

MINUTES
Affinity Networks

Women and Work APPG Meeting, Tuesday 9 July 2019
1-2pm, IPU Room, Palace of Westminster

Chair: Gillian Keegan MP, Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG

Parliamentarians in attendance:

- Baroness Garden of Frognal
- Baroness Burt of Solihull

Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG, Gillian Keegan convened the meeting as Chair, welcoming attendees and panellists.

Minutes

The first speaker, **Alison Field, Vice Chair of the University of Sussex LGBT+ Staff Network** outlined that at the University of Sussex, there were currently four affinity groups for staff: LGBT+, BAME, disability network as well as trans and non-binary staff network. She said that there were other groups under consideration such as a carers network. As a university, there were also student societies, but these were separate from staff networks. At the University of Sussex, staff networks also include PhD students as well as administrative and support staff and she highlighted that it was important that staff networks were open. In her experience, she said that staff networks allowed staff to support one another and share experiences but also raise awareness. The LGBT+ staff network also works with the Council and their networks as well as the wider education network. She stipulated that one of the benefits of networks was holding institutions to account in a cooperative and collaborative manner allowing the network to feed into wider policy and processes on the ways LGBT staff may be affected.

Samuel Okafor, Global Co-Chair of the RBS Multicultural Network stated that at the Royal Bank of Scotland, there were a number of staff led networks which were run by volunteers. He highlighted that there were currently seven networks and the underlying aim of all of them was to raise awareness of these groups within the bank. In terms of structure, alongside each of the networks, there is a senior executive who sponsors the network and helps to use this relationship to build a more inclusive environment across the bank. He spoke about the importance of having senior management role model some of the ideas that come from these networks. Each network is given a budget to drive inclusivity across the organisation and RBS has already seen many successes from its employee-led networks. There are seven affinity networks at RBS: Women, Rainbow Network, Enable, Families and Carers, Multicultural Network, Armed Forces Network and Aspire. The different groups help make RBS a more inclusive workplace and help develop products that make RBS better for customers too. Networks such as the Families and Carers group help to promote a family friendly culture and provides support new parents and those with caring responsibilities juggle their work life balance. Groups such as the Multicultural Network help to hold RBS accountable to its diversity targets as well as provide solutions to problems, particularly around recruitment and retention. He said that at RBS, these

groups work collaboratively and have the opportunity to meet with human resources and senior management through the network to implement changes across the company.

Paulette Mastin, Chair of the Black Solicitors Network said that from her own experience, she entered the workplace coming from a different cultural and social background to the vast majority of her colleagues at the law firm. She stated that when she first started, her focus was simply to fit in and that she would have benefitted from having a mentor but there were no visible role models. She also said she would have found having an internal or external affinity group very helpful. She said that nowadays, affinity groups are a feature of many companies. She spoke about the benefit of having access to mentorship and to affinity groups, not least because they provide the opportunity to share your experiences with those who may have similar experiences. She stated that as she became more senior in her career, she felt that it was incumbent for her to pay it forward and devote spare time to supporting and nurturing the careers of those in the pipeline, especially as law is not an easy career to establish yourself in.

Paulette said that she was asked to form a city branch of the Black Solicitors Network which was a particular challenge as it was during the financial crisis when black solicitors were disproportionately made redundant compared to other groups so there was clearly a need for this group. The Black Solicitors Network was dedicated to recruitment, retention and promotion of black solicitors across England and Wales and hosted events such as host careers workshops, alliances with law firms and corporates. The network also provided tailored advice to people applying to law firms as well as support for people already in their career to ensure that people continue in their careers and are promoted. She is also co-sponsor of the BAME network at her firm which was created in 2009 and that the network sees itself as an agent of change around recruitment and has seen significant increases in BAME lawyers over the years.

Gillian Keegan MP thanked the panellists for their introductory comments and opened the floor to questions.

Q&A

Charlie Garnett from the Shaw Trust stated that the focus of affinity networks needed to be on retention as for every 100 employers who enter the workplace, 140 are leaving. He noted that the panellists all came from quite larger and well-known organisations and asked how networks can be used to support people in insecure work?

Alison Field said that in many aspects, work in academia is insecure and that this highlights the importance of mentoring, especially in the early stages of careers so that people can see progression ahead of them. She said that at the University of Sussex, there was a mentoring programme for staff members with a protected characteristic and they tried to match them with a mentor with the same characteristic.

Paulette Mastin said that it was important for middle managers and senior leadership to understand the lived experience of individuals across the organisation. She said that for those with caring responsibilities, middle management and senior management needed to role model flexible working because it would help not only women but men and those

from underrepresented backgrounds. She stated that this was the only way there could be a cultural change.

Gillian Keegan MP stated that statistics about in work poverty show that the UK has a much higher percentage of people with low-skills compared to other countries and that this was due to a multitude of reasons. However, she stated that both the opportunity to learn a skill or reskill was critical for the fourth industrial revolution.

Tessa Oversby from Charles Stanley asked if there was any experience of generational affinity groups. She said from her experience, young people entering the workplace who could collaborate with older people who have a lot of knowledge.

