Ireland, with over **107** years at the forefront of education and training delivery. We provide a wide range of services in education and training, addressing every level of provision from leisure to post graduate study. We provide employment to over **1,100** people and procure **££9.3** million of goods and services per year.

Inclusive Learning

At Belfast Met we welcome and encourage applications from students who have a disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition. The College is committed to ensuring all students have equal opportunity to gain the maximum benefit from their experience at the College. A dedicated, professional team operates on all College Campuses providing a range of specialist services in the College's Inclusive Learning Team to offer students.

The main role of the Inclusive Learning Service is to assess additional support needs for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and long-term medical conditions for students on all other provisions. The centre provides pre-entry, on-course and exit advice for students who have additional support needs, how this support may be funded and how to apply for such support. The centre supports College students with a range of curriculum support resources and an Inclusive Learning Support presence has been established and embedded within college life across the different College campus locations. The centre works with students from all curricular areas, all modes of attendance and across all Belfast Met sites, including sites used as part of the community outreach programme. Direct support provision is administered as per the timetabling needs of the students.

The Range of Support Provided

The College make every reasonable effort to provide support to meet specific needs such as equipment and software loans, personal support and support in examinations, alongside other supportive interventions including;

- Providing pre-entry advice and guidance
- Assessing and reviewing support needs whilst at College

Providing additional support such as;

- Sign Language Interpreter
- Note taker
- Loan of Equipment
- Specialist Enabling Technology
- Examination Support
- Learning Mentors
- Provide information on other external services

Inclusive Learning completed 988 Curriculum Support Plans for 988 students with learning difficulties, disabilities or long-term medical conditions. The CSP includes:

- Recommendations for teaching and learning e.g. allow additional time to process information
- Recommendations for in class / outside class support e.g. Note taker, SpLD Teaching
- Exam Access Arrangements e.g., extra time, a reader

We encourage inclusion through the promotion of our service and referral process via:

- Website
- Canvas
- Intranet
- Engage App
- Student and Staff Inductions
- Open days and events.

Autism Impact Award

To help us build and maintain an accessible and inclusive service to all our students and employees, Belfast Met continues to hold the Autism Impact Award, having this in place for 4 years. This ensures we are autism-friendly, increases staff knowledge and enables us to build confidence and empower us to provide a better customer service, as well as support autistic students and staff and to attract diverse talent across all our sites.

AccessAble

Belfast Met have been working in partnership with AccessAble since 2012. AccessAble produce detailed and accurate access guides which can be reviewed by students, staff and visitors to each College. These online guides show access routes and facilities for each College campus. The guides include facts, figures and photographs to enable people to plan their visit and to anticipate whether their accessibility needs will be met.

The College seek to provide as much information as possible to prospective students, visitors and the public and believe that this access guide will help us achieve a more open, accessible and inclusive environment.

Engagement with AccessAble has undoubtedly enhanced the College's commitment to Equality, by placing as much detailed information as possible on our website to assist our students and highlighting the facilities needed to enhance their learning or working experience. In 2023 we renewed and replaced AccessAble plaques across each campus (2023-2028) each with a QR code signposting staff and students to the relevant campus to obtain accessibility information, Accessible leaflets are also available at each of our Campus receptions.

2023-2024 Statistics

From June 2023 to May 2024, the Belfast Metropolitan College Accessibility Guide had 1,161 Users and 7,599 Page Views.

This breaks down to a monthly average of 97 Users and 633 Page Views.

Belfast Met has worked closely with AccessAble during 2023/2024 to ensure the information provided is as integrated as possible and that all support available is promoted and on display in all of our site receptions. Audits have been conducted and a detailed accessibility survey carried out throughout the College estate which has been maintained through regular annual survey reviews. The work completed to date has positively impacted the usage figures;

Usage Figures incline:

April 2020 – March 2021: **324** Users

April 2021 – March 2022: **802** users

April 2022 – March 2023: **964** users

April 2023 – March 2024: **1,161** users

This reflects a continuous and significant incline in users who are accessing the Accessable support available and demonstrates an increase of 197 additional users and 6,966 page views in comparison to 2022/2023.

Disability Action Plan

The College continued its commitment to widening participation for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in 2023/2024. In addition, the NI Further Education Colleges have a joint Sector Disability Action Plan in place to fulfil their statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006. This legislation places duties on public authorities, when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability; and
- Encourage participation by people with a disability in public life.

The FE Sector Disability Action Plan outlines a number of measures in meeting the above duties including the need to *“Promote the use of AccessAble website to encourage participation of prospective students”* and to *“benchmark usage of AccessAble webpage”*. This is clearly demonstrated above in the significant increase in users and webpage views.

The access guides are a useful communication tool and send out a powerful message that the College is inclusive and welcoming of all learners. The 2023/2024 usage figures also demonstrate the College is continuing to attract and retain students with various disabilities.

Work on detail and information for the access guides will continue during the new reporting period and the use of the service will be monitored closely through regular contact between relevant College staff and a Partnerships Manager of AccessAble.

