



# BIG Discussion: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Tuesday 22nd October 2019

## Being Kind

This was the first in a series of Babcock International Group **BIG Discussions**, providing a platform for key staff, customers and partners to come together and explore common challenges. Hosted by Louise Atkinson, Director of Energy, Engineering and Automotive, Babcock International Group, the event was held at Glaziers Hall in London with representation from the rail, nuclear, automotive and energy industries as well as emergency services, defence and third sector organisations.

The theme of the Discussion - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) - represents an ongoing challenge for many organisations, despite huge investment. Stepping up to this calls for engagement from everyone in the sector, and the morning was designed as a forum for learning and mutual support. Participants were invited to bring to the table their questions as well as experiences around building EDI into their respective organisation's cultures.

### Embracing diversity is key to meeting workforce challenges

The Discussion began with a powerful analogy illustrating what's happening in many workplaces. As employers, we invite people to the dance, but then we tell them what and how to dance - rather than providing

a multitude of different musical genres that work for a range of individuals as well as our organisation.

The group agreed that diversity is not just about a set of protected characteristics, race, gender or sexuality. It goes **beyond the physical** to embracing every single person's differences across all the aspects of being human, including how they think, their emotions and their underlying beliefs. People are at their most creative and productive when they are **truly able to be themselves**, which means that collectively, we need to open our eyes and our hearts to embrace differences of **all** types. Attendees were challenged to think about uniquely gifted individuals from recent history: would the modern workplace have employed and enabled a genius like Alan Turing to make the contribution he did?

EDI also matters because the world is changing so rapidly. The challenges of unprecedented population growth, climate change and technological advances mean that we need not only the best brains in our businesses, but to empower those people to think freely and creatively.





## Is our culture one of tokenism or real inclusivity?

Stories are key to our understanding of others. Attendees shared stories of people being treated differently and unequally, and examples included neuro-diverse individuals recruited to highly-skilled roles but also expected to conform to corporate behaviours; women in male-dominated settings who felt a pressure to go above and beyond in order to prove their worth; and people who feel they don't 'fit in', forcing a decision to either leave or adapt and conform. All of which represented a loss to their employers in terms of creative potential.

The response to these stories was that organisations need to look at the context and not only the individual experiencing the issue. Perhaps the environment is what needs to change to enable everyone to function effectively.

## Changing the narrative: kindness is key

The Discussion continued with an exploration of the inclusion journey at the London Fire Brigade. Participants were invited to share ideas on what constituted barriers to engagement in this context, and how these might be overcome. Suggestions included age and prejudice, and a basic lack of understanding of the drivers for change. In terms of remedial action, the collective view was that the most effective strategy was to normalise inclusion - **it's essentially being kind!**

The LFB agenda was driven by a lack of diversity in its recruitment, rooted in public perceptions of the service and its mission. A programme of research - 'Firefighting sexism' - was commissioned to explore barriers, resulting in a myth-busting campaign on

social media. An Outreach Team was now working on recruitment across the community to create a service more reflective of the highly diverse city it serves. Internally, an engagement programme had enhanced staff representation via Equality Groups (e.g. on Mental Health), an Inclusion Board, and conversations rather than meetings. Ongoing work was focusing on how inclusivity makes staff more effective in their jobs and more productive in teams.

## Cross-sector collaboration

The Discussion also heard how the Nuclear Skills Strategy Group (NSSG) was working collaboratively to meet targets around cost reduction, exports, and diversity - recognised as an agenda that went beyond the remit of individual organisations.

The Group had published an EDI Strategy defining 'five steps to a diverse and inclusive nuclear sector' and there was certainly appetite for its implementation. The challenge was how to reach the ambitious targets - for example, 40% of the nuclear workforce to be women by 2030. Participants agreed this called for a huge amount of work on communications and branding, shifting perceptions about careers in nuclear and opening up conversations that would resonate with a new generation. But there was consensus that the most likely way to influence the future workforce was through working collaboratively across all sectors, using shared language and diverse role models which would impact wider culture.

## Long-term goals and transversal effects

Insights that could inform the NSSG's work - and shape the future of the sector - focused on EDI targets: looking 20 years ahead seemed more achievable, and a 50% improvement in 10 years more realistic. Progress should be a generational, long-term goal and we should be working to influence parents and children at a young age to effect that change.

Interestingly, the rail sector had seen an increase in the recruitment of women from 8% to 13% in five years, and by accident an increase in BAME recruitment too. Action in one area was likely to achieve improvements in another, and this would gather momentum. Another cross-sector initiative could be to enable staff to move between roles and organisations - collaboration which would lead to more diversity, more naturally.

Bringing individuals together from across sectors to share ideas, experiences and challenges around EDI delivered a great morning for all...and not a PowerPoint presentation in sight!