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Diversity and inclusion in the workplace

Understand what diversity means in the workplace and how an effective diversity and inclusion strategy can support the business

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Promoting and supporting diversity in the workplace is an important aspect of good people management - it's about valuing everyone in the organisation as an individual. However, to reap the benefits of a diverse workforce it's vital to have an inclusive environment where everyone feels able to participate and achieve their potential. While UK legislation – covering age, disability, race, religion, gender and sexual orientation among others – sets minimum standards, an effective diversity and inclusion strategy goes beyond legal compliance and seeks to add value to an organisation, contributing to employee well-being and engagement.

This factsheet explores what diversity and inclusion means in the workplace, and how an effective strategy can support an organisation's business objectives. It looks at the rationale for action, and outline the steps organisations can take to implement and manage a successful diversity and inclusion strategy, from communication and training to addressing workplace behaviour and evaluating progress.

CIPD viewpoint

The moral case for building fairer and more inclusive labour markets and workplaces is indisputable: people matter, and organisations must ensure their people management approaches do not put any group at a disadvantage. Regardless of our identity or background, we all deserve the opportunity to develop our skills and talents to our full potential, work in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, be fairly rewarded and recognised for our work and have a meaningful voice on matters that affect us.

It's also vital for the sustainability of businesses and economies. Everyone stands to benefit when we embrace and value the diversity of thoughts, ideas and ways of working that people from different backgrounds, experiences and identities bring to an organisation. It helps people grow and learn, tackles under-utilisation of skills by enabling people to reach their full potential, improves decision-making, boosts engagement and innovation, and enables businesses to better meet the needs of a diverse customer base.

At the CIPD, we're proud of our work to [demonstrate diversity and inclusion at work \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/about/working-with-us/diversity-inclusion-commitment/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/about/working-with-us/diversity-inclusion-commitment/). This includes refreshing our policies to ensure all our language is inclusive. Our Diversity and Inclusion Group includes representatives from HR to connect our D&I effort, and to capture the commitment and support of people across our organisation to make this a truly inclusive place to work.

What are diversity and inclusion?

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Diversity is about recognising difference, but not actively leveraging it to drive organisational success. It's acknowledging the benefit of having a range of perspectives in decision-making and the workforce being representative of the organisation's customers.

Inclusion is where difference is seen as a benefit, and where perspectives and differences are shared, leading to better decisions. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels valued, that their contribution matters and they are able to perform to their full potential, no matter their background, identity or circumstances. An inclusive workplace enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.

Standards, such as the BSI and ISO human resource management suite and Investors in People (IIP), provide principled based frameworks and guidelines to help organisations recognise the actual and potential value of their people and ensure their people policies and working practices are bias free. See more on [HR and standards \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/hr/standards-factsheet/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/hr/standards-factsheet/).

Everyone is a unique person. Even though people have many things in common, they are also different in a variety of ways. The concept of 'intersectionality' - that we all have multiple, overlapping identities - takes into account this principle. In the UK, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation, are 'protected characteristics' covered by discrimination law to give people protection against being treated unfairly. However, differences also include visible and non-visible factors, for example, personal characteristics such as background, culture, personality, work-style, accent, language and so on.

This means it's important to recognise that a 'one-size-fits all' approach to managing people does not achieve fairness and equality of opportunity for everyone. People have different personal needs, values and beliefs. Good people management practice demands that people propositions are both consistently fair but also flexible and inclusive in ways that are designed to support both individual and business needs.

For example, 'neurodiversity' is a growing area of workplace inclusion. It refers to the natural range of differences in human brain function. Amongst employers, it's used to describe alternative thinking styles including dyslexia, autism and ADHD. 'Neurodivergent' individuals can have unique strengths, including data-driven thinking, an ability to spot trends, and processing information at extraordinary speeds. It's estimated that at least 10% of the UK population is neurodivergent. However, most workplaces are physically and structurally set up for 'neurotypicals', so employers are missing out on other strengths.

Together with Optimize, we've produced [Neurodiversity at work](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work/>), a practical guide for employers. It helps remove potential 'friction points' in the hiring process and enable employees to play to their strengths. Most adjustments are simple and low-cost, but can make a significant difference to an individual's working life.

