BRITISH COUNCIL

Diversity Unit

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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

October 2023

Contents

Introduction

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)[1] support the range and breadth of our work. They encourage us to be open to other cultures, to challenge our assumptions, biases and prejudices. They are essential for deep, trusting, mutually beneficial relationships.

They enhance our brand, reputation and our impact both on people and on our planet. Without them our cultural relations work would be devoid of integrity and risk being solely transactional rather than mutually beneficial.

Vision

Our vision is to have a fair and inclusive organisational culture that achieves Strategy 2025 effectively and efficiently, based on consistently high standards and our values – open and committed, inclusive and expert, optimistic and bold.

We want everyone coming into contact with us, off and online and regardless of reason, to feel respected, treated with dignity and to experience our stated commitment to EDI. We want alignment between what we say and what we do.

Our aspiration is to make a meaningful contribution to international aspects of EDI for wider benefit. This will help nurture our shared humanity and interdependence, whilst acknowledging, appreciating and respecting distinctiveness.

We want to extend and share our skills and experience and what we have learnt and continue to learn over many decades, from working in different cultures and countries, drawing on the rich diversity, experiences and knowledge of our global staff and stakeholders.

Doing so will allow us to highlight the global benefits of EDI for all societies and promote its positive contribution. This is particularly important and relevant given increasing intercultural interactions, facilitated by global travel, demographic changes, and advances in technology.

We will work energetically towards this vision through a mainstreaming approach, by embedding EDI into our plans, processes and behaviours. We will undertake distinct actions based on common interests and priorities, to deliver impact for the UK. Where there are tensions, conflicts and difficulties we will try to resolve them skilfully and quickly to minimise distress and to learn and improve.

We will seek to nurture a sense of belonging for those we employ and encourage an environment where people feel comfortable being themselves at work.

We will achieve our vision through strong senior leadership and ownership of this strategy, and accountability for it at all levels.

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[1] We define Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our Equality Policy and on our web and intranet sites. We use the 'shorthand' diversity to also include equality and inclusion.

Background

Our EDI Strategy sits alongside our [Equality Policy](#). Together they set the direction and focus for the whole organisation. Our Strategy details our approach to EDI and the strategic objectives for/of the mainstreaming we aspire to. It was first launched in 2002 and has been refreshed every three-to-four years.

This revision builds on what we have learnt. It also takes account of internal and external changes and constraints, including those caused by the global pandemic in 2020, and outlines our EDI priorities leading to 2025. These include strong attention to achieving race equality through anti-racism. Much remains familiar although with discernible changes in content, emphasis and articulation.

The refresh has been informed by internal consultation involving diverse staff from across the organisation. Findings have been considered and addressed. The outcome includes a continued focus on six broad and deep areas, in addition to giving stronger attention to the cross-cutting area of socio-economic background and the crucial nature of intersectionality.

Our Approach

We have set out below our business, moral and legal case for EDI, our objectives and the tools for their delivery, and responsibilities for implementation. Together they reflect a strategic, intentional, joined up and flexible approach to EDI in response to our geographical and cultural diversity. We prioritise the following main areas:

- age
- disability
- sex and gender
- race / ethnicity and culture
- religion and belief
- sexual orientation, and additionally
- socio-economic background as a cross cutting area

These are not commented on in-depth individually here, nor are they our exclusive focus. By prioritising them we give due regard to key aspects of EDI and use our resources effectively. We appreciate these areas do not stand alone but can and do intersect.

We know that socio-economic disadvantage and inequality plays a significant role in systemic discrimination and in holding people back and is often given limited attention.[2] In this strategy we commit to addressing this and developing a plan to do so rather than just acknowledging it.

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[2] [World Social report 2020](#) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs); [In it Together: Why less inequality benefits all](#) (OECD, 2015).

This will support greater inclusion across our staff groups and wider opportunities for access and engagement across our programmes and services where it is possible to do so.

Business case

Mainstreaming EDI principles and practices is important for cultural relations and how we work and for our organisational culture. It supports us to:

- Deliver effective cultural relations - without EDI cultural relations is not fit for purpose.

- Demonstrate our respect for, knowledge of and skills in working within the diverse cultures and countries in which we operate.

- Maintain our strong brand and positively benchmark ourselves alongside other organisations including in relation to employment, services.

