



**Diverse Voices,  
United Purpose:  
the RCSLT's vision  
for Equity, Diversity  
and Belonging**

**2025-2027**

# A message from **Irma Donaldson**



Equity, diversity, and belonging (EDB) are deeply personal to me. They are not about being exceptional, but about something far simpler—recognising and respecting our differences so that everyone feels valued, heard, and included in our professional community.

As speech and language therapists, we work with people from all walks of life. I have seen how powerful it is when people feel truly listened to, when their experiences are understood, and when they feel they belong. However, I have also seen the harm that can be done when voices are ignored or when barriers stand in the way of opportunity.

Creating real change is not always easy. It takes honesty, learning, and a willingness to challenge the way things have always been done. I truly believe that together, by supporting each other, by listening and acting, we can make our profession a place where everyone—regardless of their background or identity—can thrive.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your voice matters. You matter. And together, we can make a difference.

**Irma Donaldson**

Chair, RCSLT

# An introduction from **Steve Jamieson**



At the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), our vision is to build a profession where every voice is valued, every identity respected, and every practitioner empowered to thrive.

We are committed to championing equity, diversity and belonging (EDB) ensuring that speech and language therapy reflects the diverse society we serve.

By fostering safe, inclusive spaces, promoting an intersectional approach, advocating for systemic change, and normalising active anti-racism, we aim to create a transformative environment where all speech and language therapists and the communities they serve feel a profound sense of belonging, and where equitable care is accessible to all.

We are grateful to the SLT EDB networks that have worked with the RCSLT to co-develop this vision and strategy. Together, we will build a future where EDB principles are fully integrated into every aspect of our work, shaping a profession that both uplifts and mirrors the vibrant diversity of our society.

**Steve Jamieson**

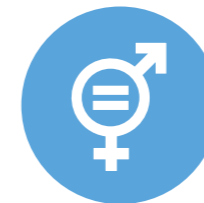
Chief Executive, RCSLT



# What equity, diversity and belonging (EDB) means

Our vision is built on the principles of equity, diversity, and belonging (EDB), and we have thoughtfully defined what these mean to us. It's essential to understand EDB not just as separate concepts, but as interconnected pillars that together create the foundation of our strategy.

## Equity



Equity means recognising that we all start from different places and have different needs. It's about more than fairness—it's about ensuring everyone has the right support to reach their full potential. True equity requires us to listen, learn, and take action to remove barriers, so no one is left behind.

## Diversity



Diversity is the strength that comes from our differences. It's about embracing and valuing the many identities, experiences, and perspectives that make up our communities. When we truly celebrate diversity, we don't just create space for different voices—we amplify them, knowing that the best ideas and the strongest solutions come from many viewpoints, not just one.

## Belonging



Belonging is the feeling of being seen, heard, and valued for who you truly are. It's more than just being included—it's knowing you are welcomed, respected, and supported. When we cultivate belonging, we create an environment where people don't have to change to fit in, because they already do.

Together, equity, diversity, and belonging create the foundation for a fairer, more inclusive world—one where everyone has the opportunity to succeed, contribute, and be their authentic self.

# Our values



## Our values are at the centre of our work and guide all of the RCSLT's actions

- **Accountable** – we take responsibility for our actions and value constructive, kind and honest feedback.
- **Belonging** – we build a sense of belonging together by valuing equity, diversity and belonging in all that we do.
- **Integrity** – we are honest, transparent, and trustworthy.
- **Professional** – we are competent, innovative, reliable and effective.
- **Compassion** – we create compassionate and supportive connections, working together as one team through successes and challenges.
- **Empowerment** – we are empowered to try new things and learn from mistakes, so we grow professionally and personally to identify existing knowledge and skills and areas for future learning and development.

# Our vision for equity, diversity and belonging

At the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), we envision a profession where every voice is heard, every identity is respected, and every community is empowered. Our commitment to equity, diversity, and belonging (EDB) forms the foundation of a future where speech and language therapists across all settings — including the NHS, education, research, social care, the independent sector and beyond — work together to create a profession that reflects the society we serve.

## A diverse and inclusive profession

Our vision is to create a profession where diversity is celebrated, not only in the people we serve but in the professionals themselves. We aim to foster an environment where all practitioners—regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, faith, other protected characteristics and socioeconomic background—feel a deep sense of belonging.

With professionalism at its core, a profession where different perspectives and viewpoints are acknowledged and included, and everyone is respectful of each other's ideas and beliefs. EDB is everyone's responsibility and the RCSLT will continue to promote opportunities for our members to share their experiences, success stories, and challenges. We will project a vibrant, diverse image that shows the full breadth of identities and experiences in speech and language therapy. By showcasing service user stories and the voices of our professionals, we will ensure our profession reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.



