

February 2020

The importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in Greater Manchester workplaces



pro-manchester

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Crowe

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Foreword

“Equality, diversity and inclusion have been overlooked for so long but these issues are really coming to the fore. As a female leader, I want to champion the cause, raise awareness and look at some real practical things that can help businesses to move forward in this area.”
Sam Booth, chief executive, pro-manchester

I am passionate about promoting women in business and making sure everyone, of whatever gender or background, can advance their career.



I value the differences that a diverse workforce brings and believe that diversity and inclusivity are key drivers of organisational effectiveness.

While the number of women in senior positions continues to increase in the city it's still nowhere near the level it needs to be. It's important for us all to continue addressing these issues and help adjust the balance of opportunities for women.

I am lucky to work at a supportive and forward-thinking firm, which encourages talent regardless of gender, ethnicity or background. They are committed to developing people and creating a culture to support people to reach their full potential. As a female partner at Crowe, I can honestly say that the firm has supported me throughout my career, from manager through to partner and now head of our private client practice.

Finally, we are delighted to have supported this thought-provoking report and would like to thank everyone involved in its production.

Rebecca Durrant, Crowe UK

Employment and equality in the workplace have come a long way in the 20 years I have worked in recruitment and the professional services world.



As I've progressed, I have seen others making professional compromises when it comes to having children or a more balanced lifestyle. In some cases, this has limited their progression.

The primary reason for this study was to look at how we can and must do better to address these issues.

Businesses have a collective responsibility to champion social mobility and diversity through apprenticeships and other employment opportunities.

We must reach out to the next generation of talent who haven't had the fortune or privilege that a university education provides.

The workforce of tomorrow demands that progressive thinking is a priority for employers. It is inspiring to see a real appetite in Manchester to do this. We have incredible leaders like Mark Fletcher, Sam Booth and Rebecca Durrant setting the bar high for others to follow.

Matt Fox-Rees

Equality, diversity and inclusion: taking steps towards a workplace that's fair for everyone

February 2020

New research from pro-manchester shines a spotlight on the state of equality, diversity and inclusion in the city region, and finds businesses in need of help to move forward. This report, which shares some of the main findings, focusses on how to create a fairer workplace – and why this agenda really matters

At the beginning of ITV's new series of *Cold Feet*, the comedy drama based in Manchester, Adam is suspended from work for 'inappropriate behavior'. The character, played by James Nesbitt, is accused of making sexist comments during a colleague's leaving party, and emailing offensive material to others.

He claims he was having a laugh and a joke and struggles to see what he's done wrong. But the more this story develops, Adam starts to realise how things have changed in the workplace, and maybe he should as well. His own family help him see a different perspective, in a world where younger colleagues with diverse backgrounds have different expectations.

"I bet when you were younger, your parents told jokes you found offensive," say his son and girlfriend, in the living room. "Times change, but if you don't change with them..." The penny drops and Adam races back to the office to speak with his boss, who has played the whole process by the book. "If I made any woman, or man, feel uncomfortable, that is not funny," he says. Adam keeps his job but gets a written warning in the process.

The impacts of equality, diversity and inclusion are real and not just on our TV screens. Organisations know

that providing opportunities to people from all backgrounds and protected groups, and helping them to feel included, makes good commercial and moral sense. It attracts more people to work for them, and ultimately forges a sense of fairness and community, too.

Research from McKinsey in 2018 points to a persistent relationship between diversity and business performance. Leadership teams with more women will outperform the market, alongside those with varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There is also a penalty for opting out, they say, with companies low on diversity metrics unlikely to achieve the financial performance of their competitors.

But while the evidence is there and weight of public opinion is moving quickly, change on the ground is slow, and local context really matters. New research from pro-manchester, which is published in this report, has found businesses across the city region still unsure about where they are on the journey. There are confused about the differences achieved and how steps taken have influenced their performance and cultures. Here are some of the headlines, with more included in the following pages.

