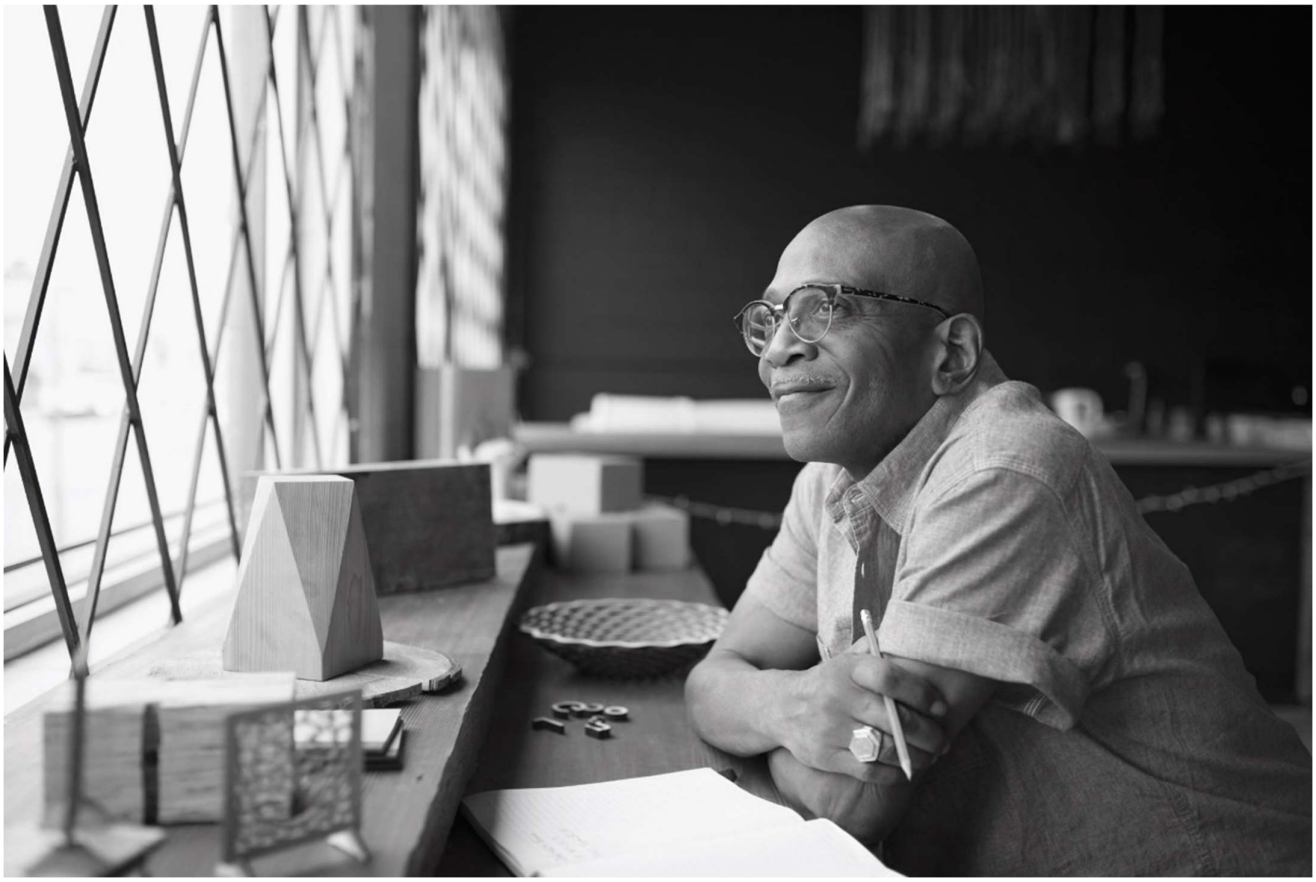
BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY
The Prince's Responsible Business Network

REPORT

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



MAY 2021

Reading Borough Council
Working better with you

HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES
ROYAL FOUNDING PATRON

Business in the Community
WWW.BITC.ORG.UK

Contents

_Toc72169225

Foreword 3

Executive Summary 4

Introduction 5

BITC EDI Audit Research Methodology 5

Detailed Findings and Recommendations 7

FOREWORD

Business in the Community's Inclusion Advisory Services team guide employers to ensure they are compliant with the UK's Equality legislation as well as support them in creative inclusive workplace cultures, going beyond statutory requirements for EDI. The Equality Act 2010 is the UK's main anti-discrimination law applicable in the workplace, covering nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

BITC are aware that all employers are at different stages of their journey to become more inclusive places to work, action in this area creates a need to address organisational culture and culture change takes time. Therefore, BITC tailor our advice and recommendations to that which is most appropriate and can have the greatest impact right now, whilst always keeping the long-term ambition in mind.

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact all our lives. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on different groups, including for women and for people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities. Whilst the scope of the audit did not explicitly explore the impact of COVID 19, or indeed the impact that the murder of George Floyd has had on Black colleagues in particular, given the timeframe of the project, they were both reflected on in the focus groups and interviews.

BITC were invited by Reading Borough Council to review key information and evidence and provide recommendations about areas for development and recommended priorities to inform Reading Borough Council's Equality, Inclusion and Diversity strategy.

Equality, Inclusion and Diversity is a key strand of the People Strategy delivery programme. Reading Borough Council's People Strategy seeks to enable the Council and its workforce to fulfil the vision to help Reading realise itssential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works in Reading can share the benefits of its success.

Thanks……

BITC would like to acknowledge the many individuals who contributed to the success of this audit: Shella Smith, (Assistant Director for HR and Organisational Development) who led and coordinated the project on behalf of RBC; the Executive Team and Elected Councillors at RBC who gifted their time to provide opinions and insights based on their experiences through the interviews we undertook; focus group participants who also provided valuable insights into organisational culture as well related their experience as and other EDI stakeholders who provided additional insight into the EDI landscape at RBC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Diversity (EDI) Audit (the audit') carried out in 2021 by Business in the Community (BITC) for Reading Borough Council (RBC). The objectives for this audit were to provide a snapshot view of the organisation with an equality, diversity and inclusion lens with recommendations for next steps.

