

Showcasing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives

We strive for our industry to be diverse, welcoming and genuinely inclusive.

June 2024





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The road to net zero won't just be paved by companies generating sustainable energy, but by those of us building, connecting and maintaining the infrastructure needed to support customers. The entire energy industry – including all of us represented by the Energy Networks Association (ENA) – has a vital role to play in the clean energy revolution.

We also have a critical role in building the clean energy workforce of tomorrow. It's predicted that over 400,000 recruits are needed between now and 2050 to achieve net zero, covering a diverse array of skillsets, whilst being representative of a culturally inclusive UK.

“Ensuring, and being able to illustrate, that our workforce is representative of the communities we serve is a critical element to attracting the brightest and best from all communities. ENA plays an important part in this by convening all the major players and their stakeholders, to keeping DEI moving forward, encouraging the sharing of best practices, helping communicate progress and highlighting the great work being undertaken day in day out by fantastic role models.”

Lawrence Slade
Chief Executive
Energy Networks Association

“At a time when we need to move faster towards a clean energy transition, we must build a workforce that challenges group think, brings diversity of thought, ideas and experience, and provide new equitable solutions. We need to leverage opportunities along the way, such as working together across the ENA to drive DEI sector-wide – by working as a collective will enable the change we are all individually working towards.”

Cordi O'Hara OBE FEI
President
National Grid's UK Electricity Distribution
and ENA DEI Sponsor

However, the energy sector continues to face intense scrutiny around its apparent slow adoption of diversity, equity and inclusivity practices; but we believe that this is reflective of the length of the journey we face, rather than a lack of pace. The Energy & Utility Skills' Inclusion Measurement Framework reported that in 2022, women only made up 26% of the industry's workforce, whilst ethnic minorities made up just 7.5%, and there was still "significant underrepresentation" of disabled people working across utilities. This could be owed to an aging workforce with niche skillsets that can't be easily replaced.

But as we speak, there's a wealth of activity going on, with many of us making significant steps in building a more inclusive workplace, where everyone can be themselves and thrive.

The ENA is taking a business-led approach in refreshing the DEI strategy for networks. Lawrence Slade CEO ENA has secured Cordi O'Hara, President of National Grid Electricity Distribution and Mark Wild, CEO SGN as Sponsors to elevate the focus and progress within the network sector this year.

A DEI SteerCo has been initiated with a number of network companies acting on behalf of the sector – including National Grid, UKPN, SPEN, SSE, SGN and Cadent. Managing Director at SSEN Distribution, Chris Burchell put it best – **“Energy is a sector with a huge social and economic responsibility and a great opportunity ahead when considering the net zero transition. To make the most of this, we need the widest range of skills, experience and thinking as we grow, providing fantastic skills and careers for the next generation. As a convener of several energy networks, the ENA plays a central role in catalysing our collective efforts and commitments.”**

As such, we have collated success stories from across the industry, from those striving to make a real difference in their approach to diversity, equity and inclusion. Each of these case studies acts as an example of how businesses are building the future energy workforce of tomorrow, ensuring nobody gets left behind. And this is just the first step in convening the sector, where progress perhaps hasn't been celebrated the way it should have been. There is so much more to learn from each other and we can't wait to see further progress as we look to the year ahead.

A massive thank you to those of you who have willingly shared your DEI stories, and to all of you who work tirelessly each and every day to make our sector more welcoming and inclusive.

The ENA DEI SteerCo

Cordi, Mark, Lawrence, Chris, Lisa, Raj, Jen and Liz

“We have a real opportunity to lead in this industry on DEI; as individual companies we have made impressive headway, but as a collective we can make significant progress to the point that other industries are looking to us for best practise. As we transition, we need to invite new thinking into our sector more than ever and I ask my fellow CEO's to embrace and leverage this diversity of thought in the best possible way.”

Mark Wild OBE FEng

Chief Executive
SGN and ENA DEI Sponsor

Lisa Waterhouse, Head of UK DEI at National Grid, Raj Ghai, Head of Resourcing and EDI at SGN, Jennifer Davies, Strategic Workforce Renewals Manager at SP Energy Networks, and Liz Nash, Learning & Development Manager at UK Power Networks together agree that **“just from the short time spent working with ENA companies and compiling these case studies, we can already see the impressive amount of work taking place in the diversity, equity and inclusion space. The power of the collective is incredibly strong, and by working together, we can make even greater strides forward across the industry as a whole.”**



What to celebrate

100%

DEI is embedded in company values and strategic priorities

100%

have a published DEI policy or inclusion statement

100%

have a process for employees to provide feedback on DEI issues

100%

proactively collect diversity data about current employees

100%

have support systems in place for employees from under-represented social and cultural groups

