

Bliss Baby Charter:

Royal United Hospital

We are delighted to announce that Royal United Hospital neonatal unit has successfully completed its Gold accreditation and has demonstrated that there are sufficient procedures, practices, and facilities in place to empower parents and carers to be partners in care through joint decision-making and hands on care, as well as understanding families' needs and availability in order to provide truly individualised care. This facilitates a solid foundation for Family Integrated Care.

These are the evaluation findings of the Bliss Baby Charter accreditation assessment which was carried out at Royal United in person and online on 16th September 2026

The assessment was carried out by Charlotte Damiral, Bliss Baby Charter Programme Officer, Rachel Quartermaine, Bliss Baby Charter Programme Lead, and Volunteer assessors Rita Mahey and Jane Tate. The Baby Charter leads for the unit were Hannah Rossi and Kate Whiting.

Summary

The assessment team observed a culture that actively promotes and values family presence, creating an environment where parents and carers clearly feel welcome, supported, and encouraged to spend extended periods on the unit. This was reflected in the high level of family presence observed throughout the assessment, including routine overnight stays. Staff demonstrated a genuine commitment to ensuring families are not only present but feel comfortable and confident remaining with their baby, fostering strong parent-infant relationships and supporting families to be active partners in care. The welcoming atmosphere and family-centred approach evident across the unit have helped create a setting where families clearly want to stay and be involved in their baby's neonatal journey.

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for babies born premature or sick

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Key findings and best practice

We have been impressed by many aspects of the unit's care, but these elements stood out in particular:

- Siblings are clearly at the forefront of the unit's approach to family-integrated care, with considerable thought given to ensuring they feel welcomed, included, and supported throughout their baby's neonatal journey. A particular strength is the dedicated sibling soft play area, which provides an inviting and engaging space equipped with a blackboard, television screen, table and chairs, a wide range of toys and books, and soft play furnishings. The assessment team was particularly impressed by the toy incubator created by one of the consultants, which offers siblings a valuable opportunity for role play and can help them better understand their baby brother's or sister's hospital experience. In addition, the unit provides siblings with a dedicated bag containing a book about the neonatal journey from a sibling's perspective, colouring activities, fidget toys, and a certificate. These thoughtful initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the whole family and helping siblings feel connected, involved, and valued during what can be a challenging time.
- As part of its commitment to reducing the financial pressures that can accompany a neonatal admission, the unit offers a range of practical support measures for families. Free parking is available, with parents able to register their vehicle details using the monitor located at the nurses' station. Families are also provided with meal vouchers, access to free overnight accommodation, and a selection of dry breakfast foods available on the unit. In addition, toiletries are available for parents and carers who may need them. These initiatives demonstrate a clear understanding of the financial challenges many families face during a neonatal stay and help to reduce barriers to parents being present and involved in their baby's care.
- The unit has recognised the challenges that parents and carers of babies requiring a prolonged neonatal stay may face in attending the registry office within the required 42-day timeframe. In response, they have successfully arranged for a registry officer to attend the unit regularly, enabling families to register their babies without needing to leave the hospital. This is an excellent initiative that helps to ease some of the practical and emotional pressures families may experience during their neonatal journey.Parents and carers are very much seen as partners in care with staff with parents and siblings having 24hr access. The unit also allow visitors at any time but with no more than 3 per bedspace including siblings to reduce noise throughout the unit.
- Alongside four dedicated rooms for parents/carers to sleep over night, they can also sleep cot side on reclining chairs. These are located at each cot space with staff mentioning

throughout the assessment how they do not have to encourage parents to stay as they automatically feel welcomed. The unit also benefit from a dedicated nursery/rooming in area named Lori Grace after an individual who was due to start working on the unit. The family raised funds to create a room with camp beds always pulled out and made up in butterfly bedding, with butterfly decor on the walls and overnight bags. The room holds four beds with cots next to each and offer a more comfortable stay.