Businesses are confused about the impact of diversity and inclusion

- While most people feel their workplace has taken action to address inequality or a lack of diversity, a significant 44 per cent of people are unsure if anything has been done, or report that no action has been taken at all.
- But for those workplaces that have acted, 45 per cent of people say their workplace hasn't changed, or they are unsure if it has become more diverse.
- The same proportion of people (45 per cent) are unsure if measures to improve diversity have had an impact on productivity and performance.
- A significant 60 per cent of people are unsure whether their businesses are competitive compared to other, more diverse businesses.

Leaders need help to grasp the importance of this agenda

- Most people strongly believe (60 per cent), that senior leaders across Greater Manchester need the most help to understand and create a fair, equal and diverse workforce.

Fears remain over fair treatment at work

- While a minority of people reported being a victim of workplace discrimination, a huge 80 per cent of people who have raised concerns believe they weren't dealt with appropriately.
- Which is interesting, because most people believe if a discrimination situation was to occur, it will be acted upon.

We'll help you understand what it means

"It's so important for businesses to understand why diversity and inclusion matter to them,"

says Sharon Amesu, leadership consultant and chair of the Institute of Directors (Manchester branch).

"If there's a threat to your neighbour's house because there have been local robberies, for example, you might think you need to be careful. But if you're aware of a specific threat to your own property then you will batten down the hatches and make sure you've got insurance in place."



Sharon Amesu

This report isn't making the case for diversity and inclusion in business because that continues to be championed across all sectors. It's here to help you understand what it means for you and take steps to achieve a fairer workplace.

It will help you understand that equality, diversity and inclusion combined are all part of a process that will sustain your business now and in the future.

The evidence from pro-manchester's research points to a business community that has taken some good steps forward but remains in need of guidance and support. What follows are practical steps that others have taken, how they deal with the challenges involved and who else can support you on the journey.

Inclusive behaviour will help attract more diverse people and more diverse people will help drive an inclusive culture



Taking your first steps

Equality, diversity and inclusion are different things, but they are closely related.

Equality is about providing everybody with equal opportunity and not treating them differently or discriminating against them because of their characteristics.

Diversity is about taking account of the differences between people, and groups of people, and placing a positive value on those differences. Traditionally, these protected characteristics include gender, ethnicity, age and sexuality, but have also broadened out to include social background and neuro diversity, such as autism and dyslexia.

Inclusion refers to an individual's experience within the workplace and wider society, and the extent to which they feel valued and included.

According to Christos Tsaprounis, head of people and culture at Autotrader, diversity and inclusion are defined in different ways, but they should ultimately be viewed as two pieces of a jigsaw, with equality, perhaps, as the finished puzzle.

"Education and awareness have changed people's attitudes in our business," he says. "The recruitment drives to attract more diverse people have been



Christos Tsaprounis

successful, but those followed the initial work to build an inclusive business.

"If you try to do those first, and look for the quick wins, they might not last or be successful. It's not because they are wrong, it's that you haven't created a culture where everyone can be included and be themselves. So, you might end up attracting people who you will not retain in the long term."

So, to achieve equality, do you start with improving diversity, or becoming more inclusive? The reality, according to the people we spoke to, is that they feed off each other and will both help you to make your workplace fairer. Inclusive behavior will help attract more diverse people, and more diverse people will help drive an inclusive culture. It's a virtuous circle, but also quite a daunting one to step into.

That's why it's important to understand where you are starting from.

"I always say 'know where you are now,'" says Amesu from the IoD. "We've got generic pieces of information in this country about how representative our senior leadership teams are, but where is your organisation? To what extent do you reflect the community in which you sit in and serve? It needs to be contextualised, rather than people being panicked into taking a generic approach."

If you operate in a particular sector, too, take time to understand what that looks like. According to business psychologist Clare Mulligan-Foster, even the most gender aware organisation in the world will struggle if the industry recruitment pool is a ratio of 70:30 men to women. Manufacturers will have different challenges to technology firms; some will be focused on gender and disability; some on cognitive diversity and other areas. Everyone is in a different place and has a different context to explore.