100%

have DEI training programmes available for employees and/or managers

100%

have other policies in place to support the DEI agenda



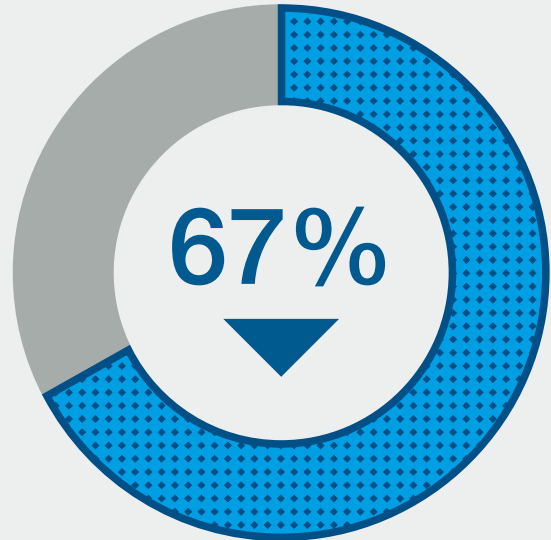
92%
 have DEI strategy/goals aligned with the overall organisational goals

92%
 have updated their DEI policy in the last two years

92%
 have DEI conversations take place at board and executive level

92%
 have DEI incorporated in Employee Value Proposition (EVP) or equivalent

83%
 have metrics, goals or targets to measure and track representation



67%
 have a dedicated DEI team and or a Chief Diversity Officer

67%
 focus on DEI outreach

67%
 track diversity of your pipeline

58%
 have received awards or recognition for DEI efforts

50%
 have development programmes specifically for under-represented groups



A new DEI strategy

BUUK is committed to providing a workplace where its people can thrive, within a supportive culture where everyone matters. This means making sure people are heard, valued, and treated fairly, without discrimination.

It's this vision that drives BUUK's EDI working group, comprised of colleagues from all levels of the business. But up until last year, whilst this group was brimming with enthusiasm and ideas for positive change, they had no formal EDI strategy, no formal targets, and no clearly defined roles or responsibilities to guide them.

This was the monumental challenge presented to the HR Team in 2023 – to build an EDI strategy from the ground up, for a company in an industry notoriously seen as lacking maturity in this space. A challenge they were ready to tackle head-on!

The critical elements that first needed consideration included:

- where to start
- defining the goals
- putting the infrastructure in place for change.

This is what the business has done so far...

Choosing an evidence-based approach, BUUK used insight from its Gender Pay Gap Report and its Great Place to Work employee survey to gauge the experience of different underrepresented groups. On top of the gender pay gap findings, it discovered employees who are part of the LGBTQ+ community and employees aged 25-34 had a less favourable workplace experience score up to 9% lower than population average. This formed the basis of its Mind the Gap campaign.

With three key demographics identified to address as a starter, the EDI working group has launched three new Employee Networks – one for women, one for LGBTQ+ colleagues, and one for ages 25-34, which will be run by colleagues, for colleagues, providing a safe space for people to share their experiences, and an opportunity to put proposals forward to the Executive Team for improvements.

Within Mind the Gap, the aim is to create a more inclusive culture for females, LGBTQ+ employees and those aged 25-34 within the workforce. BUUK will be reviewing all internal processes to ascertain and improve how it can encourage more of these individuals within these groups into the business, how to develop and create opportunities for them, and how to retain them within the workforce. BUUK is considering multiple ideas and opportunities, including undertaking more outreach with schools and young people to try and attract more women to the sector via early careers opportunities.

Of course, any great evidence-led strategy needs to be underpinned by robust data. A key action was to ensure the business could accurately capture demographic data, in order to identify any unseen barriers, unconscious bias or development gaps/opportunities. Firstly, the information asked for was reviewed by the EDI working group, with a self-identification campaign planned to encourage people to share their characteristics – with a focus on educating employees about why BUUK asks for the data, and how it'll use it to explore possible barriers.

In under 18 months, progress has been significant. Today, a formal strategy, roadmap and targets are in place (including reducing the gender pay gap, and improving employee engagement for underrepresented groups). A more sophisticated framework is also currently being devised to track tangible impacts and ROI over time.

With full support from every level of the business and a clear idea of next steps, change is already afoot. However, BUUK can confidently say that this is only the beginning of their EDI journey.

Family-friendly policies

“I have frequently been questioned, especially by women, of how I could reconcile family life with a scientific career. Well, it has not been easy.”

Marie Curie

This is a sentiment shared across generations, largely by women, and especially by those in demanding STEM-led industries. Cadent aims to change that with its evolving family friendly policies.

Balancing a thriving career with a young family still proves challenging today. Listening sessions, surveys and focus groups revealed a perception that working practices and policies for working parents, were outdated and posed a potential barrier to people choosing Cadent as an employer of choice. Cadent is striving to attract and retain a diverse range of working parents into the workplace.

Cadent wanted to challenge and remove this perceived barrier for working families. In partnership with its Employee Communities – collaborative communities representing people of diverse faith, genders, ethnicities, lived experiences and backgrounds collectively acting as critical friends to the business, helping change its demographic and make a real impact – policies and working practices are now reviewed and developed to be more inclusive, to make work and family life easier for working families.

Over the last year, Cadent made significant changes to policies for families, including:

- creating a new Time off for Fertility Treatment policy
- enhancing the Maternity Policy for expectant mothers meaning they can take a full year paid maternity leave
- enhancing the Paternity Policy with new provisions including four weeks full pay
- updating the Adoption Policy to mirror Maternity arrangements
- reviewing and enhancing the Childcare Break and Allowance policy
- introducing a Parental Bereavement Policy to show commitment to supporting colleagues in an extremely difficult time, providing everything they need including paid parental bereavement leave.

