

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

## Report 2022





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# Introduction

Considerations of equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace are at the forefront of many company agendas today. Our 2022 Skills, Retention and Attraction Survey confirmed that **57 percent** of UK businesses regard equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as a strategic priority when recruiting new staff.

Research on EDI and its impact on business performance **has certainly proliferated** in recent years, though measuring the impact of diversity – namely gender and racial diversity – has taken precedence. It has become evident, however, that pursuing diversity alone is inadequate in improving factors such as equality of opportunity and **eliminating unconscious biases** at work.

A diverse workplace is only one piece of the puzzle. Businesses wishing to promote equality and diversity in the workplace are realising that to truly benefit from a diverse working environment, they must also make employees feel included in their culture beyond superficial levels of representation.

Establishing an inclusive environment and eradicating indirect discrimination against protected characteristics such as sex/gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion is essential in ensuring that diversity has a **real impact** on business performance. Internal employment practices and **inclusive hiring** initiatives aimed at broadening the talent pool go hand-in-hand in achieving this.

This report seeks to help organisations better promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace and reap the rewards of a truly diverse workforce. The **Equality Act 2010** went a long way to assuring that employment rights and opportunities are afforded to all. Our report goes beyond an analysis of staid employment law to reveal actionable ways to instil an inclusive work culture.

Like many companies, Nigel Wright Group is on a journey to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We have been a **Disability Confident Committed Employer** for over 5 years. And our equal opportunities policy ensures that employees, during all internal and external interactions, are inclusive and respectful of protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

We continue to evolve our efforts to create a diverse and inclusive working environment. In 2022 all our employees, including board members right through to interns, participated in **Unconscious Bias** and **Inclusive Recruitment** Training. By incorporating **EDI into ongoing learning and development** in our business, we reinforce our commitment to achieving a diverse and inclusive culture.







In the sections that follow, we interrogate contemporary research on EDI and use real-life case studies shared by our clients to provide digestible content on the following areas:

- What is equality, diversity and inclusion?
- Why is diversity and inclusion important?
- Equality, diversity and inclusion strategy
- How to raise awareness of diversity, equality and inclusion

A final note – **diversity and inclusion is not just an HR issue**. People professionals should certainly play a central role in formulating and embedding the principles and practices of EDI. But it's the responsibility of leaders from across an organisation to ensure policies and initiatives that promote equality and diversity in the workplace are enacted and realised every day.

A key aspect of this approach is for leaders to establish internal mechanisms which allow employees to safely call out any behaviours deemed inconsistent with a company's inclusive ethos – e.g. an anti-bullying and harassment policy. This way, ultimate responsibility is the passed on to individuals to ensure they are inclusive at all times.

The CIPD **explicitly state** that people professionals should work closely with leaders in their organisations to achieve EDI solutions that work for all stakeholders. Information contained in the report will facilitate this task, as well as help leaders and line managers from all discipline areas, understand and enact some of the basics of contemporary thinking on EDI.

We hope that you enjoy reading our 2022 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace Report. Should you have questions about the content, please do not hesitate to contact a member of our team who will be more than happy to discuss any of the information and ideas presented in the following sections.





# What is equality, diversity and inclusion?

A working environment that fosters inclusion, equality and diversity has many benefits and, in many ways, can help organisations reach their full potential. Researchers have demonstrated several advantages associated with efforts to promote equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace. [ACAS](#) summarises them as follows:

- **Happier employees**
- **Improved retention and attraction**
- **Fewer people issues**
- **Heightened innovation**
- **Enhanced customer service**
- **More successful organisations**

Before any business can leverage the power of EDI, however, they need to understand what each concept means and appreciate how equality, diversity and inclusion are **separate but interlinked issues** that require different workplace considerations. Below, we provide a summary explanation of each concept before interrogating the interconnectedness of EDI in the following section.







## Equality

Equality means equal rights and opportunities are **afforded to all**: there is no reason why one person should have **poorer life chances** than another. At work we often talk about providing equal opportunity, which extends this description to include efforts to guarantee **equal job opportunities** for a range of people, and that a degree of fairness is incorporated into the job application process.

