

TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN YOUR BUSINESS

AN INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT GUIDE FROM
AAI EMPLOYABILITY



Promoting equity, diversity and inclusion [EDI] should be a top priority for all present-day employers. While this concept is centuries old, more recent social movements have been pivotal in highlighting the importance of creating a fair society for all. However, it's clear much progression is still required to make this a reality within the workplace.

While this guide is an attempt to help companies head in the right direction, reaching total equality within your workplace requires huge effort and commitment. It's important to take pride in taking the baby steps.

Irrespective of the importance of this agenda, many companies are still failing to take the necessary actions to champion true EDI within their organisations. A [McKinsey study](#) found that 'diverse' team members have struggled the most during the pandemic, such as women and LGBTQ+ employees. Issues such as this can most likely stem from a general lack of awareness around EDI, leading to negative impacts for these groups within employment.

Being an extremely complicated, broad and nuanced concept, spreading awareness around EDI is imperative.

The pandemic has challenged the nature of work, job roles, organisational culture and business strategy. From this shake-up, we can carve a new path towards increased success in EDI.

WHILE EDI IS PRIMARILY IMPORTANT IN CREATING FAIR AND EQUAL WORKPLACES FOR ALL, DATA ALSO PROVES THAT COMPANIES WITH MORE DIVERSE TEAMS ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE SUCCESSFUL THAN THOSE WITHOUT.

In this report, we take a deep dive into the conversation surrounding EDI and offer advice to businesses looking to become more diverse and inclusive.

Joy Lewis
CEO
AAI Employability



HOW CAN WE DEFINE E, D & I?

An initial problem arises when considering diversity, equity and inclusion as these terms are often interchangeable; their definitions can overlap and usually mean different things to different individuals.

To embed a high-quality EDI policy within your organisation, it's important to be clear on what each of these terms represents, which makes providing their distinct definitions necessary.

EQUITY

The accommodation of the needs of all employees through the acknowledgement that each individual within your workplace is unique and putting policies in place to support this.

DIVERSITY

Difference that can be split into two types; inherent diversity and acquired diversity. Inherent diversity relates to immutable traits such as race, age and gender, whereas acquired diversity refers to characteristics such as background and political beliefs.

INCLUSION

The validation of each individual and that they not feel excluded on the basis of their identity, as opposed to when minorities are *'included'* at a surface level, yet their voices are still not *'heard'*.



EQUITY

The availability of opportunity is key and with the inclusion of equity in the workplace, companies can address the fact that certain groups are subject to certain advantages, while others are subject to certain disadvantages.



With companies guilty of meeting diversity quotas to maintain a positive brand image, the implementation of quality functioning equity within the workplace is of prime importance.



DIVERSITY

“Diversity is being invited to the disco, and inclusion is being asked to dance.” - Vernā Myers

Diversity is more than just a surface level of ‘representation’; it also requires the inclusion of active participation.

The Centre for Talent Innovation, who coined the terms inherent diversity and acquired diversity, found that companies with high levels of both kinds of diversity were 45% more likely to have expanded their market share and 70% more likely to have captured a new market in the last 12 months.

Diversity should mean a ‘diversity of thought’ – it goes deeper than just employing people from different demographics and ethnicities. Genuine diversity comes from a variety of perspectives, beliefs and concepts, with all of these being able to be contributed within a safe space.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is valuing every employee’s voice, no matter their level of seniority or time with the business.

Hierarchically speaking, if junior members of the team share ideas, to facilitate real inclusion, each of these ideas should be genuinely considered within the group.

The inclusion aspect of your EDI policy should exist to create an environment where everyone is on the same, level, playing field; whether they are a security guard, cleaner, CEO, a first-time manager or a receptionist.

THE AIM IS TO DEVELOP A NATURAL, ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM AS OPPOSED TO A SIMPLE PLANTATION.

Remember, implementing a EDI policy isn't simply about displaying the appropriate terminology and phrases on your vision and mission statement. It's important to implement tangible methods of bringing this policy to life in the day-to-day operations of each area of your business, through daily actions and behaviours. For example:



HOW WILL YOU
EMBED YOUR
COMMITMENTS IN
YOUR COMPANY
CULTURE?

