



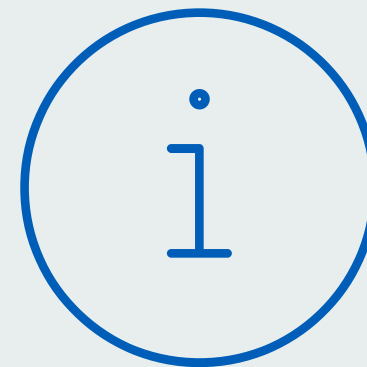
# Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) Report

2025

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## Background and context

- The Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) was introduced within the NHS in 2019. Its purpose is to ensure that colleagues living with disabilities, long term health conditions, or illnesses have equal access to career opportunities and receive fair treatment in the workplace.
- The WDES comprises a set of ten specific measures (metrics) which enables NHS organisations to compare the workplace and career experiences of disabled and non-disabled colleagues. NHS organisations use the metrics data to develop and publish an action plan. Year-on-year comparison enables NHS organisations to demonstrate progress against the indicators of disability equality.
- Implementing the WDES in an open and transparent way enables NHS organisations to demonstrate how they are addressing disability equality issues.

# Introduction



- There are currently four Commissioning Support Units (CSUs) in the NHS, comprising Arden and Greater East Midlands (AGEM) CSU, Midlands and Lancashire (ML) CSU, North of England Commissioning Support (NECS), and South, Central and West (SCW) CSU.
- Whilst there is no mandatory requirement for CSUs to complete the WDES, each CSU has undertaken individual reporting to display openness and transparency, and understand the necessary measures needed to provide equity. This year, the CSUs have developed a joint report to assess the CSUs performance as a collaborative group.
- This report provides information on the CSUs' performance against each of the ten WDES indicators for 2024/25. The report also provides commentary of areas of success, and areas for improvement.



# Executive Summary

This Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) report brings together, for the first time, the workforce data from the four CSUs for the reporting period April 2024 to March 2025. This joint approach provides a consolidated view of workforce equality ahead of the planned closure of all CSUs by March 2027.

As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, disabled colleagues make up 9.8% of the CSU workforce. There is an uneven distribution of colleagues with disabilities, with the lower bandings comprising the largest number of disabled colleagues and the upper bandings comprising fewer disabled colleagues.

Recruitment outcomes are fairly positive with a 0.82 relative likelihood of non-disabled candidates being appointed compared with disabled candidates. This indicates that disabled applicants are slightly more likely to be appointed than non-disabled applicants.

Disabled colleagues were more likely (2.69) to enter the formal capability process than non-disabled colleagues. Three disabled colleagues have gone through the formal capability process on the grounds of ill-health over a 2-year period.

The staff survey results vary, with the percentage of colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from **patients, relatives or the public** having reduced for disabled colleagues but having stayed the same for non-disabled colleagues. The percentage of colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from **managers and other colleagues** has reduced for disabled and non-disabled colleagues. However, the percentage of colleagues saying the last time they experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work, they or a colleague reported it has reduced for disabled but increased for non-disabled colleagues.



- **9.8% of the CSU workforce are disabled**
- **Disabled candidates are slightly more likely to be appointed from shortlisting than non-disabled applicants**
- **Disabled colleagues are more likely to enter the formal capability process than non-disabled colleagues**
- **The percentage of disabled colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from patients, relatives or the public, managers, and other colleagues has reduced**
- **There has been a reduction in the percentage of disabled colleagues reporting harassment, bullying or abuse incidents**

# Executive Summary

While more disabled colleagues believe their organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion this has reduced for non-disabled colleagues since last year. The percentage of disabled and non-disabled colleagues who feel satisfied with the extent to which their organisation values their work has also reduced.

There has been an improvement in presenteeism with a fewer disabled and non-disabled colleagues feeling pressure from their manager to come to work, despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties. However, the percentage of colleagues with a long-lasting health condition or illness saying their employer has made reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their work has declined. Staff engagement scores have also fallen for both disabled and non-disabled colleagues.

Board level representation (6.9% disabled members), Voting Board (6.9% disabled members), and Executive Director (7.1% disabled members) membership is also not fully representative of the workforce (9.8% disabled colleagues). Disclosure rates also need to be improved at workforce (11.1% undisclosed) and Board/Voting Board/Executive Director (between 10.3% undisclosed) levels. Addressing these issues will be crucial in ensuring that in the final years of the CSUs they deliver on equality commitments and leave a positive legacy as they transition toward closure.



