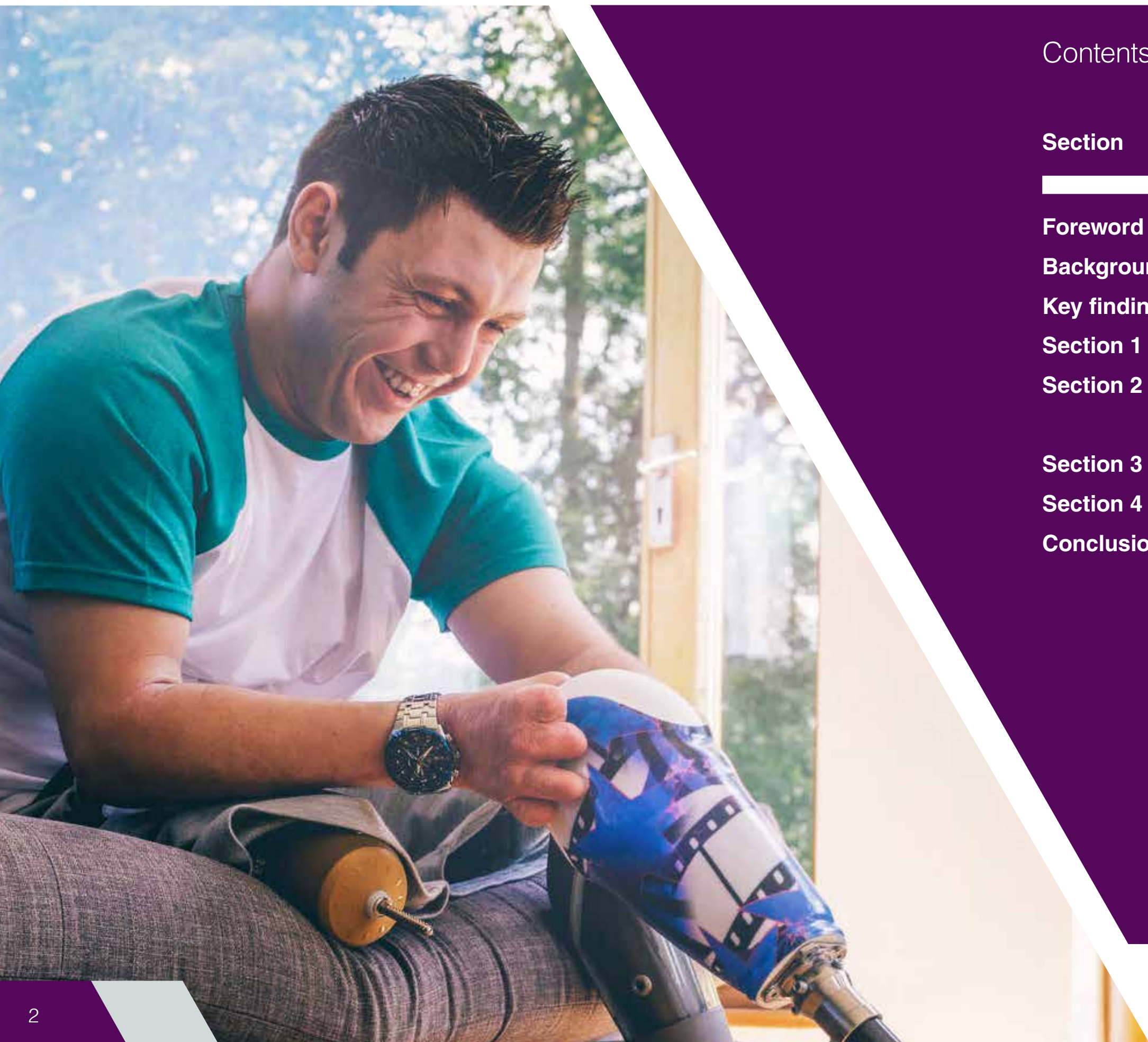


Recruiting for success

It's the differences that make the difference

Review findings on inclusive recruitment capability





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Foreword

I took on the role of Executive Lead for Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) for Highways England a number of years ago. At the time, I thought of myself as broad minded and quite well versed in EDI. But, as part of the Highways England journey, I have seen the facts and issues in much more detail. The inequality of opportunity is far, far wider than I had realised and the systemic changes needed in our industry are daunting.

