House of Commons

Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

2023-27

Introduction

This strategy outlines our plans over the next four years to build on our inclusion and diversity work.

We want an inclusive culture where all feel they can do their best work and can thrive, in line with our values.

The strategy was developed through consultation with key stakeholders and is designed to support the House Service Strategy 2023-2027 and its core message: we support parliamentary democracy by delivering excellent services to the UK Parliament.

Our approach to inclusion and diversity (I&D) particularly focuses on the House Administration's strategic aim, "support our people to thrive".

We aim to:

Be an employer of choice, ensuring that we have the skills and capabilities we need to meet the challenges we face as an organisation, enabling our people to thrive and adapt

Be an inclusive and diverse organisation, creating a positive and supportive culture where people feel able to be themselves at work and staff wellbeing is enhanced

Engage colleagues, listening and acting on feedback and co-creating solutions

Be one team, breaking down silos, delivering together and treating all colleagues fairly

The I&D Strategy also ties in with:

Our People Strategy 2022-2025

Plans to implement the recommedations from Lord Morse's independent review of financial management in the House of Commons

It sets out our vision and core aims, and the central plans on which the House Administration and Digital Service teams will build. Teams will develop their own plans that deliver the strategy and progress inclusion and diversity in their areas of specialism and service provision. They will be supported by the central Inclusion and Diversity team and their own business planning leads.

One of the strongest messages from our consultation was the need to set out to do a few things well. Therefore, our strategy focuses on three key areas for the next four years:

- ✣ Decreasing the ethnicity pay gap
- ✣ Improving accessibility
- ✣ Fostering inclusive environments

Our Strategy At a Glance

✤ Decreasing the ethnicity pay gap

✤ Improving accessibility

✤ Fostering inclusive environments

Success indicators include: improved scores and rankings in benchmarking indices, including the Disability Standard, Race at Work Chartermark; improved people survey results and customer satisfaction scores; increased representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, disabled staff and women in senior roles; ethnicity pay gap decreases and gender pay gap stays within 1% difference; users of the ICGS feel respected throughout the process and agreed response times are met; improved accessibility for users of the Parliamentary Estate and our services.

Decrease the ethnicity pay gap

Action 1
Improve experiences and mitigate unconscious bias throughout the employee life cycle:

· Attraction
· Recruitment
· Induction
· Development
· Progression
· Exit

Action 2
Development and progression of underrepresented groups, with a focus on Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff

· Talent mapping as part of workforce planning
· Diverse talent pipelines
· Accelerated development programme to help people reach their potential

Action 3
Agree measurements and monitor progress for decreasing the ethnicity pay gap (EPG). This includes:

· Reducing the headline pay gap
· Increasing the number of senior posts being filled with employees from ethnic minority groups.

Improving accessibility

Action 4
Improve physical accessibility

· Specialist accessibility audits undertaken across the parliamentary estate
· Review governance and effectiveness of access steering group

Action 5
Strengthen the focus on digital accessibility

· Creation of a dedicated team and budget
· Adoption of an accessibility maturity model
· Sustain and enhance accessibility of parliamentary website

Action 6
Strengthen our disability confidence and competence in delivering services for colleagues and customers. This includes:

· Support for managers in workplace adjustments
· Bespoke training for customer-facing teams
· Undertaking recognised benchmarking indices and accreditations
· Increasing the provision of information in alternative formats

Fostering inclusive environments

Action 7
Equitable working for all. This includes:

· Support for Estate-based colleagues to access training and engagement opportunities
· Enabling hybrid and flexible working

Action 8
Focus on leadership and management. This includes:

· Developing and embedding consistent standards, knowledge, behaviours
· Tailored development to develop confidence and competence, including anti-racism
· Individual inclusion and diversity performance objectives

Action 9
Embed inclusive behaviours. This includes

· Communicating the Behaviour Code and revising training
· Improve effectiveness and efficiency of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme
· Acting on findings of research into sexual misconduct

What are we trying to solve?

Addressing data from our autumn 2022 Working Lives survey and responses to our consultation findings has led to the development of key areas of this strategy.