The social justice case for diversity

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The social justice case is based on the belief that everyone should have a right to equal access to employment and training and development based solely on merit. Everyone should have the right to be free of any direct or indirect discrimination and harassment or bullying. This can be described as the right to be treated fairly and the UK law, principally in the Equality Act 2010, sets minimum standards.

The [Equality and Human Rights Commission](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010) (<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010>) has published a range of guidance on all aspects of the Equality Act 2010, including a [Code of practice](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/employment-statutory-code-practice) (<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/employment-statutory-code-practice>) on employment. Whilst not legally binding documents, the codes give important guidance on good practice and failure to follow them may be taken into account by tribunals or courts.

For more information on particular aspects, see our various factsheets on [age](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/age-discrimination/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/age-discrimination/factsheet/>), [disability](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/disability-discrimination/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/disability-discrimination/factsheet/>), [harassment and bullying](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/harassment/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/harassment/factsheet/>), [race](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/race-discrimination/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/race-discrimination/factsheet/>), [religion](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/religious-discrimination/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/religious-discrimination/factsheet/>), [sex discrimination and gender reassignment](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/sex-discrimination/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/sex-discrimination/factsheet/>) and [sexual orientation discrimination](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/sexual-orientation-discrimination/factsheet/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/sexual-orientation-discrimination/factsheet/>).

Diversity and inclusion are good for people and good for business

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Our research [Diversity and inclusion at work: facing up to the business case](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report/>) highlights that inequality is still widespread in the workplace, and people professionals are in a unique place to champion the importance of diversity and inclusion. It also finds the evidence base on diversity is complex, with context playing a significant role. In other words, organisational contexts must support diverse teams for good outcomes.

HR professionals should also take into account the potential positive outcomes of diversity for individuals (such as impact on well-being). Any business case for diversity must take these human outcomes into consideration and balance them with business outcomes.

It's important to consider the holistic benefits of diversity and inclusion, because good decisions about people practices benefit workers, wider society, but also organisations as well. In addition to the moral case, there are three main strands to building the argument for going beyond what is required by legislation: talent, market competitiveness, and corporate reputation.

Talent

Research on [the psychological contract](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/employees/psychological-factsheet/) (<https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/employees/psychological-factsheet/>) shows that people want to work for employers with good employment practices. They also want to feel valued at work.

To be competitive, organisations need everyone who works for them to make their best contribution and be valued. Considering diversity and inclusion in its broadest sense helps organisations to develop an open and inclusive working culture.

Increasingly, employers recognise the importance of diversity and inclusion in recruiting and retaining the skills and talent they need. As well as designing appropriate and fair people practices, it's important to create open and inclusive workplace cultures in which everyone feels valued, respects colleagues, and where their contribution is recognised. See more on avoiding unconscious bias in recruitment in our report [A head for hiring \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/behaviour/recruitment-report/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/behaviour/recruitment-report/).

Market competitiveness

A diverse workforce can help to inform the development of new or enhanced products or services, open up new market opportunities, improve market share and broaden an organisation's customer base. However people need to feel they have a [voice \(https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/communication/voice-factsheet/\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/communication/voice-factsheet/) in the organisation if the benefits of different perspectives are to be realised.

Corporate reputation

Businesses need to consider [corporate responsibility \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/corporate-responsibility/factsheet/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/corporate-responsibility/factsheet/) (CR) in the context of diversity as social exclusion and low economic activity rates can limit business markets and their growth. CR used to be centred on environmental issues, but an increasing number of employers now take a wider view, seeing the overall image of an organisation as important in attracting and retaining both customers and employees.



(<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report>)

Diversity and inclusion at work: facing up to the business case (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report>)

Our report assesses the evidence on the outcomes of diversity at work, the barriers keeping inequalities in place and explores how organisations can tackle them

[Read the report \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report)

Managing diversity and inclusion

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Overcoming prejudice and changing entrenched negative attitudes about equality and diversity issues can be difficult. To progress diversity, organisations should focus on developing inclusive approaches to employment policies and practices and personal behaviours by managing equality and diversity issues in ways that also support business contexts and circumstances. Ultimately, action should be underpinned by the principles of equal opportunity, fairness and transparency. Organisations need to move from minimal compliance with legal duties. People management practices must also recognise that being inclusive goes beyond policy and ensures that everyone is valued and supported as an individual.

