

# DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

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Diversity in the workplace promotes social cohesion and benefits business	Businesses are now the centre ground for inclusive cultures	Efforts to get more disabled people in work are falling short	Returners' schemes are helping mums and dads back to work



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Building a diverse UK workforce

The negative noise around Brexit has the potential to harm diversity

Accepting diversity in the workplace so men and women from all backgrounds belong together not only promotes social cohesion – it’s good for business

OVERVIEW

PETER CRUSH

For a country that has a black population of more than two million, three million Muslims and almost four million gay people, to say Britain isn’t diverse is foolish. Add the 8.3 million people who live here but were born abroad and the nearly 12 million Britons over the age of 65, collectively they comprise a nation defined as much by difference as similarity.

And yet for all this lack of homogeneity and despite all the research linking stronger profits with those organisations that embrace diversity, not a week seems to go by where one sector or another isn’t seen as diverse enough.

The legal profession in England and Wales was recently found guilty of having just 23 per cent female judges; only Armenia, Azerbaijan and Scotland were judged worse. The creative industry meanwhile has come in for criticism on racial grounds. The *2015 Creative Diversity Report* found only 11 per cent of all creative jobs are held by black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers, despite the fact a third of jobs are in London, which is 40 per cent BAME. Moreover, whole sectors are still criticised for being ageist and discriminatory towards the disabled.

So how can this be? Paradoxically, the answer may actually come from well-meaning human resources policies that aim to get the very best talent, but in doing so, perpetuate sameness. These are talent management and talent pipelining programmes that by mapping top per-

formers create a blueprint for hiring more of the same rather than looking further afield.

“The relationship between getting talent and achieving diversity is complex,” says Professor Paul Sparrow, director of the Centre for Performance-led HR at Lancaster University Management School. “In trying to meet business performance issues, HR can end up recruiting clones, which then creates organisational group-think.”

The problem, he argues, is that while business may not be overtly anti-diverse, the way these HR policies are internalised means the need for predictability around hiring in unpredictable times often wins.

Martin Day, vice principal of the London Institute of Banking and Finance, says: “Although it’s changed now, until very recently many banks tended only to recruit from Russell Group universities – the UK’s top 24 institutions – mainly because it was a convenient filtering process.”

It’s for this reason external recruitment companies are now being seen as vital challengers to clients’ business-as-usual tendencies. “If we come up with an all-male or all white shortlist, we would rightly wonder if we’ve searched hard enough,” says Sarah Galloway, consultant at executive search firm Russell Reynolds, who says she’d refuse to work with clients that didn’t look more broadly.

“Luckily, what we are finding is that if we supply candidates clients expect to see, it then earns us the right to add some more, what they might call left-field choices. And, invariably it’s these that succeed. What they bring that’s different really does shine through.”

Oxford University student and entrepreneur Nicholas Shekerdemian is developing Headstart App, an applicant-matching system that’s already received backing from Thomas Bucaille, senior vice president of HR at Ralph Lauren.

Instead of just grades, it considers a person’s personality, demographic background and things like overcoming adversity to see people better matched to jobs. “Company application forms ensure they get the same type of people applying time and again,” he says. “Our system looks at wider datasets and contextualises their achievements. Drive and commitment doesn’t just come from getting to Oxford; it can be shown by doing two jobs to support yourself through university.”

Royal Bank of Scotland, BP and Vodafone are all testing it to remove unconscious bias, but more firms are now seeing the benefits of being diverse. “Embracing diversity is absolutely our strategy,” says Ruth Grant, head of law firm Hogan Lovell’s diversity and inclusion committee. In the last few years the firm has widened its university pool and worked with

groups such as the Sutton Trust to boost its ethnic minority intake.

“We’re setting targets for women in management and, even though we’ve already hit these early, for us diversity is a serious strategic imperative. We can’t work locally without reflecting our client base. Diversity is not just about recognising people’s potential, but ensuring our business success too,” she says.

So are organisations finally turning the diversity corner? It’s still a question that draws muted response. “While it may not be an entirely new topic, it’s encouraging to see diversity, and crucially diversity of thinking, translate into a growing diverse employee base,” says Matthew Mellor, chief executive of people intelligence consultancy Armstrong Craven.

Crucially though, he and others argue the diversity debate must now move on, to go beyond whether organisations are hitting targets or numbers of certain groups of people. In fact, he argues just chasing numbers is missing the point.

Executive headhunter Ms Galloway concludes: “It’s inclusion that makes people welcome and feel like they’re able to flourish. If firms haven’t changed their culture to one that is accepting of anyone, people will quite rightly feel they’re there for the wrong reason.

“Inclusion drives belonging, which upholds retention. But you can’t have diversity without it and this is where I hope the next real progress will be made.”

“Diversity is not just about recognising people’s potential, but ensuring business success too

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# Brexit signals segregation and xenophobia

In the face of Brexit-fuelled division, businesses are now the centre ground with the commercial incentive to build inclusive cultures that can protect their brands and talent. If workers from abroad are excluded, firms should widen their recruitment to include UK minority groups where talented people have much to offer

## BREXIT

STEPHEN FROST

Whatever your view on the decision to leave the European Union, the vote itself was polarising, turning a complex set of issues and perspectives into a binary decision. The resultant political change, rather than being a steadying measure and counterweight to polarisation, has actually exacerbated it.

Since the Brexit vote, reported incidents of xenophobia have increased across Britain. The negative noise around Brexit has the potential not only to harm diversity, but also to damage the business case for difference in the first place.

The economy is perhaps the key determinant of social cohesion. Less diversity in the UK workforce could result in even lower productivity, lower resilience to shocks and higher exposure to risk. We know from history what can happen when markets crash. The pound has plunged to its lowest level in more than 30 years. During Theresa May's recent Conservative Party conference speech it depreciated further minute by minute, line by line, as a "hard" Brexit was articulated.

Exchange rate changes have made foreign travel (and cultural experiences) more expensive. There are dangers for Britain's research community with European partners dropping collaborative projects, fearful the UK won't be able to access EU funding.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found 57 per cent of employers have concerns that Brexit will significantly weaken their ability to acquire and retain skilled employees. The argument of the leavers is that British workers can now take these jobs. But this like-for-like substitution is grossly simplistic, ignoring different skillsets, geographical locations and proclivities actually to undertake the work.

In this sense the vote has not only damaged Britain's reputation as a good home to overseas workers, it could signal regression in our former progress towards more multicultural workplaces. James O'Brien, the LBC radio present-

er, compares new home secretary Amber Rudd's speech with lines from Adolf Hitler's book. "If you're going to have a sharp line of distinction between people born here and people who just work here, you're enacting chapter two of Mein Kampf. Strange times," says Mr O'Brien.

In one sense, the whole process of recruitment is a process of discrimination. We reject those we find unattractive, who we don't want to associate with, people who will lower our brand or status. But Brexit has come at a time when more than ever an organisation's recruitment efforts need to be focused on gaining the additional competitive advantage that comes from a different perspective, different thought or different background.

We also tend to recruit in our own image. Our natural tendency is to recruit people like us because they are the ones that "get it". In this sense, Brexit simply indulges our pre-existing unconscious biases. It allows us a false sense of security, comfort in being around people like us.

**A close vote has given fuel to the forces of extremism – once fringe views are now acquiring mainstream status**

If we don't create and nurture a culture where an inclusive and diverse workforce is viewed in a positive light, then the business benefits of diversity simply won't follow. The way the campaign was run, and the way it is still being conducted, is perhaps most harmful of all.

A close vote has given fuel to the forces of extremism – once fringe views are now acquiring mainstream status. To be clear, the threat to diversity comes not just from the leavers – social harm is also being inflicted by remainers too. Extreme leavers castigate remainers as a "metropolitan liberal elite" out of touch with daily life for most people. Extreme remainers query the intelligence of the leavers and whether they should have even had the right to vote on such an important topic.

The shock result has refocused attention on diversity, including widening rates of inequality in Britain. We are reminded that segregation is the default position and multiculturalism actually has to be built – it doesn't just happen.

The vote realigned party and social allegiances. Both bankers and



**Whatever your views on Brexit, it is clear that inclusive policies are now required if we are not to implode**

teachers voted to remain. Both elderly rich rural dwellers and young poor urban citizens voted to leave. In that sense it redefined party politics and reawakened civic interest.

Diversity and inclusion have now moved up the agenda. What were once fringe topics, seen as a sub-set of human resources, are now acquiring front-page status, and becoming a standing agenda item in many boardrooms and executive committees.

This new prominence is largely a result of a now burning platform for action. Whatever your views on Brexit, the US election or the European refugee crisis, it is clear that inclusive policies are now required if we are not to implode.

Empathy is required on both sides of the debate. It may be a bitter pill to swallow for left-wingers to contemplate empathy for Trump

**01** The Brexit vote was polarising and divided the nation into two very distinct camps

**02** This month's proposal by home secretary Amber Rudd to force companies to reveal how many foreign workers they employ has since been abandoned

**57%** of UK employers are concerned that Brexit will significantly weaken their ability to acquire and retain skilled employees

Source: CIPD 2016

supporters and for Brexiteers to empathise with immigrants, but that is now what is sorely needed.

Businesses are the new centre ground. They have the commercial incentive to build inclusive cultures that will help them protect not just their brands, but also their talent. They need to implement two work streams.

