

An Elephant in the Room

**An Equality and Diversity
Training Manual**

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About the Author

Blair McPherson is Director of Community Services for Lancashire County Council. He was previously Deputy Director of Social Services and before that Assistant Director of a large housing association. He originally trained as a teacher. Blair's passion for equality and diversity arose out of his first management post in inner city Birmingham. He has had a number of articles published in health, housing and social work journals addressing the issues faced by managers and human resource staff related to equality and diversity in the work place.

Acknowledgments

Brenda McPherson continues to be my biggest fan and my severest critic. This manual is all the better for our late night conversations.

A special thanks to Daphne.

How to Use this Manual

The materials in this manual have been designed to be used in small discussion groups.

They have been laid out so that they can be easily photocopied and issued as handouts to each member of the discussion group (this particularly applies to 'questions for group discussion' and 'further information').

Each section comprises:

- A short synopsis that the trainer can use as an introduction to the topic.
- A fuller description of the scenario.
- A series of questions that can be used to stimulate group discussion.
- References to further information so that individuals can explore the issues in more depth (these references are also good background reading for trainers).

This manual covers issues of race, gender, disability, faith, age and sexuality in relation to recruiting a truly representative workforce, getting the best out of a diverse staff group and delivering services to the whole community.

The material can be used equally well as part of an ongoing equality and diversity training programme or as a one-off staff meeting on the subject.

This approach to equality and diversity training has been found to be very effective in engaging staff at all levels because it allows people to relate to their own experience and to issues that they come across in their workplace.

Preface

This training manual is about equality and diversity in the workplace

The material itself and the discussion based approach aim to get people talking openly about race, gender, disability, faith, age and sexuality.

Most people are not racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist or prejudiced against faith groups and they don't deliberately make life harder for people with a disability. However, people are bombarded with negative stereotypes and myths in their daily lives. Their own limited opportunity for mixing with people different to them can lead to ignorance, insensitivity and unthinking prejudice. The material in this manual can be used to challenge these negative stereotypes, myths and prejudices by increasing awareness.

This manual gives managers, trainers and personnel staff the material to raise the profile of equality and diversity in their organisation. Taken as a whole the material in this manual will help:

- Change the way people think and behave at work.
- Help managers be better people managers.
- Help the organisation realise the full benefits of a diverse workforce.
- Increase the awareness and sensitivity of staff towards their colleagues and their customers.
- Create equality champions.

This manual deals with issues familiar to those working in health, housing and social services but will be equally relevant to staff in the private and voluntary sector.

Introduction

'An Elephant in the Room' is an expression to describe a big topic everyone is ignoring, pretending it doesn't exist because it is too scary or too difficult to deal with. Racism, sexism, ageism and homophobia – discrimination – can be a big, scary topic for some people.

The discussion articles, further information and good practice examples in this manual cover equality in the workplace and equality and diversity issues in service delivery.

The manual's starting point is that people need time and opportunity to think about and talk about equality and diversity issues. Managers need to establish a safe environment for this discussion to take place. The discussion articles and good practice examples encourage staff to identify the principles of good practice in equality and diversity; principles that apply whether talking about issues of race, gender, disability, faith, age or sexuality.

Simply talking about equality and diversity will not change the organisation's culture or people's behaviour. This requires everyone to recognise they have a responsibility for equality and diversity, not just managers, human resources and policy staff. Frontline staff need to acknowledge their responsibility for equality in their everyday dealings with service users and colleagues. For example, the way they respond to an enquiry, undertake an assessment, carry out a review or develop links with local community groups. The aim is to establish a culture where everyone takes responsibility for challenging racial and sexual stereotypes, ageist comments and insensitivity towards people with a disability. If we want people to take responsibility then we will need leadership from the top of the organisation, we will need managers to create a safe environment where people feel able to challenge. We will need champions to keep equality and diversity high on the organisation's agenda and we will need awareness training so that people are sensitive to the issues.

The material in this manual covers developing leadership from the top, creating a safe environment for people to challenge and be challenged, the role of equality and diversity champions and ways of raising awareness and sensitivity to equality and diversity issues.

Part One: Establishing Equality in the Workplace

Equality in the workplace is about ensuring people are not treated unfairly or discriminated against as a result of being different due to their race, gender, disability, sexuality, faith or age. This is not restricted to recruitment but extends to how people are treated at work. Do employees feel their manager and their organisation treat them fairly?

If all staff feel valued and respected, if they feel they are treated fairly, then the organisation they work for is unlikely to be characterised by bullying, harassment and discrimination. This requires managers to become more sensitive to people's needs and to improve their leadership skills by gaining insight into how their behaviour affects the people they manage.