A breakthrough moment for me came when I looked at data relating to apprenticeship opportunities in the construction industry depending on gender and ethnicity. It shocked me that a group of young people who had all passed the same pre-qualification test could all be treated so differently. With male, white applicants having a significant advantage in receiving offers of apprenticeships. And that is part of the reason why our industry looks and feels the way it does.

Highways England has carried out deep dive research into the inclusiveness of how the sector attracts and recruits talent. The conversations we are having internally, and with suppliers, signal that there is commitment to diversity and inclusion. Yet, the data we have gathered with supply chain partners since 2011 shows that despite efforts, the composition of the sector's workforce hasn't really changed much. How can this be? We wanted to find out and to learn what we need to do to really deliver on our intent.

The findings, shared in the rest of this document, are the result of that research. One of the most startling findings is that the highways sector behaves as though 'diversity lowers the bar' and can be perceived as reducing the standard for entry. We need to change this perception and behaviour.

Highways England has already made a start on improving our own understanding of the business case for EDI. We have had leadership sessions to share the evidence that shows that a more diverse talent pool supports a greater diversity of thinking, mitigates the risk of group think and makes businesses more innovative and higher performing. We have also taken stock of our own recruitment policies and practice – putting in place a plan that will change our performance over the next few years.

We want to work with partners who are growing their inclusive recruitment capability too. The investment of over £3 billion per annum to 2020 and beyond will create thousands of new jobs across the sector. Each one of those jobs will be advertised, candidates will be interviewed and offers sent – hundreds of people making thousands of decisions to secure the talent we need.

This document shares intelligence and information that can help our industry make better decisions at each stage of the attraction and recruitment journey. I urge you to use it to make a difference to your business, our sector and the many lives that our industry impacts.

David Poole
Executive Director, Commercial
and Procurement

Background

Following a tender process, the Clear Company, a specialist in inclusive recruitment, were appointed by Highways England to conduct a comprehensive review to explore the attraction and recruitment of diverse talent to Highways England and their supply chain.

The process applied was rigorous and included: A 'deep dive' into practice across 6 companies and Highways England involving:

- Provision of all recruitment and selection policies, procedure and practice documentation for analysis (over 1000 pages)
- For each company detailed analysis of documentation for 4-6 roles recruited to in the previous 6 months (job adverts, role profiles, interview questions and notes, training manuals, offer letters etc)
- 70 interviews with people directly involved in the recruitment of the above roles
- Focus groups with 22 additional organisations to check deep dive findings and enhance intelligence
- A survey sent to over 500 companies within Highways England's supply chain and analysis of the 127 responses

The outcome of the review is intended to inform recruitment policy, process and practice for all recruitment channels direct and indirect.

Key findings

Over 100 companies joined Highways England in sharing their recruitment practice with the Clear Company. Our thanks go to these supply chain partners whose unprecedented engagement in this project has resulted in such a robust picture.

great insight into what needs to change if we are each to deliver on our shared ambition to be more inclusive. Some of the key findings make for uncomfortable reading but if we can learn from these, the opportunities to make a step change in our performance are huge.

The intelligence we have gained, and that is shared throughout this document, gives us all

Key opportunity	Key findings
There is a broad ambition to be more inclusive across the industry – this has yet to be fully harnessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Realisation diversity and inclusion gives a greater opportunity to attract talent from a broader pool ■ Recognition of awareness gaps and acceptance of a need for change ■ Recognition that Highways England have firmly set expectations for delivery of a more diverse talent pool to support skills shortages
Leadership confidence and influence to deliver change needs to be developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Limited awareness of the business case for diversity and implications in terms of leadership at a senior level ■ Absence of EDI strategy, leadership and communications plan ■ Lack of horizontal alignment, ownership and communication throughout the business ■ Limited evidence of EDI as a KPI ■ Market leaders have not yet taken the opportunity to create change ■ Highways England procurement processes restricting change ■ There is some fear associated with 'appearing to fail' in being inclusive

Detailed findings: more detailed findings from the review are provided in four sections:

- Section 1 – Making the case for change
- Section 2 – Setting the foundations for inclusive recruitment
- Section 3 – Candidate experience
- Section 4 – Capability