- **More disabled colleagues believe there are equal opportunities for career progression or promotion**
- **There has been a reduction in the percentage of disabled colleagues feeling their work is valued by their organisations**
- **Presenteeism has reduced**
- **The percentage of disabled colleagues saying their employer has provided reasonable adjustments has reduced**
- **Board level representation comprises only 6.9% disabled members**
- **Improvements are required in terms of disclosure rates**

## WDES Indicator 1: Overall breakdown of workforce data



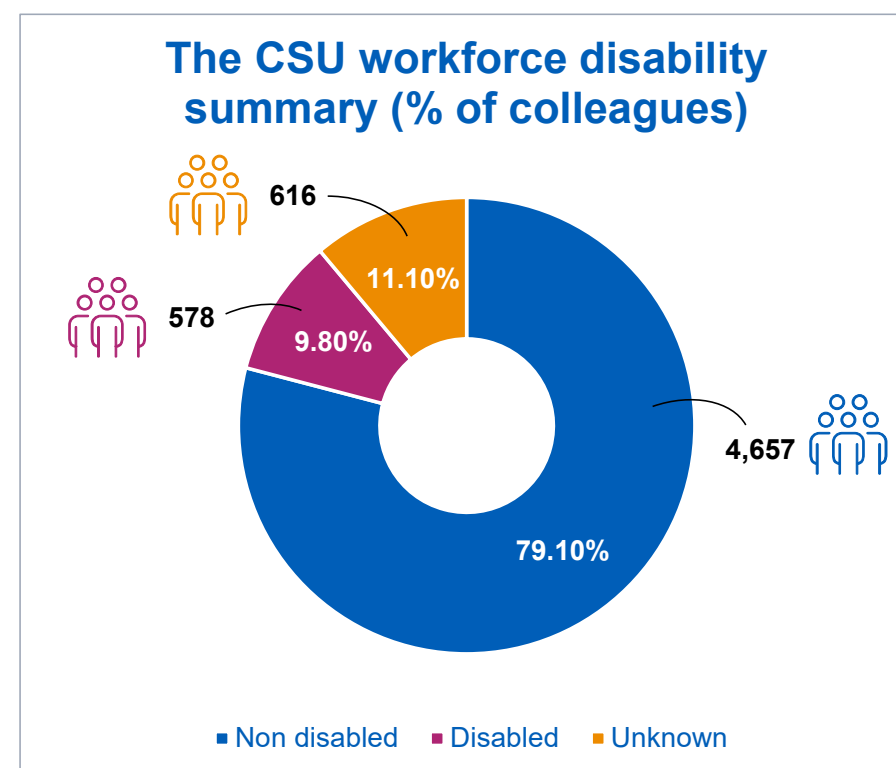
### Disability status comparison for: Percentage of staff in each of the AfC bands 1-9 and VSM (including Exec. Board members) compared with the percentage in the overall workforce

As of March 2025, the workforce of the four Commissioning Support Units (CSUs) comprised 5,887 colleagues. The disability status composition was as follows:

- **9.8%** of the workforce identified as disabled (**578** individuals).
- **79.1%** of the workforce identified as non-disabled (**4,657** individuals).
- **11.1%** of the workforce have an unknown disability status (**616** individuals).

The percentage of disabled colleagues (9.8%) is lower than the population in England and Wales (17.5%, 2021 Census).

When comparing ESR data with staff survey results, a higher percentage of colleagues identified as disabled in the staff survey (26.4%) compared with ESR (9.8%). However, within the staff survey 4,282 colleagues (98.4% of the 4,350 survey respondents) disclosed their disability status. The number of colleagues who took part in the staff survey only represents 72.9% of the overall workforce, meaning the figures in the staff survey may not be fully representative.