## Empowering conversations and safe spaces

We believe in the power of open, honest dialogue. We envision a future where uncomfortable conversations about identity, power and privilege, and inequality are not avoided but welcomed. RCSLT will work to create safe, inclusive spaces—both within the workplace and across the profession—where people feel confident to discuss and challenge issues of inequality. Our work to normalise active anti-racism will bolster this effort.

Through resources, training, and support, we will empower all members to engage with EDB and feel confident in leading these conversations. This includes fostering an environment where practitioners feel safe to make mistakes, reflect on their learning, and grow both personally and professionally. These conversations are integral to building a culture where equality and inclusion are core values.

## Intersectionality at the core

We recognise that identities and experiences do not exist in isolation and that multiple systems of oppression intersect in complex ways – this is what is meant by intersectionality.\*



### An example of intersectionality

Imagine a Black woman with a mental health condition, like anxiety or depression, working in a corporate environment.

#### 1. Race (Black)

As a Black woman, she may face racial discrimination or racial microaggressions at work, such as being perceived as “angry” or “unapproachable” when she asserts herself.

She may also be underrepresented in leadership roles, leading to fewer mentors or role models who share her experiences.

#### 2. Gender (Woman)

As a woman, she might experience gender discrimination in the form of lower pay compared to male colleagues or having her ideas dismissed in meetings.

Workplace policies may not fully account for gender-related issues like caregiving responsibilities, which are often assigned to women.

#### 3. Invisible Disability (Mental Health Condition)

Because her anxiety or depression is not visible, her coworkers and supervisors may fail to understand the impact it has on her daily work life.

Requests for accommodations (like flexible deadlines or mental health support) might be met with scepticism or seen as “excuses” for laziness.

Unlike a physical disability (like using a wheelchair), her condition might not be seen as “valid” unless she discloses it, which opens her up to stigma.

\*“Intersectionality is basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other.” – Kimberlé Crenshaw



### How these intersections create a unique experience

Individually, each of these aspects (race, gender, and invisible disability) can lead to challenges. But together, they create a unique and compounded experience of oppression that can't be understood by looking at just one factor alone.

#### For example:

A White man with anxiety might have his requests for mental health accommodations taken more seriously.

A Black man might face racial discrimination, but his anxiety might not be discredited in the same way as a Black woman's because gendered stereotypes paint women as “emotional” or “unstable.”

A White woman might experience sexism but might find more support from management for mental health needs due to her racial privilege.

These combined factors can make it harder for this Black woman to advocate for herself at work. Her experience of discrimination is not “just” racism, “just” sexism, or “just” ableism — it's the unique interaction of all three. This is intersectionality in action.

At the heart of our vision is the commitment to an intersectional approach. Our goal is to ensure that speech and language therapy, both as a profession and as a service, takes these intersections into account at every level.

By embedding intersectionality into all aspects of our guidance, resources, and professional development, we will equip every member (including students, therapists, assistants and researchers) with the tools they need to provide inclusive, person-centred care. Whether it's in clinical settings, research, or educational frameworks, an intersectional lens will guide our work, ensuring that no voice or experience is overlooked.



## Advocacy for change

Our vision extends beyond individual practitioners—it aims to challenge the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality across health, research, education and social care. As advocates for change, the RCSLT will continue to work with government bodies, funders and policy-makers, across health, research, education and social care to promote EDB throughout the profession and the wider healthcare system.

We will push for the integration of EDB principles into all aspects of health and social care, and the research that underpins it, ensuring that service users from all communities can access high-quality, equitable care. By highlighting the tangible benefits of inclusive person-centred practices—such as reducing health inequalities and improving service outcomes—we will advocate for sustained investment in our profession and for policy changes that prioritise equity, diversity and belonging.

## Building a profession that is representative

Our vision is one of transformation. We aim for a future where the speech and language therapy profession is as diverse and representative as the society it serves. We recognise that to achieve this, we must start from the ground up—promoting EDB principles through all efforts to promote the SLT profession across the education system and all stages in an SLTs career including pre-registration education and in professional development.

RCSLT will continue to raise awareness of the importance of diversity in practice, empowering members to reflect on their own biases and privileges. We will provide the tools, training, and guidance needed to build a workforce that not only embraces diversity but actively works to dismantle barriers, creating equitable outcomes for both professionals and service users.

## A foundation for equity, diversity and belonging

Our vision is bold and clear: to create a profession where every practitioner, regardless of their background or identity, feels supported, valued, and able to thrive. We are committed to fostering an environment that challenges inequality, champions diversity, and promotes inclusion at every level. This will include and be alongside people with lived experience of speech, language, communication and swallowing barriers.

Through our collective efforts, we will build a profession that is equitable and inclusive for all, one that truly serves the diverse needs of society and makes a positive impact on the lives of those we work with. By standing together, we will create a future where equity, diversity, and belonging are not just aspirations, but lived realities in the everyday practice of speech and language therapy.