To what extent do you reflect the community you are in? It needs to be contextualised, rather than taking a generic approach

Start small and build up

Michelle Vint started digital marketing business Regital back in 2011 with her husband Ian. It has since grown into a team of 35 people and the board is made up of four women and four men.

Because of the work the company does, helping clients develop successful campaigns for different sections of society, Vint believes the team is already close to the needs of diverse groups through its customers. The average age of people at the company is also in the 20s, which is partly a function of the market and those attracted to work in the industry.

But these layers of progress – some have been more conscious than others – have opened her eyes to the possibilities and the importance of diversity and inclusion.

“We’ve always found the best person for the job and maybe we have been kind of conscious about these issues in the background,” she says. “Because for a lot of businesses, especially big corporates, we can see that a lack of diversity at the top really slows down their decision making.”

It’s easier for an independent board to make quick decisions, but Vint clearly believes the gender split at Regital creates a better environment to move forward. From here, she now plans to tackle one of the biggest issues that businesses face on this agenda.

“I think we need to look at recruitment policies; we’re looking at apprenticeships now, and just different ways to bring people into the sector who haven’t come through the traditional university route,” she says.

“We’re also starting a social impact project this year, to use our skills to help people who haven’t had the same privileges we’ve had. It’s up for discussion at the moment, but perhaps we can teach skills to help get people back into work, or help people access technology. We can make a difference and that’s what we are trying to do.”



Michelle Vint

Bring people together and support them

A powerful tool for any organisation is the creation of groups and networks to shape the agenda and help drive change. With buy in and support from senior leadership, businesses say there is untapped potential ready and willing to take the conversation forward. These efforts might look at a particular aspect of diversity, or a few combined, but the energy of a collective approach helps to drive inclusion as well.

“Getting a group of people who are from a particular characteristic, or group, is a rich and fertile ground for you in shaping your agenda,” says Amesu. “Sponsor them at the most senior level and ensure they have opportunity to meet and voice their opinions. Set ground rules for what they do and how they do it, but also what you expect from them to help you to create a more inclusive environment.”

Sophie Cowen, learning and development team manager at law firm Freshfields, agrees and says that businesses can also create committees with cross-sections of people. “Don’t just outsource this to HR; have your leaders take part from different areas of the business,” she says.



Sophie Cowen

“There are also so many awareness days. If you just did an event in recognition of one of those, it’s amazing how many people will come forward. If you start showing commitment to this, many more people will share their own ideas and it will get momentum.”

She adds: “On international men’s day, there was an event and resources encouraging men to talk about mental health. A few years ago, I know when our London office celebrated Pride, they also supported Disability Pride. It’s about tapping into other people’s experiences.”

Intersectionality, working with different groups of people together, has been shown to be a very powerful driver of change.

Don’t just outsource this to HR; have your leaders take part from different areas of the business

Offer training and help it stick

If most people in Greater Manchester believe that senior leaders need help to create a diverse and inclusive workforce, then taking time out to understand how to do it makes sense. Small steps and developing networks can help drive change but taking a deeper look at biases and behaviours allows for reflection and positive action.

“It can be challenging, in your sphere of influence, if you don’t have people who are from a different background to you. Sometimes leaders do need help with that,” says Cowen.

“We held workshops globally and for each individual workshop there was a focus group with more junior members of that office, who had the opportunity to share their experiences. Those themes

were then used as a temperature check with the leaders to talk openly and frankly about some of these points.”

At its heart, training and education on diversity and inclusion is about overcoming bias and behaving in a different way. A lot of how we respond and react to situations may be unconscious until it’s pointed out, acknowledged and explored.

That’s why people find it easy to hire people like them and avoid those who are different. It’s also why some products that come to market don’t meet the needs of everyone, because the design team isn’t diverse enough to be inclusive. It happens.