## WDES Indicator 1: Overall breakdown of workforce data



Pay bands	Non-Clinical Workforce			Clinical Workforce		
	Disabled	Non-Disabled	Unknown	Disabled	Non-Disabled	Unknown
Band 2	8.70%	86.96%	4.35%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Band 3	11.17%	78.35%	10.48%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Band 4	11.75%	78.17%	10.07%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Band 5	10.39%	78.73%	10.87%	4.88%	80.49%	14.63%
Band 6	9.99%	79.53%	10.48%	12.57%	74.29%	13.14%
Band 7	10.56%	78.45%	10.98%	5.00%	81.25%	13.75%
Band 8a	8.70%	82.03%	9.27%	7.84%	88.24%	3.92%
Band 8b	8.55%	78.63%	12.82%	4.17%	87.50%	8.33%
Band 8c	7.76%	80.41%	11.84%	0.00%	91.67%	8.33%
Band 8d	8.43%	76.40%	15.17%	10.00%	90.00%	0.00%
Band 9	5.06%	69.62%	25.32%	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%
VSM	10.00%	80.00%	10.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Other	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Consultant				0.00%	78.57%	21.43%

Overall, there is an uneven distribution of colleagues with disabilities, with the lower bandings comprising the largest number of disabled colleagues and the upper bandings comprising fewer disabled colleagues. Bands 8c-VSM also have the highest percentage of colleagues with an unknown disability status.

The data shows that while there is moderate disability representation across mainly non-clinical workforce banding, there is a clear trend of under-representation at higher pay bands, especially in clinical roles.

In general, there is an increase in undisclosed disability status data as the bands increase within the non-clinical workforce, with band 9 having the highest percentage of unknown disability status colleagues. For the clinical workforce, bands 5-7 and bands 9 have the highest proportion of unknown disability status data. This indicates further work is required to build psychological safety and improve disclosure rates, to better understand disability representation within the organisation.



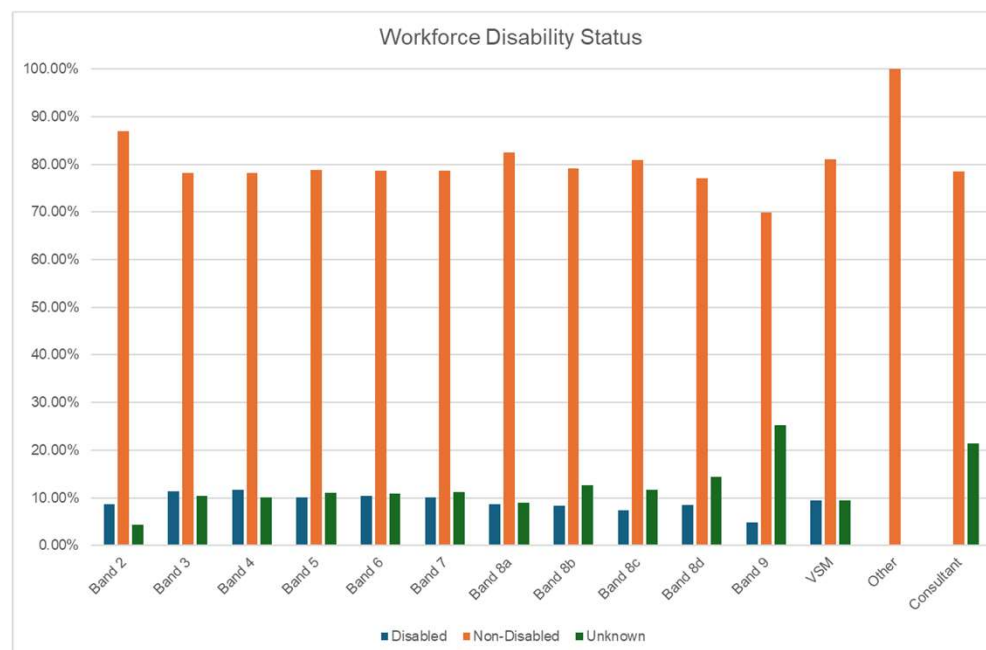
## WDES Indicator 1: Overall breakdown of workforce data



The figure to the right shows the distribution of the CSU workforce (clinical and non-clinical) across banding and disability status. The graph shows that:

- Disability representation is strongest across Bands 3 to 7, with 73.70% of disabled colleagues being distributed across these bands. The percentage of disabled colleagues in the workforce reduces between bands 8a-9 but surprisingly increases again at Very Senior Manager Level (VSM) to 9.43%.
- Out of all bands, Band 9 has the lowest percentage of disabled colleagues (4.82%), and the highest percentage of colleagues with an undisclosed disability status (25.30%). This indicates that there may be a need to address psychological safety and encourage role modelling, to ensure colleagues feel safe to share their data.
- There are no disabled colleagues present in the other or consultant workforce groups. However, it should be noted that consultants comprise the second highest group with undisclosed disability status data (21.43%) after Band 9. Again, this could potentially be due to psychological safety and whether colleagues feel safe/comfortable to share this data with us.