There have been year-on-year improvements in staff's view that everyone has opportunities to progress and is rewarded fairly regardless of sex, but views are split on whether most other characteristics are a factor.

> The House of Commons' median gender pay gap is 0.9% and the median ethnicity pay gap is 12.6%.

> PDS's median gender pay gap is 3.8% and the median ethnicity pay gap is 15.8%.

> 35% of white staff are in senior roles (defined as pay bands A and Senior Commons Staff (SCS)), compared to 18% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

The Working Lives Survey reported:

- 26% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are estate based, compared to only 17% white staff.

- 77% of white staff work in a hybrid manner, compared to 63% Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

- 46% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff want more flexibility, compared to 38% of white staff.

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are less likely to feel that recruitment processes attract a diverse workforce.

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are less likely to believe everyone is included and free to be themselves regardless of ethnicity/race.

- Black, Asian and minority staff are less likely to feel staff have opportunities to progress and are rewarded fairly regardless of ethnicity/race, though this has improved year-on-year

- Staff who identify as having a disability are less likely to feel that recruitment processes attract a diverse workforce.

- The steady decline in a feeling of being fairly treated is sharper among disabled staff.

- Disabled staff are less likely to agree that they are treated with respect by the people they work with or believe everyone is included and free to be themselves regardless of disability status.

- Disabled staff are less likely to report their career has progressed over the last two years. Levels of desire for career progression are consistent between this group and non-disabled staff.

- The key consideration disabled staff would like addressed is staff support and working conditions.

- Staff who identify as LGBTQIA+ are less likely to feel that recruitment processes attract a diverse workforce.

- Staff support and working conditions, hybrid working and changes to policy, culture and processes were commonly mentioned

- Staff with caring responsibilities are less likely to report their career has progressed over the last two years. Levels of desire for career progression are consistent between this group and staff without caring responsibilities.

Findings from the consultation included a focus on the difficulties caused by physical access issues and their impact on disabled people.

The time taken to respond to faults or address barriers like heavy doors was frequently commented on, as was the perception that essential workplace adjustments to make it possible for disabled colleagues to work to the best of their ability can be subject to delay.

The "Estate-based Community" (EBC), representing a third of the workforce and consisting of colleagues whose work is primarily or solely carried out on the parliamentary estate, are perceived by many to be disadvantaged. A significant programme of work is being undertaken to address the quality of rest and changing facilities, resulting in a wide variety of improvements, but the EBC must be an area of focus in the I&D strategy.

The rostered nature of working for many Estate-based colleagues impedes attendance at training and events such as all-staff meetings, as well as reducing their access to more flexible ways of working. These can limit their routes to progression. There are intersections between the Estate-based community and representation of staff who are from racially minoritised groups.

Colleagues wanted to see inclusion and diversity incorporated into all aspects of the House Administration, with all colleagues expected to contribute to the delivery of the strategy, in ways that support the objectives of their teams.

What will we achieve if we make progress?

Over the next four years, we will work to make a positive difference to the culture and ways of working in the House of Commons Administration and the Parliamentary Digital Service.

Our ambition is that:

All colleagues will feel visible, valued, that they can be themselves and that they belong. All will collaborate to make the House and PDS inclusive organisations. The public will trust and believe that we are diverse and inclusive employers.

We will have increased representation of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic and disabled colleagues at senior levels, and will have continued strengthening our representation of women in all areas of the organisations.

Colleagues will have increased confidence and competence in tackling misogyny, racism and other types of bias or discrimination. We will demonstrate that we do not tolerate inappropriate behaviours and are demonstrably tackling bias in our systems and processes.

We will have focused attention on structural barriers and further increase colleagues' willingness and ability to engage with accessibility issues. Delays to making repairs or adjustments will be minimised. We will have more accessible, appropriate, shared working environments with effective technology and spaces to both focus and relax.

Access to development will be more accessible to all. Parity between hybrid-working and Estate-based colleagues will increase. Annual all-staff surveys will show a reduction in disparity of scores regarding fairness between EBC and non EBC colleagues. Leaders will be visible, listen and perceived to act with integrity.

Managers will set clear expectations of staff and trust them to deliver.

