



Building inclusive workplaces

Evidence-based diversity, equality, and inclusion research and consultancy solutions



Sustaining DEI efforts: Organisational challenges explained

Across sectors, organisations are being asked to show meaningful progress on diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) by staff, customers, regulators, and wider society. At the same time, resources are tighter, public narratives are more contested, and scrutiny over what counts as meaningful progress is increasing.

For many leaders, this creates a difficult balancing act: maintaining commitment and momentum on DEI while operating in an increasingly complex and pressured environment. Without a clear evidence base bolstered by confident leadership capability and trusted strategic support, DEI can easily become fragmented, reactive, and difficult to sustain.

Our work with employers across sectors shows a shared set of challenges and questions that people leaders consistently grapple with:

- “How do we build a credible business case for DEI in a challenging economic and socio political context, without over claiming or losing senior buy in?”
- “Where do our workforce inequalities really sit, and which issues should we prioritise when data is partial, sensitive or contested?”
- “How do we recruit, retain and progress an increasingly diverse workforce while maintaining fairness, cohesion and trust?”
- “We have workforce data, but how do we translate it into meaningful insights and action, rather than dashboards with little impact?”

- “How do we promote inclusion and representation for under represented groups without creating disengagement or backlash among other staff?”
- “How do we avoid DEI becoming fragmented, performative or organisationally divisive, rather than embedded in everyday people practices?”
- “What new risks are emerging, especially those linked to AI, automation and data driven decision making? How do we ensure these do not amplify bias or inequality?”

These challenges sit at the intersection of organisational culture, leadership capability, workforce data, power dynamics and lived employee experience. As a result, organisations struggle to maintain momentum on DEI, even where commitment is genuine.

Addressing these issues requires more than off the shelf interventions. It demands high-quality evidence, contextual understanding, and the ability to work constructively with complexity and disagreement. This is where IES is uniquely positioned to support employers.



IES is an independent centre for cutting-edge DEI research and consultancy

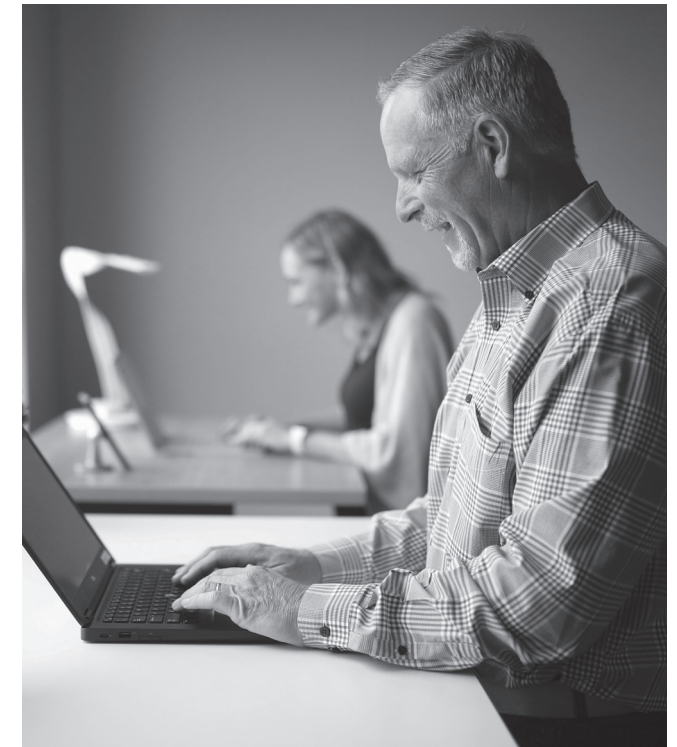
IES delivers:

- Rigorous research and evidence-backed knowledge on what drives behaviour change in organisations and creates inclusive workforce outcomes
- Bespoke consultancy solutions that help organisations translate evidence into practical insight and concrete action
- An independent, impartial and trusted voice that facilitates difficult conversations across leadership, HR, DEI, unions and staff
- A critical friend approach that combines challenge, expertise and support in complex decision-making

Our DEI solutions are designed for organisations that want to:

- Understand how various elements of the DEI strategy are working in practice
- Tackle workforce inequalities using credible evidence
- Strengthen inclusive leadership capability at executive, senior and line manager levels
- Use workforce data and employee voice to inform meaningful change
- Embed DEI as part of a core people strategy, rather than a parallel agenda

Our DEI work supports employers to progress beyond fragmented or performative initiatives towards credible, sustainable approaches to workforce inclusion. It is grounded in robust employment research, workforce data, employee voice, and real world organisational understanding.





How IES can support you

A rare combination of research and consultancy, helping organisations translate evidence into practical action.

IES supports organisations wanting to make confident progress on diversity, equality and inclusion through independent evidence on 'what works', deep listening of stakeholders to shape consensus, and tailored guidance on practical action and shared outcomes.

We work collaboratively and proportionately, tailoring our approach to sector context, organisational maturity and available capability. Our aim is to support practical, sustainable change that leaders can stand behind.

