

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN BIRMINGHAM'S PROFESSIONAL SERVICES SECTOR

The first annual report from BPS Birmingham
Future's Diversity & Inclusion Committee

January 2020



Contents

- Introduction 3
- Limitations 4
- Key findings..... 4
 - Who completed the survey? 4
 - How does this compare with the demography of Birmingham? 5
 - What matters to people? 6
 - What do organisations need to do more of? 7
- Challenges 7
 - Barriers to entry or progression 9
 - How can we affect change? 10
- What happens next? 13
 - 2020: a focus on mental health 13
 - Our 2020 survey 13
 - Further reading 14
 - Join the D&I Committee..... 14

Introduction

Welcome to the first annual survey into diversity and inclusion within the professional services sector in Birmingham.

The goal of this survey is to examine the current state of diversity and inclusion within the sector in order to help BPS Birmingham and partner organisations develop a greater understanding of the current challenges faced by our city's professional services workforce. We can then use this data to support companies and individuals to create workplaces that are truly accessible and welcoming for everyone, regardless of factors like age, race, gender, sexuality, or socio-economic background.

"The BPS Birmingham Future Diversity and Inclusion Committee exists to ensure that our city's professional services sector is accessible and welcoming for everyone. We're very pleased to be launching this survey so we can better understand where the sector currently is in terms of diversity and inclusion and where people are interested in getting to.

"Key for us is working out how we can help employers and employees realise the benefits of having a truly diverse and inclusive workforce so we want to learn all we can from individuals and organisations to help us better understand existing problems and areas for development."

- *Ria Blagburn, Diversity & Inclusion Committee Chair*

This survey will be repeated annually so we can ascertain the shifting priorities of employees and employers in the area and use the data to determine our primary area of focus for the following calendar year.

Our primary area of focus each year will be where we spend the majority of time developing relationships with partner organisations and signposting resources and tools to help individuals and businesses, whilst also ensuring BPS Birmingham becomes a more inclusive organisation and representative of the wonderfully diverse city in which we operate.

Limitations

This survey was distributed via the BPS Birmingham marketing channels and mailing lists, and was amplified by other organisations and individuals who share and support our objectives. This means that the respondents were predominantly from the professional services industry already, which means the responses may fail to reflect the importance of certain issues for groups that remain excluded.

For example, as no one who completed the survey identified as non-binary, gendered representation from a non-binary perspective may not have been considered a particularly pertinent factor, yet would still serve as a major barrier to entry in many professions. Broadening reach and ensuring results are more representative will be a key factor for our 2020 survey.

Key findings

Who completed the survey?

The survey was open for three weeks from November-December 2019. During this time, 74 individuals completed the survey across a variety of roles – including many in leadership or managerial positions.

Age

- The survey was completed by individuals ranging from 16-65
- 39% of survey respondents were between 25-29
- Over half of respondents were under 35

Ethnicity

- The majority of respondents (62%) were white, followed by Asian/Asian British (18%), mixed (12%), then black (8%)

Gender

- 60% of respondents were female, and 40% male

- No one responded as anything other than male or female

Sexuality

- 86% identified as straight, 7% as gay or lesbian, and 7% as bisexual

Health

- The most common condition/illness reported was mental health (20%)
- Other conditions or illnesses reported by respondents included those which affected stamina or breathing or fatigue, vision, mobility, hearing, dexterity, learning, and anxiety

Beliefs

- 45% of respondents reported having no religion
- Christianity was the next largest group (36%), then Muslim (10%), then Sikh (3%)

How does this compare with the demography of Birmingham?¹

Similarities

- Birmingham has a young population compared to the UK as a whole, with a higher proportion of the city's population being under 34
- There are more women than men in Birmingham (though only slightly – and this is most likely due to women living longer)

Differences

The breakdown of ethnicities between our survey respondents and the population of Birmingham is as follows:

	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other
Our survey	62.2%	17.6%	8.1%	12.2%	0%
Birmingham	57.9%	26.6%	8.9%	4.4%	2.2%

¹ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census

If our survey were representative of the professional services sector within Birmingham, then the Asian community in particular is underrepresented. The larger number of individuals identifying as being of Mixed ethnicity may be due to more non-first-generation migrants.

The above lack of representation regarding those from Asian ethnicities is backed up by underrepresentation from Muslim respondents: Birmingham's population is 21.8% Muslim, whereas only 9.6% of those who completed our survey were Muslim.