The research finds the following main drivers and main blockers with respect to RBC's work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):

Drivers	Blockers
Commitment from the organisation to drive change on the EDI agenda including commitment to publish ethnicity pay gap.	This commitment to EDI is not understood by all employees, and employees do not feel they have a route to feed into the EDI agenda.
Commitment to sign up to the BITC Race at Work Charter confirms that Reading Borough Council's Senior Leaders are focused on race quality.	The role for leadership to implement change on the EDI agenda and leadership accountabilities are not yet defined.
Regular feedback surveys, with good engagement and growing ethnicity declaration rates.	Each survey needs to be followed up with commitment to take action with timescales, accountabilities and expected outcomes.
A clear set of Team Reading Values to build on and embed throughout the organisation.	Different employees are having different experiences at work. To drive culture change and workplace inclusion for all Reading Borough Council colleagues, these experiences need to be understood and addressed.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the EDI audit carried out in 2021 by Business in the Community for the Reading Borough Council, in its role as an employer and in its mission to attract, retain and develop a diverse workforce that understands and represents the community it serves.

The key objectives of the research are to:

- Review relevant workforce data and pertinent policy documents;
- Uncover employee perceptions and experiences with relation to EDI at RBC; and
- Provide recommendations for next steps and considerations for driving inclusion in the workplace.

The research was conducted with the objective of providing recommendations that will reinforce the Team Reading values and drive consistency in culture and values across the organisation. It compliments work supported by ***Ethical Reading***, who were commissioned by the Council to collaborate with the Directorate of Social Care and Health to create a healthy and ethical workplace.

The following sections in this report outline BITC's methodology for the research, detailed findings and recommendations. Appendices with further details of the audit are also included.

BITC EDI AUDIT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In line with best practice for diversity and inclusion research, and to create a holistic picture of EDI at RBC, the EDI Audit takes a mixed methods approach.

The research requires a deep-dive data collection exercise to determine the EDI landscape at RBC. This is performed using an analysis of employee data, survey data, policies and procedures supplied by RBC across six key themes:

- Strategy and leadership
- Recruitment
- Progression
- Employee engagement
- Bullying and Harassment
- Culture and behaviours

Additional qualitative research and data collection is then undertaken to probe and understand key themes that the desk-top research has uncovered. This method allows for an exploration of the reasons behind many of the employee engagement scores suggested by employee survey. It is important to highlight that as this further stage of research involves potential sensitive conversations with RBC staff, confidentiality is of utmost importance. Sessions were therefore not recorded or transcribed. All comments have been recorded anonymously and any comments used in the report will be paraphrased and will not be attributed to individuals, roles or divisions.

Our recommendations are based on examples of the positive action employers can take to increase diversity and create inclusive workplaces. **Positive action** means the steps you can take to 'level the playing field' for people from groups with different needs, with a past track record of disadvantage, or with low participation or representation. This is distinct from **positive discrimination**, which

is the practice or policy of favouring individuals belonging to groups who may suffer discrimination. Positive discrimination is unlawful in the UK.

In the RBC EDI Audit, two types of qualitative data collection were used: individual interviews and focus group discussions. An interviewer and notetaker were present for virtual interviews with the key stakeholders suggested by RBC, including elected members and employee Union representatives. All interviews followed the same format[1], exploring topics such as overall understanding and perception of EDI, leaderships role within EDI and insights into organisational culture. These interviews with the executive team gave insight into RBC's leadership and their aspirations in relation to EDI.

Details of the interview structure and guiding questions can be found in Appendices.

Focus groups investigated employee perception with respect to the EDI landscape at RBC. The topics addressed in the focus groups included: culture, authenticity, line manager support, employee voice, bullying & harassment, and progression. Approximately 50 employees attended five virtual focus groups, two groups were Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic only, one was for 'front line' employees only.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic only focus groups were facilitated by a BITC issue area expert and note taker who is also from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background. The focus of the discussions was adjusted to enable deeper discussions on race and ethnicity. This approach, which is based on best practice helps create a 'safe space' for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees who otherwise may not feel able to speak their truth and share experience. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees may otherwise feel inhibited to share this information due to societal racism and associated power systems.

BITC also undertook a review of select policy documents that we determined most pertinent to other areas of focus. This included the RBC recruitment and selection policy, the learning and development policy and a review of documentation relevant to bullying and harassment.

[11]We agreed with RBC that all interviews would be conducted individually with exception of the interview with Union representatives which was a group interview and feedback session.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The thematic areas below are based on key areas of examination and BITC methodology for EDI research, as well as insights gained from discussions about the culture at RBC. We confirm why each area of focus is pertinent for EDI then review evidence from our research to guide our conclusions, which are defined as primary recommendations and primary actions.

Anonymized quotes from focus groups or interviews are included where it helps the reader contextualise the findings to RBC, and to demonstrate the value of having direct access to employees with lived experience of the issues presented.

Primary recommendations outline the actions that BITC believe will have a significant impact on progress for EDI at RBC. Primary actions outline the actions that BITC believe will kick start change and demonstrate that you are taking action because of this (and other) review(s).

STRATEGY

An EDI strategy should align to organisational vision and be accompanied by a clear plan to achieve stated EDI goals and objectives. It should be designed in a way that builds employee trust and promoted to recruit and retain diverse talent. It should be integral to your organisational strategy and embedded across the organisation.

While 100% of senior management state that they understand what the council's priorities are and that they know what the organisational values of Team Reading are; these figures are slightly lower for the general employee population, at 80.6% and 80.8% respectively.[2]

During the focus groups, particularly those for colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds, it was expressed that the organisational commitment and strategy relating to EDI was not clearly communicated throughout the organisation and that some Black and Asian participants were surprised to hear that an ambition existed.

An elected member confirmed that "it is very clear that there is scope to improve communications across the organisation about the Race at Work Charter and this project and of course what comes next".

The aspiration for an integrated and embedded EDI strategy is there, was shared by your senior leaders, and one interviewee confirmed that the organisation "needs to think about how to mainstream the activity and prioritise it as a part of what we do".