First, they need to redesign their systems and processes such as recruitment, promotion and marketing. Regardless of individual world view, people can act more inclusively by default through using nudges and behavioural economics to influence behaviour. For example, hiring teams, over individuals, can result in a more meritocratic and more diverse cohort.

Second, they need to embed inclusive leadership as a standard leadership competency. For example, leaders need to be aware of their in and out groups, and actively diversify the circles they move in and recruit from.

This is serious. Organisations such as Barclays, Deloitte and Tesco Bank have multicultural networks as one of their major strands of diversity. Doing nothing is not an option, unless we are willing to sit passively as segregation strengthens before us.

What's required now is leadership, a better articulation of the benefits of difference, a rediscovery of the difference all around us and then the gumption to take advantage of it.

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## COMMERCIAL FEATURE

# INSURERS NEED DIVERSITY FOR SUCCESS

*Our industry is conscious of the pressing need to establish greater diversity. At Direct Line Group we are creating true inclusiveness, leading from the top, says chief executive **Paul Geddes***



**T**he British insurance industry is highly competitive, possibly one of the most competitive markets for any financial services product. Switch on your television and you will not only see commercials from insurers trying to win your business, but also from different price comparison sites each offering easily to compare various insurers.

In competitive markets such as this, every advantage matters. I believe deeply that being a more diverse organisation can be a major benefit. Let me explain why and what we are doing about it.

Our team consists of around 10,000 people responsible for brands including Direct Line, Churchill, Privilege and Green Flag, collectively making us the leading insurer of homes and cars in the UK. Success depends upon us mastering a huge diversity of skills from car panel beaters to actuaries, empathetic front-line staff to mathematicians working out how to better model risk and fraud, and digital marketing experts to loss adjusters helping customers with claims.

When it comes to finding the best talent in the market for these various roles, it stands to reason that we would want to draw from the biggest possible pool and that is the first benefit of diversity. Just as any company would be foolish to only select people whose birth years were even numbers, for example, it needs to make sure it is drawing upon the talents of all groups and communities to broaden scope.

There is some effort required to access this full pool of talent. Insurance is an industry that tends to come with a certain “male, pale, stale” image that may put off some applicants, while some potential employees do not know anything about insurance or anyone who works in the industry.

Current demographics can perpetuate this as candidates are recruited for previous insurance experience and all too often people tend to hire in their own image. We are putting in the effort to fix this. For example, to make sure the 70 people joining our graduate programme were diverse, we worked with organisations to help us access outstanding young people from under-represented and under-served communities.

In recent years, we’ve been particularly focused on gender parity within our senior population. When hiring at more senior levels,



we have repeatedly sent back all-male candidate lists from headhunters and asked them to try harder. In most cases they have then gone on to find outstanding female candidates, whom we have ended up hiring on their merits.

We have also signed up to the government’s Women in Finance Charter. We will increase female representation in senior management to 30 per cent by the end of 2019, while specifically identifying ten talented females at middle management level who will be formally developed for their succession potential next year. We are equally focused on other aspects of diversity, such as working families, race, religion, disability and carers.

The next opportunity is to make sure we get the most from our diverse population. That means creating a culture in which different perspectives are sought and listened to, in which people do not feel compelled to fit their style or interests to a corporate stereotype and in which we try to let people flex their working life around their roles as parents or carers.

New initiatives include piloting the ability for call centre staff to answer customer inquiries from home and working with a cross-



company initiative called Creating Inclusive Cultures to identify and harness the competitive advantage of diversity and inclusion in the northern region of the UK.

We have also put in place company-wide initiatives to make sure we tap into the ingenuity of our people and get honest feedback on how we are doing. Through elected employee representatives from the front line, every three months I receive direct, personal feedback on how we are doing.

Our Ideas Lab allows anyone in the company to post ideas, have their colleagues’ support and receive a

share of the financial benefits when the idea is launched. Finally, all our front-line colleagues are trained to identify their own personality type and pick up on the personality types of our customers so they can flex their styles accordingly.



Diversity is multi-faceted and for us that means being able to be yourself across all the many subtle dimensions of identity



It is also critical to make sure our managers are up to the task. Research from The Prince’s Responsible Business Network shows that where employees have worked with an inclusive leader, more than four in five had increased performance, motivation and innovation. Managing diversity will be a core part of our three-day residential course we’re putting our thousand-plus people managers through from next year.

Mentoring is an important part of how an organisation transforms itself to become more diverse, and can be hugely beneficial for both mentee and mentor. We have several programmes running both within and outside the company. For instance, we’re participating in membership organisation OUTstanding’s mentoring programme to reach out to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community.

There are some encouraging early signs that these efforts are working. Diversity is multi-faceted and for us that means being able to be yourself across all the many subtle dimensions of identity. We’re proud that 86 per cent of our employees tell us they can bring “all of themselves” to work at Direct Line Group. Our customer numbers are growing, and they are increasingly happy with our brands and service.

These results so far give us the encouragement to keep going and to pick up the pace. We are going to stay focused on increasing the diversity in our business. Not only is it the right thing to do, but I am convinced it will also continue to help us win in our highly competitive market.

For more information please visit [www.directlinegroup.co.uk](http://www.directlinegroup.co.uk)

**TOP RIGHT**  
Paul Geddes  
Chief executive  
Direct Line Group



Bloomberg/Contributor/Getty Images

# The importance of being yourself in life and work

John Browne, Baron Browne of Madingley, best known as the former chief executive of BP, saw his career with the energy giant end in 2007 when he was outed by a tabloid newspaper as gay – his third book, *The Glass Closet*, carries the subtitle *Why Coming Out Is Good Business*

## Q&A

EDWIN SMITH

**Q** In *The Glass Closet* you argue that running a company embracing diversity and inclusion is not just the moral thing to do, it's good business as well. Why?

**A** Many long-running studies show companies that have inclusion as a fundamental part of their leadership have great engagement of teams. And engaged teams produce abnormal returns, over and above those of average companies. On average, it's about 2 per cent [more] profitability a year, so 20 per cent over ten years. That's tough to get any other way.

The second thing is that being inclusive allows you to recruit a diverse set of people, which means you get a better array of people. You get the best of the best and you also get diverse thinking, which stops companies from operating in a bubble.

**Q** You make the point that when it comes to race and gender, issues of diversity and inclusivity are more visible. With lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, the issues

might be harder to spot. Does this mean some companies fail to realise what they're missing out on?

**A** More and more companies are understanding what they're missing out on and why this is important, but not everybody. And it's been a long time in the coming. If you look at gender, I remember at the start of my career, I don't think there were any women's toilets on the board floor. Over 50 years it's

“Attitudes take time to change, but I would say that the glass is half full

got better, but it hasn't reached the point where it's satisfactory. LGBT inclusion is behind that. After all, the law didn't change until '67 in this country and attitudes took a much, much longer time to shift – so much so that we only recently had gay marriage.

I also think there is a lack of role models. If you say to someone “Be yourself at work”, they might say “That's great; I'd love to, but who's

been out and gay, and become a CEO?” Then you have to scratch your head – there's only one at the moment and that's Tim Cook of Apple. That's very unusual because you'd think in the top 500 companies in the world – on average let's say 5 per cent of the population is gay – why wouldn't you expect 25 chief executives to be gay? So either 24 are still in the closet or there's been something odd about the selection.

**Q** When Tim Cooke came out publicly, what was your reaction?

**A** I was delighted. I thought it was a very important move because he crossed a threshold. When you're in a leadership position, you can't say that your private life is private. Actually you're owned and shared by your organisation, and you should demonstrate yourself to be a role model and a leader in all aspects. I was outed and then I resigned from BP because of the circumstances around that. I wish I'd come out earlier, but that was then and this is now.

**Q** How much have things changed during your career?

**ABOVE** Lord John Browne says companies misunderstand the business case for diversity

**A** It's changed a lot now. In this country, passing the legislation for gay marriage was a remarkable watershed. It puts everyone on a level playfield. So there are many parts of society where attitudes have changed and it's much easier to be yourself. But it's more difficult in institutional life – corporations tend to be very conservative. I remember being interviewed by a well-known bank after publishing my book and the interviewer had interviewed me for 20 minutes or half an hour without once using the word “gay”. It's because it was very difficult to talk about it, and you have to respect and understand that. So attitudes take time to change, but I would say that the glass is half full.

**Q** If there are LGBT chief and senior executives at the top of large organisations who aren't yet out, what would you say to them?