Samuel Okafor said that at RBS all the networks were open to people of all ages and there was no particular group focused on age because of this. He said that when the groups were designed to be inclusive regardless of an individual's gender, age etc. He said that ensuring that affinity groups were open to all was a critical part of designing and setting up a group.

Alison Field said that for an affinity network to be effective, it had to be built from the grass roots up. She stated that networks emerged because there is a felt need. She said it was important for networks to work in collaboration with the employer but equally important that it's from the grassroots.

Jennifer Liston-Smith from My Family Care stated that a lot of affinity networks are to do with identity characteristics such as ethnicity but in regards to parents and carers, not only is this part of their identity but it is also part of their everyday life. She said that parents and carers, by definition, are very busy people and when creating a network for parents and carers, it was needed to think carefully about how these groups were designed to work around their schedules. She highlighted the value of online virtual networks to accommodate for this. She also said that it was really important to have a budget for these affinity networks and support for administrative tasks as not to over burden the person who has set it up.

Samuel Okafor said that different groups had different challenges in how they worked and this was particularly true with parents and carers groups, using digital is very important as well as arranging when these sessions would be held. He highlighted the importance of having a budget as well.

Gillian Keegan MP asked what the catalyst was for deciding that these groups needed a budget.

Samuel Okafor said that at RBS, each of the networks have to bid for their budget each year and have to make sure that the money is used well. He highlighted that dedication from staff members is needed.

Paulette Mastin said that when the BAME network was started in 2009, there was immediate buy-in from the top however, one of the issues was that the two chairs were burdened with the work of the group. She highlighted that devolution of responsibility was important to empower committee members to carry forward the objectives. She also stressed the importance of data and that her firm had looked at how many BAME

graduates are coming into the firm. She stressed that interrogating and understanding the data was critical to put in initiatives to change these statistics.

Stef Kenyon from the Association of British Insurers asked what advice the panellists could give to smaller networks in helping them to provide their staff with data and what role can affinity networks play to drive forward the change needed?

Michaela Gibson from AXA said that in AXA, the workforce goes from 17 years old to 70 plus. With regard to networks, she stated that AXA had started to require network co-chairs to have representation from each group and each stage of development in careers. In this way, she found that you hear about the lived experience of a range of ages and stages of their career and ensure that people can work together. She also said that there was a system of reverse mentoring to ensure that knowledge is passed down to younger workers.

Samuel Okafor stated the importance of employer buy-in. He highlighted that affinity groups can start very small but always have the power to influence policy.

Paulette Mastin highlighted that most of the BAME solicitors are concentrated in small firms because the opportunities do not exist as they should in other firms. She highlighted the importance of taking into account different developments such as the ethnicity pay gap reporting and stated that this would have a big influence on companies and their employees. She said that the gender pay gap reporting had already been a success in shining a light on the gaps in business and hoped that the same thing would happen with ethnicity pay reporting. However, she said that extending pay gap reporting to ethnicity was only the first step, there was also the need to look at areas such as retention and promotion to understand the real issues. She stressed the need for this data to form a concrete action plan.

Samuel Okafor said he had seen successes from networks, in changing internal policy and increasing gender and BAME employees through shortlisting females and using diverse panels.

Gillian Keegan MP said that in the last five years, the challenge had changed from a shortage of talent to how to retain talent. She highlighted that a key to retaining talent was making sure people feel comfortable at work.

Alison Field said that they had set a university strategy which extends to 2025 and includes very challenging targets around halving the gender pay gap. She stated that this was a good place to focus in order to deal with other equalities issues. She stated that all aspects of the overall strategy were underpinned with equality and diversity as a core focus.

Samuel Okafor said that he felt confident that in the next five years, businesses will be in a much stronger position around gender and BAME targets and will move away from a focus on these targets and rather, ensuring that the workplace is a comfortable and inclusive place for everyone.

Paulette Mastin said that we now have access to far more statistics, and we cannot ignore the data. She stated that it was important to recognise the issues with the data and engage with it to find solutions for the future.

Gillian Keegan MP closed the session and thanked panellists and guests for their contributions.

Non-parliamentarian attendees

Name	Organisation
Jennifer Liston-Smith	My Family Care
Lenny Rolles	University of Sussex
Mandy Garner	Working Mums
Gillian Nissim	Working Mums
Nina Atwal	Bombardier UK
Jon Di Perna	Bombardier UK
Charlie Garnett	Shaw Trust
Ben Williams	Centrica
Tanya Dolan	IAWA
Tessa Oversby	Charles Stanley
Debbie Petford	BESA
Arjun Gadhvi	Office of Lord Gadhia
Victoria Burham	Skanska
Balvinder Ahluwalia	Gard
Nina Doehmel-Macdonald	Atlas Partners
Yinka Bolaji	RBS
Jamie Black	RBS
Daniel King	RBS
Monica Stancu	Royal Academy of Engineering
Michaela Gibson	AXA
Ayesha Ghafoor	Barclays
Isabelle Green	Fidelio Partners
Rafaella de Freitas	Fashion Roundtable
Eleanor Burkey	Centrica
Ursula Heng	P&G