EDI is not a core value for the organisation. What has been done? It seems like a token gesture.

[2] RBC 2021 staff survey

Primary Recommendations

- Prioritise the development of an EDI strategy that aligns to your People Strategy and which reflects the recommendations in this report.
- Work with your internal comms team, ethnic minority network and directorate stakeholders to create a communication campaign that cascades your EDI strategy and targets to the wider organisation.
- Create innovative ways to disseminate your strategy to all corners of your organisation, with regular reminders, discussion and feedback channels that are designed to reach all staff, including those that are not office based.
- We also recommend that your EDI strategy is regularly discussed and reviewed at your Senior Leadership Group meetings.

Primary actions

- Publicise this report and recommendations on your website alongside your People Strategy and other related information such as your Equality Audit, Gender Pay Gap and Ethnicity Pay Gap.

LEADERSHIP

In addition to the makeup of a leadership team, individual leaders, and their involvement with EDI work are crucial to the success of EDI in any organisation. EDI should be built into leadership frameworks, processes and business as usual, so that senior managers and those above are supported to lead inclusive teams and deliver on EDI objectives. To drive this, **leaders must be accountable** for EDI initiatives, and responsibility must be linked to pay and reward.

We asked RBC's executive team about their role in progressing EDI, responses were varied and occasionally vague. Some senior leaders talked about the importance of role modelling values and behaviours, others felt it remained the role of Human Resources to tackle issues such as diversity in recruitment. One senior leader did confirm that they felt their role was to "*challenge behaviours which don't support the agenda*".

Accountability for EDI must start at the top, this should be understood across your senior leaders and they should have clear roles and responsibilities for implementation across the organisation. One of the elected members confirmed that they would welcome clear articulation of their role in respect to EDI and culture at RBC.

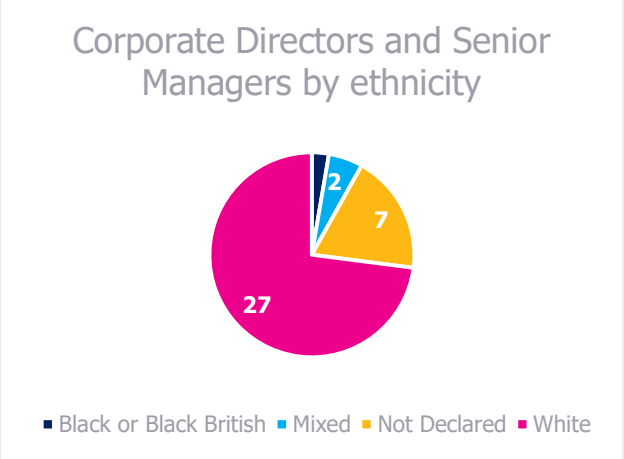
The 2021 staff survey points to confidence in leadership at Reading Borough Council having greatly improved since the 2019 survey. In 2019 45.2% of staff had confidence in the Senior Leadership Team to

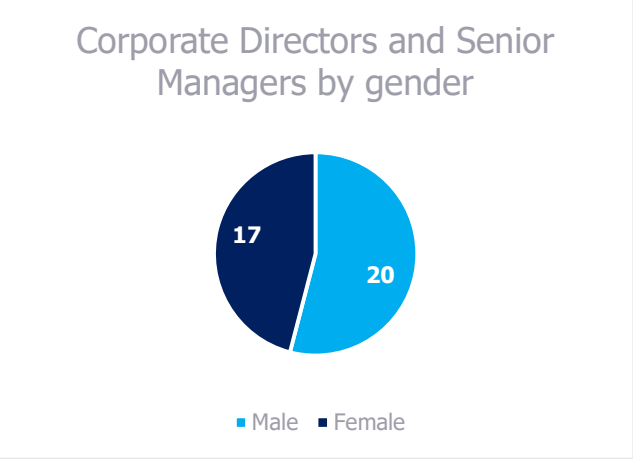
lead the organisation, and 42.7% of staff stated that leadership by the Corporate Management Team is positive and supportive. The 2021 survey sees these figures improve to 62.2% and 61.1% respectively.[3]

While progress has been made, this still indicates that there is clear opportunity for clarification about the role of leadership in progressing and embedding EDI strategy and targets and for regular reporting on action taken and progress. This will help increase trust and understanding about the role of leadership.

Role modelling

It appears that the Executive team are on the path to progress but there is still a substantial gap with respect to gaining colleague trust and transparency on EDI leadership.





All focus groups identified that there is a lack of diversity in the senior leadership team, and that this was something that should be addressed to enact change and make progress.

Organisations set targets and metrics to measure progress in key areas of the business and to drive change. Setting targets for ethnic minority representation should be no different. Clear targets set the timeline and pace of change required and focus activity to deliver the desired outcome. Without the use of targets to drive change, there is a risk that organisations will not increase representation, and will lose the trust of employees with regards to its ambition to drive diversity and inclusion. In top management roles across private sector organisations just 1.5% are black, an increase of 0.1% per cent since 2014. Public sector leadership remains static at 1% and 62% of charity boards are all-white[4].

The timeline upon which targets are set will depend on how quickly the organisation is expecting to enable change and we would recommend timelines between 5 and 10 years to enable achievement of targets in a measured and sustained way. Targets should be supported by regular reporting of progress against them

[3] RBC 2019 staff survey, RBC 2021 staff survey
[4] BITC's Race at the Top research: https://www.bitc.org.uk/news/black-livelihoods-matter-less-than-2-in-top-management-roles-are-black/

to enable prompt remedial action if progress is not at the required level. Targets should be applied across the employee life cycle including for recruitment, progression and retention. We have suggested how action can be taken to progress against targets in these areas in related sections in this report. Further case studies about organisations who are setting ethnicity targets can be found in BITC's toolkit: How to Set Ethnicity Targets (https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/bitc-race-toolkit-racecatworkexecutivesponsorethnicitytargets-feb20.pdf) and in BITC's member area on its website.

