

Updated standards of proficiency: themes of the key changes

Registrants must:

5: recognise the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice and practise in a non-discriminatory and inclusive manner

5.1: respond appropriately to the needs of all different groups and individuals in practice, recognising this can be affected by difference of any kind including, but not limited to, protected characteristics, intersectional experiences and cultural differences

5.2: understand equality legislation and apply it to their practice

5.3: recognise the potential impact of their own values, beliefs and personal biases (which may be unconscious) on practice and take personal action to ensure all service users and carers are treated appropriately with respect and dignity

5.4: understand the duty to make reasonable adjustments in practice and be able to make and support reasonable adjustments in theirs and others' practice

5.5: recognise the characteristics and consequences of barriers to inclusion, including for socially isolated groups

5.6: actively challenge these barriers, supporting the implementation of change wherever possible

5.7: recognise that regard to equality, diversity and inclusion needs to be embedded in the application of all HCPC standards, across all areas of practice

These are in addition to other standards of proficiency that relate to this theme, but have not been updated or changed.

What does equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) mean?

Equality means treating people fairly in a way that reflects their needs, ensuring they have equal opportunity to achieve their desired outcomes, and eliminating discrimination.

Diversity is about valuing individuals for the different perspectives they have to offer and maximising the range of voices who can contribute.

Inclusion means ensuring that everybody has a voice and a means to participate, which may involve making reasonable adjustments to our usual processes.

In the context of healthcare, EDI relates to reducing health inequalities on a national level and ensuring that practice is free of discrimination, prejudice or bias. This means that professional colleagues are treated with respect and that all service users are able to access the care they need.

The updated standards are in effect from **1 September 2023**.

What does this mean for registrants?

HCPC registrants have always been expected to provide excellent care to all service users, ensuring their specific needs are responded to. With the increased emphasis on EDI in the updated standards, registrants are required to actively identify, understand and respond to the diverse needs and perspectives of service users, adjusting their practice to suit a service user's needs where necessary.

Registrants should recognise that exclusion can happen for a wide range of reasons, including culture, nationality, sexual orientation and many others. The updated standards recognise the central importance of these factors in people's experiences of health and care. It is important that registrants understand the ways they can impact individual service users and work to remove these hurdles within their practice.

We expect registrants to identify and challenge the barriers to access that service users might experience. This includes external changes such as providing information in different languages or formats, as well as internal reflection to mitigate against assumptions about service users' lifestyle or beliefs.

The standards expect registrants to be proactive in thinking about the care they can offer, and not to wait for a service user to raise the need for an accommodation first.

There is no set way to meet the standards relating to EDI. We expect registrants to use their professional judgement to assess how they relate to their workplace, role and scope of practice.

Every individual on the HCPC Register is required to meet the standards of proficiency as far as they relate to their scope of practice

Background

The updated standards of proficiency include significant content around equality, diversity and inclusion. The standards place specific importance on making sure that practice is inclusive of, and accessible by, all service users. Registrants must be proactive in ensuring this.

Excellent care can only be delivered when the needs of all service users are taken into consideration.

Updated standards of proficiency:
themes of the key changes

Case study

Ezra is a practitioner psychologist working as a sole practitioner. He understands that some individuals who need his services will not find it easy to access them.

To understand the demographics of who might be affected, Ezra uses signup form data to analyse the characteristics of his recent patients. He compares this with national data, which suggests that there is a disproportionately low number of his service users who describe themselves as living with physical disabilities.

Ezra is keen to investigate and understand the underlying causes of this. He engages in dialogue with existing service users, conducts a survey of past patients and seeks input from disability advocacy groups and organisations. He also considers his own practice, exploring what assumptions he might carry about people living with physical disabilities, and any issues he might not previously have been aware of.

Ezra gains valuable insights on potential barriers for this group. These include the physical accessibility of private practices, communication difficulties for individuals with visual and hearing impairment, lack of representation of people living with disability and the approach of practitioners.

After reflecting on these, Ezra decides to develop an enhanced offering. In addition to remote therapy, which he already provides, he offers use of a video conferencing programme that has closed captioning, as well as a sign language interpretation service.

He also introduces accessible information options, including provision of written materials in large print and braille. He also ensures that his physical and digital promotion is inclusive, and updates his website to clearly represent individuals living with disability.

Finally, Ezra invests in a professional development course to enhance his work with individuals with physical disabilities. This includes training on adaptive communication techniques and understanding the psychosocial aspects of living with a disability.

These updates to the standards of proficiency were made after a detailed review process, to ensure they reflect the reality of current practice.

The Equality Act 2010 helps to ensure that people are not discriminated against because of what are known as protected characteristics. It provides a framework to protect the rights of individuals and promote equality of opportunity.

The protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Similar protection against discrimination in Northern Ireland is also covered by a network of legislation including the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Resources

Equality Act 2010: applies in England, Scotland and Wales
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Northern Ireland equality legislation
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/diversity-and-discrimination>

NHS England EDI e-learning
<https://nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/e-learning-for-health-resources>

EDI reflection questions
https://practicetransformation.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/clinicaltips_personcenteredpractice.pdf

HCPC definitions of EDI
<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion>

HCPC's gap analysis tool: identify and address gaps in your current practice
<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/gap-analysis-tool>

HCPC's webinar on EDI
https://www.youtube.com/the_hcpc

Further information in the updated standards of proficiency around EDI
<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/updated-sop/edi>

For full information on the updated standards of proficiency, see the HCPC website.

The key changes in the updated standards of proficiency can be grouped into a number of themes, of which this is one. The other themes are: digital skills and new technologies, equality, diversity and inclusion, leadership, registrants' mental health, and promoting public health and preventing ill-health.

The changes in the updated standards extend beyond these themes. The full standards for all professions can be downloaded from the HCPC website.

Registrants should use their **professional judgement** when applying these standards.