The Disability Action Plan is due for renewal in January 2025.

Equality updates / Reviews

Equality Screening conducted by Belfast Met from 1 September 2023 to 1 September 2024:

PART A

Policy Name	Policy Description	Revised or New Policy	Sector Policy (Yes/No)	Equality Screening Date	Equality Screening Outcome
Castlereagh Campus Consultation	<p>Our Castlereagh Campus has been an important part of the life of Belfast Metropolitan College since August 2007 and is one of four Belfast Met campuses across the city. Our</p> <p>most recent condition survey of the Castlereagh campus identified, however, that some £10 million is now needed to ensure the facility remains suitable for ongoing curriculum delivery. It has</p> <p>been rated 'C' using the building maintenance definitions published by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and has been deemed in need of major repair (at a cost of £10 million) or replacement (indicative costings £51 million).</p> <p>These options were presented to our Governing Body, who considered them against a</p> <p>backdrop of recent unprecedented cuts to our college budget, lower student enrolments on</p> <p>the Castlereagh Campus, and the need to ensure the sustainability of the wider College.</p> <p>Given the above factors and the current condition of the Castlereagh Campus, our</p> <p>Governing Body has since decided that it would be more prudent to consult on the proposed closure of Castlereagh Campus.</p>	New	No	31/10/2023	Screened out with mitigation
Performance Management Framework	<p>The Corporate Performance Management Framework links a range of existing policies and statutory/required reporting arrangements including the College Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan the Widening Access and Participation Plans. The Framework formally articulates and ties together the ways in which corporate performance is already managed within the College, setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the key College planning cycles and the mechanisms by which performance is monitored, managed and improved specific roles and responsibilities in the planning and performance management processes to ensure there is clear accountability for performance at every level. 	New	No	04/10/2023	Screened out
Maternity Leave Policy (Sector)					

PART A

Parental Bereavement Leave (Sector)					
VR Scheme (Sector) VR Scheme (Local)					

During 2023/2024 three policies were equality screened as attached and the [equality page of the website](#) was updated.

There were also two sector Screening of Policies carried out as follows:

- Sector Maternity Leave Policy
- Sector Parental Bereavement Leave Policy

“Advice was provided to a number of curriculum areas on courses, entry requirements, admissions and accessibility.

The College has introduced accessibility training for staff and implemented a number of changes to its website, intranet and virtual learning environments to improve accessibility for all. We have worked with third party platform providers to ensure that the accessibility issues identified in an audit were implemented. We continue to work with staff to ensure that only accessible content is posted on digital platforms.”

2024 Learner Satisfaction Survey

The Learner Satisfaction Survey is an opportunity for full-time or substantive part-time learners to rate their experience at Belfast Met. The report provides overall agreement statistics and reflects an increase in our scores compared to 2023 as follows:

- **99%** of students agreed that they feel comfortable interacting with others from different backgrounds, religious differences, ages, races and abilities
- **97%** agreed that they feel part of a diverse & inclusive culture at Belfast Met
- **98%** agreed that Belfast Met values students regardless of their unique backgrounds, identities and abilities
- **97%** agreed that their unique background and identity are valued by Belfast Met.

The full report can be accessed here:  [LSS 2024 Report for Diversity & Equality.pdf](#)

Student Services

The College’s student services department represents all students on all campuses and with the help of the Student Council and Class Reps, represents the wider student voice.

Over the reporting period a number of initiatives have been undertaken to promote equality and diversity across the College including:

Student Wellbeing 2023-2024 Inductions:

Student Wellbeing offered class inductions for the 23-24 Academic Year in our campus lecture theatres and encouraged students to book onto one of the available slots to receive information in relation to support which is available to them during their studies.

Specialisterne Empower Programme Bi-weekly drop-in sessions:

Offering our students who identify as Autistic or neurodivergent, support and guidance to find work and the opportunity to meet mentors across the sector.

The Aspiring Professionals Programme

Free for students, supporting high-achieving, disadvantaged young people in year 13 through to their Level 3 Education and university, and into highly-skilled graduate employment, through a blend of virtual and in-person provision including 1:1 mentoring by a professional in their sector.

Student Winter Warmer Campaign 2023-2024:

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing to take its toll on our students, we commenced our Winter Warmer Campaign on Monday 15th January 2024. This campaign provided FREE Breakfast or Lunch every day, for every student, across all campuses until funds were exhausted. Through the daily Winter Warmer Campaign Information Briefing, we also raised awareness of initiatives and schemes that may be of help to our students at this time.

Student Christmas Wellbeing

Promoting our Inspire Counselling services and Student Support Hub and providing advice and guidance on how to connect more and manage family dynamics over the holiday period, when students are perhaps estranged or separated from family and friends at this time.

Learner Support Fund

The Learner Support Fund support our students of 18 years of age and who have exhausted all other available sources and feel they require further financial assistance with any of the following categories, and are encouraged to apply.