**A** Well I can't give advice because it would be general advice for something that's very personal. But I hope they will, at some stage in their life, come out. It would be really deeply tragic not to be yourself, at least

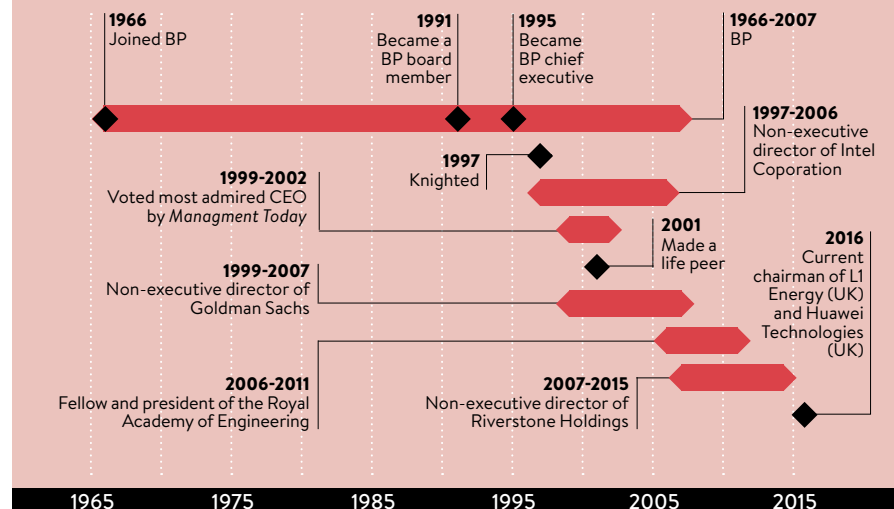
at some stage. But life is long, so you can pick your time. It would be great if they came out while they are still chief executives, but they have to reconcile themselves with their family, with their surroundings and probably also with this point – that having lived a life where they haven't said they're gay, does it create a challenge to their authenticity?

**Q** What about the idea that people's private lives are just that – private? It's the “don't ask, don't tell” approach. Does it fall short in your view?

**A** Sort of. I think a lot of people like to behave like that: “Whatever you do in your private life is none of my business.” But, actually, that never is the case. When straight people get together, they do talk about their families and they do talk about what they did at the weekend, they do have photographs of their nearest and dearest around them. So, if you're gay and you're excluded from that, you really are excluded, and life is very tough.

**Q** As a senior manager within a business, what can you do?

## LORD JOHN BROWNE CAREER HIGHLIGHTS 1966-2016





**A** The most important thing is for the tone to be set from the top. Every single day, the signal has to be out that inclusion is a fundamental plank of the leadership – from the chief executive and the senior people. They have to say it; they have to insist on it. And anything which is not inclusive should be instantly dealt with and normally punished. Bigotry, exclusion – there can be no approximation here. None.

Secondly, they need to get everybody in the organisation who's a manager to have time on their agenda to talk to people, to explain why it's important to be inclusive and why they want people to be themselves. Thirdly, you have to measure the attitudes – what are people really thinking? And fourthly, you have to help people because everybody has an unconscious bias. It's a human thing that everyone has an irrational bias towards something, even if it's something trivial.

**Q** Lots of large corporate companies have a presence at Gay Pride events, with banners and staff wearing branded T-shirts, but it can feel as though this is a one-off, that they don't pin those same colours to the mast with the same enthusiasm at other times. Do you think some are guilty of "pink-washing"?

**A** You can never tell. I think that it's better than nothing. But it's nothing like enough. So the test is: how are they doing internally? Are they actually worrying about this? Is the chief executive talking about LGBT inclusion? Are they asking their managers to allocate time to do this? Do they have the right networks? Do they have straight allies in the networks or is it just a ghetto of LGBT people? Are they teaching people about how to drive out bias? And, finally, are they applying the same standards to their suppliers as they are to themselves? That's actually a very big test.

You ask your supplier of potatoes, whether they've thought about how they're dealing with LGBT people – do they have a policy, does it work and do they take it seriously? And if they say "no" then what do you do? Stop buying the potatoes or say it doesn't matter? That where the test is. If they pass those tests, then I think having T-shirts is a great idea.

**Q** You've said in the past you regret telling your lawyers the version of events you did – that you met your former partner jogging in Battersea Park. But, when an injunction against the newspaper story failed because of that, it also began a chain of events which has resulted in you doing what you're doing today. So, do you still regret it or do you think things have worked out for the best?

**A** Who knows? It's a very interesting question – the question of hidden hands. But I deeply regret telling that lie. Many people said it was the sort of thing anyone would do. Nevertheless, I hold myself to a pretty high standard. I corrected it pretty quickly, but it was a bad error of judgment. Mind you, it was an error of judgment to have met [Jeff] Chevalier the way that I did, through an escort site, and it was an even worse error of judgment to believe that it could have been converted into a relationship. So the whole thing was bad.



Bigotry, exclusion – there can be no approximation here. None

I was convinced I had to leave BP. When I resigned there was no doubt because I thought the [consequences] would be damaging to BP and I just wanted to stop it. I left thinking I would leave behind all my friends – that no one would speak to me. And, of course, exactly the reverse happened. People stopped me on the street, shook my hand and said "We're right behind you". I started a new life, which has been enormously refreshing. I did a very different set of things and I met a lot of very interesting people. So, in some ways, maybe it was, what do they say? "Written in the book before it happened" – who knows? But it has been an extraordinary journey.

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Lord Browne says Apple's Tim Cook is among the few well-known business leaders who are openly gay

## COMMERCIAL FEATURE



# CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE WITH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

*Literacy support software helps create inclusive digital workplaces, supporting people with dyslexia and other disabilities to reach their full potential*



Effective communications are at the core of every successful organisation – with clients and also within the organisation itself. Colleagues should be able to communicate with one another with ease. However, more than one in ten people in the UK are affected by dyslexia and other conditions that impair their ability to read and write effectively in the workplace.

Dyslexia is known as a hidden disability, and many with it conceal their condition from their employers, fearing stigma and prejudice. They develop their own coping strategies where there is no workplace support, working longer hours or getting family members to help. This is stressful, often resulting in increased absenteeism, low morale and reduced productivity. It makes good economic sense for employers to help staff with hidden conditions, with the use of assistive technology (AT).

For Texthelp, which specialises in the provision of literacy support software, ensuring each employee is supported in the workplace is of paramount importance. Established in 1996, it works with leading technology companies, including Google and Microsoft, to provide literacy support solutions to public, private and voluntary-sector organisations worldwide. It is Google's Technology Partner of the Year 2016.

Texthelp's easy-to-use support technologies can help everyone read and write with confidence and independence. Jacqui Burns, Texthelp's lead on diversity and inclusion, explains its ethos. "We believe that effective communication – reading and writing –

is our passport to academic, social and professional success," she says.

Ms Burns encourages organisations to create inclusive digital workplaces where AT is openly available for all staff to use. "AT benefits everyone by enabling people to work smarter, processing information in their preferred style and format, from audio to mind maps to tinted screens," she says.

"AT is an enabler to help us all improve our efficiency and quality of work; additionally it benefits colleagues on the neurodiverse spectrum, including those with dyslexia or English language challenges, people with mild visual impairment or eye fatigue."

She stresses the importance of technology being available for the whole organisation. "It's important to normalise the use of assistive technology. Nobody wants to stand out as having different software and our technology helps everyone work smarter," says Ms Burns.

Texthelp emphasises the need for support to be available right from the start of the online recruitment process, which must be made more accessible. Digital inclusion software, such as Texthelp's product Browsealoud, can read web pages out loud and translate the information into multiple languages, both written and audio, making online content much more accessible. Texthelp's software also offers intuitive and advanced spellcheckers and word prediction, to help users create error-free text quickly and effectively.

Ms Burns says: "AT can completely change people's lives, helping them

reach their full potential. One fireman, struggling to pass promotion exams because of his dyslexia, eventually admitted his condition to his boss. With our software in place, he's achieved multiple promotions and is now writing fire safety policy at a national level."

She also recalls an urgent call from ITV, which needed AT software to convert text to audio, to help actors learn their lines for *Coronation Street*.

UK organisations driving workplace inclusion include many health organisations, such as NHS England, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital, also Network Rail, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Wirral Council and Transport for London, as well as other organisations in national and local government. Organisations such as ITV, BBC and GCHQ increasingly seek to recruit people with neurodiversity, recognising the valuable skills they offer.

The bottom line profits too. A recent report from the British Assistive Technology Association found that 78 per cent of organisations providing AT reported improved productivity and up to 50 per cent reduction in sickness absence across the workplace. It's a win-win for everyone says Ms Burns. She concludes: "Create an inclusive workforce by putting support technology in place – you'll have happier, more productive staff, while cutting absence and workplace assessment costs."

For more information please visit [www.texthelp.com](http://www.texthelp.com)

# Closing the disability employment gap

Despite government and other initiatives, efforts to get more disabled people in work are falling short of official targets which increasingly appear difficult to meet

## DISABILITY AND JOBS

KATHARINE QUARMBY

The government has a bold target – to halve the 33 per cent employment gap between disabled and non-disabled workers by 2020. Government estimates suggest this would mean that over one million more disabled people would have to enter the workforce, out of around seven million disabled people of working age, with over three million already in work.

The Learning and Work Institute, a think-tank, has estimated that at the current rate it would take 200 years, rather than a little over three, to completely close the gap. Melanie Jones, a professor at Cardiff Business School, who has studied disability and the workplace, is cautious too. “If you look at historical trends, the disability gap has not been narrowing to the extent that it will halve without large-scale intervention,” she says.

Three organisations offer some answers about what barriers impede progress. The Business Disability Forum (BDF) works closely with larger employers, as well as in partnership with PurpleSpace, which supports disability employee networks. Purple, a new organisation bringing disabled people and business together, aims to offer bespoke advice to employers and disabled employees.