HOW WILL IT
INFLUENCE YOUR
COMPANY
VALUES?

WHAT NEEDS TO
HAPPEN FOR
YOUR POLICY TO
BE REFLECTED IN
YOUR INTERNAL
SYSTEMS AND
PROCESSES?

This policy should coalesce into every area of the business, from recruiting, onboarding, performance management, career development programmes, succession planning, the management of individuals and teams and how senior leaders lead by example and turn words to deeds.

However, this doesn't just mean including a diverse range of different individuals on promotional materials.

Successful EDI is when tasks are delegated, decisions are made, all individuals are facilitated in growth and development, job opportunities are created and filled by the best, most suitable person, because the company's culture, systems and processes fully espouse equity, diversity and inclusion.

IT'S ABOUT CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENT IN THE DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS OF YOUR COMPANY, WHERE A POLICY OF ZERO-TOLERANCE FOR DISCRIMINATION IS CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED.

ARE EMPLOYERS DOING ALL THEY CAN?

Even organisations with commendable focus and systems for encouraging EDI can sometimes fall victim to broader infrastructure problems. This can commonly happen in sectors that have deep-rooted, ingrained stereotypes.

For example, women in the U.K. are four times more likely to work in health and social care than in either manufacturing or construction. The important question is, are individual employers the cause, or is it more to do with historical gendered stereotypes still present today?

Regardless, this is one of the most important aspects of facilitating EDI within your workplace; it's all about learning and, if intentions are positive, it's okay to make mistakes along the way. Everybody needs to learn and no-one's going to have all the answers right away.

Although the tide is turning, there is still progress to be made for some sectors to become truly gender diverse. In this case especially, it's very easy to continue talking about change and not take action.

As an employer, you should have a dedicated focus on improving EDI in your organisation, and if you haven't already – now is the time to act.

**BEHAVIOUR
CHANGE COMES
THROUGH
EDUCATION**

**SPEAK TO AAI
TODAY ABOUT
YOUR DIVERSITY
AND INCLUSION
GOALS**





IT'S ABOUT CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES IN YOURSELF AND THOSE AROUND YOU

Employers must encourage every individual to believe that they can fulfil their career goals and not be held back by labels or sweeping generalisations. This means giving genuine, equal opportunities to all employees and candidates;

Businesses sometimes pick what makes the most sense to them. Working on improving the section of EDI requiring the most attention and then moving on to the next seems a logical approach to take. For example, a company could decide to drive the promotion of women in male-heavy industries such as STEM roles.

HOWEVER,

the danger is that this can be perceived as a box-ticking exercise instead of viewing it as a **holistic challenge which results in shifting values, beliefs and ultimately behaviours**. The term EDI covers such a wide range of areas that your policy should have a structured breakdown and tackle each area with nuance and specificity.

In the following section, we present innovative strategies you can implement to improve EDI within your organisation to create this shift. The importance of having a plan of when and how to act that can facilitate action can't be understated.

EFFECTIVE EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT NOW

If substantial progress is to be made, sentiment needs to be replaced with fresh and collaborative approaches.

These changes need to be made at a boardroom level that can trickle down through the organisation.

Commonly, boards are often very traditional and these traditions need to be challenged if the situation is to change.

Here are the key ways employers can do better.



In a recent McKinsey report, EDI was highlighted as playing a significant role in the economy's Covid recovery. The report states, "companies pulling back on I&D now may be placing themselves at a disadvantage: they could not only face a backlash from customers and talent now but also, down the line, fail to better position themselves for growth and renewal."

01 Create a Culture of Respect

02 Genuinely Listen

03 Fair Career Progression Structures

04 Appraisals

05 Accountability

06 Marketing & Communications



1. CREATE A CULTURE OF RESPECT

An employer can be legally above board in terms of discrimination, and yet there can still be a culture where there is a lack of respect between employees. This facilitates toxic work environments and can hinder the progression of EDI.

Think about:



DO YOUR MANAGEMENT EMPLOY 'OLD SCHOOL' WORK ETHICS, SUCH AS BEING OVERLY HARSH OR CRITICAL IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE STANDARDS?

WHAT WELL-KNOWN CLIQUES OPERATE IN YOUR COMPANY?