- The unit have now successfully run two Teddy bear picnics for families of neonatal babies. These events have given parents the opportunities for peer support and collaboration with staff to improve services. Siblings are also welcome at these events and have had great feedback from the events.
- After feedback from parents the unit psychologist in collaboration with parents and staff have introduced a coffee morning. This again offers parents/carers the chance to seek peer support whilst also having the psychologist nearby for any questions.
- The unit show a commitment to understanding their neurodiverse parents and carers with sensory grab bags which include fidget toys, glasses and information. This is a great resource to have and supports the inclusivity of all different families.
- Although the unit is now 15 years old it still looks incredible, with a calming entrance that some have described as spa like, this offers parents and carers a move relaxed welcome into neonatal care. When designing the unit staff mentioned those involved really thought about all details, including how the ITU and nurseries are set out so babies almost follow the circle round, moving through the unit as they move through their journey towards discharge.
- From the tour and interviews it is clear to see how important families and babies are to staff. There is such a positive feel on the unit, and this is sure to put parents/carers at ease whilst staying on the unit. It was noted how well the team work together which can be evident from their shortlisting as outstanding team for the BAPM Gopi Menon Awards 2026.
- After speaking with parents/carers about dinner time the unit recognised the need for two microwaves within the family kitchen enabling both parents/carers to eat at the same time not having to wait for each other's food to be cooked.
- To support staff morale on the unit, staff have a tuck shop stocked with sweets, crisps and snacks for staff. This is restocked by staff members as and when needing. Within the staff room there is also a food bank to support staff through harder times.
- Parents/carers who have babies on the unit have a unique opportunity to spend time in the unit's family garden. This is a private courtyard style garden within the unit meaning parents and carers do not have to leave their baby for long whilst they get some fresh air.

As the courtyard is on the unit it also means parents/carers can take their baby out to spend some time outside whilst also being close to staff. It also backs on to the parent rooming in rooms so can be accessed from here. Staff members are also lucky to benefit from a smaller courtyard away from the parents/carers one enabling them to have their break time outside but also not taking space in the parent garden.

- The unit have considered all parents/carers and visitors within the accessibility of the unit. Within the wide door entrance there are three sinks one of which is at a lower-level supporting wheelchair users/those with mobility difficulties. Alongside the lower-level sinks there is a disabled toilet on the unit with a shower and shower seat, they have stools to assist more comfortable sitting, incubators that lower and reclining chairs.
- Located on the unit is a NICU library. This is placed outside the sibling play area for families to pick and choose books from, some of which are in different languages. When selecting a book to read families are given library cards, these explain the benefits of reading to babies, there is also space on these to record what families have read to babies and the responses babies have from this.
- The assessment team received positive feedback from all families interviewed. Some of the quotes are as followed:

– "Flats are useful nearby. Able to use facilities to have dinner... Nice communal space"

– "Ward feels like family. Everyone knows our journey. It feels very safe...."

– "...they remembered us it almost felt like we were coming home. They were respectful, listening and asked if we were okay."

– "Bath is really special and why I requested transfer. They really care. Staff are so caring. I miss going and seeing them, which is a testament to how amazing they are. They care for you as a family. Delighted to see you. No one like them."

– "Nurses very encouraging, you can always ask for help."

– "This is the most stressful time. The extra support and nurses are incredible."

Recommendations for the future

- It was noted that the unit have a dedicated band 8A Psychologist who supports families through the NICU journey and staff. However, we understand the post currently is not compliant with BAPM staffing recommendations. It is therefore recommended that the unit consider creating a business plan seeking more hours for the psychologist to further support her work with parents/families and staff.

