



Recruitment  
& Employment  
Confederation



# Unlock the power of inclusive recruitment

for your business, clients and candidates

INCLUSION  
CROWD



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# Introduction

**We know that working in recruitment can be tough, and when it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) things might get a bit confusing and even daunting at times.**

After talking with our members, we noticed a few common themes:

- ▶ A fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, worries about getting 'cancelled' and concerns about causing offence.
- ▶ Diverse candidates simply aren't applying to the roles being advertised.
- ▶ Small owner-operator businesses feeling overwhelmed with where to begin.
- ▶ Recruitment consultants developing the right skills to engage a diverse range of candidates and clients.
- ▶ Keeping up with rapidly shifting client expectations, including analysis of diversity data and performance expectations.
- ▶ Making sure recruitment businesses are diverse and inclusive organisations first; clients are examining the diversity of their supply chains and recruitment providers.

That is why we have put together this guide – to help you navigate the world of workplace equality, diversity and inclusion. We will break down what these terms mean, show you how they impact your day-to-day work as a business owner or recruiter, boost your confidence in leading EDI conversations with your teams and help you engage with underrepresented groups to make your business stronger and more future proof.

The accompanying EDI resource pack offers comprehensive insights and practical guidance, equipping recruiters to champion EDI.

It is okay if you are feeling a bit uncertain or apprehensive about this topic. The most important step you can take is to actively be part of the conversation. Do not let fear hold you back from learning more, asking questions and seeking guidance and support. Making a start is the most important thing - we are here to help.

The accompanying **EDI resource pack** offers comprehensive insights and practical guidance, equipping recruiters to champion EDI.



*“As with everything else, the REC is right by your side, making sure that, together, we can make that difference”.*

Neil Carberry, Chief Executive, REC



**Neil Carberry:**  
**REC's commitment to EDI leadership**



**Michelle Mellor:**  
**Building inclusive workplaces in recruitment**

This guide consists of 3 chapters, each designed to support you on your equality diversity and inclusion development and provide you with practical tips along the way.

Chapter 1 outlines relevant language and helps you navigate legal requirements when it comes to workplace EDI. This equips you with the basics to start building your internal EDI strategy which is discussed in chapter 2. This includes advice on how your internal progress enhances client relationships and benefits your brand, including talent attraction. Drawing on that, the final chapter includes a comprehensive step-by-step guide on developing inclusive recruitment process, from initial conversations with the client to effective onboarding.

The REC has partnered with Inclusion Crowd to bring you this guide.

## Setting the stage for future success: Why does EDI matter?

**Understanding the importance of EDI is not just an ethical imperative, it's a strategic advantage for businesses in an increasingly diverse, competitive and interconnected world. Both the social and business cases for EDI are compelling, offering huge advantages to clients, candidates and recruiters alike.**

Socially, embracing EDI creates an inclusive workplace, fostering belonging and aligning with broader values. From a business perspective, diverse teams drive innovation, cater to diverse markets and elevate employee engagement.

For clients, partnering with EDI-focused recruiters enables access to a rich talent pool, enhancing the match between candidates and organisational values. Candidates benefit from fair processes and equal opportunities. Recruiters, as catalysts for positive change, contribute to a more inclusive job market.

*“EDI may seem like a short-term risk and slower burn, but in the longer-term recruiters will see much better overall profitability, with increased client and candidate satisfaction.”*

Neil Morrison, Group HRD, Severn Trent Plc

What does that mean for how you do business? Think of your recruitment business as a mobile phone manufacturer. The mobile phone you produced several years ago was ground-breaking and led the way, but now, it is outdated. If you allow yourself to be complacent, resting on past successes and refusing to innovate, you will become the company known for yesterday's technology.

Just as mobile phones have evolved, the recruitment sector is changing rapidly. Our role is to ensure REC members not only keep pace with these changes but proactively lead the way. Embrace innovation, adapt to current trends and strive for excellence. Just as the smartphone industry has thrived by evolving and embracing innovation, new perspectives and fresh thinking,

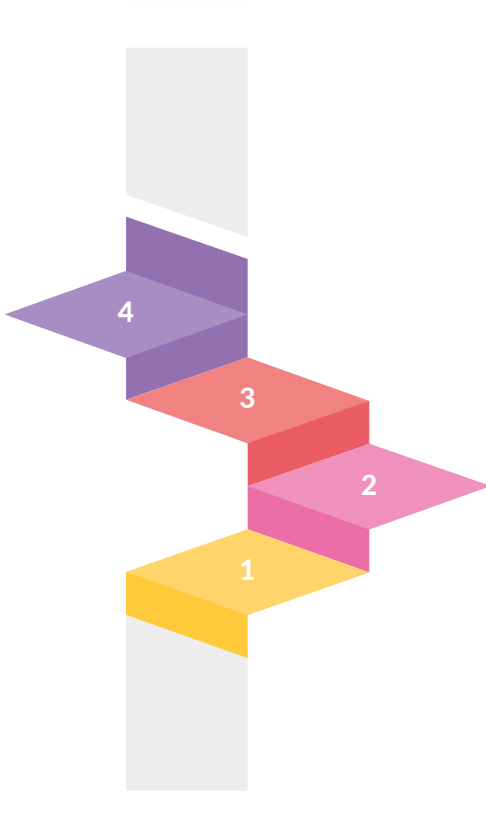


we want our members to stay at the forefront of transformation across the recruitment sector.

It is understandable to feel overwhelmed when deciding where to begin. That is precisely why we have tailored this guide around four primary aims – this way it doesn't matter whether your recruitment business is large or small, or where you currently stand on your EDI journey; these four key objectives will resonate with everyone:



## Tricia Wombell: Leading EDI for REC's organisational success



### Inclusive recruitment

#### 4 Key aims

- 4 Provide added value & consultancy**  
The recruitment and staffing sector is rapidly changing, and clients expect more than transactional recruitment services.
- 3 Sourcing exceptional candidates**  
Irrespective of background, culture, ethnicity or characteristic, REC members have the ability to source the best talent for clients.
- 2 Attracting top internal talent**  
REC members must remain competitive by attracting the best and the brightest in the sector to join their team.
- 1 Win & retain high margin business**  
The REC supports members to navigate evolving client and candidate expectations, to win and retain profitable business.

### 1. Win and retain high margin business.

*“...we are winning big contracts based on our values and our approach to EDI”.*

REC Member: Abdul Mozzamdar, PSR Solutions

In a fiercely competitive marketplace, recruitment companies who place authentic and credible focus on EDI are more likely to attract and retain clients. Authentic commitment to EDI aligns with social values and serves as a significant differentiator.

Increasingly, clients are selecting recruitment partners capable of understanding their EDI challenges and collaborating to address them. Clients also want a recruitment partner with extensive reach to secure top talent. EDI capability and competence is crucial to maintain client satisfaction, trust and loyalty.

## 2. Attracting and retaining top talent for your own business

*“...a business that looks after its people does better commercially and retains the best talent”.*

REC Member: Clive Hutchings, STR Group

An EDI-led approach opens doors to more talent. Candidates are increasingly attracted to companies that value and prioritise inclusion, innovation, development and individual wellbeing. Inclusive cultures and environments help to address this, fostering employee and team wellbeing, a sense of belonging and career growth – all of which improves talent retention. Recruitment companies with a strong EDI presence will naturally attract individuals seeking an employer who shares their values.

Employers that posted about diversity saw 26% more applications from women than employers who posted less<sup>1</sup>

## 3. Sourcing exceptional candidates for your clients

Clients want assurance that you can also secure the very best talent for them, regardless of background or characteristics. This means reaching beyond traditional pools, networks and sources of talent. Actively promoting commitment to EDI in candidate attraction helps to engage quality individuals from a wider variety of backgrounds, perspectives and experiences. Proactive EDI commitment must be maintained throughout the recruitment lifecycle: understanding and managing the needs and expectations of individual candidates is central to delivering top talent that will delight your client.

## 4. Providing clients with added value

*“... it is important to do the right thing and exceed expectations, clients are deserving of more added value relationships”.*

REC Member: Jayne Morris, TPP

Client and candidate expectations are becoming ever more sophisticated. They recognise a world of benefits beyond transactional efficiency. For example, with businesses driving

<sup>1</sup> <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/learning-culture/diversity-workplace-statistics-dei-importance>

greater value from their supply chains, clients are hungry for recruitment partners who can help them respond to EDI needs and expectations across a wider universe of stakeholders.

Increasingly, both clients and candidates are seeking partnerships with recruitment organisations that align with their values and goals. Blind focus on being the best at what good used to look like can lead the race to the bottom. Alternatively, a strategic and consultative EDI-led approach, can help you offer better value and help you stand out from the crowd as a result.

## Who can benefit from this guide?

**In the dynamic world of recruitment, where people are at the heart of every decision and every hire, this guide serves a diverse audience.**

We're talking to the owner-operators of small and medium-sized recruitment firms who hold the influence and power to ensure that best practices are not just talked about but embedded in the firm's culture. This guide will help you start those crucial conversations, manage performance and act as a practical internal training resource.

For the leaders in bigger recruitment businesses and the HR professionals who make critical decisions daily, this guide offers valuable insights. Use it to foster meaningful EDI dialogues across various teams, build buy-in and emphasise that EDI isn't just an HR issue but a collective responsibility to be worked on and embedded within all strands of operation. By equipping your leadership and teams with this knowledge, you pave the way for a more inclusive and thriving workplace.

Aspiring future leaders eager to make a difference can use this guide as a gateway to enhancing the services you provide to clients and candidates, individually and for the long-term success of your firm. Learn how to influence best practices and add immeasurable value to the organisation. Your journey starts here.

And last but not least, the power to make a difference is also in the hands of recruitment consultants who are committed to improvement and making their mark. Use this guide to enrich your knowledge and hone your recruitment skills. Discover how to venture into the market with confidence, sourcing diverse talent and ensuring a brighter future for your organisation. This is a way for consultants to achieve excellence for their business and create a fairer society.



**Ed Jervis:**  
**Shaping inclusive recruitment with Inclusion Crowd**



# Chapter 1:

## Understanding the language and law of EDI

**"It's a minefield!" Unfortunately, that is a common concern often voiced by those trying to manage equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) without taking the time to learn the law and language of the landscape. In this chapter we walk you through key terms and definitions and UK law, providing some examples of how to get to grips with and apply them in everyday operations and dialogue.**

Nervousness, wariness, discomfort and confusion – as with any new language or discipline, it's easy to understand why those who don't know better might throw their hands up in frustration and back away.

In the world of recruitment – focused on valuing and evaluating people – we cannot afford to not know better. We must educate ourselves. We must be more knowledgeable and comfortable with EDI than anybody else.

Understanding, implementing and abiding by current EDI law and language is non-negotiable for modern recruiters and organisations. Embracing these concepts not only ensures legal and regulatory compliance and keeps your business safe, but it also fosters a diverse and inclusive work environment that leads to better business outcomes.

***"Consultants have to understand how EDI impacts the job they do and how it makes them a better recruiter."***

**REC Member: Jayne Morris, CEO, TPP Recruitment**

Beyond that which is defined in law, there is no one-size-fits-all 'correct' approach for understanding and articulating EDI. The journey and terminology preferences may differ for each recruiter. It is what these words represent that matters, and the spirit in which they are spoken and acted upon.

# Understanding the language

## 1. The overarching terms:

Equality	Equality is the principle of treating all individuals the same, regardless of their unique circumstances or background. In the context of workplace EDI, promoting equality means providing the same opportunities, resources and access to everyone.
Diversity	Embracing diversity is a celebration of individual differences. These unique qualities not only enrich our lives but also enhance our personal growth and the organisations we are part of. These include socio-economic background, nationality, culture and education as well as characteristics that are protected in law (see 'The 9 Protected Characteristics' on page 19).
Inclusion	Inclusion is about much more than diversity and representation. It is the ability to create an environment where everyone is safe, welcomed and genuinely valued. Inclusion is the practice of allowing people to feel a sense of belonging as well as the ability to fully participate in decision-making processes. This is a continual improvement exercise that constantly addresses visible and invisible barriers that might prevent certain groups or individuals from thriving within the organisation.
Equity	Equity is about recognising that people have unique needs, different starting points and challenges. Driving equity means placing an emphasis on tailoring support, resources and opportunities to account for disparities such as institutional or systemic racism.

Brought together, these terms and their acronyms (EDI, DEI, D&I...) all represent the broader agenda for promoting fairness, representation, equal opportunities and justice for every person in society and the workplace. Variation in their usage often stems from an organisation's specific priorities and objectives.

At the beginning of our own journey, the REC used 'D&I' as the label for our work in this space. Today we refer to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This change followed feedback from our members and because we feel this nomenclature best reflects our own approach to this topic.

It is important to note, however, that there is no 'correct' title. For example, even though 'equity' is not a part of our chosen title, we still embrace it in our approach.


Words matter, but it is crucial that organisations don't get bogged down in 'what to call things', rather than taking meaningful action. What matters is how organisations choose to stand up for and empower their people and everyone they serve, represent and partner with.

