

Equality Impact Assessment Report

Administering the NHS Scotland Physiotherapy Funded Places Scheme

NES directorate or department: NMAHP

Date Report Completed: 26/08/2024

Date reviewed: 26/01/2026

This report has been prepared for colleagues who support and administer the scheme within NHS Boards and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), and applicants to the scheme.

Introduction

Equality Impact Assessment is a process that helps us to consider how our work will meet the 3 parts of the Public Sector Equality Duty. It is an important way to mainstream equality into our work at NES and to help us:

- Take effective action on equality
- Develop better policy, technology, education and learning and workforce planning solutions for health, social care and a wide range of our partners, stakeholders and employees
- Demonstrate how we have considered equality in making our decisions.

[The Scottish Government Health and Social Care Integrated Workforce Plan](#) was published in December 2019. It sets out how our health and social care services will meet growing demand by ensuring we have the right numbers of staff, with the right skills, in the right places, able to deliver high quality, patient-focussed services across Scotland. This included the commitment to create 225 more Advanced Musculo-Skeletal (MSK) Practitioners in Primary Care, by increasing MSc training places for the Physiotherapy workforce.

The NHS Scotland Physiotherapy Funded Places Scheme is designed to deliver the increased training places in collaboration with NHS Boards and HEIs. This involves a competitive interview process in which successful Scottish Domicile applicants will receive payment of course fees for two years and agreement that 50% of practice-based learning placements will be located within the host health Board.

The scheme is administered by NHS Education for Scotland (NES), and this is the focus of this EQIA. Processes, guidance and supporting documents have been agreed with the Scottish Government; and shared with all host health Boards to ensure a consistent approach across Scotland. Mechanisms are agreed for national indexing to enable data to be gathered tracking students on the Physiotherapy Funded Places Scheme from admission to university through to graduate employment.

A working group with representation from NES, Scottish Government, the Scottish HEIs, the Scottish Directors of Allied Health Professions, and Physiotherapy service within the host health Boards, ensures that key stakeholders are represented throughout. This group has oversight of the processes. In addition, there are mechanisms for wider stakeholder engagement including in the planning for future phases of the scheme.

The aims of the Physiotherapy Funded Places Scheme are to:

- Promote equity in access to learning and development opportunities. Payment of course tuition fees may allow applicants to access the MSc Physiotherapy programme who would have otherwise been unable to self-fund
- Support positive learning experiences and outcomes for learners throughout Scotland with promotion of opportunities within all geographical health Boards
- Support of recruitment opportunities across Scotland's diverse landscape
- Contribute to a workforce that is skilled to deliver person-centred health and care to Scotland's diverse population

This work aligns with the following NES equality outcomes:

Outcome 1: Our support for youth employment with a particular focus on engagement and supporting transitions from school, college and university for those further from the labour market or more likely to experience barriers to full employment: young people who are care-experienced, disabled, or from Black and minority ethnic or socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

Outcome 8: NES is an inclusive employer, with:

- Effective employee voice, including staff networks with effective influence on policy
- Improved recruitment outcomes for young candidates, minority ethnic candidates and disabled candidates
- An adaptable and flexible workforce with positive support for staff wellbeing

The following table outlines the potential impact of the Physiotherapy Funded Places Scheme on different population groups and mitigations.

Population group	Potential impacts	Mitigations
Age	<p>The scheme is likely to contribute positively to younger applicants, though it does apply across different career stages and aims to be drafted to be inclusive of older registrants going through career transitions.</p> <p>There may be assumptions of line / hiring managers in supporting learning opportunities, digital literacy, and different learning styles.</p>	<p>No differential impacts have been identified specifically relating to registrants who are younger in relation to the application process of the scheme, so no mitigations have been proposed.</p>
Disability	<p>Applicants with disabilities may benefit from support during the application process and during the university programme. People with disabilities often need to share enhanced information about their disability and, may feel there is insufficient psychological safety to do so as part of the application process. There may be lack of understanding of reasonable adjustments which may be required during the application and interview process. A robust and inclusive process should contribute to a more supportive outcomes that supports people with disabilities. Applicants with disabilities may have a higher attrition rate if they are not supported with tailored support. NES is a Disability Confident Employer – see An inclusive and diverse workplace NHS Education for Scotland</p> <p>Potential negative impact on applicants who use British Sign Language.</p>	<p>We provide opportunity to request assistance within application form and candidate application guidance.</p> <p>Highlighted in guidance document that as part of the interview process hiring managers ask if applicants have any additional learning requirements and make any reasonable adjustments required, for example additional time, printed materials sent beforehand, an interpreter for those using British Sign Language etc.</p> <p>Information provided in guidance document for interviewers that signposts to NES resources supporting making reasonable adjustments:</p> <p>Part 1 Part 2 Part 3</p> <p>These resources will be included in resource pack sent to boards.</p>