There is no reason why one person should have poorer life chances than another.

Internally, too, organisations must aspire to treat people **fairly and with dignity and respect**, while seeking to challenge discrimination and remove any barriers that prevent certain disadvantaged employees from achieving their career aspirations. Closing the gender pay gap is a good example of this in action.

The Equality Act 2010 outlines various **protected characteristics** where prejudicial attitudes can create disadvantages within employment. Often employers remove the need to disclose personal information related to the following characteristics on application forms, to avoid discrimination entering into the recruitment process.

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Equality **applies to employees** as much as employers. Workers can also face consequences if they use discriminatory language or behaviour in their jobs. The Equality Act 2010 encapsulates the tenets of equality by making it a legal requirement for organisations and individuals to treat all protected groups the **same and without judgment** during **all stages** of employment.





## Diversity

Diversity implies **recognising, respecting and valuing** differences. Within the context of work, differences are traditionally associated with **protected characteristics** defined in the Equality Act 2010. **Targeted recruitment** and initiatives aimed at attracting a **wider talent pool** are key ways in which organisations seek to embrace diversity and create more diverse cultures.

Today the concept of diversity has expanded. While **surface-level diversity** describes an appreciation for differences across demographic areas, deep-level diversity acknowledges **less immediately observable** characteristics such as political beliefs, family, organisational role, communication skills, income, appearance and work experience as **representative of difference**.

Moving away from categorical differences to celebrating individual differences is considered a more **ethical approach** to diversity. Organisations that acknowledge an **infinity of diversity** and welcome people from diverse backgrounds, as well as include a diversity of **thinking, skills and experience** in their workforces, are more likely to reap the benefits of a **creative and innovative** culture.

Moving away from categorical differences to celebrating individual differences is considered a more ethical approach to diversity.





## Inclusion

Inclusion is how we describe efforts to create an environment where everyone feels **accepted and valued**. A diverse culture won't necessarily be inclusive. Inclusion in the workplace only occurs when people are satisfied that their **differences and perspectives** are respected. This is evident in their level of engagement and willingness to **interact, connect and collaborate** with colleagues.

An inclusive culture facilitates collaboration amongst a diverse range of people. Values alignment is always important, but no one should **feel a need to conform** in any way to enjoy a sense of belonging. Rather, everyone should feel safe at work and encouraged to **contribute their unique and authentic voice** to new ideas, have influence and **effect change**.

Establishing an environment that allows uniqueness and authenticity to thrive is only possible when people become **aware of their unconscious biases**. If employees acknowledge their preconceived views and tacit prejudices, they can then work towards eliminating them. Inclusion should develop naturally once this process is underway.

Inclusion in the workplace only occurs when people are satisfied that their differences and perspectives are respected.

### **Case study:** How career development underpins Greggs' gender diversity strategy

Gender diversity has been a major priority for Greggs during the last decade. A Women's Career Development Working Party was established in 2012, which regularly engages with employees across the business to identify ways to improve gender equality. Outcomes have included Greggs embracing flexible working, as well as encouraging more women to apply for internal vacancies.

Fewer women were achieving top roles at the organisation because prolonged absence during maternity leave often persuaded them to pursue a different career trajectory or leave the workforce entirely. Greggs' maternity returners' initiative has helped female employees return to work after their maternity leave, ensuring the transition is as easy as possible.

Further, in 2018 Greggs launched its Women's Career Development Program. This was the culmination of efforts to ensure more women, generally, move up through the business. The program acknowledges that gender diversity cannot be solved simply by appointing people into key positions but rather by creating development opportunities at all levels of the organisation.

Created for women who demonstrate the potential to achieve more, those who join the program initially work in small groups to identify their individual and collective development needs before completing modules based on those perceived requirements. This way women are actively building the foundations of the course themselves.

Career development opportunities and guidance for maternity returners have helped create a pipeline of talented female managers and directors at Greggs. And the business utilises regular employee listening groups to develop employee self-awareness and gather feedback on workplace trends to ensure that it responds appropriately to evolving employee needs.