Cadent intend to understand the impact of these policies by tracking:

- gender retention before and after the policy updates
- take up of paternity leave
- progress of returners and volume of non-returners before and after the policy updates
- feedback from staff about how these policies impact them, via engagement surveys and through the Employee Communities.

These changes are intended help employees get the time they need with their families; support them with changes to their family situations, help ease some of the financial burden experienced during this ongoing cost-of-living crisis and remove barriers which might prevent talent from seeing Cadent as an employer of choice.



All-girls work experience

No one company can fix the historic lack of female representation in the Energy and Utilities industries overnight – but they can do what businesses like Electricity North West (ENW) are doing, and make a concerted effort to engage school-aged girls, inspiring them to join the energy workforce of tomorrow.

ENW has been running work experience placements for children of all genders for three years; however, in early mixed-gender cohorts, girls were woefully underrepresented, and the few who did participate were reluctant to speak up and be heard in a room full of male peers – a challenge many adult women will be familiar with!

To combat this, ENW has partnered with a handful of local schools to run a work experience programme exclusively for female pupils. This aimed to not only make them feel more comfortable and confident, but also to give them the opportunity to be inspired by the wonderful women who already have thriving careers at ENW.

The programme includes:

- an application and reference process, mirroring the experience of applying for a real job
- spending a day at ENW's Training Academy, learning about the different craft and engineering opportunities
- meeting the apprentice Programme Manager and current apprentices, including existing female apprentices who can share their unique perspectives
- meeting Design Engineers and Cybersecurity and Telecommunications teams. Again, where possible, ENW invited female colleagues, including a female STEM ambassador, and members of the Women's Employee Network
- listening to real, live customer calls with the call centre teams
- tours of the depots
- spending half a day at the University of Salford learning about research into clean energy initiatives and reducing carbon emissions
- undertaking an interactive session with the recruitment team focused on writing CVs and interviewing.

29 girls have been through this process to date. They've provided excellent feedback, and many of them told the team at ENW that they were inspired to look into a career in energy, thanks to this opportunity. In fact, from the most recent cohort, 10 out of the 11 participants told ENW that they wanted to pursue roles they'd learnt about during the experience.

So far, one of the girls from an early cohort applied for an apprenticeship position at ENW. Whilst she eventually ended up going down the further education route instead, ENW has agreed to stay in touch and support her learning so she can one day thrive in an energy-centric role.

"I really enjoyed the cyber security session as it's an interest of mine for my future career."

"Working with and talking to the apprentices was really good. They answered all my questions and helped me know what it'd be like working here."

Whilst it's too soon to track the impact on current diversity targets (target: 30% female workforce by 2028), ENW is confident activities like this help to futureproof the entire industry, motivating young girls to be all they can be.

Schools are also thrilled to have this opportunity alongside ENW, to inspire young minds:

"We've been incredibly fortunate to work alongside ENW to create an amazing work experience opportunity. Everyone who took part has returned to school with a glowing report about the work experience and a genuine interest and excitement about pursuing a STEM career."

John Ramsdale
Senior Assistant Headteacher
Penwortham Girls' High School

Women in operations

National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) delivers electricity to more than eight million UK customers across the Midlands, South West and South Wales. The NGED business – comprised of over 6500 colleagues – is working to embed DEI as part of its culture, with a dedicated DEI strategy designed to demonstrate the same level of inclusion and belonging at work as the business does with its customers.

An essential element of NGED’s DEI strategy is increasing female representation across its employee base, whilst aiming to reflect the communities it serves. As part of this, NGED have committed to increasing gender diversity from 15.7% to 26.2% over the next five years contributing to the wider company’s ambitious gender diversity goals.

Kicking off this journey, in March-2024, National Grid led its first bespoke Women in Operations conference, specifically for c.200 women – many of whom work in male-dominated teams – and male allies at NGED. This event was just one way for the business to be more proactive in making life at NGED more inclusive, by connecting the women of NGED.

This is why the conference was designed around the theme of connection, with two simple aims:

- 1 connecting with leadership, providing honest feedback centred around making experiences at work better
- 2 connecting with each other, to build a community and keep the conversation going, even after the conference was over.

The conference included activities to engage and unite the women of NGED, including:

- a re-cap from the President of NGED on her aims, targets and why representation matters to her
- a breakout session for attendees to discuss barriers faced by women, with the opportunity to share and give feedback to the wider group

- a fireside chat with two senior leaders to explore the past, present and future of being a woman working in a typically male-dominated sector
- networking opportunities, allowing women to meet new people and make important connections
- a session to discuss solutions to the barriers faced, with feedback to the wider group
- a panel discussion covering topics on supporting women, what good male allyship can look like, and overcoming barriers both in society and in the workplace.

Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive, leaving colleagues feeling heard and respected. There have already been requests for future conferences with an even broader audience and more networking opportunities. Some practical actions have already been taken following the conference (ensuring there’s always access to sanitary products in substations, for example), to improve the facilities across NGED, specifically with women in mind.