Purple’s recent research found that some 45 per cent of UK businesses are nervous about hiring a disabled person, citing concerns about the interview process, not knowing whether to help with tasks such as opening doors or pulling out chairs, and falling foul of discrimination law. Despite the latter fact, most in the sector say legal sanctions are largely ineffective in boosting employment.

There is some good practice, of course, with many larger companies and public-sector employers accounting for around 20 per cent of the entire UK workforce, working in partnership with the BDF to boost employment opportunities. However, some 60 per cent of the labour force in the private sector, according to the government, is employed in smaller and medium-sized enterprises, and although many acknowledge the importance of closing the gap, some lack the structures and know-how to do so.

A disproportionate number of disabled people are also self-employed, according to the Office for National Statistics, but some disabled entrepreneurs say barriers around funding for reasonable adjustments and benefit payment strictures during their startup period hinder their earning power and career progression.

Job retention is seen as key to closing the gap. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, only a minority of people (17 per cent) are born with impairment; most acquire impairment during their working life. Employers need to have the know-how to keep them in work.

Think-tank the Resolution Foundation has found that disabled people who have been out of work for over a year see their odds of returning to employment reduced at twice the rate of non-disabled people. Professor Jones says: “Early intervention before they leave the labour market would offer possible gains, before people become detached from work.”

The government acknowledges more needs to be done, and is carrying out a consultation that will lead to a green paper on improving disability employment and health.

There has been increased scrutiny of the government’s strategy, in particular of the Access to Work programme, administered by the Department for Work and Pensions, which supports disabled workers with funding for adjustments that employers could not be reasonably expected to meet. In addition, the Disability Confident initiative was launched in 2013 to encourage companies to employ more disabled people.

Both could do more, and many disability experts add that the welfare reform agenda, with its stricter eligibility criteria and testing regime, as well as some actual cuts, for disability benefits, has hindered rather than helped disabled people to get work.

Purple, headed by Mike Adams, builds on its legacy as a former user-led organisation. It is promoting both pre-work and job progression measures, including a “boot camp” for disabled people, getting them work-ready. Mr Adams says he wants to change attitudes of some disabled people seeing themselves as “vulnerable adults whose only purpose is to maintain welfare benefits”. He says: “I stand full square behind resisting any attempts to radically change the benefits system, but the narrative Purple is trying to progress is that disabled people in their own right are consumers and a talent pool waiting to be exploited.”

Mr Adams also chaired the government’s expert panel on Access to Work in 2013. He wants it to go further. “My view is that an explosion in its use would demonstrate that their target of halving the employment gap is serious,” he adds. The government, however, has only promised to expand the scheme to reach 60,000 people – a tiny proportion of the one million-plus workers needed to halve the disability gap.

George Selvanera, BDF strategy and external affairs director, wants the government to provide bespoke advice to employers hiring disabled people, which could be part and parcel of a reformed Access to Work package.

Disability Confident has also come in for criticism. Mr Selvanera says: “It needs scaling up. Our disability standard was developed in 2004 and represents best practice so companies know how to make changes across the whole organisation. Disability Confident has a much narrower focus on recruitment and retention. You can get level two in Disability Confident [accreditation] without having any disabled staff.”

He adds: “Government should show, not tell. It has 400,000 employees – can they demonstrate to UK plc that they have made the changes to be a Disability Confident employer and they are recruiting substantially higher proportions

of disabled people?” The Leonard Cheshire Disability charity has established that only 8.9 per cent of civil servants have a disability.

Mr Adams, for his part, supports a more rigorous Disability Confident offer, with an external assessment process for the highest level of compliance. Purple will work with employers to get approval at all levels. “For all the criticism, it’s the best thing out there. I can see value in it and by Purple working with business, on its accreditation scheme, we can maximise that value,” he says.

It has partnered with the London Stock Exchange, which will support Disability Confident and go through its new accreditation process. Lynne Chambers, group head of talent at the London Stock Exchange Group, says: “We will challenge ourselves to go forward through the levels, with Purple’s support. We are conscious of our role, leading the way and taking these bold steps.”

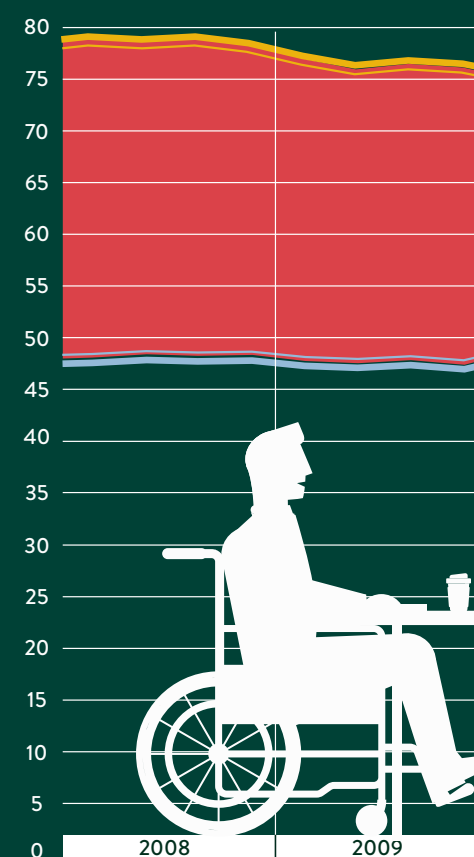
PurpleSpace boosts peer support networks, which many experts see as key to retaining talented, disabled staff within the workplace. Kate Nash, its creator, says networks are the start of “a better conversation” in the workplace between employers and employees. “We are seeing some signs of change, because disabled people and companies are more prepared now to share their stories of success,” she says.

Alison Unsted, head of global diversity at law firm Hogan Lovells, also stresses the importance of employee networks, which can encourage job retention and progression, as well as provide role models. “Our networks celebrate, educate and raise awareness of difference,” she says. But Ms Unsted counsels that raising the proportion of self-declared disabled employees is tricky, partly because of the perceived stigma of disability.

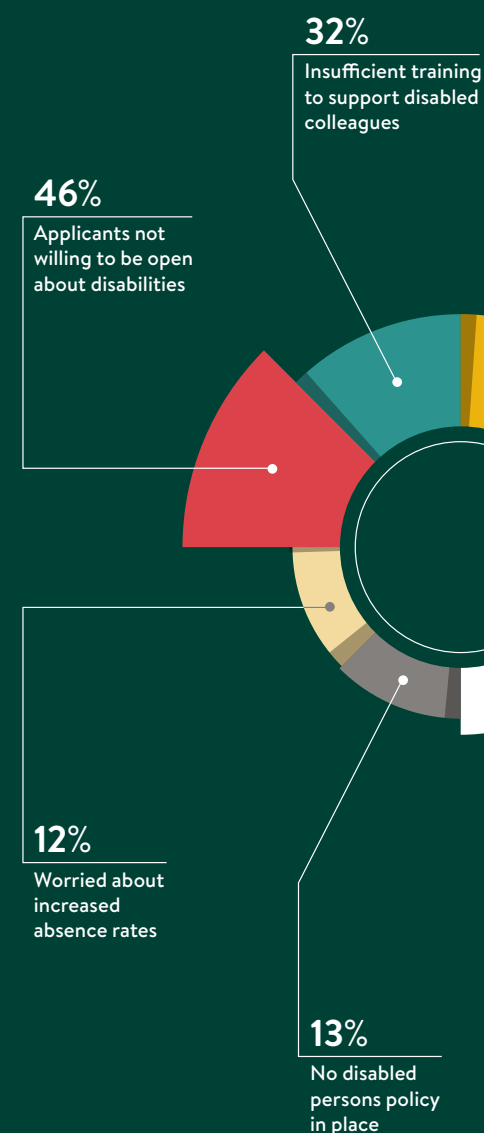
Mr Selvanera concludes that the government should help transform such attitudes, supporting companies in the process. “The government would need to put some money into a big communications campaign,” he says. “Changing attitudes requires pump-priming and that is not part of the measures in place.”