- Maximise and retain valued skills, knowledge and expertise.

- Have committed and motivated staff who feel fairly treated, respected, and included. This results in greater job satisfaction, better employment relations, fewer grievances and enables them to fully focus on utilising their skills and talents in the workplace.

- Attract new talent and fresh perspectives. Research confirms increasing numbers of prospective applicants specifically seek out employment in organisations with strong values and a demonstrable commitment to inclusion.[3] There is also strong evidence that heterogeneous teams outperform homogenous ones and that diversity in leadership roles can enhance organisational performance.[4]

- Continue to nurture creativity, innovation and flexibility and spot new opportunities to work with others, as well as new inclusive approaches and sources of support which facilitate meaningful participation and other benefits.

- Remain relevant and dynamic and achieve greater reach, impact and sustainability. This will come from engaging with a diversity of partners, perspectives, needs, abilities and opportunities.

- Effectively manage risk and enhance our reputation including by specifically and deliberately considering the potential impact of our policies, practices, programmes, activities and events on different groups. This allows us to promote inclusion based on attentiveness to intersectionality, and to mitigate against potential discrimination, unfairness, or bias.

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[3] Deloitte Millennial Survey (2018).

[4] McKinsey (Diversity Wins: How inclusion matters, May 2020), World Economic Forum (Business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming, 2019), CIPD (Diversity management that works, 2019), Ozbilgin (Global Diversity Management, 2019), Barak (Managing diversity: towards a globally inclusive workplace, 2016), Harvard Business Review (Why diverse teams are smarter, 2016), Hays Asia Diversity and Inclusion Report (2018).

Moral case

There is growing evidence that at the core of EDI lies compassion[5] and an authentic respect, empathy, and care for others.

We believe therefore that it is important to value everyone and to be empathetic, fair, respectful and inclusive. This holds for employees, participants in, or contributors to our work, irrespective of background, characteristics or attributes.

Our moral case especially encourages a focus on what we have in common and what joins us as global citizens. It is centred on what is mutually beneficial and dignifies people, rather than how we differ, what separates us and diminishes people. It establishes the conditions for empowerment and recognises our shared humanity. It can help reduce conflict, stress, tension, discrimination, unfairness and anger, at an individual, organisational, wider societal and global level.

Our moral case supports us to achieve a fair, inclusive, anti-racist organisational culture that is attentive to colonial histories and decolonising practices recognised as such by staff and contacts, along with organisational values which are consistently applied.

Investing in and being committed to EDI is the right thing to do from many perspectives, including the strong alignment with human rights and social justice, but particularly because our vision is for a more connected and trusted UK in a more connected and trusting world.

Legal case

In many countries in which we work aspects of EDI are enshrined in law. The legal case recognises the important role the law plays in eradicating unjustified and unlawful discrimination and achieving positive change and inclusion.

Different jurisdictions of course have different legal frameworks in place, and we respect these. At the same time we recognise gaps, including in their enforcement, that can lead to increased vulnerability for some groups. Within our locus of control and based on appropriate negotiation and cultural sensitivity we will, in instances, take action that responds to and addresses these, using our own Equality Policy and international human rights principles as a guide.

We work in many different contexts and cultures that are shaped by different beliefs, traditions and principles and therefore frequently confront clashes, challenges and cultural dilemmas. When we do, we seek to resolve these by drawing on, amongst other things, overarching international instruments including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

Great Britain's Equality Act 2010, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1988 and other relevant legislation, codes of practice and guidance are important reference points and steer our approach.

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[5] Gibbs, At the core of diversity is compassion, in Global Diversity Management, Ozbilgin et al, 2019.

Alongside our Equality Policy, a range of other policies relate to EDI and within them have legal requirements that govern how we behave.[6] These include complaints and speaking up about concerns, health and safety, environmental awareness and sustainability, safeguarding adults and children, modern day slavery, anti-fraud and corruption, information security and privacy and our Code of Conduct.

Our distinct Anti-racism Action Plan places a spotlight on race equality. It sets out a clear commitment to proactively work towards dismantling racisms and unjustified race discrimination at an individual, team and organisational level. This aligns with our legal case.

Our objectives

Three key objectives underpin our EDI strategy. They are set out below, alongside specific tools and actions that will determine the next phase of our work.