**Find out more about Greggs' diverse careers paths [here](#).**





# Why is diversity and inclusion important?

In providing an explanation for the different elements of EDI in the previous section, we already offered some top-level answers to the question why is diversity and inclusion important? Here we explore these concepts in more detail, emphasising how they are **interconnected but in no way interchangeable**.

Our definition of equality earlier is sufficient in highlighting the legal ramifications of equality within a business context. It also implies the duty organisations have to go beyond mere legal compliance to tackle the **systemic challenges** around inequality at work. Equality is essential. And getting diversity and inclusion (D&I) right is key to achieving it in the workplace.

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With this in mind, we want to momentarily leave the E of EDI behind and present the business case for diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The concept of equity, however, is important. While equality means providing the same for all, equity recognises that because **everyone is unique, they should be treated according to their own needs** – a key theme when discussing the merits of D&I.

## Equity vs. Equality

Many organisations are now focused on developing equitable solutions to encourage inclusion in the workplace. Equity acknowledges that offering the same resources and opportunities to everyone won't necessarily result in a fair and equal working environment. Rather, individuals often require specific inputs that will enable them to achieve the same outcomes as their peers.

Given the importance of engendering inclusion in modern workplaces, equity is a great way for organisations to demonstrate inclusive approaches to employment. When devising rewards and benefits, for example, instead of offering the same benefits to everyone, firms may instead offer a broad range of benefits and allow employees to choose the ones that best suit their needs.

Researching the acronym EDI will often return results related to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) with the concept of Equality missing. DEI is popular because it outlines the process of moving from a diverse to an inclusive culture. Alternatively, organisations may prefer using Equity first, as the catalyst for achieving inclusive diversity.

It doesn't matter how you phrase your strategy, as long as your objectives are clearly defined. And even if you swap-out Equality for Equity, Equality will always remain top of mind for leaders who wish to create an environment where employees perceive themselves to be part of a fair and equal culture, albeit one that favours equitable initiatives aimed at meeting their unique needs.



So, we proceed then with an overview of research into the benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion where 'equity' is an invisible yet ever-present theme in understanding why D&I is important. Using the framework provided by [ACAS](#) referenced at the beginning of this report, we will refer to research that demonstrates the impact of D&I investment in the workplace. But first:

## Diversity and inclusion: You can't have one without the other

The notion that a diverse workforce is an inclusive one has dominated thinking on workplace culture. By establishing diverse teams and improving workforce diversity – hiring more women, people of colour and those with different sexual orientations, etc. – those traditionally underrepresented employees feel more included at work and company culture benefits accordingly.

In many ways, the logic is sound – diversity promotes variety and to a certain extent nurtures a sense of belonging. The concept lends credence to the idea that bolstering the numbers of marginalised groups will have a positive impact on the employee experience. Employee engagement may even become obsolete, due to a tangible sense of fulfilment felt across the business.

Yet despite the huge amount of time, resources and money invested in improving organisational diversity over the last decade, [issues around inequality persist](#) and marginalised groups of people continue to suffer as part of exclusionary workplace cultures. This is because focusing on diversity alone – even deep-level diversity – doesn't account for individual perceptions of working life.

What organisations tend to find is that a diversity strategy (e.g. investing in hiring diverse talent) that disregards inclusion can lead to the development of a [toxic working environment](#). Similarly, socially homogenous companies that prioritise inclusion without attempting to diversify their teams [risk limiting innovation](#) and the generation of new ideas.

What organisations tend to find is that a diversity strategy that disregards inclusion can lead to the development of a toxic working environment.



In their 2020 [Harvard Business Review article](#) professors Robin J. Ely and David A. Thomas – two early proponents for encouraging heterogeneity in organisations – reinforce the “no-brainer” logic of establishing a truly diverse workforce, while arguing that increasing the number of people from underrepresented groups is meaningless “if those employees do not feel valued and respected.”

Inclusion, then, as the CIPD unequivocally states in its 2019 report, [Building Inclusive Workplaces](#), is the key element in creating a “positive environment for a diverse workforce.” Further, only a long term “concerted effort” to engender an inclusive and diverse workforce will empower employees and allow them to flourish as individuals, as team members, and as part of the wider organisation.