## 2. Intersectionality

'Intersectionality' offers a framework for recruiters to recognise that individuals may face discrimination across multiple aspects of their identity. It underscores that individuals have diverse, overlapping backgrounds, circumstances and characteristics. Different systems of oppressions (like racism and sexism) often "intersect" creating multiple obstacles for disadvantaged groups.

### For example:

A middle-aged woman experiencing menopause may face discrimination that is a combination of age and gender discrimination. If you want to know more, check out our guide

 [Menopause and Employment](#)

A dad from a working-class background, raising his children by himself, may face discrimination because he is a single father and discrimination because of the economic circumstances of his upbringing. Therefore, workplace programmes encouraging social mobility should address the diverse needs of employees to be effective.

By considering how different characteristics intersect within organisational systems and structures, we gain insight into how systemic barriers and biases can arise in recruitment and employment.



**Maylis Djikalou:**  
**Recruiting across borders and overcoming adversity**

### 3. Understanding unconscious bias | The Royal Society

Over 99% of our reasoning happens “unconsciously”. 'Unconscious bias' (sometimes called 'implicit bias') describes the associations we maintain outside our conscious awareness and control. These can cause us to make snap judgments and assessments automatically. They are influenced by our own background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes and cultural context.

Unconscious bias affects everyone and is not limited to protected characteristics. Height, weight, names, accents and many other ways in which we perceive and experience other people can trigger unconscious bias.

***“Any bias is bad for business. Companies must act now to eradicate all forms of discrimination, including any bias in recruitment”***

Matthew Fell, Director of Competitiveness, BusinessLDN

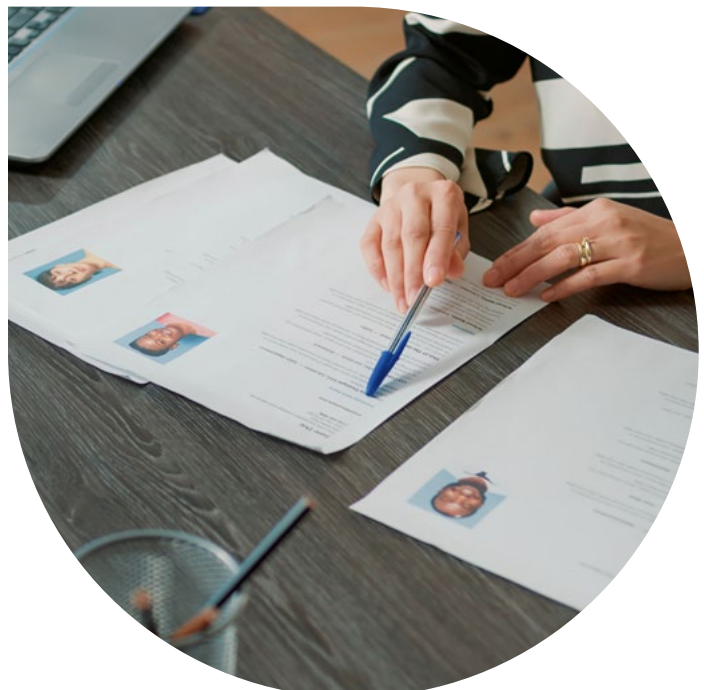


#### **Understanding unconscious bias**

The Royal Society <sup>2</sup>

In recruitment, unconscious bias can have significant influence on attitudes and behaviours towards candidates. It can silently infiltrate various stages of the process, such as CV sifting, candidate analysis, client interactions and recruitment marketing. It can influence key decisions in the recruitment and selection process and unintentionally perpetuate inequality. For example, CVs may be rejected because of unconscious bias regarding peoples' names.

Unconscious bias often expresses itself as a preference for one candidate or another because of 'culture fit'. We are likely to favour candidates with whom we share characteristics (this is known as 'affinity bias').



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE>

### Examples:

During the hiring process, a manager reviews several CVs and encounters one candidate name that feels unfamiliar and challenging to pronounce. Unconsciously, the manager may associate this name with a lack of cultural fit within the organisation, even if the candidate is highly qualified. This unconscious bias could lead to the candidate being overlooked or receiving less favourable treatment based solely on their name, which has nothing to do with their abilities.

In another case, the hiring manager is interviewing a candidate from the same hometown, who attended the same school. They discover they have children of the same age and are both married. While personal connections are natural, there is a risk that the hiring manager may unconsciously favour this candidate over others, even if those others have more experience.

While we all have our biases, a diligent recruiter knows how to counteract their impact. Unconscious bias can have a significant impact on hiring decisions, and it is crucial to implement policies to help combat this kind of bias. Regularly reviewing decision-making processes and using diverse selection panels will help do so.

## 4. Psychological safety

Fostering 'psychological safety' means creating an environment where individuals can express their thoughts, experiences, ideas and concerns without fear of judgment, reprisal, discrimination or retribution. Some individuals may hesitate to voice suggestions or insights from their individual experiences for fear of being labelled 'troublemakers'. Effective leaders foster a constructive atmosphere that not only welcomes feedback but also acts on it.

## 5. Stereotypes

These are simplified, often unfair, generalised beliefs or assumptions about individuals or groups based on certain characteristics. We asked members to volunteer some real-world client examples and these two stood out:

### **Older people and technology:**

One member told us they had to work with a client who said, “older people are not good with technology”. This stereotype assumes that older individuals may struggle with modern digital tools or devices because they didn't grow up with them, which is not the case.

### **Religion and belief as 'culture fit':**

Another member told us about a client who felt some religious beliefs may not be a good 'culture fit' in their workplace. The client said that the team often goes out after work. This stereotype assumes that people from certain religious backgrounds may not feel comfortable participating in such activities. More importantly, even if that was the case, not wanting to participate in some after work activities is not a reflection of candidate's credentials and their value to the team.

It is important to remember that even if an individual does appear to conform to any given stereotype on the surface, it is never appropriate for any related direct and indirect assumptions to influence the thinking and behaviour of those they interact with.

## 6. Pronouns and misgendering

Pronouns are the words we use to refer to someone instead of using their name, like "he," "she," or "they". It's critical that everyone involved in the recruitment process uses the correct pronouns to respect a candidate's gender identity.

Misgendering occurs when someone is referred to using the wrong pronouns, which can happen unintentionally in the recruitment process. Recruiters should be mindful of this risk and proactively ask candidates for their preferred pronouns to ensure respectful and inclusive communication.

Most importantly of all: if a candidate tells you their pronouns, make sure you always use these when referring to them or introducing/discussing them with clients and other stakeholders.



**Jade Fraser:**

**Tackling real-world challenges in inclusive recruitment**



# Understanding the law

## 1. The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010<sup>3</sup> is UK legislation designed to protect individuals from discrimination and promote equality in various aspects of life, including employment, education and access to services. (The Equality Act does not apply to Northern Ireland [Northern Ireland's anti-discrimination legislation](#).)

The Act replaced and consolidated several previous anti-discrimination laws, simplifying and strengthening the legal protections against discrimination for certain groups of people.

For both individual recruiters and recruitment organisations, it is essential to know and understand the implications of the [Equality Act 2010](#) and take measures to safeguard both personal and business interests.



## 2. The nine protected characteristics

The Equality Act 2010<sup>4</sup> sets out nine characteristics protected from discrimination by law in the UK:

### 1. Age

A person belonging to a particular age or age range (for example '18- to 30-year-olds').

**Ageism**<sup>5</sup>: Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age. For more advice check out our [Good Recruitment for Older Workers GROW Toolkit](#).

3 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

4 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1>

5 <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism#:~:text=Ageism%20refers%20to%20the%20stereotypes,or%20oneself%20based%20on%20age>

## 2. Disability

A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out everyday activities. The Equality Act 2010 states that a person does not have to 'prove' or provide diagnostic evidence of this.

**Ableism<sup>6</sup>:** Beliefs or practices that rest on the assumption that not being disabled is "normal" while other states of being need to be "fixed" or altered. This can result in devaluing or discriminating against people with physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities. Institutionalised ableism may include or take the form of un/intentional organisational barriers that result in disparate treatment of disabled people.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/ableism>



### 3. Gender reassignment

This is the process by which a person transitions away from the sex they were assigned at birth. A person does not have to be undergoing a medical/surgical transition, or be required to have a Gender Recognition Certificate, to be protected under this category.

**Transition**<sup>7</sup>: The process of shifting toward a gender role different from that assigned at birth, which can include social transition, such as new names, pronouns and clothing, and medical transition, such as hormone therapy or surgery.

**Transphobia**<sup>8</sup>: Negative attitudes, feelings, or actions towards transgender people or transness in general. Transphobia can include fear, aversion, hatred, violence or anger towards people who do not conform to social gender expectations.

Check out our  [“Legal Bitesize” on transgender workers](#) prepared by our legal team.

**Non-binary or genderqueer**<sup>9</sup> is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not solely woman or man, or identities that exist outside the gender binary entirely.



### Ben Pechey: Transcending labels in recruitment

### 4. Marriage and civil partnership

Marriage and civil partnerships are legal unions that can be entered into by two people of either the opposite sex or the same sex. Under Equality Act, those who are married or in a civil partnership must not be treated less favourably than those who are not.

### 5. Pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

### 6. Race

'Race' refers to a group of people defined by their skin colour, nationality (including citizenship) and ethnic or national origins.

**Racism**<sup>10</sup>: Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or group based on their racial or ethnic group.

**Anti-racism**<sup>11</sup> goes beyond “not being racist”. It encompasses a range of ideas and political actions which are meant to actively counter racial prejudice, systemic racism, and the oppression of specific racial groups.

7 <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/transition>

8 <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/transphobia>

9 <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/non-binary>

10 <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/racism>

11 <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/anti-racism>

## 7. Religion or belief

'Religion' refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. 'Belief' refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. A belief should affect an individual's life choices or the way they live for it to be included in the definition.

## 8. Sex

A man or a woman. A non-binary or gender fluid person is protected under the gender reassignment category.

**Sexism**<sup>12</sup>: Discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping based on gender, most often perpetrated against women and girls.

**Gender**<sup>13</sup> refers to the range of socially constructed characteristics and behaviours pertaining to femininity and masculinity, with particular reference to social and cultural differences between groups of people rather than biological ones.

## 9. Sexual orientation

Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.


**Homophobia**<sup>14</sup>: The fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. People can also outwardly manifest homophobia towards other people as a result of cultural, social and religious views, or even as a result of internalised shame.



**The Queer Ally Lexicon,  
an intersectional LGBTQ+ glossary of terms**<sup>15</sup>



**The Equality and Human Rights Commission,  
Information about each of the protected characteristics**<sup>16</sup>

For Northern Ireland anti-discrimination legislation  [click here](#).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/sexism>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/gender>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary/homophobia>

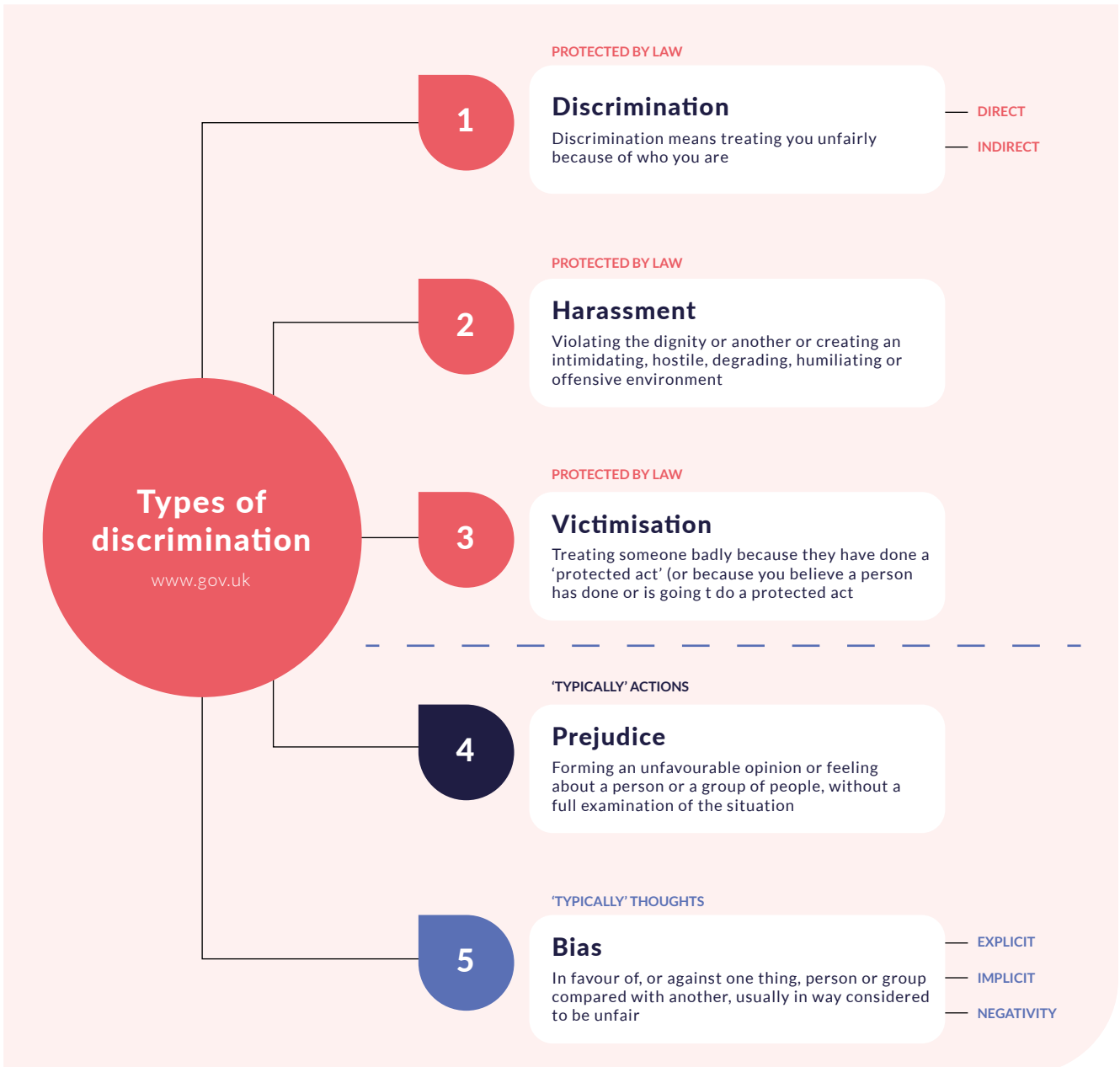
<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wecreatespace.co/glossary>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010>

### 3. The four main types of discrimination<sup>17</sup>:

In the world of recruitment, there are several significant risks associated with getting EDI wrong, particularly when it comes to managing internal staff, engaging clients and managing candidates.