## CHALLENGE

### EMPLOYMENT RATE FOR DISABLED AND



### TOP CHALLENGES FACED BY EMPLOYERS



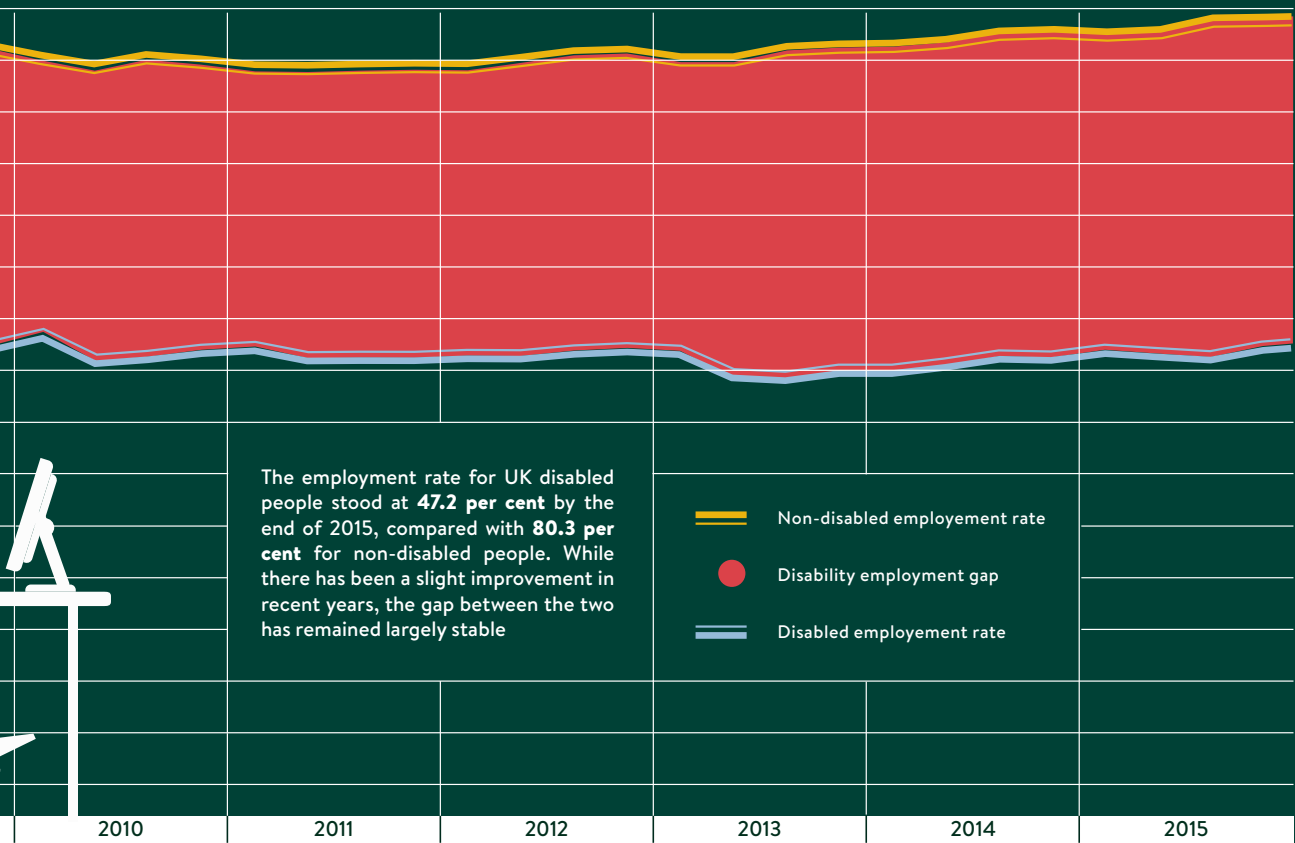
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# ING THE STATUS QUO

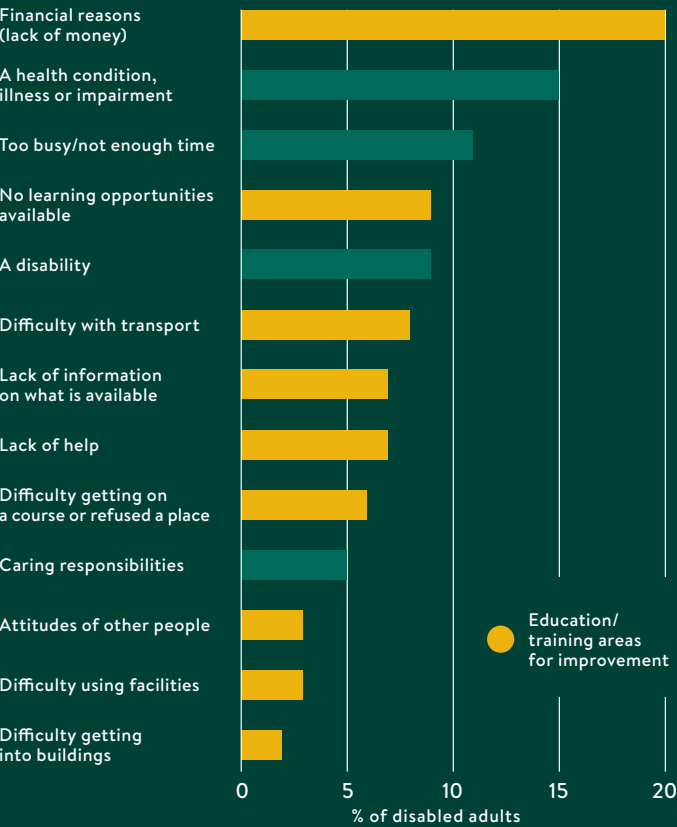
The government's target to halve the UK disability employment gap – currently at 33.1 percentage points – by 2020 would require more than one million disabled workers entering the workforce. However, people with different disabilities still experience varying problems and discrimination in finding employment. And according to the Trades Union Congress, under current rates of change, this target is not likely to be met until 2030

## NON-DISABLED WORKERS 2008-2015



Source: TUC analysis of Labour Force Survey 2016, Office for National Statistics (ONS)

## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR WORKING-AGE ADULTS WITH IMPAIRMENTS

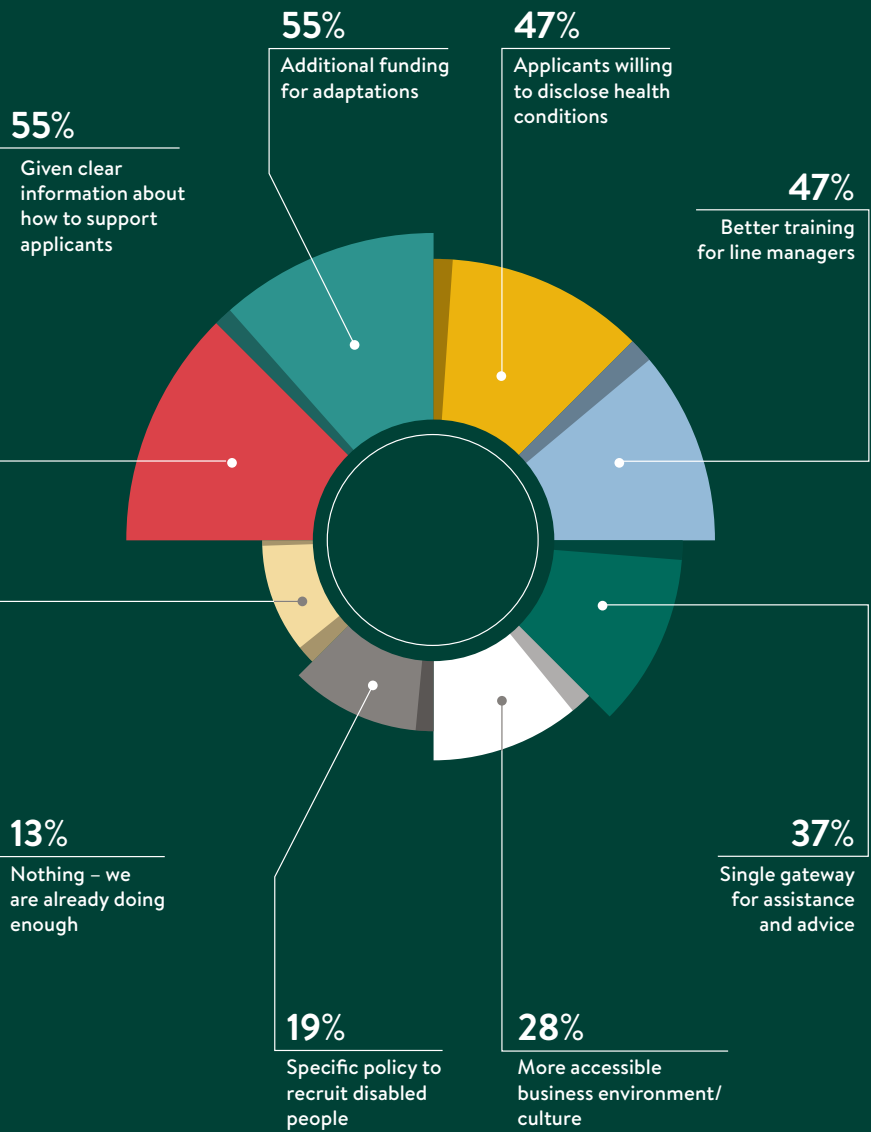


Source: ONS

## RS TO DISABILITIES AT WORK

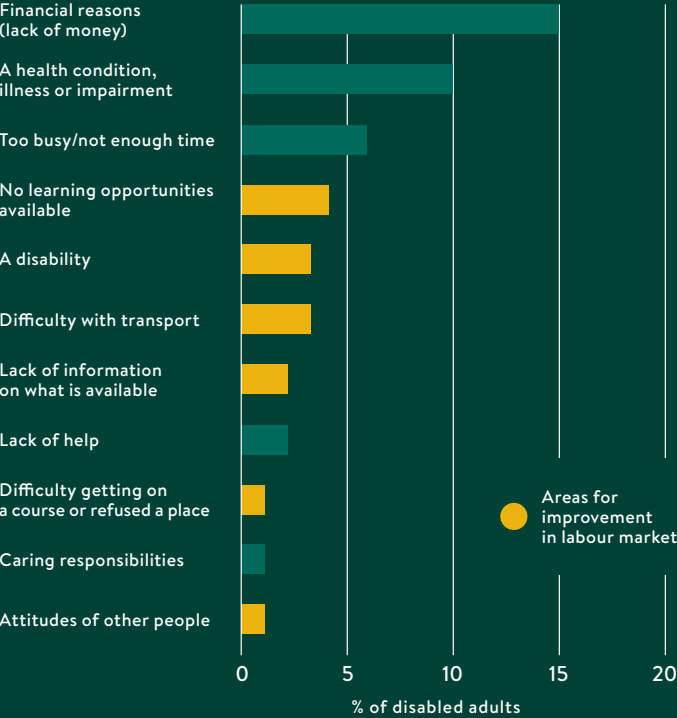


## FACTORS HELPING BUSINESSES EMPLOY MORE DISABLED PEOPLE



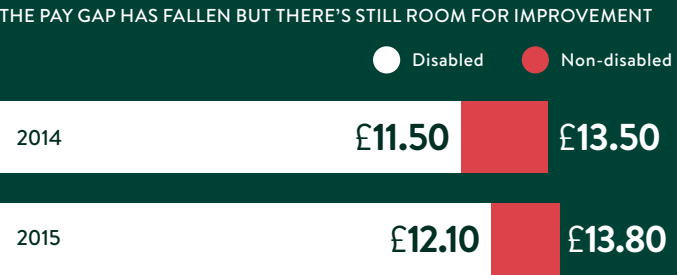
Source: Reed in Partnership/Disability Rights UK 2016