1 An inclusive organisational culture

Organisational culture refers to 'the way things are done around here';[7] the policies, practices, systems, and behaviours that affect how it feels to work in or engage with the British Council.

Our goal is to ensure our organisational culture is inclusive. We welcome and commit to treating everyone with dignity; we make decisions drawing on different perspectives and experiences; we involve, listen to, and seek to learn from a wide range of people; we strive to nurture a sense of belonging and ensure everyone can meaningfully participate.

Specifically this means:

- Informed by data led interventions, we intend to address the under-representation and improve the inclusion of locally contracted country nationals, UK minority ethnic staff and disabled people in our workforce, particularly, but not only, at leadership levels.

- We want to sustain women's representation at senior levels across our organisation, and in some instances as confirmed by data, improve the representation of men in our workforce and in our activities.

- We want to reduce any unfair, unjustified and unnecessary hierarchical divisions based on contract type, most notably between UK and locally contracted staff, teachers and examiners.

- We will nurture an organisational culture where people working and engaging with us feel respected and comfortable being themselves, free from unjustified discrimination. This

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[6] Our global policy statements and the Code of Conduct are accessible from our Global Policy Statements web page.

[7] Edgar Schein, Organisational culture and leadership, 2004.

includes but is not limited to racism in its different forms and manifestations, exclusion, offensive behaviour, harassment or bullying.

- Disagreement and conflict will be managed constructively. Staff will feel optimistic and empowered.

- There will be expanded opportunities for under-represented groups internally and externally to participate and contribute to informing and shaping our organisational culture, building on the contribution of our global Anti-racism Challenge Group and Task Force.

- We will strive to extend our reach so that our participant profile will be broadly representative of the societies in which we work.

- There will be alignment with how we engage with EDI internally and how EDI is reflected and addressed in the delivery and content of our programmes and services, as part of our cultural relations offer.

The result will be an organisational culture that is experienced as more, if not wholly, inclusive, fair and anti-racist. It will allow for speaking up at all levels to all levels.

Tools to support an inclusive organisational culture

- Additional resources including specialist equipment, or adjustments, where required and feasible, to enable or enhance access and engagement for staff and contacts.

- Planning tools that encourage inclusion through mitigation and positive action when policies, programmes or activities are developed. Amongst these Equality Screening and Impact Assessment, access audits and checklists and other tools and other proactive measures.

- Inclusive internships, work experience and other relevant opportunities with a particular focus on socio-economic disadvantage.

- Forums and initiatives for staff contributions and engagement regardless of ethnic background or other irrelevant factor, role, hierarchy, contractual type or geographical location.

- Anti-racism learning and development interventions, including upward mentoring and awareness sessions on allyship, decolonisation and different forms of racism.

- Specific EDI learning and development to raise awareness related to all our priority areas and others to promote behaviour change and seek to bring about greater inclusion.

- New approaches to inform and achieve informal conflict resolution and support a constructive giving and receiving feedback culture, at all levels, everywhere.

- Re-development of our Living Library to allow staff to engage with and learn from the rich diversity that exists in our own organisation.

- Development of an equality plan identifying key actions that will contribute to addressing aspects of socio-economic disadvantage.

2 Developing capability and leaders

Leaders exist in different roles and particularly, but not exclusively, in senior positions. They are crucial in driving progress, achieving fairness, promoting inclusion, ensuring anti-racism, and enhancing our working culture, reputation and impact.

So our emphasis on nurturing and developing engagement, role models and leadership capability in EDI will continue.

Specifically this means:

- We will have people with internally accredited expertise in facilitating EDI who are able to promote EDI as an integral part of cultural relations and demonstrate the benefits of doing so.

- We will increase accountability so that leaders at all levels are both supported in and measured against their contribution to EDI.

- Greater attention to EDI deliverables and personal development objectives, so they are SMART, stretching and ensure accountability for change, to strengthen and ultimately achieve inclusion and a sense of belonging.

- Promoting and sharing our internal and external facing international EDI work and learning with others through storytelling, research, articles, publications, speaker contributions and memberships.

The result will be more confident, competent and committed leaders, particularly at senior levels. In addition, we will have contributed to our desire to make a meaningful contribution to international aspects of EDI for wider benefit.

Tools to support developing capability and leaders

- EDI learning and development activities for leaders, to raise awareness and promote behaviour change, including unconscious bias; anti-racism; effective people management of diverse and dispersed, matrix teams; upward mentoring; intercultural fluency and decolonisation.