The resources for women have only continued to grow, with opportunities including:

- access to the Women in National Grid and Women in Non-traditional Roles employee resource groups
- numerous internal and externally led development programmes for women at different points in their career
- reverse mentoring
- celebrations for inclusive events, including a Vogue photo shoot with female role models for International Women’s Day.

The National Grid group as a whole already saw a 4% uplift in new female hires last year. With an ongoing series of opportunities and events, the business looks forward to seeing even more women be inspired and empowered to build a clean, affordable energy future.



DEI network development days

National Grid's role as a responsible business extends beyond its customers and communities; it commits to investing in its people, building the skills needed to deliver a clean energy future. This includes creating an inclusive culture, where it's safe to speak up, and where colleagues' voices are heard and understood.

National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) is the business arm responsible for owning and maintaining the high-voltage electricity transmission network in England and Wales. This includes c.4,500 miles of overhead line, c.900 miles of underground cable and more than 300 substations. In recent years, NGET has worked tirelessly to build a DEI strategy, ensuring it tackles specific hotspots while remaining aligned to global DEI commitments.

Part of this is ensuring DEI isn't just the responsibility of a single team, but instead is everybody's business. To embed and bring this way of thinking to life, NGET was one of the first business areas to create a dedicated DEI Network, comprised of representatives from each business unit, who are responsible for driving their own units' DEI agenda to drive systemic change throughout the business with support from the executive team.

Leaders at NGET are responsible for role-modelling desired behaviours within their teams and across the wider business. This means ensuring the management population are equipped with the right skills and awareness, is key to driving lasting cultural change. To ensure the leaders within each could confidently discuss a broad range of diversity-led topics NGET created and piloted DEI Development Days – a full day dedicated to helping leaders improve their DEI knowledge in a safe and interactive environment. Topics included:

- icebreakers designed to practice inclusion
- immersive exercises responding to different DEI scenarios, perspectives and approaches on how they would handle them

- inclusive leadership, what it means, what it looks like, and what actions underpin it
- sexual harassment, including the laws, shocking statistics, and their responsibility to take action
- live actors bringing DEI topics to life, to help the audience better understand what discrimination and microaggressions can look like at work
- skills practice in roleplays with the actors, covering actions such as calling out unacceptable behaviours and dealing with sensitive inclusivity-related topics.

This event was so well-received that plans are already underway to replicate it for National Grid's newest acquisition, National Grid Electricity Distribution.

Every person within NGET is given the opportunity to play their part in creating and enabling positive change. For example, recently a group of NGET employees demonstrated 'safe to say' by volunteering to share their experiences of microaggressions at work, to raise awareness and challenge others to identify and rectify problematic behaviour if witnessed. The video has since been replicated across two other business units. Providing a voice to proactively identify and challenge inappropriate behaviour, is just one step towards making the entire National Grid group a safer and more inclusive place to work.



Colleague communities

Northern Gas Networks (NGN) delivers gas to 2.7 million homes and businesses across the North East, northern Cumbria and much of Yorkshire. As a business based at the heart of the region, it has a responsibility to understand the diverse communities that it serves. It's equally important to NGN that it builds a workforce representative of all the different people and communities throughout the North.

This starts with creating a workplace where everyone values difference and all individuals feel comfortable with being themselves and can thrive and maximise their potential, no matter what their background. In 2021 NGN embarked on their DEI journey, which included seeking guidance and advice from DEI consultants, The Equal Group and Business in the Community, as well as engaging directly with colleagues themselves to develop NGN's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy, Vision and Principles.

NGN's Colleague Communities, which were created that same year, played an instrumental role in guiding the development of this strategy. Created by colleagues, for colleagues, the Communities are just one way of breaking down internal barriers while understanding the knowledge, experiences and perspectives of under-represented voices.

The **five** groups include:

- 1 Women's Community
- 2 Ethnic Minority Community
- 3 DisABILITY Community
- 4 Parents & Carers Community
- 5 LGBTQIA+ Community

All of these communities have worked hard to create a safe space, along with tackling challenges and driving positive changes for underrepresented groups.

Spotlight on the Women's community

Women make up just 18% of the NGN workforce yet represent approximately 72% of the five Community's memberships. The Women's Community was developed to empower female colleagues to have a strong and authentic voice. Many of the initiatives undertaken by this Community have been or will be replicated by other groups within NGN.

Highlights include:

- hosting the first Women's Utility Network event in the North of England, with panel speakers from both inside and outside the industry, focussing on levelling up decision-making in business
- this led to the Women's Community introducing a mentoring scheme with the Women's Utility Network
- holding the company's first ever Women's Safety Bounce event – an interactive colleague event focused on personal safety, including networking opportunities and panel discussions
- implementing changes to help women feel safer on its sites for example making PPE suitable for women and providing appropriate sanitary ware at all facilities
- changing the company Travel Policy to prioritise physical safety (e.g., picking hotels in safe, accessible areas)
- driving an employee-made video covering microaggressions, to help educate colleagues on what's appropriate in the workplace – this eventually became a group effort across all communities
- agreeing a challenging target with the NGN Board to have 40% women in senior/decision making roles by 2030, and to reduce the gender pay gap by 50%
- working with the HR team to interrogate NGN's current gender pay gap data to identify and address the underlying challenges.

