

Appendix 2

Examples of activities and civic contributions across the University, which have helped to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Widening Access and Participation

The Government regulates the University's Widening Access and Participation Plan, which includes an account of expenditures, projects and plans to widen access and participation to groups that are underrepresented in Higher Education (HE). Information on the plan can be found on the Ulster University [webpages](#). This showcases a wide range of engagements, activities, and events the Educational Partnerships and Policy and Community Partnership teams have undertaken with widening access schools and community partners.

Equal Opportunities (EO) Data monitoring

The EDI team completed two staff EO remonitoring exercises, in June 2025 and March 2026, to ensure that the equality and diversity information we hold is accurate, meaningful, and up to date.

The team adopted two approaches for these exercises: The first was a simple communication to all staff in to encourage them to update their information over a two-week period. Although open for a brief period, the first exercise was successful in reducing the proportion of missing data for Gender Identity (-1%), National Identity (-1.6%), Country of Origin (-0.9%) and Disability (-0.5%).

The second approach consisted of a one-month communication campaign which expanded the messaging to encourage staff to update their information, included myth busting, demonstrating ways in which we use equality information and linking the exercise to the launch of the triennial Staff Disability Survey. The second exercise was successful in reducing the proportion of missing data for most categories with the largest reductions being in the newer ones: Gender Identity (-11.01%), National Identity (-13.49%), Citizenship (-10.22%). Furthermore, this exercise was successful in engaging staff by encouraging them to update their disability information, with an increase in staff reporting a 'Known Disability' (+0.39).

Through both exercises we publicised that with accurate and up-to-date data, the University can,

- Gain a clear understanding of staff diversity
- Increase the accuracy of pay gap analyses
- Benchmark against local and national data

- Provide for an in-depth understanding of inequality or unfair treatment, different experiences and areas for action
- Identify areas for improvement in policy, planning, decision-making, and Equality Action Plans and assess the success of any positive action we are taking
- Meet legal obligations relating to equality, including making appropriate reasonable adjustments.

Building upon this work, the EDI team will continue to strengthen equality monitoring in partnership with the System, Rewards and Analytics (SAR) team and develop our methodology for engaging with staff through future re-monitoring exercises.

Athena Swan

Athena Swan is the framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within HE and research. Ulster University was awarded a Silver Charter Award in 2023, and within the recent reporting period, the Athena Swan Committee is meeting regularly to follow up on Ulster University's Institutional Silver Action Plan, keeping it prioritised. The committee will continue this pattern until entering the submission year in early 2027 in preparation for an Institutional Athena Swan Gold Award. The University currently holds 18 School and Faculty Awards and two Professional, Technical and Operational (PTO) Award, recognising the University's gender equality efforts and the promotion of inclusive working practices.

The School of Nursing and Paramedic Science recently received an Athena Swan Departmental Gold award, making them the first nursing school in the UK to achieve this. Ulster University has also completed the pilot scheme for PTO Athena Swan, winning its first Bronze PTO Athena Swan award, with the Chief People Officer's office achieving their first Athena Swan PTO Silver award in March 2026.

The University's Athen Swan Committee held four meetings and one workshop during the reporting period and ran a university-wide Pulse Survey in May 2025 which received over 800 responses. The data collected from the survey was then analysed by a working group formed from members of the Committee, and the analysis will be shared to the Committee members in upcoming Committee meetings.

Return Carers Scheme (RCS)

This scheme opens for applications twice a year for carers returning from their leave with opportunities of their choosing that can potentially advance their career perspectives, once it is approved by their Heads of School or Department and a designated panel.

The RCS has been continuously supporting staff in both academic and PTO roles: Nine people successfully applied for the RCS funds within the reporting period.

Additionally, eight people applied towards the end of the reporting period and are still waiting for the RCS panel's decision as of April 2026.

A number of success stories based on interviews of past awardees of the scheme have been included on the [RCS website](#) to encourage more staff to apply. Besides the existing RCS, a new one-to-one Parental Coaching opportunity was launched in 2024 and so far, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team has funded seven employees both academic and non-academic to participate.

Aurora

[Aurora](#) is Advance HE's leadership development initiative for women. It is run as a unique partnership bringing together leadership experts, HE providers and research institutes to take positive action to address the under-representation of women in leadership positions in the sector. Ulster University's EDI and People Development (PD) teams funded 16 women for the Advance HE Aurora leadership programme. The programme this year ran at the university from October 2025 to March 2026. An event to celebrate 10 years of Aurora took place on 17 October 2025 in Coleraine.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG)

Ulster University is the first university to sign up to the NEXUS pledge to end violence against women and girls (EVAWG). The University teamed up with Nexus to launch this year's 16 Days of Activism campaign on 25 November 2025, which is a global campaign that drives advocacy towards EVAWG by raising awareness and demanding action.

Throughout the 16 days, Ulster University hosted a diverse programme of events for staff and students across our campuses and online, to deliver targeted interventions designed to challenge misogyny, promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and girls. For its second year at Ulster University the campaign was launched on the 26 November 2025 and finished on the 10 December 2025. A programme of 28 events was delivered across the three campuses. The Gender and Sexual Orientation (GSO) Section Lead also attended the PwC and PSNI Business Briefing on the economic impact of violence against women and girls in November 2025. Furthermore, the Dean of EDI and GSO Section Lead presented the EVAWG Ulster University strategies to address gender-based violence (GBV) at the Business in the Community (BITC) Event in January 2026.

EVAWG Tertiary Education Working Group

This working group was established with the purpose of assessing the current landscape of GBV, promoting awareness and education, enhancing reporting and support systems, strengthening institutional responses, fostering collaboration and key partnerships, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions to

address VAWG to ensure continuous improvement. A workshop was held on 17 June 2025 where the group mapped out the outcomes from the workshop and the main themes that emerged into three categories for EVAWG subgroups. The subgroups were established on the following areas: Training, Policy and Reporting. A Capacity Building Workshop took place on the 8 December 2025.

White Ribbon

White Ribbon is a global movement to end VAGW, and Ulster University has held White Ribbon accreditation since 2023. To renew our commitments and partnership with White Ribbon, a meeting was held on 4 January 2026 to agree next steps for the University to review and refresh its Action Plan, working with the Women's network.

White Ribbon also delivered a GBV awareness session for staff and students on 9 December 2025.

GBV Working Group

The GBV Working Group was established on the 2 March to develop comprehensive guidance to support the University's prevention, response, and management of gender-based violence. The Group will review current institutional practice, identify gaps, and produce recommendations and tools that promote a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all staff and students.

Men's Day – November 2025

As part of celebrating Men's Day, the EDI team, in partnership with the Taking boys Seriously Project, held the 'Empowering Boys' Voices Photography exhibition' across all three campuses, which included presenting 14 compelling portraits accompanied by QR codes. Attendees were invited to listen to young men as they talk about themes including belonging, community, school, future, roles models, strength, and being a boy. The artwork is the result of a Taking Boys Seriously collaborative project involving St Joseph's Boys' School, Oakgrove Integrated College, Belfast School of Art, and the Nerve Centre.

Women's Day Events – March 2026

As part of celebrating Women's Day, the EDI team supported with the following events:

- The voices and experiences of LGBTQIA+ women in Northern Ireland - documentary Screening 3 November 2025 organised by LGBT+ Network and delivered by HEReNI
- Give to Gain: The Power of Giving Celebration was held on 3 April 2026 in partnership with the Women's Network

Age Positive Initiatives

The University secured membership of the Age-Friendly University Global Network (AFUGN). Membership recognises the University's commitment to promoting positive and healthy ageing, and to enhancing the lives of older members of the community through innovative educational programs, research agendas, curriculum development, online education, health and wellness activities, arts and culture programs and civic engagement opportunities.

Age Positive Work and External Partnerships

The EDI Disability and Age section became active contributors to the BITC Age Positive Workshops, a structured programme aimed at improving age inclusion in the workplace. As part of this work:

- BITC's Age Positive Workshops were completed
- Planning began for an Ulster University Age Inclusion Action Plan, to embed age-inclusive practice across the University
- Two employee focus groups were held to inform the development of the Age Inclusion Action Plan
- The University also maintained external engagement through membership of the Age Alliance, Derry–Strabane City Council.

Accessibility Improvements and Disability Awareness

Read and Write

Read and Write software was made available to staff for download via the University Staff Portal, improving access to assistive technology.

Accessible Room - Pride Belfast 2025

The University supported the provision of an 'Accessible Room' at Pride Belfast 2025, receiving positive feedback. Attendees highlighted:

- Excellent planning and accessibility, including nearby disabled parking
- Attentive, kind, and disability-aware staff
- A calm, welcoming environment that fostered community without being overwhelming: This was supplemented with the provision of refreshments, Pride merchandise, and colouring activities for emotional regulation and improved wellbeing.

Quiet Room

A Quiet Room was created for staff and developed collaboratively with the NeuroNetwork, Disability Network and EDI. It is a dedicated single-occupancy Quiet

Room for staff on the Belfast campus. Located on Floor 5 of the BC Building (BC-05-108), this purpose-designed space offers a calm, low-stimulation environment for any staff member who wishes to use it. The Quiet Room is available on a drop-in basis and does not require booking. This is a pilot which the teams are hoping to roll out to the Coleraine and Derry-Londonderry campuses.

Disability History Month (November–December 2025)

Disability History Month was marked through a comprehensive programme of:

- Practical training on disability equality, reasonable adjustments, and hidden disabilities
- Awareness raising for staff and managers
- Community-building activity.

The programme also celebrated disabled voices and lived experience through:

- The relaunch of the Disability Network with guest speaker Jamie Shields.
- Informal coffee mornings
- An intersectional event exploring disability, age, mental health, and domestic abuse.

Inclusive Language

The EDI team developed an '[Inclusive language Guide](#)', which was completed in early February 2026 and launched at the EDI in the Curriculum Community in Practice event on the 18 March 2026, and at the Student Panel with Student Success on 26 March 2026. Feedback from students was collected to further develop the guidance into a teaching module in partnership with Student Success, and the Inclusive Language resource is being developed in e-learning for staff in partnership with and People Development.

The guide was developed as a university wide resource for staff and students, supporting a use of language that is respectful, inclusive and reflective of the University's values of inclusion and belonging. It marks a significant milestone in Ulster's journey towards greater cultural competence, offering a practical and compassionate framework for engaging with the complexity of language.

Rather than presenting language as a compliance exercise or checklist, this resource positions inclusive communication as a shared and evolving journey. It recognises that language is a personal choice, shaped by lived experience, identity and context, and that preferences and interpretations will vary. By acknowledging this complexity, the guide encourages reflection and openness, learning opportunities that are essential to a creating an inclusive organisation.

Language and Culture

As a widening access University, Ulster University's mission is to encourage a diverse University community. 'Inclusion' is one of the University's four core values, supported also through our 'People, Place and Partnership – Delivering Sustainable Futures For All' strategy. We recognise especially the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity as part of the cultural wealth of our society here. This next section outlines activities during the reporting period that promoted the language and cultures of Irish and Ulster-Scots.