- Development of a network of EDI champions; as a priority anti-racism champions.

- An expanded and resourced Accredited Diversity Facilitator pool within regions and UK business areas.

- EDI Leads designated, supported and resourced for regions, countries and business areas.

- Guidance to support and strengthen EDI performance deliverables and development objectives to measure progress.

- Interventions that support accountability to help track this area and achieve our EDI strategic objectives.

- Development of an equalities resource-bank to increase understanding, share good practice and contribute to personal and organisational change, focused on our priority areas including socio-economic inequality and how they intersect and intersectionality more generally.

3 Measuring performance, impact and legal compliance

Tracking the progress of our strategy is crucial. Increasingly we want to take an evidence-informed approach, so that resources and priorities are focused where they are most needed, risk is managed, and good practice is widely shared.

Globally there are different reporting requirements and expectations that must be met. We are signed up to various organisation-wide charters and standards that confirm our commitment to EDI and these need to be actively managed.

Specifically this means:

- We will measure our performance towards our vision, progress against our objectives and the extent and quality of the contribution and distinct impact we aim to make through EDI.

- We will ensure we comply with our legal obligations and where possible and appropriate, go beyond the legal minimum.

- EDI related risks will be anticipated and well managed.

The results will be improved performance against our own EDI standards, derived from national and international benchmarks and external recognition.

Tools to measure performance, impact and legal compliance

- A comprehensive EDI data dashboard that is tracked and disseminated, including through a new quarterly performance review process to review performance, interrogate data and insights and ensure that we are meeting and exceeding our EDI objectives. To include staff survey results, equal pay reviews, recruitment, exit and other relevant data.

- Representation targets, where evidence confirms these are warranted, to provide focus and encourage actions that improve the internal representation and involvement of locally contracted country nationals and other under-represented minorities, especially at senior levels, as well as disabled and female staff.

- Development of an annual organisational global disability dashboard to support compliance with quotas (where these exist) and digital and communications standards, capture good practice and monitor the inclusion of disabled people in our work and workforce.

- Annual global faith room review and report.

- Revised equality targets for UK staff informed by 2021/22 UK Census data and other relevant benchmarking.

- Diversity Assessment Framework indicators, targets and trend data.

- A mechanism to record and monitor the outcome of all grievances, disciplinaries, concerns and complaints raised that have an EDI dimension.

- A log to track submissions for Diversity Awards and significant contributions to external forums.
- Development of a compliance tracker based on statutory Equality Schemes and related legal requirements (e.g. South Africa, India, Northern Ireland, Welsh Language,), and applicable statutory codes to ensure legal compliance and manage risk.

Resourcing and costs

The EDI Strategy will be fully owned by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and managed by the Diversity Unit. Each SLT member and Regional Director will review the strategic objectives and factor them into their business plans and allocate the financial and staff resources required to implement them.

This will ensure time spent working to progress the EDI Strategy will be fully costed and help ensure EDI is recognised as contributing to our cultural relations work. It will remove the current reliance on volunteerism.

Responsibilities

The progress we have made towards mainstreaming EDI within our cultural relations work combines the direction provided by our Diversity Unit[8] and the strong support of staff globally.

We will continue to share responsibility and require accountability, particularly from those with influence and authority, including the Chair and Chief Executive of the British Council, the Senior and Global Leadership Teams and senior managers.

Their support for this Strategy and commitment to it through their behaviours, attitudes and effective use of resources will make a critical difference.

Managers of regional teams, country offices and Teaching and Exam Centres, as leaders of large numbers of staff and critical areas of work, also have a crucial role to play, as do leaders of all business areas, but especially Human Resources.

All staff however are responsible for ensuring that all the cultural relations work and activities we do, wherever we are in the world, mainstreams EDI consistently to help bring about the inclusive, anti-racist organisational culture we aspire to.

Diversity Unit

October 2023

Next review date: September 2026

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[8] **The Diversity Unit** sets and drives the strategic direction of the British Council's EDI work and is supported by a pool of Regional EDI Leads and Accredited Diversity Facilitators, alongside other internal and external groups. They welcome feedback that helps to identify barriers to progress and good practice. If you would like to get in touch please email DiversityUnit@britishcouncil.org.