- Course Fees
- Additional Living Costs (Full Time Only)
- Travel Costs
- Books and equipment costs (essential/required)
- Childcare Costs

Free CBT Provision

In November 2023 the Centre for Wellbeing promoted services available from a University Trainee Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner, on placement at Belfast Met.

The University trainee offers students low intensity **CBT** (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), which is essentially guided self-help for students who are struggling with:

Anxiety, low mood, worry, phobias, stress and more.

An assessment is provided along with a total of approximately 6 sessions, involving interventions and in between session tasks as part of the service.

Family Action Fund (Support for Asylum Seekers in Further Education)

The Family Action Fund is a charity that the College affiliates with to enable our students that currently hold Asylum Seeker status and who are studying in Further Education to apply for a small grant of up to £250 to aid them with their studies.

2023-2024 Exams Access Arrangements

Providing support for students with a disability, learning difficulty or long term medical condition.

Students' Union Sustainability hub

Following the Pilot set up by a lecturer in Belfast Business School in TQ for a clothes swapping scheme named "Wear & Share", designed to address the rising cost of living and the need for a dignified way for Belfast Met students to access quality clothing, who may not have the resources to buy appropriate clothing - this scheme continues to be successful in 2023-2024.

Taste not Waste!

Our taste not waste project works closely with the Linen Lounge to be a zero food waste business.

Centre for Economic Development & Social Inclusion / Centre for Skills and Apprenticeships

The College is dedicated to actively including individuals with low or no qualifications, as well as those facing barriers to learning. It aims to equip them with the necessary skills and qualifications for employment, enabling them to realise their potential, build self-confidence and key competences and ensure their active participation and contribution to the economic and social prosperity of Belfast and the wider region.

In 2023 the College developed an approach to engaging with the community and voluntary sector and social enterprises to deliver skills and employability programmes for particular targeted groups for entry level programmes including women, people with mental or physical disabilities and young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, not in mainstream education, employment or training. These programmes include the **DARE** Programme to assist disabled learners, the **WRAP** Programme aimed at women returners and the **College Connect Programme** which has strands aimed specifically at young people who are **NEET** and Adult learners who are economically inactive. These programmes have been very successful in supporting these groups of learners to achieve recognised qualifications and improve their overall skill levels and employability.

Case Study

The College in partnership with Women in Business delivered the **Press Refresh Programme** in 2023. This is a free, supportive, and intensive 16-week data analytics training programme to give women who are currently out of work or in part time casual employment, the opportunity to learn new skills, explore data analytics, build confidence, and enter the Tech sector with support from female role models already working in the IT Sector.

During the programme the participants worked towards completing qualifications in Programming, Data Fundamentals, Power BI Data Analytics and Prince2 Project Management, whilst also developing core skills to help build their confidence, understand how to restart their careers, and additionally build a network of like-minded women through their collective experience on the programme. Across the three cohorts of the Press Refresh Programme, there were **57** participants who collectively achieved **168** qualifications.

The skills, knowledge, support, and qualifications gained through **Press Refresh**, gave the women an opportunity to make a valuable first step into the IT sector.

Feedback from participants on the programme has been very positive of the programme:

“The course has been fantastic, I have felt challenged and learnt a lot, have really enjoyed going through the course with a great group, and am very positive about my career prospects following the course.”

As a result of the success of the Press Refresh Programme the College also developed the Career Reboot initiative which is a month-long programme encouraging women to build confidence, develop their interview skills, enhance their CV, and gain a level 3 ILM qualification in leadership and management which focuses on Communication and Presentation Skills. At the end of the programme, the participants were given the time to meet and network with employers and recruitment agencies to discuss and progress

employment opportunities. **The Career Reboot** initiative has been another great success, with **88** women participating across three cohorts.

Reasonable Adjustments

Within the Centre for Skills and Apprenticeships a member of staff who has a significant visual impairment has been skilled up to undertake the role of Skills Support Coach with a caseload of learners through use of specific IT applications enlarged text etc.

Skill Up Programme

Since 1st of April 2022, through the NI Office and DfE funded Skill Up programme, Belfast Met's Business Development team have successfully delivered tailored Women Returners programmes for 141 learners.

Through these programmes we have upskilled individuals in industry-relevant digital skills, business administration and key employability skills including confidence building, interview techniques, communication, and presentation skills. Each of these programmes were specifically tailored to support women returning to work, with each course delivered part time during hours which would suit caring responsibilities and offering a training allowance, childcare payments, and travel allowances.

Within the programmes we offered female-led delivery, ongoing mentoring and relevant accredited qualifications and micro-credentials to increase employability in participants. Learning from these courses is now shaping our Digital Skills and Employability academies through the Bank of America fund.

Testimonials from Women Returners:

I spent seven years 'economically inactive' caring for ill and disabled family members and had found it difficult to return to work. Despite having a wealth of experience and being highly qualified for the roles I applied for, I couldn't seem to get over the final hurdle of attaining employment.

My confidence was at rock bottom and I began to feel that I had missed my opportunity to have a career and that I had little to contribute. I confided this to a trusted friend who recommended the Skill Up course.

