



**EQUALITY, DIVERSITY
AND INCLUSION:
FUTURE-PROOFING
YOUR WORKFORCE**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Future-Proofing Your Workforce Impact Report

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Future-Proofing Your Workforce (FPYW) was a 6-month project delivered under the umbrella of Transforming Founding Industries Network + in June-December 2023
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PROJECT MEMBERS

University of the Arts London, London College of Communication

Amanda Crawley Jackson, Professor of Place and Culture, Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange
Silvia Grimaldi, Reader in Service Design and Collaborative Futures, Co-Founder Service Futures Lab
Polly Nash, Senior Lecturer MA Film and Knowledge Exchange Co-ordinator Screen School

The University of Sheffield

Rachel van Duyvenbode, Professor of Education and the Humanities, National Teaching Fellow (NTF)

<https://tfinetworkplus.org>

Knowledgeexchange@lcc.arts.ac.uk

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AUTHOR

Professor Amanda Crawley Jackson

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Future-Proofing Your Workforce

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Future-Proofing Your Workforce (FPYW) was a 6-month project delivered under the umbrella of Transforming Founding Industries Network + in June-December 2023. According to UKRI (2021), 'the foundation industry workforce is dominated by male employees at almost all levels and there is under-representation of younger employees, compared with the average in the economy'. As one business leader engaged in FPYW observed, however: 'the evidence is that the companies that are led in terms of inclusive cultures are more diverse, have teams that make better decisions, don't suffer from groupthink, outperform from a financial basis compared to their peers, are able to recruit the best talent'. Addressing systemic equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) challenges is 'the right thing to do from an ethical and moral point of view – and it also makes good business sense'.

FPYW was delivered by a multidisciplinary team with backgrounds in the arts and humanities, design and creative practice: Professor Rachel Van Duyvenbode (University of Sheffield) and colleagues from London College of Communication, University of the Arts London: Professor Amanda Crawley Jackson, Dr Silvia Grimaldi and Polly Nash. The academic team engaged 3 businesses from different foundation industry sectors - glass, ceramics and aggregates – to pilot a unique development and coaching proposition that aims to empower businesses to co-design and deliver EDI culture change, using innovative top-down/bottom-up approaches, participatory methodologies and principles of co-production. Each of the 3 businesses engaged by FPYW benefited from 4 x 1:1 equity leadership coaching sessions for the nominated business leader/executive sponsor (2 MDs and 1 Director of Operations); 1 x service design workshop and a bespoke roadmap for change; and 1 x 10-minute film, co-produced with the workforce, capturing insights and aspirations of employees around EDI in the workplace. The plans for action were effectively shaped 'by the business, for the business', in contradistinction to what can be experienced as directive, 'off the shelf' or 'tick box' commercial consultancy interventions.

Service design workshops led by Dr Grimaldi qualitatively explored the lived experiences, perspectives and aspirations of employees from a range of job families and at different career stages. The workshops encouraged debate about positive change, collectively identifying problems and blank spots in current plans and policies, as well as defining and prioritising actions to address these in the form of a bespoke roadmap for leadership. This process of reverse mentoring had two-fold benefits: it enabled senior leaders to learn more about EDI from the perspective of less senior colleagues and under-represented groups in the



workforce, and created a safe and discursive space in which employee voices and experiences could be better embedded in strategic planning for EDI. Leaders noted that the workshops and filmmaking activities engaged people around the business who may otherwise not have been engaged.

1:1 equity leadership coaching sessions, led by Professor Van Duyvenbode, provided a novel professional development opportunity for business leaders to grow their capabilities, clarity, confidence and motivation to make and/or influence business decisions around EDI. Equity coaching also helps leaders reflect on approaches to contentious and emotive issues, talking through the implications of actions. Leaders said they felt better equipped to explain the value of EDI in their business and accelerate culture change. They valued academic expertise and the sharing of new research insights, as well as dedicated time to think through and test their thoughts and ideas while developing a shared, new language for EDI within their business. The coachees also described how their learning, insights and aspirations have been shared already with others, influencing entire teams. One leader observed that FPYW provided an invaluable space to '[coach] the solutions out that we already know but just can't visualise or implement'.

Filmmaker Polly Nash worked with employees to co-create a short film for each of the businesses engaged, surfacing personal perspectives on lived experiences of EDI in the workplace, as well as recommendations for future action that might stimulate the recruitment of a more diverse talent pipeline. Leaders noted that the films have provided a useful benchmarking tool against which to measure future EDI progress and add to the compelling, qualitative evidence base created through FPYW that is bespoke to each business: 'it's one thing to sort of know [the issues] and it's another to watch a video and hear it like that'. The films will be used internally as authentic EDI training assets to promote buy-in for EDI processes and strategy at all levels, including boards, senior leadership, middle management and employees.

Leaders commented that they found FPYW's three-stranded approach innovative, useful and challenging. It created a cultural shift, opening up future options and surfacing different ways of doing things, as well as enabling leaders to better understand and articulate to others why EDI culture change is important - a 'foundation' rather than a 'bolt-on'. The project clarified thinking, encouraged reflection and accelerated EDI work in the business. Leaders described a range



of impacts: the project touched hundreds of people around the business, advancing their thinking about EDI topics as a result of their having been engaged; it accelerated EDI change, enabling leaders to have conversations with different people within the organisation to explain and advocate for it. It fed into meaningful strategy work, supporting the business to grow beyond compliance towards strategies that focus on protected characteristics, unconscious bias and understanding the intersectional needs of different people. It gave businesses a 'head start' in developing their EDI strategy, exceeding expectations and '[making] a difference in what we do'.

Longitudinal evaluation will be required to ascertain the longer-term impacts for the businesses, which may include increased job satisfaction and retention; more effective management of discriminatory behaviours; a greater sense of belonging in the workplace and the recruitment of a more diverse talent pipeline. It was felt that businesses require further support in terms of working out how best to use hitherto unfamiliar creative methodologies and assets (such as the film), in order to maximise longer-term impacts. As one leader noted, this was a short, intense pilot that has huge legacy potential. It was also suggested that the unique, 3-stranded approach of FPYW might be usefully deployed to accelerate thinking and action in other areas of strategic priority, for example decarbonisation and sustainability.

Grounding the project in the principles of co-design and co-production also facilitated two-way learning, nuancing existing sector intelligence about EDI in the foundation industries. FPYW focused on age and gender, but the project team learned that other factors such as the history of the business, its geographical location(s), the demographics of local labour forces, family structures and the affective dimensions of work play a critical role in shaping EDI objectives.

Given the very positive responses to FPYW and the already tangible outcomes in terms of helping support EDI culture change within organisations, the next steps for the project team will include scoping options to scale up the initiative and make it sustainable in the longer term. Both the University of Sheffield and University of the Arts London are currently proactively supporting the academic team to explore routes to commercialisation.