According to business psychologist Clare Mulligan-Foster, unconscious bias happens automatically. It’s triggered when our brain makes quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, and is influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. It doesn’t usually come from a place of bad intention, but it does get in the way of progress.

At its heart, training and education on diversity and inclusion is about overcoming bias and behaving in a different way



Clare Mulligan-Foster

“We are more attuned to evidence we are comfortable with and that supports our points of view,” she says. “Your brain is smart, but it’s also lazy: it tries to take shortcuts wherever it can. We rely on these shortcuts to make decisions, but our perceptions are subjective and impacted by past experiences, personal preferences and, of course, biases.”

Raising awareness of bias can help people to move forward and look at something differently: their recruitment policies, the way they treat others, and seeing the world through others’ eyes. But it’s easy to sit in a workshop and then go back to business as usual.

Cowen from Freshfields says: “It’s about making the outputs of those workshops really pragmatic. We asked people what they were going

to differently in the short and long term. We followed up with a series of emails on different topics, when people were thinking about recruitment, year-end discussions, work allocation and new projects – these just-in-time reminders help to embed change.”

The nudge theory of behaviour change applies well to this kind of training.

A nudge is a choice that alters people’s behavior in a way that is predictable, without taking anything away from them or changing their motivation. That means, says Mulligan-Foster, we can access our whole thinking system at the same time.

Inclusive nudges help people ‘feel’ the need for change, rather than having to understand the rational argument, creating light bulb moments; process nudges, such as opting out of something rather than having to opt in, helps use our unconscious mind, which is easier. All of this can be framed so that diversity and inclusion are primed with positive or neutral associations. People will move towards things that they associate good feelings with.

The research: main findings

Diversity and inclusion: work to do

6 The score, out of ten, that Greater Manchester workplaces have been given for their perceived level of diversity (with ten being 'very diverse')

44%

The number of people who feel that ideas and opinions aren't valued equally at work

45%

The number of people who say even though their workplace has taken action to address inequality or a lack of diversity, nothing has changed, or they are unsure if diversity has increased

44%

The number of people who are unsure if their workplace has taken action to address inequality or a lack of diversity, or report that no action has been taken

60%

A significant number of people are unclear whether their businesses are more or less competitive than other, more diverse organisations

Businesses need support, but who needs it most?

60%

Most people strongly believe that senior leaders across Greater Manchester need the most help to understand and create a fair, equal and diverse workforce

Workplace discrimination: is perception different to reality?

80%

The number of people who have raised concerns about discrimination and believe they weren't dealt with appropriately. Which is interesting, because most people believe if a discrimination situation was to occur, it will be acted upon

Gender diversity: progress has been made, but gaps remain

40%

While the number of women in senior positions continues to rise, and people largely believe men and women are treated equally, a significant minority of people believe men and women don't have access to the same opportunities

45%

The number of people who still believe it is difficult to return to work after maternity leave. Only 10 per cent say the same is true for men after having children

77%

believe the gender pay gap remains a very real issue

Social diversity is a growing concern

50%

believe children in Greater Manchester schools, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation, aren't all given access to the same opportunities

88%

believe a more socially diverse workforce would improve the economy in Greater Manchester

Diverse groups: where are we really at?

56%

the number of people who believe people from the LGBTQ+ community are fairly represented in their workplace

33%

the number of people believe age has affected their progress at work

39%

the number of people who believe people from BAME backgrounds are fairly represented in their workplace

54%

the number of people who believe that people with disabilities are fairly represented in their workplace



Get help from outside your business

Three years ago, Mark Fletcher, who is responsible for running Manchester Pride, experienced a racist incident during the weekend event. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, this was a turning point in his thinking about what could be done to effect change. The team embarked on a survey of organisations, community groups and businesses to understand more about what was happening behind closed doors.



Mark Fletcher

“We were quite alarmed by the response we got back from that,” he says. “I wanted to do something about it; I wanted to use my platform to help people who feel they don’t have the visibility and recognition for who they are. In the celebration we create, but also in workplaces, people do face discrimination.”

