June 2020

Workplace stories

Case studies prepared for the Equality Commission NI

Ipsos MORI Northern Ireland

Ipsos MORI

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Background and methodology

Background and methodology

Research objectives

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's (ECNI) statement on key inequalities in employment in Northern Ireland highlights that 'prejudicial attitudes both within and outside the workplace are experienced by people with disabilities, women, Trans people, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, people from minority ethnic groups, migrant workers and those of different religious beliefs'. ECNI has sought to obtain further evidence to improve practices on harmonious working environments across the range of equality grounds.[1]

The Commission has launched an initiative to better understand workplace inequality, through the 'Shaping Welcoming and Inclusive Workplaces' programme, which to date has involved a literature review and online surveys among employers and employees.

ECNI commissioned Ipsos MORI to compile a series of case studies based on the themes arising from these information gathering exercises. The key objectives of this project were to:

- Consider and apply the themes identified from the programme of work to date, to identify suitable participants.

- Liaise with the Commission on the identification of participants for the case studies from the employees and employers who consented to being re-contacted.

- Undertake appropriate methods of contact to interview participants, ensuring appropriate permissions are obtained for the Commission to publish and promote case studies, along with additional permissions to be named and/or photographed if required.

- Provide the most appropriate case studies, set within background information gathered from the identified thematic areas, so that they may be used as examples for advice, guidance and training purposes.

- Deliver the case studies in a format which is accessible, according to disability access standards, for website publication.

Methodology

To achieve these objectives, Ipsos MORI researchers produced 15 case studies (10 for employees and 5 for employers) utilising an interviewing methodology. The case studies explore the key themes emerging from the Commission's quantitative and qualitative research, focusing on positive examples of where a welcoming and inclusive working environment has been promoted through experience, change or the application of good practice. The Commission shared a database containing the details of those participants who had given consent to be re-contacted. An advance email was sent to these participants by the Commission before the database was shared with Ipsos MORI, to give participants the opportunity to opt out of being contacted further.

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[1] https://www.equalityni.org/Delivering-Equality/Addressing-inequality/Employment/Research-investigations/Welcoming-and-inclusive-workplaces

The case studies explore the views of a mix of employees and employers, within the scope of the available database. The depth interviews were conducted over telephone or video conference due to fieldwork taking place during the COVID-19 global pandemic and a period of lockdown imposed by the UK government. A phenomenological approach was adopted for the project to allow the lived experience of the participants to be shared and explored freely. Due to this approach, the discussion guide was very flexible and loosely structured, with time prioritised to build rapport with the participant and make them as comfortable as possible before asking them directly about their experiences. Interviews lasted for an hour and copies of the discussion guides are appended to this document.

Given the potential for sensitive issues to be covered in the interview, there were multiple stages of consent and measures in place to safeguard participants. In line with recommendations made by Ipsos MORI's ethics committee and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), participants were provided with an information sheet containing additional signposting to support services, Ipsos MORI's privacy notice and a consent form upon initial contact. Verbal consent to participate was obtained at the outset of the interview and again at the end of the interview, where participants were asked to confirm their preference for the case study being written anonymously or attributed to them and their organisation. Once written up, the case study was shared with the participant for final approval before being shared with the Commission. Any participants who wished to remain anonymous are given a pseudonym in the case study. This is indicated in the text and marked with an asterisk (*) in the title for ease of identification.

Please note, there is one completed case study missing from this document as we are awaiting approval from the participant before it can be shared.

Thematic scope

The case studies were developed in line with the thematic scope established for this project, based on the key findings from the online surveys. An overview of the thematic scope is provided below, showing the aspects of workplace experience which underpin the employer and employee stories.

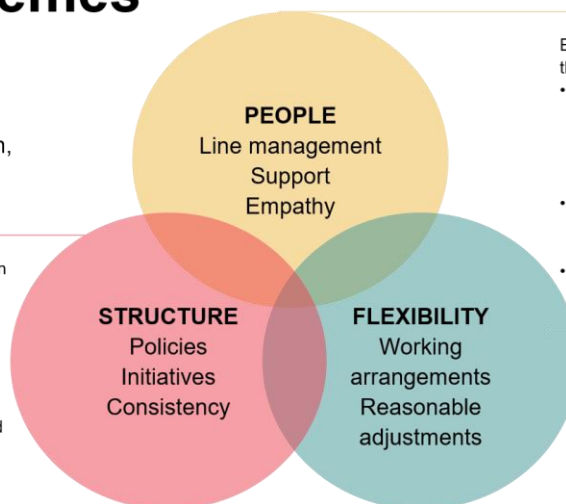**Figure 1.1: Thematic scope for employee case studies**

Employee themes

Potential demographic context:
Gender, age, disability, caring responsibilities, mental ill health, political opinion, sexual orientation, trade union membership.