Regarding the promotion of Irish Language:

- Taught provision in Irish language and literature continues across the University with part-time diploma and degree programmes at Belfast campus and both full-time and part-time programmes at the Derry-Londonderry campus. The University also delivers a part-time diploma programme (with Mid Ulster Council) at Cookstown and Dungannon. Taught programmes incorporate field trip and residential opportunities in Gaeltacht communities in County Donegal.
- Dr. Comer was commissioned to design and implement the language testing for the Irish Language Commissioner post in 2025.
- Dr. Comer was awarded £25k in 2026 to organise a conference in June 2026 for the Office of the Irish Language Commission (including Language Commissioner from other jurisdictions). This will form the basis for the Commissioner's recommendations for the use of Irish in public service.
- Dr. Comer continues on his series of place-names' talks for local community groups, including The John Hewitt Society and others on the North Coast.
- Research collaborator on the FLOURISH Project (*Framing the Legacy of our Irish and Scottish Heritage*), launched September 2025 and running until February 2029. The project examines Irish and Ulster-Scots language, culture, peacebuilding, and community relations in Northern Ireland. Dr Comer is listed as Co-Investigator alongside scholars from Ulster University and the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Regarding the promotion of Ulster Scots:

- April 2025
 - Meetings to develop USA250 Ulster Scots projects
 - Initial meeting to provide consultancy on a RTE documentary that examined C S Lewis Irish and Ulster-Scots heritage.
 - Consultancy provided on Ulster-Scots Street signs for Belfast
- May 2025
 - Advisory Panel for Ulster American Folk Part
 - Attended meeting Forum for the Research into the Languages of Scotland and Ulster

- Interviews for PhD on Ulster Scots PhD in collaboration with National Museums NI
- Meeting Northern Ireland Screen as Ulster Scots Broadcast Fund Chair
- September 2025
 - Consultancy on Ulster-Scots “Biggin it Up” project
 - Interview for CS Lewis Film East Belfast
 - Discussion with Mellon Centre on USA250 commemorations
 - October 2025
 - Meeting with NVTV to discuss Ulster-Scots TV projects
- November 2025
 - Launch of Flourish Project
 - Schools Outreach talks on Ulster/Ulster Scots poetry and song
 - Consultancy/Networking trip to Moneyrea
 - Public talk on Heaney and Ulster Scots in Ballyclare
 - Launch of edited collection of Ulster Scots Poetry Ballyclare
- December 2025
 - Launch of Ulster Scots Poetry Jukebox Linen Hall Library
- January 2026
 - Rabbe Burns Event Belfast
 - Launch of Look North Belfast Festival
- February 2026
 - Discussion to develop Ulster Scots Translation of Waiting for Godot
 - Look North Belfast Festival Public talk on Vernacular Poetry of North Belfast in UU
- March 2026
 - Meeting with DoubleBand Films to explore Waiting for Godot Project
 - Workshop provided for the **FLOURISH Project** on Ulster Scots
 - Meeting at Ulster Museum to explore Language Development Issues
- Ongoing:
 - 6 PhD Projects that explore Ulster-Scots literature and language
 - Consultancy on Ulster-Scots literature and language to various public bodies and TV companies

Diversity Networks

WoMen’s Network

The Women's Network is now in its seventh year of operation and continues to grow in membership and impact with support from internal and external partners.

Membership numbers have increased to almost 600 members, including academics, professional support staff, and PhD researchers. The Network remains committed to advancing gender equality and creating inclusive spaces where women can connect, develop professionally, and support one another.

The Women's Network continues as a member of Women in Business with 245 WIB members. Our institutional membership offers staff individual access to an online dashboard to view upcoming events and resources, as well as offering discounted rates in the Centre of Learning and the opportunity to attend Women in Business events.

Guardian Girls Self-Defence Programme

Following successful taster sessions in December 2025, the Women's Network has promoted the Guardian Girls Self-Defence programme across both Belfast and Coleraine campuses with support from ONAKAI and Sport Ireland. The programme offers free training to all staff and students, creating a safe space for women to develop confidence and practical skills. Three-week blocks ran in early 2026 at both campuses, with participants reporting increased confidence both in and outside the sessions.

World Menopause Day – Online Yoga Session

In October 2025, the Women's Network hosted a free online yoga session to mark World Menopause Day, facilitated by network member Lesley McGrogan. The session focused on lifestyle approaches to wellbeing during menopause, including movement, mindfulness and stress management. Offering the class online allowed colleagues to participate in the privacy of their own homes, offering convenience for busy women.

Employee Wellbeing

The Women's Network leadership team has established regular monthly meetings with the University's Wellbeing Team to strengthen collaboration and ensure that women's wellbeing priorities are clearly represented. These meetings have become an important space for sharing insights, raising emerging concerns, and ensuring members' voices directly inform institutional wellbeing initiatives and future planning. An example of this is through being able to provide targeted support to members experiencing the challenges of menopause. We thank the Wellbeing Team for their ongoing partnership in providing this essential support to our members during significant life transitions.

Northern Lights Podcast Series

To mark ten years of the Aurora Women in Leadership Programme, Women's Network member Nancy Brown launched the Northern Lights Podcast series, featuring conversations with Aurora alumni across the University. The Women's Network emerged from the Aurora Project, a pioneering initiative that created a dedicated space where women could connect, learn together, and support each other's professional development. Recent episodes include role model interviews exploring women's career journeys and the courage required to reinvent professional

paths. The podcast creates accessible spaces for women to share authentic stories about leadership, growth and navigating change, making these conversations available to our wider community at a time that suits.

Strategic Leadership Development

Members of the Women's Network have benefited from strategic leadership sessions across the campuses by Nancy Brown, providing platforms for women in leadership roles to build confidence and develop professionally within a supportive community. These sessions recognise that leadership development is an ongoing journey, and women benefit from continued opportunities to reflect, learn and grow together.

Role Modelling Female Leadership

The Women's Network broadened its student-facing activity through a series of guest speaker engagements by the Network Co-Chairs designed to showcase diverse female leadership journeys and provide visible role models across disciplines. These sessions offered students valuable insight into professional pathways, challenges, and successes, while fostering open conversations about leadership, confidence, and career development for women at all stages of study.

Welcoming FACE Colleagues for a Transformative Discussion

In May 2025, the Women's Network participated in a powerful conversation on transformation in HE, with a focus on race, colour, and ethnicity. The Women's Network is grateful to Sharon D. Lloyd from London Metropolitan University, Benita Odogwu-Atkinson MA(CSM) FHEA PGCE, and Caryn Franklin MBE from Kingston School of Art for their contributions to this important dialogue. We extend our thanks to WN Co-Chair Louise O'Boyle for making this transformative collaboration possible.

Ulster University Collaborative Education Excellence Award

In June 2025, the Women's Network was honoured to be part of the team recognised as Collaborative Education Excellence Winners for our work with the Special Interest Group on Inclusive Teaching (SIGIT). What began as a small initiative in the Business School has grown into a university-wide movement, now evolving into the EDI in the Curriculum Community of Practice. This recognition reflects the power of collaboration across the Women's Network, the Wellbeing and Belonging Workgroup, Curriculum Enhancement and Approval, the Digital Team, the EDI Working Group, the EDI Team, and dedicated colleagues from all three campuses. Special thanks go to Nancy Brown, Dr Paul Joseph-Richard, Tracy Galvin, Christina Woods, and the Network Co-Chair Jo-Anne Watson, whose dedication and collaborative spirit made this achievement possible.

Summer Social Celebration

In June 2025, the Women's Network hosted a vibrant Summer Social, bringing together colleagues from across the University to connect, celebrate, and unwind. The event was made possible through the generous support of sponsors including House of Zen, Zen Restaurant, UNITE Union, ACCA Longevity Clinic, and Ulster University, which contributed prizes and gifts.

International Women's Day 2026: Give to Gain – The Power of Giving

The Women's Network organised and supported a programme of International Women's Day activities across the University's campuses in March 2026, celebrating the achievements of women and encouraging collaboration and empowerment across the University community. The flagship 'Give to Gain: The Power of Giving' event was held on 4 March at the Belfast campus, featuring a fireside conversation with Ulster University alumna and philanthropist Eileen Mooney, founder of the Summerhill Foundation. Eileen shared her journey from a dairy farm in Maghera to becoming a business leader and philanthropist, and discussed how her foundation supports early years, family support, and scholarships across Northern Ireland and internationally. Her story exemplified how purposeful leadership and giving back can create transformative community impact.

International Women's Day 2026 Celebrations across Campuses

Complementing the Give to Gain event, the Women's Network promoted CelebrateHER Conference at The Diamond, Coleraine on 5 March 2026, featuring inspiring speakers and panel discussions exploring women's leadership and achievements. The 'EMPOWER HER' portrait exhibition at Derry-Londonderry campus library showcased women who have achieved career firsts across the island of Ireland, providing visibility and recognition for those who have broken through barriers. The Network also supported Women Across the West, a free regional event at Derry Guildhall on 13 March 2026, organised in partnership with the Department for Economy, which celebrated women's strengths and the balance between resilience and self-care.

Limited Edition Sterling Silver Pins – Supporting Women's Aid

In November 2025, the Women's Network collaborated with the Silversmithing and Jewellery department at Belfast School of Art to create one hundred handcrafted sterling silver pins. All proceeds from sales are donated to Women's Aid, allowing network members to signal their commitment to supporting women experiencing gender-based violence and contributing to a valuable local cause.

Celebrating Women in the Creative Arts

The Women's Network celebrated member Jennifer Jackson-Smyth whose artwork was selected for the Royal Ulster Academy's 144th Annual Exhibition at the Ulster Museum. As both a talented artist and a dedicated researcher within the University, she exemplifies the multidisciplinary excellence and creative talent within our network. Her work, inspired by architecture and nature, invites viewers into imaginative landscapes where different elements reclaim forgotten spaces.

Partnerships and Recognition

The Women's Network has strengthened partnerships across the University and beyond throughout this period. Our work grew to engage with Sport Services and Guardian Girls, whilst also collaborating with Belfast School of Art. We continue to work with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives across the University, supporting projects such as the HER-STEM seminar series. These partnerships reflect our commitment to fostering inclusive communities and advancing gender equality across all sectors of the University.

Looking Ahead

As the Women's Network continues into its eighth year, we remain committed to our mission of creating an inclusive, supportive community where women at Ulster University can thrive professionally and personally. The momentum built through our events, partnerships, and initiatives demonstrates the power of collective action in advancing gender equality. We look forward to building on this progress and continuing to drive meaningful change across the University and beyond.

Carers' Network

The Carers' Network, the sixth Staff Network at the University, officially launched across each NI campus location in March 2026, with guest speakers including members of the University's Senior Leadership Team, and staff and student beneficiaries of the Returning Carers Scheme sharing their experiences: It was launched during Carers week in Belfast Tuesday 10 March, in Coleraine Thursday 12 March and Derry-Londonderry Wednesday 11 March.

