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SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

**Employer Roundtable**  
Diversity &  
Inclusion

**No. 14**

Wednesday 9th  
June 2021  
10am - 11:30am

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Overview

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are of critical importance to our roundtable attendees. Over the past year we have discussed how early talent strategies are a fantastic way to kick start or complement existing D&I strategies.

Due to growing concerns over young people, and especially those in diverse groups, being left behind post pandemic, D&I has rapidly gained visibility and support from senior leaders within organisations and the pressure is on HR leads to deliver.

So, by popular demand, this month we continued to expand on our diversity and inclusion discussion.

Key areas discussed in this roundtable were:

1. Defining and measuring diversity and inclusion
2. Attracting talent and building relationships
3. Supporting candidates through the process

Attendees of the thirteenth roundtable include:



With many more attending...

MPS RICS  
Michael Page MMC  
River Island AQA  
GlaxoSmithKline RPA

TfL  
Poundland  
JCB  
Channel 4

AAT  
RSM  
Azets  
DPD

Kaplan  
Pitney Bowes  
SMRS

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## Key Points

- 1 There is great positivity in the approach businesses are taking to address the challenges of true diversity and inclusion.
- 2 Organisations must “Be the change they want to see in the world” to attract and retain diverse groups of people, but they must also be honest about where they are now.
- 3 Diversity and inclusion are not just a recruitment issue. For true D&I, it needs to be an organisational priority for the whole employee journey.
- 4 Sponsorship from the senior leaders of the business is vital to drive this message throughout the organisation.
- 5 Businesses must build trust with the communities they want to attract, which will take time. In the meantime, they must aim not to be tokenistic with their attraction and retention strategies.
- 6 Data is key to a successful D&I strategy. HR leads should analyse the past (what we need to maintain or change), the future (What is our aim? What does inclusion mean for us? How do we define it?), and present activity (Are we attracting the right groups? What can we do to increase engagement?).

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# Defining and measuring Diversity & Inclusion



The way organisations are defining diversity and inclusion has evolved. Some businesses previously focused on just one aspect of diversity and inclusion, while others have attempted to address them all. How are companies defining and measuring D&I? And how do HR leads manage the D&I demands from within their business?

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## The conversation



One attendee from a male-dominated industry said their business was solely focused on gender diversity for two to three years. Whilst this has had a positive effect on their gender balance, this approach led to tunnel vision about what D&I meant. They have now switched to an approach of “Diversity of thought and experience” to open opportunities to those who have not worked in the industry before but have the skills the business needs.

Defining D&I includes understanding who is responsible for D&I. Whilst many organisations have historically seen D&I as a recruitment activity, many of our attendees agreed that their business is shifting to an organisational culture approach to D&I. One attendee stated that you could hire as many diverse people as you like, but if they don't feel welcome or included, they will have a bad experience and leave, affecting the individual and the business.

Several attendees have now flipped their focus from D&I to I&D. This simple change prioritises how people feel included in their organisation, enabling the diverse groups they are attracting to feel comfortable and confident when they join. This will help their business to attract the right people, increase representation, empower diverse groups and retain them for longer.

One attendee stated that the D&I agenda is fluid. Genuine D&I needs to move beyond the historic viewpoints - it is not just focused on 'visual' or physical characteristics to include groups such as LGBTQIA+ and neurodiversity. One business is looking at their diversity and inclusion strategy for women returners (working parents or career changes), refugees and young offenders. Another attendee shared that they have added preferred pronouns and pronunciation of names into their email signatures to allow everyone to feel comfortable sharing who they are. This is a companywide change, and senior support is key to this.

Diversity and inclusion strategies are most effective when there is support from the top down. One organisation has felt greater emphasis and support around this topic from their new CEO, who joined the business as a school leaver from a low socioeconomic background. Previously the HR team led the way with changes in process and selection. But with strong senior support, they feel empowered to ensure early talent is open and accessible to all. Many attendees echoed this opinion, with one business, that has only just implemented their early careers strategy, stating that it is high on the senior teams' agenda - they are bought in and asking lots of questions.

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Measurement was also a key topic of conversation with many attendees stating they struggle to track everything they need to in their ATS. They are also aware that they will not be able to provide detailed reporting overnight and that strategies they implement now might not see results for another two years.

David Allison from TheTalentPeople stated that D&I strategies and measurement of those strategies and tactics need to be constant. Measuring diversity and inclusion at every step of the campaign activity is crucial to the success of that two-year strategy. Without this, there will be frustration at the end of the hiring process when the business D&I targets are not met. Monitoring and making informed decisions in real-time will increase retention of target candidates during the process and yield better results long term.

Measurements are not limited to the organisations own recruitment activity. Understanding a specific location's demographics will help businesses set realistic goals about the pool of people they can attract. As one attendee stated, if you are looking for an even mix of white, black, asian and mixed ethnic heritage employees, but the location you are advertising in is 90% white, you are unlikely to reach your target. An attendee from the insurance industry said that in areas where businesses expect a diverse mix of candidates, if the sector doesn't appeal to them due to perceptions that it is, for example, very white or male-dominated or only for those with a degree, you won't attract the right people.

Location has been a challenge for several attendees. In the capital, one organisation has been tasked with at least 40% of their workforce to "look like London". This organisation has struggled to connect with people within the Black Asian and Mixed Ethnic Heritage communities previously. To tackle this and attract a broad mix of people, they have set up outreach programmes and surveyed the community to find out how they would like to be approached by the organisation.

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# Attracting talent and building relationships



Attracting diverse talent has presented many challenges and opportunities for the attendees of this Roundtable. The group discussed attracting diverse early talent without coming across as tokenistic, false or untrustworthy in their efforts.