Achieving diversity is an ongoing project that all organisations should commit to. Starting with the principle that everyone is unique, companies that wish to turbocharge already existing diversity initiatives should seek to [canvas perceptions](#) of workplace inclusion and find ways to [improve the employee experience](#) for those individuals that feel excluded in the culture.



In a later section, we will look more closely at equality, diversity and inclusion strategy and consider the importance of executive team participation in inclusion endeavours. Developing **inclusive leaders** and achieving diverse leadership teams are now seen as equally important. And as the data below attests, general efforts to prioritise D&I together help businesses consistently perform better.

## The positive outcomes of prioritising D&I together

By prioritising D&I together, guided by the principle of equity, organisations can achieve positive outcomes across **several key metrics**. Further, efforts to bring together these interconnected concepts under one strategic action makes it easier for firms to remain **compliant with the Equality Act 2010**.

In diverse organisations, employees feel a greater sense of connection to colleagues and the wider business if they are valued for who they are and have a voice to effect change. **ACAS** helpfully summarises the benefits of a joined up D&I approach. We use that framework below to highlight research demonstrating why prioritising diversity and inclusion is important.

### Happier employees

It's true – employees are happier when they are part of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Happiness in the workplace is measured by factors such as willingness to stay at a business, a decrease in absenteeism, and an improvement in individual discretionary effort. Combined, they give firms a powerful competitive advantage.

Research carried out by the **Corporate Executive Board (CEB)**, confirmed that discretionary effort increases by 12% and intent to stay rises as much as 20% in organisations that promote D&I. Similarly, Boston Consulting Group discovered that **81% of employees** who feel included in a diverse company culture are happy in their jobs.

Further, the **CIPD reports** how gender diversity is linked to a reduction in absenteeism only in situations where there is a high level of support and enthusiasm (i.e. inclusion) for diversity within teams. The **causes of absenteeism** in this context refers to conditions such as stress & anxiety, burnout, and low morale.



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## Improved retention and attraction

We've already alluded to how combined D&I strategies improve retention. Several other studies compliment the CEB's findings. Great Place to Work, for example, indicate that diverse and inclusive workplaces enjoy **5.4 times higher employee retention**. Deloitte, too, revealed how **over half of millennials** will consider leaving an employer if they perceive D&I initiatives to be insufficient.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the impact on talent attraction is equally impressive. Not only will a D&I strategy help businesses recruit from a **diverse talent pool**, but it will also enable firms to easily attract more candidates. Over two thirds of candidates **actively search for employers** with a track record in D&I, including **47% of millennial** job seekers.

Interestingly, authenticity is a key factor in successful D&I related retention and attraction initiatives. Evidence suggests that D&I initiatives that are **too focused on financial gains** will put candidates off. Yes, there is a business case for D&I. But firms should always seek to promote the **social and moral aspects** of D&I or risk seeming disingenuous.

Authenticity is a key factor in successful D&I related retention and attraction initiatives.

## Fewer people issues

Data suggests that discrimination is still widespread in the world of employment. In the UK, **one in three people** experience age prejudice. **Almost 20 percent** of LGBT staff have been targeted by negative comments at work because they're LGBT. And **a third of people** consider those with disabilities to be less productive than non-disabled people.

Discriminatory views stem from either conscious or unconscious biases – **explicit or implicit prejudices** that people develop over time **due to socialisation**, media exposure and **other subjective experiences**. Biases can be aimed at protected characteristics as well as other traits such as weight, accent or political beliefs. They affect our perceptions of, and behaviour towards, others.

Diversity alone is inadequate. Research indicates that **decision making** and the **performance of diverse** teams are impacted when biases exist. Issues of bullying, harassment and victimisation as a consequence of people's biases **are only reduced** when D&I is prioritised, **the right policies and procedures** are in place, and efforts are made **to understand and act upon** unconscious biases.



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## Heightened innovation

Organisations recognise that **innovation is essential** in today's complex and competitive business environment. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that an **ability to pivot** was a key factor for firms that performed well during that turbulent period. Innovation requires companies to **look at things differently** and diverse cultures have always been an enabler of that.