Currently there are 154 staff and students' members in the network:

- Belfast 10 March 2026 (approximately 32 attendees)
- Derry-Londonderry 11 March 2026 (approximately 15 attendees)
- Coleraine 12 March 2026 (approximately 20 attendees)

Staff Disability Network

On 1 December, in alignment with the International Day of the Disabled Person, Ulster University officially relaunched the Staff Disability Network. The Belfast event

featured a keynote address from disability advocate Jamie Shields, Co-Founder of 'Disabled by Society', who encouraged colleagues to recognise disability as a natural and common aspect of the human experience. Relaunch activities continued across campuses, with coffee-morning engagement sessions held on 2 December in Coleraine and 3 December in Derry-Londonderry, helping to increase visibility of the Network and connect with staff in a cross-campus capacity.

Also in December 2025, the Staff Disability Network partnered with the Ulster University NeuroNetwork to launch a pilot Quiet Room. The dedicated space provides a low-stimulation environment for colleagues who may require time away from noise, sensory demands or high-pressure settings. Subject to the evaluation of the pilot, there may be potential to explore similar facilities on other campuses in the future.

On 24 February 2026, the Network hosted an online Inclusion Hour with Sharron Sturgess, Co-Chair of the Ulster University NeuroNetwork. Sharron shared her experience of chairing the Disability Network at the University of Leicester and offered practical insights on building community, strengthening Networks and empowering disabled staff.

In March 2026, the Network further built on this momentum by opening nominations for the voluntary roles of Chair, Co-Chair and Secretariat. These positions will form the Network's leadership team as it continues to grow following its December relaunch. The roles provide opportunities for disabled staff, colleagues with long-term health conditions and allies to help shape the Network's future direction.

Collectively, these activities demonstrate meaningful and sustained progress in advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good relations, and embedding disability inclusion across Ulster University's culture and day-to-day practices.

NeuroNetwork

The NeuroNetwork was set up for neurodivergent staff, research students, allies and anyone who has a personal or professional interest in and desire to further neuroinclusion within the University. The Network's committee has grown over the year and currently includes a number of academic, professional services, administrative, technical staff and a post-doctoral student. A number of subcommittees were set up to ensure the Network can undertake work in the widest possible area; these include campus-based committees, projects, events and a staff and parents' group. Of the 17 members of the committee at least six are also openly neurodivergent, ensuring that work is genuinely informed by the community that the Network seeks to represent.

The Network sought to promote neuroinclusion, its work and other opportunities for staff through a fortnightly Network email. This engagement ensures positive attendance at events like the new staff inductions, and through opportunities presented to the Network by the EDI team like the Network Chairs meeting in August

2025. The Network distributed lanyard pins to promote its existence and has begun to develop its webpages.

Network members worked with EDI and the Disability Network to establish a quiet room on the Belfast campus. This is a space available to all staff as a place to take time away from the busy workday and relax or recharge.

Members also created sensory resource packs and some accompanying training for staff working with students to use. The packs are designed to support focus and concentration and allow students to emotionally regulate in a more covert way. They are available for all students to use as a way of mainstreaming mental health and neurodivergent strategies.

As part of Dyslexia Awareness week, 6 to 10 October 2025, the Network sent out a series of emails during the week to promote awareness around dyslexia and practical ways staff could support students and each other. These emails also included accounts of the lived experience of dyslexic staff at Ulster University.

AD(H)D awareness day was on 24 October 2025, and the Network presented a webinar, 'AD(H)D: the lived experience and what neurotypicals need to know!', to increase knowledge and understanding around the condition.

As part of a programme of neurodiversity celebration week events, the Network produced a video sharing the personal experience of staff members and its aspirations for a neuroinclusive University, and also hosted a variety of events to mark neurodiversity celebration week:

- Video Screening on the Belfast campus, 19 March: Lunchtime screening of the Network's new Neurodiversity Celebration Week video, with an opportunity to meet members of the NeuroNetwork and learn how to get involved.
- Game and Connect Café on the Coleraine campus, 19 March: Drop in for games and conversation, open to all staff and students.
- Coffee and Connect on the Derry-Londonderry campus, 19 March: Opportunity for staff to come by for a coffee or tea and learn more about the work of the NeuroNetwork.
- Neuroinclusion Showcase on the Coleraine campus on 25 March: The Neuroinclusion Showcase celebrated this year's theme, "Celebrating Neuroinclusion at Ulster," and highlighted neuroinclusive initiatives across the University. It was presented by undergraduate students, research students and academic and professional services staff. The event was opened by Professor Odette Hutchinson, featured a keynote from Dr Aideen Hunter, and was closed by the Dean of EDI.
- Neurodiversity and Intersectionality online on 20 March: This was a discussion on the intersectionality of neurodivergence with other conditions and life experiences.

- Caring for the Carer online on 23 March: The Network explored caring responsibilities for parents of neurodivergent children and young people, with input from David Duly (Employee Wellbeing) on support available at Ulster University.
- The Importance of Neuroinclusive Language online on 24 March: This involved a discussion of how neuro-affirming language can support more inclusive environments.

LGBT+ Network

Since April 2025, the LGBT+ Staff Network has engaged in a number of activities that highlight its commitment to providing a safe space for LGBT+ Staff (and allies), to connect and share their experiences whilst also promoting issues related to the LGBT+ community and the wider Ulster community.

On 18 November 2025, the Chair of the Network attended HEReNI's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity training to ensure that the Network fosters an inclusive environment to all individuals who identify themselves as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

On 12 December 2025, the Network hosted their one day hybrid conference 'Queering Research' that offers postgraduate researchers the opportunity to present queer research and provide them with experience of planning and managing a conference. This year, the Network expanded the scope to include post-doctoral researchers, including a presenter from Queen's University Belfast. This year's conference was chaired by Jude Copeland, a local LGBT+ advocate and Ulster alumni, and 54 people attended. The conference was funded by the Doctoral College, and Research and Impact.

On 25 February 2026, the Network hosted the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project to screen their queer-focused 'Voices in the Troubles' documentary and lunch discussion ('Lunch and Learn') to mark the end of LGBT+ History month. This screening was also a hybrid event and 30 people attended. The documentary was well received that attendees requested Joe (the project lead) return for a second screening (see below).

On 11 March 2026, to mark International Women's Day, the Network hosted the LGBTQIA+ Heritage Project again to screen their second documentary, 'We Were Always Here', as part of a Lunch and Learn session. This was also a hybrid session and 25 people attended.

In addition to the above, the LGBT+ Network continues its ongoing support of UU's engagement with the campus-adjacent Pride festivals by attending working group meetings as we prepare for Pride this summer.

BAME+ Network

The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME+) Network carried out a variety of community-based activities and outreach events during this reporting period:

Regular Network Meetings

The Network Working Group Chairs monthly meetings to discuss and share the activities of their respective working groups. The BAME Network Board also meets quarterly to discuss the visions, goals and ambitions for the Network and the progress the Network is making toward these ambitions.

Advancing Racial Equalities Awards

In March 2025, The Advancing Racial Equalities Awards in Derry-Londonderry, hosted by the Northwest Migrant Forum, celebrated efforts to promote racial justice and inclusion in Northern Ireland. The event brought together community leaders and organisations committed to equality. A key highlight was Daniel Sanusi receiving both the Young Leader Award and the Advancing Racial Justice and Fairness Award for his leadership and advocacy work at Ulster University. His contributions focus on improving representation, shaping inclusive policies, and supporting marginalised communities.

Overall, the event recognised collective progress while reinforcing the need for continued action to achieve a more equitable and inclusive society.

Ramadan Iftar Event – March 2025

The EDI unit and BAME+ Network members were invited to a Ramadan Iftar event at the Stormont Parliament Buildings which aimed to promote peace and unity between Muslims in Northern Ireland and the local community.

The program included a series of talks focusing on the significance of Ramadan and the shared messages of peace in both faiths, promoting harmony and understanding. These talks were then followed by Iftar (breaking the fast for those observing Ramadan) and dinner (for those not fasting or practicing Ramadan), accompanied by light entertainment. The event also featured performances by Middle Eastern musicians and singers, adding a vibrant cultural touch to the evening, which is something both cultures tend to enjoy.

InspireNOW BAME Youth Annual Conference

The InspireNOW BAME Youth Annual Conference 2025, held on 14 March at the Great Hall, Queen's University Belfast, and brought together young people, educators, and community leaders to explore BAME leadership, inclusion, and empowerment within education and wider society.

In his keynote address, the Chair of the BAME+ Network emphasised that while diversity is a strength, systemic inequalities continue to marginalise BAME communities. Drawing on examples such as Nelson Mandela and Malala Yousafzai, he highlighted the transformative impact of leadership in advancing social justice. He stressed the need for inclusive and decolonised education systems, stronger institutional collaboration, and greater representation across sectors.

The speech also outlined the role of the BAME+ Network in supporting empowerment through mentorship, partnerships, and policy development. He concluded by calling for collective action to address structural barriers and promote sustainable, inclusive growth.

Hummingbird Awards

The Hummingbird Awards 2025, held on 20 March 2025 at Belfast City Hall, celebrated individuals and organisations making significant contributions to diversity, inclusion, and community development across Northern Ireland.

At the event, the Chair of the BAME+ Network delivered a keynote address focused on diverse voices, inclusion, and inspired change. He highlighted the central role of education as a gateway to opportunity, emphasising its power to promote equity, cultural awareness, and social transformation. The speech also underscored the importance of inclusive leadership in driving representation and shaping policies that reflect the needs of diverse communities. Addressing ongoing challenges such as inequality in access to education, resource limitations, and cultural barriers, he outlined the need for collaborative strategies involving educators, communities, and policymakers. Drawing on global examples of inclusive education and development initiatives, he demonstrated how empowerment and targeted support can reduce disparities and strengthen communities.

He concluded by reinforcing that education, leadership, and empowerment are key to achieving sustainable and inclusive growth, encouraging collective action to ensure that all voices are recognised, valued, and supported.

Diwali Celebration

The School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, in collaboration with the BAME+ Network, hosted a Diwali celebration at the Derry-Londonderry campus on 24 October 2025. Diwali, derived from the Sanskrit word Deepavali meaning “a row of light,” is a major Hindu festival celebrated globally. It symbolises the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance, and is traditionally marked by the lighting of clay oil lamps.

The event was well attended by staff and students, alongside their families and friends, with many participants wearing traditional attire. The programme included an informative talk by Professor Girijesh Prasad, followed by an open discussion on the

cultural and religious significance of Diwali. Attendees also enjoyed a Bharatanatyam dance performance by Ulster University alumna Ashwini Rudraprasad, as well as henna artistry provided by local artist Sarika Shah.

The celebration provided an inclusive and engaging platform for cultural exchange, contributing to the University's ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and community engagement.

Pride Working Group

In line with its Section 75 obligations, the University ensured that the delivery of Pride events in 2025 promoted equality of opportunity and good relations. The programme was designed to be inclusive, accessible, and reflective of the diverse communities the University serves. Particular emphasis was placed on supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals while encouraging participation from people of different ages, genders, abilities, religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and socio-economic groups.

Accessibility and inclusion were key considerations throughout planning and delivery. Measures included the use of accessible venues, clear and inclusive communications, and the provision of a designated viewing gallery to support individuals with accessibility needs, ensuring they could fully engage in the events. These efforts aimed to minimise barriers and create a safe, welcoming environment for all participants.