Apart from in very limited circumstances allowed in law, employers and employees must not make decisions about job applicants or staff based on a protected characteristic. Doing so could lead to a discrimination claim to an employment tribunal.



<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights/how-you-can-be-discriminated-against>

### **Direct discrimination**

This means overtly treating one person less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic.

#### **Example:**

A client tells you that they do not want any candidates over 25. (Discrimination on the basis of age).

### **Indirect discrimination**

This can happen when an organisation puts a rule or policy or a way of doing things in place which has a less favourable impact on individuals with certain protected characteristics rather than others.

#### **Example:**

You decide to host work events that extend into the evening. Caring responsibilities remain largely performed by women and many female employees are unable to participate because of childcare responsibilities.

### **Harassment**

This means treating an individual in a way that violates their dignity, or creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

#### **Example:**

An employee at your recruitment agency has recently come out as gay. His colleagues have started calling him 'princess.' This is explained away as being meant in good humour (such behaviour is often referred to as 'banter') but the gay employee is protected within the law from working in an offensive environment and if he feels humiliated or degraded, your agency is at risk. Workplace banter is an area of increasing concern in the recruitment sector; we must be proactive in managing it.

### **Victimisation**

This means treating an individual unfairly if they are taking action under the Equality Act (such as making a complaint of discrimination or harassment) or if they are supporting someone else who is doing so.

#### **Example:**

A recruitment consultant has raised a complaint at work because she feels she is being discriminated against based on her race. A few months later, she applies for a promotion. A member of the selection panel raises her complaint as cause for concern, commenting that she is a 'troublemaker'. If she does not get the promotion and this is the reason why, she is being victimised.



## Chapter 2:

# The EDI impact roadmap

**In this section, we walk through the journey recruiters must take to build authentic brand and presence with clients, candidates and across their sector. Ultimately a focus on internal EDI practices within your business will drive external credibility and sustainable business growth. Each step is accompanied by practical tips.**

## A new way forward

*"I appreciate that for smaller recruitment companies in this economy focusing their attention on EDI may be difficult, but those who fail to embrace EDI will not secure preferred supplier agreements and it will restrict their growth."*

REC Member: Clive Hutchings, CEO, STR Group

There is no going back. Time is running out. The window of getting away with only talking a good game is shrinking rapidly.

Hiring organisations have already accepted – on an intellectual level at least – that they must recruit diverse talent to stand any chance of being taken seriously and achieving sustainable long-term success.

And those organisations who have truly taken it to heart are going after it hard. Those who wish to remain in their supply chains need to do the same. But how? Our answer is: by choosing to evolve from process deliverer to an EDI impact partner.

## What does it mean to be an impact partner?

The best service providers put their clients' needs first because they know this value creation will lead to stronger business performance and growth. They make it their business to understand their clients inside and out – from how their employees feel about the organisation to the new market pressures rolling over their horizon. They are strategic – choosing to pre-empt rather than react.

*“Sadly, with the industry many recruiters are seen to be focused on the end result (placement). A consultant demonstrating the value of building long term relationships, understanding the client’s EDI goals and how to support them will not only make them better recruiters it will improve the industry reputation”.*

REC member: Donna Newton, Head of Client Services, TPP Recruitment

Modern recruiters understand the immense value of strong, collaborative relationships built on mutual trust and respect. They want to be their client's 'go to' advisor and delivery partner.

And they don't wait for their client to invite them to step up. They are already broadening and evolving their thinking, and their approach and thinking differently about their place and purpose in the wider ecosystem they inhabit. They are exploring new and different ways of working – not just to keep up, but to lead.

## The journey to being an EDI impact partner

The very best way to convince a client that you can help them be an inclusive employer is to be an inclusive employer yourself.

Yes, you need to know how to deliver the best inclusive recruitment outcomes (and we'll cover that later, in [chapter 3](#)) but what better proof of your commitment and capability could there be than your own engaged, diverse and dynamic team?

If you've done it for yourself, you can speak from experience as a peer and partner, not just a provider. If you can do that, then you'll find you have significant competitive advantage as well as a high performing and rounded business approach.

If you can't convince your clients and candidates that you have what it takes, your competitors will.

The key principles underpinning the EDI Impact Partner Roadmap are: be brave; be authentic; be proactive; be intentional; and build experience and insight.

There are six stages in the EDI Impact Partner Roadmap, grouped together as follows:

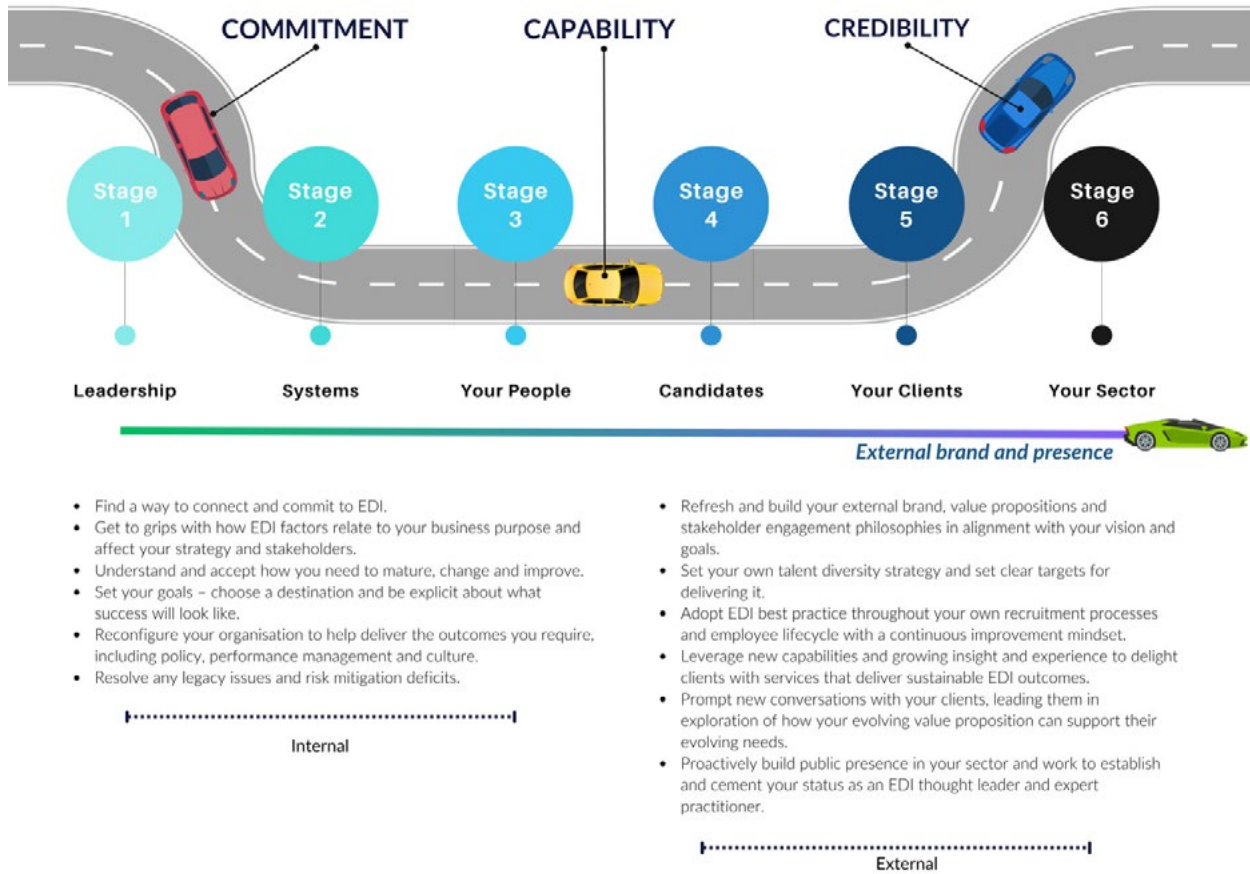
▶ **Internal: leadership, systems, people**

Internal commitment and capability drive external credibility. If you don't do it for yourself, your clients won't believe you'll be able to do it for them.

▶ **External: candidates, clients, sector**

Reimagine and refresh how you approach, engage and work with your external stakeholders – evolving your processes, purposes and presence in the wider world.

Below, we have included an overview of what is involved at each stage.



## A word of warning: there are no shortcuts

It is not always essential to have completed the preceding stage before commencing the next, but we strongly recommend not taking the next step until good progress is already underway earlier in the roadmap.

A warning though: do not try and run before you can walk. Many organisations assume they should jump straight to impressing the outside world with snazzy, off-the-shelf EDI credentials.

This roadmap was designed for, and is being successfully applied by, many different organisations across a range of different sectors who have recognised that the only way to win is through commitment and credibility as well as capability.

In other words: practice what they preach.

On this journey, you must prove that you can do it for yourself first. If you do not, no one will believe you can do it for them. You will look out of your depth at best.

## Don't panic!

No one is suggesting you should transform overnight, and we wouldn't recommend that, even if it were possible. There is immense value in what we learn on our journey from 'ok' to 'better' to 'better still'.

Like a ship changing direction, it takes time to turn. The key is to start turning in good time.

What is separating those who are winning from those who are not is not how far or fast they have travelled but the depth, breadth and quality of their commitment to the journey and the destination (and their acceptance of the need for change, and that the road to success will not be quick and easy).

For the remainder of your first read through this guide, we suggest not trying to force any 'what?' or 'how?' answers from yourself. Instead, give yourself the time and space to explore 'why?'

## Choose your path and start moving

This is not an issue only affecting your clients. It is not 'somebody else's problem'.

Do not make the mistake of putting this in the 'too hard' drawer. Do not take your cues from clients who have chosen only to play at it. Before too long, they and others like them will have to find a way through the wave or get swept out of the race.

***“It is the biggest opportunity facing the recruitment sector today.”***

**Ed Jervis, CEO Inclusion Crowd**

You don't have to do what everybody else is doing. You do have to work out what you should be doing and why.

Regardless of your business' size, turnover or any other factor that you believe is preventing (or protecting) you from having to go on this journey, start exploring the ideas, recommendations and practical takeaways in this guide. Even doing only this will move you forward and begin to differentiate you from your peers.

# 1. Leadership

## Goal: organisational leadership that is personally committed to driving EDI.

Meaningful, positive change cannot embed and thrive in an organisation without direct active and personal engagement from leadership.

They are the principal decision makers. They are the prime role models for what matters and what is acceptable – they shape the cultural agenda and set the tone. They are the face and voice of organisational commitment.

To get everyone onboard, believing and pulling in the same direction they must take the EDI agenda under their wing and drive it from the top. When leaders make EDI their own personal priority, they send a profound, impactful message that reaches deep into the organisation and beyond.

And yet there are many who have not yet stepped up to this responsibility.

One of the biggest challenges to EDI progress is the fear of doing or saying the “wrong thing”. This is especially for people in roles with high levels of accountability. Often, when we see senior leaders delegate responsibility for EDI elsewhere or deliver only tentative or 'hands off' leadership in this space, it's because they are affected by their own doubt, discomfort and uncertainty.

A recognised way to enable leaders to lead the EDI agenda from the front, with credibility and conviction, is to help them connect and get comfortable with it, and then build competence.

***“The senior leadership team is where EDI needs to start, or it will fail. The leaders need to be driving this, making it a priority, and changing the mindset of other leaders and employees”***

**REC Member: Abdul Mozzamdar, Group Social Value Director, PSR Solutions**

Once comfortable on a personal level, leaders can identify, define and articulate the specific EDI challenges facing their business. Take the same approach they might take to addressing any other new challenge for the business. What are the issues? What are the risks? They must challenge themselves to nail this down hard. Beating around the bush or copying someone else's homework will set all subsequent effort up to miss the mark, wasting time and eroding valuable stakeholder engagement in the process.