The Skill Up course provided me with a chance to pause and reflect on where I had come from both academically and professionally and focus on where I wanted to get to. I gained valuable knowledge on career development, interview skills, networking and resilience as well as having the opportunity to work towards a vocational qualification.

Since completing the course, I have gained employment in the field and sector that I had discovered that I wanted to work in. I have confidence in my skills and knowledge as well

as the ability to seek support and mentoring to address any gaps. I can absolutely say with great certainty that I would not be in this position had I not attended the course and I have recommended the course to a number of friends and acquaintances. I can think of no better way to encourage and support women who need that extra bit of help with their career development.

Completing the Skill Up course has been transformative both personally and professionally. Professionally, the acquired skills have empowered me to tackle complex tasks with newfound confidence, making me a more valuable asset to my organisation. On a personal level, the sense of accomplishment and the continuous learning experience have been fulfilling. The course has not only broadened my horizons but has also instilled a habit of lifelong learning, crucial in today's rapidly evolving job landscape.

A year ago, I was diagnosed with cancer and during the time of my treatment my contract with Queen's University ended. Since I was unable to find another position in the university, I was made redundant. At that time, I realised that it was quite difficult to adapt my research CV to the requirements of other employers, not connected to scientific research. Skill Up programme helped me achieve that, I have updated my CV and gained confidence for interviews. I have met wonderful people on the course too, we keep in touch and support each other.

I would recommend the Skill Up programme wholeheartedly.

Now Group Programme

In 2023, in collaboration with Now Group, Belfast Met delivered a four-month programme to help those with learning difficulties and autism to gain the skills, confidence and qualifications required to secure business technology roles. Delivered through the Skill Up programme:

- 30 learners took part in the Digital Skills Academy.
- 28 learners successfully completing the course and achieved their qualifications.
- 8 immediately secured full-time employment.
- 13 learners remain on work placement.
- This programme has been heavily supported by some of Northern Ireland's leading Tech companies, including Citi Bank, Expleo, Deloitte and Kainos.

Bring IT On Programme

One of the many highlights from the Bring IT On programme has been our partnership with Specialisterne in the delivery of the 'Consider IT' initiative. Consider IT is a three-month mentoring programme which aims to help unemployed neurodivergent people to gain an insight into roles within the tech sector and encourage them to Consider IT as a real career opportunity. Outputs of this year's programme are:

- 26 autistic and/or neurodivergent participants took part in Consider IT

- 8 participants signed up for the IBM Skillsbuild platform where they gained digital credentials to demonstrate ability for IT roles.
- 2 participants to date have completed the Creative Industries New Entrant bootcamp, 1 participant has applied for creative industry roles and has had an interview, 2 participants have started college and/or university, 1 of whom is studying cyber security, 1 participant has applied for an apprenticeship, 1 participant has started volunteering and 2 participants have secured employment.

Bank of America Digital Skills and Employability Programme

The objectives of the Belfast Digital Skills and Employability Programme are:

- Development and Delivery of an inclusive digital skills and employability programme targeted at a range of disadvantaged groups across Belfast City Region.
- A network of employers clustered into relevant sectors who are prepared to engage to create work experience, development and employment opportunities for programme participants.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for performance reporting and to track distance travelled for participants/ employer feedback.

Indicative Annual Targets and Priority Groups

- 40 NEETS (not in employment, education or training) completing programme and 50% progressing into FE, Training, Apprenticeships or employment.
- 20 Adult Learners in Work completing programme and 60% progressing in their employment.
- 40 Disabled Learners completing programme and 60% progressing into FE, Training, Apprenticeships or employment.
- 40 Women Returners completing programme and 60% progressing into FE, Training, Apprenticeships or employment.
- 40 Underemployed graduates completing programme and 70% progressing into Training, Apprenticeships or employment.
- 20 New Arrival Migrants completing programme and 50% progressing into FE, HE, Training, Apprenticeships or employment.

Age	Almost half (44.5%) of BoA learners are aged 26 to 35 years. This proportion is considerably higher than the College average (18.5%).
Gender	Higher proportion of female learners enrolled in BoA Academies in comparison to College as a whole.
Ethnicity	BoA Academies are considerably more ethnically diverse, in comparison to College as a whole.
LGD	Higher proportion of learners enrolled in BoA academies are from Belfast, in comparison to the College average.
Quintile	Considerably higher proportion of learners enrolled in BoA academies are from Quintile 1 (20% most deprived areas in NI), in comparison to the College average.
Disability	In line with College average.