This data highlights that while disabled colleagues are generally well-represented across Bands 3-7, their representation isn't consistent across all bandings and reduces with senior roles. There is a clear need for targeted actions to address career progression barriers, improve leadership diversity and reduce the number of unknown disability declarations, particularly at strategic levels. Enhancing transparency and inclusivity in talent development, recruitment and retention strategies will be essential to ensuring equity across all grades in the CSU workforce.



## WDES Indicator 2: Recruitment

**Disability status comparison for: The relative likelihood of non-disabled candidates compared to disabled candidates being appointed from shortlisting across all posts**

2024/25	Shortlisted	Appointed	Relative likelihood of non-disabled candidates compared to disabled candidates being appointed from shortlisting across all posts
Disabled	291	49	0.82
Non-disabled	3055	422	
Unknown	132	66	

- A likelihood of 1.00 would indicate that there is an equal likelihood of disabled and non-disabled candidates being appointed to a role. A likelihood of less than 1.00 indicates disabled candidates are more likely to be appointed to a role. A likelihood of more than 1.00 indicates non-disabled candidates are more likely to be appointed to a role. However, a good range is considered to be between 0.80 and 1.25 in terms of likelihood.
- The recruitment data shows that the relative likelihood is 0.82. This means disabled candidates are more likely to be appointed to a role than non-disabled applicants.
- The data also shows that 3.8% of shortlisted applicants and 12.3% of appointed candidates prefer not to share their disability status with us during the application process. As such, there is more that can be done to demonstrate that all CSUs are equal opportunity employers, and to promote their Disability Confident statuses and the practices and values they have in place to support disabled colleagues and candidates

## WDES Indicator 3: Colleagues entering formal capability processes



### Disability status comparison for: The relative likelihood of non-disabled colleagues entering the formal capability process compared with disabled colleagues, as measured by entry into a formal capability procedure

- The CSUs record and monitor all capability cases against protected characteristics and makes note of the reason behind the case. The indicator looks at the number of capability cases over a 2-year period and considers whether they may be on the grounds of ill health.
- Where the number of colleagues entering a formal capability process is 5 or less, we will not disclose or publish the information for reporting purposes, to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of individuals subject to such processes.
- For the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2025, 27 colleagues entered a formal capability process across the CSUs (average of 13.5 colleagues over two years). Of this, there have been 3 disabled colleagues going through this process on the grounds of ill-health over the past two years.
- As there are five or fewer colleagues who have entered the formal capability process in certain disability status groups, it is not possible to disclose detailed information. Analysis of the data shows that disabled colleagues are significantly more likely than non-disabled colleagues to enter a capability process, with a likelihood of 2.69.
- A likelihood of 1.00 would indicate that there is an equal likelihood of disabled and non-disabled colleagues entering a formal capability process. A likelihood of less than 1.00 indicates non-disabled colleagues are more likely to enter a formal capability process than disabled colleagues. A likelihood of more than 1.00 indicates disabled colleagues are more likely to enter a formal capability process than non-disabled colleagues. A good range is considered to be between 0.80 and 1.25 in terms of likelihood. As the relative likelihood exceeds 1.25, it indicates there is a significantly higher likelihood of disabled colleagues entering a formal process.



## WDES Indicators 4-9: Staff survey questions



Disability status comparison for: Percentage of colleagues that said “YES” to the WDES questions in the 2024 Staff Survey and a comparison with the 2023 results

Staff Survey indicator (WDES)	Disability status	Staff Survey results			Staff Survey indicator (WDES)	Disability status	Staff Survey results		
		2023	2024	Difference			2023	2024	Difference
Indicator 4a – Percentage of colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from patients/service users, their relatives or other members of the public in the last 12 months	Disabled	7.1%	6.4%	-0.7% ↓	Indicator 5 – Percentage of colleagues who believe that their organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion	Disabled	54.8%	55.5%	+0.7% ↑
	Non-disabled	3.0%	3.0%	0.0% ↔		Non-disabled	64.3%	61.9%	-2.4% ↓
Indicator 4b – Percentage of colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from managers in the last 12 months	Disabled	14.7%	11.5%	-3.2% ↓	Indicator 6 – Percentage of colleagues who have felt pressure from their manager to come to work, despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties	Disabled	16.8%	15.9%	-0.9% ↓
	Non-disabled	5.5%	4.9%	-0.6% ↓		Non-disabled	10.7%	10.2%	-0.5% ↓
Indicator 4c – Percentage of colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from other colleagues in the last 12 months	Disabled	16.8%	14.5%	-2.3% ↓	Indicator 7 – Percentage of colleagues satisfied with the extent to which their organisation values their work	Disabled	49.4%	46.0%	-3.4% ↓
	Non-disabled	7.4%	6.2%	-1.2% ↓		Non-disabled	61.5%	58.6%	-2.9% ↓
Indicator 4d – Percentage of colleagues saying the last time they experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work, they or a colleague reported it	Disabled	49.3%	46.6%	-2.7% ↓	Indicator 8 – Percentage of colleagues with a long-lasting health condition or illness saying their employer has made reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their work	Disabled	81.4%	78.6%	-2.8% ↓
	Non-disabled	45.6%	50.0%	+4.4% ↑					