With a clearly defined problem statement, they can look at how to fix things. Businesses need to develop a clearly defined strategy to deliver success complete with clearly defined metrics for progress and a robust vision they can use to drive engagement, understanding and commitment from stakeholders.

60% of employees want to hear business leaders speak up on diversity issues.

[Report: Why Is Diversity and Inclusion Important, LinkedIn, 2020<sup>18</sup>](#)



<sup>18</sup> <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/learning-culture/diversity-workplace-statistics-dei-importance>

# Practical steps

## 1. Implementing leadership development

Leadership development plays a significant role in advancing EDI within any organisation. It's all about creating a safe and encouraging space for leaders to come together and explore the essentials of EDI. These safe spaces provide an environment where leaders can openly share their ideas, express concerns and discuss potential issues related to EDI. Open and respectful conversations are the foundation of this approach, promoting transparency and understanding among leadership teams. These spaces can be facilitated in-house, or you may wish to seek external support.

*“At the Return Hub, we work primarily with business leaders alongside HR. In organisations like these, where there is a high degree of understanding, we see much higher success rates in terms of attracting, hiring, promoting and retaining senior, diverse individuals”.*

REC Member: Sarah Thorne, Chief Operating Officer, The Return Hub

## 2. Reverse mentoring

Reverse mentoring is an extremely powerful tool for leaders. An example of reverse mentoring is when younger, less experienced employees or employees from underrepresented or minoritised groups mentor the leader. It provides the leader with unique insights into the lived experience of that employee, offering fresh perspectives and enabling the leader to challenge personal assumptions, biases and gain a better understanding about diverse employees.

At the same time, there are important benefits for mentors themselves, such as building confidence and developing their voice while gaining leadership insight and deeper understanding of business concepts and skills. Organisations practicing reverse mentoring can experience higher levels of 'early career' retention than those who do not.

## 3. Demonstrating commitment

The entire organisation will be looking to the leadership team to check if they are taking EDI seriously, or if it is a box-ticking exercise. Leaders must actively take part in EDI initiatives. This includes talking authentically about why fairness, safe spaces and representation matters to them. Taking such a step will make it clear to employees, clients and other stakeholders that you are a modern recruitment business taking EDI seriously.

*“I was determined to create an inclusive culture within the organisation long before ‘diversity and inclusion’ became a commonly used term. Creating a workplace where individuals from all backgrounds can flourish is non-negotiable for me”*

REC Member: Clive Hutchings, CEO, STR Group

Additionally, do all the leaders in the business share similar backgrounds and experiences? Diversity in leadership can help diversity to spread throughout the organisation, supporting long-term ambitions of creating an inclusive and welcoming place to work. Focus on introducing diversity into leadership while also providing senior leadership teams with appropriate training.

Embarking on the journey of creating a full-fledged EDI strategy can feel overwhelming. However, it's perfectly acceptable to begin with a foundation of basic principles and translate them into a practical, actionable plan. If you're unsure about where to start, the EDI resource pack accompanying this guide can be a valuable tool.

In the EDI resource pack, you'll discover next steps and practical checklists designed to guide you through the process. These resources are tailored to assist you in constructing a plan that aligns with your current position on your EDI journey. 'Getting it right' means taking your first steps and then continuing to grow and evolve your strategy over time.

**Example:**

An inclusive leader doesn't just sponsor or open EDI events but participates and stays engaged throughout. They have completed EDI training relevant to their position, specifically focusing on leading the EDI strategy. Most importantly, they are aware of their verbal and non-verbal cues, and understand that their words and actions are observed by others, influencing workforce attitudes and behaviours.



**EDI resource pack**

## 2. Systems

**Goal: a system of governance and management that holds the organisation to account for EDI progress and practices.**

Policy and governance, risk management and compliance, process and technology, data and reporting, organisation design – if leaders are the rightful architects of an inclusive organisation then here is the architecture.

Organisational systems in all their guises are the structure, and the lenses through which effective decision making and improvement activities are informed and enabled.

Regardless of where an organisation is in its EDI journey, robust systems aligned to those ambitions will help hold the organisation to account – driving consistent messages, standards, practices and behaviours.

Effective systems also offer data and insights for key functions and leadership teams, empowering them to address critical issues, monitor progress and ensure accountability at individual and organisational levels.

In each area, the question must be asked: how aligned to enabling and supporting the development and maintenance of an inclusive organisation are the existing arrangements and how can any gaps be closed?

## Practical steps

The first step is to make sure that all employees are aware of the internal processes in place to address concerns and conflicts. Approaches may vary, depending on the size of the business.

It is essential to assess whether you have well-defined resources like a company handbook, social media policy, or bullying and harassment policy. These documents should be readily available, up-to-date and easy to access. If any of these policies are missing or outdated, take immediate action to ensure they are fit for purpose and that employees are familiar with them.

### 1. Drafting an EDI policy

Irrespective of an organisation's size, a specific EDI policy can help establish fundamental guiding principles as well as providing a foundation for procedures to uphold them, such as those for complaints and mediation.

Not only is it an expression of your commitment, but it also helps your people understand their rights and obligations as employees. However, even the best policies will not be impactful if they are not properly implemented, regularly updated and fully understood by everyone. We recommend implementing a schedule of policy review – annually as a minimum – by panels comprised of people representing an inclusive cross-section of your organisation.

If you do not already have an EDI policy in place, ACAS<sup>19</sup> provide a template and the REC provide a policy model for Equal Opportunities and Diversity:



**Download ACAS Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion template**



**Download REC Equal Opportunities and Diversity model**

## 2. Complaint procedure

Ensuring that employees have clear channels for addressing issues within the organisation is vital. Not only do employees need to know what to do, they must feel safe in doing so. The organisation bears the responsibility of safeguarding its employees and must actively promote a culture where everyone understands what behaviours and language is acceptable and what is not.

Employers must take any bullying or discrimination complaint seriously and investigate as soon as possible. If a complaint is not managed appropriately, the complainant may be more likely to make a claim to an employment tribunal, who will take how you managed the complaint into account.

More information and support is available via ACAS online:

 [Approaching a complaint - Handling bullying and discrimination](#)<sup>20</sup>

## 3. Applying technology

Reach out to your technology partners to discuss how to leverage your existing systems to maximise EDI efforts. Whether it's HR, CRM or any other system, these can offer valuable insights and solutions both directly and indirectly relevant to EDI. Additionally, they may share case studies and examples from other clients who have successfully addressed EDI challenges using their solutions.

Those specialising in recruitment solutions understand the challenges and the need for diverse candidate and employee disclosure, especially for businesses operating in various locations and geographies.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.acas.org.uk/equality-and-diversity-monitoring-form-template>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.acas.org.uk/handling-a-bullying-discrimination-complaint>

### 3. People

**Goal: an inclusive culture embodied by engaged employees who are ready to be ambassadors for the organisational commitment to EDI.**

An organisation's employees are its best asset. They embody the workplace culture and are fundamental to the success of all EDI initiatives.

Before focusing on attracting new talent, care should be taken to make sure that the working culture is safe, empowering and welcoming to candidates from diverse backgrounds. Existing employees will be the managers, colleagues and direct reports for all new hires – essential pillars of support and inclusivity.

Staff are also ambassadors for leadership vision and commitment – they need to trust and believe in it themselves before they can be expected to help build that same trust and belief elsewhere. Leaders should consider how to get colleagues to the stage where they are ready to welcome and play their part in driving change.

The current culture – including workforce behaviours, values and opinions – should be reviewed and understood, with a view to identifying opportunities for developing and building on strengths while addressing any risks and weaknesses.

*“...we increasingly have examples in recruitment of candidates refusing job offers for companies that don't demonstrate their EDI credentials. But still not every business is acting to bring this important change about.”*

REC: Overcoming shortages - How to create a sustainable labour market

 [Overcoming shortages: how to create a sustainable labour market](#)

Candidates are becoming more selective when it comes to choosing an employer. A workplace where employees feel recognised, valued and looked after is the best advert for attracting talent.

At the same time, a non-inclusive work culture, discriminatory practices, or incidents that suggest a lack of diversity and inclusivity could repel potential talent.

# Practical steps

## 1. Collecting data

The cliché that if you don't measure something it doesn't get done is apt here. If you don't understand your people and their needs, you will miss opportunities to enhance employee satisfaction, reduce potential risks and retain talent. So, collecting data about equality, diversity and inclusion within your business is an effective way for you to identify areas for improvement, benchmark your efforts against industry best practice, and make solid, data-driven decisions. Repeating these exercises annually will help track progress.

*"You can't just talk about EDI, you have got to live it... The foundation for all these efforts must be genuine authenticity. At STR Group, we dedicated years to ensuring that our company embraced the right values and lived these principles."*

REC Member: Clive Hutchings, STR Group

Depending on your size and any existing initiatives, there are several ways you can approach data collection. You could also consider combining these to ensure the data is accurate and that people feel safe and comfortable to share. Whichever system you adopt, the most important thing is to analyse and act on the insights gained from the data. Regularly reviewing the feedback and addressing concerns is essential for creating a work environment where employees feel heard, valued and supported. This approach fosters a culture of continuous improvement and helps maintain a positive workplace atmosphere.

It's vital to approach employee feedback with a logical rather than emotional mindset. This enables businesses to address issues objectively and make necessary changes, even in owner-operator businesses.

Here are some examples of ways to collect data on workplace EDI:

### **A. Diversity monitoring forms**

It is possible to collect diversity information for monitoring purposes, provided employees are not compelled to share the information and the correct data protection safeguards are in place. You should always check with your legal department or advisors prior to any changes to your approach to data capture.

You can use a monitoring form to understand diversity among existing employees, as well as part of your application process for internal recruitment.

To avoid discrimination<sup>21</sup>:

- ▶ only request information for which you have a practical, measurable and applicable requirement; and
- ▶ do not ask employees (or applicants) to enter their name or any other information that identifies who they are.

When using EDI monitoring forms in recruitment, also make sure that you:

- ▶ keep the information on this form separate from the application form and CV; and
- ▶ do not give anyone involved in interviewing or hiring decisions access to the information.

ACAS have produced an Equality and Diversity Monitoring Form Template.

 [EDI Monitoring Form](#)

### **B. EDI employee surveys**

Create anonymous surveys to gather feedback on workplace culture, inclusivity and diversity. These are valuable resources to collect honest feedback and uncovering potential issues within the business. You do not necessarily have to organise a specific EDI survey, but you could implement EDI-focused questions in any employee satisfaction measuring tools you are already using.

### **C. Focus groups/interviews**

Creating diverse employee groups to facilitate open discussions and feedback is a powerful way to gain insights into the workplace environment. These sessions can help in conducting culture and engagement audits to understand your organisation's strengths and areas for improvement. Appropriate facilitation is required to help to create psychologically safe spaces conducive to such discussion (see 'Psychological safety' in chapter 1). When employees trust and feel safe to participate and provide honest feedback, it supports growth and improvement.

## **2. Setting up EDI-focused employee groups**

Make sure that staff are active participants in creating inclusive workplace culture and are given opportunities to drive change. A great way to facilitate that is to set up an EDI-focused staff group/committee. This means creating a forum or regular meeting to discuss EDI. Larger organisations can establish Employee Resource Groups (ERGs; also referred to as 'diversity networks'). ERGs are employee-led groups concentrating on supporting a specific segment of the workforce, such as LGBT+ community or employees from minority ethnic backgrounds.

During such meetings, the emphasis should be on identifying the internal priorities and setting specific objectives within a defined timeline.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.acas.org.uk/improving-equality-diversity-and-inclusion>

The **EDI resource pack** accompanying this guide provides support for these activities and discussions, including terms of reference (TORs) and templates for EDI planning sessions.

Ask your client about any EDI groups or meetings that they may be involved in.



### **EDI resource pack**

Networking with these individuals can provide valuable insights into their EDI initiatives. When working with a client in a consultative manner, this is an excellent approach to expand your network of stakeholders. It also helps generate discussions about your active involvement, promoting your reputation and increasing your visibility within the client's organisation.

## **3. Learning and development**

Learning and development is a cornerstone of success for any EDI initiative. It plays a vital role in raising awareness, building competence and ensuring that every member of the organisation understands their role in fostering an inclusive workplace.

The value of providing EDI training, and signposting staff to resources such as this guide and accompanying EDI resource pack is not just in meeting legal requirements; EDI training helps to strengthen workplace relationships, bringing people together with respect and appreciation for different perspectives.

EDI learning and development should not be approached as a one-off endeavour but as an ongoing journey, equipping employees with practical tips and best practices they can use daily while also helping the whole organisation stay aware and aligned with latest trends, challenges and thought leadership.

## 4. Candidates

**Goal: a best practice approach to attract top diverse talent. For candidates to feel they have been recruited fairly and inclusively feeling they can hit the ground running to add value.**

As soon as an organisation takes its first meaningful steps to align leadership, systems and culture to an authentic EDI vision, it can start to look at bringing new talent into the team. To live by their commitments, employers should challenge themselves to attract and engage the very best talent from the broadest talent pool, regardless of background and circumstance.

