

Briefing

Improving Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Practice in the Workplace

Inclusion at Work Panel Report
March 2024

half the sky

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Improving Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Practice in the Workplace:

Inclusion at Work Panel Report, March 2024

This recent report is the result of a six-month study by the Government's Inclusion at Work Panel looking at workplace D&I practices. It sought to identify effective practices and recommend ways to support them for the long-term benefit of all kinds of businesses. Here we offer our summary of the key findings followed by a response from Half the Sky.

Key take-outs:

- + The Panel does not support the creations of an **Inclusion Confident Scheme** (i.e. a kitemark or certification)
- + The Panel recommends the development of a **Teaching and Learning Toolkit** to provide guidance and accountability for leaders.
- + The Panel recommends greater clarity on **employment law** relevant to inclusion practice (governance, behaviour, and HR policies)
- + The Panel sets out a **Recommended Framework for D&I Success**.

Quick read:

Summary of findings:

The report begins with a heartening advocacy of diversity: "There is widespread consensus that a diverse, inclusive workforce can reap meaningful rewards for businesses and employees. Drawing on a wide range of experiences and backgrounds in an organisation improves the potential for effectiveness, is conducive to innovation and creativity, and reduces groupthink".

Diversity is understood to refer to ethnicity, gender and socio-economic and geographic factors and 'inclusion' is recognised as requiring active interventions. We hear that just like other business operations, D&I must be rooted in evidence and data, and that progress must be measured in a meaningful way.

However, the study finds that leaders lack the confidence and tools to successfully navigate suppliers, strategies and interventions. Repeatedly, the report asserts that impact is extremely hard to evidence, and that many interventions are not delivering impact.

Kitemark not required:

The development of an Inclusion Confident kitemark is not recommended due to the existence of other initiatives, namely: the Disability Confident Scheme, Investors in People, Race at Work Charter, Inclusive Employers Standard, National Centre for Diversity Accreditation, and the Women in Finance Charter.

Toolkit to be developed:

The study identified a demand for government-endorsed data and evidence to support organisations in setting targets for recruitment, retention, progression, and pay: "The Panel recommends the government funds the design and maintenance of a tool to synthesise evidence of impact and value for money of workplace D&I interventions... this will give all leaders and managers in every sector access to evaluation rigour. It will also 'nudge' commercial or activist providers of interventions to be transparent and prove impact."

The framework:

The report puts forward a framework based on five criteria grouped in two themes. These comes with five Conditions of Success.

EMBEDDING EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE
<p>Criteria 1: Gathering evidence systematically and comprehensively. Using quantitative and qualitative analytics to establish a baseline before determining which interventions are most needed within an organisation.</p>
<p>Criteria 2: Putting evidence into practice. Stopping investing heavily in diversity training only and opting for interventions which are shown to increase exchange across lines of difference or improve diversity.</p>
<p>Criteria 3: Reviewing interventions and processes regularly. Continuing to evaluate the impact of interventions to assess whether they are having the desired effect, and to adapt or reverse them if they are ineffective.</p>
SOPHISTICATED RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT
<p>Criteria 4: Widening diversity of thought and experience. Recognising socio-economic diversity and invisible types of diversity such as diversity of education or views.</p>

Criteria 5: Restoring the importance of clear performance standards, high quality vocational training, and excellent management, as the most effective means to improve equality of opportunity, inclusion and belonging.

Investing in transparent progression and high-quality vocational training over standalone awareness initiatives or identity networks.

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS

Condition 1: Board and CEO level direction and leadership.

Senior managers need to be visible when it comes to D&I practices, to 'show not tell.'

Condition 2: Awareness and mitigation of unintended consequences.

Make efforts to avoid offending those they seek to help or alienating particular identity groups.

Condition 3: Applying equality law correctly.

Clear and simple legal explanation and an accessible common framework for understanding equality legislation is vital.

Half the Sky comment:

We are interested to read the report and welcome engagement with and improvements to D&I best practices and have the following comments on the findings and recommendations outlined in the report.

Impact

We need to be clear about the relationship between ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion.’ In our work, we insist on clear objectives for D&I interventions. Our point here is that ‘increasing diversity’ is rarely the sole objective of D&I. As a result, we think the report is overly critical of the failings of D&I practices in ‘delivering.’ We do however agree that superficial training is unlikely to instigate any kind of change and we support the call for evidence-based practices and systematic approaches.

Toolkit

We agree that a kitemark is not required, this is not where the energy needs to be focussed. We welcome support for D&I practice in the form of a toolkit but also have reservations around the willingness of companies to share sensitive data. The precise nature of the toolkit is vague at this stage, and we will follow progress on this. It will be important that it works for all and involves commitment to action over box-ticking.

Framework

The proposed framework offers sensible underlying principles, all of which are central in our own practice. It is interesting to note the strong call for data, evidence, and measurement. This fits with our perspective on the necessary rigour required in D&I. However, we would recommend qualitative methods as well as quantitative data to fully understand the current picture and issues. Similarly, the conditions for success feel like hygiene factors though there is clearly merit in promoting these best practices.

What’s missing?

The proposals do not address the certification of D&I consultancy providers. It would be helpful for businesses to know if advisers are expert in the science and sociology of inclusion.

Conclusion:

Currently, the report stops short of offering practical advice or tools, but we should expect an increased demand across the sector for rigour and evidence. However, we also sense the seeding of scepticism in D&I which may not be helpful for the larger picture of change. We will need to see how the initiative is developed should there be a change in administration and policy.