The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic focus groups vocalised that there was a lack of awareness amongst the senior leadership team around cultural issues and barriers that ethnic minority employees face. Though efforts were recognised to address issues such as bullying and harassment, there was a consistent feeling that enough action hasn't been taken to back up any commitment to EDI expressed by leadership. It was expressed that greater engagement and visibility from senior leaders would be appreciated. Targets are a clear representation of what needs to be achieved and by when, so that leaders in the organisation can understand and engage. Organisations should be transparent about its commitment to drive change and share its diversity targets with employees.

When I took on management responsibility I was not equipped and supported to work with so many different cultures and communities – we need a depth of consciously thinking about inclusion to be able to do our jobs properly.

I am tired of entering rooms where I am the only person of colour in a sea of white people who are making decisions for a diverse group of people.

Primary Recommendations

- Find effective ways to make senior leaders more visible overall and specifically with how they are engaging with topics of EDI.
- Provide one-to-one coaching on inclusive leadership to all executive and directors. One-to-one coaching on these topics enables leaders to expand and embed their understanding of sensitive, sometimes personal topics. One way of enabling this learning by coaching is through reverse or reciprocal mentoring schemes.
- Set diversity requirements for succession plans for senior roles.

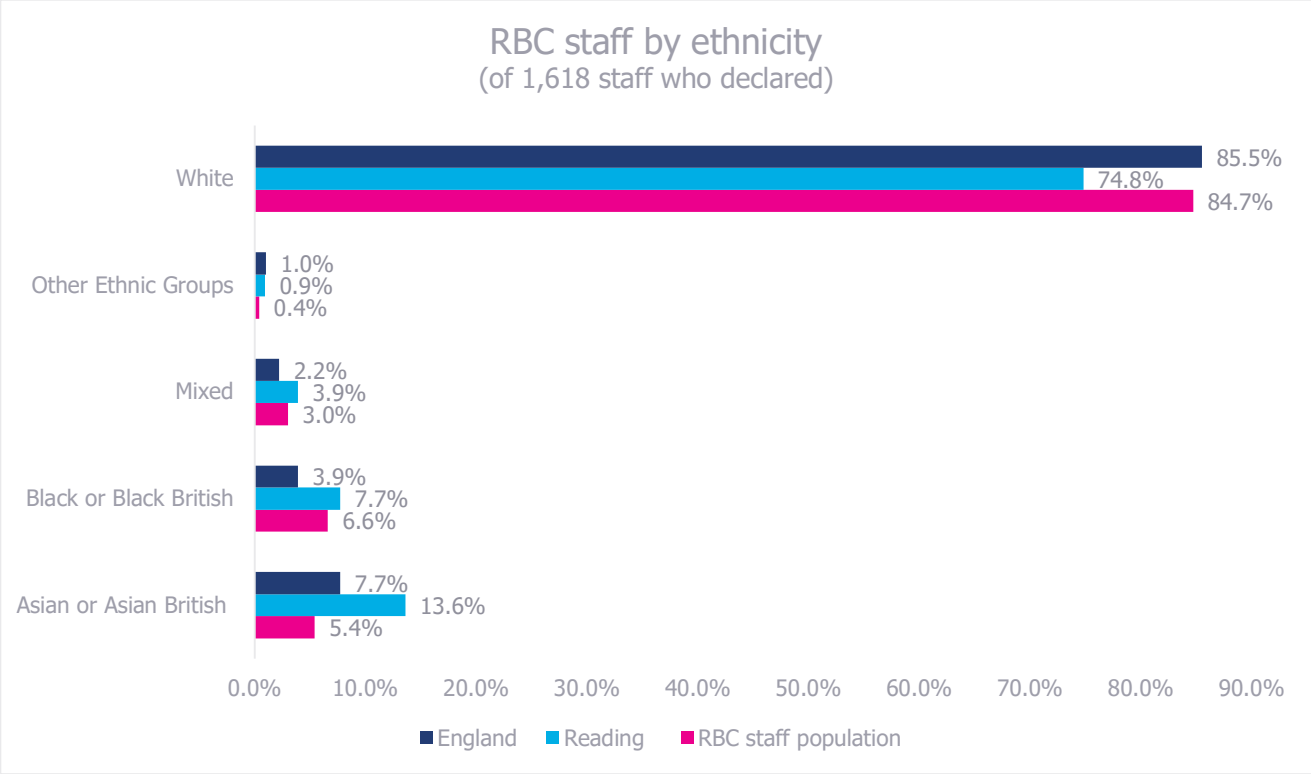
Primary actions

- Set representative diversity targets at senior levels.
- Offer additional, targeted training for line managers. We would advise that this targeted training is ongoing and enables line managers to understand best practice for inclusive leadership including discussion and reflection on their own barriers such as perceptions, biases and to deepen their understanding about the strengths of diversity and change.

RECRUITMENT

According to a 2015 McKinsey study, diverse companies perform at least 35% better than their homogeneous counterparts. Not only is it beneficial for your bottom line to recruit a diverse team, it is common sense in our growingly diverse nation. A focus on diversity in recruitment and progress will enable RBC to move towards its aspiration to represent the communities it serves.

The Council's Recruitment and Selection Policy recognises that "it is crucial to recruit the right people with the right skills and values to the right job and that these individuals should reflect, as far as possible, the diversity of the local community it serves." Below we can see how the diversity of RBC's employee population compares with that of Reading and England. The graph below suggests that the employee team at RBC are not dissimilar to the population of England. However, compared to the population of Reading White people are significantly over represented whilst Black and Asian people are underrepresented



N.B. this analysis uses data on the general population from the 2011 census. We recommend that this analysis is carried out again when ethnicity data from the 2021 census is released in 2023.

It was recognised in the Senior Leader interviews that recruitment will play a key role in enabling a more diverse workforce, and that inclusive recruitment is a key priority, and that several initiatives are underway to attract a more diverse workforce. For example, running job fairs in community centres, apprenticeships that target candidates from particular areas and engagement with local schools and colleges.

We would recommend building on these initiatives with a detailed review of your recruitment processes. This will support the objective to increase diversity throughout the organisation, not just in entry-level positions or into certain teams.