Leaders and managers will be clear about what's expected of them. They will be exemplars of fair, inclusive behaviours that contribute to a more collaborative environment where everyone can thrive. All colleagues will take responsibility for their behaviours and actions. Leaders, managers and all staff will be held accountable on inclusion and diversity, being clear on what they are responsible for and monitoring impacts.

Staff will feel confident to raise concerns and ideas through established channels.

Our ethnicity pay gap will have reduced and our gender pay gap will remain under 1%.

Everyone demonstrates inclusive behaviours and lives the corporate values.

The House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service will be recognised as great places to work where everyone is valued, visible and can thrive.

What will make the difference over the next four years?

There are nine main actions that we will deliver, alongside our business-as-usual work.

Actions that focus on the three key areas will not only benefit those with diversity or role-based characteristics named in each area; they will benefit everyone:

- A significant driver of the EPG is a simple structural reason: we still have too few Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues in senior roles. Pay gaps are a good indicator of inequalities in access to work, career advancement and rewards; they require broad initiatives to address the challenging economic, social and cultural factors underpinning them. Focusing on tackling bias in our structures, systems and processes, e.g. at all stages of the employee life cycle, and taking a more robust approach to managing our talent improves the experiences and progression of everyone at work;

- Improving accessibility not only removes barriers for disabled people, it also improves the experience for all users of our workplaces and services;

- Fostering inclusive environments creates parity not only for Estate-based colleagues but for all of us, including people travelling for work, colleagues returning from parental leave and people working as, or aspiring to be, managers and leaders.

Key area 1

Decreasing the ethnicity pay gap

Action 1:

Improve experiences and mitigate unconscious bias throughout the employee life cycle.

We will take a consistent, inclusive approach in reviewing and monitoring our systems and methods for all stages, including:

- Attraction
- Recruitment
- Induction
- Development
- Progression
- Retention
- Leaving employment, e.g. conducting value-adding exit interviews

This will provide data that informs planning and improves outcomes in relation to race and ethnicity but also for other groups. To be successful, we need to implement the recommendations from the Inclusive Recruitment Review, ensure management information such as people dashboards is well used by teams and more accessible and user-friendly, and monitor delivery over the four years of the strategy. We will use the Race at Work Charter to indicate what improvements we need and to monitor progress.

Timescales:

- Work with Teams to support consistency in the employee life cycle by March 2024
- Inclusive Recruitment Review's 18-month action plan to be implemented by August 2024
- Submit to the Race at Work Charter in March 2024, with results published in October 2024.

Action 2:

Focus on the development and progression of underrepresented groups, particularly our Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

This will include a more structured and joined-up approach to talent mapping and management, as part of our workforce planning, and the creation of career pathways and diverse talent pipelines over time. These will be driven partly from the centre and partly by Teams, e.g., by considering the circulation process in the Select Committee Team.

We will explore targeted ways to accelerate the development and progression of underrepresented groups so that they are in the best possible position to compete for roles. This will be supported by developing a sponsorship scheme involving senior leaders.

Timescales:

- Talent management process designed and operational by October 2024
- Accelerated development programme to start April 2025

Action 3:

Agree measurements for decreasing the ethnicity pay gap.

Progress on addressing our pay gaps will be tracked, monitored and reported regularly to the Commons Executive Board. This will include:

- reducing the headline pay gap;
- increasing the number of senior posts being filled with employees (both existing and newly recruited) from ethnic minority groups.

Timescales:

- Measurements agreed by September 2023
- Headline pay gap reduced by 2027, with bi-annual review points

Success indicators under this key area will include:

- Improvements are measurable against the Race At Work Charter;
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff feel supported, evidenced by improvements in staff survey scores
- More Black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates progress to interview stage and appointment;
- Increased representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and under-represented groups in senior roles;
- Decreasing the ethnicity pay gap.

Key area 2

Improving accessibility

Action 4:

A programme of specialist accessibility audits will be undertaken across the parliamentary estate to improve physical accessibility.

This will concentrate on areas that are crucial to facilitating the business of the House, undergoing change, or of particular inaccessibility.