Key opportunity	Key findings
The real and tangible business benefits of EDI need to be more widely and effectively shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Currently the business case is generally absent, not clear or not communicated – changing this would build a foundation ■ Myths associated with diversity and inclusion in recruitment are widely accepted as true eg <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – diversity in recruitment = lowering the talent bar – diversity and inclusion is an extra pressure in an already busy recruitment process ■ Messaging not permeated throughout corporate communication ■ Focus almost entirely on gender diversity ■ Particularly low levels of disability confidence
Simple steps can be taken to create greater opportunities to attract more diverse talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Imagery tends to be typical to the industry with the exception of targeted campaigns – lacking diversity and resulting in 'mirror of attraction' ■ The small number of organisations using diversity networks to increase their reach are the exception rather than the rule ■ Advertising protocols are an exception with little reference to diversity ■ External perception of the industry – 'this is not for me'
Steps to improve recruitment practice can be straightforward and could affect significant change to the applicant base and quality of hire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Role profiles are not based on the right person for the job but the same person for the job ■ Desirable criteria unnecessarily reduce the applicant pool ■ Mandatory criteria don't always appropriately use qualifications, specific experience, length of service etc ■ CV based shortlisting is subjective and results in unnecessary filters being applied ■ Interviewers lack the skills to hire objectively and inclusively ■ Disability is perceived as a health and safety risk ■ Reasonable adjustments for disability are not in place representing a legal risk



Section 1 – Making the case for change

Overall diversity and inclusion

Organisations who aspire to be truly inclusive will consider having in place.

- Inclusive values
- Statement of commitment to diversity
- A level of understanding about the relative meanings of diversity and inclusion
- Leadership commitment
- Awareness and education programmes
- Diversity KPIs for performance management
- Employee networks
- Diversity programmes or initiatives

The review found significant evidence of a commitment to diversity but rather than being a true business imperative it was generally seen as 'a HR issue'. There was limited evidence of organisations appreciating the business case for diversity as a strategic imperative that would inform the development of a modern, inclusive and therefore more effective approach to talent sourcing and retention.

Without training and support to ensure that everyone is at the same level of knowledge and understanding about what good looks like, it will be difficult to move the agenda forward and the same unconscious mistakes will continue to be replicated, restricting diversity at every stage. In some cases, the 'head and the hearts' are engaged in wanting to develop better practice but the 'hands' (the people doing the job) lack the knowledge and tools to make a difference.

The diversity message needs to go beyond gender

The review found organisations are inclined to limit diversity strategies to the protected characteristics, defined in the Equality Act 2010. The reality is that the wealth of talent restricted by traditional and narrow approaches goes far beyond these factors and creates barriers around socio-economic background and education standards for example.

The review highlighted an almost exclusive focus on the attraction of more women. This is not unusual, given both the sector's history of male domination and the recent drive from UK Government on first voluntary (Think, Act Report), then mandatory reporting (UK Corporate Governance) and gender pay gaps (from April 2017). However, the risk of such a singular focus is that it sends out a message that by diversity we mean 'women'. This can both disengage large sections of the population and lead to increased bias along with views around token appointments and lowering of the bar. It's a risky approach with repercussions.

The review identified limited or no awareness, engagement, monitoring etc around disability and sexual orientation which did not tend to feature in policy, practice or strategic aims.

The review found some elements of good practice evidencing, how organisations are getting the message of diversity and inclusion out into the broader business, bringing it to life with a number of positive initiatives and engagement activities, highlighting that activity will 'change the feel of the place' in terms of diversity and inclusion.

Although there was evidence of this, it appears limited to just a small number of organisations, with a small number of initiatives being introduced that will actually deliver diversity and inclusion at all levels of their business. As stated above, without a firm business case and an opportunity for each team to think about how they play a part in enabling the strategy, it will be difficult for diversity and inclusion to gain any real traction.

The provision of training to support the commitment to improve diversity and inclusion was found to differ considerably across the participating organisations. Where training was present, it appeared to have a limited reach, relied on voluntary engagement and lacked any follow up support for participants.

Sporadic and top level training initiatives, such as these, only go part way towards delivering organisational change and creating the right environment for diverse talent to thrive.





Inclusive values

Most organisations have not considered diversity and inclusion when creating their organisational values. A common assumption generally is that values will by default be inclusive, but this is not the case.

Values have a significant impact on organisational culture, unwritten rules have the potential to create a certain 'fit' which if not addressed will result in poor retention of diverse hires.

Section 2 – Setting the foundations for inclusive recruitment

Diversity policy

A diversity policy should encourage an inclusive, rather than compliant culture and contain a statement of intent linked to organisational values. It should promote positive language and tone, whilst setting clear expectations for behaviour, including how to report poor behaviour. Measures of success are important and roles and responsibilities should apply to the policy.