## BARRIERS TO WORK FOR EMPLOYED WORKING-AGE ADULTS



Source: ONS

## AVERAGE GROSS HOURLY PAY FOR DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED ADULTS



Source: TUC analysis of Labour Force Survey 2016, ONS





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# Levelling the playing field of opportunity

Social mobility should be addressed by rejecting elitist notions and focusing on all-round individual achievement

**SOCIAL MOBILITY**  
CHARLOTTE SWEENEY

**S**ocial mobility sits at the heart of prime minister Theresa May's commitment to create "a country that works for everyone" by improving movement across social positions and addressing elitism. For employment, this means no one should be prevented from fulfilling their potential purely because of where they were born, the school they went to or the jobs their parents do.

Recent figures from the Social Mobility Commission show that in the UK 7 per cent of children attend fee-paying schools. However, the Sutton Trust found that in 2014, 34 per cent of new entrants into investment banking over the previous three years had attended a fee-paying school. The picture is similar in other professions – 71 per cent of top military officers, 74 per cent of top judges and 61 per cent of the country's top doctors attended fee-paying schools.

The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions released a report on the opportunities available as well as highlighting the pragmatic and practical steps employers could take. Even with this, progress is slow. In law, there has been a 2 per cent shift in the last 30 years of those educated in independent schools, from 76 per cent in the 1980s to the 74 per cent we see today. Of current FTSE chief executives, 34 per cent were educated at independent schools compared with 70 per cent in the late-1980s, partly due to the internationalisation of top posts.

Employers pride themselves on being true meritocracies – hiring the best person for the job – but there is too much reliance placed on academic qualifications and where they were achieved?

Some will argue that good qualifications from an impressive university, such as Oxford or Cambridge, will result in hiring the best, however there is much more required to building a successful career such as a good work ethic, resilience and interpersonal skills. Assessing talent by academic success alone is a blunt and lazy screening tool, and is not a clear-cut indicator of future success or potential.

As one boss says: "I would rather have someone on my team who is determined and has had to work hard for everything they have achieved than someone who has had it all handed to them on a plate."



Gary Burchell/Getty Images

A small number of businesses are taking note, with some working together to drive change. The Cabinet Office created the Social Mobility Business Compact with the aim for all supporting companies to work with schools to raise the aspirations of young people, provide fair, accessible and high-quality work experience and internship opportunities, and recruit fairly and ensure their recruitment practices eliminate barriers to social mobility.

As a result, EY removed academic qualifications from its trainee application process for graduates, undergraduates and school leavers. They are no longer required to comply with achieving a minimum of

number of commitments including specifically targeting work experience at school-age students who have the least opportunity to access it otherwise, provide financial assistance to ensure they can attend work experience and maintain contact with the firm after work experience has ended. PRIME exceeded their initial aim by providing high-quality work experience for almost 4,000 young people and has raised awareness of the legal profession. However, a recent review showed that more needed to be done to maintain contact between the law firms and those taking part in the work experience.

Specific steps taken by some of the law firms include, Hogan Lovells, a founding member of PRIME, offering bursaries to those interested in a career in law. The aim is give students from less privileged backgrounds an insight into the legal profession and demonstrate how they could achieve a career in law.

Pinsent Masons have taken a step closer to schools and developed a structured school work experience programme open to students who are at least 16 years old and studying towards either AS or A-levels or equivalent qualifications. These opportunities enable students to experience life at a top law firm and broaden their horizons. Nearly a quarter of their annual placements are allocated to students from less privileged backgrounds.

An increasing number of professions offer internship opportunities. Historically, in some industries there are examples where these were offered as a goodwill gesture to the children of high-revenue clients rather than an opportunity actively to seek out a wider pool of potential talent. Organisations such as ratemyplacement.



Assessing talent by academic success alone is a blunt and lazy screening tool, and is not a clear-cut indicator of future success or potential

300 UCAS points. Instead they conduct a number of online strengths assessments and numerical tests to assess the potential of their applicants. To ensure the assessments were measuring the key elements required for people to succeed in EY and drive the business forward, surveys were conducted with key stakeholders across all business areas to hone critical assessment.

In 2011, the legal profession launched PRIME, a programme to tackle social mobility in the sector. To date 89 firms have signed up to a



co.uk are creating more transparency around internships and raising awareness far wider than the closed contacts of parents who may have a social network that enables them to access entry routes to sectors such as insurance and investment banking.

Employers such as the Bank of England and Morgan Stanley post intern opportunities on their websites. People who have completed an internship with the companies are also able to post honest feedback about their experience, which really opens the door on what it's like to work inside these organisations.

Focusing on increasing transparency, removing barriers and bias from recruitment processes, and broadening the reach much wider into wider communities are all important factors for increasing social mobility for those who decide to stay in full-time education and progress to university.

However, they are not the only solutions as there is a wider pool of talent who will decide to leave full-time education at the earliest opportunity for a number of reasons. Given the increased government focus on apprenticeships and the imminent implementation of the apprenticeship levy in the UK, companies are increasingly assessing how they can attract a broad pool of talent via apprenticeship programmes.

Placing vocational learning on an equal footing with academic courses is an important tool for meeting future skill requirements across the UK. Direct Line is one company that has taken the apprenticeship route seriously as an alternative for talented people to get noticed by employers. Their programme enables people to gain valuable work experience and a recognised qualification without the longer-term

burden of university tuition fees.

Social mobility is a complex issue that can't be remedied with quick-fix activities, but this isn't going to go away or remedy itself. For organisations to widen their horizons and increase the potential pool of talented individuals for their organisations, the following three points are a good place to start.

Firstly, broaden access points into the organisation – talent comes in all shapes and sizes and talented people don't all go to university. Ask how you can access those who choose to start their careers without completing the university years. Secondly, remove information on a candidate's educational background from the recruitment and promotions process to neutralise any bias towards particular institutions. Challenge qualification requirements on job roles. Ask are they absolutely necessary for every role? And thirdly, understand your numbers, and identify how you can collect and monitor information about social and educational background.

Creating sustainable change begins with knowing your starting point.

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CREATING INCLUSIVE CULTURES



Creating a company culture that attracts and retains people from diverse backgrounds is increasingly on the business agenda for many senior leaders. Taking action to open up opportunities to individuals from socially diverse backgrounds is also vital if businesses are going to access untapped talent.

However, how often does that commitment visibly leave head office and impact those across the wider organisation in a meaningful way?

To create a workplace that “works for everyone”, a critical factor is to ensure everyone is included in the discussions and feel they have made a

contribution to the outcomes. Although many companies focus on finding out what other companies are doing, one element that is often missing is communicating with their own employees, to really hear their views.

It is important to remember that one size does not fit all and what is critical in London may not be the key issues across the rest of the UK. For example, employment opportunities and expectations are different from city to city and how an organisation tackles that may be different in Manchester, and different again in Birmingham.

To respond to the challenge, a business forum called Creating Inclusive Cultures (CIC) brings organisations together within their own cities to work together on developing diversity and inclusion strategies that create high-performing teams. CIC has already launched in Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, and will continue to broaden their reach across the UK in 2017.

COMMERCIAL FEATURE

MOST PEOPLE WANT FLEXIBLE WORKING

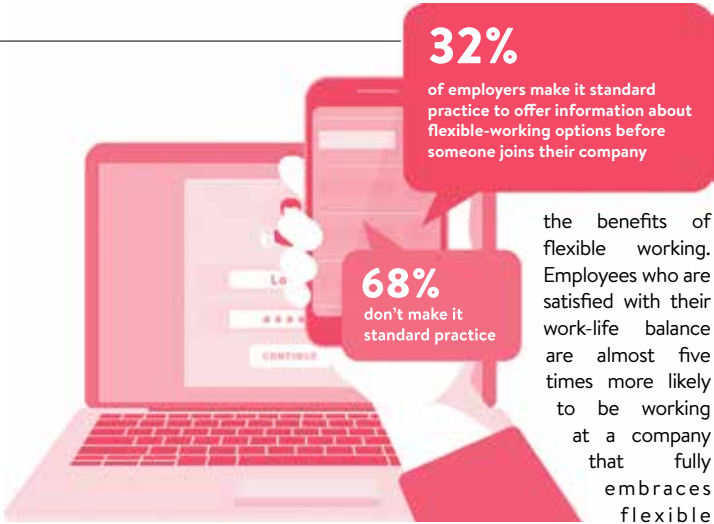
More than 80 per cent of employees look for flexible working before joining a company

Employees would rather work flexibly than have a salary increase, according to My Family Care's research in partnership with global recruitment experts Hydrogen. The survey of 1,587 UK employees and 310 employers found that 53 per cent of employees would choose flexible working over a 5 per cent salary increase. This figure is even higher for working parents and carers with 58 per cent willing to sacrifice a 5 per cent pay rise for the chance to work flexibly.