They will incorporate inclusivity for neurodivergent users of the estate and our services.

We will ensure the process for maintaining effective access and egress (e.g. maintaining accessible facilities) is improved and review the governance and effectiveness of the Access and Inclusion Steering Group.

Timescales:

• Audits begin September 2023 and will continue to 2027;
• Access and Inclusion Steering Group review completed by November 2023

Action 5:

The current focus on digital accessibility will be maintained and strengthened through the creation of a dedicated team and budget.

Adoption of an accessibility maturity model will provide the framework for benchmarking current practice and identifying and tracking areas for improvement over time.

The embedding of regular accessibility testing and compliance checks for Parliament's website will continue, to confirm that new products being developed meet public sector standards and to ensure the accessibility improvements made in recent years to the whole website are sustained and further enhanced.

The new Intranet for Parliament, which will go live during 2023, has been designed with digital accessibility in mind. An ongoing programme of compliance checks and enhancements will continue after launch.

Timescales:

• Dedicated digital accessibility team and budget to be created by December 2023;
• Initial accessibility maturity assessment of Parliament's key digital tools to be completed by March 2024 and then refined and monitored through to 2027;
• Testing and compliance checks for Website and Intranet: ongoing, through to 2027
• Guidance for managers on making workplace adjustments to be launched in July 2023;
• Further guides developed and delivered by December 2023;
• Training developed and first tranche delivered by December 2023

Action 6:

Strengthen our disability confidence and competence in delivering services for colleagues and customers so that they are more accessible and changes are sustained.

We will focus on training and support to address attitudinal barriers to accessibility and promote a shared understanding of barriers, misconceptions and how to work inclusively with accessibility in mind. We will prioritise information that is most used by the public, e.g., visitors; recruitment documentation; e-learning, as well as reviewing our mechanisms for maintaining access arrangements and logistics. Actions include:

• Training and guidance for managers in making timely and appropriate workplace adjustments for disabled colleagues;
• Bespoke training for front-line teams to ensure seamless services to customers
• Undertake benchmarking indices and standards, including the Business Disability Forum's Disability Standard, the Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) Visibly Better Index, and those supporting neurodivergent users. Implement agreed recommendations from each;
• Increase the provision of information in British Sign Language (BSL) and Easy Read formats. All videos hosted on the internet and intranet to be captioned;

Timescales:

• Benchmarking indices: submissions made during 2024 and 2025, with agreed recommendations implemented by March 2025 and 2026
• Extension of BSL and other formats: 2024

Success indicators under this key area will include:

• Implementing recommendations from audits and benchmarking indices to improve accessibility across the Parliamentary Estate;
• More of our information will be available in alternative formats;
• Satisfaction scores for disabled colleagues and customers will improve.

Key area 3

Fostering inclusive environments

Action 7:

Continue to improve our support for the Estate-based Community (EBC) and ensure working environments and practices are equitable for all.

As well as our ongoing programme for improving facilities and provision for EBC staff, we will:

- Review and revise existing delivery methods for training and development to be more accessible for EBC learners;
- Explore the provision of protected time for EBC staff working shifts. This should aid their engagement in learning activities and support career development;
- Review teams' inclusion analyses (IAs) on hybrid working, share good practice and implement improvements.

Timescales:

- Business case for next phase of EBC improvements to be completed by August 2023; protected time by December 2023;
- Hybrid working review of IAs by May 2023; improvements made by October 2023

Action 8:

A renewed focus on leadership and management so that people in management roles feel supported and support others in turn.

We will develop and communicate a set of standards for leaders and managers so that everyone is clear what is expected and how they can be achieved. All leaders and managers will have individual inclusion and diversity performance objectives and report progress at quarterly review meetings.

Tailored I&D development workshops and coaching or other support for leaders will be offered to develop confidence and competence in meeting standards and driving inclusion and diversity principles and priorities. This will be strengthened by programmes such as the senior leadership development programme, anti-racism training and reciprocal mentoring.

Timescales:

- Leadership and management standards developed and in place by March 2024
- I&D development workshops reviewed by June 2023. Revised workshops in place by October 2023
- Inclusion objectives in place for leaders and managers by April 2024

Action 9:

We will ensure that inclusive behaviours are communicated and embedded, the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) functions effectively for users, and concerns about inappropriate behaviours are examined.