More of our respondents identified as non-heterosexual than the average for the West Midlands, where just 2.2% of the population class themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual² (compared with 14% of our respondents).

According to the 2011 Census, Birmingham has 197,901 citizens with a long-term health problem or disability that affected their day-to-day activities. This equates to around 18% of the population; less than our survey reported.

What matters to people?

We asked people to rank various subjects in order of how much each mattered to respondents as individuals. These areas were:

- Race/ethnicity
- Age discrimination
- Sexuality
- Disability
- Mental health issues
- Gender identity
- Religion or beliefs

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2017#people-in-london-are-most-likely-to-identify-as-lesbian-gay-or-bisexual>

Whilst race/ethnicity was most commonly ranked as the subject that mattered the most to people, mental health had a greater weighting of higher numbers.

Age discrimination, sexuality, and disability were all ranked next and fairly evenly, and gender identity and religion/beliefs were ranked lowest in terms of priorities for individuals.

What do organisations need to do more of?

65% of respondents deemed mental health as the area organisations needed to do more to support with race/ethnicity, disability, and age discrimination ranking second, third, and fourth respectively.

Gender identity, religion/beliefs, and sexuality were lower, but were still selected as areas that organisations needed to support more by 25-33% of respondents.

Challenges

The survey allowed respondents to freely share their thoughts regarding what challenges were most prevalent in terms of the professional services sector in Birmingham being truly diverse and inclusive, and there were several common themes:

Leadership teams are not diverse

- Senior positions are filled by white men – it’s an “old boys club”
- There’s a lack of representation of ethnic minorities
- There are few visible role models
- Leadership teams are not reflective of stakeholders

Preconceptions and prejudices stop people from entering the sector

- Social mobility is a big issue
- Many people don’t feel like professional services is open to them

Institutional bias stops people from progressing

- People are often unaware of unconscious bias
- This means change doesn't happen
- The same people are put in the same roles time and time again

Different generations have differing attitudes

- Younger and older generations struggle to communicate
- Assumptions are made, which blocks cooperation
- Mental health is dismissed as a weakness by the older generation

There's a lack of education, support, training and development

- This hinders those without confidence from becoming leaders
- Earlier intervention would help

Inflexible working practices hinder those who need flexibility

- A culture of overworking puts some at a disadvantage
- Single parents or some with disabilities can't work as many hours

There isn't enough empowerment of those in non-leadership roles

- The majority of the workforce don't feel capable of enacting change

There's often a reactionary approach to diversity

- The focus is on the 'hot topic' at the time

People think the issue has already been solved, or won't be

- Some individuals don't acknowledge there's an issue

"D&I does it's round every 7-8 years and becomes a 'talking shop' under this does not become compulsory, nothing will change and will just once again be shelved"

- *Survey respondent*

Barriers to entry or progression

Our respondents highlighted a number of factors that are likely to stop those from minority groups entering a career in professional services, or progressing as far or at the same rate as others:

Classism

- Some people in decision-making roles have ingrained prejudice

An expectation to give your time up for free

- For example, by working extended hours without compensation
- Unpaid internships or work experience
- This discriminates against those from less privileged backgrounds

Funding to complete required qualifications

- Requiring expensive qualifications means some fall at the first hurdle

Too much tradition and hierarchy

- Old-fashioned views can alienate some people
- There's a perceived need to be from a certain background/education level

“It's a very 'middle class' industry and people often progress based on who they know. It can be very difficult to break through if you're from a 'different' background.”

- *Survey respondent*

There's less focus on potential than actual experience

- Experience can be hard to get unless you have connections
- The recruitment process isn't set up to prioritise or measure raw talent

Confidence

- People feel inadequate/unsupported so don't go for roles
- Not everyone knows that this may be due to imposter syndrome

A lack of role models

- People can't see themselves represented in leadership roles
- This can make it seem like an impossible task

Lack of awareness of opportunities available in the sector

- Careers and potential entry routes aren't advertised to everyone
- The sector isn't exposed to some socio-economic/ethnic groups

Certain careers require you to start preparing in your early teens

- If pupils aren't made aware of this, they're already at a disadvantage

Some cultural practices aren't well accommodated in the workplace

- For example, prayer rooms and times
- Networking practices may also disadvantage some (e.g. after work drinks)

Dated and biased recruitment processes

- Those doing the hiring and promoting conform to a narrow range
- They may not recognise their own bias

There's not enough awareness around different learning needs

- This may manifest in lower qualifications, so people are overlooked
- Traditional recruitment practices don't work for everyone

How can we affect change?