Health and Wellbeing

Mandatory Training

Module Name	Number of staff completed
Accessibility	670
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	695

Health and Wellbeing Related Training and Development:

Training Title	Number of staff completed
Cultural Awareness in Northern Ireland	15
Support for Students with Disabilities/ Learning Difficulties: Assessments and Exams	14
Supporting Neurodiversity in Education	12
Promoting Positive Mental Health	42
Promoting Positive Mental Health in the Classroom	39
Supporting Non-Native English Speakers	34
Menopause Awareness for All	47
Healthy Habits Formation Programme	24

Financial Wellbeing	15
Face to Face Health Checks	40
Overcoming Impostor Syndrome	77
Supporting Learner Resilience and Wellbeing – using example from Dutch education system	65
The essentials of Health and Wellbeing	129
Using Maths to Support Language Development in Non-Native English Speakers.	15

Inclusion & Diversity

Counselling

Belfast Met works in partnership with Inspire Counselling to provide a comprehensive Counselling service for all Belfast Met staff and students. The service is professional, confidential and free to all. The Inspire team work together with people living with mental ill health, intellectual disability, autism and addictions to ensure they live with dignity and realise their full potential. They want to develop a culture of compassion, creating a society free from stigma that focuses on people and their abilities.

The Inspire team attended the College's virtual freshers' events and quarterly Information Roadshows providing students with support and advice. Inspire also provided in college one-to-one support as well as facilitate Hybrid sessions allowing those who need it to talk and begin to explore issues that are causing them difficulties.

Sept 23 – April 24 Counselling Services data analysis:

Referrals = 275 Students

Trends = October/November 2023 and February 2024 had the highest referral rate.

Top three presenting issues = 1st Anxiety – 2nd Stress – 3rd Low Mood

The Inspire Support Hub has been a recent introduction for both staff and students alike. The Hub provides the **right** help **right** now, giving users instant access to a range of information, guidance and screening that is tailored specifically to help care for your individual wellbeing needs. The Hub also helps create a bespoke wellbeing care-plan, as well as giving guidance on appropriate support and intervention through guided self-assessment.

Sept 23 – April 24 Support Hub data analysis

Student Interactions = 207

Most popular pages = IHelper/Mental Health Resources/Access Counselling. referral rate.

Most popular Courses = Stress Course & Self Esteem Course.

Employee Referral Stats:

Quarter	Female	Male
Q1 23/24	3	7
Q2 23/24	10	3
Q3 23/24	3	6
Q4 23/24	6	10
Total	22	26
Grand Total	48	

Diversity NI Bronze Charter Mark

Having recently receiving the Diversity Mark Accreditation, demonstrates our commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse workplace where all our employees can feel valued, safe and respected.

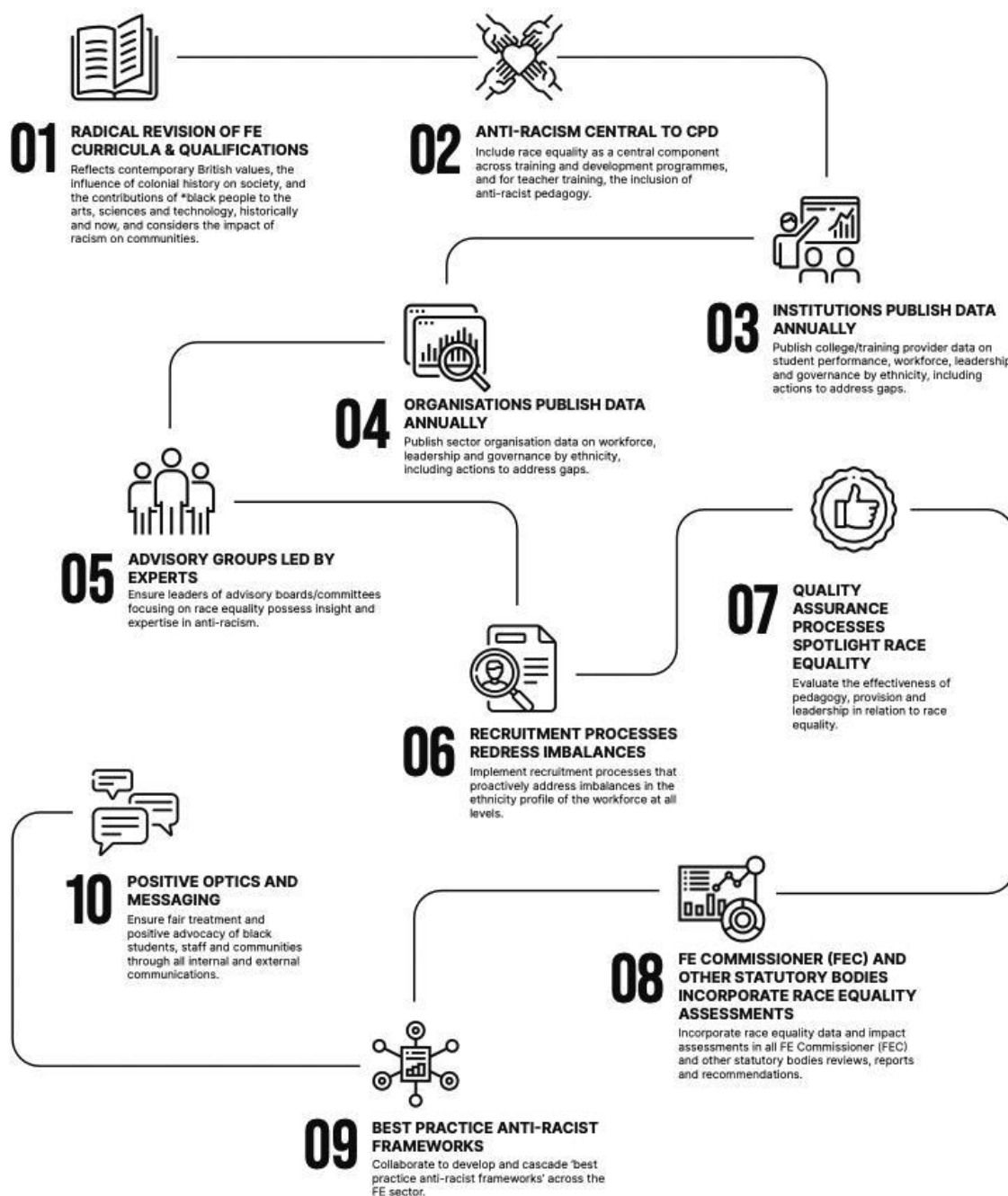
Black Leadership Group Induction Training Event