This includes:

- Building on revised training for new starters launched in 2022, communicating the Behaviour Code via an awareness programme for the existing Parliamentary community;
- Improve effectiveness and efficiency of the ICGS following a review and improve associated risk management processes;
- Conduct research into sexual misconduct and review the findings.

Timescales:

- Behaviour Code awareness programme roll-out begins: June 2023
- ICGS review: indicative timescale autumn 2023.
- Sexual misconduct research completes: October 2023

Success indicators under this key area will include:

- Positive change in the engagement scores for EBC colleagues in the staff survey.
- Increased visibility of EBC colleagues at corporate events
- Everyone understands what's expected of them in terms of behaviours and role model inclusivity in all work and interactions
- The ICGS is accessible to all and user feedback is positive
- Time taken to investigate complaints through the ICGS
- Improvement in annual all-staff survey score: "I feel able to challenge inappropriate behaviour"; "I took action in response" to experiences of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct

Delivering the strategy

Teams will be supported to conduct their own action-planning based on the central strategy. They will treat every strategy, service or initiative they own as an opportunity to deliver this I&D strategy.

Action plans will include both central and local measurements for impact and reviewed quarterly. Progress will be monitored and reported through heads of People Capability, Business Management Directors and the Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group.

If our aims are achieved ahead of predicted timescales, we will increase our ambitions at quarterly reviews over the four years of the strategy.

A communications plan will accompany the strategy and will be updated at review points.

The I&D strategy will inform the annual strategies Workplace Equality Networks (WENS) develop for their work for each financial year, supported by the inclusion teams of each House Administration.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Developing our new strategy: consultation findings

We held a consultation to gather feedback to inform the development of our new strategy. Staff and other stakeholders were offered the opportunity to participate in online and in-person focus groups and interviews.

Between 11th November and 23rd December 2022, 37 focus groups and 35 one-to-one interviews were conducted, involving over 500 participants.

The feedback concluded that this strategy should:

• Be designed to respond to the changing experiences and events of the last three years, including Covid-19, a huge increase in hybrid working, and Lord Morse's review of financial management
• Further embed diversity and inclusion into the leadership, planning and practice of the House of Commons and PDS.
• Commit to tackling structural barriers that impede our progress to inclusion for all
• Be dynamic, visible and owned at both corporate and local levels.

Summary of headline messages

From the consultation, it was acknowledged that progress had been made against the objectives of the last strategy. Leadership is seen as vitally important, including seeing leaders "walking the walk", openly talking about diversity and inclusion issues, role modelling inclusive behaviours and taking responsibility for agreed actions.

Barriers to a sense of inclusion included a lack of accessibility, experiencing micro-aggressions that went unchallenged, and the need for managers to develop greater confidence and competency in managing topics related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and supporting their staff to deal with them.

The effects of Covid-19 were noted, including greater use of hybrid working, the pausing of some work such as work experience and apprenticeships, and differential impacts on colleagues whose work is primarily or solely on the parliamentary estate (the "Estate Based Community" (EBC). EBC was seen as a large group to continue to focus on in the next D&I strategy, as they consistently reported a less positive experience (for example the Working Lives survey shows differences in perceptions of fairness among EBC and hybrid- and remote-working staff: 62% of EBC agreed they are treated fairly as an individual, compared to 81% of hybrid/remote workers agreeing (78% all staff)).

The Workplace Equality Networks (WENs) are valued and more collaborative working (e.g., addressing issues of intersectionality) would elevate their effectiveness. Similarly, the importance of joining up corporate initiatives and strategies, such as the Inclusive Recruitment Review, was a common theme. On recruitment, selection and progression, there is a need to take a more strategic and practical approach to supporting greater diversity at the more senior levels.

One of the strongest messages was the need to set out to do a few things well. This necessitates an evidence-based, data-driven and clearly prioritised strategy and action plans with clear objectives, built-in accountability, and quarterly reviews. These should be accompanied by a communications plan with regular progress updates for all.