Flexible working is in such high demand that it's the top benefit that people look for when considering a new role, far surpassing other benefits such as an enhanced pension scheme, the survey found. An overwhelming 81 per cent of employees would look for flexible working options before joining a company.

“Give your employees a bit of flexibility, some practical support and some cultural empathy, and they will be some of the most loyal and productive members of any team,” says Ben Black, director of My Family Care, an award-winning provider of family-friendly employer solutions to the some of the UK's best employers, from banks and City law firms to big multinationals.

The findings also highlight a significant disconnect between the high numbers of people wanting to work flexibly and the low numbers of employers who embrace it. More than half of the UK's working population



want the opportunity to work remotely or from home, but just a third were encouraged to do so, with many feeling a constant stigma around it.

The research found that 54 per cent of all employees want to work remotely or from home at least once a week yet only 34 per cent actually do. The desire for flexible working is not simply the preserve of working parents and carers, although it's the practical need of this group that dominate the headlines

The results also reveal the disconnect between the hours that people work and want to work. While just over a third of people have flexible start and finish times, almost double this number said they wanted the same flexibility.

The research confirms that both employees and employers believe in

More than half of employers believe that employees would be less stressed if working flexibly and 92 per cent of employers think those who work flexibly are just as, if not more, productive than those who work regular hours.

Despite these benefits, some employees are reluctant to ask for flexible working. Some of the barriers stopping employees from asking for flexible working include a fear of their line manager's reaction, a company culture that isn't supportive of flexible working and a potentially negative impact on their careers.

The results show that some employers genuinely understand the benefits reaped from offering flexible working with almost two-thirds of employers believing that employees would be more loyal and much more likely to stick around longer if allowed to work flexibly. Yet there is a dichotomy here. Only a third of employers raise the topic of flexible working during the interview process and only 6 per cent detail the options that are available on their company's website. Employers clearly still have much work to do to promote flexible working to talent.

And flexible working will become even more crucial in the future, particularly when it comes to the retention of talented employees, the research found. More than half the employees surveyed believe it will be more challenging for organisations to retain staff if they don't offer flexible working. Employers will lose their competitive advantage if they fail to offer and promote flexible working to their employees.

The full report is available for download, and employers, human resources and diversity professionals can also sign up for webinars to hear from leading employers discussing the research as well as their own success and challenges of flexible working.

TOP FOUR POLICIES AND BENEFITS LOOKED FOR BEFORE JOINING A NEW COMPANY

Parents of preschool and primary children

1	2	3	4
Flexible working options	Enhanced pension scheme	Parent and carer benefits and policies	Commission /bonus
86%	32%	30%	26%

Carers

1	2	3	4
Flexible working options	Enhanced pension scheme	Parent and carer benefits and policies	Private healthcare insurance
81%	31%	27%	24%

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# Now it’s time to recruit talent at the school gate

Programmes to help women return to work after a career break are an important part of an organisation’s diversity strategy

Ms Miles says returnships provide women – and men – with a period “to get back up to speed with their knowledge and skills, and to rebuild their professional identity, which they may have lost”. While for businesses, it gives a “try before you buy” period.

Information collated by Women Returners shows the returnship trend is growing and spreading to the law, banking, telecoms and construction sectors.

Three UK programmes ran in 2014 and this has risen to 23 this year, at companies including J.P. Morgan, Skanska and Tideway. They are no longer confined to London, but are seeping into the regions. KPMG run programmes in Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow.

Last year Deloitte launched a pilot 12-week programme for eight prospective returners. It was such a success, with five employed in the company at the end of it, that it has more than doubled the size of this year’s cohort to 17.

“There is a lot of untapped talent standing at the school gate – highly talented women looking to get back into the workforce,” says Emma Codd, Deloitte’s managing partner for talent.

In family-friendly fashion, the programme begins after the end of the school summer holidays and gives participants the week off over half term.

The company has increased the programme to 20 weeks, says Ms Codd, at the end of which there is viable role for every returner.

She says the firm was inundated with applications and Ms Codd hopes it will run annually as part of the recruitment process.

Companies offering returnships, says Lisa Unwin, co-founder of She’s Back, an organisation that supports women returners, reap the benefits of increased diversity, not only from a gender perspective. They gain mature and experienced employees who, having stepped out of the corporate world, return with a wider and fresher perspective.

Returners, she adds, also provide younger women with realistic role models, who demonstrate that it is possible to return to senior positions and combine it with family life.

Telecoms company O2 launched a Career Returners’ Programme this year, as part of its drive to increase diversity. Human resources director Ann Pickering explains why diversity is essential for consumer-facing industries. “We have 25 million diverse customers,” she says. “It is important that we have a workforce who reflect that.”

But Ms Pickering and Ms Codd are clear that companies need more than a returner programme; they must have an holistic diversity strategy across the business. “Returnships are not the whole solution, but one piece of the jigsaw,” says Ms Pickering.

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RETURNSHIPS  
CATHERINE BAKSI

In the drive to hire and retain top talent, businesses are waking up to the idea of tapping into the “talent at the school gate” – high-calibre women looking to return to the workforce after a career break to care for their children.

Women remain under-represented in senior posts and on corporate boards. Research from executive search firm MWM Consulting shows that less than 10 per cent of executive directors at FTSE 100 companies are female.

Female attrition is caused largely due to a lack of flexible working arrangements, which make it difficult for mothers to return to work after a break, particularly in sectors where promotion is based on years since qualification.

Research from an American university shows that managers would rather hire a less qualified candidate over one who has been out of work for more than six months.

Unsurprisingly, this has caused many to fear taking a career break. A survey from the London

Business School reveals that 70 per cent of women in business feel anxious about it.

Where they do take time out and return, the Institute of Fiscal Studies shows that women earn a third less than their male colleagues, and a survey by the Equality and Human Rights Commission of 3,200 working mums found that three-quarters experienced bias.

But businesses overlook the skills of potential returners at their peril. A link is emerging between in-

“Returnships are paid, supported programmes of work, mentoring and networking designed to be a stepping stone for those looking to jump back aboard the corporate bus

creased gender diversity and that all-important bottom line.

A PwC report released earlier this year suggests that increasing female participation in the UK labour force could add £170 billion to the economy and boost GDP by 9 per cent.

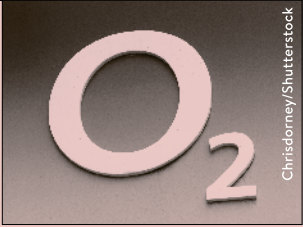
A separate report from McKinsey & Company states that for every 10 per cent increase in gender diversity in the UK, earnings before interest and tax rises by 3.5 per cent.

Returnships, a concept pioneered by Goldman Sachs in the United States in 2008, offer a mutually beneficial solution. They are paid, supported programmes of work, mentoring and networking designed to be a stepping stone for those looking to jump back aboard the corporate bus.

The idea is taking off on this side of the Atlantic. Julianne Miles, co-founder of Women Returners, which launched in the UK in 2014 to link FTSE 250 companies with prospective employees, explains that the challenge for someone who has had an extended career break is their “CV gap” makes them a risky candidate for businesses, however talented they are.



## CASE STUDY: O2



Earlier this year, telecoms giant O2 set itself the challenge of luring back to work the untapped pool of talent who had taken a career break to bring up their children. The move is part of O2’s wider efforts to encourage more women into science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and improve workplace diversity.

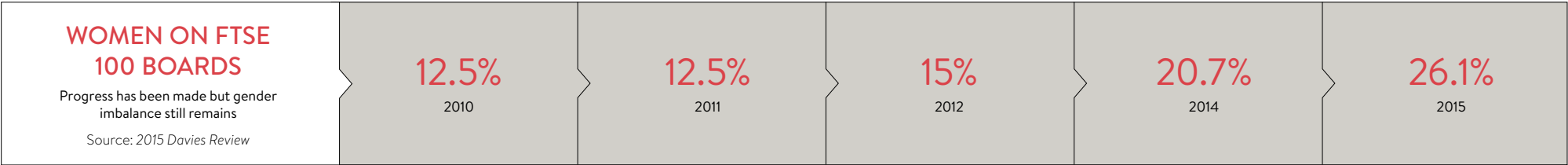
In partnership with Women Returners, it launched a Career Returners’ Programme, open to women, and so men, who had taken a break from two-and-a-half to ten years.

Twelve women joined the 11-week programme, at the end of which eight secured senior positions at O2 and two found jobs elsewhere.

Paula McAleavey, a 40-plus mother of two, had spent 17 years working in the telecoms industry when she left a senior role at Vodafone nine years ago. In a bid to spend more time with her young children, she did a postgraduate certificate in education and spent seven years teaching, then deciding to return to telecoms.