Positive change in experience from previous year





Negative change in experience from previous year






No change in experience from previous year

## WDES Indicators 4-9: Staff survey questions

### Disability status comparison for: Percentage of colleagues that said “YES” to the WDES questions in the 2024 Staff Survey and a comparison with the 2023 results

Staff Survey indicator (WDES)	Disability status	Staff Survey results		
		2023	2024	Difference
Indicator 9a – Staff engagement score (0-10)	Disabled	6.5	6.3	-0.2 
	Non-disabled	7.1	6.9	-0.2 
Indicator 9b – Has your organisation taken action to facilitate the voices of your disabled staff to be heard? (yes) or (no)	Disabled	Yes	Yes	

-  Positive change in experience from previous year
-  Negative change in experience from previous year
-  No change in experience from previous year

### Annual change comparison

The 2024/25 staff survey data has been mixed, with both declines and improvements in experiences for both disabled and non-disabled colleagues. There have been positive improvements in experience for:

#### Both disabled and non-disabled colleagues on:

- Indicator 4b with a reduction in the percentage of disabled and non-disabled colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from managers in the last 12 months.
- Indicator 4c with a reduction in the percentage of disabled and non-disabled colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from other colleagues in the last 12 months.
- Indicator 6 with a reduction in presenteeism and a decrease in the percentage of disabled and non-disabled colleagues who have felt pressure from their manager to come to work, despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties.

#### For disabled colleagues on:

- Indicator 4a with a reduction in the percentage of disabled colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from patients/service users, their relatives or other members of the public in the last 12 months.
- Indicator 5 with an increase in the percentage of disabled colleagues who believe that their organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion.

#### For non-disabled colleagues on:

- Indicator 4d with an increase in the percentage of non-disabled colleagues saying the last time they experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work, they or a colleague reported it.

## WDES Indicators 4-9: Staff survey questions

### Annual change comparison

- There has been a decrease in the percentage of colleagues satisfied with the extent to which their organisation values their work for both disabled and non-disabled colleagues. The % decrease for disabled colleagues is greater than the decrease for non-disabled colleagues, and significantly fewer disabled colleagues than non-disabled colleagues feel satisfied with the extent to which their work is valued.
- There has been a reduction in staff engagement for both disabled and non-disabled colleagues, by the same number of points. However, more non-disabled colleagues have taken part in the staff survey than disabled colleagues.
- The percentage of disabled colleagues saying the last time they experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work, they or a colleague reported it has reduced, with significantly fewer disabled colleagues than non-disabled colleagues saying they have reported these incidents.
- There has been a reduction in the percentage of colleagues with a long-lasting health condition or illness saying their employer has made reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their work.
- There has been a decline in the percentage of non-disabled colleagues who believe that their organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion. While there has been a reduction in the % of non-disabled colleagues saying they believed this, there is still fewer disabled colleagues than non-disabled colleagues believing this.
- For non-disabled colleagues there has been no change in experience for the percentage of colleagues experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from patients, their relatives or the public.
- All CSUs have colleague network groups who meet every 1 to 3 months and help to amplify the voices of disabled colleagues throughout their organisations. They support with safe space events, learning events and the publishing of blogs, where network members discuss their personal stories.
  - AGEM's disability colleague network group (Enabled) is represented at their quarterly EDI Committee meetings, where any issues/concerns from members are raised on their behalf.
  - MLCSU hosts a bimonthly EDI forum, where the staff forums Chairs and Vice Chairs, which includes the Disability Staff Network, take part in the meeting, their voices are heard, and improvements are made in a formal setting.
  - NECS has a rotating Executive Team member attend each Inclusion Network meeting, who provides feedback to the rest of Executive Team. Additionally, an anonymous feedback portal is available to colleagues throughout the organisation to share any concerns or requests they might have related to EDI, which are then addressed and acted upon where feasible.
  - SCW's Disability Network Executive Sponsor and the People and Wellbeing Team meet with network leads at least quarterly to take forward issues or feedback through formal channels. Network leads are also involved in shaping actions from WDES insights which has led to joint development of improvements. These actions are maintained annually to ensure colleague voices are heard throughout the CSUs and positive change is achieved.