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT JUDGEMENT IS KEPT TO A MINIMUM

Creating a respectful culture is the first step to improving diversity and inclusion, as acceptance and tolerance, high emotional intelligence, kindness and consideration are all necessary for forward-thinking organisations.

With many employees also suffering from a lack of education on what is or isn't appropriate to say, it's also important that judgement is kept to a minimum. Meeting these kinds of scenarios with negative emotions such as these can be one of the greatest barriers to ushering in communication and dialogue, thus reducing learning.

Disrespectful behaviour should not be tolerated, and it's a necessity that this message permeates down through the organisation from the leadership team. Bullish tactics are not an acceptable part of the modern workplace and could be deemed discriminatory.



INTERNAL TRAINING

Employers should also focus on training in any areas where employees need help to create a level playing field in terms of skills and career progression.

Offering excellent training programmes to all employees is one of the best ways to support people with different skills and abilities. Identifying and explaining the barriers present for underrepresented groups to employers can allow them to make significant changes in how they operate.

Be aware that individuals from different backgrounds will have different skill sets - a robust training programme is vital for equality. For example, would you encourage the same development opportunities in the part-time mother as opposed to the new graduate?

EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY & TRAINING

Having a wide range of perspectives and opinions isn't just beneficial from an internal standpoint, but also an external one. If you are going to provide training focused on EDI in your organisation, external training can be highly effective and have a resounding effect on your EDI policies.

It's easier for an internal trainer to sell the company perspective, whereas an external trainer is impartial. This allows this external participant to be far more direct in their assessment and recommendations.

However, there first needs to be an environment where employees fully understand the importance of EDI. An external trainer must act as a consultancy first to check that the training is even possible, find the gaps and then work out what this means in terms of training within the organisation.

HAVE YOU LOOKED INTO PROVIDING EDI TRAINING IN YOUR ORGANISATION? AAI HAS SUPPORTED BUSINESSES ACROSS THE UK WITH BESPOKE EDI TRAINING. FIND OUT MORE HERE.



2. GENUINELY LISTEN

In your company, would an idea or suggestion be treated with the same respect if it came from somebody at the bottom of the internal ecosystem instead of an executive?

Treating employees inclusively means giving them a voice and listening to that voice. It's through conversation and communication that employers can gain true enlightenment.

This means listening to everybody at all levels and making organisational changes based on your team's ideas. It might sound like a radical notion, but there are real-life examples of employers carrying this ideology out to great effect.

IT'S THROUGH CONVERSATION AND COMMUNICATION THAT EMPLOYERS CAN GAIN TRUE ENLIGHTENMENT

MULTINATIONAL VIRGIN IS KNOWN FOR INSTIGATING DEBATES AMONG STAFF TO DRIVE INNOVATION AND CREATE A BETTER WORKPLACE.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME SOMEONE IN AN ENTRY-LEVEL POSITION WAS ASKED FOR THEIR INPUT ON A SIGNIFICANT DECISION?

2. HOW DID YOU DEMONSTRATE THEIR OPINION WAS VALUED?

3. WHEN DID YOU LAST ACT ON AN IDEA PUT FORWARD BY A JUNIOR STAFF MEMBER OR SOMEONE NEW TO YOUR BUSINESS?





3. FAIR CAREER PROGRESSION STRUCTURES

“Have structures in place which allow people to progress no matter what their background. It’s easy to assume certain demographics wouldn’t be interested in employment within certain industries but, regardless, the opportunity should always be there.

Businesses should not reward generalists over specialists in an unequal way. Most employees are specialists in their skills and abilities, but this very fact can hold them back.



Offer the same development opportunities to everyone; don’t be swayed into thinking someone will do well over another based solely on demographic factors, previous employment history and current skill-set.

Some individuals who previously have been discriminated against may not feel confident to put themselves forward. As leaders, we need to recognise talent, encourage it, and inspire people to do just that. Equality of opportunity for any potential applicant is key in making more progressive steps forward.

At the highest level of your career progression strategy, make sure succession plans also represent your EDI policy. You can then use this as an opportunity to promote diversity of success within your workplace and showcase the diversity of success at different levels, providing role models and making everyone feel like they can participate.