On the 9th February 2023 a cross section of the Senior Leadership Team attended a facilitated Induction Event, providing a safe environment to share personal and collective perspectives and experiences, in relation to the opportunities and challenges pertaining to anti-racism, focusing on how this plays out in our organisational context.

The Event introduced research, tools and conceptual frameworks, developed by BLG, that engaged and helped the group to identify what constitutes best anti-racist practice. The BLG's 10 Point Plan will act as a central reference, enabling Belfast Met to inform our organisational approach and priorities. Please see below a copy of the 10 Point Plan.

10 POINT PLAN

Black FE
Leadership
Group



*NB 'Black' is used as an inclusive definition for people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who share a lived experience of the effects of racism.

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- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2023-24 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Action Measure Undertaken
<i>Further develop the Centre for Student Well-being to support students from a background that puts up barriers to education and learning, and help them overcome challenges they may face.</i>
Outcome/Impact on Individuals
<p>Having a diverse student population impacts positively on everyone's learning and development, during 2023-2024 the college has provided extensive support and services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable Adjustments • Implementation of the Boop App • Bespoke recruitment process • Welcome and encourage student applicants with a disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition • Completed 988 Curriculum Support Plans for 988 students with learning difficulties, disabilities or long-term medical conditions • Providing pre-entry advice and guidance • Assessing and reviewing support needs whilst at College • Sign Language Interpreter • Note taker • Loan of Equipment • Specialist Enabling Technology • Examination Support • Learning Mentors • Provide information on other external services • Recommendations for teaching and learning e.g. allow additional time to process information • Recommendations for in class / outside class support e.g. Note taker, SpLD Teaching • Exam Access Arrangements e.g., extra time, a reader. <p>We also encourage inclusion through the promotion of our service and referral process via:</p>

- Website
- Canvas
- Intranet
- Engage App
- Student and Staff Inductions
- Open days and events

Further details on the above support provided can be found on page 4,5 6 & 7 of this document.

In addition to the above the college renewed its Autism Impact Award and AccessaAble engagement for 2023/2024 and also continuous its commitment to widening participation for learners with learning disabilities via our Disability Action Plan.

Action Measure Undertaken

Promote and encourage student and staff participation in college working groups and events.

Outcome/Impact on Individuals

Belfast Met celebrate a wide range of festivals and specific days to promote and encourage participation in College working groups, these include but are not limited to:

- The Aspiring Professionals Programme
- Free CBT Provision
- Wear and Share
- Taste not Waste
- Specialisterne Empower Programme Bi-weekly drop-in sessions
- Launch of LGBTQ+ Society
- Action Mental Health Workshops
- I&D Strategic Direction & Action Planning
- Differing Abilities /Disabilities Group
- Black Leadership Group –

A full list of these support groups and can be found on page 10, 11 & 12 of this document.

The college has also achieved its Diversity NI Bronze Charter Mark.

Action Measure Undertaken

Continued roll out of Mandatory Equality, Diversity, Safeguarding and SENDO training.
Outcome/Impact on Individuals
<p>In order to increase awareness and compliance of policies, a two-day compliance event was introduced in September 2022, at this event all staff were required to complete all mandatory training, including a range of equality and diversity training modules that are updated annually, <i>(a full list of our staff training numbers can be found on page 17 of this document)</i>.</p> <p>The college also annually updates student induction materials and the student handbook using available feedback.</p>
Action Measure Undertaken
Grow and enhance relations with local community groups
Outcome/Impact on Individuals
<p>Community education programmes are delivered across the college and links maintained with local community groups, some examples include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Connect • Skill-Up • NOW Group • Bring IT On • Bank of America Digital Skills and Employability Programme • Syrian Refugee delivery Project • Cara Friend • Black FE Leadership • Volunteering • Change Markers • Good for me Good for FE • Disability Officer and Groups • BAME • Gender Identity <p>Further information regarding the above can be found in Part A of this document.</p>
Action Measure Undertaken

Monitor, Evaluate, and Review Equality Improvement Plan
Outcome/Impact on Individuals
<p>The college continues to share information and good practice in relation to equality projects, some examples of these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equality and Good Relations Annual Progress Report• Equality Scheme• Internal Equality Working Group• Disability Action Plan

- 3** Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☒ No (go to Q.4)

☐ Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 3a** With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 3b** What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

☐ As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

☐ As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

☐ As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

☐ As a result of changes to access to information and services (*please specify and give details*):

Click or tap here to enter text.