All Communities have an Executive sponsor, to ensure they have a channel to drive real change and are empowered and encouraged to promote any outcomes using company-wide communications. Today, NGN's Colleague Communities are an essential part of its DEI approach, guiding business decision-making which is delivering proven business and social benefits.

The DEI forum

It's well-known that STEM-led industries like Energy and Utilities are blighted by a historic lack of diversity. Most face an enormous challenge to not just make their existing culture more inclusive, but also to attract the next generation of diverse talent. But it's important this responsibility doesn't just lie with senior leaders – all employees should feel empowered to drive real, lasting change. So what happens when employees don't feel their voices are being heard?

This was exactly the challenge Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE) faced back in 2012. Like its peers, it suffered from a lack of diversity, but the challenge also lay in engaging the existing workforce and enabling them to be at the forefront of change. This became clear when its employee engagement was sitting at just c.30%.

NIE needed to take action, to both transform itself into an inclusive employer of choice, and to give a voice to existing staff, enabling them to be leaders of positive change.

Using Northern Ireland's well-known Diversity Mark accreditation as a framework, NIE founded its DEI Forum. Comprised of 30 passionate volunteers from all levels of the business, including two Executive members, this newly formed team took up the mantle of not just making NIE a more diverse and inclusive place to work, but also of acting as the voice of the people. Since its launch, the DEI Forum has driven noticeable improvement across the business, with initiatives such as:

- creating six Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), designed to create a safe space for diverse groups of employees and allies alike. Six volunteers from within the DEI Forum took the lead of each ERG, including:
 - Empowered Abilities (health and disability)
 - Spark Unity (ethnicity)
 - Pride Connects (LGBTQ+)
 - What's Age? (age)
 - Good Network Vibrations (relations and religion)
 - Equal Energy (gender).

- undertaking DEI training on topics such as unconscious bias, co designing bespoke training with local charities and talking openly about ethnicity. Forum members attend training sessions, then curate bespoke training for the wider business, including the development of online toolkits and resources
- having members share their personal stories and perspectives with the wider business, for both future and existing employees, demonstrating authentic representation
- creating development programmes and mentoring for minority groups, i.e., women in leadership
- supporting events, activities, and inviting guest speakers to celebrate key annual occasions such as International Women's Day, Deaf Awareness Week, World Menopause Day, Autism Awareness Day, and World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development
- developing a self-identification campaign to capture more robust diversity data from existing employees, supported by the mantra "be kind, be curious, be brave"
- joining forces to holistically review policies and procedures to ensure they're representative of the diverse needs of colleagues. For example, policies concerning menopause, maternity, sexual harassment and inclusive facilities have been either created or enhanced, in line with Diversity Mark's externally recognised framework.

These are just some of the impressive changes made across NIE so far. The DEI Forum and the ERGs work tirelessly to create a culture where people can be their authentic selves, in a comfortable environment in which they can flourish. And since the launch of the Forum, employees feel their voices are being heard, and engagement continues to climb year-on-year. In 2023, the engagement score sat at 84%, with staff retention at an impressive 97%.

"A concept we like at NIE, is that 'diversity' is an invitation to the party, 'inclusion' is being asked to dance, and 'belonging' is feeling nurtured enough to dance like nobody's watching."



Leadership toolkit

Northern Powergrid is on a mission to build a stronger team through empowering its people managers to lead inclusively. That's why it's developing a Leadership Toolkit across the organisation, with DEI and culture at its core. This quote by Nellie Borrero, the Senior Global Inclusion & Diversity Lead at Accenture, reflects the role of leadership in role-modelling inclusive behaviours.

"Diversity is a fact, but inclusion is a choice we make every day. As leaders, we have to put out the message that we embrace and don't just tolerate diversity."

Northern Powergrid's aim is to have confident, inclusive leaders who have a Toolkit of processes, policies and procedures to help them create high-performing workplaces where colleagues can contribute their very best.

Building the Toolkit includes:

- embedding a leadership framework and objectives into HR processes, including performance management, absence management, and recruitment
- embedding inclusive working practices across every stage of the employee lifecycle, from attraction and inclusive recruitment, through to support into returning to work after an extended absence (e.g. maternity leave)
- enhancing internal and external recruitment processes to remove any potential unconscious biases, driving a more inclusive experience for candidates.

The Toolkit will be hosted on Northern Powergrid's Intranet, accessible to all leaders and people managers. It will include all reviewed processes and documents, complimented by internal training and mentoring programmes through the business's key partners, Moving Ahead.

Progress to date includes:

- creating a centralised register of the culture and DEI elements already in place within L&D-led initiatives and training programmes
- completing collaborative deep dive sessions to map out current HR processes and materials to agree what's in scope
- identifying where specific DEI intervention is needed, particularly where a more tailored approach would help, including:
 - Toolbox Talks for field-based colleagues
 - Management programmes with inclusive leadership as a key theme
 - Senior Leadership Team engagement, with leadership accountability for setting up an inclusive working environment.
- progressing the creation of resources and training materials for peer checking within the organisation, across Recruitment, L&D and HR.