A diversity policy should cover all protected characteristics, going beyond disability and into the nonlegally required characteristics, such as ex-offenders, socio-economic, or educational background. A good policy should reference reasonable adjustments provision and how to effectively implement a manageable process to ensure action behind the commitment and the policy should be relevant at each and every stage of the recruitment and employment life cycle.

The quality and robustness of the diversity policies reviewed varied significantly. There was evidence of some individual areas of good practice tested against a variety of the criteria but no single organisation demonstrated best practice in all expected areas. There are some great examples of good policies around that could be shared as a starting point. It is then the role of the organisation to make them live and breathe.

Recruitment and selection policy

A recruitment and selection policy should have a clear statement of intent, as an inclusive employer, which threads diversity through every stage of the recruitment cycle, stating expectations around the level of expertise for recruiters, whilst also setting expectations and measures for third party suppliers.

The policy needs to have clearly stated roles and responsibilities to ensure an inclusive approach at each stage of the process, along with a commitment to

measure and monitor impact, taking remedial action, when necessary. As a minimum, the policy should outline how the organisation intends to comply with local legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010.

The review found that most organisations did not have a recruitment and selection policy although a few organisations had fairly robust and detailed recruitment and selection policies. However, there were no examples of a policy successfully weaving inclusion into all the stages of recruitment.

Reasonable adjustments policy and process

Recruiters must be confident to manage reasonable adjustments, with a clear policy to follow at every stage of the recruitment process to request adjustments. This process should ensure timely and effective adjustments, with roles and responsibilities for adjustments clear and effective and adjustment requests monitored for consistency.

There was a significant gap evident with regards to reasonable adjustments policies and processes.

The review did not identify an example, or indication of an organisation being able to evidence that they either have a policy, or are able to swiftly and proactively implement workplace adjustments in recruitment or at work – other than ad hoc responses to employee requests.

Despite 18% of the UK working age population having a disability organisations did not get a sense that disabled people applied for roles with them. Disability overall is a cause for concern and an area of significant legal risk.





Competency frameworks

A competency based approach enables recruiters and managers to assess against a clear range of criteria and behaviours. This sets a great foundation for an objective, inclusive and consistently applied approach. Note that not all frameworks are inclusive in language and tone and have diversity, not as a standalone competency area but integrated throughout. An inclusive framework must have positive and negative behavioural indicators that are clear and easy to observe and which can be measured consistently, with a set of competency based questions for use both in interview and in performance assessment.

The review saw that there is a level of variation in the use of competency frameworks, some organisations don't have one, some have one and don't use it and others may use them but they are not inclusive overall. The review did find a singular example of some diversity – friendly behaviours, such as interpersonal sensitivity, consideration for others and emotional intelligence but did not identify evidence of how those behaviours were subsequently tested.

Job design – role profile

A good role profile will highlight the unique selling points of working for an organisation, it introduces organisational values, without expressing a 'need to fit in'. It positions the organisation as an inclusive employer, that respects diversity, looking forwards, not backwards. The role should be designed concisely and effectively, using appropriate tone and avoiding use of language which may create bias, adjectives such as strong, driven, energetic or dynamic.

As a minimum, it must be compliant with the Equality Act 2010, which means not using requirements, such as a number of years of experience, or extensive experience. It should avoid setting unnecessarily narrow criteria, such as education standards, place of education, sector experience, or geographic location, whilst remaining focused on the specific skills required for a role, rather than a wish list mixing skills, attributes and specific experience (unless technical experience is needed).

A role profile should be refreshed each time it is used and should set out the criteria for selection in terms of skills, knowledge and competence, whilst attracting and engaging with the widest possible audience.

The role profile gives a real opportunity to provide an overview of the organisation and a statement that highlights diversity and inclusion aspirations to enhance employer value proposition.

Evidence suggests that organisational approaches differ significantly. Examples of good practice included guidance on avoiding lengthy task lists, along with good examples of how to write responsibilities using 'action verbs'. There were few examples of organisations already using job descriptions that focused on transferrable skills, with just one example of a job description including a statement on diversity and inclusion albeit inconsistently. The inclusion of lists of desirable criteria becomes a wish list creating an unnecessary filter for diverse candidates.

The review found many examples of job descriptions using sector specific 'jargon' that limit them to people already within the industry. Where skills were articulated, there is the opportunity to be more specific about the job outcome. For example, rather than requesting 'good communication skills', the requirement could be more appropriately explained as 'the ability to write clear reports', if that was the need covered by the more general 'good communication skills'. This simple step makes the process easier for a candidate to understand the requirement for the role in terms of the transferrable skills they have.