☐ Other (*please specify and give details*):

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☒ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☒ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

PART A

- ☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- ☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 6 In the 2023-24 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

- ☒ Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- ☒ Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- ☐ Yes, in some departments/jobs
- ☐ No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's corporate plan
- ☐ No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2023-24 report
- ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Equality action plans/measures

- 7 Within the 2023-24 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed: 14

Please refer to Action Plan attached

Actions ongoing: 2

Please refer to Action Plan attached

PART A

Actions to commence: 1

Disability Action Plan to be reviewed January 2025

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 8** Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2023-24 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

The Equality Action Plan was updated for 2023-2024 (*Equality Action Plans/Measures can be found on page 21-24 of this document*).

- 9** In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2023-24 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- ☒ Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- ☐ Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- ☐ Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- ☐ Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

- 10** Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: (*tick one box only*)

- ☒ All the time
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

PART A

- 11** Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2023-24 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

TU Consultation as part of the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme 2023/2024.

- 12** In the 2023-24 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

☒ Face to face meetings

☒ Focus groups

☒ Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing

☒ Questionnaires

☐ Information by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation

☐ Internet discussions

☐ Telephone consultations

☐ Other *(please specify)*: Click or tap here to enter text.

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☐ No

PART A

☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

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Click or tap here to enter text.

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

3

- Castlereagh Campus Consultation
- Performance Management
- Voluntary Redundancy

We also completed **2** Sector Policy Screenings as follows:

- Sector Maternity Leave Policy
- Sector Parental Bereavement Leave Policy

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2023-24:

Yes Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.

No Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.

No Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

- 17** Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

3 Policies were screened during this reporting period and **2** Sector Screening of Policies with consultations conducted for each:

- Castlereagh Campus
- Performance Management
- Voluntary Redundancy
- Sector Maternity Leave
- Sector Parental Bereavement Leave

- 18** Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

☒ Yes

☐ No concerns were raised

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Voluntary Redundancy Policy and Castlereagh Campus Consultation.

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

- 19** Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2023-24 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

☐ Yes

PART A

☒ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

- 20** From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2023-24 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☐ No, already taken place

☒ No, scheduled to take place at a later date

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 21** In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2023-24 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

None

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

Not Applicable

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

- 24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2023-24, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

Mandatory Training

Course Title	Engagement
• Accessibility	670
• Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	695

Other Relevant CPD

• Promoting Positive Mental Health in the Classroom	39
• Promoting Positive Mental Health	42
• Cultural Awareness in Northern Ireland	15
• Support for Students with Disabilities/learning difficulties: Assessments and Exams	14
• Supporting Neurodiversity in Education	12
• Supporting Non-Native English Speakers	34
• Using Maths to Support Language Development in Non-Native English Speakers	15

Recruitment and Selection Training

The training session looks in detail at the various aspects of the recruitment and selection process and aims to provide hiring managers across the College with the skills to recruit

fairly. Providing appropriate training to all managers and any other persons who will have a role in implementing the recruitment and selection policy. This will ensure they understand:

- their responsibilities under the college's equal opportunities and recruitment and selection policies.
- their responsibilities under current equality legislation.

25 Please provide **any examples** of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

- Accessibility
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Promoting Positive Mental Health in the Classroom
- Promoting Positive Mental Health
- Cultural Awareness in Northern Ireland
- Support for Students with Disabilities/learning difficulties:
Assessments and Exams
- Supporting Neurodiversity in Education
- Supporting Non-Native English Speakers

The above training and additional curriculum support ensures we raise awareness of these areas to help create a diverse and inclusive culture at Belfast.

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

26 Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2023-24, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

Further information on access to information and services can be found under the AccessAble section of part A (page 7&8).

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2023-24?

Insert number here: **1**

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

A complaint was received from Unite the Union on 24th January 2024, made under Paragraph 10 of Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998, the complaint was in relation to the College's Voluntary Redundancy Scheme (VR) and alleged that the College had failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland wrote to Mrs McCormack (Head of HR) on 1st July 2024, advising that the Committee had reviewed the College's response and had decided not to investigate the complaint. The decision was made, on the basis of the assessment provided, there was not an arguable case that a failure to comply with the approved Equality Scheme had occurred.

Section 3: Looking Forward

- 28** Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

January 2027

- 29** Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

- Screening
- Updating of equality action plans

- 30** In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

☒ Employment

PART A

- ☒ Goods, facilities and services
- ☒ Legislative changes
- ☐ Organisational changes/ new functions
- ☐ Nothing specific, more of the same
- ☐ Other (please state):

Click or tap here to enter text.