4. APPRAISALS

There are a few ways you can build E, D & I into your performance management:

- **Base performance on facts, always - sometimes factors such as gender or age can affect a manager's ability to be objective in performance reviews. Continually assess performance expectations, and analyse whether reviews are in-line with data rather than opinions.**
- **Use inclusive language - avoid using words or phrases which perpetuate stereotypes. For example, saying, "I was surprised that you did so well on this project, I didn't expect that you would have such an interest in this topic" can limit employees' beliefs that they can progress in areas they are not familiar with.**
- **Ask for feedback, and listen - ask your team 'what more could I be doing to help you be your authentic self at work' and put into practice their suggestions.**

Appraisals are often overlooked in terms of EDI, so it's a good idea to re-evaluate them through the EDI lens.





5. ACCOUNTABILITY



YOUR EDI POLICY SHOULD BE BAKED INTO YOUR COMPANY'S INFRASTRUCTURE.

There needs to be a recognition among all employees, from new starters to the CEO, that EDI is not an isolated construct but a core principle of your organisation, with every member having a part to play.

One way this can be implemented within your company is through making EDI a requirement for career progression, ensuring employees are held accountable.

There is also a recognition of the need to educate middle managers on different career progression routes.

Traditional models centering around starting at the bottom and working up should also now be challenged. People study and progress in their careers differently now; you do not require decades of experience to be regarded as an expert anymore.

Challenge your own beliefs and discuss your decisions with colleagues - championing diversity and inclusion is about engaging, communicating and having conversations that others might find uncomfortable. That's why it's so important to find a balance between learning and feeling comfortable; ushering in a safe space where a positive dialogue can be initiated between all employees.



6. MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing, both internal and external, has a significant role to play in improving EDI. There can be discrimination built into the language we use every day but there are ways we can modify our language to make it more inclusive. For example, someone tells you a story about their lawyer; if you reply and assume that their lawyer is male, this is an example of the ingrained stereotypes we can challenge by changing our language.

It's about challenging our own unconscious biases and striving to view the world through the eyes of all those who represent it as a whole and carry less privilege. Many marketing images are still laden with white, male business-like figures. Think about the language changes you can make in your internal communications and everyday language, as well as external marketing material.

Often companies will arbitrarily include a woman or someone from an ethnic minority background into their images to appear more diverse; if you're trying to appear more diverse than you are, you are engaging in performative EDI.



Beth Dunn, [UX Operations Lead at HubSpot](#) in a Medium article, states, *"Try not to present the privileged, tech-savvy, wealthy, able-bodied, white, cis-gendered, anglo-centric male experience as 'standard' and everything else as 'other' or 'diverse.' Seek ways to place the 'other' in the centre of things instead."*



[AAI CAN SUPPORT WITH CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING - CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE](#)

THE ISSUE OF PERFORMATIVE EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



Sometimes companies get it wrong.

With an increased focus on diversity in recent years, we have also seen a rise in performative EDI, appearing to be an inclusive employer on the surface and failing behind the scenes.

An example of this is when businesses go out of their way to create an inclusive hiring process and a diverse shortlist. They hire diverse employees but then fail to make them feel included. This happens when EDI strategies are not embedded and implemented within the business. It could also be because the strategy is too vague or even non-existent.

Employees are increasingly less tolerant of employers who don't deliver on health and well-being, diversity, and inclusion. Employee satisfaction is a major factor many companies are beginning to place a higher priority on, so if your company is lacking in these areas, you risk falling behind.

Some businesses will hire 'diversely' and then fail to make the new recruit welcome - this must be addressed.

Finally, as companies look to improve EDI, let's look at the role recruitment companies have to play.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUR RECRUITMENT PROCESS

EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE BUILT FOR EVERYONE, SO EVERYONE NEEDS TO BUILD THEM.

Improving EDI all starts with recruitment. Attracting a wide range of individuals, especially at higher levels of your organisation, helps change the chemistry of your company.

An organisation can't change without the full support of its board, so the board itself benefits from being diverse. Otherwise, points of view can't be fully understood or EDI won't be as much of a priority.

Evolving your recruitment strategy and processes is the easiest way to champion inclusion and make your workforce more diverse. Naturally, as you recruit more from underrepresented groups, the more of a priority EDI will become. Everything needs to be built for everyone, so everyone needs to build them.