'Equality and diversity' is therefore a management and a leadership issue – not something to be left to personnel and training staff.

Section 1 *Leadership and Equality and Diversity* identifies leadership as the missing ingredient when it comes to turning equality and diversity rhetoric into reality. This section also identifies ways of improving managers' people skills through coaching.

Equality in recruitment is covered in Section 2 *Head-hunters, Beauty Parades and Trial by Sherry* where the process for filling senior posts in local councils is critically examined as a way of prompting a discussion about fair recruitment processes.

In Section 3 *Supermarkets Show us the Way* the issues involved in recruiting staff who have a disability are identified. By using the example of people with a learning disability rather than a wheelchair user it is much more obvious that the barriers to recruitment are not physical but negative attitudes and inflexible recruitment policies. The discussion article shows how recruitment practices can be adjusted and how colleagues can be won over.

Most people would recognise it is unfair as well as illegal to turn someone down for a job or deny them a service because they are black, a woman or disabled. So how is it that there are so few black managers, senior women managers and disabled employees in health, housing and social care organisations? The answer is not overt discrimination but the result of stereotypes, myths, lack of awareness, ignorance and prejudice. To address

this situation an organisation needs an equality and diversity training framework such as the one provided in Good Practice A *Developing an equality and diversity training framework for the whole organisation*. Such a framework will equip staff to manage a diverse workforce, deliver services to all sections of the community and promote best practice in relation to recruitment.

Part Two: Realising the Benefits of a Diverse Workforce

To realise the full benefits of a diverse workforce the organisation needs to identify the complex reasons why women, and people from black and minority ethnic groups, are under-represented in senior management posts. These patterns cannot be simply down to overt discrimination but require recognition that each individual experiences the world in a different way to you. This can affect their approach to seeking employment and promotion.

An organisation that values diversity, and employs people from a range of different backgrounds and experiences, recognises that it broadens and strengthens both the teams within it and the organisation as a whole. People who are different may bring something new to the team or organisation but only if their manager and the organisation values what they have to offer.

A well functioning and diverse workforce requires all staff to develop a sensitivity towards their colleagues by gaining knowledge and insight into how people who are different to you experience the world of work. This needs to be recognised as a two-way process in which the needs and perceptions of all people are identified.

Section 4 *Losing Balance on the Ladder* examines the reasons given by women and black staff for not applying for posts for which they have the qualifications and experience. It is clear that this has more to do with confidence than ability. In the case of black staff this is confidence in the recruitment process and for women it is a belief that they should feel confident they can do every aspect of the job before they apply. The implications of this for recruitment and staff development are examined. Good Practice B *Balanced interview panels* is an example of a measure taken to improve confidence in the recruitment process by the introduction of interview panels balanced in terms of gender and race.

If it is difficult to recruit black managers because the recruitment pool is so small then the alternative is to grow your own. Encouraging aspiring

managers from under-represented groups is the aim of the training event described in Good Practice C *Climbing the ladder of success*.

An innovative approach to recruiting more black and minority ethnic staff is described in Good Practice D *How to recruit more black and ethnic minority staff*. This approach is based on establishing a database for those individuals who have expressed an interest in working in the organisation which is then used to deliver a direct mailshot of any relevant vacancies. In this way, details of people who applied but were unsuccessful are captured. Such individuals are often discouraged by their lack of success and think quite wrongly that there is no point in applying for further vacancies within the same organisation. This is a misunderstanding of how the recruitment process works but highlights the need to provide feedback to applicants, even those not invited to interview.

Having recruited staff from black and minority ethnic groups it is necessary to recognise that they may feel isolated as the only black person in the team or office and therefore need some additional peer group support. An example of such a black workers' support group is given in Good Practice E *Black workers development group*.

Part Three: Equality and Diversity as it Applies to Service Delivery

Equality and diversity is not restricted to employment, it also covers service delivery. Are people less likely to receive a service if they are black, gay, disabled, old, young or of a particular faith? Does the service offered take account of differences arising out of race, gender, disability, faith, age and sexuality or is everyone treated as if we all have the same needs, interests, circumstances and beliefs? Equality and diversity is not about treating everyone the same. The task is to help managers and staff understand this and explore what this means for their team, their service and their place of work.

Applying equality and diversity to service delivery is what managers say they struggle with most. Section 5 *Faith, Tolerance and the Acceptance of Diversity* recognises that managers often feel confused by the apparent contradictions when the Muslim community or the Gay community don't speak with one voice. The section examines the difference between faith and culture as a way of explaining the apparent contradictions and the implications for consulting about how best to provide services.