The Pride events contributed positively to fostering respect, visibility, and understanding, enhancing good relations and promoting diversity across the University community. Feedback indicated that the programme was well received and supported increased awareness of equality issues.

The Race Equality Charter

The Race Equality Charter is the Advance HE framework used across the UK to support and transform race equality within HE. The University's Race Charter Committee fulfilled a comprehensive self-assessment between November 2023 and August 2025, which included,

- a) An analysis of institutional staff and student data to identify equity gaps across racial and ethnic minorities pertaining to a range of factors such as headcount totals across nationalities, gender and ethnicities, jobs roles and contract type, promotions, recruitment, levels of study and award classifications amongst others.
- b) A cultural analysis across staff and student populations by way of an institutional Race Equality Survey followed by focus groups with staff and students to identify experiential gaps across the University's campuses.

The analysis of data and culture led to the development of a thorough 5-year Race Equality Charter Action Plan (2026 – 2030), and the submission of an Institutional Race Equality Charter Bronze Award Application to Advance HE in November 2025. The University was notified of receiving the Race Charter Bronze Award in February 2026, based on the level of analysis that was conducted and the strength of the Action Plan which was outlined across 7 themes:

1. Civil Unrest and Rapid Response,
2. Race Charter Implementation (Reporting, Structures and Data),
3. Curriculum,
4. Reporting Mechanisms,
5. Cultural Literacy,
6. Sense of Belonging, and,
7. Race Charter Communications.

The delivery of the Race Charter Action Plan commenced from March 2026 with further updates to be provided in next reporting period.

University of Sanctuary

Ulster University has commenced work on becoming a University of Sanctuary. University of Sanctuary is a UK wide framework enabling universities to evidence a commitment to welcome, inclusion and support for people seeking sanctuary. Ahead of progressing with a University of Sanctuary application mid-2026, a range of activities have been delivered to date.

In June 2025, Ulster University provided support and sponsorship for the Belfast City of Sanctuary team's Great Refugee Week Picnic, an annual city-wide, community event bringing together refugees, people seeking asylum, residents, community organisations, students and public-sector partners to celebrate welcome, culture and shared community.

The University hosted a documentary premier event for Belfast City of Sanctuary and Diverse Youth NI on 17 October 2025 on its Belfast campus. The documentary, focusing on the experiences of a young refugee in Belfast, was a community event attended by Diverse Youth NI, community representatives and the Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast.

The University sponsored the 'Inclusive Educator Award' at the third annual Minorities Recognition Awards NI (MRANI), held at Titanic Belfast on 3 October 2025. The MRANI awards is an initiative set up to recognise and celebrate excellence among Minority business in Northern Ireland.

In October 2025, the University hosted the Diverse Youth NI documentary premier, 'Unseen Boundaries', telling the story of a refugee in Belfast, during Good Relations Week.

The University hosted and sponsored the North West Migrant Forum's fifth annual Black History Summit at its Derry-Londonderry campus on 24 October 2025. The Black History Summit brings together academics, community leaders, activists, artists and public sector stakeholders to explore Black history, heritage and lived experience in Northern Ireland, and to address contemporary issues relating to race, migration and identity.

The University also hosted the annual Stronger Together Conference at its Belfast campus on 16 February 2026, bringing together over 50 representatives working across the community, voluntary and public sectors to promote ethnic equality, inclusion and integration across Northern Ireland. Furthermore, Ulster University contributed to an 'FE and HE Sanctuary Pathway Event' at Queen's University Belfast on 4 March 2026, supporting refugee, asylum seekers and newcomer communities with information on study and admission requirements.

A Family Sanctuary Day was held at the University's Coleraine campus on 18 March 2026, in collaboration with QUB, the Education Authority NI, Reach Portrush and Ballywillan Community Hub. The day event was attended by over 50 refugees, asylum seekers and newcomer families, supported by a range of university staff teams and Global Ambassadors (employed international students).

Employee Experience

Valuing Voices Initiative

Valuing Voices is the University's employee engagement and 'listening' initiative which has been in place since 2023. Its continuous implementation, including within this reporting period, supports the University's intention to be a values-led organisation that authentically engages with its people and ensures equality of opportunity and good relations. The initiative supports the University in actively engaging with staff at all levels across the organisation, from all backgrounds, seeking their feedback and then subsequently taking this into account to help shape the employee experience. The initiative is operationalised through a range of engagement surveys and listening mechanisms.

Within the period April 2025 to March 2026, activity has included:

- Continuation on reporting to all University staff on the organisational Valuing Voices action plan. This plan was implemented following feedback gathered during the all-staff Valuing Voices survey in late 2023 and further detailed focus groups in early 2024. The plan consists of actions under seven overarching themes, including Workload, Employee Wellbeing and Colleague Development, with 21 supporting actions across all of the themes. As of the end March 2026, a total of 14 actions have been completed and the remaining actions are in progress. Progress is communicated to staff at regular intervals throughout the year

- Continuation of local level action plans, as a result of the initial 2023 staff survey, ensured leaders across the organisation have access to their respective departmental and school results. Leaders across the University communicated results to their staff and, where appropriate, developed actions at a local level in relation to specific survey feedback and results. These have been actively progressed during the latest reporting period
- The two Valuing Voices Staff Panels have continued to operate in connection with the initiative. These panels meet at regular intervals during the year in relation to the organisation seeking continuous engagement with staff at all levels
- A Staff Suggestion Scheme has been established as a means of continuous feedback, with the organisation implementing it university-wide in February 2026. This is a pilot scheme over a three-month period with the aim of this scheme being implemented on a continuous basis

People Development – Aurora Leadership Programme

During the reporting period, Ulster University celebrated 10 years involvement in the Advance HE Aurora Leadership programme, with 120 of our incredible female colleagues participating in the programme and growing personally and professionally.

People Development continue to work in partnership with EDI, and 16 colleagues were sponsored to participate in the programme 2025 to 2026, which helped to shape a more inclusive and diverse leadership culture across the University.

As part of our 10-year celebration, the University has been honouring the contributions of our Aurora colleagues and hearing how Aurora has impacted their journey. People Development along with the Aurora Alumnae community arranged a series of coffee mornings focusing on themes of “Connection” and “Resilience”. These coffee mornings have been a great opportunity to share experiences and recognise successes.

Carmel Mimmagh, Administrative Officer, Estates Services fed-back that,

“Friday’s event was excellent! There was an informal, relaxed vibe with a refreshing and thought-provoking fireside chat by Nancy and Abbie. Lots of opportunity to network and connect with colleagues old and new! It has made me think differently about leadership and that we are all leaders in our daily lives.”

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Wellbeing staff have carried out the following to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between April 2025 and March 2026:

- Health checks conducted for both men and women

- Menopause information sessions
- Emergency Special Leave policy implementation and updates in line with new NI regulations
- Domestic Abuse policy implementation
- 'Brew day' sessions, providing opportunities for colleagues to have a coffee and a bun together held across all through campuses working to improve inclusion across the University community
- Collaboration with the external BITC Age Friendly Working Group
- Partnership working with the University's Women's Network
- The annual Ulster University Work Well Expo, which is a conference bringing together colleagues to explore and to adhere best practice in wellbeing

Ulster University Student Union (UUSU)

Mental Health

UUSU allocated £1,000 to the #UBelong Bursary Scheme, enabling four student groups to deliver peer-led mental health and wellbeing initiatives. Funded activities to-date include an identity and mental health workshop in partnership with the LGBT+ Network, and a High-Wire workshop delivered with the Juggling Society, focusing on grounding techniques.

Race and Religion

- UUSU delivered a programme of events for Black History Month, aimed at celebrating and educating students on Black history and culture.
- Through the Culture Shock events programme, UUSU facilitated celebrations of key cultural and religious occasions, including Diwali.
- UUSU also participated in the "Causeway Coast is Home for All" counterdemonstration on 4 April in Coleraine, demonstrating a clear commitment to challenging racism and Islamophobia.

Disabled Students

- The UUSU Disability Empowerment Network has been active throughout the year, hosting events to raise awareness, build community, and create opportunities for Disabled students to connect and share experiences.
- UUSU ran a targeted social media campaign highlighting key awareness dates, including the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, ADHD Awareness Month, Dyslexia Awareness Week, the International Day of Sign Languages, and World Hearing Day.
- UUSU has also achieved Autism NI Accreditation as an employer, reflecting a commitment to inclusive workplace practices.

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls

- UUSU contributes to a Gillen Review Working Group, in partnership with the Department for Justice, feeding into work on recommendations to address rape myths and improve justice outcomes.
- UUSU actively participated in key advocacy events, including Reclaim the Night 2025 (where the UUSU President delivered a speech), Project Pink 2.0, and a vigil for Amy Doherty.
- The Women’s Empowerment Network has delivered a programme of safe-space events, alongside campaigns on inclusive sex education and participation in Sexual Health Advice and Guidance Week.
- UUSU also hosted an in-conversation event with Cara Hunter MLA, exploring the impact of AI and deepfake technologies on the safety of women and girls online.
- In addition, UUSU participated in the International Women’s Day rally in Belfast under the theme “Strength in Solidarity”.

LGBT+ Students

- UUSU supported LGBT+ visibility and inclusion by participating in Belfast Pride 2025.

Global Solidarity

- UUSU worked with the Gaza 40 campaign to advocate for the temporary removal of biometric visa requirements, enabling Palestinian students to access HE in the UK. This directly supported three Ulster University students in taking up their places.
- The UUSU Palestinian Solidarity Society, with UUSU support, organised fundraising initiatives to assist these students with essential living costs.
- UUSU has also collaborated with AMLÉ and NUS-USI to address international student visa restrictions, particularly those limiting mobility between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which impact academic opportunities.

Irish Language Rights

- Following an eight-year student-led campaign, UUSU installed bilingual (Irish and English) signage across its spaces.¹
- UUSU delivered a programme of events for Seachtain na Gaeilge, supported by a social media campaign to promote awareness and celebration of the Irish language.
- UUSU also participated in the CEARTA protest in Dublin, advocating for enhanced rights and resources for the Irish language across the island of Ireland.

¹ Note: The EQIA on this UUSU Bilingual Signage mandate is on pause.

Chaplains' Office

Within the reporting period, the Chaplaincy teams across all three campuses have continued to work together ecumenically to offer hospitality and pastoral and spiritual support to any students and staff wishing to avail of it.

Every day Chaplains talk to a wide representation of people from all across the University community about the wide range of topics and issues affecting both students and staff.

The invitation to chaplaincy events on campus extends to all those who wish to attend and there is information available to help students and staff find a local Christian church or religious faith community most suited to their needs.

On the Belfast Campus, the Chaplaincy lounge is an accessible space and also a registered 'safe place' with signposting to support anyone affected by domestic violence. The lounge is open for students and staff to drop into at any time.