Organisations with diverse management teams have **19% higher revenues** due to innovation. Other studies also highlight a **statistically significant relationship** between diversity and original thinking. **Recent research**, however, has pointed to the role of deep-level diversity and team creativity. Surface-level diversity, on the other hand, has no positive impact on innovation.

As well as a **willingness to change direction, knowledge-sharing** is believed to be a vital component of innovative cultures. Employees only feel able to share ideas with colleagues in inclusive environments. **Exceptional ideas** also tend to arise within diverse and inclusive teams. **Trust, collaboration** and innovation only really occur when organisations adopt combined D&I practices.

## Enhanced customer service

According to the **Institute of Customer Service**, "True customer service excellence comes when diversity and inclusion is hardwired into businesses practices and governance structures." And it's notable that contemporary consumers favour those organisations that can actually prove they are **making progress** in engendering a diverse and inclusive culture.

It is logical that a company's ability to leverage a diverse culture will enable it to better understand and service its customer base. But it's the combination of inclusion, too, that allows **different perspectives to be heard** and new and more relevant services for a variety of customers to emerge. Ongoing D&I activities enable businesses to tap into the needs of **emerging customer profiles** too.

One of the indicators of an inclusive working environment is the presence of **high levels of empathy**. Making a human connection with customers is an ongoing challenge for firms. Businesses with empathetic employees will more likely achieve authentic connections with customers, leading to greater loyalty and customer satisfaction over time.

Innovation requires companies to look at things differently and diverse cultures have always been an enabler of that.



One of the indicators of an inclusive working environment is the presence of high levels of empathy.



## More successful organisations

Of course, all the above points to the fact that diverse and inclusive organisations are more successful. As previously stated, however, the motivation for financial gain – while clearly attractive – should never be the primary motivation of pursuing diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Engagement, retention, innovation, etc. are sufficient indicators that your D&I strategy is working.

Several studies have demonstrated the impact diversity has on revenue. **Deloitte revealed** that diverse companies enjoy 230 percent higher cash flow per employee. McKinsey highlighted how **racial, ethnic** and **gender diversity** leads to an increase in earnings over time. Harvard Business Review also discovered that diverse companies are **70 percent more likely** to capture new markets.

In terms of the combined impact of D&I on the bottom line, Gartner found that inclusive teams increase productivity by **up to 30 percent** in diverse environments. Employees from empathetic workplace cultures are **44 percent more likely** to work for above-average revenue generating companies. And highly diverse, inclusive firms enjoy **consistent stock performance increases**.

### **Case study:** Tech industry benefitting from joined-up D&I approach

Equality, diversity and inclusion was the main topic of discussion at Nigel Wright Group's July 2022 Tech Leaders Webinar. Over the last 10 years, the tech industry has acknowledged it has a diversity issue and made incremental gains in attracting a more diverse workforce into the sector. This is especially the case with improving gender diversity.

Tech leaders are keen to highlight, however, that hiring to close a perceived diversity gap is no longer a primary objective for many firms. Rather, organisations are focused on building strong teams through utilising inclusive hiring techniques alongside a commitment to leveraging the benefits of D&I together.

What does this mean in practice? Well, to attract a broader range of candidates, Tech industry leaders have started to write job descriptions using gender-neutral language, including replacing active male words like 'driven' and 'superstar' with 'collaboration' and 'teamwork.' Efforts are also underway to create neurodiverse-friendly interview formats.

In the world of software development, tech leaders noted how Scrum meetings often consist of a diverse range of people representing different genders and ages, as well as roles and levels within the organisation. Inclusivity, therefore, is essential in facilitating innovative thinking in these settings. By encouraging authenticity and self-awareness, these diverse teams are achieving better outcomes.

Deep-level diversity is also helping tech firms build higher-performing teams. Bringing together people from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, for example, has enabled some companies to create unique and innovative solutions to traditional software development challenges.

**You can read more about equality, diversity and inclusion in the tech industry [here](#).**

In the next section, we will outline the best practices for creating a successful equality, diversity and inclusion strategy.





# Equality, diversity and inclusion strategy

As discussed in previous sections of the report, efforts to advance equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace should first and foremost seek to **improve the employee experience**. By ensuring basic compliance with legislation through to eliminating biases and achieving **fully integrated D&I**, companies will achieve this as well as gain a strategic advantage over competitors.