Careers site accessibility

A careers website needs to be accessible for all potential candidates, including those with a disability, with user testing by disabled colleagues being the only true way to ensure accessibility. A website should have an easily located accessibility function, with full details of accessibility options and support on how to navigate the site using assistive technology.

Provision of a contact email and helpline for support (specifically support for reasonable adjustment provision and what information to include in your application) makes a huge difference to the candidate experience. The opportunity has to be repeatedly presented in a supportively worded statement, to identify and request adjustments, if required. Alternative methods of application for candidates with a disability should be proactively provided, along with examples of case studies, role models and evidence of diversity commitment present on website, with the use of inclusive imagery ensuring an appeal to a wider audience.





The review found a small number of organisations using good examples of diverse imagery in recruitment campaigns, however, this was not applied consistently and could reflect a tokenistic approach. The Clear Company did find one organisation having developed an inclusive advertising protocol.

The Clear Company expert partners, AbilityNet, provided a website accessibility review to a selection of participating organisations, highlighting significant areas of risk regarding the accessibility of their careers websites. In addition, many organisations are still using predominantly 'white male' imagery which reflects the current workforce, rather than that of the diversity talent pool they aspire to attract.

There are most definitely opportunities to tell more news stories about diverse employees – for example, those on flexible working patterns – to highlight what is possible through concerted effort. Also, there is the broader opportunity to build a library of such case studies that could be provided at an organisational, or a sectoral level, to improve the outside view of the sector's overall diversity.

The benefits of an accessible website will positively influence the user experience as a whole. BT ran two careers websites in parallel, one with great design not 'hindered' by accessibility and the other, also with great design, but adhering to best practice accessibility protocols and user experience testing showed the latter to be much more appealing to all users, not just those using assistive technology.

Attraction

In a best practice model, a good attraction strategy will have the impact of reaching and engaging a diverse mix of talent. The findings of the research project showed a scale of practice being adopted from very traditional and narrow focussed campaigns, to some examples of real innovation to support good intentions.

Clearly, some organisations are already ahead of the majority of the sector in terms of their approach to attraction, however, these organisations themselves were hindered by weaknesses in other areas of recruitment, such as the role profile.

Attraction strategies need to be based on a genuine commitment to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. Case studies of successful candidates, a clear message that inclusion is at the heart of the business strategy and constant attention to making campaigns open to all, are critical features of a truly diverse attraction strategy.

Positive examples include:

- An organisation signposting the use of working with the Job Centre Plus and Career Transition Partnership in their recruitment guide
- An organisation using the 'Where Women Work' careers site to advertise roles
- Actively supporting the recruitment of 'over 300' ex-offenders
- Advertising guidelines, including explicit advice to consider 'local diversity customs and religion'

All of the above examples came from the same organisation, showing that there is evidence of positive activity in the market but that progress is limited in terms of market representation.

The other end of the scale saw an organisation's recruitment guide directing recruiters to reduce hiring costs by using their own network, which is undoubtedly likely to lead to 'more of the same'.

Third party suppliers

Without doubt, the selection of third party suppliers to deliver talent is the most overlooked area of recruitment, in terms of its potential adverse impact on diversity of hire.

Because of the vicarious responsibility approach adopted in equality law, employers using third party suppliers have vicarious responsibility for that supplier. This means that, where there is a current procurement framework for talent suppliers (very few in this review), the focus tends to be on compliance but there is no evidence of how that compliance is appropriately tested, beyond asking for statements of intent.

To achieve diversity of hire, there must be clear procurement guidelines for all talent suppliers. A preferred supplier list should be in place, with suppliers regularly measured against key performance indicators. However, the responsibility for delivering a diverse talent pool is shared and should be managed in a partnership approach, rather than a compliance success/fail approach. Talent providers need direction and support in order to achieve the required outputs for the sector. Simply saying "we want more diversity", is not enough.

In this review, the awareness of the business case for diversity and inclusion amongst talent providers was mostly non-existent. Talent providers feel under some pressure from employer clients but mostly, they don't get any push back from clients and they are certainly not tested for performance in relation to diversity and inclusion.

In summary, embedding diversity and inclusion expectations in contracts and monitoring third party suppliers presents another significant opportunity for practice development. There are some pockets of good practice emerging but there was not a good example, in this review, of an organisation where they are setting expectations, sharing guidance and support and monitoring ongoing performance. This area of the recruitment process requires a step change in approach in order to remove risk and manage better practice. Good practice examples are available in other sectors such as energy.