Northern Powergrid has also established a DEI Colleague Panel with members with a range of tenures, seniority levels, characteristics and roles, plus it has also conducted focus groups to gather feedback on the culture and progression of the DEI toolkit. Opening up these channels of communication will hopefully continue to encourage colleagues to come forward with suggestions and feedback.

The Toolkit is just one way to support leaders in creating a more flexible, inclusive and equitable workplace where there's space for everyone, so people feel valued, confident and can thrive.



Removing CV bias from entry-level recruitment

Bias – conscious or not – can derail passionate and promising applicants before their careers have even begun. Not understanding or acknowledging bias can also prevent employers from benefitting from the innovation a truly diverse workforce brings.

One way companies are attempting to combat bias is by using 'blind' CV screening, but whilst that can help prevent gender or ethnicity bias, requiring a detailed CV can still alienate those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with literacy difficulties, and young people lacking experience. The question is, what's the alternative?

SGN believes it has the answer. Partnering with behavioural experts at Arctic Shores, SGN made the bold move to completely remove the need for a CV for all their entry-level roles. When it found it wasn't getting the diverse array of candidates it wanted (just c.4% female and c.12% non-white entry-level hires), with unseen barriers seemingly preventing diverse candidates from getting past the application stage, it needed to make a radical change.

Thus, it launched an initial pilot to fill 20 NCO1 entry-level engineering roles without a CV in sight! Historically, CVs demonstrating a lack of experience would often be 'screened out', but this time, SGN put out targeted advertising across four key regions, simply asking applicants if they thought they had the skills and potential for one of these roles.

Over 900 applicants responded – a staggering 608 of whom proceeded to undertake an online task-based assessment, designed with behavioural psychologists at Arctic Shores, to identify key behaviours critical to success. 41% of applicants passed the suitability threshold, and the top scorers were then invited to in-person assessment centres, which had also been redesigned with guidance from Arctic Shores to focus on potential behaviours rather than prior experience.

The impressive results speak for themselves:

- all 20 roles were filled immediately, within a relatively tight timespan
- 20% of hires were female (vs. just 4% previously)
- 35% of hires were non-white (vs. just 12% previously)
- over 50% of applicants who passed the online assessment were identified as coming from a disadvantaged background
- applicant feedback on the recruitment experience was overwhelmingly positive. 93% said they felt immersed and engaged with the assessment, and 91% revealed the whole process left them with a positive impression of SGN
- hundreds of operational hours screening CVs/interviewing were saved, with anecdotal feedback from hiring managers indicating this cohort was the strongest pool of candidates seen to date.

This considerable success led to SGN making the decision that all entry-level hiring would no longer include a CV-reviewing process. The methodology also impressed those at the very top of the business, with similar guidance now being used to recruit Director-level roles. SGN hopes it can role-model this innovative approach, setting a more inclusive and bias-free blueprint for the industry.

“All parts of the assessment were well planned, out and engaged the applicant right through the whole process.”

“It was very interesting, engaging, and more fun than other recruitment assessments.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed each assessment task as each one was different and tested you in a variety of ways, which is something I'm no used to.”



Employee networks and diversity committee

Driving real, sustainable change, especially within industries that have historically struggled with representation, is arguably everybody's responsibility. But without leadership from authentic voices, this change becomes infinitely harder.

Few companies know this better than SP Energy Networks. SP Energy Networks are part of the Scottish Power Group, the only integrated energy company in the UK to generate 100% green energy. But its commitment to sustainability extends beyond the environment, into the workforce of tomorrow. Diverse talent is needed to pursue innovation as the future of energy evolves. To capture authentic voices, allowing for what's described within the organisation as 'respectful curiosity', change is guided twofold, by its Employee Networks and its unique DEI Executive Committee.

Its debut network 'Connected Women' paved the way for six further networks, which today help equip the business for the next generation of diverse talent, whilst providing a safe space for diverse team members and allies alike to share their experiences. They also offer vital, unique insights into how everyday policies and procedures can impact the working lives of different groups. All networks are supported by an Executive sponsor, and representatives from each network are invited to the DEI Executive Committee's monthly steering meeting, to share success and to petition essential change.

The DEI Executive Committee, launched in 2023, brings together seven senior leaders committed to driving successful delivery of ScottishPower's Diversity and Inclusion Roadmap.

The combination of dedicated support – from the very top of the business, to the network volunteers – committed to developing an open and supportive workplace is incredibly powerful. To date, these groups have made a significant impact on life at SP Energy Networks, with just some of their achievements listed:

- multiple networks helped redesign the policy supporting transgender colleagues, and improved both maternity and paternity policies to make them more inclusive
- connected Women was instrumental in the creation of new policies to support colleagues facing menopause or menstrual health concerns
- all networks banded together to create a policy supporting those experiencing domestic abuse /violence
- vibe helped the organisation understand and celebrate Black History Month, sharing food, clothing, and inviting external speakers to engage and inspire
- IN-Fuse is currently helping the business prepare to represent its LGBTQ+ colleagues at both Glasgow and Liverpool PRIDE celebrations
- Sparc helped redesign systems, so that those with additional accessibility needs could have the same seamless user experience as those without.