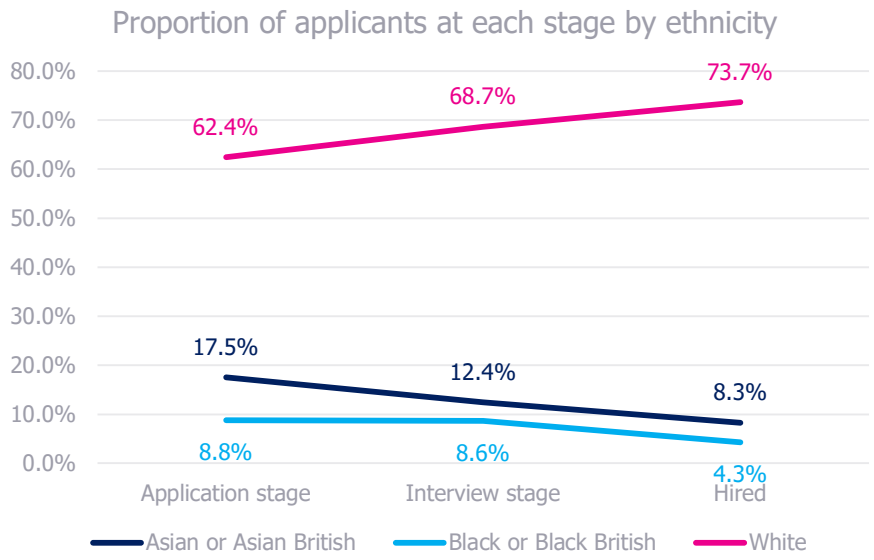
The focus groups highlighted the fact that all recruitment processes may not be aligned with best practice for inclusivity. For example, including criteria for jobs which are not essential for the role can exclude certain groups of potential candidates. It was also mentioned that marketing materials and communications don't always reflect the diversity that the organisation is aiming for. Furthermore, across all focus groups there was a consistent feeling that most of the recruitment is internal and based on existing relationships, which is a blocker to fostering a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

We heard from your Senior Leaders that "*BAME people tend to be funnelled into certain areas*", which may explain a lack of representation in certain functions.

Diversity through RBC's recruitment stages

White applicants are more likely to progress through each stage of RBC's application process, while Asian and Black applicants are less likely to progress through each stage.[5]

The data and analysis below contradicts the perception from one of your elected members that "*there is no discrimination at interview, its about a lack of applications from ethnic minorities*".



In 2020, White applicants invited to interview were **more than twice as likely to be appointed** as Black applicants. [6]

[5] RBC 2020 recruitment data
[6] RBC 2020 recruitment data

	NUMBER INVITED TO INTERVIEW	OF THESE, NUMBER APPOINTED	% CHANCE OF AN INTERVIEWEE BEING APPOINTED
White applicants	890	241	27.1%
Black applicants	112	14	12.5%
Asian applicants	160	27	16.9%

RBC's recruitment policy states that "*The process should be undertaken by competent managers who have received appropriate training*" and that Recruiting Managers are responsible for "*Maintaining their technical knowledge and skill levels by undertaking recruitment and selection training, including refresher courses, as required*", however, in 2020 1,291 interviews for 203 roles were carried out but only 34 staff completed either the 2016 (10) or updated 2020 (24) Recruitment and Selection e-learning training. [7]

The removal of bias is key to achieving fairness and equality in recruitment. An important component of removing bias is by ongoing and continued awareness raising and training for hiring managers and recruitment professionals about conscious and unconscious bias. However, this change will not happen overnight and it's important to supplement with other measures such as ensuring diversity in decision making including in interview panels. A larger panel will increase the diversity in thinking and will also help diverse candidates feel more comfortable as well as demonstrating that your business is inclusive and welcoming. BITC has worked with organisations that have implemented diverse panels into its recruitment process, via working with the ethnicity employee resource groups and working with independent consultants. For example, the Cabinet Office introduced mandatory diverse recruitment panels for senior roles, which has now been rolled out across other government departments.

A critical factor for this is the ensure all panel members have an understanding of their roles and understand the role of each panel member so that decisions are made collaboratively and with equal weighting on inputs from different panel members.

There is a lot of internal recruitment involving people who are friends with the manager ... these people then tend to be just like that manager.

[7] RBC 2020 learning pool data, RBC 2020 recruitment data

Priority Recommendations

- Currently only those managers who, as a minimum, have undertaken the Council's recruitment and selection and equalities training can be involved in the recruitment and selection process. Given the above apparently low take-up of recruitment and selection training, consider monitoring this more closely and/or requiring staff to complete this training every 12 months.
- Ensure your recruitment panels should be diverse or, where that is not possible, that diverse observers are present and included in the decision-making process.
- Standardise values assessment questions in interviews, assessing all candidates against the Team Reading values.
- Currently recruitment and selection statistics are collected for the purpose of equalities monitoring by HR. Consider creating an action plan to address the imbalances outlined in the table above, setting accountability and targets with regular reviews of data feeding into this.
- Perform regular recruitment audits to ensure you have diversity at each stage of recruitment for all levels.
- Review recruitment processes to ensure consistency in terms of inclusive practices.
- Review internal talent in a transparent manner for senior vacancies as a default before recruiting externally.

Primary actions

- Create a system to ensure that all managers are receiving and disseminating information about internal vacancies.
- Ensure that marketing and branding of RBC is diverse and inclusive.

CAREER PROGRESSION

Career progression is an essential pillar to the employee lifecycle, affecting how diversity moves up through the organisation as well as impacting employee engagement. Women and minority groups face many barriers to progression in the workplace due to for example, bias around pay and promotion, difficult workplace cultures (i.e. sexual harassment), tensions between balancing work with care and a shortage of quality part-time work with a good wage potential.

Across all focus groups, a concern was raised around the lack of transparency regarding promotion decisions. There was a common opinion that opportunities were given according to networks and cliques; this was felt more strongly by the ethnic minority focus group. Another area of concern was highlighted related to training opportunities. Here, similarly, it was felt that opportunities were not open to everyone, and communication around training and what is available is not clear. There was a comment that training was provided "*if your face fitted*".