Application process

The application process must, by law, be an accessible process, with flexibility around application methods for people who cannot use the main route of application, for example, someone with sight loss.

A competency based application form is the most inclusive approach and best practice recommends redacting all personal information from CVs to ensure consistency and objectivity when reviewing applications. The review of the application processes for the participating organisations, found that they were mostly inflexible, had little, or no reference to requesting adjustments to process, guidance and support, or an alternative application method. The research also showed that CVs are not redacted and included names, photos, hobbies and interests, which leads to bias in shortlisting and assessment.

The combination of the above findings is prohibiting a broad spectrum of diverse talent at the very first stage of the candidate experience.

Shortlisting

A shortlisting process must show clear evidence of a consistently applied, defensible, structured process, which is linked to key competencies and essential skills. There must be supporting documentation underpinning assessment decisions and a robust audit trail. An inclusive shortlisting process should have no evidence of subjective decision making, using criteria, such as 'the right fit', or contain unjustifiable criteria, like industry-specific experience. The shortlist should be transparently logical, such as there should be no evidence of failing to shortlist someone who meets the relevant criteria required, in favour of someone who did not.

A structured process is vital to ensure consistency of interpretation and application. Generally, the review highlighted a lack of defensible, auditable processes in place when shortlisting candidates and this applied to all levels of seniority of post, from apprentices to executive positions.

There was evidence of organisations using informal processes, for example, CVs being circulated to a team for 'a view', and if there is consensus, the application will progress. Examples showed shortlisting of non-redacted CVs without any discernible criteria, or guidance for hiring managers to shortlist on essentials. In at least one example, there was evidence of candidates being deselected for not having experience that was not required in the role specification; on further investigation all three applicants were from outside the UK, this example would be indefensible if questioned.

Interview

Whether telephone, or face to face, best practice would have a structured, often competency based, interview template, with clear assessor instructions on how to introduce and conduct the interview, a list of pre-selected questions to be consistently applied, space for capturing detailed notes and further detail about how to close the interview, with clear next steps outlined. Question structures should be seeking examples, rather than hypothetical, or self-evaluative, with a balanced mix of positively and negatively-framed questions.

There should be an evaluation template, with behaviourally anchored rating grids and space to record supporting evidence, with overall ratings for each competency. Interviewers should ideally work in pairs, with roles agreed in advance, ie note-taker, or questioner, in order to ensure that there is a full and detailed transcript. Consistency with questions asked to all candidates and a transcript that is as close as possible to verbatim, with no subjective comments, or evidence of unconscious biases, should be provided in all instances and at every level of hierarchy.

Although the review highlighted some good practice in this area, it tended to be inconsistently applied, even within individual organisations. Evidence showed some good guidance reminding assessors that an interview should be a two-way process, to interview in pairs, putting candidates at ease, and active listening etc. However, there were no methods in place to support capability of assessors, or, in fact, monitor that practices were being followed. The specific area of inclusive interviewing is

another significant opportunity for improvement across all participating organisations and was highlighted as requiring support during both focus group sessions and the Development Definition Workshop. Participating organisations cited a lack of knowledge regarding 'what good practice looks like' and, certainly, surrounding the capability to achieve it.

There were many examples of poor interviewing processes across all of the participating organisations.

The review consistently found the term 'fit' in reference to either a role, or the broader organisation. Hiring managers focusing on that, rather than capability, made subjective hiring decisions allowing biases to take a large part in the selection process. Decisions were made on 'gut feel', with those making such decisions basing their actions on their personal opinion of being a 'good' recruiter, despite the lack of any formal training in recruitment.

There was a recurring lack of consistency, with interview questions asked, with the use of biographical questions and no means of scoring objectively. Interview notes, where available, were very brief, high level and often would not provide a defensible audit trail, with many examples of candidates being rejected for not meeting criteria that were not met by the successful candidate either.

Assessments

In a best practice model, prior to the assessment process, consideration should be given to ensure that the chosen venue for assessment is fit for purpose and accessible. Prior thought should also be given to the diversity of assessors and

candidates to try to guarantee a diverse mix, wherever possible. When using an assessment centre, the timetable should allow sufficient breaks for both candidates and assessors and allow enough time for assessors to complete their ratings immediately after each exercise.