We asked what measures/methods would have the greatest positive impact in helping to make the professional services sector more diverse and inclusive, and the results were as follows:

- Mentoring and one-to-one discussion was deemed to be the most potentially positive measure for impact – 63.9% of respondents felt like this would be helpful

- Events, safe spaces, and networks were the next popular ideas, with around 45% of respondents thinking these would encourage a stronger sense of inclusivity
- Literature and media were deemed to be useful by some
- 'Other' suggestions included education and training, role models, and engagement with schools and parents

We also asked respondents to share their thoughts on what one change they would make if they had a magic wand, and the responses were insightful. Again, these can be grouped together into broad themes:

Role models

- A greater representation of minority groups in senior roles
- Fast track people from different backgrounds into leadership positions
- Diverse and inclusive leadership setting the tone
- Remove senior figures that detract from an inclusive culture

Better recruitment

- More focus on skills than CVs
- A process that measures potential and raw talent
- Blind recruitment, and being transparent about this process
- Diverse interview judging panels
- Adjusted recruitment process for applicants with learning needs

Incentives/regulations for businesses

- Bursaries for SMEs to take on a wider pool of apprentices and juniors
- Free or subsidised support and training
- A requirement for socially minded companies to have diverse leadership

Encouraging discussion, even when it's difficult

- Challenge outdated thinking
- Educate those who don't get it rather than alienating them

“[If] everyone felt more confident to have difficult conversations about the issues without feeling concerned they will offend, not know the answers, or show weakness/lack of understanding in organisational policies. Safe spaces to have discussions about solutions without prejudice.”

- *Survey respondent*

Moving away from tradition

- Remove hierarchy (for example, the rigid structure of law firms)
- Open satellite offices in more diverse communities

Better education and more entry options

- Greater promotion of different entry route options
- More pathways for those from less privileged backgrounds
- Reach children as early as possible
- Target those less likely to enter a career in professional services

Empowering the workforce

- More opportunities for people to participate in decision making
- Allow employee-led groups to make changes without fear of management

What happens next?

2020: a focus on mental health

The results of this survey have helped the BPS Birmingham Future Diversity & Inclusion committee to choose mental health as our primary area of focus for 2020. This means we'll spend the year building connections with partner organisations who can provide support in this area, and developing a toolkit of resources that our members can access in order to make their own organisations more welcoming for anyone struggling with poor mental health.

We'll also be proactively staging events around mental health and D&I as a whole in order to help educate businesses and individuals about why creating truly inclusive workplaces helps everyone succeed. Please keep an eye on the BPS Birmingham website and newsletter for event announcements and updates!

Our 2020 survey

We will repeat this survey annually, using the data to understand how the sector is changing and developing with regards to diversity and inclusion, as well as helping us to determine our primary areas of focus for future years.

As previously mentioned in the 'Limitations' section of this report, the survey was predominantly completed by individuals already in the professional services sector due to how it was pitched and marketed, which meant the voices of those who had already felt blocked from entering the sector were not represented. This is something we will strive to fix in our 2020 survey, which we hope to achieve by partnering with other organisations to both increase the reach of the survey itself, as well as potentially carrying out other research with partners to examine employment barriers.

We're keen to ensure this survey is as accessible and useful as possible, so please do send any feedback you have to hello@bpsbirmingham.co.uk.

Further reading

Bodies such as the WMCA, WE-LEAD at the University of Birmingham, and Beatfreaks have produced some great reports into D&I recently, so if you're keen to find out more, take a look at these resources:

- [Leaders Like You \(WMCA\)](#)
- [WE-LEAD](#)
- [Brum Youth Trends](#)

Join the D&I Committee

“The attitudes of those leading the organisations [need to change]. It is no longer okay to just sit back and comment on 'how things need to change' - we need to change them.”

- *Survey respondent*

Want to help us? The BPS Birmingham Future Diversity & Inclusion committee is looking for new members. Our goals are:

- To support BPS Birmingham in becoming an organisation that truly reflects the city.
- To educate Birmingham's professional services sector as to why diverse teams are key to long-term success.
- To assist business leaders in implementing practices that support and promote equality, diversity, and inclusion and that help to develop a diverse talent pipeline.
- To connect third sector and public sector organisations with the professional services sector in order to facilitate greater awareness of the many dimensions of diversity.

If you are interested in helping us to achieve these goals, we'd love to hear from you! Please email hello@bpsbirmingham.co.uk to find out more.