One of your elected members confirmed that they had noticed "*an issue around the career development of staff from non-white backgrounds*".

Data supplied indicates that only seven promotions were recorded in 2020, which does not give enough information to draw any trends by protected characteristics. [8]

The 2021 staff survey indicated that satisfaction rates with learning and development opportunities were relatively consistent across gender and ethnic groups. Overall staff satisfaction with learning and development opportunities was 71.8%, and this figure was higher for Asian and Black staff (87.9% and 82.1%). [9]

There were no significant disparities between the population of leavers in 2020 when compared with the overall employee population by gender, ethnicity or disability, Of 167 leavers in 2020, 7 were known to have a disability (4.1%), compared with the wider employee population of 1,713 employees, 63 of whom are known to have a disability (3.7%). [10]

People get shoehorned into jobs based on who you know rather than what you know, sense of roles even being created for some people.

Training is only given if your face fits.

I do not see the diversity every day in my work. There is not as much diversity at senior levels. When I am with senior people I am often the only ethic minority person.

Primary Recommendations

- Continue to monitor progression data and consider implementing succession plans internally which consider diversity in succession plans.
- Consider monitoring decisions on progression within grades by ethnicity and gender, as part of your strategy to address any gender and ethnicity pay gaps.
- Consider setting targets for diverse representation at senior levels, monitoring progress against these.
- Explore talent-spotting and/or sponsorship programmes to accelerate progress towards diverse representation at senior levels.
- Conduct an Equality Impact Assessment for your Learning and Development policies and interventions to make sure they are fit for purpose in terms of content and to ensure all staff and managers can access these without barriers.
- Create a colleague sponsorship/advocacy programme in addition to internal and external mentoring initiatives.

[8] RBC 2020 promotion data
[9] RBC 2021 staff survey
[10] RBC 2020 leavers data

- Consider implementing a reverse mentoring programme, with senior leaders being mentored by a more junior colleague who, from a diversity and inclusion perspective, is different from them in some way. Reverse mentoring is an effective way to build genuine awareness of the barriers faced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic employees and improves employee engagement and retention.

Primary actions

- Hold weekly or bi-weekly line manager surgeries on a different HR policy, L&D or progression topic, ensuring line managers are using these as consistently as possible across the organisation.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement encompasses multiple factors, including employee consultation, volunteering, network activity and workplace culture and reflects experiences of and perception of workplace bullying and harassment.

An essential component to enhancing employee engagement is the **employee network**, or the employee resource group.

You should engage with your staff to identify areas of priority for these networks and ensure the networks are accompanied by senior level sponsorship, a clear strategy and are accessible to all staff.

We heard that there is a perception that the recent Diversity and Inclusion forums "*never really took off*", so reflecting on that and identifying lessons learned will be important in planning for network launch/relaunch.

We recommend that you review the success of your LGBT+ staff network to inform how you develop, grow and embed further employee resource groups.

Consider creating a platform for additional staff networks to emerge if there is appetite, for example for employees with disabilities, and of different faiths.

EMPLOYEE NETWORKS

- Provide an open and honest platform for raising issues and sharing ideas
- Help the company understand the challenges employee groups are facing
- Be the voice of employees to inform strategy and policies
- Help employees take steps to achieve their career ambitions
- Offer an opportunity for social connection to enhance employee health and wellbeing
- Offer opportunity for networking

Another important aspect of employee engagement is **consultation**. Businesses can consult employees across a variety of business considerations, including policies, restructures, values and organisational

culture. For example, one of your Executive team acknowledges the positive outcomes for service delivery to residents when involving staff.

We heard from your senior leaders that there is a gap in understanding of the needs and potential limitations to engagements with more junior teams: "*senior leadership doesn't understand the barriers fully, which makes it difficult to engage*".

Methods of consultation should vary (roundtables, open forums, anonymous surveys) according to the subject matter and timeframe for the issue resolution or change, but the overall goal of consultation is to gather as much employee insight pre-decision and to ensure business decisions do not negatively impact one group over another.

In addition to creating staff networks and consulting with these networks, another method for enhanced employee consultation and engagement is via all-staff surveys. The RBC 2021 staff survey had a 58.6% completion rate. The average satisfaction rate ("*I enjoy my job*") for employees in the 2021 annual staff survey was 87.3%. The fact that you have been able to disaggregate by some strands of protected characteristics is promising. We recommend that you repeat this survey, with a real focus on improving disclosure around ethnicity via meaningful communications strategies. This will enhance the robustness of your data and enable you to establish trends. Drawing insights from the data you have now may not yield reliable results. For example, the distribution of satisfaction scores across ethnicity scores ranges from 72.3% - 100%, although 18% of survey respondents did not disclose their ethnicity.[11]

ETHNICITY	TOTAL	TOTAL %	I ENJOY MY JOB	I FEEL RESPECTED AND VALUED
Asian or Asian British	33	3.3%	100.0%	100.0%
Black or Black British	28	2.8%	92.9%	85.7%
Don't know/ not answered	184	18.3%	72.3%	52.7%
Mixed	19	1.9%	94.7%	84.2%
Other	5	0.5%	80.0%	80.0%
White	735	73.2%	90.1%	78.9%
Total	**1004**		**87.3%**	**75.1%**

[11] RBC 2021 staff survey

In order to maintain high overall ethnicity declaration rates[12], and to encourage staff to share personal data, RBC should consider creating a campaign for Self ID, the issue of trust, and improve transparency of how the data will be used. Employees who participated in the focus groups highlighted a potential lack of trust for some, alongside the need for clarity around intentions when collecting personal data and the intentions for employee engagement survey data. There is uncertainty about how the data will be used and what actions will be taken following analysis of this data.

Employee **retention and turnover** is also an important indicator for engagement, this is discussed earlier in this report.

When we apply an ethnicity lens, it appears that leavers, both voluntary and involuntary, are representative of their overall ethnicity cohorts.

4.1% of leavers identify as having a disability, while 3.7% of staff overall have a disability. Rates for disability declaration are exceptionally low and it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions.

Ideas seem to disappear into a black hole … nobody really cares what I think.