PEOPLE
Line management
Support
Empathy

Exploring employees' experiences in relation to the people they work with, e.g.:
- Line managers providing support, assistance and guidance. If possible, an example of a line manager supporting an employee following an experience of unwanted behaviour (11 cases in the data).
- Support from other team members, resulting in a more inclusive environment and positive work culture.
- Employees being shown empathy during a time of personal difficulty.

Exploring employees' experiences in relation to the organisation's policies, illustrating times when the actions of the organisation have been consistent with those of an inclusive workplace, e.g.:
- Where policies have been consistently and fairly applied to all staff.
- Workplace initiatives which have helped to promote inclusivity and wellbeing.
- Times when formal procedures have been followed to resolve an issue (i.e. unwanted behaviour: there are 21 cases in the current dataset, 5 of which followed formal company procedures to resolve).

STRUCTURE
Policies
Initiatives
Consistency

FLEXIBILITY
Working arrangements
Reasonable adjustments

Exploring employees' experiences when managing work/life balance or dealing with individual circumstances, e.g.:
- Flexible working hours.
- Working from home.
- Changes to the work environment to allow an employee with a disability to work safely and comfortably.
- On-site facilities for those in need of them (e.g. breastfeeding).

Source: ECNI 'welcoming and inclusive workplaces' online survey results | Base: 446 employees willing to be re-contacted

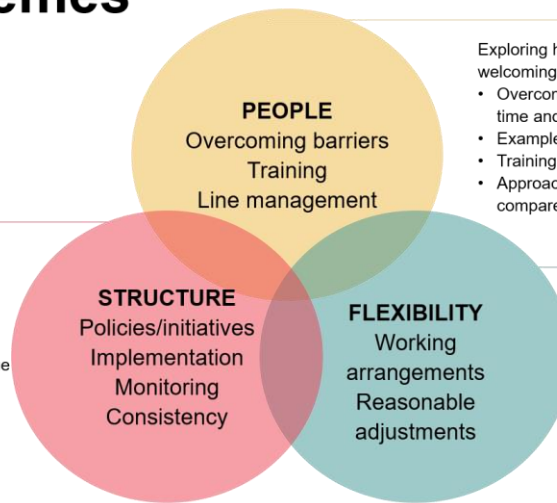**Ipsos MORI**

Figure 1.2: Thematic scope for employer case studies

Employer themes

Potential business context:
Public/private/charity sector, industry, business size and unionised/non-unionised.

PEOPLE
Overcoming barriers
Training
Line management

Exploring how people in the business have promoted a welcoming and inclusive workplace, e.g.:
• Overcoming barriers (staff attitudes, lack of knowledge, time and resources).
• Examples of leadership and impact.
• Training that has been implemented and the impact of this.
• Approach to line management (this will be useful to compare with the employee experience of line managers).

Exploring the **type**, **nature**, **implementation** and **monitoring** of policies in place, such as:
• Equal opportunities and/or diversity.
• Recruitment and selection.
• Harassment and/or dignity at work.
• **Flexible working** (this will be a key one due to its importance for employees).
• Reasonable adjustments for disabled people.
• Affirmative action and/or positive action to promote equality of opportunity.
• Stakeholder engagement/consultation policy.
• Initiatives (quiet rooms, charity events, LGBT ally programmes, company values).
• Measures against unwanted behaviour and impact of this.

STRUCTURE
Policies/initiatives
Implementation
Monitoring
Consistency

FLEXIBILITY
Working arrangements
Reasonable adjustments

Exploring employers' understanding and implementation of policies/initiatives in response to individual circumstances, e.g.:
• Flexible working hours.
• Working from home.
• Changes to the work environment to allow an employee with a disability to work safely and comfortably.

Source: ECNI 'welcoming and inclusive workplaces' online survey results | Base: 38 employers willing to be re-contacted

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The remainder of this document contains the 15 individual case studies produced for this project.

02

Employee stories

Adam, Cara-Friend

Background

Cara-Friend has been supporting the LGBTQ+ community in Northern Ireland since 1974. They provide regional LGBTQ+ youth groups across Northern Ireland, one-to-one support for individuals, LGBTQ+ awareness training for professionals and volunteers working in a variety of different areas, community development, the LGBT Switchboard NI helpline service, and the LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools Programme as well as a range of policy, advocacy and campaigning initiatives.

Adam Murray has worked for Cara-Friend for 12 years. In his experience, Cara-Friend has provided a welcoming and inclusive workplace environment for him as an employee. He described their intentional balance between structure, policy and procedures with a culture of flexibility and trust as creating a 'family environment' in which he felt 'confident' and 'secure'.