The team at Manchester Pride started creating a set of shared values for the venues and suppliers involved with the festival, in order to reduce the potential for discrimination in future. They started sharing their work with others and began to uncover a real appetite for the initiative. Companies wanted help to implement change and they thought this could be part of the answer.

“The level of interest was quite astounding, really,” says Fletcher. “We were pleasantly surprised by the number of organisations that felt that they could implement this. So, we evolved an equality charter and want to make it accessible to as many different organisations as possible.”

At the time of writing, Manchester Pride is set to launch its equality charter after a phase of testing with

businesses around the country. Companies pledge to follow a set of principles and they are assessed on where they are now. A visit helps the team understand current activity, alongside the policies and processes in place to support LGBTQ+ people at work. That’s then reviewed with meetings to provide feedback and to explore the next steps. Different levels of accreditation are reviewed on an annual basis.

Tsaprounis from Autotrader is a big supporter of this work and has been involved from the outset.

“We were part of the creation and testing of the Manchester Pride equality charter,” he says. “As part of the audit process we had the chance to sit down and reflect with an external specialist who provided an assessment of what we are doing, which was both challenging and insightful. It helps to avoid becoming very internally focused.

“It’s also good to celebrate some of the work our teams are doing. Make sure you do it for the right reasons. Don’t do it to tick a box, or achieve an award; they are positive outcomes, but not the reason to do it.”

Help is available for businesses on the diversity and inclusion journey. Organisations like Stonewall and Business in the Community offer support and guidance, alongside the work that Manchester Pride is doing. For Cowen at Freshfields, this is an important route for companies to consider.

“You can share what you are doing well, and you get some really good feedback on what you can do differently,” she says. “This is about collectively helping others to make their policies more inclusive.”

The challenge of impact and measurement

How do you know diversity and inclusion is working, when many businesses in the research remain confused about the impact? This is a big question and one that our interviews explored. We found companies happy to provide anecdotal evidence of success, alongside efforts to measure outcomes. Overall, it seems to be the case that moving in the right direction is one thing, but taking a long-term view is important.

“I think we are more creative in our products and services; it makes it a fun place to work and people can be themselves,” says Tsaprounis from Autotrader. “On a business level, I think it does make us more competitive. If the numbers say anything we have been growing and are more successful commercially.

“Sometimes it’s more difficult to prove the correlation, but we are confident there is one. Commercial outcomes aside, the most important feedback is that which we get from our people, the stories they tell and the impact we have on their working lives.”

He says the board and senior team are interested in both measures – the experience of the people inside the culture and the impact these initiatives have on the bottom line. “It gives us some comfort we are doing the

right things, but it also gives us more ideas and challenges about doing more. The more you open the conversation, the more people will come forward, and the more you will be able to drive your diversity and inclusion strategy forward.”

In practical terms, you can also look at the metrics of your business. Are more people staying in the company for longer, do they ‘feel included’ on staff surveys, and can you feel a change in the culture compared to 12 months ago? If the data shows a positive change in recruitment, for example, you know you are doing something right.

“It’s about all of these facets coming together, which contribute to someone feeling engaged and included in the workplace,” says Cowen from Freshfields. “If you feel you need to hold back, it can hold back creativity, collaboration and innovation.

“But small changes can have a cumulative effect and impact. For people trying to work in this space and move the dial, change can seem slow. You can’t expect to do one programme; one initiative and things to change overnight. Change does happen but it takes time and there’s always more to be done.”

Sometimes it’s more difficult to prove the correlation, but we are confident there is one



Key points to remember

This report has explored equality, diversity and inclusion as an agenda to be embraced, understood and developed. There are myriad ways for businesses to make changes, but it's clear these are issues to be nurtured carefully over time with strategy and tactics. Attracting the best talent, the best thinking, and creating the best culture are things that most directors would jump at the chance to achieve. Here are five things to consider on the path to a brighter future.