Primary Recommendations

- Develop a strategic approach to forming and supporting employee networks. BITC's factsheet 'Steps to Set and Run an Employee Network' provides recommendations that are best practice for building sustainable and impactful employee networks[13].

Primary actions

- Share findings and insights from employee surveys and focus groups (where possible and while remaining anonymous).

BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

In all organisations formal grievances and recorded incidences tend to only represent a small proportion of what is experienced by minority groups. A term for these often more subtle incidences of bullying and harassments is 'microaggressions'. Microaggressions tend to be more common than overt bullying in workplace settings and have detrimental impacts to employee experience.

[12] Ethnicity data declaration is relatively high (only 5.5% not declaring), however this is much lower in recent employee engagement surveys (increases to 18%).
[13] https://www.bitc.org.uk/fact-sheet/steps-to-start-and-run-an-employee-nework/

The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic focus groups reported a lower sense of inclusion than others. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees offered examples of microaggressions such as comments around accents and hair, mispronouncing names and unequal distribution of work and opportunity. Whereas Respondents explicitly linked the "othering" impact of microaggressions to their levels of engagement and motivation.

Many white colleagues expressed that they felt that they could bring their whole selves to work, this was not the case for many Black and Asian colleagues. All focus groups identified that incidents of bullying exist within the organisation. Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority employees believed that racism was not always taken seriously within the council.

Whilst Union representatives were unable to share information about specific cases, they did confirm the sense that they continue to respond to cases that "*can't be anything but bullying",* reporting incidences where staff are asked to report and give account for every hour of every day, including notifying line managers when they take toilet breaks.

The Union reps also reported that when they review their cases, all staff that are currently under investigation are either Black or "*European*" – that they rarely see investigations into white British staff.

34.4% of those responding to the RBC 2021 staff survey said they had experienced or seen bullying or harassment at work. There was negligible difference in the responses reported by men and women and no clear trends in the experiences across age groups. [14]

RBC's Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy states that employees have the right:

- To challenge all discrimination and bullying, including abusive and offensive language/behaviour and to bring this to the attention of the Council; and
- For their culture and identity to be respected and valued

Victims of microaggressions are often labelled 'sensitive' or 'lacking a sense of humour' and the policy above only names the more visible traditional aggressions such as harassment and bullying. However, these larger, more overt instances of bullying often arise from a culture of disrespect, exclusion, and 'othering' which is symptomatic of larger society. If RBC can develop the culture of respect and inclusion outlined in the policy, employees are less like to experience overt bullying and harassment.

We have reviewed the RBC Bullying and Harassment Policy (2018). We would recommend reviewing this and building out guidance about accepted behaviours and making reference to microaggressions. This could include:

- Review of examples of behaviour that the policy would cover
- Examples of how to challenge these behaviours, including how to call-out microaggressions and the organisation's support for this

[14] RBC 2021 staff survey

- Reporting channels – including alternatives to raising with Line Managers internally and confirming confidentiality for victims
- Consequences for perpetrators
- Commitment to monitor reporting incidents based on characteristics to identify any groups who are experiencing this more acutely and take targeted action

People are allowed to get away with bad and unacceptable behaviour for such a long time that it's empowered them as nothing ever happens. People get worn down and leave.

My hair is a CONSTANT source of microagression!

There's a lack of faith that senior leadership will do anything at all. People will always find a way to dismiss your experience.

My white colleagues are seen as assertive, but as a black woman I fear being seen as aggressive so do not speak.

I feel that my opinion is ignored, but when a white man says the same thing then they are heard.

I recommended someone to be employed with an Indian name and the response from my colleague was "why can't they have a normal name?"

Primary Recommendations

- Ensure your bullying and harassment policy covers microaggressions alongside more explicit behaviours.
- Monitor instances of bullying and harassment by protected characteristics.
- Reiterate that RBC has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and set targets to reduce reported incidents.
- Roll out training to educate employees on microaggressions and provide guidance on how to call these out.

Primary actions

- Draw explicit links between Team Reading Values and microaggressions.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

An inclusive workplace culture indicates a climate in which people can bring their whole selves to work and where all employees can thrive. An examination of workplace culture is as an essential component to any organisation's EDI journey and BITC investigated this via the focus groups and stakeholder interviews.

The words in the diagram below represent a 'word cloud' of words used to describe RBCs culture by focus group participants. Those words that are larger appeared more frequently.

The words used to describe the **culture were fairly mixed** as well as dependent upon directorate and team, this is reflected in the clear popularity of the word "*inconsistent*". This inconsistency, or lack of confidence in consistency was shared by your executive team:

"*I'm not sure that the culture here is consistent. I have seen evidence of teams working well together but little evidence of cross team collaboration and lots of siloed working*".

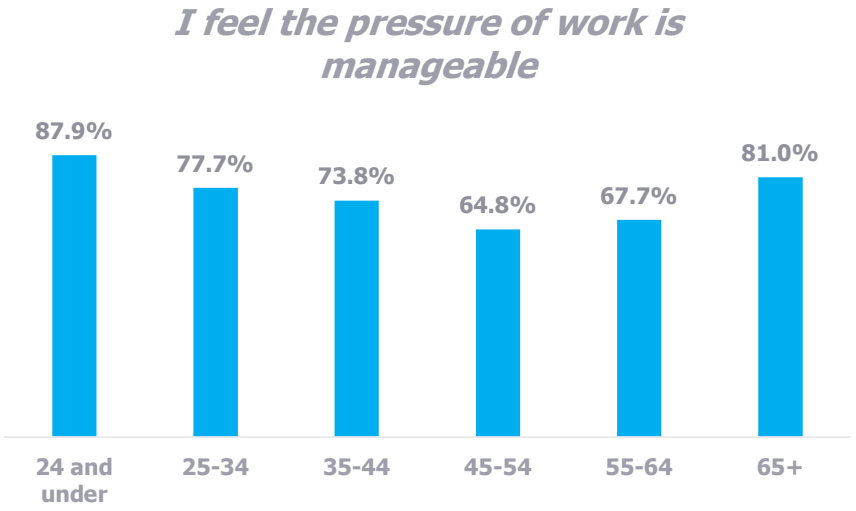
During focus group discussions, there was a clear sense that the culture is heavily dependent on team and line manager. Employees that have worked at RBC for a long period have described how the organisation has been changing but at a slow pace. Many focus group participants, especially new joiners agreed that colleagues have been welcoming, friendly and supportive towards them. However, it was universally acknowledged that cliques did exist within the council. A lack of education and awareness around certain issues, particularly race, were highlighted as a cultural concern by many.