Throughout 2025 to 2026 academic year, the Belfast Chaplaincy team ran their weekly Tuesday lunches to encourage students and staff from all different backgrounds, cultures and studies to come together in a safe and welcoming space. At these lunches everyone is welcome and valued and it is always a joy to see new friendships forming over a simple meal. Not only do these initiatives help to break down some of the barriers which often exist between the local and international students on campus, and between students and staff, but they are often a lifeline for students facing financial hardships, loneliness and isolation or some social anxiety making it difficult to integrate with others. The chaplains also use these events to both signpost and refer students to the other support services available on campus.

This year the Chaplaincy hosted three special celebratory meals to celebrate Thanksgiving (autumn), Christmas and St Patrick's Day (spring) in an all-inclusive, multi-cultural way. The date of the spring meal this year coincided with Eid Al-Fitr (the end of Ramadan), the spring celebration of Ugadi and the festival of Nowruz to mark the Persian New Year so it was a great opportunity to get students from different cultural and religious backgrounds together to share their home-cooked dishes and information about their traditions. We had students participate from a wide range of places such as Ireland, Nigeria, Ghana, Iran, Indonesia, Poland, Germany, Austria, France, China, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Palestine, Sudan and USA.

At the weekend there is a chaplaincy programme called, 'Saturday Danders' to encourage students and staff to come together as a community to exercise and enjoy the Northern Ireland countryside at the weekend.

Inclusive Research Toolkit

Stemming from discussions within the University's internal Research Culture Committee, the EDI team commenced development of an Inclusive Research Toolkit during Summer 2025.

The Inclusive Research Toolkit aims to support researchers at the University in embedding inclusive practices into their work. Inclusivity in research helps to address systemic inequalities by strengthening evidence base on the experiences of people with different characteristics and backgrounds. It supports research aims, objectives, and outcomes that serve all communities. It allows to reduce implicit bias in research practice. This interactive Inclusive Research Toolkit provides a set of tools for researchers to integrate inclusivity principles into project design, methodology, analysis, writing up and dissemination. It aims helps users build confidence in carrying out inclusive research which is ethical, equitable and robust in advancing knowledge and addressing global challenges.

In early 2026, plans were developed to launch the Inclusive Research Toolkit which will commence in the next reporting period with an Inclusive Research workshop for research teams, April 2026.

HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award – EDI Action Plan

The HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award, managed by Vitae in the UK and supported by EURAXESS in Europe, recognises institutions committed to improving researcher career development, working conditions, and equality. It aligns with the Researcher Development Concordat and is earned through a structured three-year, peer-reviewed self-assessment process.

To support the University's submission to the HREiR Award in March 2026, a SMART action plan was developed alongside the research team representatives to meet Obligation 4A (EDI), one of the University's chosen priority themes for this cycle.

Key EDI actions pertain to additional activities with research staff and research managers regarding increasing awareness and delivering training outcomes on a range of EDI matters, including tutorials and use of the Inclusive Research Toolkit in research practice.

Delivery of EDI actions within the HREiR Award will commence during the next reporting period.

Doctoral College

The Doctoral College is dedicated to fostering an inclusive community where every individual feels valued and empowered, and all PhD Researchers can thrive while feeling valued and respected. The Doctoral College believes in equality, celebrates diversity, and fosters inclusion. Embracing diversity enriches the institution and strengthens its collective growth. The Doctoral College also recognises that prospective and current PhD Researchers face unique challenges at various stages of their PhD journey and therefore implements the following measures in response to these challenges. These measures should be read in conjunction with the University Equality Scheme and Equal Opportunities Policy.

There have been a number of changes to the terms and conditions for both Department of Economy (DfE) and Vice-Chancellor's Research Studentships (VCRS) (internal) funded PhD studentships as detailed below:

Updated Terms and Conditions for DfE funded PhD Students

Changes to the terms and conditions for both DfE and VCRS (internal) funded PhD studentships include,

- Increase in VCRS studentship stipend rate: The stipend rate has been increased in line with the increase in the DfE studentships rate. This will help studentship holders with the costs of living and facilitate access to PGR study in particular for students with dependants. Holders of VCRS funding tend to be international candidates so it is anticipated that the change will benefit students from UK-minority racial groups.
- Introduction of part-time DfE studentship funding: Part-time DfE studentship funding has been introduced at 0.5FTE rate for payments of stipends, RTSG and fees. Switches between part-time and full-time are possible more than once during registration. Enhancing access to funded study for, in particular, more mature students with financial or caring responsibilities or dependants, female students who are typically responsible for caring responsibilities, and students with a disability or ongoing health issues.
- Changes in the eligibility criteria for DfE studentships: Irish Nationals are now defined as 'home' students. This change will benefit Irish nationals residing in the south of Ireland who will now be able to access a full award, meaning both fees and stipend rather than a 'fees only' award. As the majority of those who reside in the south of Ireland identify as Roman Catholic, it is anticipated that this religious group in particular may benefit from this change.
- Increase in the cap for international students for DfE studentships: The cap on international students eligible for DfE studentships has been increased from 15% to 30%. This may benefit students from UK-minority racial groups.

- Increase in available paid medical leave: This has been increased from 13 weeks to 28 weeks in a rolling 12-month period. The total cumulative amount of medical leave must not exceed 39 weeks across the whole Studentship (based on a three-year Studentship). This will help students with a disability or ongoing health issues.
- Introduction of additional paid and unpaid leave categories for DfE studentship funding: Family and additional leave categories have been expanded to provide more paid and unpaid leave provision (including for neonatal care, parental leave, death during a period of maternity, emergency situations, pregnancy loss). Expanded leave categories should benefit students with dependants, married students and female students, who are more likely to have financial and caring responsibilities.

Researcher Development Programme (RDP) and Research Culture

The Doctoral College recognises the diverse composition of Ulster University PhD Researchers cohort and associated strengths and challenges. Updated information on Researcher Development for this reporting period is provided below:

- Specific workshops for Part-time PhD Researchers: The Researcher Development Programme provision includes workshops on Doing a Part-time PhD, delivered by academic staff in Ulster. These workshops are run in the evening time to facilitate attendance by those who work full-time or have caring responsibilities and are unable to attend during normal working hours. Enhancing access to the Researcher Development Programme and the training and development opportunities for those who work full time and those who have caring and other responsibilities.
- Provision of Evening Training Workshops as part of the Researcher Development Programme: The Doctoral College works in partnership with the University of East Anglia (since 2018) to deliver a programme of researcher development workshops in the evening time. There is a full range of workshops offered between 7pm-9pm across the year, including the summer months, and they are outlined below.
 - Module 1: Academic Writing
 - Module 2: Qualitative Research Skills
 - Module 3: Finishing your PhD
 - Module 4: Teaching Skills
 - Module 5: Quantitative Research Skills

This enhances access to the RDP and the training and development opportunities for those who work full-time and those who have caring and other responsibilities. It is also more inclusive for those PhD Researchers who work more productively in the evening time. There has been more engagement in training sessions by part time PhD Researchers as a result.

Supervisor Development Programme

We have held various training opportunities for supervisors as part of our Supervisor Development Programme. This year we hosted an event from externally renowned speaker Professor Debbie Riby, Durham University on Supporting a neurodiverse postgraduate community.

The session covered issues such as: What is neurodiversity? Supporting neurodiversity-affirmative practices in supervision, understanding the individual student, building a strengths-based PhD approach, supervision, preparing for the viva, and more. This workshop was well attended, with intended learning outcomes including:

- Increased knowledge of neurodiversity and neurodivergence, including the language of neurodiversity;
- Considerations for supporting a neurodiverse, inclusive, postgraduate research community;
- Reflecting on support for postgraduate researchers with lived experience of neurodivergence (and understanding the individual);
- Consideration of potential modifications to supervision practices, communication, and support for neurodivergent PhD students;
- Reflections on potential areas of specific need for neurodivergent PhD students, for example in relation to viva preparations.

Research and Innovation

Research Mentoring Programme

The research mentoring programme is a programme to support academic and research staff in building their research capacity and capability.

Experienced researchers (professors, readers, senior staff) provide focussed mentoring support to academic and research staff within their faculty (whether research active or not). There are 64 mentees and 41 mentors in the current cycle, which aligns with the reporting period.

The mentoring programme promotes fair access to career development opportunities, enhances researcher confidence and capability, and supports progression at different career stages. By using structured and transparent mentoring processes, the programme fosters inclusive practice, increases awareness of equality considerations, and contributes to a supportive research culture.

Sabbatical Leave

The University offers academic and research staff the opportunity to take a period of sabbatical leave for the purposes of individual career development. The university-

wide Sabbatical Leave policy ensures that all staff can apply for sabbatical leave to focus on their research and personal development, consciously moving away from bespoke faculty-based approaches to improve equality and diversity of uptake and include Early Career Researchers. There are 21 staff taking sabbatical leave in the current cycle, which aligns with the reporting period. Application and approval data is equality screened by the EDI department to give a percentage against the working force population.

Research Excellence Awards

The Research Excellence Awards recognise and celebrate a broad range of research contributions across disciplines, career stages and roles. The awards framework is designed to be inclusive, with transparent criteria and nomination processes that support fair access to recognition and value diverse forms of research excellence.

By highlighting varied pathways to success and acknowledging individual and team achievements, the awards contribute to advancing equality of opportunity, increasing visibility of researchers and their impact on society, and fostering an inclusive research culture.

Research Training Programmes

During the reporting period, a structured programme of Research and Innovation events and training sessions were delivered, as evidenced through the centrally published Research and Innovations Events listing. The programme included open-access research, workshops, development sessions, and information events covering a range of research themes, processes and inclusive of career stages. The breadth of topics and audiences supported engagement from researchers and professional staff with differing needs, backgrounds and levels of experience.

Collectively, the events and training programme contributed to advancing equality of opportunity, supporting capacity building, and promoting inclusive participation within the wider research community.

Ulster University Business School (UUBS)

Teaching, Learning and Inclusive Culture

EDI in the Curriculum Community of Practice, led by Nancy Brown and Dr Paul Joseph-Richard continues to scale inclusive teaching practices across programmes. Focus areas include flexible pedagogies, digitally-inclusive learning environments, and embedding inclusive curriculum design. This works now informs wider faculty development and supports consistency across modules and programmes:

Through the Antonio Carluccio Outreach Programme and partnership with the Oxford Cultural Collective, the Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Events Management

at UUBS advances EDI by widening participation, embedding diverse food cultures, and supporting inclusive pathways into hospitality and food careers. Led by Professor Lynsey Hollywood, Dr Laura Wells and Michael Gillies, this work focuses on engaging those least likely to consider HE while providing accessible, values-led learning and leadership opportunities.

The UUBS at 50 Anniversary launch featured an all-female leadership panel, visibly advancing female representation and reflecting the School's ongoing commitment to gender equality, inclusive leadership. The appointment of five new female Visiting Professors (out of seven total) strengthens leadership diversity and student visibility. Faculty participation in work-shadowing and mentoring schemes ensures including continued support for women students and early-career academics.

Research Leadership and Policy Influence

The Gender Budgeting Programme was active between 2025 to 2026. The five-year project led by Professor Joan Ballantine and Aoife Mallon continues to generate direct policy impact across NI. The project was referenced in Department of Finance, Equality Commission, Human Rights Commission, and NI Assembly outputs. Ongoing stakeholder engagement planned for 2026 positions UUBS as a national authority on gender-responsive budgeting.