Start from where you are

Some companies aren't doing anything because they are scared to make mistakes and say the wrong thing. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, because showing that you care about these issues, and approaching them with good intentions, will help people to support change. Taking time to understand what diversity and inclusion means to you, in your sector, will help you find out where to start.

Bring people together

The message of untapped potential is a powerful one. Create networks and groups of people with protected characteristics and support them with leadership and framework. You will have help to shape your diversity and inclusion strategy from the ground up.

Ask for help

There are business leaders, public sector leaders, and many others who will be able to share their experiences. They might be running small companies or organisations with thousands of people. But they are here, and they will probably share a coffee. That's in addition to the help on offer from organisations like Manchester Pride, Business in the Community and Stonewall. Remember

the power of collective experience and diverse perspectives.

Use data to help decisions; but beware of targets

Once you measure something, it's easier to work out what to do about it, but don't get obsessed about ticking boxes. Your data on recruitment and attrition, staff surveys and discrimination will tell an important story. It can help you to chart progress on diversity, inclusion and ultimately, equality. But if you start trying to hit targets, the message is: be careful of stigmatising people because they 'only got a job to hit a number'.

Clear leadership is important

It's no surprise that leadership is the crux of this issue. Diversity and inclusion need individuals in senior positions to champion the causes and help steer the agendas forward. If leaders in the region remain

uncomfortable with these issues, it will be impossible to effect real change.

In his recent book Trailblazer, Marc Benioff, the co-chief executive of global tech giant Salesforce, devotes an entire chapter to equality. In sharing the lessons learned building one of America's biggest companies, his message is remarkably direct.

"The bottom line is that building a diverse workforce makes good business sense," he writes. "Success in the rapidly changing digital age requires an ecosystem that supports continuous innovation, and that demands diversity in every sense of the word. Can you imagine trying to drive innovation and transformation inside your company when everyone looks and thinks the same? That doesn't produce the creative solutions we need to help our customers be successful.

"I firmly believe that in the future, equality will be the key to unlocking a company's full and sustainable future. That doesn't mean it's easy to achieve, but those who fail will be on the wrong side of history."

The bottom line is that building a diverse workforce makes good business sense

'Leadership is the crux' of success

Ian Hopkins is the chief constable of Greater Manchester Police and holds a national role for workforce representation and diversity. From his days on the rugby field, to leading an organisation of 10,000 people, he believes 'difference' is the only way to win the game.

Why does diversity and inclusion matter to you?

A lot of my leadership style and learning is rooted in sport. I played rugby union from a young age and saw the value of difference. When you bring together a group of people from different walks of life, with the right ethos and leadership, you can mould them into a successful team. Social mobility is important, too. I've had opportunities in my life, when I was able to pass the eleven plus and go to grammar school, as a boy living in a council house.

Why is this an important issue more broadly?

All of us are in a race to recruit the most talented people. If my workforce does not reflect the communities we serve, I am missing out on a huge amount of talent, and not delivering the best outcomes I can.

The next thing is about legitimacy. We police with the consent of communities; we are not an arm of government that enforces the law. If you don't reflect the make-up of communities, how do you remain legitimate? I suspect that plays out in business, too.

There is also research that shows the more diverse your team, the more diverse your thinking and the better outcomes you get. If everyone thought the same and looked the same, you just wouldn't get that difference of thought. It's also the right thing to do. Why should be people be disadvantaged in their chosen career?

The research has highlighted that leaders need more help in this area. What do you think?

Leadership is the crux of this issue. If you want to improve diversity and inclusion there are two aspects to it: leadership and cultural change. In the past three years I've said, 'here is an overall strategy, with some tactical things we can do', but at the heart of this is leadership.

It's about setting the tone, through a clear strategy and framework, and through the things that you say and the behaviours you mirror. You then reach into the organisation and check, because people realise you are serious about it.

