

## **View from the Chair; Business Newsletter; 10 May 2022 Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI**

### **Diversity and inclusion in the workplace**

Over the past two years, new ways of working and new ideas have changed completely how we work. As we enter the hopefully post-pandemic era, in these changed working environments, we should not lose sight of the importance of workplaces being welcoming and inclusive.

Northern Ireland's workforce of 2022 is very different to that of 2002 or 1992 and many businesses already actively consider the importance of diversity and inclusion in their workplaces. These businesses have worked hard to create a positive culture of inclusion within their business. They have created inclusive workplaces where the principles of equality, fairness, dignity and respect are promoted. These traits are so ingrained they are part of the business's DNA, they are actively demonstrated through its goals and the behaviours of the people who work there.

Inclusive employers are committed to the practice of equality of opportunity for all regardless of grade or position within the business, from the CEO to the front of house staff. They create workplaces with good solid policies and procedures that are actively implemented and used.

The benefits of adopting diversity and inclusion in the workplace can significantly boost a company's brand and reputation, presenting as a desirable place to work. A research report by global consultancy firm McKinsey & Company 'How Diversity Matters' states that the most diverse companies are now more likely than ever to outperform non-diverse companies on profitability.

Workplace diversity is an especially beneficial asset for attracting top talent from diverse talent pools. Glassdoor's 2020 Diversity Hiring Survey highlighted that more than 3 out of 4 job seekers and employees (76%) report that a diverse workforce is an important factor for them when evaluating companies and job offers.

There are other benefits too. Diversity and inclusion can lead to higher employee engagement - when employees feel included, they are more engaged. It is also beneficial for employee retention. Diversity and inclusion in the workplace ensures that employees feel accepted and valued, and happy employees are more likely to stay longer with a company, resulting in lower turnover rates.

There are of course also strong legal reasons to be open to and adopt a culture of inclusion and diversity. All businesses in Northern Ireland must ensure that they

operate within our anti-discrimination laws and it makes good business sense to avoid any reputational damage by failing to do so.

But to successfully create a culture of inclusion within the workplace, there needs to be buy-in from the whole organisation. Senior managers must set the standards and play a key role in promoting inclusion by ensuring relevant policies are fairly implemented. Line managers have a practical role in promoting inclusion and diversity within a context of dignity and respect and ensure that the values of inclusion are integrated into all aspects of daily management.

On a practical level, managers can ensure that working practices do not unintentionally exclude some employees, so everyone feels valued. Simple things such as arranging meeting times that do not exclude those with family commitments or arranging networking and social opportunities in an inclusive environment that does not make participation difficult for employees of a particular religion or belief or for those who are disabled.

We know that inequalities and stereotypes can spread into the workplace from wider society and these can be amplified in the workplace. By instilling a positive culture of inclusion and diversity within the workplace, employees can spread this outwards into the wider community as colleagues learn more about each other and pass on this knowledge on to others.

Creating positive inclusive change in our workplaces can bring many business benefits as well as other benefits that will spread well beyond our office or factory walls, and deliver a win win situation for both our businesses and wider society.