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## The conversation



A key message throughout our Roundtable was, “Be the change you want to see”. Businesses must be open and honest about where they are in their D&I journey to attract the people they want.

Role models are critical to attracting diverse talent. Attendees recognise that this presents a ‘chicken and egg’ scenario; you can’t use role models if you don’t have them. However, there is a danger of becoming tokenistic and singling out individuals within the business to be those role models. This may make them feel uncomfortable and choose to leave the company. Honesty and openness are key.

To avoid singling out individuals, one organisation runs network groups for groups including BAMEH and LGBTQIA+, giving employees a place to connect with people who share similar experiences as them. These groups aim to provide a voice to these communities. The chairpeople for each group are responsible for promoting and championing the groups around the business. Building these relationships solidifies the company culture and helps potential candidates feel at ease about applying for an opportunity. This also goes for companywide policies, including flexible working for those returning from maternity leave and support for those who are neurodiverse or young offenders.

Businesses cannot expect instant results from one D&I focused campaign. An ‘always-on’ approach is essential to ensure the company is positioned well with the target groups before the vacancy goes live. Attendees at this Roundtable spoke about partnering with organisations such as Shaw Trust, which will help build relationships with underrepresented groups throughout the year. They also discussed work experience and how they can widen the definition of this to become more inclusive.

Work experience is a fantastic way to attract talent to an organisation. But many attendees shared that their organisation usually runs on a ‘friends and family’ basis for work experience, which will exclude groups of people, including children in care and those who have second or third-generation unemployed parents. One attendee has turned this around in their organisation by allowing ‘friends and family’ work experience only if it is matched with a work experience placement for someone from a disadvantaged background. Another business ran a targeted work experience placement scheme in London and successfully attracted a wide range of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, sometimes engaging with local schools to attract this talent can also be a barrier. Following the pandemic, getting children back on track with their learning is the priority. One attendee has moved from work experience ranging from 1–2 weeks to running insight days which are more appealing to the schools.

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# Supporting candidates through the process



During this and previous roundtable events, many attendees have shared their desire to have a hiring process that reduces barriers to entry for early talent and diverse groups. Sometimes, this is at odds with managers who believe in the traditional assessment methods, including GCSE or A-Level grades and CVs. So how are businesses incorporating their D&I strategy throughout the recruitment process?

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## The conversation



When supporting candidates through the journey, personal contact and building a trusted relationship are the most important things for the attendees at this roundtable event.

An attendee who has recently joined as the diversity and inclusion lead within her company spoke of her experience of being hired into what she considered a 'white male industry'.

During the application process, she chose not to move ahead. But, determined not to lose a great candidate, the business reached out to her personally to explain where they were in their D&I journey and how they wanted her to help them get there. This honesty helped build a trusting relationship with the candidate and she joined the business. This activity is now firmly ingrained in their hiring strategy as a result. Her advice is to be proactive. Release a diversity statement, set up groups to support new joiners, and ensure you have diverse people on the interviewing panel to make sure individuals feel supported throughout.

As discussed in previous roundtables, a lot of businesses have moved their recruitment processes online.

The digital divide has meant that many candidates from disadvantaged groups do not feel comfortable with the technology required to undertake an online interview or assessment centre. One attendee even said they had experienced candidates who panicked about what established employees would consider a minor glitch and just shut the laptop mid-interview.

While some feel the digital divide has excluded groups of people without access to technology, others believe it has opened their opportunities to a much broader and more diverse group of people.

One attendee stated that their organisation has changed their perspective during the pandemic and moved to a more hybrid working mode. This has allowed them to select early talent from locations other than close to their London office. Reducing the barrier of expensive travel into London has enabled them to cast the net wider and provide more opportunities. Another agreed and said their organisation saw a more diverse range of candidates attending virtual assessment days due to reduced cost and logistics barriers.

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Next, the discussion moved to 'disempowering managers' through the process. One attendee posed the question, "You've done all this work to get the individual to apply what's stopping the hiring manager from making a snap judgement about them, whether during selection or interview?".

One attendee has implemented an organisational change whereby the interviewers are not given any CVs, assessment test results or application forms. They go into the interview only knowing the person they will meet has the proper criteria for that role. This ensures confidentiality and a level playing field for all candidates entering the interview stage.

Another organisation uses a panel of employees to interview candidates who have nothing to do with the hiring manager or hiring team. They are also teaching their graduate and apprentice employees how to interview, to allow early talent to meet individuals in the organisation who are more 'like them'. An attendee from a different industry said they have a similar process, bringing at least one out of the three on the interviewing panel from a separate business area. Their interviewers must also go through unconscious bias and D&I training before the interview.

David Allison of TheTalentPeople says organisations need to start by considering the whole person and reflecting on whether their recruitment process is truly inclusive.

Exam grades have historically been used to evaluate candidate suitability, but businesses need to be aware that this measurement is often affected by the individual's location. If they are in a deprived area, they are more likely to have lower grades than someone in an affluent area. Businesses should also review their use of application form questions. Disadvantaged young people may lack the support around them to complete the application form and articulate themselves accurately.

Another consideration is how prepared individuals are to apply for roles. In the GetMyFirstJob database, if you are at the highest level of socioeconomic status, you are 25% more likely to have a CV on your profile which provides an advantage to more affluent individuals. TheTalentPeople are therefore reaching out directly to young people to offer CV writing workshops.



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### More from the roundtable...

If you liked what you read here, why not attend our next roundtable via our [events page](#).

You can also catch up on our previous discussions via our [resource hub](#).

If you're looking for more in-depth insights into candidate behaviour, we're pleased to be able to offer you our own research into the world of early talent - read more [here](#).



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