## WDES Indicators 4-9: Staff survey questions

### Non-disabled and disabled colleagues experience comparison

Overall, disabled colleagues have a worse experience than non-disabled colleagues, this can be seen for all indicators and is further detailed below. It can be seen that:

- More disabled colleagues than non-disabled colleagues have said they have experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from patients/service users, their relatives or other members of the public (+3.4%); managers (+6.6%); and other colleagues (+8.3%).
- A lower percentage of disabled colleagues (-3.4%) than non-disabled colleagues have said that the last time they experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work, they or a colleague reported it.
- A higher percentage of disabled colleagues (+5.7%) than non-disabled colleagues have experienced presenteeism and have felt pressure from their manager to come to work, despite not feeling well enough to perform their duties.
- A lower percentage of disabled colleagues than non-disabled colleagues believe that their organisation provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion (-6.4%); and are satisfied with the extent to which their organisation values their work (-12.6%).
- A lower proportion of disabled colleagues than non-disabled colleagues have engaged with the staff survey (-0.6%).

## WDES Indicator 10: Board Membership Representation

Disability status comparison for: Percentage difference between organisations' Board (Exec team) membership and its overall workforce\*

	Workforce Representation		Total No. Board Members		Voting Board Members		Executive Board Members	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Disabled	578	9.8%	2	6.9%	2	6.9%	2	7.1%
Non-disabled	4657	79.1%	24	82.8%	24	82.8%	23	82.1%
Unknown	616	11.1%	3	10.3%	3	10.3%	3	10.7%

- A comparison of the total number of Board Members and Voting Board Members against Workforce Representation shows they are not representative of the workforce. While the percentage of undisclosed Board members and colleagues are comparable, there are fewer disabled Board members than there are colleagues within the workforce overall (-2.9%).
- A comparison of the Executive Board Members against Workforce Representation shows a similar pattern, with there being a lower percentage of Executive Board Members (-2.7%) than there are disabled colleagues in the workforce.

- Additional work should be undertaken to improve psychological safety within the workforce and throughout the Executive Team.

\*The Total Number of Board Members comprises the number of Executive Directors and Non-Executive Directors in the CSUs. While the number of total board members, voting board members and executive board members remain the same for AGEM, NECS and SCW, these counts differ for MLCSU. This is due to MLCSU having one Non-Executive Board Member with voting rights.



# Recommendations and next steps



## 1. Embed equity in transition planning

Ensure that workforce disability equality considerations are embedded in CSU closure and transition/transfer plans, with considerations given to reasonable adjustments and support throughout the process.

## 2. Culture and inclusion initiative

Act on survey feedback by tackling harassment, bullying, abuse and discrimination from both managers and colleagues, encouraging incident reporting, and enabling CSU group-wide networks, where requested, whilst maintaining local networks as an ongoing support mechanism. Hold listening events for colleagues during the CSU transition/transfer and closure process and increase engagement to better understand and support workforce needs.

## 3. Develop and enable access to support and resources

Provide opportunities for colleagues to better understand reasonable adjustments and how to access them through delivery of sessions and promotion of health and carer passports to facilitate discussions between disabled colleagues, their team members, and line managers around health and care needs. Undertake regular communications through a variety of methods to enable equitable application across all disability statuses.

## 4. Improve board-level accountability

Engage Senior Management/Leadership Teams in development opportunities around disability and inclusion, to extend senior leader knowledge on this characteristic and enable decision making through an inclusive lens.

## 5. Monitor and maintain progress through closure

Continue to monitor actions and WDES metrics to track improvements or regressions. Data continuity will be vital for transferring learning and ensuring that receiving organisations support colleagues, fulfilling their own responsibility for inclusive workforce practices.