When discussing EDI, our clients often highlight the importance of taking **small steps every day** towards achieving your goals. Best practice involves tackling one area at a time – maybe even starting with the element of your strategy that requires the smallest input – and building on it until momentum affords you more time and resources to deal with harder obstacles along the way.

In this section, we want to provide an overview of five core components companies should always include in their equality, diversity and inclusion strategy. Each organisation is different of course and EDI strategies will always include several bespoke elements, tailored to a company's needs. But we believe that the following five approaches are key to any EDI strategy's overall success:

- **Make EDI integral to the whole business**
- **Use employee perceptions to shape strategy**
- **Ensure leaders become role models**
- **Invest in EDI training and development**
- **Adopt inclusive systems for talent attraction**

## Make EDI integral to the whole business

If EDI is an isolated agenda within an organisation – the purview of human resources alone and without the buy-in and involvement of other areas of the business – it will likely fall short of its objectives. Companies that take EDI seriously aim to **integrate EDI practices** into their overall business strategy and make certain that EDI behaviours become embedded across the organisation.

**The CIPD** phrase this as “concerted, meaningful and intentional action.” According to **50:50 Future**, several areas are highlighted for review when EDI is located at the centre of strategy and practice. They include but are not limited to the treatment of customers, marketing campaigns and promotional choices, company values, policies and procedures, performance reviews and hiring processes.

Cross-functional teams representing all employees should play a preliminary role in reviewing different areas of the business from an EDI perspective. Taking each area separately and evaluating it with a **fresh pair of eyes** is a helpful approach. Those involved in shaping EDI strategy should begin to understand **individual and organisational viewpoints** and use them to formulate ideas.





It's important to address both inclusion and diversity at the earliest stage of the process.

**Acknowledging demographic differences** alongside employee values, attitudes and experiences will guarantee a joined-up D&I approach. Further, firms should avoid proposing **one-off D&I initiatives** that lack a clear vision to address long-term EDI issues.

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## Use employee perceptions to shape strategy

All employees should be given an opportunity to inform the development of EDI strategy from the outset. Alongside evaluating different business practices and processes, cross-functional teams responsible for creating EDI strategy should seek to **“understand the state of play”** within the business through data collection and through establishing employee networks (e.g. of LGBTQ people) to canvas opinions.

It is recommended that organisations **consider a range of data** that is truly representative of the workforce. Surveys are the most effective way to do this combined with focus groups and feedback from employee networks. **Understanding communication preferences** in advance of data collection is important – to facilitate the process for different people and as a demonstration of EDI in action.

Questions **should cover topics** such as employee views on organisational diversity, their sense of belonging and perceptions of fairness, equality and decision making, as well as attitudes towards discrimination and harassment at work. Organisations are encouraged to make use of any **existing employee data**, provide avenues for **continuous feedback**, and track diversity data over time.

Remember, employees are **under no obligation** to volunteer information about protected characteristics. Anonymity should be guaranteed, and it should always be clear **why data is being collected**. Employees must feel empowered by the process in terms of their agency to affect change, through a direct acknowledgment of their specific concerns and/or ideas.

**Employees must feel empowered by the process in terms of their agency to affect change.**





## Ensure leaders become role models

If leaders aren't engaged in the EDI agenda then any gains that an organisation makes in this area will be superficial – real change only occurs when it is driven from the top. According to research, a key catalyst for creating momentum around D&I at work is when leaders are **empowered to champion D&I** and encouraged to act as role models for the right kinds of behaviours.

Significantly, this applies to the board and leadership team as well as senior management throughout the business. Even if an organisation has a diverse leadership structure, leaders who don't value difference – something which is evident through their words and actions – will create a working environment where certain employees will **feel like they don't belong**.

**Educating senior leaders** about the principles of EDI, as well as the cultural and financial impact of embracing diversity and inclusion in the workplace is a crucial first step. Attending one-off D&I training sessions is not enough. Rather EDI should form part of **ongoing leadership learning and development** so that behaviours and positive sentiments toward D&I become implicit in the culture.