# Strategic priorities and objectives

## Priority 1: Championing diversity and fostering belonging

### Aspiration:

- Promote mentorship programs connecting individuals with different protected characteristics and socioeconomic status (e.g. mature students, EDB ambassadors).
- Consider a directory of mentors with profiles to enhance accessibility and personalised support.
- Develop the tools, training, and guidance needed to build a workforce and evidence base that not only acknowledges diversity but actively works to dismantle barriers, creating equitable outcomes for both professionals and service users.
- Lead by example in building an inclusive and diverse culture at the RCSLT and across the profession, fostering a professional body and profession where everyone feels valued, supported, and recognised for their unique perspectives and contributions.



## Priority 2: Equitable focus on all diversity groups - taking an intersectional approach

### Aspirations:

- Parity of support for all diversity peer groups representing different communities to collaboratively address intersectional needs.
- Foster mutual understanding and communication between diversity peer groups.
- Ensure a sustained commitment to each diversity peer group.
- Refresh and keep updated the EDB links and resources on the RCSLT website, working in tangent with diversity peer groups.
- Embed intersectionality into all RCSLT research and guidance and provide real-life examples to clarify its importance.



## Priority 4: Advocate for change

### Aspirations:

- Promote a profession that is reflective of the society it serves and works closely with broader systems.
- Support and advocate for inclusive approaches to research recruitment, reflective of our diverse service users and their needs.
- Work with partners across the health and social care sector, including ASLTIP and others.
- Work to alleviate the financial barriers and service delivery pressures preventing entry into the profession.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts, emphasising the societal and economic benefits of early, inclusive interventions.

## Priority 5: An accountable and transparent professional body and employer

### Aspirations:

- Uphold our commitment to integrity and fairness by implementing robust internal policies and regularly monitoring relevant data to ensure ethical practices and transparency.

## Priority 3: Affirming diverse perspectives

### Aspirations:

- Form partnerships with marginalised community groups, to co-develop culturally sensitive messaging and inclusive advisory panels.
- Equip professionals with the tools to promote allyship, manage microaggressions and promote positive, supportive environments for all service users.
- Support the development and use of evidence that includes all sections of society and respects the full range of knowledge traditions.
- Ensure that curricula and frameworks across the career lifespan affirm and support diverse perspectives.
- Ensure alignment with and promote HCPC standards relating to EDB.





# Accountability and governance

We report directly to the Board on Equity, Diversity, and Belonging (EDB) matters on a biannual basis, focusing on strategic oversight and progress. Alongside this, our Nominations Committee addresses EDB at an operational level, primarily through recruitment activities aimed at ensuring our Board and committees represent the diversity of our membership and those we serve.

Each year, the Nominations Committee leads efforts to recruit for all Board and committee roles, ensuring that our outreach is inclusive and that our candidate pools reflect our commitment to diversity. In 2024, we introduced a new measure: all applicants for these roles now complete an anonymous diversity monitoring form, structured around government census categories. This approach provides a data-driven foundation for identifying potential barriers to an inclusive, diverse Board, committees, and interview panels (which include Senior Leadership Team members).

By tracking this information over time, we can assess the impact of our recruitment strategies and make targeted adjustments to support a more inclusive approach. This enables us to take meaningful steps toward achieving and maintaining a Board and committees that truly represent our organization's diverse community.

For effective governance and to meet our future needs, we propose establishing a clear process to ensure that insights and outcomes from our EDB-focused working groups are reported to both the Board and the Nominations Committee, addressing strategic and operational priorities, respectively. To facilitate this, EDB-related working groups should have mechanisms to collaborate and communicate with one another, allowing them to share insights and identify key issues collectively. These consolidated findings should then be presented to the Nominations Committee for detailed discussion and operational alignment.

Capturing this information systematically is essential to creating a pathway for EDB insights to inform strategic decision-making at the Board level. Implementing robust reporting and communication channels will ensure that EDB initiatives have lasting impact throughout the organisation.



## A call to action

This strategy and vision have been co-developed with our SLT EDB networks, including the Anti-Racism Reference Group, the SLTs of Colour Network, the Jewish Representatives Group, RCSLT Disability Working Group, RCSLT Neurodiversity Working Group, RCSLT LGBTQIA+ Working Group, and the RCSLT Men in SLT Working Group. We invite all members, partners, and stakeholders to join us in advancing this work. Equity, diversity, and belonging are shared responsibilities, and we are committed to building a future where these principles are embedded in every aspect of our profession, reflecting the rich diversity of society.

By fostering safe, inclusive spaces, promoting an intersectional approach, advocating for systemic change, and normalising anti-racism, we aim to create a transformative environment where all practitioners and communities feel a profound sense of belonging and where equitable care is accessible to all.



The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. As well as providing leadership and setting professional standards, the RCSLT facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy, promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists, and provides its members and the public with information about speech and language therapy.

[rcslt.org](http://rcslt.org) | [info@rcslt.org](mailto:info@rcslt.org) | [@RCSLT](https://www.instagram.com/RCSLT)