



# EVERYDAY INCLUSION

The events of 2020 have thrown a stark light on the divisions that exist between us. From the health inequalities of COVID-19 and the way in which the economic crisis is impacting more heavily on some than others to the anti-racist protests highlighting ongoing racism; many are asking how to create a fairer, more equal world.

At Business in the Community (BITC), we believe business has a powerful role to play.

Prior to the pandemic, BITC research showed that, despite organisation's best efforts, many employees felt excluded at work. Women, younger workers and employees from black, Asian and ethnic minority communities were more likely to face 'non-inclusive behaviours' at work – from seemingly benign, low level slights such as inappropriate jokes and other micro-aggressions to deliberate harassment and discrimination<sup>1</sup>. The impact of COVID-19 on workers experiences is still being understood, but early research suggests there is a risk widespread financial pressures, the rise of mental health problems and the rapid shift to remote working for many could amplify non-inclusive dynamics<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, there is a concerning overlap between those most likely to

experience poor treatment at work, and those set to bear the brunt of economic measures adopted as business and others adapt to changed working environments. For example, survey data has found more mothers than fathers have lost jobs in the past six months<sup>3</sup>. Many are also warning that organisations which struggled to mainstream diversity and inclusion during normal times could lose sight of these efforts in the 'new normal' as other issues push them down the agenda<sup>4</sup>.

Against this backdrop, BITC's work to support employers to create truly inclusive working cultures where everyone feels included – they feel like they belong, have a voice, are valued and can be their true selves, every day – has never been more important. Our landmark Everyday Inclusion campaign brings together our work, often focussed on supporting individual groups, such as women and older employees at work, under one umbrella.

## What is an inclusive working culture?

Organisational efforts to grow and nurture inclusive working cultures have focussed on different things at different times, from demographic diversity to prioritising the experiences of specific groups. BITC believes a modern vision for inclusive working cultures is one where everyone feels included – they feel like they belong, have a voice, are valued

<sup>1</sup> BITC and Deloitte (2019) YouGov Survey Findings, Workplace Discrimination, October. Polling undertaken of 2,000 UK employees.

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey has warned that teams newly working in separate locations can feel confused and isolated with 'uncertainty about whom to talk with on specific issues and how and when to approach colleagues, leading to hold-ups and delays. In such a climate, there is a risk of amplifying non-inclusive dynamics.' See

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-still-matter>

<sup>3</sup> See 'Parents, especially mothers, paying heavy price for lockdown' available here

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14861>

<sup>4</sup> Some have warned that companies slow to make progress on diversity and inclusion sometimes called 'laggards' may fall further behind as COVID 19 and ensuing economic challenges put additional pressure on companies e.g See <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-still-matters>



and can be their true selves, every day – regardless of their different characteristics and backgrounds.

### **How can businesses and other employers create inclusive working cultures?**

This briefing paper includes a set of recommendations for organisations wanting to create inclusive working cultures to follow. These draw on the insight of many years of work in this area, particularly around race and gender, cutting edge research as analysed by the Global Institute of Women's Leadership of Kings College London, and the experiences BITC members have shared with us, as they grapple with the new normal of a COVID-19 world.

Depending on your organisation's wider approach to diversity and inclusion, you may find it helpful to follow these recommendations step by step – or pick those areas that are most pertinent to your current situation.

**Be brave and listen** gather insight around the everyday experiences of your employees when it comes to working culture and feelings of inclusion, going beyond online surveys to include other opportunities to 'lift the lid', such as listening circles and employee network forums. Quality data that includes an understanding of lived experience is especially important at a time when old trends may be disrupted (for good or bad) – for example, among teams where some remain at home and others are in the office.

**Be clear about your organisation's expectations:** label clearly that your organisation wants everyone to feel they belong, are valued, and heard. Be explicit about the damage even low level, non-inclusive behaviours can do, and that tackling

poor behaviour is everyone's responsibility – this can make it easier for individuals to act. Embracing differences between your workforce in, for example, corporate communications can help people feel a sense of belonging, particularly those from ethnic minority groups. These messages are most effective if they are underpinned with policies and practices.

**Ensure staff feel safe and able to speak up:** employees can be wary of challenging non-inclusive behaviours for fear of reprisal, and wider organisational culture around feeling safe and valued can play an important role in overcoming this. Explain that challenge and feedback to support inclusive working experiences are welcome; some organisations have introduced 'inclusion ambassadors' to spearhead these efforts.

**Give your people the right tools to challenge themselves and others:** diversity training and other initiatives to support employee's feelings of inclusion are proven to work better when they include 'perspective taking' where people learn about others different to themselves, active learning like group discussions, and promote dialogue between different groups. Consider how you can support colleagues to become effective allies; research shows seeing someone calmly confront an incident of 'exclusive' behaviour can mean wider staff feel their organisation is one where inclusion is valued.

**Make sure your wider policies are fair and just – and your people know that.** employees should be clear about how decisions are made around for example, pay and promotion, and be confident that you take an unbiased and objective approach. If, like many, you are restructuring, be mindful of making sure some demographics e.g., gender,



race, age, disability, are not worse affected than others; there is a risk that efforts to cut costs can turn the clock back on diversity and inclusion, undermining wider initiatives to foster inclusion.

### The evidence base: diving deeper

The above recommendations draw on BITC's report 'Ensuring inclusive working cultures – what really works?' Produced by the Global Institute of Women's Leadership at Kings College London, this reviewed over 60 pieces of academic literature, primarily selected from 'in workplace' research, to understand what the data shows really works when it comes to fostering inclusion at work.

BITC members can download the full report from BITC's website, some areas not referenced in this briefing paper include: the pivotal role line managers can play, the need to consider both promotion and prevention when fostering inclusive working cultures, and the powerful way in which employee networks or similar 'responsibility structures' can champion the diversity agenda.

### How BITC can help

For all the above recommendations, BITC has tried and tested advisory products and accompanying campaign materials to support your organisation's work to foster an inclusive working culture.

These include advisory sessions, typically workshops, aimed at 'lifting the lid' on your current culture, including listening circles, guidance around maintaining and enhancing effective employee networks and supporting staff to discuss race and issues related to intersectionality and privilege via our flagship Let's Talk About Race programme. We also offer bystander intervention training and support on everyday advocate and allyship.

Training aimed at leaders includes 'Exploring Inclusive leadership', and support with 'Managing Multigenerational Teams.' In addition, we have a number of online resources designed to support employers during this challenging year including: [Responsible Restructures: Facing the future together](#) and support with [Taking an inclusive approach to remote working](#)

Finally, BITC members can also access case studies of the approach other employers have taken around inclusion, compelling real life stories from Santander, Deloitte, CapGemini, the British Film Institute and many more.

For further information about how you can get involved in this campaign, please contact your Relationship Manager, Inclusion Advisor, or Campaign Manager Emily Rona-Roper [Emily.rona-roper@bitc.org.uk](mailto:Emily.rona-roper@bitc.org.uk)