The CEO should also position themselves as the **top champion** for D&I efforts. This is achieved through having them spearhead EDI efforts and **clearly communicate policies** to support them. Line managers should be briefed to execute all related policies and practices. And all those at the senior level should be **held accountable** for any EDI objectives established by the business.

## Invest in EDI training and development

With the leadership on board, businesses must then agree to invest in EDI training and development for the whole organisation. This can include formal sessions run by organisations such as **50:50 Future**, and on-the-job training through **observation and informal conversations** – a great way for leaders to role-model the right behaviours and attitudes during talent management activities.

EDI training and development should become incorporated into the **whole employee journey** – from new employee inductions to performance review processes and promotions. Staff should be encouraged to look out for instances of discrimination, inequality and exclusion, and organisations should be **clear about the consequences** for those who don't adhere to policies and values.

Training programs should aim to include all areas of EDI, from understanding the **basic legal requirements of the Equality Act** to more complex **inclusion and unconscious bias** training. Often organisations undertake **disability training** too, given the lack of awareness or understanding today of hidden disabilities such as those associated with neurodivergence.

There is a **poor understanding of neurodivergence** such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and autism within modern workplaces. 50% percent of managers say they would **avoid hiring** a neurodiverse candidate, while several studies now point towards the **untapped potential** of neurodiverse people. EDI training will help remove barriers to inclusion across the whole diversity spectrum.

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## EDI training will help remove barriers to inclusion across the whole diversity spectrum.





## Adopt inclusive systems for talent attraction

Recruiting for diversity is essential in today's employment market. All organisations want to attract people from a large talent pool. **Expanding the talent search** to target individuals based on their sexual orientation, socio-economic background, ethnicity and age, for example, will help organisations find the best people, as well as build a truly diverse workforce.

This is sometimes framed as **taking positive action** – a deliberate effort to promote equality by increasing the number of employees from a protected characteristic. Positive action is different from positive discrimination because it requires “credible evidence” of under-representation alongside proof of “equal merit” of the individuals benefitting, compared to other suitable candidates.

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That aside, as already discussed, increasing diversity doesn't address barriers to inclusion. Inclusion therefore must be a **primary consideration** during the talent attraction process right through to the interview and onboarding stages. Without an inclusive recruitment strategy, businesses risk missing out on the full benefits of workplace diversity and achieving an inclusive environment.





**Stating the company's D&I vision** in job adverts and other career opportunity materials will help attract and retain more people, especially younger workers who want to work within inclusive cultures. Other **D&I considerations** when recruiting include writing succinct and easier to understand job adverts, using gender-neutral and other inclusive language, and incorporating inclusive imagery.

### **Case Study:** Nomad Foods demonstrates how prioritising inclusion enables diversity to flourish

Nomad Foods is the largest frozen food manufacturer in the UK and Europe, and the second largest in the world, with around 8,500 people based in various European locations. The collective ambition at Nomad Foods is focused on creating a culture where everybody feels that they can be themselves when they come to work.

The firm's I&D strategy is based on three areas proven to make the biggest impact – Inclusive leaders, Inclusive culture, and Inclusive hiring. At the heart of the strategy is the idea that an initial focus on engendering inclusion will lead to better organisational diversity over time. This is supported by employee networks that promote diversity, inclusion and belonging.

All leaders at Nomad Foods are given the requisite support to ensure that they become the best leader they can be. This includes training on how to treat all people equally. Leaders also learn about equal opportunities and diverse talent in the workplace perspectives. The intention is to demonstrate the importance of employee feelings from multiple viewpoints.

In the inclusive culture programme, employees are given the tools and training to empower them to be themselves in the workplace. At seminars held throughout the year, people come together to discuss their limiting beliefs and unconscious biases. After completing the programme, staff members become ambassadors for I&D across the business.

To ensure inclusive hiring, Nomad Foods trains managers on how to interview in a way that will encourage diversity. Employees also learn how to write inclusive job ads that attract people from all backgrounds. Creating an inclusive culture has enabled the business to attract, develop and retain the best talent in every country and at every level.