People

Generally, Adam believes that the relaxed environment created by management and employees alike has made him feel welcomed and included. Family environment, welcome and inclusivity are in their DNA as an organisation:

> **"Working for an LGBT charity- that message of inclusivity, of equality, of respecting difference, of finding the things that unite us- that is deeply ingrained in the work that we do."**

Effective line management has been fundamental to Adam's experience. At Cara-Friend, line management is governed by policy and structure, which builds confidence and trust. They have a monthly line management questionnaire which is produced in collaboration with the line manager and employee. This covers well-being, inclusivity and workplace relations as well as performance. The employee is given a chance to review the report produced before it is filed and make any amendments. This means the employee has evidence, should an issue come up down the line.

> **"This [management approach] does instil a sense of confidence in people."**

The management staff also demonstrate good leadership. Adam's boss has an open-door policy which he feels confident to make use of should an issue arise, either pertaining to employment or workplace experience. In Adam's view, this leadership approach helps halt any issues quickly, avoiding the need for any escalation. This effective leadership helps create a culture of inclusivity which subsequently 'diffuses' throughout the whole organisation.

> **"[The open-door policy] stops most issues becoming bigger issues because people are given an opportunity to vent, knowing that it's in confidence."**

Structure

In Cara-Friend, policies and procedures are valued and prioritised. They defer to NICVA as the 'gold standard' for policies and procedures in the community and voluntary sector. Additionally, the Cara-Friend board of directors annually review, amend, and update all policies and procedures where appropriate. This provides a reputable baseline for company policies which in turn fosters a sense of security among employees. Consequently, Adam feels confident that their management are held to account by another organisation.

"People see that, and it gives us confidence that the management aren't just making things up arbitrarily… there's a bigger picture in play."

As Adam explained, it is not enough for an organisation to have effective policies and procedures in place. Rather, these must be embedded throughout the organisation. At Cara-Friend, policies and procedures are actively referred to and employees are proactively encouraged to familiarise themselves with them so that they are aware of their rights and entitlements as employees. Additionally, they have recently introduced a regular contract review process. This is an opportunity for employees to proactively review their role description, discuss their rights and entitlements, and contribute to refining these. For Adam, this has given him ownership over his role and enhances his sense of value as an employee.

"It gives me a lot of confidence to see that these things are taken seriously… it gives me a great sense of satisfaction to be part of that process."

Adam is a member of a trade union and this provides a window into a wider movement and enables him to learn lessons which he can then bring to his employers. For example, he learned recently about steps the NICS are taking to create mental health positive workplaces, by introducing quiet rooms and training mental health first aiders.

Flexibility

While policies and procedures are adhered to and applied consistently in Cara-Friend, there is flexibility in the way these are implemented. As Adam explained, ownership, flexibility and trust are key to creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace.

Adam shared an illuminating example of such flexibility in action, describing an occasion in which his management allowed him to take 3 months off to attend a meditation retreat, and then take another 6 months off to return to the same retreat the following year. When he approached them with his request, the organisation responded flexibly and worked with him to 'make it happen'- finding someone to cover his post and demonstrating their prioritisation of employee wellbeing and the value placed on external interests, beliefs and passions.

At Cara-Friend there is a clear and effective balance between flexibility and boundaries. While structure, targets and performance are important, employee wellbeing is prioritised concurrently. For Adam, this balanced approach helps provide structure and clear goals, while also enhancing his sense of feeling valued as an individual. Consequently, he feels enthusiastic about his role and confident in his employer.

"What makes Cara-Friend a very good employer is that it is very flexible and very accommodating, but there is a baseline of policies and procedures which are held to. They're not used as a whip, but they are the bed rock."

When asked what advice he would give his younger self to improve his experience in the workplace, Adam said:

"Work is such a huge part of your day to day life. You should really place a high value on workplace balance and how much you get out of work. If you're desperately unhappy in your workplace and you don't feel valued and included… start looking for other places where you'll feel valued and you wake up and think 'ok, let's go to work!'"

*Carol, NICS

Background

Carol is married, with two grown-up children and has been working for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) for 30 years, starting as an Administration Assistant and now working as a Staff Officer. Carol began working in the Northern Ireland Civil Service at the age of 20 and has seen changes to the organisation over the years, having moved departments upon promotion during her career. Carol feels "well-looked" after working in the NICS and is particularly happy to be able to work flexibly.

Following the successful completion of exams, she has progressed to more senior roles within the organisation, and during her time working for different departments she has gained an understanding of the variability in good practices within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Since taking part in the online survey, Carol has moved to a new department.

This case study relates to Carol's experiences in the role she was in at the time of completing the online survey (March 2019). Please note, for privacy reasons the name of the employee has been changed and does not relate to anyone within the organisation of the same name.