One of the most commonly expressed concerns is how can a white manager like me know what services to provide to people of a different race or faith. The same comment could of course be made about being an able-bodied heterosexual. The answer is the same – ask! In Section 6 *Chinese Lesson* the setting up of a culturally appropriate service and the issues it raised are discussed. Information and guidance on providing culturally appropriate care is given in Good Practice F *Culturally appropriate care*.

Specific guidance to managers is offered in Good Practice G *What can I do as a manager?*

To date, most of the attention around equality and diversity has focused on issues of race, gender and disability. Very little attention has been paid to issues of sexuality and its implications for providing health, housing and care services. Section 7 *Old and Gay* discusses Age Concern's research and its implications for meeting the health, housing and social care needs of older people who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transsexual. It also provides an opportunity to examine the general issues of sexuality in service delivery. Good Practice H *Civil partnerships and sexuality* is an example of how to provide a sensitive and appropriate service in relation to arrangements for civil partnerships.

Part Four: Creating the Opportunities for Staff to Challenge and be Challenged

Getting people to talk openly about race, religion, gender, disability, ageism and sexuality involves creating a safe environment for people to say what they are really thinking and about creating appropriate opportunities for people to be challenged or supported. This will involve changing the way some people think and behave at work by identifying the questions people really want to ask but are reluctant to for fear of being labelled ageist, racist, sexist or homophobic. It means identifying stereotypes, myths and prejudices and challenging them.

Most people are not racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or insensitive to people with disability, but they are bombarded with negative stereotypes and myths in their daily lives. If they have limited opportunities for mixing with people different to them this can reinforce ignorance, insensitivity and unthinking prejudice. Opportunities need to be created to challenge these negative stereotypes, myths and prejudices.

Section 8 *Creating a Safe Place* identifies what managers need to do if they want staff to discuss issues like race, faith and sexuality openly. This involves making it easier for people to raise issues of discrimination without fear of being labelled a troublemaker. It also involves having appropriate support arrangements for managers and not automatically labelling them bad managers if they are the subject of a harassment, bullying or racism claim.

Raising the profile of equality and diversity issues and encouraging people to talk openly involves finding innovative ways of encouraging staff to say what they are really thinking, to get the hot issues out into the open. This gives the organisation/senior managers the opportunity to challenge myths and explain policies.

Section 9 *Challenging Racism by Letting People Have Their Say* shows how an organisation used its intranet to get these questions out in the open – and answered – however uncomfortable the questions might be. A lot of the questions came from a two-day equality and diversity awareness course, fuller details of which are set out in Section 14 *An Equality and Diversity Training Course for Managers*. Some of the more controversial ‘frequently asked questions’, along with the answers, are to be found under Section 13 *Frequently Asked Questions*.

To promote good practice and keep equality and diversity high on the organisation’s agenda requires equality champions. People at all levels within the organisation who are prepared to put time and energy to raising awareness around equality and diversity issues. In Section 10 *We are the champions* tackles the inertia and lack of passion that characterises most organisations and groups set up to address equality issues. Unlike nominated representatives, champions identify themselves, they don’t represent a team or service area; what they have in common is a commitment to equality and diversity. The section explains what champions do on a day-to-day basis, how they were identified and how they are supported.

Throughout the manual, material has been introduced which provides an opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes, myths and ignorance. Ageism and homophobia are issues that are all too often neglected in health, housing and social care services. Ageism is widespread in society. It would be naïve to think it was not present in health, housing and social care services.

In Section 11 *I Hope I Die Before I Get Old*, a survey to identify managers' attitudes to old age is discussed. Some of the managers in the survey worked in specialist services for older people, others worked in a range of services. The aim of the survey was to raise awareness about ageism and encourage discussion amongst senior and middle managers. A simple and effective technique was used to get a quick and high response rate. A one-question questionnaire was sent by e-mail to 71 senior and middle managers working in a range of services. The e-mail required managers to select one of six responses. Sixty-four replies were received.

When it comes to sexuality does the number of gay characters in popular television programmes reflect a change in attitude towards gay people? Is this reflected in the workplace? In Section 12 *Gay May be Trendy But Have Attitudes Really Changed?* the outcome of a workplace survey is used to stimulate discussion and challenge stereotypes. In the survey staff are asked to respond to two workplace scenarios, one involving an invitation from a gay colleague to go for a drink after work and the other involving a male colleague who announces he intends to live as a woman. In the further reading suggestions the website for Stonewall is given. Stonewall offers advice and support to organisations in terms of training and awareness-raising around the issues of sexuality and advice on how to support gay employees.

The material in this training manual will allow groups of staff to explore equality and diversity issues and give staff a greater awareness and sensitivity about those who are different to themselves. It will assist an organisation to create a safe environment in which to challenge and be challenged, to develop equality and diversity champions and to reinforce the leadership role in equality and diversity.