One thing we know, through the data, is that people with protected characteristics often fall at the first hurdle when applying for a promotion or change of role. If they don't have that support or a particularly good relationship with their line manager, they are disadvantaged. So, we decided to run these processes independently, through assessment centres.

What would your advice be to other leaders?

Don't be afraid to talk about diversity and inclusion as a business outcome; as a means of improving the organisation. Don't be afraid to make mistakes and learn from them. If people see you are interested, they will help and support you.

I see far too many chief executives and chief constables not being comfortable talking about this agenda. There is something powerful for me, as a white heterosexual male, talking about this. You've got to have the head of the organisation setting the tone. Then it's about asking questions, challenging, and giving others permission to do the same.

What about the tricky areas of measurement and impact?

Don't set targets, use the data to drive the improvements, through leadership and cultural change. Targets mean you get into isolating people and they can be accused of getting a job because there is a number to be met.

I don't know what it's like to be a black woman walking into a station, as a young officer, but I have talked to people about what that is like. They already feel like they have got to work harder to achieve their ambitions. I don't want to add to that burden.



Creativity, big picture thinking and problem solving – why neuro diversity matters

Erica Ingham is the chief financial officer of advertising agency MediaCom North. She believes the next frontier for diversity and inclusion involves recognising differences in the way we think.

As a finance director, what do you think about diversity and inclusion?

Diversity of thought, diversity of ideas and improved creativity are massively important to us. From the research, diversity is also shown to reduce risk and increase earnings. As a finance person, those things are important, they make good business sense.

There are a lot of people talking about diversity. Are a lot of businesses implementing all encompassing initiatives? There are not as many as I would like to see at the moment.

Awareness of race and ethnicity, and gender diversity, has increased but it's nowhere near where it needs to be.

Awareness of other groups is definitely not where it needs to be.



What matters to you when measuring impact?

There are a lot of business with a strong focus on revenue and businesses development, and keeping costs controlled. Where is the next area of advantage?

I believe there that has got to be an advantage of having a diverse workforce. People are more able to be themselves and fire on all cylinders, because they are feeling comfortable. It's very difficult to measure that, but if you want brilliant people doing brilliant work for clients, it obviously makes sense.

Can you afford not to do it when your competitors are?

You are a champion of neurodiversity. Why is that?

People are starting to hear about the concept of neurodiversity, but I still think there is education needed

about what neuro diverse people can bring to the table, which is a lot – creativity, big picture thinking and problem solving are just a few things.

There is quite a high proportion of neuro diverse people – with autism and dyslexia, for example – working in the creative and technology industries.

The British Dyslexia Association came in to do some training with all our senior managers. It went down so well, so we carried on. We've worked with Autism UK, and on the mental health side, Anxiety UK and Mind, too.

We do a lot of training in our business, but the feedback we got from our neurodiversity training and mental health training was outstanding.

There are practical ways to communicate, manage work and adjust recruitment processes to help. Dyslexics are massive big picture thinkers, which is important at board level and for people looking to address client problems. Creativity is also a strong trait. Autism UK told us that people with autism can be exceptionally good at detailed tasks.

When we have spoken about this at events, people come over to me, and sometimes they are in tears hearing the workplace is becoming autism friendly.

What would you say to a business leader who wants to improve diversity and inclusion, but isn't sure about the money or time needed?

It doesn't have to cost money. The training isn't particularly expensive, but businesses don't have to do that. They can put things in place that can make a big difference, like changing their recruitment practices.

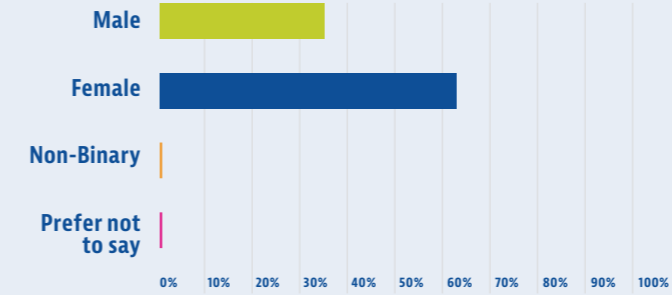
Very few job adverts talk about flexible working. I think a lot of women, or anyone with childcare or care responsibilities look at roles they would really like and don't apply. If people stated those opportunities for flexibility, I think that would be helpful.