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:
--

10	1	0
Fully achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on <u>all</u> actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.
--

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ
National ⁱⁱⁱ	Increase awareness of specific barriers faced by people with a disability including through linking in with National Awareness days or weeks.	The College hold and annual accessibility week. This is a whole college initiative to encourage students with disabilities to participate more fully in College life. There is also a whole College calendar, provided by the Centre for Inclusive learning. This is filled with events that both staff and students may access to	Awareness increased, students availed of the workshops available, accessed information via the College intranet and portal.

PART B

		provide awareness of disabilities	
Local ^{iv}	Promote the use of AccessAble website to encourage participation of prospective students.	The AccessAble contract was renewed for a further 3 years with effect from 1 February 2023. AccessAble logo is used on College website for prospective students and leaflets requested to enhance promotion and signposting of AccessAble services.	AccessAble produce detailed and accurate access guides which can be reviewed by students, staff and visitors to each College. These online guides show access routes and facilities for each College campus. The guides include facts, figures and photographs to enable people to plan their visit and to anticipate whether their accessibility needs will be met. This year the College have worked closely alongside AccessAble to ensure the information provided is as integrated as possible. New plaques are now displayed in each campus reception, with barcodes for staff and students to scan to obtain easy access to all necessary information. Audits continue to be conducted and a detailed accessibility survey carried out throughout the College estate which has been maintained through regular annual survey reviews. The work completed to date has positively impacted the significant increase in usage figures;

PART B

			(documented on page 7 & 8 of this document).
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2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Accessibility	Increased awareness across staff and students on Accessibility, awareness of legislation and better understanding of the importance of promoting positive attitudes to those with accessibility needs.	Colleagues with accessibility needs are supported by staff and students, with promotion of useability they feel inclusive, with equal access.
2	Supporting Neurodiversity in Education	Increased awareness across staff and students on Neurodiversity, awareness of legislation and better understanding of the importance of promoting positive attitudes to those with Neurodiversity needs.	Develop a general awareness across staff and students, resulting in a better understanding and appreciation of colleagues with neurodiverse needs, potentially leading to increased innovation, creativity and problem-solving abilities.

PART B

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Create an open an inclusive workplace culture which displays respect for those with mental ill health	The College's Centre for Excellence continued to increased support through the development of online health and wellbeing training for students and staff. The staff intranet page was further developed to promote health and wellbeing and the support available, mindful of those with a disability in particular.	Increased visibility of health and wellbeing events and courses. The Centre for Excellence provided a range of Health and Wellbeing Webinars The health and wellbeing week is run annually to support staff and managers. There have been 980 engagements in courses last year.
2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Encourage students with a disability to participate more fully in college life.	The College's student's union and Learning Support Departments have worked together to encourage those students with a disability to participate more fully in college life. Introduction of the BOOP app for students with additional needs.
3	Through Widening Access Participation scheme increase number of students with a disability entering the College	The College's Centre for Learning Success participates in Belfast Met's Widening Participation events to reach out to those with a disability who make struggle to engage with education. Widening access and participation is embedded within the College's overall corporate plan, informs policies and actions and is evident in the admissions criteria. The College actively encourages	Students at the Met are encouraged to disclose their disabilities at the time of enrolment so that learning support needs can be assessed and curriculum and/or examination recommendations are disseminated to the relevant course lecturers/teams.

PART B

		students from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply and offers support throughout their student journey.	
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2 (d) What action measures were achieved to '**encourage others**' to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Continue to encourage the participation of disabled people on committees, student representatives on the Governing Body groups across the College	The College ask for disabled people to apply to committees and groups across the College	Participation and involvement from representatives in College groups and forums influence College policy and decisions.

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	Consider development of a (Sectoral) Disability Advisory group that could involve staff and students.	The FE Sector group has placed this as an agenda item in their quarterly meetings and remains ongoing.	Increase sharing among colleges to examine what is currently being done and what could be implemented.

PART B

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Monitor and review the progress of the Disability Action plan	Undertaken within the FE Sector group as an Agenda item	Monitor and review the progress of the Disability Action plan	Ongoing during period of action plan
2	Roll out mandatory training for front line staff on disability and the provision of goods, facilities and services	Review training completion rates on compliance portal	Click or tap here to enter text.	Ongoing during period of action plan

4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
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N/A

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

PART B

(a) Qualitative

- The Head of HR at the College monitors actions as part of the reporting process to the Governing Body and the HR Subcommittee of the Governing Body.
- Evaluations are completed following training which provides valuable feedback.

(b) Quantitative

- The annual student and staff surveys to identify trends or increases/decreases in satisfaction.
- The use of data from the ebs system allows for monitoring of students with disabilities.
- The on-line training modules to assess the number of staff trained and completion rates.
- The College's compliance procedure ensures all complaints are recorded and those relating to disability are communicated.
- Annual Review of staffing profile measured against equality characteristics.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

No

If yes please outline below:

PART B

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
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N/A

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation's annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

None envisaged at this stage.

ⁱ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

ⁱⁱ **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

ⁱⁱⁱ **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

^{iv} **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.