Ethnicity / Race	<p>There will be instances where applicants have English as a second language and there is the need to ensure that the process is accessible; avoiding content which might perpetuate discrimination or prejudice; cultural background; potential experience of facing discrimination from managers etc; lack of psychological safety.</p> <p>We have considered impact on applicants from a minority ethnic background and recognise that racism exists, however the scheme intends to progress equality of opportunity for minority ethnic applicants through a fair and inclusive process.</p>	<p>Ensure those interviewing are signposted to NES website Equality, diversity and human rights NHS Education for Scotland which sets out the importance of specific actions to address systemic racism. This will be included in resource pack sent to boards.</p> <p>All involved in recruitment encouraged to complete the Cultural Humility eLearning resource: Cultural Humility eLearning resource</p> <p>Review of diversity data revealed that we have received a low number of applications from minority ethnic groups.</p>
Gender / Sex	<p>Physiotherapy tends to be a largely female profession (79% of the NHS Scotland Physiotherapy workforce on 31st Dec 2023 were reported to be female on Turas Data Intelligence) therefore are more likely to be positively affected by the scheme. However, as evidence suggests, women are more likely to be carers (children, relatives, partners with ill-health or disabilities) and are therefore more likely to have to take career breaks and may have an increased chance of attrition from the programme. There is a potential impact of direct discrimination, marginalisation, assumptions of line managers and peers about participation of women in education and training.</p>	<p>No differential impacts have been identified specifically relating to registrants who are female in relation to the application process of the scheme, so no mitigations have been proposed.</p>

Gender Reassignment	<p>The following question (wording agreed by Scottish Government) is included in the application form</p> <p>Do you consider yourself to be trans, or have a trans history?</p> <p>Trans is a term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as the sex they were registered at birth</p> <p>There may be a potential impact if there are transphobic attitudes from those reviewing application forms and interviewing.</p>	Equality and diversity information is not shared with the interviewing boards and used solely by NES for monitoring and to inform any necessary updates to the scheme.
Religion/Belief	Direct discrimination against minority religions if failure to take account of religious festivals and observance with regards to scheduling interviews	If the interview timeframes include dates that coincide with religious festivals, a religious festival calendar will be added to the resource pack for interviewing boards to allow them to take this into account.
Sexual Orientation	It is recognised that there may be discriminatory attitudes about sexual orientation which could be direct or indirect from those reviewing application forms.	Equality and diversity information is not shared with the interviewing boards and used solely by NES for monitoring and to inform any necessary updates to the scheme.
Socio-economic background	Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may have potential lack of opportunity and lack of financial means to access further and higher education; power dynamics and psychological safety; lack of confidence in ability to achieve learning outcomes. We also recognise the intersections between low socioeconomic status and other marginalised groups. Digital poverty / lack of IT facilities to access application process.	<p>The scheme enables provision of economic means to access the MSc (pre-reg) Physiotherapy programme.</p> <p>There is opportunity to request assistance within the application form and candidate application guidance.</p>
Care Experience	We know that care experienced children and young people have poorer educational outcomes which can perpetuate inequality in later life and therefore they may be of further disadvantage.	This is recognised as an issue to be considered by the providers of funded places and not as part of the application process.

Caring responsibilities	<p>Applicants who have caring responsibilities may also have unpredictability in terms of caring role which may make it difficult to commit to the interview schedules. This may disproportionately impact of women.</p>	<p>Importance of flexibility in interview schedule to accommodate those with caring responsibilities.</p> <p>Information included in the resource pack sent to boards.</p>
Neurodiversity	<p>Application process will consider the potential impact of different ways of learning and barriers to access and understanding e.g., text heavy information on web page</p>	<p>Ensure that as part of the interview process hiring managers ask if applicants have any additional learning requirements and make any reasonable adjustments required.</p> <p>Ensure those interviewing signposted to NES resources supporting making reasonable adjustments:</p> <p>Part 1 Part 2 Part 3</p> <p>These resources will be included in resource pack sent to boards.</p> <p>Ensure specific Neurodiversity resources are included in the resource pack and NES accessibility policy</p>

Evidence

It is important to have up to date evidence to inform our impact assessment.