**Read more** about how Nomad Food's I&D strategy has helped the business enjoy consistent growth.

Communicating a commitment to disabled and neurodiverse candidates is also a must. Research suggests **several low-cost adjustments** companies should consider when hiring. Firms are even **removing the need** for candidates to complete psychometric testing and other written assessments as they make participating in the recruitment process challenging for neurodiverse people.

In the following conclusion, we will consider a final and essential step on the EDI journey – how to raise awareness of diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace.



# Conclusion: How to raise awareness of diversity, equality and inclusion

In this report, we have explored the **interdependent relationship** between equality, diversity, (equity) and inclusion. Our aim – to help organisations with promoting diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace – is achieved through discussing the benefits of pursuing a joined-up approach to EDI, as well as through highlighting several actionable EDI strategies.

Over the last 45 years, society has witnessed the rise of individualism. This is driven in part by a **prevailing economic system** that asserts competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It has been exacerbated by globalisation – bringing us closer to different cultures, ideas and ways of living – as well as social media's predilection for idiosyncratic behaviours.

The last decade has seen **five generations in the workforce** for the first time. And generational diversity is becoming more important as people live longer and retire later. Many older workers are **returning to employment** too, due to the rising cost of living. Each generation – and individual – has a different outlook and needs (**e.g. remote working vs. office based**) which impact employment.

Further, a deeper understanding of mental health and neurodiversity makes the diversity terrain more complicated. The John Hopkins Wheel of Diversity clearly illustrates how complex diversity has become. **Some employers** no longer ask, "What is this person lacking?" when recruiting, but rather "Can their unique traits and perceived flaws add to the organisation in unexpected ways?"

Difference is everywhere today, and it is inevitably **causing friction in the workplace** as society continues to evolve vis-à-vis the widespread culture of individualism. It is for these reasons that equality, diversity and inclusion should play a vital role in all workforce planning. In conclusion, we want to discuss an important concept that will help organisations kick off their EDI journey.

Awareness plays a major role in all aspects of EDI strategy development. When awareness is lacking EDI initiatives will either not exist, or they will fail to take root within an organisation. But a clear indication that EDI efforts are impacting the working environment is when people **become aware of difference**, are more accepting of otherness and act to embrace diversity in a positive way.







It's a simple idea that may take time to enact within the workplace. On the one hand, there's the basic task of **making employees aware** of the legal implications of EDI (equal opportunities for race, gender, etc.) and company policies that support EDI efforts. The challenging aspect is developing employee self-awareness to create an inclusive culture of connection and togetherness.

There are no straightforward guidelines on how to raise awareness of equality, inclusion and diversity in the workplace. The last section on strategy certainly points to a few key areas. But taking a more conceptual approach, HR and other leaders may consider having regular sessions focused on **self-reflection of views and actions** as a way to cultivate awareness amongst employees.

Self-reflection can **help people develop empathy**, an essential quality within an inclusive culture. People build positive relationships with team members by learning to recognise discriminatory attitudes, manage their unconscious biases and respect the similarities and differences of others. Often described as **cultural intelligence**, it engenders sensitivity as a precursor to inclusiveness.

A famous line from one of the great works of modern literature – **Harper Lee's 1960 novel, To Kill A Mockingbird** – helps us to mentally visualise how we can try to become more sensitive and practise empathy towards others: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view. Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."

If leaders can learn how to do that effectively and become aware of how a person's unique ways and perspectives add value to the organisation, then the EDI agenda will gain momentum and the benefits of EDI will become reality. When employees sense tangible improvements in their working life, then it will become easier to improve diversity and change behaviours in line with EDI goals.

Society is always changing and the process of **awareness-raising never stops**. We're entering a new crisis period characterised by high inflation and lower living standards. As firms deal with tightening markets and limited resources, organisational resilience remains crucial – it's important to remember, therefore, that diverse companies with inclusive cultures **tend to be the most resilient**.



**Nigel Wright Group is Europe's number one consumer sector talent search firm and the leading and largest, multi-discipline recruitment business specialising in the North of England. We have 11 offices across the UK and Europe and one in America.**

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- Our communities benefit from how we use our market relationships



Contact Sue O'Donovan to discuss aspects of this report and to become part of our EDI network.

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