In chapter 3 of this guide, we take a closer look at the mechanics of recruitment, particularly from the perspective of EDI. As you embark on this journey, it's crucial to engage in self-reflection by asking a series of critical questions regarding your internal processes. To start, consider what kind of impression your organisation makes on a candidate who may not be familiar with it. Explore whether your external profile conveys a welcoming environment for underrepresented groups using inclusive language.

Would diverse and underrepresented talent find your organisation appealing, and does it reflect a commitment to fostering an inclusive workplace? Such questions prompt critical examination of current practices and help to identify areas that may need improvement. Remember, EDI is a continuous process not a one-off act so it's essential to continuously adapt and enhance your processes to keep up with best practices. You can use chapter 3 and the accompanying EDI resource pack to help you with this.

This is the point in your plan where you need to take an objective and critical view at your practice. Despite a busy schedule, it's crucial not to assume that, just because you provide professional recruitment services for your clients, your internal processes are flawless.

***"Candidates are now more than ever interested in your ethos and your values, this is even more relevant for younger generations. For them, charity and social value are very important, and this helps us keep our people for longer."***

**REC Member: Abdul Mozzamdar, Group Social Value Director, PSR Solutions**

Refreshing, updating and strengthening their approach to recruitment in line with EDI best practice will not only yield better recruitment outcomes for recruiting firms themselves, it will also enable them to guide and advise clients from demonstrable commitment and experience, having already taken their own advice.

80% of respondents said they want to work for a company that values DEI issues.

[Report: Why Is Diversity and Inclusion Important, LinkedIn, 2020<sup>22</sup>](#)



<sup>22</sup> <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/learning-culture/diversity-workplace-statistics-dei-importance>

## 5. Clients

**Goal: a stronger relationship with clients as their trusted talent acquisition partner, and to evolve the client service and drive business growth.**

Who do you want to be, in the eyes and minds of your clients? How do you want to come up in their conversations? And in what conversations? These are the questions that forward-thinking recruitment professionals should be asking themselves. Recruitment businesses deliver professional services that align with their clients' broader growth strategies and organisational aims. Providing support with their EDI development is another way of adding value for your client.

*“Good recruiters should never be afraid to ask clients if we can do things in a different way, if they want us to help them attract diverse talent.”*

REC Member: Kelly Dunn, CEO, KD Recruitment

At the same time, the drive for cost efficiency is pulling all suppliers and service providers under the unforgiving eye of the 'value for money' microscope. In other words, hiring organisations are hungry to get more out of leaner supplier chains.

For professional recruiters, the risk is: not making the cut and being shown the door, or not even being invited to pitch in the first place.

In a world where artificial intelligence solutions are beginning to outperform in transactional recruitment, those who want to win need to add value to the people aspect of recruiting. Chat GPT may be able to write a job advert in seconds but only a good recruiter will be able to check it for EDI best practice.

*“Clients ask us more and more about EDI and how we can demonstrate not only our commitment but our performance. They want a recruitment partner that can support them with the best talent, irrespective of where that talent comes from or their background.”*

REC Member: Abdul Mozzamdar, Group Social Value Director, PSR Solutions

But there is golden opportunity for those who have chosen to step outside the comfort zone of transactional recruitment and can demonstrate – with transparent credibility, not performative gestures – that they:

- ▶ understand their clients and their clients' strategic needs;
- ▶ can reliably and comprehensively inform strategic decision making;
- ▶ share the same drive and commitment for positive change;
- ▶ have won the trust, advocacy and goodwill of key stakeholder communities;
- ▶ have up-to-date, best practice experience, intelligence and capabilities that they can bring to bear across a range of client pain points; and
- ▶ are thinking further ahead and further afield on their clients' behalf – ready to engage in and lead new conversations and new thinking.

Those who are already on the same journey as their clients – and can prove it – are in a much stronger position. Those who can legitimately present themselves as earnest exemplars of what their clients aspire to be are in the strongest position of all. They will not need to sing and dance about their credentials; their clients will recognise that they have what it takes to be a trusted advisor who can help them to succeed.

Professional recruiters who have already embraced Steps 1-4 in the EDI impact partner roadmap will be in that position. They will have earned themselves the opportunity to capitalise on it by giving careful thought to who they want to be for their client, and how they can leverage their new advantage to turn that vision into a reality.

## Practical steps

### 1. Learning more about your client's EDI journey

Start by initiating open conversations with existing clients, supported by thorough fact-finding and 'outside the box' curiosity. Rather than the traditional transactional approach, move the emphasis towards consultation in which you are genuinely interested in their EDI goals. The aim is to transform your interactions with clients by making EDI an integral part of the discussion rather than an afterthought or add-on.

This consultative approach not only strengthens your client relationships but also opens the door to valuable insights, data and intelligence that can also be used in attracting new clients.

By actively seeking to understand their progress and sharing best practice, you set the stage for collaborative, long-term partnerships that goes beyond the conventional client-provider relationship. This will help you differentiate your value proposition in a highly competitive market. The focus is on building trust, gaining comprehensive insights and aligning your services with their specific needs and objectives.

## 2. Offering consultancy services

Tailoring your proposition for each client involves not only designing a talent attraction strategy that aligns with their EDI strategy but also offering additional consultancy and support. These can be shared with clients to help them implement and adapt your proven methods more easily and effectively. This approach builds trust with the client and can lead to preferred status and long-term, high-margin business.

*“When a client seeks an inclusive campaign, we provide a comprehensive EDI monitoring service covering the nine protected characteristics. These services are customised for each client and aligned with the specific campaign requirements, such as including social mobility and neurodiversity”.*

**REC Member: Donna Newton, Head of Client Relations, TPP Recruitment**

Those organisations who have already made good progress in Stages 1-4 of the EDI impact partner roadmap will have accumulated lots of experience and expertise in attracting and targeting diverse talent, collecting and managing data, and creating an inclusive internal culture. These are valuable assets that can be offered to clients.

### **For example:**

A detailed case study that highlights your own experiences and achievements in talent attraction and internal culture management will act as a powerful real-world example to illustrate your capability and successes with clients, candidates and employees.

Toolkits, templates and resources based on your talent attraction and internal culture management strategies and successes. Toolkits could include interview guides, diversity and inclusion training materials and best practice checklists. Sharing these resources highlights your commitment to supporting clients.

By proactively seeking information about your clients and their activities, you can align your offerings to their specific interests and create opportunities to participate directly in their EDI initiatives.

For example, you can offer them guidance in identifying external events and causes that align with their strategy and resonate with their values. Attending or co-sponsoring these events together can significantly strengthen your client relationship as well as generating new collaboration opportunities and cost efficiencies.

## 6. Sector

**Goal: a strong presence and superior reputation across the sector as an engaged and experienced thought-leader and expert practitioner in the EDI space.**

Those organisations who are well progressed in their journey from transactional recruitment provider to EDI impact partner are ready to stand up and take their place in the recruitment industry with credibility, confidence and pride.

This should be undertaken with due care and strategic planning. Charismatic and commanding reputations are built on informed and selective participation and contribution, not scattergun fanfare and self-promotion.

In delivering that strategy, established and aspiring EDI impact partners should aim to enhance their brand – with clients, candidates and sector peers alike.

In any sector, stakeholders value and respect transparency and true commitment, repaying it with trust and advocacy. It is not necessary to have all the answers; but those who want their stakeholders to take them seriously, must step up and take their stakeholders seriously – them and everything they care about.

In today's evolving landscape, doing nothing and staying silent on EDI matters is no longer an option. Inaction risks reputational harm and being left behind. To remain competitive, you must embrace the principles of EDI publicly, communicate them clearly and demonstrate your commitment through tangible action. This proactive approach is not about playing along with a trend, it's about shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for your organisation and society as a whole.

***"Like all businesses, recruiters have a responsibility to serve society and improve EDI performance in the workplace. There are bottom line and sustainability benefits to getting this right."***

**Neil Carberry, Chief Executive, REC**

## Practical steps

In the EDI space, authentic visibility, purpose and presence are the cornerstones of credibility. Whether you are a small or large organisation, establishing and maintaining a credible EDI profile is vital. Be brave and intentional, but also transparent and balanced, in all that you communicate.

For smaller organisations, there are smart ways to enhance visibility, purpose and presence. Collaboration with external partners, attending industry events, leveraging social media and aligning with EDI-centric causes can boost credibility significantly. If possible, invest in a dedicated role with expertise in ethical social media management.

Always remember that it's not just a matter of what you say but also what you do. Your actions, initiatives, and statements must all align with your EDI values.

1. **Visibility** is about ensuring that your commitment to EDI is evident to everyone, both internally and externally. Explain what you stand for, what your priorities are, as well as your plans. Acknowledge the challenges that you are experiencing and celebrate successes. Report your progress through performance data, news and case studies – keep audiences informed about your initiatives and their impact.
2. **Purpose** centres on why you are pursuing EDI. Having a clear sense of purpose in your EDI efforts helps build trust. Be forthcoming about your journey – acknowledge your history, exemplify that you understand your own risks and issues and why change is necessary. Share your vision for what you are working to achieve and how it will create value for your clients and candidates, people and peers.

*“It is essential that recruitment businesses understand what differentiates them. At STR we have beaten huge competitors because of our focus on EDI.”*

REC Member: Clive Hutchings, CEO, STR Group

3. **Presence** implies that you are actively engaged in sector specific EDI activities, discussions, and initiatives. Seek out opportunities to have a voice and make a difference – sharing experience and insight, contributing to appropriate causes, and collaborating in projects for broader sector benefit. This also extends to your online presence and how well your digital content reflects your EDI commitment.

For smaller organisations, this means not having to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel. Instead, you can get involved and share insights into broader sector activities already taking place. You are not a mere bystander; you are an active participant. This engagement enables you to build a knowledge base that is directly relevant to your clients.

#### 4. **Collecting industry insights**

Keep a keen eye on emerging trends and best practices within your industry. Organise these insights into a knowledge database, which can be readily shared with clients to underline your ongoing commitment to staying ahead in an ever-evolving landscape. That way you can showcase that you understand the risks, issues and opportunities facing their key stakeholder.

Clients not only expect you to be informed about these challenges but also to provide viable solutions and options to address them. Engaging in conversations without data-driven and fact-based approaches, or relying on outdated statistics, can erode client confidence in your capabilities.

#### 5. **Producing regular communications and/or an EDI thought leadership blog**

Create a blog or regularly produce content on your website dedicated to EDI-related topics. Begin by publishing articles and case studies that demonstrate your commitment to EDI, highlight your team's expertise and offer insights on industry trends and challenges. This will serve as a valuable resource for both clients and candidates while positioning your organisation as a thought leader in the EDI space.

Focus your content on the solutions you have implemented and the issues you are actively addressing. Your stakeholders are interested in seeing the tangible impact you are making and your ability to drive meaningful change. While activities like event sponsorships have their place, it is essential to demonstrate practical contributions.



### **About the REC: equality, diversity and inclusion**





## Chapter 3:

# Making a difference to your recruitment process

**In this section, we walk through the core stages of the recruitment lifecycle, looking at how you can improve and evolve your approach to inclusive recruitment.**

## Going above and beyond to attract diverse talent

Striving to attract as many of the very best candidates as possible to fill a vacancy or take on a new role is not new. What has changed over time is our understanding of who the very best candidates could be.

The short answer is, of course: absolutely anyone.

At the same time, we all know that it's just not good enough simply to open the door, and wait for top quality talent to come wandering in. We have to go out into the market and work hard to secure the very best talent for our clients, before someone else does. And by 'secure' we mean attract and retain the very best talent throughout the recruitment process and beyond.

Leading recruitment practitioners (and their clients) are going above and beyond to reach, engage and win over diverse talent. For many, that means upping their game regarding underrepresented communities.

They also know it's not just about upping their game 'out there' – they need to make sure that the entire, end-to-end candidate experience delivers – fairly, consistently and authentically – on every recruitment marketing promise.

And don't forget, the candidate experience does not end when the employment contract is signed...

***“Consultants have to understand how EDI impacts the job they do – and how it makes them a better recruiter.”***

REC Member: Jayne Morris, CEO, TPP Recruitment



**Ash Ahmed:**  
**Navigating recruitment as a South Asian, Kashmiri-Pakistani, Muslim woman of colour**

## Your approach could be working much harder for you

Take a step back and look at your existing approach to recruitment. Chances are that your processes are already in a constant state of evolution through your commitment to continuous improvement.

Your recruitment processes are probably good enough for the time being, if not better. But will they be good enough tomorrow?

When it comes to acing inclusive recruitment, your processes could be working much harder – for you, your clients, and your candidates.

Getting EDI right is not sprinkling box-ticking cliches over your tried and trusted ways of winning. Getting it right means forensically analysing all the dimensions of how you manage and deliver for clients and candidates, acknowledging room for improvement and challenging yourself to do better.



**Dr. Jack Lopez:**  
**Embracing diversity in recruitment**

## Reasons to be cheerful

The good news is that you're in good company. Even the best recognise they can get better.