Our report, [Diversity and inclusion at work: facing up to the business case \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report/) highlights touchpoints in the employee lifecycle that may contain barriers to equality and practical recommendations, such as being aware of gendered job adverts that may inadvertently deter candidates from applying. [Flexible working \(https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet/\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet/) and [job design \(https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/strategy/organisational-development/job-design-factsheet/\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/strategy/organisational-development/job-design-factsheet/) are important components of diversity strategies and need careful consideration to attract and retain a wide pool of talented people into the organisation.

As well as targeted initiatives, a coherent strategy is needed to ensure that working practices across the organisation support an inclusive culture which embraces difference. The strategy needs to be supported with a well-communicated value system reflecting the importance of diversity and inclusion. All employees should be trained to understand and engage with this in the way they do their jobs and work with their colleagues.

Although there's no legal requirement to have a written diversity policy, it's a good idea to produce one to demonstrate the organisation takes its legal and moral obligations towards being a diverse employer seriously. It can also encourage employees to treat others equally.

Overall strategy

- Ensure that initiatives and policies have the support of the board and senior management.
- Remember that managing diversity and developing a culture of inclusion is a continuous process of improvement, not a one-off initiative.
- Develop a diversity strategy to support the achievement of business goals, including ways of addressing the diverse needs of customers.
- Focus on fairness and inclusion, ensuring that merit, competence and potential are the basis for all decisions about recruitment and development, and be alert to the influence of conscious and unconscious biases.
- Keep up-to-date with the law and review policies through checks, audits and consultation.
- Design guidelines and provide training for [line managers \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/hr/line-managers-factsheet/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/hr/line-managers-factsheet/) to help them respond appropriately to diversity needs, as they are vital change agents, but give them scope for flexible decision-making.
- Link diversity management to other initiatives such as Investors in People (IIP), BSI 76000 Valuing People and ISO 9001 Quality Management.
- In an organisation that operates internationally, be aware that the approach to managing diversity will need to take account of the ways that individual working styles and personal preferences are influenced by national cultures.

Workplace behaviour

- Reflect respect and dignity for all in the organisation's values and ensure these are reflected in the way the organisation and its employees operate on a daily basis.
- Aim to describe the desirable behaviours to gain positive commitment.
- Make clear that everyone has a personal responsibility to uphold the standards.
- Introduce mechanisms to deal with all forms of harassment, bullying and intimidating behaviour, making clear that such behaviour will not be tolerated and setting out the consequences of breaking the organisation's behaviour code.

Communication

- Develop an open culture with good [communication channels \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/communication/factsheet/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/communication/factsheet/) based on open dialogue and active listening.
- Ensure appropriate channels for employee voice and that different groups feel able to access them.
- Use different and accessible methods such as newsletters, in-house magazines, notice boards and intranets to keep people up to date with diversity policies and practices.
- Actively seek people's ideas and take action on feedback.

Learning and development

- Build diversity concepts and practices into staff training courses, management training and teambuilding programmes to increase awareness of the need to handle different views, perceptions and ideas in positive ways.
- Consider awareness-raising programmes, such as 'lunch and learn' sessions, about various aspects of diversity to help people appreciate difference.
- Include diversity issues in induction programmes, including raising awareness of employee network groups, so that all new employees know about the organisation's values and policies.
- Train line managers to help them understand the issues and drive their support for organisational and operational policies and practices.

Measure, review and reinforce

- Regularly audit, review and evaluate progress and keep quantitative and qualitative data to chart progress, highlight where barriers exist (for example, recruitment data) and show the positive impact of initiatives.
- Use employee surveys to evaluate initiatives, to find out if policies are working for everyone, and to provide a platform for improvement.
- Track actions to see if they have had the intended results and make appropriate changes if necessary.
- Include diversity and inclusion objectives in job descriptions and appraisals, and recognise and reward achievement. For example, staff surveys could ask questions about the team culture and whether they feel there is equality of opportunity.
- Benchmark progress against other organisations and explore what others are doing to adopt and adapt ideas where appropriate.
- Network with others from inside and outside the organisation to keep up-to-date and to share learning.