A range of evidence has been used to inform this assessment and includes:

- Diversity questions within the scheme's online application form using the agreed NHS Scotland wording. This is completed and reviewed for each cohort of applicants annually.
- Regular discussion with / in the working group on scheme outputs and proposed improvements for the future involve individuals representing a range of roles and organisations; and feedback is invited throughout the year.
- Data collected annually via stakeholder surveys shared with students and other key stakeholders. Information is reviewed and acted on accordingly.

Assessment

We have considered how this work will impact on the Public Sector Equality Duty. This includes how it might affect people differently, taking account of protected characteristics and how these intersect, including with poverty and low income. This is important as a national NHS Board in our work to address health inequalities. Further information can be seen in Appendix One.

The bullet points below are the 3 parts of the Public Sector Equality Duty:

- How will it progress equality of opportunity for people who experience inequalities?
- How will it eliminate discrimination, victimisation or harassment or other unlawful conduct?
- How can it promote good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not? For example, think about how we can tackle any prejudice or stigma.

The Physiotherapy Funded Places Scheme progresses equality of opportunity and aims to reduce discrimination and prejudice through:

- Provision of economic means to access the MSc (pre-reg) Physiotherapy programme.
- Being proactive by putting in place reasonable adjustments for applicants and stakeholders to enable participation.
- Standardisation of process with the same agreed guidance, interview questions and templates used across Scotland that meet NES accessibility guidance.
- Adhering to all relevant guidance and policy, including following the advice of the technology enhanced learning team to increase digital accessibility, and information governance for indexing processes
- Principles underpinning the scheme seek to advance equality, eliminate discrimination, victimisation, or harassment.

Opportunity to contribute to inclusive working environments which recognise diversity in the population, including in experience, learning styles, previous education and learning

opportunities. Bringing people from different backgrounds together to learn from each other is an important way to challenge attitudes and behaviours towards people who are different to each other.

Opportunity to be proactive in ensuring there is equity in access to education and training for those staff groups who can be furthest from opportunities for learning in the workplace. This includes increasing access to the MSc Physiotherapy programme to Physiotherapy Healthcare Support Workers.

In addition, it should be recognised that this scheme may assist with recruitment and retention in certain board areas.

We have not produced a Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment given our remit is in the administration of the Scheme. However, we have considered the potential for the Scheme to address inequalities due to socioeconomic circumstances. A Child Rights Impact Assessment is not relevant to the Scheme.

Next Steps

The Equality Impact Assessment has informed the following actions:

The evidence shows that there is no potential for unlawful discrimination, and we have built in the following actions to further advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The status of all actions in the table below was reviewed on 26/01/26.

Actions	Complete / Continuing
Guidance has been sought from the equality and diversity team on additional advertising opportunities which may improve access and visibility in the future.	Complete
Review of diversity data revealed that we have received a low number of applications from minority ethnic groups	Continuing
All involved in recruitment encouraged to complete the Cultural Humility eLearning resource: Cultural Humility eLearning resource	Complete
Ensure those interviewing signposted to NES resources supporting making reasonable adjustments: Part 1 Part 2 Part 3 These resources will be included in resource pack sent to boards.	Complete
Ensure those interviewing are signposted to NES website Equality, diversity and human rights NHS Education for Scotland which sets out the importance of specific actions to address systemic racism. This will be included in resource pack sent to boards.	Complete
If the interview timeframes include dates that coincide with religious festivals, a religious festival calendar will be added to the resource pack for interviewing boards to allow them to take this into account	Complete
Ensure specific Neurodiversity resources are included in the resource pack and NES accessibility policy	Complete

The work will be monitored via:

- Indexing process (system of spreadsheets moving onto Turas Management System).

- Annual stakeholder surveys and other regular opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback.
- Working group overseeing cycle of continuous improvement.
- Stakeholder experience / stories gathered and shared.
- Generation of anonymised workforce data upon students entering the workforce.

The impact assessment will be reviewed annually to take account of any feedback, and evaluation on its impact.

Sign-off

Director: Karen Wilson

Date: 11/11/2024

Review (1): January 2026

Review (2): January 2027