The great news is that we have decades of learning and best practice development at our disposal. The challenges may be evolving at an accelerating pace but so are the solutions.



# 1. Planning and preparation

**Goal: Create a recruitment campaign that is as far-reaching, accessible and inclusive as possible, aimed at achieving good EDI outcomes, that support the client's strategic vision.**

When your client calls on you to help them recruit, they are inviting you to become part of the solution they need to help them fix a problem or seize an opportunity. Regardless of their expectations, this is your opportunity to drive the conversation on EDI and help them take new steps on their EDI journey. Even if that's not (yet) the case, this is your chance to position yourself as their thought leader in this space.

Steer discussion about recruitment needs and objectives into the EDI context. Before you initiate the recruitment process, seek to become fully conversant in your client's EDI agenda, even if they haven't formally recognised that they have one.

And keep the business case for EDI in your back pocket. Never miss an opportunity to educate and remind your client about how their bottom line can benefit from diversity and inclusion.



## EDI resource pack

Aspire to understand their risks, issues and opportunities better than they do. Don't be afraid to question, challenge and recommend – that's what thought leaders do.

What is their EDI journey? What are their ambitions? What are they struggling with? How can you help them close any gaps? How can you help them build on any strengths? And how does the role you were called in to recruit for relate to all of this? You can use this guide as a framework for that conversation.

By proactively leading the conversation into this space (or being on the front foot when you find yourself in that conversation) you will be able to co-create the strongest foundation from which to turn your client's vision into a reality.

*"We ensure that our consultants begin promoting EDI principles from the very start, right from the initial job briefing... We encourage them to possess the knowledge and confidence to challenge clients if their approach is not inclusive."*

**REC Member: Jayne Morris, CEO, TPP Recruitment**

Once the strategic groundwork is done, move the conversation into more detailed consideration of the role in question, related requirements and what the best practice approach will look like.

Talk through every stage of the recruitment lifecycle with your client. Who will need to do what? Make sure your client fully understands their responsibilities as an inclusive

employer. What are the risks to be mitigated and the opportunities to be capitalised on? How can existing policies and practices be optimised, tailoring the process to the specific needs of both your client and a diverse candidate pool?

Again, use this guide as a framework. This is your opportunity to introduce new ways of thinking and working, educating your client and helping them to evolve, understand and get comfortable.

## Practical steps

### 1. Use the guide as a template with clients

Using this guide as a tool, engage with your client on all of the steps ahead. Your role as a consultative recruitment partner is to make sure the client is in the right headspace and open to ensuring the process you are going to run for them is attractive and inclusive to the broadest pool of talent.

### 2. Agree the approach up front

For example, would the client like you to anonymise applications from their hiring managers? Is the client familiar and comfortable with reasonable adjustments or accommodations they may need to use later? Are the hiring managers familiar with inclusive interview questions? Preparing the client now and not later in the process helps the client to feel supported and confident in your abilities.

### 3. Continually sell the business case for EDI

You might find that your clients are not familiar with the benefits of a diverse and inclusive recruitment process. They may feel that the process 'is not broken and does not need fixing'. It may be useful to familiarise them with the EDI business case – this will help them contextualise the commercial benefits and become curious, even excited about the opportunities you are offering.



#### EDI resource pack

You will find support and guidance later in this chapter about how you can work with your clients to ensure that candidates are set up for success and continually improve the process thereafter.

Diverse teams make better decisions

87%  
of the time<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/learning-culture/diversity-workplace-statistics-dei-importance>

## 2. Attracting the best talent

**Goal: reach and engage all target communities to create the broadest possible pool of talent.**

Outreach is a key component in inclusive recruitment, and effective outreach depends on knowing who your target audiences are, how they think and behave, and how to convince them to engage with you. You will need to carry your client's intentional commitment to EDI outcomes and the role in question to different – perhaps entirely new – candidate communities.

*“Members tell us regularly that one of the key challenges they face is that diverse talent ‘simply does not apply’ and they are unsure how to reach them. Rethinking attraction channels is a fundamental step to address that.”*

Dr Olga Frańczak, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme Lead, REC

You cannot afford to leave this to chance and half-measures. Be bold and confident. This is the time to go all in on building a detailed plan to deliver a targeted strategy.

And don't be shy about communicating the results you want to see. Your recruitment marketing needs to reach as many eyes and ears and hearts and minds as possible, and it needs to land appropriately: applications from a pool of talented candidates like nothing your client has seen before. So, share the intent and set the tone and your objectives should shine through in every interaction.

*“Clients frequently inquire about EDI, anticipating that we can offer them a wide range of skilled talent. It's worth noting that many of our clients also have specific requirements for attracting neurodiverse talent and seek guidance on effectively accomplishing this.”*

REC Member: Clive Hutchings, CEO, STR Group

# Practical steps

## 1. Writing person specifications

Your goal is to find the best person for the job. Whether you have created the person specification yourself or received it from your client, your responsibility is to collaborate with your client to make sure it centres on the behaviours necessary for success, rather than candidate background, personality or character traits.

For example, recent years have seen a growing focus on social mobility and ensuring that individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds have equal access and opportunities. For this it is crucial to consult closely with your client regarding education and training requirements. Some roles may require specific qualifications, but a university degree may not be the absolute necessity that your client might think it is.

Engaging with the client, challenging existing norms and exploring alternative strategies to expand the talent pool will likely improve equality in the recruitment process.

Research shows that women are unlikely to apply for a position unless they meet 100% of the requirements, while men will apply if they meet 60% of the requirements<sup>24</sup>



[Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified.](https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified)

[Harvard Business Review](https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified)

### Tips:

- ▶ Aim for as few requirements as possible, only role specifics that are essential to success.
- ▶ Always review the person specification. You must make sure the person specification reflects the needs of the client organisation today, not when it was first written.
- ▶ Question education and training prerequisites. Are there alternative methods of showcasing competence? A heavy focus on higher education can potentially limit the talent pool and hinder social mobility. Encourage open discussions with your client to explore different criteria for role suitability.
- ▶ Use language that does not infer to a specific gender, nationality or able-bodied bias.

## 2. Reimagining job specifications

This is your client's chance to market and showcase the role to a broad audience. The job description should be enticing but also transparent about pay while highlighting flexibility and the advantages of working for the client. Don't overlook the inclusion of opportunities for career advancement and progression, breaking down short, medium and long-term objectives to attract a broad range of candidates.

<sup>24</sup> <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>

A role that lacks flexibility is likely to significantly narrow the talent pool. It may stop individuals with primary carer responsibilities from applying. It can also restrict the geographic reach of potential candidates. Striking a balance between the role's expected outputs, physical location and working hours is a key strategy to keep the talent pool broad and inclusive.

## CASE STUDY:

### A [field trial](#) with Zurich Insurance to advertise all jobs as part-time<sup>25</sup>

In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on closing the gender pay gap and ensuring equal pay for equal work. Modern recruiters play an important role in contributing to pay gap reduction by advocating for pay transparency. Encouraging your clients to openly discuss salary details in all job specifications and adverts is a powerful step towards fair and equal pay.

#### Tips:

- ▶ Make sure the job specification does not include duties or responsibilities that the client will not actually require from the role. Sometimes an organisation may try to maximise the value of a role by including the kitchen sink when assigning tasks. It is much more effective and inclusive to keep the job specification focused on what the role holder will truly need to do.
- ▶ Make sure there is as much flexibility as possible in the role. Think about hybrid working, physical locations and working hours.
- ▶ Advocate for pay transparency with your clients and publish the salary or salary range on the job specification and adverts.

If you want to know more about pay transparency, check out

 [End Salary History: a Guide for Recruiters](#)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/JLP-PT-Trial-final-report-200521.pdf>

### 3. Advertising the vacancy

The quality of your advertisement and its placement will have a significant impact on its visibility and engagement. As a professional recruiter your primary role is to ensure maximum exposure, particularly among individuals from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds. It is essential to demonstrate to your client that your professional services have a broad reach, and you are proficient in attracting talent from diverse backgrounds, cultures and characteristics.

The job advert should go beyond the job specification, offering candidates insights into the client's organisational culture and identity. It should include client ambitions and activity in the EDI space, as well as their approach to employee wellbeing and social responsibility. Authenticity is key; avoid overrepresentation or performative elements.

*“[For] any direct reports to the board...there needs to be diverse candidates on the shortlist and all the jobs need to be posted internally and externally.”*

Marie-Helene Tyack, Global Inclusion, Diversity & Belonging Business Partner, Allianz

If you want to target minoritised, underrepresented or marginalised groups, you must make sure you place your adverts in places where they are likely to see them, and that you are being intentional in finding them.

Meanwhile, is the advert accessible for everyone, have you considered offering it in different formats, braille, font sizes, audio descriptions and image descriptions? If diverse talent cannot engage with the advert itself, it is unlikely they will apply.

*“...broaden your horizons when it comes to advertising for talent. Look beyond the usual recruitment channels. Explore social media groups, connect with local communities, and get involved in initiatives that support future talent. It's about finding talent where it is, rather than sticking to the same old routes.”*

REC Member: Kelly Dunn, CEO, KD Recruitment

### Tips:

- ▶ Broaden your reach, cultivate community connections, embrace EDI job boards, and leverage word of mouth. Community engagement and working with organisations and charities that serve the people and communities you are targeting is a smart way for you to build relationships and access a diverse talent pool.
- ▶ Focus on client commitment to EDI when communicating role benefits.
- ▶ Explicitly state your active encouragement of applications from underrepresented and minoritised groups.
- ▶ Get social. Do not be afraid to move beyond posting on LinkedIn. Use the power of social media and online networks to reach diverse talent pools. Many industries have dedicated groups where people ask for advice and share best practice. Make sure you map out those relevant to the sector you are working in and build your presence there.
- ▶ Include in your ad how you are actively targeting diverse talent and how you support disabled employees.

*“...Think about grassroots organisations and community partnerships, your traditional techniques may not be working the way they need to”.*

Maylis Dijikalou, Founding Partner, We Create Space

## 4. Implementing engaging and inclusive language

Throughout the entire recruitment process and employee lifecycle, it's crucial to use inclusive and respectful language. This is especially important when establishing the tone for candidates through the job and person specifications, as well as in the job advert. Thoughtful consideration of language and its impact significantly enhances your ability to attract diverse talent.

Ensure you thoroughly review all your content for potential biases, as certain words, phrases and communication styles can unintentionally appeal more to some groups while being less attractive to others. The important thing to remember with language is to keep it specific. In doing so you are reducing the potential for bias.

Language often contains hidden codes, and we might not even be aware that we're sending these hidden signals. This is known as gender-coded language and being aware of it is essential for creating inclusive and equitable content.

Here are some examples of words that have hidden gender codes<sup>26</sup>:

**Masculine:** competitive, aggressive, challenge, decisive, courage/courageous, dominate, champion, driven, fearless...

**Feminine:** collaborate/collaborative, dependable, honest, loyal, interpersonal, enthusiasm/enthusiastic, committed, connected, patient...

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.employerscouncil.org/resources/words-matter-gender-coded-language-in-job-ads/>

Superlatives – such as 'superior' and 'world-class' – are often overused. Superlatives related to candidate background requirements or preferences can limit the pool of applicants.

Here are some other examples you may have already encountered:

Bias examples	instead of...	try this...
Racial	Native English speaker	Proficient: English language
Religious	Clean shaven	Professional appearance
Age	Tech-savvy / digital native	Proficient in 'X' software/ hardware
Affinity	Similar background	Similar skillset
Socio-economic	Articulate / well-spoken	Effective communicator
Gender	Salesman / chairman	Salesperson / chair

**Tips:**

- ▶ Ensure clear, purposeful and accessible communication. Write in a friendly and welcoming, conversational tone.
- ▶ Keep in mind that, even when completely unintentional, the language used in the job descriptions and external content could discourage diverse talent. Make sure you review for and eliminate any biased or coded language.
- ▶ Don't use company or industry 'buzzwords', avoid exclusionary language and be vigilant to avoid the risk of unconscious bias creeping into your marketing.
- ▶ Use correct pronouns, pronunciation and spelling when addressing and referring to candidates.

### 3. Application

**Goal: grow candidate confidence and cultivate candidate commitment so that all the diverse talent you engaged during attraction flows through into selection whilst working with you to help them shine for your client.**

This is where you start building relationships with the people who may go on to make a great impression on your client. Your application process needs to convince all candidates that they are making the right decision and that they can trust you and your client to deliver on the promises made in your recruitment marketing.

Always keep in mind that the application stage marks the beginning of a valuable relationship. Your role is to welcome and encourage as many talented individuals as possible to apply. Equally important, you must work diligently to ensure that talented individuals remain engaged throughout the process by accommodating and understanding their individual needs. Your commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive experience is key to retaining top talent in the recruitment process.

*“...the job application is your best window of opportunity to advertise yourself in the best possible light.”*

Oliver Fenghour, Principal Consultant, Inclusion Crowd

Don't assume that you have secured a great candidate simply because they have initiated the application process. Candidate interest and commitment may remain wary and fragile until you have convinced them that you understand them, and that you want to help them to succeed.

What that means will vary from one candidate to the next. This is your opportunity to prove that you and your client truly value them for who they are and what they offer and that you are in their corner – ready to support them in fulfilling their career ambitions.

