



# Expert Opinion - Edition 1

## Beyond lip service: Driving real progress on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

One of The 5% Club's aims is to support and spread best practice amongst its members and other employers. In this series, we aim to publicise good examples and challenge conventional thinking and approaches. Each edition will feature member companies which are leading the way on issues which face employers and the economy, making recommendations to drive improvement.

This first edition focuses on EDI, something which is rightly becoming a business priority, but one on which tangible progress is often frustratingly slow. Indeed, despite research which proves that businesses with a diverse workforce consistently outperform those without<sup>1</sup>, hidden barriers to diversity still exist in recruitment processes and early career workforces remain imbalanced. Only 11.3%<sup>2</sup> of apprenticeship starts are made by BAME applicants, and whilst women represent more than half of all apprentices (54%)<sup>3</sup>, women represent only 8.1% of those in STEM. Just 10% of apprenticeship starts are by people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities<sup>4</sup>.

Discussions with our members on diversity and inclusion (D&I)<sup>5</sup> have shown that traditional recruitment and retention strategies are no longer fit for purpose in delivering the skilled, diverse workforce businesses need now and in the future. How our members are responding to this takes a number of different forms, encompassing where they look for candidates, how they shortlist, the interview process and the retention and development of staff from diverse backgrounds.

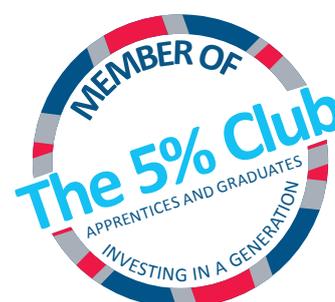
In this first edition of Expert Opinion, we speak to Mark Lomas, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at HS2 about the changes employers can make to remove barriers to employment and ensure that they can access the talent that UK Plc is not currently making use of.

**Q. Mark, you've been working on this agenda for many years. Why has progress on EDI been so slow, in your view?**

Progress has been slow in my view because of two main factors. Will and Skill. The will to make it happen includes setting aside budgets for EDI, improving diversity requires change and holding leaders to account for progress. Not many organisations have the will to make the changes necessary to succeed. The second is the Skills to enable the change. D&I and HR professionals need the technical skills to re-engineer recruitment, talent, performance, procurement and engagement practices to be inclusive. In my experience, a majority of D&I practitioners are too junior in the company structure to affect the required change.

**Q. So do we have to completely rip up existing HR processes and start again?**

In the main, yes. You need to treat EDI progress like an engineering issue. You find the point of failure and fix it. This requires the data to make informed decisions making.



<sup>1</sup> Apprenticeship Statistics: England Jan 2018

<sup>2</sup> Apprenticeship Statistics: England Jan 2018

<sup>3</sup> WISE

<sup>4</sup> Apprenticeship Statistics: England Jan 2018

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.5percentclub.org.uk/wp5pc/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Breaking-the-Deadlock.pdf>



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**Q. What 3 things can companies do to make real progress?**

1. Ensure you have robust EDI data to make intelligence lead decisions
2. Look at recruitment processes from the very start, at each stage and each interaction with candidates. Change the model to change the result
3. Make leaders accountable. Managing people is managing diversity. Managers and leaders should be competent in it.

**Q. How important is senior-leader buy-in?**

Senior leader buy-in is essential. But only if buy-in includes accountability. Rhetoric alone won't create change. In many cases, this has to include performance accountability – making the executive committee members and senior leadership – accountable by embedding accountability into performance evaluation with links to remuneration. Accountability has a profound effect on the delivery of improvements in D&I.

**Q. How do we get employees to take ownership of this agenda?**

To create a sense of ownership, you need to encourage participation. When you inspire participation and people giving you ideas and challenges you have to respond to them. Developing credibility by taking action is essential.

**Q. How important is it for businesses to take their supply chain with them and how can that best be achieved when it is made up of SMEs?**

Inclusive procurement and supplier diversity is becoming more and more important. At HS2 it's a core part of our approach. To take SMEs with you it's important to ensure there are opportunities to tender for business and that care is taken to ensure they are aware of opportunities for building capacity – such as undertaking training. There are many free sources of support available. The first step is often as simple as increasing awareness of them.

**Q. What role does artificial intelligence have to play on this agenda?**

Artificial intelligence may have a key role in the future. I need further convincing of how effective it is from a diversity viewpoint. I'm sure it won't be too long until AI is a part of business as usual approaches to some HR practices.

Huge thanks to Mark for that fascinating insight into how businesses can speed up change on this important agenda.

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