Assessors should be thoroughly briefed and familiarised with all assessment materials in advance. Each exercise used should be structured around observable, measurable, role – relevant criteria, i.e. there should be no attempt to measure skills and behaviours that are not essential for success in the role. For example, assessing presentations skills in a role which does not require it, should not be an assessment method. In an assessment centre, every competency should be evaluated twice through a combination of observed and reported evidence, with no more than seven competencies measured.

As with interviews, behaviourally anchored ratings grids should be completed in full, with sufficient supporting evidence to justify the overall rating. Exercises should be designed and professionally validated by experts and not created by hiring managers. Assessment centre sessions should also conclude with an assessment expert facilitating a wash up session to collate and test the scoring of the assessors, in order that an informed consensus is reached before making the hiring decision. The review found no evidence to suggest consideration of buildings accessibility when hosting assessment centres. There were instances of assessment centres being used, however, the results were not being objectively assessed. There was a lack of standardisation in the questions asked and topics used in assessment exercises, with groups being assessed on different scenarios for the same

role, e.g. one group having a subject requiring sector knowledge and another group given a generic topic to present on.

The impact of this example clearly favoured those with industry knowledge, as they were able to use the correct 'industry speak' and technical language. Those without, may well have had the skills needed to do the job but would have been deselected due to a lack of knowledge unwarranted in the assessment process. A consistent approach must be applied to all assessment processes to ensure an inclusive approach and give all those participating an equal opportunity to achieve.

Section 3 – Candidate experience

Feedback

Best practice states that feedback information should be clearly documented, with an overview of the strengths and development areas highlighted for the candidate's reference. Information on who provided the feedback, along with a descriptor of when and how the feedback was arrived at, should also be provided.

Whilst some organisations stated that their processes align with this best practice, most often, the reality fell short. For example, the review did find a structured, auditable feedback process in place to provide telephone feedback. However, the policy was contravened in practice, with a letter to a candidate stating that feedback would not be provided due to high volume of applicants.

In another organisation, an email offering feedback to applicants to their graduate scheme was poorly worded as a result of errors with auto – populated text, leaving a poor candidate experience and creating reputational risk. One organisation had a process in place to provide verbal feedback, although it was found from interviews that hiring managers, who actually deliver feedback, do so in varying ways and to varying quality standards. In general, the review findings showed poor feedback processes, each being applied inconsistently.

Ensuring consistency and quality of feedback provides a positive candidate experience, having a direct impact on employer and consumer brand. Not doing so poses a reputational risk and will, in fact, damage the brand and reduces the available pool of talent.

Offer management

A best practice offer management process not only provides contractual information but also provides an opportunity to start to build the emotional contract with the new employee. The offer process should feature the values of the organisation at every opportunity, creating a level of transparency and trust, where the employer can begin to get to know their new employee. There should also be an informed workplace adjustment discussion to ensure new hires are most appropriately supported in their work. Overall, there are many opportunities for all participating organisations to improve their processes at the offer stage. Aspirations for diversity and inclusion should be a key element of the process and the experience of transition into the company should be an open, warm and welcoming one.

In the review, some organisations included reference to diversity and inclusion in their offer letters and terms and conditions, which, although great to see in every instance, missed the opportunity to go further – beyond legal compliance – and use diversity and inclusion credentials to engage, excite and build pride in the candidate's future employer.

Mostly, offer letters tended towards the cold and factual, missing the opportunity to begin the employee engagement process and enhance the employee value proposition.

Section 4 – Capability

Recruitment is predominantly an assumed competence held by most hiring managers. In reality, very few people are innately good recruiters without the benefit of training. Recruitment is seen as a process and is often undervalued as a management discipline.

The findings of this review indicated hiring managers presumed they were capable recruiters. However, the questioning conducted by the Clear Company in the qualitative stage of the review, showed considerable competence and confidence gaps around the basics of good recruitment, let alone awareness of inclusive recruitment. To ensure the capability of all hiring managers, they should receive reputable training to standardise capability and approach across the full end to end recruitment process, with classic best practice models, such as STAR and ORCE, as well as unconscious biases being covered.

Managers need to be moved on from their favourite questions and a tendency to interpret enthusiasm as competence.

Training materials should be used consistently and audited to ensure inclusive best practice. The training should be mandatory, accredited and monitored, and, where possible, should be run across a significant time frame of at least one full day, it should include both practical and theoretical content, with an interactive facilitative approach. Measures should also be in place to ensure there is opportunity to test usage and provide regular refresher courses to ensure consistency of use.