## Practical steps

### 1. Making necessary accommodations and adjustments

To ensure that all candidates have an equal opportunity to shine during the process, offering adjustments may be necessary. This isn't about providing unfair advantage, but rather levelling the playing field. Proactively discuss adjustments and accommodations during the application process. This demonstrates your familiarity and confidence in managing the needs of diverse talent, while also aligning with the values of fairness, equality and representation.

***“It is important to match people to the values of the client and the role, recruit around the person, and understand the human element of recruitment, this is not a tick box exercise.”***

**REC Member: Kelly Dunn, CEO, KD Recruitment**

Section 60 of the Equality Act 2010<sup>27</sup> makes it generally unlawful, with certain exceptions, to inquire about a candidate's disability or health before extending a job offer. However, employers are allowed to ask pre-health questions if they are related to making reasonable adjustments for candidates to participate in interviews or assessments, or to assess whether a candidate can perform the tasks required for the advertised position. These questions must always be directly relevant to the role or aimed at monitoring workplace diversity.

### **What do we mean by reasonable adjustments?**

- ▶ Providing closed captions or interpretation services.
- ▶ Making changes to the location of the interview. For example, holding an interview on the ground floor to enable wheelchair access, or to dim the lights for someone with epilepsy.
- ▶ Holding the interview at a specific time of the day. There is no point requesting an interview at a time or day that is challenging for the candidate, so be proactive in asking if there are times or days that suit them.
- ▶ Supplying the interview questions and structure of the interview in advance.
- ▶ Offering to have a practice call for the candidate if using video conferencing software like MS Teams or Zoom.
- ▶ Allowing an online interview without the camera as this can be distracting to some neurodiverse candidates or offering extra time for tasks.
- ▶ Offering accessible facilities like parking and reserving it for the candidate as well as providing details regarding toilets and instructions on site locations and directions.
- ▶ Building comfort breaks into online interview schedules.



### **Oliver Fenghour: Nurturing neurodiversity in recruitment**

For more guidance on neuroinclusion check out our

 [Beginners Guide to Recruiting Neurodiverse Talent.](#)

It is important to note that while reasonable adjustments are likely to be useful for all employees, the Equality Act 2010 relates specifically to disabled job applicants. As part of your ongoing commitment to improvement, don't forget to ask candidates whether there are any additional adjustments or accommodations they might require that haven't been discussed yet. These include talking about alternative assessment methods. This proactive approach demonstrates your dedication to meeting the unique needs of candidates.

To help monitor and plan for diverse needs, you can send applicants an equality and diversity monitoring form during application. For more information, see 'Keeping track of progress' under 'People' in Chapter 2 of this guide.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/60>


## 2. Minimising bias when using Artificial Intelligence

Whether you or your client employ AI-based solutions for sifting through CVs or rely solely on human judgment, the objective is to minimise bias in the process. You might think that by using an AI approach it is more likely to produce a diverse shortlist, as computers are impartial and do not exhibit sexism or racism. It's important to be aware, however, that AI solutions can involuntarily adopt biases from their creators, such as through data decisions made in programming, and their users, such as through decisions made in consuming AI outputs.

For instance, in a 2019 experiment conducted across 191 countries, it was discovered that an advertisement for a STEM position was 20% more likely to be shown to men than to women<sup>28</sup>. Another study, consisting of 21 experiments, revealed that setting your gender as female on your LinkedIn profile led to fewer high-paying job advertisements being displayed to you. If you want to know more about, check out our

 [Data-driven tools in recruitment guidance.](#)

## 3. Conducting equality monitoring

In Chapter 2, we discussed the use of an equality monitoring form to gain insights into the diversity of your organisation's workforce. The application stage of talent acquisition for your client is a great opportunity to send an equality monitoring form to every applicant. This will provide you with a clear picture of the diversity among applicants and help you prepare for any accommodations or adjustments needed later in the process. Additionally, it allows you to make campaign adjustments if you find that there is a lack of diversity among the applicants. You can  [download the ACAS equality monitoring form here](#)<sup>29</sup>, and you'll also find a template for this form in the EDI resource pack.

### Tips

- ▶ Being approachable, understanding and proactive creates a safe environment where applicants can recognise and trust the benefits of discussing accommodations and adjustments. This trust-building process strengthens the relationship between you and the applicants.
- ▶ Monitoring candidate diversity is a crucial step in reshaping the workforce and ensuring that organisations reflect the diversity of society. Collecting information and data during the application stage not only allows you to meet applicant needs but also facilitates comprehensive analysis throughout the entire recruitment lifecycle. This data helps identify trends or issues that require attention. Many clients also now expect recruiters to provide the demographic breakdown of applicants.
- ▶ Engage with the candidate in an open and empathetic manner. You can ask questions such as, "What can we do to support your success throughout the recruitment process?" or "Is there anything we can assist you with to make the process more accessible?". Additionally, you can inquire about their past interview experiences and if they encountered any challenges or aspects they believe could be improved upon.

<sup>28</sup> Here is a thought provoking podcast about how AI can affect women within recruitment processes, you can [listen here](#). The research was produced for [UNESCO](#) and highlights the limitations of relying solely on AI to address diversity issues.w

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.acas.org.uk/equality-and-diversity-monitoring-form-template>

## 4. Getting the selection and hiring processes up to scratch

**Goal: every candidate and all client representatives have a positive experience of the selection process, creating clear value for all involved and resulting in the best possible candidates receiving and accepting the job offer.**

The selection process is where your client will make good on their commitment to inclusive recruitment in person. Your job is to help them do that well ensuring that all candidates are well supported throughout.

By now, you will know the candidate pool very well. You will understand their needs and how these can most appropriately be accommodated and provided for. You will have insight into how to create the best opportunities for them to demonstrate their value to your client. How your client can most appropriately engage and build rapport with each candidate, and how they can most effectively explore each other's ambitions, motivations and expectations from a platform of mutual trust and respect.

To facilitate all the above, you must work closely with your client to ensure they remain fully cognisant of their responsibilities; that they are fully informed, educated and coached about all members of the candidate pool; and that every dimension of the selection process has been carefully tailored to giving everyone the best opportunity to present their full and very best selves – including your client.

*“Good recruiters should never be afraid to ask clients if we can do things in a different way, if they want us to help them attract diverse talent.”*

REC Member: Kelly Dunn, CEO Kelly Dunn Recruitment

## Practical steps

### 1. CV sifting and shortlisting

British citizens from ethnic minority backgrounds must send, on average, 60% more CVs than their white counterparts to elicit a positive response from recruiters<sup>30</sup>.

You may already be familiar with a practice used to help combat this type of discrimination and bias within the recruitment process, often termed as a 'blind CV'. We prefer the terms 'anonymous' or 'anonymised' CVs.

The primary purpose is to provide the hiring manager with specific information about an applicant's suitability for the job while removing any indications of their characteristics such as age, sex, and race. This involves removing names and dates from their education and employment histories. As a general guideline, employers should prioritise the applicant's professional qualifications relevant to the job, rather than their personal background.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/news-events/news/new-csi-report-on-ethnic-minority-job-discrimination/>

*“...employers may simply read no further as soon as they see a Middle East-sounding or African-sounding name.”*

Dr Valentina di Stasio: Co-author,  [CSI Report](#) Nuffield College, University of Oxford, 2019

When creating the shortlist, it is crucial to steer clear of tokenism. If the shortlist includes only symbolic representation from under-represented, marginalised or minority groups, it may indicate that your approach lacks inclusivity or doesn't resonate with those communities. We've heard from clients that some recruiters, in pursuit of diversity targets, may populate the shortlist with diverse candidates who don't meet the necessary criteria. This practice can undermine the credibility of the process and harm candidate and client relationships.

## 2. Conducting interviews

Standardising interview questions is a method to ensure that every candidate is evaluated based on the same set of criteria. It may also be worth sharing these standardised questions with candidates in advance. The aim is not to surprise or catch candidates off guard but rather to facilitate optimal performance for all.

In the previous section on applications, we explored the idea of encouraging candidates to share any adjustments that would support them throughout the recruitment process. This is an opportunity for you to confirm with the client and hiring managers that they comprehend and are comfortable with alternative assessment methods, including how to implement them and evaluate their results.

Address the importance of interviewer training and preparation, as well as asking clients about their approach. There is an opportunity here to serve as a valuable consultant and ensure both the client and candidate are set up for success. When interviewers lack confidence or a solid understanding of the interviewing process, it will lead to lower quality, typically less diverse outcomes.



 **CIPD**  
**research** has  
shown that only 28%  
of employers train  
all interviewers on  
legal obligations and  
objective interview  
practice.

*“When it comes to interviews, you might want to rethink the traditional format. Instead of the usual Q&A, consider setting up practical projects or tasks. It's also a good idea to send competency questions in advance and frame questions in a more human-centred way, using scenarios to gauge a candidate's abilities.”*

REC Member: Kelly Dunn, CEO, KD Recruitment

It is essential to avoid interview questions that are illegal and unethical, as outlined in the Equality Act 2010 (see [Chapter 1](#) for more information).

### **Examples of interview questions that cannot be asked:**

#### **Question: "What is your family situation?"**

**Why not:** This question is inappropriate as it relates to a candidate's family status. Not only are the applicant's future life choices their business only and not set in stone, but also knowledge or suspicion of an applicant's plans to start a family could discourage employer's interest in them by prompting stereotypical assumptions about how their commitment to the role could be compromised by upcoming parental responsibilities and other associated life choices. Under the Equality Act 2010, it's unlawful to discriminate against someone based on their family or childcare responsibilities.

#### **Question: "What is your religion, and do you attend religious services?"**

**Why not:** Enquiring about a candidate's religion is discriminatory. As with the above example, for many people religion and beliefs can be deeply private and personal – asking for that information is inappropriate. Beyond that, knowledge of someone's religious choices can trigger discriminatory biases, such as through religious stereotypes regarding how a member of a certain faith might dress or behave. Under the Equality Act 2010, religious beliefs are considered a protected characteristic, and asking about them during an interview is against the law.

### Suggested alternative interview questions:

	Don't ask...	Consider asking...
Age	How old are you?	Are you over 18 or 21? (minimum legal age requirement for the role)
Race	Are you from the UK / Is English your first language	What languages do you fluently write or speak?
Disability, Health	How many sickness days did you take in your last period of employment?	Do you have any specific requirements to be able to perform this job effectively?

### What you can ask a job candidate about their disability and health<sup>31</sup>

You can ask a job applicant relevant questions about their disability and health (before you interview them, during an interview, and before making the job offer) in order to find out whether they can do something essential to the job.

You can also ask a job applicant about their disability and health if you want to:

- ▶ Find out whether they are able to take part in the application / selection process or need special arrangements or assistance (reasonable adjustments).
- ▶ Monitor the diversity of applicants for jobs you advertise.
- ▶ Support positive action for disabled people.
- ▶ Recruit a person with a particular disability.
- ▶ Vet them for reasons relating to national security.

What you **CANNOT** do:

- ▶ You cannot ask questions about disability and health on an application form or during an interview before the offer of a job has been made, unless it relates to an intrinsic part of the job.
- ▶ You cannot reject a disabled candidate just because they are disabled – that would be unlawful disability discrimination. You need to be sure that they cannot do the job before you reject them on that basis.

<sup>31</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ab206e5274a34770e67a3/small-business-guidance.pdf>

**"Stop eliminating perfectly good candidates by asking them the wrong questions."**

Nilofer Merchant:  [Harvard Business Review](#) (HBR) 2019

### **Video interview guide**

If you conduct interview via video, creating a video interview guide for candidates can be a valuable addition to your process, especially when considering candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those who may not have professional experience. This guide can also be beneficial from a neurodiversity perspective as it provides clarity and support for all candidates regarding how to control their environment and minimise sensory distractions.

### **Diverse interview panels**

Diversity attracts diversity – advise your clients against having just one interviewer. By ensuring that those involved in making hiring decisions come from various backgrounds, encompassing different ages, genders and ethnicities, we can inject a broader spectrum of perspectives and experiences into the hiring decision-making process.

For greater consistency in scoring, and to minimise the impact of individual biases when evaluating candidate responses, panel assessments should be calibrated across the entire applicant pool. This can be accomplished by reviewing and scoring all the answers, results and outputs together in batches.

For better results, discuss the questions and potential responses with the client or hiring managers before and after panel interviews, to calibrate the panel's own understanding of what is being looked for.

## **3. Implementing alternative assessment methods**

Offering alternative assessment methods alongside or in combination with traditional interviews can be beneficial for recruiters, candidates, and clients. These alternative methods provide a more comprehensive evaluation of a candidate's skills, competencies, and potential, while also enhancing the overall inclusivity of the recruitment process.

Here are some alternative assessment methods and their advantages.

### **A. Work sample tests**

This type of test requires candidates to complete tasks or assignments that simulate actual job duties or responsibilities. Work sample tests aim to provide employers with concrete evidence of a candidate's ability to perform essential job functions. These tests are particularly valuable in assessing practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and the candidate's suitability for a specific role.