Before discovering the Career Returners’ Programme, she received rejection after rejection, but the programme helped to rebuild her confidence, while offering the flexibility to balance work life with family responsibilities. Paula now works as a full-time project manager in the Network Futures team.

She says: “It gave me a foot in and a chance to prove that I was still capable of working – it is a more accessible process for people who are nervous about getting back into the working environment.”





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# Training brings uncon

Major employers such as Google, Lloyds Bank and the BBC are i awareness of possible hidden discrimination

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS  
KAREN HIGGINBOTTOM

We all have natural bias – it’s a part of human nature that can pervade the workplace. Such bias can include our natural people preferences that are hard-wired on a neurological level. There are different types of unconscious bias, explains Denise Keating, chief executive of the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI). “Affinity bias is about favouring people like us who have a similar education and hobbies. Conformation bias confirms our existing perceptions, and social

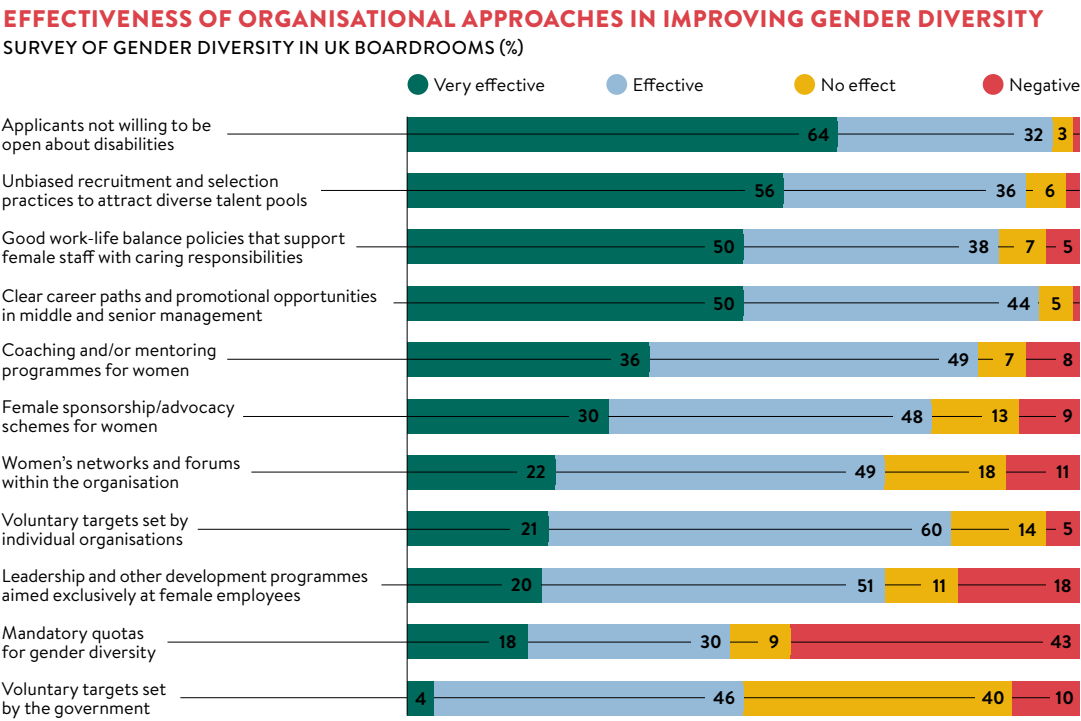


Managers tend to support people like themselves in terms of career development

comparison bias is when we tend to compare ourselves to other people in order to develop a sense of individual and group identity.” Many FTSE 100 firms, such as Lloyds Bank and Bank of America Merrill Lynch, have rolled out unconscious bias training in an attempt to raise awareness among employees of their hidden biases. “We’re human beings with stereotypes that impact

the way we view other human beings. Unconscious bias training can help an individual understand they are not as objective as they think they are,” says Binna Kandola, senior partner at business psychologists Pearn Kandola. There is plenty of evidence that proves the impact of unconscious bias on recruitment. A study by the Department for Work and Pensions found that applicants who appeared to be white needed to send nine applications before receiving an invitation to interview or an encouraging telephone call. In comparison, candidates from an ethnic minority background with the same qualifications and experience had to send 16 applications before receiving a similar response. The government has taken this seriously and last year then-prime minister David Cameron asked

universities to consider anonymous applications to counteract unconscious bias towards people from a minority background. As a result, universities are considering name-blind recruitment for staff applications. But unconscious bias also has an impact on other stages of employment. A study by Pearn Kandola looked at the associations between senior and junior positions and men and women. It found a bias towards associating men with senior jobs and women with junior ones. Most organisations have examined the impact of unconscious bias on the recruitment process, says Sandra Kerr, race equality director for Business in the Community. “But some organisations are realising it’s about the key decision-making stages in employment. I know in the civil service they are focusing on bias





# conscious bias to the surface

Increasingly adopting unconscious bias training to help raise



around the performance appraisal. This is when the employer can think about whether they are making stereotypical assumptions during appraisals,” she says.

Organisations need to look at how unconscious bias affects selection for promotion and performance management, says Ms Keating. “How do you de-bias the process? Organisations need to raise people’s awareness of unconscious bias and how it might affect decisions in ways that the workplace doesn’t become diverse.”

Unconscious bias can also impact on career development. Ms Keating adds: “Managers tend to support people like themselves in terms of career development.” ENEI’s research found strong evidence of affinity bias among managers and staff members, particularly when it came to the provision of informal support such as “putting in a word” or releasing resources.

The impact of unconscious bias on critical decision-making processes within the organisation is undeniable, but less is known about the difference training makes in creating a culture that fosters diversity.

Ms Kerr says unconscious bias training is beneficial when it’s part of corrective action on the different stages of the employment cycle. “The awareness of unconscious bias has to be linked to taking action on decisions such as recruitment, selection and promotion,” she says. “The awareness of bias is part of the journey, but not the end, and it’s the commitment to take action that makes all the difference.”

There is not enough clear-cut evidence of the difference that unconscious bias training can make on employment processes such as performance management or training, says Snéha Khilay, managing director of Blue Tulip Training. “But unconscious bias training can be useful in the organisation once the penny drops

about its impact on employment processes,” she says.

Unconscious bias training can stand alone if it’s linked in a practical way to the decision-making elements of the employment cycle, says Ms Keating. “Lots of organisations do unconscious bias training, but they only focus on the theory. However, it’s also about what do I do with these biases? It’s only one aspect of trying to shift the culture in an organisation.”

Christian van Nieuwerburgh, executive director of coaching and behavioural change at Henley Business School, believes there are three big risks in organisations relying on unconscious bias to create a diverse culture. “Unconscious bias training on its own can be unhelpful if it’s not followed up,” says Dr van Nieuwerburgh. “Just knowing that you have unconscious bias isn’t sufficient. It can raise awareness of discriminatory behaviour in an organisation without providing a change in behaviours.

“We know that unconscious bias exists, but it might be more worthwhile spending time making sure that recruitment, reward and development processes don’t allow for unconscious bias to happen. For example, firms can redact the names of applicants in the recruitment process.

“The second risk of unconscious bias training is that it can normalise this type of discriminatory thinking that ‘we all have unconscious bias’

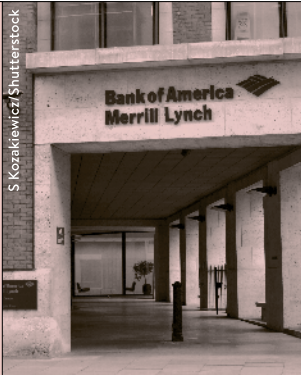
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A focus on unconscious bias can take attention away from institutional or overt bias

and then you could go to the next stage of ‘it’s OK’. The third risk is very pertinent in the wake of Brexit. I do think that a focus on unconscious bias can take attention away from institutional or overt bias that does exist. It’s naive to ignore that in an organisation.”

Ms Kerr acknowledges that unconscious bias training on its own is insufficient in creating a diverse organisational culture. “It’s not enough to just do the unconscious bias training, but it’s good practice to remind people to put aside their bias because organisations need diverse talent,” she says. “It’s about getting employees and managers to talk about their biases to ensure they don’t use them to block talent.”

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## CASE STUDY: BANK OF AMERICA MERRILL LYNCH



Bank of America Merrill Lynch launched unconscious bias training in 2013. Daniel South, Europe, Middle East and Africa head of diversity and inclusion at the bank, says: “We realised it could have potential benefits for the firm in terms of raising personal awareness. Ultimately, we felt an understanding of unconscious bias would help us function better as a company.”

The bank has rolled out its programme to nearly 30,000

employees globally, including 15,000 last year and more than 1,500 so far this year. Initially the mandatory training was for senior management, but it was later expanded to include middle management.

“We remind leaders to think about their unconscious bias during decision-making processes by recapping on unconscious bias key messages and questions they should ask themselves to check they are being objective,” says Mr South.

In addition, the bank puts its internal and external recruitment partners through the training. “The training helps them to understand what unconscious biases they have in possibly preventing them from putting forward a particular candidate,” he says. “This has definitely impacted their understanding of what we expect of them in terms of diverse candidates.”



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