The review found limited areas of good practice in recruitment training, with positive examples, where found, sitting in isolation of the process and not being mandated, or having those who had taken the course being monitored for performance.

The provision of best practice training in inclusive recruitment and selection to all those responsible for recruitment, is another key opportunity for development. This, together with the implementation of appropriate learning measurements, will create positive change in an organisation's ability to attract, select and retain the very best person for the role, whatever their background. Training, when provided, however, must be reflected in the development of the whole recruitment policy and process mapping. For example, the introduction of unconscious bias training will not have the desired impact if policy guidance still references 'fit' as an important factor in assessment decision making.


Importantly, there was also a widespread lack of awareness of the potential risks associated with non-compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the broader employment law framework.

Because most tribunal cases happen post – employment and not generally during the recruitment process itself, employers assume the level of risk in recruitment to be minimal. However, the majority of tribunal cases involving employees in their first two years of tenure will cite the recruitment process as the reason for their claim. Ignorance of the law at the recruitment stage and a lack of equality knowledge as a reason for discrimination, is no defence in law. Training and development is, therefore, a key priority for the sector in its development of better recruitment outcomes, as a whole, as well as part of the improved inclusion programme.

Audit trail

To ensure an inclusive best practice approach, there should be documentation completed at every stage of the recruitment cycle, with defensible records supporting selection, or deselection decisions. There also needs to be a transparent record of the efforts the organisation has taken to support candidates throughout the recruitment cycle. Reasonable adjustments are a legal requirement but, more importantly, an organisation actively seeking to support candidates through the journey towards employment, will evoke a greater feeling of belonging and value for the process, resulting in a much improved candidate experience.

Failure to record when and how the organisation has offered support to candidates is a high level risk, especially when it comes to supporting candidates with disabilities.



The review found that this is one of the highest risk areas for the participating organisations. There were significant gaps in the audit trails, both for decision making and in tracking the candidate experience. Solutions to bridge this gap should be a priority consideration in the presentation of recommendations.

Monitoring and review

A best practice approach to monitoring and continued review should evidence diversity data being collected at every stage of the recruitment process, to highlight any areas that may be having an adverse impact on any demographic groups. The positioning of monitoring information is critical. It should be clear what the employer intends to achieve by collecting this data. It should be supportive in its wording and in its format, so that candidates do not feel declaration of data will lead to some form of discrimination. For example, a Clear Company survey found that 84.3% of disabled

candidates would not declare their disability to an employer for fear of discrimination. This statistic is reflected in the data collected by participating organisations, with little evidence of candidates proactively declaring a disability. It was also found that most hiring managers' perception was that not many disabled candidates applied for work with their organisation. A perception that doesn't fit with the reality that 18% of all candidates will have some form of disability and that of all candidates over the age of 45, one third will have a disability.

Examples of collecting diversity data found in the review, were inconsistent in quality and with a major focus on gender, particularly at graduate level.

There is a significant opportunity for the sector to implement more robust measurement processes and to react to the data. This will enable organisations to understand how inclusive recruitment projects are, to gain a common understanding of the status quo and to measure improvement over time. Attraction, selection and hire conversion rates are not broadly to be tracked and where they are, the quality of tracking is widely varied.

Conclusion

As the detailed findings evidence, there is much to do if we are to deliver on our shared ambition to deliver inclusive recruitment and source talent from the breadth of the talent pool to meet our capacity and capability needs.

Tackling the flaws at the beginning of the recruitment process which act as barriers to diversity at the later stages of the recruitment process will be key to building stronger recruitment foundations. Ensuring that assessment criteria steer clear of subjectivity and bias is critical too. It will help hiring managers look for the talent they need and not fall into the trap of looking for the 'obvious' or easy fit candidates, enabling them to tap the broader diversity of talent that lives outside of the stereotypical view of the ideal candidate for the role.

Most importantly, there is broad commitment and appetite to get better at attracting and recruiting diverse talent. This combined with a deepening understanding of real business need and benefit will go a long way to underpinning change. The guidance given in this review on the practical, straightforward changes we can make to policy, process and behaviours provide us all with a route map to better performance.

Suppliers may wish to work independently on developing their own capability but further work and discussion of the findings will form part of Highways England's supplier diversity forum's work. Membership is open to all in Highways England's supply chain whether they are at the start of their equality, diversity and inclusion journey or well on their way.¹

¹ To find out more about the Supplier Diversity Forum, please contact the Supply Chain Development Division via SCD@highwaysengland.co.uk



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