This list isn't exhaustive – each network boasts c.150-200 members working tirelessly for inclusivity, whilst DEI Executive Committee members publicly share DEI-based thought leadership, which reaches thousands of people every day. Members also use their stories and images to credibly promote diversity, continuously embedding a culture of trust and collaboration.

"I joined Connected Women because, from my years of experience in a very male-dominated environment, I really appreciate how beneficial it can be to have another woman to talk to who shares your experience of juggling life with work. By connecting with other women, I can [also] support others."

Jane
District General Manager (Mid Cheshire)
SP Energy Networks

Banter awareness sessions

As part of its Sustainable People strategy, SSEN Transmission is committed to creating 'One Inclusive and Engaged Team'. This means encouraging people to thrive and perform at their best.

However, as a diverse and growing organisation with five different generations in the workplace, people naturally will have different views on what's considered funny and what's considered offensive. Take banter between coworkers, for example – SSEN Transmission poses the question, where do you draw the banter line?

To help answer this question, it launched interactive Banter Awareness sessions, providing a safe space where people can show up vulnerably and be themselves. Sessions, held separately for managers and non-managers, cover:

- what banter means, and what's considered appropriate in the workplace
- how to encourage positive banter in the workplace
- real-life cases of when banter may have been taken too far
- exploration of the Equality Act
- what to do – from both a personal and procedural perspective – if banter goes too far.

Importantly, these sessions are **NOT** in place to try and stop colleagues from enjoying each other's company – this isn't a HR crackdown on banter in general, it's a people-led discussion about being respectful in the workplace.

The key takeaways include:

- think before you speak – would it be funny if someone said the same thing to you?
- imagine your words were played back out of context – would you still have said it?
- don't pick on someone's insecurities
- be aware whether someone is enjoying the 'banter' – if they're not, STOP
- don't laugh along if you're not finding it funny – you're essentially adding fuel to a fire
- saying something is 'just banter' doesn't mean it is – there's a line, don't cross it.

These sessions are running at least twice a year, with a recorded version and supporting resources available on the intranet. SSEN Transmission also shared this content with the wider SSE group at Learning at Work Week.

Making a space for these open conversations in an enjoyable and interactive environment has been hugely successful, with an overwhelmingly positive response from employees:

“Very informative, clear and precise, and very engaging.”

“I enjoyed the scenarios we discussed; they provided a valuable perspective regarding our understanding of banter.”

“Use of polls provided a good insight to audience opinions and how differently 'banter' can be viewed, which was added to by those speaking up throughout the session.”

SSEN Transmission is delighted by the engagement thus far, and hopes it can continue to grow and evolve these conversations, with everyone working together as part of 'One Inclusive and Engaged Team'.



Reverse mentoring to break down barriers

SSEN Distribution serves more than 3.9 million customers and employs a diverse team of over 4,000 people to deliver power through a safe, resilient and responsive network.

Recognising that the industry is changing at pace, it strives to reflect the communities in which its colleagues live and serve. As part of its efforts to build a diverse and inclusive workforce, SSEN Distribution has embarked on a reverse mentoring programme, whereby senior leaders within the business are given the opportunity to be mentored by more junior colleagues.

In 2022, this programme saw its first cohort comprised of the Executive team who were paired with colleagues from a variety of different backgrounds. The relationship-driven approach included:

- a carefully managed ‘matchmaking’ process, to ensure that mentor and mentee were well-suited, and complemented each other’s’ knowledge gaps and lived experiences
- one-on-one conversations
- job shadowing, including Executives getting to explore field-based roles
- sharing the knowledge and experience gleaned with the wider business, for example giving presentations on the mentoring experience on all-company calls
- creating a pipeline where teams can deliver feedback on things affecting their day-to-day lives, directly to a senior leader
- coaching and guidance for mentors from an experienced third-party to make sure they feel confident and comfortable when interacting with their more senior mentee.

This experience allowed the team to explore assumptions and inequities in their thinking, both in the workplace and in personal lives. For the senior leaders as mentees, it gives them the opportunity to be curious and consider things from a different perspective, removing systematic unconscious bias from future strategies and policies, casting more inclusive leadership shadows. For the mentors, this has created a psychological safe space where hierarchy is abolished and conversations can lead to lasting change, from the bottom up.

Three cohorts comprised of 35 mentors (senior leaders) and 35 mentees have taken part to-date, including the entire Executive Team – with a fourth due to begin in August.

Feedback from both mentors and mentees has been overwhelmingly positive:

“It’s been a fantastic opportunity to be guided by someone I wouldn’t naturally work with, to help me understand my blind spots and give me grounded, alternative perspectives. Shuba has really challenged my thinking on collective opportunities, such as team empowerment and recruiting for difference.”

Chris Bratt
Mentee and Director of Asset Management

“It’s been a tremendously eye-opening experience. I’ve been inspired and never felt uncomfortable proposing topics that pushed boundaries... helped by how open Chris is to thinking about how we can make tomorrow better. It’s made me feel included and part of driving SSEN forward.”