This lack of awareness/confidence to talk about race was not shared by some of your senior leaders who felt broadly confident to talk about race and did not identify any areas of D&I where they were felt discomfort. Other senior leaders demonstrated more awareness of their lack of lived experiences which contributed to their levels of discomfort.

During focus groups, line managers were cited as often being perpetrators of microaggressions and other unwanted behaviour. Although not all line managers have been identified as blockers to inclusive culture, the role of the line manager in employee wellbeing and development should not be overlooked. It is advisable to provide training for line managers on inclusive behaviours, including recognising and reporting/calling out microaggressions.

In the 2019 RBC staff survey, 78.9% of staff agreed that they cope well with the current pressure of work. In the 2021 survey, only 67.4% of staff agreed that they felt the pressure of work was manageable. While the question was worded slightly differently, this appears to be a downward trend and is potentially attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic.[15]

Supporting staff with stress management and their health and wellbeing is a critical element of maintaining an inclusive workplace. We did not explicitly examine this during the focus groups, but a lack of support was cited and Union representatives also raised their perception of a stigma around mental health and room for further work around employee wellbeing.



[15] RBC 2019 staff survey, RBC 2021 staff survey

BITC REPORT 'WHAT REALLY WORKS?' WHEN DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE WORKING CULTURES – KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiatives to foster greater inclusion will not work, and could even be counter-productive, if they do not include a focus on behaviour change, active learning, and promote dialogue between different groups. Formal diversity training or other programmes designed to support inclusion must include supporting trainees to break habits that show unconscious bias. For example 'perspective taking' where they learn about others' lives, should expect proactive participation from attendees, such as group discussions, and do best when they foster 'intergroup dialogue' – interaction between people who might normally not connect.

To enable employees to confront non-inclusive behaviour, explain that this is a 'community responsibility' – that as an organisation you believe respect is everybody's business and support your staff to become active bystanders. Individuals face a lower bar when it comes to challenging poor behaviour if they feel the organisation expects the community to stand up. Enable your staff to act on this through providing training in how to 'calmly confront' incidents, highlighting the powerful role allies can play.

There is a great opportunity to describe the workplace culture that supports the RBC EDI ambitions by expanding on the Team Reading initiative. The values under T can only be fully realised if there is an inclusive culture that empowers all individuals to play their part.

Feedback from participants consistently highlighted the **hierarchical nature** of the organisation. According to employees, the hierarchy at RBC is the **main impediment to trust**. When asked if RBC was a safe space for people to speak up, many employees disagreed.

Many employees were also able to point to hierarchy as a prime ingredient of many organisational problems such as poor communication, racism or a lack of employee engagement.

The purpose of this report is not to advise on organisational structure, but we do note that hierarchies can create power dynamics that are easily exploited. This can lead to a lack of psychological safety across teams and a lack of trust across the organisation. Research from PWC[16] and Deloitte[17] finds that values such as trust, diversity and inclusion are increasingly important to the workforce. In the interest of creating a healthy organisational culture, we recommend that RBC explore how to implement a flatter organisational structure, and/or drive greater trust across its current structure. Flatter organisational structures can also help tackle issues such as unconscious bias and microaggressions within organisational culture, as employees will feel more empowered to call-out behaviours and question processes that undermine organisational values, including equality, diversity and inclusion.

[16] Millennials at Work, Pwc.
[17] 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey

Conversations generated in focus groups and stakeholder interviews also exampled siloed cultures and ways of working that exist at RBC as well as the differences in leadership styles from individual executives. These, more general organisational challenges will certainly affect the way EDI is viewed and experienced by individuals in different locations and teams. The scope of this research does not allow for a discussion around these organisational aspects but we have suggested some recommendations and primary actions, recognising the impact these could have on your organisational culture.

I am a muslim and the organisation does not get my culture.

I am fed up of people giving me wishes for festivals that I do not celebrate – people who have worked with me for years ... people don't listen to me or show an interest in who I am.

Primary Recommendations

- Ensure that your organisational structure and levels of hierarchy comply with your organisational design principles throughout.
- Build a campaign about the Team Reading initiative to confirm your organisational values and expected behaviours.
- Continue to support the wellbeing of your staff, with line management training and adherence to initiatives such as the Mental Health at Work Commitment. (https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment/).
- Find creative ways to 'flatten' the RBC hierarchy in day-to-day business, improving rapport between senior leaders and junior staff. This will improve communications, leadership visibility and employee engagement.

Primary actions

- Raise awareness of religious festivals by commemorating key events from all religions and advising on how these may affect work routines.
- Profile junior staff in internal communications, for example include a 'get to know your colleagues' section of a regular newsletter, update, blog post, etc.

APPENDICES

Interview questions

1. What does D&I at RBC mean to you? Why is it important to the organisation and to you as a leader?
2. What role do you see yourself and other senior leaders having in driving change on the D&I agenda within RBC?
3. How comfortable do you feel talking about D&I at RBC? Are there areas of D&I that you are more/less comfortable talking about?
4. What would you want employees to say about the organisation's commitment to D&I? What is the ambition?
5. How would you describe the organisational culture at RBC? Is this culture consistent across the council?
6. What are the most pressing D&I challenges in your business/division?
7. Are you confident you know how the organisation is feeling? What channels do you use to hear feedback from employees?
8. How active are you in engaging with D&I at RBC?
9. How do you see the D&I agenda being implemented and how does it fit with the business strategy and future focus?
10. How do you role model D&I across RBC?
11. What further training / guidance do you (or your leadership teams) need to be an effective D&I ally?

Focus group questions