Useful contacts and further reading

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Contacts

[Acas - Equality and discrimination \(http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1363\)](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1363)

[GOV.UK - Employers: preventing discrimination \(https://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination\)](https://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination)

[Equality and Human Rights Commission \(http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/\)](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/)

[Government Equalities Office \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-equalities-office\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-equalities-office)

[The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion \(enei\) \(https://www.enei.org.uk/\)](https://www.enei.org.uk/)

[Equality and Diversity Forum \(http://www.edf.org.uk/\)](http://www.edf.org.uk/)

Books and reports

ACAS. (2014) *Delivering equality and diversity* (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=818>). Advisory booklet. London: ACAS.

BUSINESS DISABILITY FORUM. (2015) *Square holes for square pegs: current practice in employment and autism* (<http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/media-centre/news/autism-in-the-workplace-business-disability-forum-launch-new-report-on-current-practice/>). London: Business Disability Forum.

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Visit the [CIPD and Kogan Page Bookshop \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/learn/bookshop\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/learn/bookshop) to see all our priced publications currently in print.

Journal articles

JACOBS, K. (2013) Getting the right mix. *Human Resources*. August. pp22,24-27

JONES, P. (2011) What is unconscious bias? *Equal Opportunities Review*. No 215, August. pp21-24.

LEWIS, D. (2017) *Businesses expect to increase investment in diversity* (<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/experts/research/businesses-expect-increase-investment-diversity>). *PM Daily*. 8 November.

PHILLIPS, K.W., DUMAS, T.L. and ROTHBARD, N.P. (2018) Diversity and authenticity. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol 96, No 2, March-April. pp132-136. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell, issue 75* (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/nutshell/issue-75/embracing-difference/>).

CIPD members can use our [online journals \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/journals/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/journals/) to find articles from over 300 journal titles relevant to HR.

Members and *People Management* subscribers can see articles on the [People Management \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/pm/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/pm/) website.

This factsheet was last updated by Alan Beazley of The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) and by Dr Jill Miller.



The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei)

The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) is the UK's leading employer network covering all aspects of equality and inclusion in the workplace, focused on delivering high quality practical advice, products and services to our members. We seek to encourage best practice to enable organisations and people to prosper by valuing difference in the workplace.

**Dr Jill Miller: Diversity and Inclusion Adviser (Maternity leave)**

Jill joined the CIPD in 2008. Her role is a combination of rigorous research and active engagement with policy makers, academics and practitioners to inform projects and shape thinking.

She frequently presents on key people management issues, leads discussions and workshops, and is invited to write for trade press as well as offer comment to national journalists, on radio and TV. She specialises in diversity and inclusion, employee well-being, people management in SMEs and future HR trends.

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<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work>

Guides

Neurodiversity at work

<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work>

Learn more about neurodiversity, the benefits for organisations, and how to support neurodivergent people to be comfortable and successful at work

[Read more \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work)



<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/quotas-impact-report>

Reports

The impact of quotas and targets on diversity

<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/quotas-impact-report>

A discussion of the pros and cons of quotas and other affirmative action policies, reviewing evidence from politics education and the workplace

[Read more \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/quotas-impact-report\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/quotas-impact-report)



(<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/international-management>)

Factsheets

International diversity management

(<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/international-management>)

An introduction to the challenges and opportunities of managing a diverse workforce with practical guidance on effective diversity management

[Read more \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/international-management\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/international-management)



Disability Confident employer

The CIPD is a [Disability Confident Leader \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign). We work with the DWP and lead the way in changing attitudes towards disability, and to encourage all employers to provide opportunities to ensure that people with disabilities and those with long-term health conditions are able to fulfil their potential at work. We regularly review our own people practices and approaches to ensure that our workplace is as open, diverse, accessible and inclusive as possible.



Stonewall Global Diversity Champion

The CIPD is a member of Stonewall's Global Diversity Champions programme, working together to ensure that we are an LGBT+ inclusive employer and membership organisation across our UK and International communities. Our principles – work matters, people matter and professionalism matters – enshrine our belief that good work is safe and inclusive.

Stonewall and the CIPD share the vision that by embedding inclusive values, organisations can drive higher levels of wellbeing, motivation, satisfaction and productivity. Our ambition is to ensure that all of our staff and volunteers feel confident and

comfortable in bringing their whole selves to work - because people perform better when they can be themselves.

[Read: The CIPD pledges to make a positive difference to LGBT+ workers \(https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/news-articles/cipd-pledges-positive-difference-lgbt-workers\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/news-articles/cipd-pledges-positive-difference-lgbt-workers)