Our DEI work has helped organisations to:

- Diagnose workforce inequalities by reviewing policies, processes, and practices
- Review and strengthen DEI strategies and action plans
- Evaluate the impact of existing DEI initiatives and interventions
- Build inclusive leadership capability at senior and line manager levels
- Translate workforce insights into clear priorities and practical change
- Identify emerging risks and opportunities, including those linked to AI, bias and sustainability

Clients choose IES when DEI challenges are complex, contested or high stakes. Our approach is grounded in the latest thinking, a mix of methods and a context sensitive approach, that places emphasis on building internal capability and delivering insights that are practical, proportionate and sustainable.



Case study 1



IES supports The Guardian News and Media with a DEI strategy review

Context

The Guardian Media Group is a global news organisation with a strong public commitment to inclusion, independence and social impact. As part of its ongoing people and culture work, the organisation wanted to reflect critically on the direction of its DEI strategy and ensure it remained effective, credible and fit for a changing internal and external context.

The challenge?

Senior leaders were keen to:

- Benchmark their existing DEI approach against emerging evidence and practice
- Explore how to promote constructive dialogue and engagement across staff networks
- Consider the strengths and limitations of moving beyond identity based approaches toward a more inclusive, organisation wide strategy

The IES approach

Alongside our sister organisation, the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA), we combined a strategic review with employee voice by:

- Deploying IES's diagnostic Policy–Process–Practice (PPP) framework to comprehensively assess progress and opportunities across policies, people processes and everyday practices
- Undertaking 'listening interviews' with senior leaders and staff network representatives to gather lived experience
- Examining up-to-date research and real-world practice on DEI and how to build more inclusive organisations

Impact

Together, the evidence and insights provided leadership with a stronger foundation for reflecting on organisational priorities to refine the DEI strategy. It offered:

- A robust, evidence informed assessment of where DEI activity was working well and where further investment was needed
- A shared language and framework for leadership decision-making and DEI engagement
- Greater confidence at senior leadership levels to clarify priorities and engage constructively with the next phase of DEI strategy

Client feedback:

"A team of approachable experts whose experience and knowledge of the DEI landscape helped provide fresh perspectives for our D&I business priorities and planning. We found the team took the time to understand and engage stakeholders, working collaboratively and providing pragmatic recommendations to future-proof our strategy."

I am pleased we are continuing our relationship with the IPA team as trusted and critical partners on our inclusion and belonging work."

Case study 2



IES supports The Care Quality Commission to tackle workforce inequalities at system scale

Context

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England, it is responsible for registering the providers of health and adult social care services. As part of its statutory responsibilities, CQC wanted to deepen its understanding of workforce inequalities and discrimination across the sectors it regulates, and to consider how regulatory approaches could better support fairness, inclusion and workforce wellbeing.

The challenge?

CQC sought to:

- Understand the systemic, organisational and interpersonal drivers of workforce inequalities
- Capture the lived experience of staff working across very different health and social care settings
- Develop an evidence led picture of how inequalities manifest across protected characteristics and intersecting factors
- Translate insight into practical implications for regulation, inspection and sector improvement

The scale and sensitivity of the task required a robust, inclusive and analytically credible approach.

The IES approach

We led a large scale, mixed methods study designed to capture both breadth and depth of workforce experience. This included:

- Using an intersectionality informed conceptual framework to underpin study design
- A review of national and international evidence on workforce inequalities in health and social care

- Interviews with sector experts, trade bodies, and senior stakeholders
- A bespoke frontline Employee Voice survey, completed by over 800 staff working across all six CQC regulated sectors
- Employer case studies with NHS Trusts to explore effective practice in context

Findings were triangulated across data sources and sense checked with CQC inspectors and senior leaders to ensure relevance and robustness.

Impact

The research provided CQC with:

- A rich, evidence-based understanding of how workforce inequalities and exclusion are experienced at the system level
- Clear insight into the intersectional nature of discrimination, including the compounding effects of ethnicity, gender, health and employment conditions
- Practical recommendations to support regulatory thinking on fairness, rights and workforce inclusion

Client feedback:

"The team at IES were highly professional, responsive and clearly committed to delivering high quality work. Despite some challenges, they remained flexible and solution focused, ultimately producing a final report that was clear, insightful and tailored to our needs."

The next steps

We typically begin with an exploratory conversation to understand your context, priorities and constraints. This helps us identify how IES can add value, and what forms of support would be most useful. Initial discussions are:

- Confidential and informal
- Focused on clarifying challenges rather than signposting solutions
- Designed to help you think through options, evidence and next steps

To start a conversation

Please contact Dr. Meenakshi Krishnan, Principal Research Fellow and Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Research and Consulting at Institute for Employment Studies: meenakshi.krishnan@employment-studies.co.uk

About IES

IES is an applied research institute with expertise in education, employment, and workplace practice that is widely respected for its knowledge, insight and practical support in labour market policy and people management issues. The Institute is a leading centre of evidence-led HR and combines expertise in research with its practical application through our research and consultancy work. Our approach is based on:

- Independence, objectivity and rigour
- Building, sharing and exploiting the evidence base
- Bespoke, tailored to the organisational context
- Systems-driven, considering the whole people system, not just the individual parts
- Building our clients' capabilities rather than their dependence
- Delivering practical, sustainable business benefits