Shuba Khatun
Mentor and Smart Meter Lifecycle Analyst

Power among us

“If I hadn’t had this opportunity, I couldn’t tell you what I’d be doing. UK Power Networks has opened a door for me, and I don’t think they know how beneficial it’s going to be.”

This sentiment was shared by Ayo Osere, a participant in UK Power Network’s ‘Power Among Us’ programme, designed to break down one of the most significant barriers to STEM careers – socioeconomic disadvantage. A rewarding career in a STEM field, such as Energy and Utilities, feels out of reach for many disadvantaged young people in the UK, especially those unable to take advantage of higher education opportunities.

But UK Power Networks recognises that potential is not always dictated by qualifications and excluding those from disadvantaged socio-economic groups without said qualifications, means potentially missing out on a diverse pipeline of incredible talent. As a business, UK Power Networks strives to represent the communities it serves and is part of The Purpose Coalition – a working group of innovative leaders openly committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity across the UK.

The cost-of-living crisis and high levels of unemployment within its footprint grew exponentially in the wake of Covid and Brexit, leaving more young people than ever classified as ‘disadvantaged’. Power Among Us was created in response to this challenge. With enthusiastic collaboration across the business, and support from external experts, nine young individuals identified as being out of employment, education or training for at least six months, were offered a unique opportunity to develop their skills under the tutelage of UK Power Network’s highly trained teams.

This included two weeks of coaching, developing core employability skills, such as CV writing, interview preparation, and LinkedIn brand building, before undertaking two weeks of practical work experience with field teams and engineers to experience first-hand how the power network is maintained. The experience was bolstered further by Network Awareness and first-aid training. All expenses were covered along with a bursary being offered to enable individuals to fully participate.

The aim of Power Among Us was to make a real, tangible impact on the nine lives of these individuals. Initially the aim was to assess participants at the programme’s conclusion and fast-track three top performers to assessment centres, but the unprecedented level of skill and commitment displayed by the cohort actually led to five participants being fast-tracked into full-time Craft Attendant positions where they will be further supported by technical training to help them grow and thrive in their new roles.

“It’s been an enlightening experience – over four weeks, we got to meet so many new people and learn so many different roles within the company. I’m really looking forward to getting more experience in the industry.”

Oliver Kemp
Participant

Social mobility continues to be a golden thread throughout UK Power Networks DEI initiatives. 2024 will see another cohort of entrants join the workforce as Power Among Us continues to support the workforce of tomorrow.

“This will have a good impact on – and change – my life. It’s going to impact my future by giving me experience with businesses and working-class people to build networks. I’m ready to start at UK Power Networks right away.”

Kamron Nicely
Participant



Creating psychological safety

A vital – yet often missed – step in creating a successful EDI strategy, is listening to the people who will help bring the strategy to life, and to those who will in-turn benefit from it.

That's exactly what Wales & West Utilities (WWU) did when it started its EDI journey, nearly two years ago. It ran sessions to speak – and most importantly listen – to its people, to gauge their thoughts and understanding around key EDI topics. The output from these sessions was that while managers were passionate about creating a more inclusive environment, there was some reticence and even fear of “saying the wrong thing” in an unfamiliar situation. Leaders specifically, wanted to learn more about the importance of EDI and how to appropriately approach sensitive topics within their teams.

Armed with a mission to create a culture where differences are embraced and celebrated, WWU set about to help its leaders better understand psychological safety and to feel empowered to speak up and ask questions. This led to the creation of its innovative ‘Inspire Leadership’ programme, specifically designed to help managers feel more confident when leading diverse teams, but to also equip them with the knowledge needed to ensure their teams feel safe.

Learning was underpinned by a ‘culture code’, comprised of:

- 1 building safety
- 2 sharing vulnerability
- 3 establishing purpose.

Topics and exercises include:

- group discussions around practical activities which build safety
- understanding the comfort and stretch zone model, and discussing how it could be practically applied within their teams
- discussing the importance of managers showing vulnerability
- coaching skills-development
- drafting a purpose statement for their teams, aligned to WWU’s ambition and priorities
- completing a personal action plan on how to embed the learning in practice.

Feedback to-date on the Inspire programme has been overwhelmingly positive:

“Intense but excellent day! Really liked having a tailored action plan to take back to the office.”

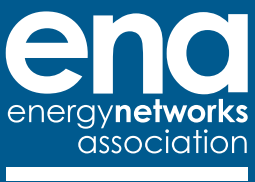
“Well delivered, inspiring training!”

“Good presentation and delivery. Very good discussion and group participation – the one-to-one sessions were very good for coaching and felt more personable. Thanks for delivering a great leadership programme.”

As leaders, once the learning is complete, it's then their responsibility to be drivers of cultural change throughout the business. Without psychological safety, there's a risk that real, lasting change will never happen, through fear of doing something “wrong”. But at its core WWU knows that if you get this first step right, the rest will follow.

Since beginning its EDI journey and creating a culture of psychological safety, female recruits have increased by 60% and female leavers have reduced by 50% – this is just one of the ways WWU can see how powerful a well-developed EDI strategy can be.





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