## Advantages:

1. **Recruiter / Hiring Manager:** Allows the recruiter or hiring manager to assess a candidate's actual skills using job-related tasks.
2. **Candidate:** Provides a chance to showcase practical abilities.
3. **Client:** Ensures candidates have relevant skills for the role.

## Considerations and solutions:

- ▶ **Consideration:** Work sample tests may involve physical tasks or activities that could be challenging for candidates with physical disabilities.
- ▶ **Solution:** Offer reasonable accommodations such as modified testing environments or adapted tasks to ensure accessibility. Ensure that the physical requirements of the test are genuine job-related tasks.
- ▶ **Consideration:** Complex work sample tests can impose a heavy cognitive load on candidates with cognitive disabilities or neurodiverse conditions.
- ▶ **Solution:** Simplify instructions and tasks to reduce cognitive demands. Provide extra time or breaks to accommodate cognitive processing differences.
- ▶ **Consideration:** Candidates with sensory sensitivities (e.g., autism spectrum disorders) may be overwhelmed by certain sensory aspects of a work sample test.
- ▶ **Solution:** Create a sensory-friendly testing environment, reduce sensory distractions, and offer noise-cancelling headphones or sensory breaks if needed.
- ▶ **Consideration:** Some work sample tests may require effective communication, which can be challenging for candidates with communication disorders.
- ▶ **Solution:** Offer alternative ways for candidates to demonstrate their skills, such as video/audio explanations or visual aids. Focus on assessing their core skills rather than their communication abilities.

## B. Assessment centres

An assessment centre is a comprehensive and structured evaluation process used by employers to assess the skills, abilities, and suitability of multiple candidates for job positions. Typically used for recruitment and employee development purposes, assessment centres are designed to provide a holistic view of a candidate's competencies and potential by using a combination of various assessment methods. These methods may include interviews, well-designed group exercises, role-play simulations, in-tray exercises, aptitude tests, and other forms of assessment, depending on the job's requirements.

### Assessment centres – advantages:

1. **Recruiter / Hiring Manager:** Evaluates candidates in a controlled, standardised environment.
2. **Candidate:** Encourages teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills.
3. **Client:** Assesses multiple competencies and behaviours simultaneously.

## Considerations and solutions:

- ▶ **Consideration:** Group exercises tend to favour candidates with visible confidence, not necessarily those with the best skillset. At the same time, leadership skills displayed by different people can be perceived differently. For instance, white men are seen as 'confident leaders' while the same behaviour displayed by black women is perceived as 'loud' or 'bossy'.  
  
**Solution:** Make sure the assessment panel is diverse, scoring system is standardised and activities allow diverse candidates to show their skills (see below). Allow enough time and space for the panel to reflect on their biases before making the decision.
  
- ▶ **Consideration:** Ensure that the physical environment, activities, and facilities used in assessment centres are accessible to candidates with physical disabilities.  
  
**Solution:** Offer accessible venues, provide ramps, lifts, and other accommodations. Adjust physical activities if necessary, keeping them relevant to the job.
  
- ▶ **Consideration:** Complex assessment centre tasks can increase cognitive load, which may be challenging for candidates with cognitive disabilities or neurodiverse conditions.  
  
**Solution:** Simplify tasks and instructions. Allow for extended time or provide opportunities for breaks to accommodate cognitive differences.
  
- ▶ **Consideration:** Some candidates may fear sharing their disabilities or conditions due to concerns about bias or humiliation.  
  
**Solution:** Foster a supportive, inclusive recruitment environment. Clearly communicate the organisation's commitment to diversity and encourage candidates to share their needs confidentially, during the application stage and in preparation for any assessment.
  
- ▶ **Consideration:** Ensure that the assessments used in the assessment centre are valid, reliable, and unbiased for all candidates.  
  
**Solution:** If you are using tests or assessments to decide if someone is right for a job, you need to check if these tests are fair and related to the job. If someone has a disability or thinks differently (like being on the autism spectrum), you should make sure the tests work for them too. If not, change the tests to be fair for everyone. This helps everyone get a fair chance at the job.

## 4. Making an offer<sup>32</sup>

While this may seem self-evident, it is vital that the hard work put into the process is not undone by sending the offer letter or contracts to the candidate in a format that doesn't align with their needs. If they required specific accommodations, it is crucial that the commitment to EDI is reaffirmed, maintain the proactive approach to reasonable adjustments.

Just as you took the initiative to provide applicants with adjustments to enable them to perform at their best during the selection process, it is equally essential for an employer to be proactive and inclusive when offering reasonable adjustments to new hires that cater to their individual needs. Recognising and implementing these accommodations is a key factor in enhancing the recruitment and retention of disabled staff.

This helps to ensure that the candidate's transition into the organisation is seamless and supportive of their unique requirements. Encourage hiring managers and HR departments to collaborate with relevant teams to implement necessary accommodations.

## 5. Onboarding and beyond

Goal: Facilitate positive final recruitment outcomes for the candidate's onboarding experience. Grow your client relationship and explore new opportunities to create value by caring about their ongoing EDI journey.

### **Inclusive onboarding**

Inclusive recruitment goes beyond just placing a candidate. Although onboarding sits outside the traditional scope of recruitment process outsourcing, it is in your interests to make sure your candidate enters an inclusive environment and has a positive onboarding experience.

Stepping from fully inclusive recruitment into non-inclusive onboarding can be like hitting a brick wall for a candidate. The risk of poor probationary outcomes will be high, which can damage your client and candidate relationships and wider reputation.

Depending on the arrangements in place, it can also have a detrimental impact on your commercial outcomes.

***“...don't shout advice from the side lines, get in amongst the problems and find practical and tangible ways to solve them”.***

**Ed Jervis, CEO Inclusion Crowd**

Make it your business to know the client's onboarding approach inside and out. During the planning phase influence your client's approach for the better (and broadening your value-adding role accordingly) it will also help you better inform your candidates, managing their expectations and setting them at ease.

<sup>32</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ab206e5274a34770e67a3/small-business-guidance.pdf>

And, of course, you will want to set positive expectations that you know your client will deliver on.

By working with your client to help them make their onboarding process as inclusive as possible you will increase the likelihood of success and satisfaction for all involved, building trust in the process. You will demonstrate your commitment to positive, inclusive recruitment outcomes beyond your immediate role.

### **Grow your client relationship and explore new opportunities**

With your engaged candidate successfully making the transition to engaged employee, now is the time to get your client in a review of the recruitment process just delivered, as a platform from which to explore future opportunity.

Draw the conversation back to everything they shared with you during **Planning & Preparation**. Approach this new conversation with a continuous improvement mindset using a consultative approach. How well have their objectives been achieved? What worked well? What could have been better? How could it be more effective and efficient? What else could potentially be done to drive game-changing gains – not just in the recruitment process but across the broader employee lifecycle?

Share your data. Capture and share candidate feedback from before, during and after. Help your client to make informed decisions about what to do next and how to involve you. Agree action that will keep the momentum going and drive further value from the experience – for you, your client and all future candidates.

Beyond this, don't be afraid to check back in with your client periodically – not to enquire after any upcoming transactional work but to express interest in how their broader EDI agenda is evolving and how they are progressing in their journey to realise their ambitions. By doing so, you will continue to sow the seeds of new conversations – not hung loosely around a sales agenda but wrapped around a 'value-adding partnership' with a smart, tailored fit. This is the type of relationship that all recruiters need to be building in this era of fast change. This isn't only useful for partnerships around EDI but is hugely helpful to your business overall.

At the same time, don't lose touch with the diverse talent you have just won for your client. Your relationship with each successful candidate is an asset you have invested in. By continuing to invest in that relationship, you are investing in future opportunity. They might become a prized candidate for you again, or perhaps even a future client.

# Practical steps

## 1. Offer onboarding consultations

Share best practices and provide recommendations on how to make the onboarding process more inclusive. This may include creating a structured onboarding plan, offering diverse resources and implementing inclusive training modules. Featuring this within bids and tenders could be a competitive advantage.

## 2. Signpost clients to EDI training

Clients may identify a skill gap or lack of competence and confidence and reach out to their recruitment provider for advice and recommendations.

## 3. Collect onboarding feedback

Encourage your candidates to stay in touch and provide feedback on their onboarding experience. This open channel of communication allows you to gain valuable insights into their progress and the overall transition into the new company. By actively collecting this information, you position yourself to suggest improvements to your client's processes.

**For example,** if your client has disclosed concerns about attrition during the planning and preparation stage, you can leverage the candidate's feedback to propose onboarding solutions aimed at addressing these issues. This proactive and consultative relationship not only benefits candidates but also enhances your role as a high-value recruiter, potentially resulting in higher-margin relationships.



# From here to inclusivity

**In this guide, we have created for you a package of new thinking and proven best practice, curated from the insight and experience of trusted advisors and pioneer practitioners across the recruitment sector and EDI.**

We opened with acknowledgement of the fear that can overwhelm, deter, derail and disrupt the approach to and accomplishment of meaningful change in this space. Our aspiration for you, in reflecting on the information and advice within these pages, is that you will feel more comfortable and prepared to begin or to recognise that you already have the capacity and capability to start putting your arms around the inclusive recruitment opportunity and bringing it into how you grow your business.

## Seize the opportunity and make it your own

REC members who kindly shared experience and insight for this guide were consistent in underlining that building EDI commitment and capability has been a key contributing factor in stronger business performance and growth. For them, it has never been a 'nice to have' or 'necessary evil', to be grudgingly shouldered or glibly sidestepped, it is a strategic imperative that they have embraced willingly.










Specific 'why', 'how' and 'what good looks like' commitments can vary widely from one practitioner to the next. The wisdom adhered to by all in the best-practice community, however, is that they are – and will always be evolving and improving underpinned by these fundamental principles:

- 1.** In the world of recruitment – a world focused on valuing and evaluating people – we cannot afford to not know better. We must educate ourselves. We must be more knowledgeable and comfortable with EDI than anybody else.
- 2.** We must prove that we can do it for ourselves first, or no one will believe we can do it for them. Internal commitment and capability drive external credibility, building authentic brand and presence with clients, candidates and across the sector, supporting sustainable business growth.
- 3.** Getting it right means forensically analysing how we do recruitment – all the dimensions of managing and delivering on our responsibilities to clients and candidates. We should acknowledge room for improvement and greater maturity and challenge ourselves always to do better.

## Guidance and support at your fingertips

There may be hard miles ahead, but none of us are doing it alone.

As you reflect on your next steps – which ideas you might start to explore tomorrow; what conversations you might initiate next week; what targets you might consider for next year – know that we are here to support you with further guidance and resources, including:

- ▶  [Our EDI resource pack](#), the must-have partner to this guide, putting the business case for EDI in your back pocket and equipping you with easy-to-use checklists and tips for taking action.
- ▶  [Our EDI portal](#), your one-stop-shop for the latest news, advice and discussion on EDI across the recruitment sector and at REC.
- ▶  [REC networking and events](#) and  [our LinkedIn community](#), dedicated to giving you the inside track while enabling peer-to-peer engagement, collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
- ▶  [REC training and qualifications](#) to help you develop the skills you need to thrive in the recruitment industry.
- ▶  [REC recruitment law specialists](#) and our comprehensive  [library of template contracts, policies and legal guides](#) covering all aspects of employment law.
- ▶ The  [REC research](#) and  [resource hubs](#), putting into your hands market-leading intelligence and tools from the forefront of contemporary recruitment, helping you navigate the changing landscape and future opportunities.

## Acknowledgements

This guide has been created with valuable insights from the recruitment businesses and clients. We would like to thank the following REC members and businesses who contributed their time and experience:

Abdul Mozzamdar, PSR Solutions;  
Clive Hutching, STR Group;  
Donna Newton, TPP Recruitment;  
Emma Bradman, Prospect-US;  
Jayne Morris, TPP Recruitment;  
Katie York, The Best Connection;  
Kelly Dunn, KD Recruitment;  
Kim Beatie, Employers Voluntary Housing (EVH);  
Lee Crimes, The Best Connection;  
Lorna Ravell, Employers Voluntary Housing (EVH);

Sarah Thorne, Return Hub;  
Debbie Dobson, ISS World;  
Jayne Haines, Rio Tinto;  
Marie-Helene Tyack, Allianz;  
Neil Morrison, Severn Trent Plc;  
Paul Devlin, Alpheus Management;  
Richard Kuti, AND Digital;  
Simon Blackburn, Growth Engineering.





The Recruitment & Employment Confederation is the voice of the recruitment industry, speaking up for great recruiters. We drive standards and empower UK recruitment businesses to build better futures for their candidates and themselves. We are champions of an industry which is fundamental to the strength of the UK economy.

Find out more about the REC at [www.rec.uk.com](http://www.rec.uk.com)

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At Inclusion Crowd, we recognise the significance of gaining the support of all impacted teams to drive successful EDI initiatives. Our close collaboration with clients helps create the operational space and resources essential for cultural transformation. We assist organisations in identifying strategies to prioritise DE&I, engage all employees, and build excitement and momentum around it. Our commitment lies in helping clients establish an inclusive culture that truly makes a difference.

Find out more at [inclusioncrowd.biz](http://inclusioncrowd.biz)