We did a few things that were great, so we put a strategy over the top, afterwards. You can start with smaller things first.

The research: who took part?

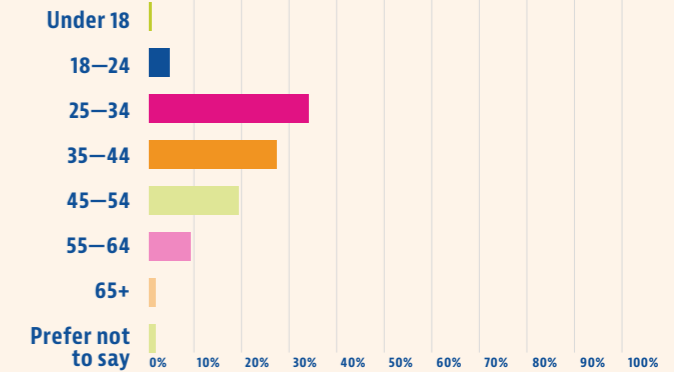
pro-manchester's research invited responses from 600 organisations across the city. Key sectors included financial and professional services, technology, property and creative & digital. Here we look at the gender, age, job role and education data

Gender



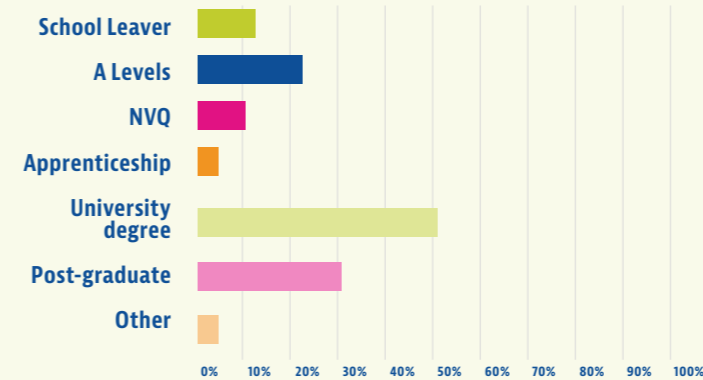
Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Male	36.08%	219
Female	62.77%	381
Non-Binary	0.33%	2
Prefer not to say	0.82%	5
Total (responses)		607

Age



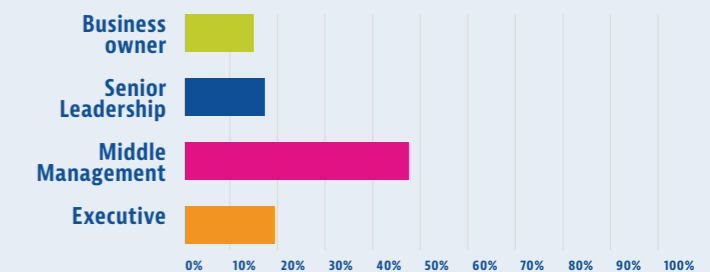
Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Under 18	0.33%	2
18-24	5.10%	31
25-34	34.38%	209
35-44	27.96%	170
45-54	19.90%	121
55-64	9.70%	59
65+	1.48%	9
Prefer not to say	1.15%	7
Total (responses)		608

What level of education have you achieved? (tick all that apply)



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
School Leaver	12.71%	77
A Levels	22.94%	139
NVQ	10.40%	63
Apprenticeship	4.46%	27
University degree	52.15%	316
Post-graduate	32.34%	196
Other	5.78%	35
Total (respondents)		606

How would you define your role at work?



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Business owner	15.28%	88
Senior Leadership	18.23%	105
Middle Management	47.40%	273
Executive	19.10%	110
Total (responses)		576