As with the issue of performative diversity and inclusion, your hiring processes should not be made more diverse solely for brand image and appearances. There needs to be a EDI support mechanism to assist employees during their onboarding and as they begin to build their new career.

What organisations should not forget is that recruitment is about finding the best person for the job – and not hiring arbitrarily to fulfil quotas. Create an environment of inclusivity, and this will permeate through your hiring and the type of talent you will attract. The goal is to hire based on skills and hire strong individuals with strong opinions and strong views.

As long as the recruitment company you work with has a matrix that is non-biased, you are doing the right thing. So ask yourself:

1. HOW PROMINENTLY IS EDI FEATURED IN YOUR CURRENT HIRING PROCESS?

2. HOW OFTEN ARE YOU HAVING CONVERSATIONS AMONG THE HIRING DEPARTMENT ABOUT HOW DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION CAN BE INCORPORATED INTO YOUR HIRING DECISIONS?



THE FIRST STEPS TO MAKING YOUR RECRUITMENT STRATEGY MORE INCLUSIVE

1. Use Inclusive Language in Your Job Descriptions

Audit your previous job descriptions and look at how you can make them more inclusive by changing the language. You might notice that the language you have used in the past was geared towards certain demographics - this can happen when you start the recruitment process with an idea of the 'type' of person you want already in mind. At AAI we use gendered language analysis software to balance masculine and feminine coded language in job adverts. Additionally, don't be afraid to mention that you welcome candidates from all different backgrounds.

2. Have Managers Complete Unconscious Bias Training

Unconscious bias can derail the recruitment process. Implement training for everyone involved in your recruitment processes on how to spot and eradicate unconscious bias to create a fairer system.

3. Use 'Blind' Recruitment in the Early stages

This means considering employees without being aware of personal details such as name, age, ethnicity, sexuality etc. Scrutinising candidates in this way creates an equal playing field, although it can be difficult to achieve in practice without the right recruitment and CV tools.



AN EXPERT INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT COMPANY WILL BE ABLE TO WORK WITH YOU ON YOUR CURRENT HIRING PROCESS TO ADVISE ON IMPLEMENTING EXCELLENT RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES.

IF YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES AND RESULTS THIS YEAR, WE CAN HELP.

YOUR NEXT ACTIONS

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR SERVICES, CONTACT US TODAY AT AAI-EMPLOYABILITY.ORG.UK

GET IN TOUCH WITH THE TEAM: TEAM@AAI-EMPLOYABILITY.ORG.UK

GET IN TOUCH WITH THE CEO: JOY@AAI-EMPLOYABILITY.ORG.UK

ABOUT AAI EMPLOYABILITY



AAI - is an award-winning not-for-profit that supports the private, public and third sector to access graduate and returner talent of all ages, skillsets and backgrounds. It also helps businesses to better attract and retain diversity.

With a highly respected name after 11 years, the AAI team offer tried, tested and flexible inclusive-employment and recruitment services from ad hoc, short-term projects, including internships and maternity leave, to permanent positions. It has worked with over 1100 growing businesses of all sizes.



AAI will support both employers and candidates before, during and after the post, as the need arises. It uses its surplus to support disadvantaged people and marginalised groups struggling to enter the workforce.



AAI also works with private-sector businesses offering tailored social-impact projects around the themes of gender and racial diversity, disability and supporting the third/voluntary sector. These projects are aimed at improving attraction and retention of staff as well as providing tangible and reportable social and financial impact.

ABOUT JOY LEWIS



Joy joined the Centre for Scottish Public Policy in January 2009 and spun out AAI EmployAbility (then, Adopt an Intern) a year later. The company has since gone from strength to strength, placing over 1700 graduates and returners into valuable paid work across the UK.

She served for 20 years in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and has lived and worked in Brazil, Argentina and Germany. Joy also worked for many years in fashion retail where she recruited, trained and mentored women sales managers, culminating in a successful business in Germany.

After addressing their first employment injustice of unpaid graduate internships, Joy and team have widened their scope of inclusive employment to include diversity and inclusion services to help more businesses to grow and more talented people to access opportunity.