Inclusive Entrepreneurship Research and International Influence was also a focus. UUBS academics have contributed to a second Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) volume on Entrepreneurship Policy Through a Gender Lens, expected for release shortly. The School remains an international thought leader in women's entrepreneurship, resilience studies, and inclusive enterprise ecosystems, supporting the NI and UK policy landscape.

EPIC Futures NI (continuing through 2026) was led by Principal Investigator, Professor Kristel Miller. EPIC Futures NI is dedicated to creating a prosperous and sustainable future for Northern Ireland by bringing together academia, policymakers, business, and the community and voluntary sector. With a strong place-based focus, the partnership works collaboratively to tackle the region's unique challenges and develop evidence-based solutions that support fair, inclusive and accessible employment for all.

Dr Suzanne Kelly (UUBS) and Dr Désirée McIlwee (QUB) have developed 'Good Food First' project, upon winning the UKRI (BBSRC and ESRC) Multidisciplinary Food Systems Commercialisation Catalyst Award to explore how research ideas in food systems could move closer to real world solutions. The project co-designed solutions with families from diverse communities across Northern Ireland rather than for them. Through 'Yumfull' - tested with 45 families and shaped by insights from parents, early-years practitioners, community food organisations, local farmers and

public-sector stakeholders - it supports equitable access to healthy local food, early childhood development and parental confidence, while ensuring food systems innovation reflects real-world needs across different socio-economic backgrounds.

Talent Development, Industry Engagement and Outreach

'Elevate AI,' Led by Dr John Bustard and Dr Judith Wylie, engages Year 8 pupils and sixth-form students from North Belfast schools in an inclusive, mentored programme. By combining e-sports (AI literacy and digital inclusion), me-sports (aspiration, enterprise skills and mental health) and we-sports (physical wellbeing, teamwork and belonging), it removes barriers to participation, builds confidence and strengthens clear pathways between local young people, Ulster University and community partners such as TAMHI (Tackling Awareness in Mental Health Issues).

Pipeline Initiatives, includes collaborative programmes with SistersIN continue to provide multiple touchpoints for young women entering the business pipeline:

- Work Shadow Days with broad faculty involvement
- Career exploration programming for female secondary school students (2025–2026 projections)
- These initiatives support regional skills development, widening access, and visible progression routes for women and girls.

The award-winning initiative Talent Hub launches to connect employers with Derry talent. The UUBS–FinTrU, and Londonderry Chamber of Commerce Talent Hub continues to build momentum through 2025–2026, connecting North-West talent to employers and embedding inclusive employability support.

Connect to Success Programme, under Professor Sandra Moffett's leadership, continues to expand global networks for women entrepreneurs. Connect To Success (C2S) aims to tackle gender inequality, empower women, and strengthen the regional economy by equipping women-owned businesses (WOBs) with the tools for success.

Strategic Events and Thought Leadership (2025–2026)

UUBS partnered with Arts and Business NI and colleagues from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to explore how creativity, technology and inclusive practice can advance Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Professor Gillian Armstrong welcomed guests and contributions highlighted human-centred EDI strategies, inclusive innovation and the role of arts and digital technologies in fostering belonging.

Specific focus was given to accessibility and neurodiversity, with Open Arts demonstrating how inclusive design and communication practices can remove barriers and support meaningful participation for disabled and neurodivergent

people. Creative practice was also positioned as a tool for building empathy and social connection, reinforcing the importance of accessible, inclusive engagement across education, culture and the workplace.

As part of the Professorial Lecture Series, Inclusive Entrepreneurship (2025), Professor Laura McCauley's public lecture on social enterprises as catalysts for inclusion strengthens UUBS's academic leadership in inclusive economies.

Strategic Appointments and National-Level Influence

Professor Kristel Miller, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development and Director of EPIC Futures NI, has been appointed as a Commissioner to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, beginning a three-year term on 1 September 2026. The appointment was announced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It highlights Professor Miller's expertise in inclusive labour markets, entrepreneurship, and EDI policy, and reinforces UUBS's direct influence on national equality policy, aligning research, practice, and statutory equality work.

This appointment significantly strengthens UUBS's prestige and strategic influence in Northern Ireland's equality landscape.

Organisational Strategy and EDI Governance

The Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan (2023–2028) remains an active guiding framework for:

- Recruitment, progression, and workload allocation
- Flexible and family-friendly policies
- Role modelling and outreach.

Progress monitoring continues through 2025–2026 to meet key milestones.

Being a signatory of The Charter for Inclusive Entrepreneurship (2024–2027) creates obligations, and opportunities, for UUBS to lead regionally in,

- Removing barriers to entrepreneurship
- Increasing visibility of diverse role models
- Enhancing inclusive enterprise support across the region
- This aligns directly with regional economic needs and Northern Ireland's gender enterprise gap.

UUBS has signed the Charter for Inclusive Entrepreneurship, committing to reduce barriers for underrepresented entrepreneurs by promoting diverse role models, delivering inclusive support and education, improving access to finance, and setting measurable inclusion goals. The School has already contributed through research, including the first report on ethnic minority and migrant entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland.

Inclusive Entrepreneurship NI (IENI) is a cross-sector collaboration within Northern Ireland's business support ecosystem, focused on addressing structural barriers faced by entrepreneurs, particularly those from under-represented groups. Membership spans local government, financial institutions, enterprise bodies, community organisations and academia, including UUBS's Steve Pollard, Nancy Brown and the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre's Dr Karen Bonner. IENI aims to improve access to enterprise support, finance and networks, while influencing policy and practice to foster a more inclusive, diverse and equitable entrepreneurial landscape across Northern Ireland.

UUBS contributes academic expertise and evidence-based insight, supporting inclusive entrepreneurship through research, policy engagement and sector collaboration aligned with EDI principles.

Faculty of Life and Health Sciences (LHS)

The Faculty of LHS is fully committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, aligning activities with the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. The Faculty strives to embed inclusive practices across all aspects of academic life, such as teaching, research, leadership, community outreach, and student experience. The associated Schools have led a wide range of initiatives aimed at supporting equal opportunity, enhancing access, and promoting good relations across the respective protected characteristics. The following summary outlines this year's activity across the Faculty's Schools and highlights Ulster University's collective commitment to inclusive education and civic engagement:

School of Health Sciences

Health Promotion and Student Engagement

- Festival Style IPE Engagement on Derry-Londonderry Campus (April 2025). A day of learning and teaching activities around the campus that encouraged interprofessional interaction. The event created an opportunity for collaboration and socialisation.
- Interprofessional Event for All Year One students within the School of Health Sciences (September 2025). This event was an opportunity for all Year One students to come together to engage on week one of teaching. Students had the opportunity to come together to understand the diversity of healthcare professionals educated in the School of Health Sciences.
- IPE Inclusion Event (October 2025), held in the Guildhall, Derry-Londonderry. The event brought together a broad range of health providers who deliver to people who are homeless or disenfranchised from across the city. Students gathered to explore and address the pressing issues of homelessness and health inequalities through an inclusive and collaboration lens. The School of Health Sciences has engaged with Derry City and Strabane District Council to

deliver on an ongoing initiative to foster an understanding amongst healthcare practitioners with regards the plight of the homeless, disenfranchised community. The conference engaged students in Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Podiatry from the School. They attended alongside their peers from Dietetics (School of Biomedical Sciences) and medical students (School of Medicine).

Public Engagement and Outreach

- Online History Taking Session (April 2025). In conjunction with volunteers from Versus Arthritis, year one physiotherapy students ran online sessions to gather information from volunteers in relation to their condition and experiences of physiotherapy.
- School of Health Sciences Summer School (June 2025). Exploring Health Sciences at Ulster. This involved engagement with local secondary schools and education colleges to promote the Healthcare professions and build connections within the local community. This work highlighted the need to increase male applicants to healthcare related programmes to improve the gender balance in the Healthcare workforce.
- USA Mobility Trips to Boston and Philadelphia

Curriculum and Partnership

- USA Mobility Trips to Boston and Philadelphia (May to June 2025). This was open to all students within the School of Health Sciences. The students attended Regis College (Boston) and Thomas Jefferson University (Philadelphia) to see how sport and healthcare operate in the USA including funding and access thus the students were able to compare this to the UK model.
- College of Health and School of Health Sciences Summer School (June 2025). This is an ongoing connection with the College of Health and a yearly event. Over 80 chiropractic students travel from the UK mainland to attend a learning event with academic colleagues, in the AHP programmes in the School of Health sciences.
- Ulster University hosted AHP Conference on Derry-Londonderry Campus (June 2025). Inaugural Allied Health Professional conference on the Derry-Londonderry Campus jointly hosted by School of Health Sciences and Chief Allied Health Professions Officer NI. The conference had an emphasis on health inequality and healthcare delivery.

School of Nursing and Paramedic Science

The School of Nursing and Paramedic Science demonstrates sustained compliance with its statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 through an

embedded, strategic commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

As Athena Swan Gold Award recipients, the School evidences over a decade of systematic action to advance gender equality and broader EDI goals. The importance of EDI in the school has been reflected in its achievements, including winning the Ulster Excellence Team award for EDI.

Inclusive practice is integrated into School planning, workload allocation, and promotion processes, with clear accountability for EDI outcomes. A whole School, multistrand programme has embedded equality principles into governance, daily operations, and external partnerships. This includes explicit behavioural standards rejecting discrimination, bullying, harassment, and GBV, codesigned with staff and students. Green Dot bystander training is delivered across all preregistration programmes, and staff have participated in regionally facilitated workshops addressing incivility in nursing.

The School undertakes targeted initiatives to support underrepresented groups, including belonging focused mentoring and outreach to increase participation of men in nursing and paramedic science. We lead regional work to improve access to HE for internationally educated nurses, ensuring equality of opportunity irrespective of community background or nationality. This includes the establishment of a regional International Students Forum and the development of accessible guidance on pathways to further and HE. Promotional materials and recruitment activities intentionally reflect and support diversity, with engagement directed towards seldom heard communities. Staff from the School have also been involved in a project to widen access to health care education for informal carers supporting people with substance abuse.

Programme Directors have aligned Ulster's widening access priorities with accessible campus visits through the "Onwards to Honours" initiative, supporting progression to HE for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. We have further led a regional project outlining the diverse routes into nursing in Northern Ireland, demonstrating the inclusive nature of the profession.

Collectively, these actions evidence a sustained, structured approach to advancing equality and inclusion across all protected groups and to fostering good relations within the School and regionally.

School of Geography and Environmental Sciences (GES)

Social Impact Research

- Launch of PEACE-Air Cross-Border Air Pollution Project: the PEACEPLUS-funded PEACE-Air project, a cross-border research initiative addressing shared air pollution challenges was launched in this period. The

project strengthens cross-community and cross-border collaboration and contributes to environmental justice and shared societal benefit.

- Research on Defective Concrete and Mental Health Impacts: Prof Paul Dunlop from GES alongside Faculty's colleagues Prof Karen Kirby and Dr Eileen Doherty undertook interdisciplinary research examining mental health and social impacts alongside technical investigation of defective concrete. This work raises awareness of unequal societal impacts and contributes to policy debate through a more inclusive evidence base.

