

HATS Group Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2026

1. Foreword

At HATS Group, equality, diversity and inclusion are not concepts we apply to our work, they are fundamental to who we are and how we operate. We transport vulnerable patients, support children with complex needs and work across some of the most diverse communities in the country. The values we hold about fairness and respect are expressed in every journey we make and every decision we take.

This strategy sets out our commitment for 2026. It is ambitious and grounded in the realities of our workforce and the communities we serve. We are proud to publish it and to be held accountable against it.

2. About HATS Group

HATS Group is a specialist transport organisation delivering Patient Transport Services (PTS) and Home to School (H2S) transport across England and Wales. We operate from multiple sites, employing approximately 2,000 people and running a fleet of around 900 vehicles.

Our workforce is made up of drivers, passenger assistants, clinicians, coordinators and support staff — all working together to deliver safe, dignified and reliable transport for the people who depend on us. Across our services we support NHS Trusts, Local Authorities and commissioning bodies who rightly expect high standards of equality, inclusion and care.

3. Background and Context

HATS operates across diverse communities, supporting individuals with a wide range of needs. Our workforce reflects multiple roles, locations and service models, all of which require fairness, accessibility and trust. The expectations of commissioners, regulators, NHS Trusts and Local Authorities continue to increase, particularly around safeguarding, workforce representation and equitable access to services.

Our 2026 EDI Strategy strengthens our commitment to creating an environment where every employee and every service user is treated fairly, feels valued and is supported to thrive. Diverse, inclusive teams deliver better passenger outcomes, reduce clinical incidents, improve staff retention and meet regulatory requirements.

This strategy aligns with our values of being Helpful, Adaptable, Teamwork and acting in ways that are Sustainable.

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4. Purpose and Commitment

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- Promote equality of opportunity across HATS.
- Increase workforce diversity and representation.
- Improve the employee experience through an inclusive culture.
- Strengthen leadership capability in inclusive practices.
- Ensure fair and accessible service delivery for all service users.

HATS commits to embedding EDI principles in our policies, leadership behaviours, processes and service design.

5. Key Definitions

Term	Meaning
Equality	Actively identifying and removing systemic barriers so that all employees are given fair treatment and opportunities regardless of their protected characteristics.
Diversity	Recognition and valuing of differences including race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and background.
Inclusion	Creating environments where all feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued.
Equity	Ensuring everyone has what they need to thrive by removing barriers so that all employees have equal access to opportunities.
Reasonable Adjustments	Making changes that remove barriers for employees and service users, ensuring no one is disadvantaged due to disability or any other characteristic protected under the Equality Act.
Protected Characteristics	Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, caring responsibilities and neurodiversity.

6. The Case for EDI at HATS Group

HATS Group exists to serve people. We transport vulnerable patients, support children with complex needs and operate across some of the most diverse communities in the country. How we treat our employees and our service users is not separate from our business strategy, it is central to it.

As a significant employer and a visible presence in the communities we serve, the decisions we make about recruitment, retention, pay and culture have a direct impact on thousands of lives. Getting those decisions right is both a moral responsibility and a practical necessity.

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Inclusion drives performance. A workforce that is treated fairly, stays longer, works harder and delivers better care. In a frontline service where the quality of every patient journey depends on the people delivering it, inclusion is a direct operational asset.

We choose to lead on EDI not because we are required to, but because it reflects the kind of organisation we are determined to be.

7. Our Legal and Regulatory Framework

Our approach to EDI is grounded in the legal obligations and regulatory expectations that apply to our work. These include equality, employment, safeguarding and data protection legislation, as well as the standards set by our commissioners and regulators, including NHS Trusts, Local Authorities and the Care Quality Commission.

We treat compliance as a baseline, not a ceiling. Our ambition goes further.

8. Our Strategic Commitments

Our strategy is built around five commitments. Progress against each is reviewed regularly and reported to our Board.

Objective 1: Inclusive and Capable Leadership

Inclusion starts at the top. We are committed to building leadership capability across HATS Group so that inclusive behaviour is consistent, visible and expected at every level.

In 2026 we will ensure that EDI is embedded into how we develop, appraise and hold accountable our leaders and managers. We will establish the governance structures needed to sustain this beyond a single strategy cycle, and we will track and learn from the outcomes of any workplace disputes that touch on equality.