- Through conversations with AHP's on the unit it was noted that they are also not staffed to the recommended BAPM hours. It was understood that a lot of work is completed in their own time to further develop the great work going into the unit. It is therefore recommended that the unit consider a business plan to support more hours for AHP's this will recognise the amazing effort put in by staff on their own time.
- During the tour it was noted that the signage on the parent room read only mum and dads. Whilst it is recognised the unit have added this sign to highlight the room is just for parents/carers so they have a welcoming space it is noted that some may not identify as mum or dad. Therefore, it is recommended that the unit consider the wording around the poster to make sure it is inclusive for all.
- The unit currently benefit from a washing machine and tumble dryer for staff within the staff area. The staff mentioned how they were considering adding a washing machine for parents. It is recommended that the unit implement this to support parents and carers to wash their own clothes and baby clothes without having to leave the unit.
- The unit mentioned looking into creating pronunciation name cards to support inclusivity. It is recommended that the unit focus on developing this, it is also recommended they consider looking into a similar system for parents/carers to avoid mispronouncing their names as well as baby.
- It was noted during the visit and through the parent interviews that parents struggled with the entry and exist buzzer system with families sometimes having to wait long periods for staff members to let them in and out of the unit. It is recognised that the unit are currently in the process of securing Biometric access it is therefore recommended that the unit prioritises the implementation of this in order to relieve parents/carers of waiting around for staff to let them in.
- The unit benefit from four ensuite bedrooms alongside their ample space next to cots and the Lori Grace room. The staff mentioned they are undertaking renovations to improve the ensuite rooms with hopefully creating an accessible bathroom in one room. It is therefore recommended that the unit follow through with this development, considering accessibility at all times.
- Unfortunately, the Bereavement Leads were unable to attend the interview, which limited the opportunity to gain a fully detailed understanding of the unit's bereavement processes and pathways. However, it was evident that the unit has made significant progress since the Silver interview, particularly through the introduction of mandatory bereavement training for staff. This demonstrates a clear commitment to improving the support provided to bereaved families. To ensure this knowledge is embedded and maintained across the multidisciplinary team, it is recommended that the unit continues to provide regular updates, ad hoc teaching sessions, case reflections, and learning opportunities in

addition to mandatory training. This will help ensure all staff remain confident, knowledgeable, and equipped to deliver consistent, compassionate bereavement care, particularly given the sensitive and complex nature of supporting families following the loss of a baby.

- It was noted during the tour and interview that the unit does not currently have a notice board dedicated to financial support for families. Whilst information regarding parking concessions and food vouchers is available, there is an opportunity to further enhance the visibility of financial support resources. It is recommended that the unit consider developing a dedicated financial support board that brings together key information in one accessible location. This could include details on parking and meal support, local food banks and baby banks, charitable grants, local offers available to families, and signposting to relevant local and national organisations that provide practical, financial, and emotional support. Such a resource would help ensure families are aware of the assistance available to them and could help alleviate some of the financial pressures that can arise during a neonatal admission.
- As mentioned in the key findings and best practise it was noted that the unit now get the Registrar to come to the unit for the families to registry babies. However, it was noted that this information is not recorded within the welcome pack. It is therefore recommended that the unit update this information to reflect the great opportunity parents/carers have to register their baby whilst still on the unit.
- It was noted on the tour that the unit do not currently have a Psychosocial board on display for parents/carers on the unit. Such a resource could provide valuable information about the psychologist's role, available emotional wellbeing services, practical support resources, and help normalise feelings. It is therefore recommended that the unit consider creating one.
- The unit offer sibling packs, sensory grab bags and an array of information folders for parents/carers however it was noted that they do not currently have anything on offer for Grandparents. It is therefore recommended the unit consider gaining some feedback around this area to see if something can be developed for Grandparents maybe an information pack or sessions.
- As mentioned previously in key findings the unit have created sensory grab bags for those attending the unit who may be Neurodiverse. This is an incredibly useful resource to have on the unit for neurodiverse parents/carers and siblings. It is recommended to support this that the unit consider creating a Neurodiversity board with information for parents/carers to view.
- During the interview it was mentioned that the unit are currently in the process of creating a QR code board in the shape of a bath. This will hold useful QR codes to link

parents/carers to important information. It is recommended that the unit focus on creating this and adding to the unit asap.

2nd October 2026

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