Science Communication and Public Engagement

- NI Science Festival Engagement: Dr Wes Forsythe delivered public engagement activities as part of the NI Science Festival. These activities focused on environment, climate and island sustainability, enhancing inclusive public engagement with science and strengthening community access to university research.
- GeoTopics Outreach Event: Dr Paul McKenzie alongside other GES staff organised the yearly GeoTopics conference for geography teachers and professionals across Northern Ireland. This long-standing initiative helps support curriculum development and knowledge exchange between secondary and tertiary education.
- Schools and Community Outreach Activities: Dr Saad Bhatti, supported by Faculty staff, delivered outreach talks and engagement activities in schools and community settings, incorporating global environmental case studies. These activities promoted mutual understanding, global citizenship and positive engagement between communities and HE.

Educational Outreach and Skills Development

- Inclusive Teaching in STEM: Dr David Tosh led an inclusive teaching initiative in which undergraduate students worked collaboratively to identify historic and contemporary scientists under-represented in STEM curricula. Short student presentations increased awareness of diversity within STEM disciplines and promoted inclusive learning and recognition of under-represented contributions.
- GIS in Education Symposium (ESRI UK): Dr Saad Bhatti participated in the ESRI UK GIS in Education Symposium, engaging with educators and professionals from diverse backgrounds. This activity supported inclusive dialogue, strengthened good relations and facilitated the dissemination of inclusive GIS education practice across institutions.
- CPD and Micro-Credential Provision in GIS and Remote Sensing: Dr Saad Bhatti led the expansion of CPD, short-course and micro-credential provision through the conversion of postgraduate modules into flexible formats. This initiative widened participation by supporting carers, mature learners,

return-to-study students and those in employment, improving access to lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities.

- DfE Skill Up Funded Postgraduate and Short Courses: The School delivered Department for the Economy Skill Up funded places across multiple postgraduate and short-course programmes with a focus on green skills. This reduced financial barriers to HE and increased participation among Northern Ireland-domiciled students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.
- Support for PhD and Early Career Researchers: Dr Dave Tosh and Dr Joerg Arnscheidt supported PhD researchers and early career researchers through funded training, conference attendance and hybrid participation opportunities. This enabled more equitable access to professional development, including for those with caring responsibilities.

School of Biomedical Sciences

The following events promoted equality of opportunity and good relations:

- Ulster Life Science and Biotechnology (ULife) Education Hub Lab Day, held on 08 April 2025 as a workshop.
- Ulster Life Science and Biotechnology (ULife) Education CPD Teacher Training, held on 14 May 2025 as a workshop.
- CEDEFAR 25 YEARS, held on 25 July 2025 as a public event.
- BSNM Annual Meeting, held on 2 September 2025 as a public lecture. British and Irish Hypertension Society meeting, held on 9 September 2025 as a presentation.
- Phlebotomy Course, held on 25 November 2025 as a two-day taught course and workshop followed by assessments.
- Parkinson's UK Northern Ireland Research Event, held on 28 November 2025 as a public research event.
- Meet the Food Nerds, held on 13 February 2026 as an interactive workshop for families. The event featured experts from the Co-Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast, focusing on research into food, health, and sustainable diets.
- Nutrition for Athletics, held on 28 February 2026 as a public lecture delivered to a local athletics club.
- Women's Health, held on 12 March 2026 as a seminar on nutrition and women's health delivered as part of a health initiative at Thompson's Feeds.
- Women in Agriculture and Food NI Event: Food Health and Farming, held on 12 March 2026 as a public lecture and panel discussion.
- The first World Congress on Paediatric Urgencies and Emergencies was held on 25 March 2026 as a public lecture.

Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment

Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment (BSABE)

Throughout the reporting period, colleagues across BSABE have organised and participated in a range of events and initiatives, underscoring the School's commitment to EDI. The impact of these initiatives has been recognised in the Athena Swan Silver status recently, awarded to BSABE in March 2026.

Based on feedback from staff across the School, a social programme was designed based on the theme of sport, art and wellness. Events were designed to be inclusive and open to all colleagues within BSABE with a focus on developing collegiality and belonging amongst staff across the School to promote diversity and inclusion. The programme included lunchtime sport activities such as a 'Have A Go at Art' event in May 2025, and regular boardgames nights on the Belfast campus. In addition to this programme, informal school-wide events have also been organised such as an 'escape room' and dinner in December 2025. Staff involvement with charity fundraising events were also regularly promoted across the School. These activities were open to all and promoted community and wellbeing within BSABE.

On 10 January 2026, a BSABE Staff and Family Day was held in the Jordanstown Sports Centre. All staff in the School were invited to attend this event, which provided the opportunity for staff and their families to connect across cultures in a fun and relaxed environment.

Across the year, regular opportunities for staff to meet on campus were organised every fortnight based on the BSABE 'Chocolate Wednesday Socials', a lunchtime programme open to all staff and research students in the School. A thematic approach was adopted in the organisation of the programme including tailored cultural, learning and teaching, and research contributions from across the School. This included a Diwali celebration on 22 October 2025, Christmas Jumper and afternoon tea event on 12 December 2025, Chinese New Year on 25 February 2026 and International Women's Day on 11 March 2026 (in support of and collaboration with Ulster University's Women's Network). Information on various cultural and religious festivals is also shared regularly across the School to enable a common recognition and understanding of these significant events for staff in BSABE.

In addition, through these regular gatherings, awareness was also raised with BSABE colleagues on EDI-related networks across the University. Staff in BSABE connected to or who represent such networks were invited to share best practice from their involvement with programmes including Ulster's NeuroNetwork and international student support. This year events also provided colleagues in BSABE with support in career development, for example a workshop in October 2025 that included staff sharing their career journey.

During 2025 to 2026, the School continued to provide a bespoke Mentor-Mentee scheme for staff in BSABE. This is complementary to University and Faculty-wide initiatives. The scheme is open to all staff, early career and established members of the School, as a means for sharing of experiences, serving to support the University's EDI strategy.

A BSABE PhD coffee morning was held on 16 October 2025. This celebrated the School's diverse research student community and provided an opportunity for networking amongst students and supervisors. The PhD coffee morning was followed by an Early Career Research (ECR) 'Festive ECR Lunch and Learn' on 21 November 2025. This event celebrated recent successes and inspired staff from various cultural backgrounds and genders to feel supported in navigating their own career journey.

The School continues to celebrate personal achievements of staff and mark life events of colleagues, with gatherings of colleagues organised as appropriate.

Colleagues within BSABE continued to be involved – as co-PI – with the Showcasing and Empowering Women in STEM (SEWS), a collaboration between BSABE and the School of Engineering which concluded in summer 2025. Indeed, the school continues to emphasise the importance of female role models in traditionally male-dominated professions to inspire the next generation of built environment professionals. For example, in addition to marketing events, multiple outreach activities were organised, both on and off campus, involving pupils from all-girl post-primary schools in the Belfast area.

The School of Engineering

Throughout the reporting period, the School of Engineering demonstrated a sustained and strategic commitment EDI, building on the successful retention of its Silver Athena Swan Award in 2025 and laying strong foundations towards a future Gold submission. The Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team met regularly under new leadership to embed EDI principles across governance, staff engagement, and school culture, with Athena Swan remaining a standing item at staff briefings and away days. Targeted actions included reviewing progress against the Silver Action Plan, enhancing support for women's engagement, and ensuring that all public-facing marketing and promotional materials accurately reflected the diversity of the School's staff and student population.

Significant emphasis was placed on visibility, empowerment, and recognition of women in Engineering, particularly through initiatives such as the Women in STEM Final Year Poster Awards and the SEWS (Supporting and Empowering Women in STEM) project. Funded activities included alumni seminars, leadership panel discussions, and a School-wide video series showcasing women at all career stages, alongside a highly successful International Women's Day 2026 campaign. These initiatives provided role models, celebrated achievement, and created inclusive

platforms for women's voices, while also engaging allies and partners across the University and wider STEM community.

The School continued to advance inclusive practice through early-stage outreach, widening participation, and the celebration of cultural diversity. Engagement with Primary Engineers, the NI Science Festival, gender-balanced work experience placements, and the WE-Bridge Academy helped challenge gender stereotypes and promote Engineering pathways from an early age. Internally, the School supported intersectional inclusion through leadership of the Ulster University BAME+ Network, participation in the Technician Commitment, and a programme of cultural celebration events that fostered belonging and mutual understanding. Collectively, these activities strengthened inclusive culture, enhanced visibility for underrepresented groups, and demonstrated measurable progress in embedding EDI across all aspects of School life:

Silver Athena Swan Award Retention

The Athena Swan Charter is a framework aimed at supporting and advancing gender equality in HE and research. It also acknowledges broader efforts to address gender equality, beyond just the challenges faced by women. In 2025 the School of Engineering achieved its retention of the silver Athena Swan Award. We now look towards a potential submission for Gold at the next submission point in 2030. Working towards this:

- The AS Institutional Self-Assessment Team (ISAT) continued to meet to review and begin to implement the Action Plan in the successful 2025 Athena Swan Silver renewal submission.
- The ISAT under new Athena Swan champion Ruth Holman began consultation on the 5-year strategy for Athena Swan gold.

Final Year Poster Awards

'Women in STEM' sponsored prizes for Women Engineering students at the annual Final Year poster presentation session. This increases the number of prizes available to celebrate the achievement of women Engineering students. These awards highlight the additional challenges that women in Engineering disciplines face in getting to the stage of finishing a degree in STEM and the achievement to get to this stage in their journey. These awards also give more women students the chance to be profiled for their achievements and increases women role models for undergraduate students in earlier years.

Showcasing and Empowering Women in STEM (SEWS Project):

Academics in the School of Engineering received funding from the Garfield Western Trust for the SEWS project – Supporting and Empowering Women in STEM. As part

of this project the following initiatives and events were launched in the reporting period:

- SEWS HER-STEM Seminar, April 2025, showcased eight female alumni of the School of Engineering in an event open to all staff and students. Alumni were from all courses and from early-stage career through to experienced women alumni working in industry roles across Engineering.
- SEWS HER-STEM 'Breaking Barriers, Building Futures' panel discussion, May 2025, through which four Inspiring leaders in STEM hosted a panel discussion event. All four panellists were leaders with a vested interest and track record of promoting and advocating for women in STEM. In collaboration with the School of Architecture and the Built Environment
- Conclusion of the SEWS video series, promoting women staff across the School (Professors, Researchers, Students, Administrative staff) through a video series made available across the School's social media platforms.
- Dr Usman Hadi was an Award Finalist at the WES 2026 Men as Allies awards, reflecting his work on the SEWS program and his overall commitment to supporting women in STEM and Engineering.