Objective 2: Fair Pay for Everyone

We believe in fair and transparent pay. Every person doing the same work should be paid equitably and where that is not the case, we will act to put it right.

In 2026 we will conduct a thorough equal pay audit across our workforce. Where we find unjustified differences, we will address them, always by bringing pay up, never down. Our findings will be shared with employees and we will introduce clearer pay frameworks to prevent future drift.

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Objective 3: A Culture Where People Feel Safe to Speak Up

Every employee should feel confident that if they raise a concern, it will be heard, taken seriously and handled fairly. We are committed to making that a reality across every site and every team.

In 2026 we will strengthen the visibility and accessibility of our reporting channels, improve how concerns involving discrimination are handled, and ensure that our leadership team is regularly sighted on themes and outcomes. We will introduce an anonymous reporting option for those who need it.

Objective 4: A Workforce That Reflects the Communities We Serve

We want HATS Group to be an organisation where people from all backgrounds can join, progress and thrive. That means being intentional about how we recruit, how we develop people, and what our workforce looks like at every level.

In 2026 we will improve the quality of our workforce diversity data, review our recruitment practices to remove bias, and create clearer pathways for progression. We will be transparent about where we are starting from and honest about the progress we are making.

Objective 5: An Inclusive Culture and Accessible Services

Inclusion is not just about our employees; it is about every person who uses our services. We are committed to ensuring our passengers and service users are treated with dignity, that their individual needs are understood and met, and that our staff have the knowledge and confidence to make that happen.

In 2026 we will strengthen our training offer, listen more actively to our employees through regular surveys, and make meaningful improvements to how accessible and responsive our services are. We will report honestly on what we hear and what we change as a result.

9. Our 2026 Priorities at a Glance

The commitments below represent our headline priorities for 2026. They are underpinned by a more detailed internal implementation plan which is reviewed and updated regularly.

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Period	Focus Areas
First half of 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a clear baseline of workforce diversity data Complete our equal pay audit and publish findings Review and update our recruitment and onboarding practices Launch our management development programme with an EDI focus
Second half of 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver EDI and cultural competency training across frontline teams Launch our anonymous reporting channel Publish our annual EDI report with honest progress against each commitment Review the strategy with our Board and set priorities for 2027

10. Accountability Across HATS Group

Delivering this strategy is a shared responsibility. Everyone at HATS Group has a part to play, from the Board setting direction to managers creating inclusive environments, to every employee treating their colleagues and passengers with dignity and respect.

Who	Their commitment
The Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set the tone from the top and hold the organisation to account Review EDI progress regularly and ask the right questions Ensure EDI is factored into significant business decisions
Executive Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Champion EDI visibly and consistently Ensure their teams have the time, tools and support to deliver Model the inclusive behaviours they expect of others
EDI Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead strategy development and track progress Support managers and employees with expert guidance Report transparently to the Board and publish the annual EDI report
People and HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed fairness into every people process Maintain accurate and compliant workforce data Support managers in handling EDI-related matters well
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create teams where people feel safe, valued and fairly treated Complete EDI training and apply it in practice Act on reasonable adjustment requests and escalate concerns promptly
All Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treat every colleague and service user with dignity and respect

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete required training and engage honestly with feedback • Speak up if something does not feel right
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11. Governance and Accountability

HATS Group has established an EDI Steering Group to provide senior-level oversight of our equality commitments. The group brings together executive leadership, HR, clinical oversight and employee representation, and reports to the Board on a regular basis.

EDI objectives are built into how we assess and develop our leaders. Where those expectations are not met, we will address that through our normal management and conduct processes. Discriminatory behaviour is taken seriously at every level and is subject to our full disciplinary framework.

We are committed to learning and improving. We will review this strategy annually, listen to our employees and service users, and update our approach as our organisation and the wider landscape evolves.

12. Looking Ahead

This strategy marks a significant step forward for HATS Group — but it is not the destination. Equality, diversity and inclusion are things we will continue to work at, year on year, as our organisation grows and our understanding deepens.

We will publish an annual EDI report setting out our progress honestly, and we will use what we learn to sharpen our focus for the year ahead. We welcome feedback from our employees, our commissioners and the communities we serve.

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