Primary Engineers involvement

The School of Engineering continued its involvement with Primary Engineers hosting the annual award night for Primary Engineers NI 'Engineers in the making' in June 2025. The awards were hosted on the University's Belfast campus by members of Primary Engineers and Professor Dewar Finlay, Head of School of Engineering and celebrate primary school age children and their Engineering ideas and ambitions. This is a great initiative making Engineering accessible and promoting Engineering as an option for all genders from a young age. In February 2026 we also hosted the Primary Engineers 'Kite works' programme funded by Thales, on the Belfast campus bringing school children on to campus to take part in a fun and engaging workshop. We recognise that decisions to pursue STEM subjects start from a young age when children first have choices in early secondary school about the subjects they select to study. Our involvement over the last few years with Primary Engineers aims to promote and provide a platform for both boys and girls to see what Engineering has to offer and inspire them to pursue the subjects that may lead towards a career in Engineering.

Conclusion of the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAE) Diversity Impact Programme Funding

Funding won by Professor Margaret Morgan and Dr Sharatchandra Varma Bogaraju. The School established the WE-Bridge Academy in 2024, supported by a £164,000 grant from the Royal Academy of Engineering, to address gender imbalance in Electronic Engineering. This initiative promotes inclusivity through engagement with

secondary schools and delivers targeted outreach activities that showcase female role models and career prospects in the field. This funding concluded in August 2025 but has contributed to greater visibility for women across Electronic Engineering. The School will continue to evaluate impacts on applicant numbers for its Electronic and Mechatronic Engineering programmes in the coming years.

Technician's Commitment

The Technician Commitment (TC) is a university and research institution initiative, led by a steering board of sector bodies, hosted by the UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy. The Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in HE and research, across all disciplines. The School supports the technical team to elevate the visibility of technicians across various disciplines within the University's staff and student community, highlighting their roles, skills, and contributions as essential professionals in what is often an overlooked workforce. Through our participation in the Technician Commitment, we've prioritized EDI by ensuring that technical staff are more visible and their contributions more recognized. We've established clear career progression pathways, which have led to a more diverse group of technicians being promoted. This has fostered a more inclusive environment where all staff feel valued and supported.

Hosting work experience students

In June 2025 we hosted AS level work experience students. We ensure all groups of work experience students are gender balanced to ensure promotion of STEM subjects to both women and men.

NI Science Festival and Schools involvement

The School of Engineering hosted the NI Science Festival Engineering Futures Event in February 2026. Opening up the campus to children from two local primary schools and giving them a fun taste of everything Engineering has to offer, from biomedical engineering to aerospace technologies. Feedback from the teachers was overwhelmingly positive with one teacher stating that this would be the first chance some of her class had had a chance to step into a University campus or had heard about studying at University as an option for them.

Celebrating cultural diversity

During the reporting period the School of Engineering hosted the following events celebrating the cultural diversity of our staff and students:

- Christmas Quiz and Christmas celebrations: The School hosted the Christmas party celebrations for all staff and supported the NIBES pub quiz which raised

£1200 for breast cancer charity Pretty in Pink in honour of dearly departed staff member Dr George Burke.

- Chinese New Year celebration in February 2026: The School hosted a fun afternoon of celebrations, food and a quiz for students from our partner institution Shannxi Institute of Science and Technology (SUST) in China, this event was attended by students and staff and fosters a sense of belonging for these students.
- Ramadan celebration – Breaking fast together in March 2026: The School of Engineering hosted an event for staff to break their fast together towards the end of Ramadan. This event was really well attended by all staff, those of a Muslim faith and others, and fosters a real sense of belonging and inclusion among staff.
- Nowruz celebration in March 2026: The School of Engineering hosted a Nowruz celebration event, marking the Persian New Year. Again, this event was attended very well by both our Iranian staff and student community and all other members of staff. These events are very important for belonging and inclusion, in particular with the political situation at the time of Nowruz 2026 this event was a chance for the School to show support and empathy to those members of staff with family and friends in Iran during this time.

Staff and students have reported an increased sense of belonging and inclusion due to these events. Staff have also reported an increased understanding of cultural beliefs and events due to these events.

International Women’s Day 2026 campaign

In March 2026 the School of Engineering launched its International Women’s Day campaign – promoting 10 women members of its community across the School’s social media platforms. Profiles ranged from Professors to undergraduates including Lecturers, PhD Researchers and Research Associates. As well as increasing visibility for those visiting the School’s social media platforms of women working in Engineering disciplines, including potential student and staff applicants to Engineering courses and roles. This campaign also gave a voice to our women Engineer community and was very well received by those who were nominated to contribute to the campaign.

The School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems (CEIS)

Below are examples of inclusion events and programmes used by the CEIS school:

Easter Potluck Celebration

On 18 April 2025, the Easter Potluck Celebration supported the promotion of good relations by providing an inclusive social space where staff and their families from a range of religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, ages and family circumstances could come together informally. By encouraging colleagues to share traditional foods and experiences, the event helped to build mutual understanding, respect and positive relationships across different Section 75 groups. The inclusion of family-friendly activities supported participation from staff with dependants, helping to remove potential barriers to engagement and ensuring broad accessibility.

Amelia Earhart STEM Challenge

On 16 May 2025, the Amelia Earhart STEM Challenge was delivered as part of the University's commitment to advancing equality of opportunity in education and addressing under-representation in STEM disciplines. The event engaged approximately 80 students from across Northern Ireland, providing inclusive access to university facilities and hands-on learning experiences regardless of gender, background or school type. By showcasing the legacy of Amelia Earhart, the initiative positively promoted the role of women in STEM and challenged gender stereotypes. Bringing together students, educators, industry partners and civic representatives, the event supported good relations and encouraged aspiration through collaboration, shared learning and positive engagement with HE.

Digital Technologies and AI Seagate-Sponsored Summer School

On 7 July 2025, the Digital Technologies and AI Summer School promoted equality of opportunity by widening access to skills development and experiential learning in emerging digital and technological fields. Participants from diverse educational backgrounds were supported to engage with university and industry environments, helping to build confidence and reduce barriers to future participation in HE and employment. Collaborative learning activities and site visits fostered inclusive participation and strengthened positive relationships between students, staff and industry partners.

Foyle Hospice Coffee Morning

On 9 October 2025, the Foyle Hospice Coffee Morning provided an inclusive opportunity for staff and students to participate in collective charitable activity that promoted social responsibility and community wellbeing. Open to all members of the University community, the event supported good relations by bringing together individuals across different roles, ages and circumstances in a shared purpose. The accessible format enabled broad participation and reinforced positive attitudes towards community support and volunteering.

Diwali Celebration (SCEIS in partnership with UU BAME+ Network)

On 28 October 2025, the Diwali Celebration contributed to the promotion of good relations by recognising and celebrating religious and cultural diversity within the University community.

Through shared food, cultural presentations, dance and artistic expression, the event increased awareness and understanding of Hindu traditions while providing an inclusive space for participation by staff and students from all backgrounds. The collaboration with the BAME+ Network supported the University's commitment to respect for difference and the creation of a welcoming environment for minority ethnic communities.

Maths Outreach

On 23 October 2025, the Maths Outreach Event supported equality of opportunity by engaging young people early in their educational journey and promoting access to STEM subjects among students aged 13–15 from different schools. Interactive talks, laboratory demonstrations and campus tours provided an inclusive and supportive introduction to university study, helping to raise aspirations and challenge perceived barriers to progression. By fostering positive engagement between the University, schools and pupils, the event also contributed to the development of good relations with the wider community.

Professor Jim Harkin's Inaugural Professorial Lecture

On 15 January 2025, Professor Jim Harkin's Inaugural Professorial Lecture provided an inclusive academic forum that was open to staff, students, external stakeholders and the public, supporting equality of opportunity in access to research dissemination and scholarly engagement. The lecture showcased leadership and innovation in engineering and artificial intelligence, highlighting advances in sustainable and energy-efficient AI systems. By contributing to public understanding of cutting-edge research, the event supported positive engagement with science and technology across a diverse audience. It also promoted good relations by fostering shared learning, dialogue and collaboration within and beyond the University community.

NI Science Festival, Foyle Arena

Participation in the NI Science Festival, 21 to 22 February 2025, supported the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations by engaging members of the public from all age groups, backgrounds and abilities in accessible science and engineering activities. Through hands-on demonstrations and interactive learning experiences, the School and the Intelligent Systems Research Centre (ISRC) helped to reduce barriers to participation in STEM by presenting research and teaching in an inclusive and engaging manner. The event promoted positive attitudes towards science, encouraged curiosity and aspiration, and strengthened relationships between the University and the wider community through open and inclusive public engagement.

The Learning and Teaching Committee – Educational Partnerships

Since September 2025, the Educational Partnerships Team and academics and students from CEBE have delivered a strong programme of outreach and engagement activities across the Belfast and Derry-Londonderry campuses, reaching 292 pupils from 14 schools. Activities have supported awareness and potential future recruitment for key disciplines including Maths, AI, Cyber Security and Urban Planning. Feedback from teachers and pupils shows high satisfaction, improved awareness of career pathways, and increased intent to explore STEM-related study. Two new Discovery Academy online courses (Energy and AI) are under development to strengthen digital engagement and widen participation and reach with post-primary schools for CEBE related courses.

Additional outreach events included:

Urban Planning Event – Belfast Campus (12 Sept 2025)

- 55 pupils (Years 12–14) from 3 schools.
- Workshops: AI in Planning and Shaping Our Community.
- Pupils attended part of the Planning Research Conference and engaged with UK Chief Planners.
- Impact: Raised awareness of digital innovation in planning; enhanced understanding of planning study options and careers.

Maths Schools Outreach – Derry-Londonderry Campus (23 Oct 2025)

- 58 pupils (Years 12–14) from 3 schools.
- Promoted new Computing with Applied Maths degree.
- Tours of Robotics and MEG labs; ‘Question and Answer’ talks with academic staff including Dr. William Smyth, Dr. Barry Dillon, Dr. Bronac Flanigan and Layla Abukhalaf.
- Impact: Strengthened visibility of new UG degree; positive engagement with research environments.

Garfield Weston Foundation - AI and Robotics Programme

- In School workshops and Campus Event – Belfast (13 Jan 2026)
- 73 pupils (Years 12–13) from 4 Belfast schools.
- In-school workshops on Robotics, AI and Cyber Awareness.
- Campus visit: tour, AI activity, demonstrations e.g. Formula 1 simulator and Smart-Lab
- Impact: Strong hands-on engagement; reinforced school-university links; part of funded project delivery.

Maths Event – Derry-Londonderry Campus (20 Jan 2026)

- 33 pupils (Years 12–14) from 2 schools.
- Showcased new Computing with Applied Maths degree.

- Campus tour including Engineering Labs; 'Question and Answer' with academics Dr. Barry Dillon, Professor KongFatt Wong-Lin, Dr. Bronac Flanigan and a PhD student Ravi Jha.
- Impact: Highlighted real-world applications of maths, enhanced interest in STEM careers and Ulster University study opportunities.

Magic of AI – NI Science Festival (16 Feb 2026)

- 73 pupils (Years 12–13) from 2 schools.
- Interactive coding activity and demonstrations explaining practical AI use and limitations.
- Included Smart-Lab tour and campus tour.
- Impact: Increased AI literacy and critical thinking; aligned with festival outreach goals.

End of Document.