People

In general, Carol's sees her workplace as a welcoming environment and explains how her line manager at the time of completing the survey was very flexible with her, which was a very positive experience.

> **"He was extremely happy to be flexible, working from home. And a lot of the work, again, the nature of the work sort of allowed you to do it from home no problem. Just very welcoming, and made you feel part of the team, made you feel appreciated. And his manager was very much the same."**

This contrasts with a previous post within the NICS. She felt that her manager then had little power to do anything to resolve an issue she had with her role. Reflecting on this experience, Carol feels that some managers are not confident or comfortable to deal with individual staff issues outside of their official remit of responsibilities.

Having a line manager who is confident to act in their employee's best interests, while at the same time considering the needs of the organisation, is key to a welcoming and inclusive workplace, from Carol's experience.

Flexibility and trust

Carol has experienced some very positive attitudes towards flexible working which have been fundamental to her overall work-life balance. She believes that a positive attitude towards family fosters an open culture around flexible working.

> **"They had a very positive attitude towards your family, you know, having to have a family and work."**

Feeling trusted by line managers to carry out her job to the best of her ability while working flexibly is something that has given Carol great confidence. This has also enabled her to be more available to her family, for example, when her daughter was completing her A level examinations.

> **"You were trusted to be at home, or just get on with it. It's very empowering to feel trusted. To not feel that you have to explain yourself all the time, that's good for your confidence."**

Carol recognises that some jobs are more suited to flexible working or working from home than others depending on the needs of her organisation. But when flexible working is supported, Carol has felt more positive about her role and more willing to go the extra mile for her employer, highlighting the mutual benefit of this approach to the organisation and employee.

> **"Whenever it works and you do get supported, it makes you feel brilliant."**

Consistency

Due to the scale of the Northern Ireland Civil Service as an organisation, Carol has experienced different management styles in various departments and feels that some managers go "by the book" to a greater or lesser extent. From Carol's perspective, this highlights a lack of consistency across departments, which in turn has impacted on her experience as an employee.

> **"There's a sort of different culture in different departments and then it really does come down to your own line management at the end of the day."**

Carol believes that there can be different cultures in different departments – with some working environments more "easy-going" than others, which is ultimately determined by more senior management. In some departments there is more recognition of the importance of family and flexible working, whereas other department heads take a more "work comes first" approach.

> **"I have had some, so positive experiences, but I've also had some not so good experiences."**

For a workplace to be welcoming and inclusive, Carol suggests that it is particularly important for everyone to be treated in the same way and given equal opportunities, while recognising the unique circumstances of all employees.

*Jenny, NICS

Background

Jenny has worked in the Northern Ireland Civil Service for 10 years, moving department once during her time in the organisation. She started her career in accountancy in the Republic of Ireland before moving home to Northern Ireland and joining the NICS. She has two young children and since completing the online survey (in March 2019) she has taken a career break to care for her family, with the intention of returning to her previous role.

Jenny feels that the NICS are a great organisation to work for and given the large scale of the organisation she is particularly happy that it is a flexible place to work.

Jenny explains that there is a lot of "scope" within the civil service to move or progress into different roles or in different directions, which she considers to be a positive thing for employees. Jenny is happy with her role and hasn't chosen to pursue a different direction within the organisation.

"I suppose due to family or personal circumstances I haven't chosen to move around as much as I might have done."

Please note, for privacy reasons the name of the employee has been changed and does not relate to anyone within the organisation of the same name.

Structure

Jenny had a very positive experience returning to work after her maternity leave. Her employer ensured that appropriate facilities were in place for her as a breastfeeding mother. The flexible nature of working patterns within the organisation, allowed her to comfortably avail of these facilities.

"I was able to use a private room to pump in during my lunch hour, because the civil service has flexi time, I was able to have as much time as I needed for that during the working day. And storing facilities for the milk and washing facilities [were provided]."

Jenny had looked into the details of the organisation's breastfeeding policy before going on maternity leave and she emphasises that all of the organisation's policies are made freely available to staff. The NICS have specific policies in place for breastfeeding mothers, which she believes is not always the case with other employers.

"The civil service does have written policies about breastfeeding, and I know that's not the case with many employers. I was able to take full advantage of those facilities."

While Jenny was proactive in researching issues around breastfeeding in advance of returning to work, she feels that not all women are aware of the policy on breastfeeding in the workplace. To ensure that other employees have similar positive experiences, Jenny feels that perhaps Human Resources could let expectant mothers know that there is support available for breastfeeding mothers, so they have this knowledge before they go on maternity leave.

As a member of an online support network for mothers, Jenny is aware that not all workplaces are as accommodating as the NICS, with many employers failing to have policies in place for breastfeeding mothers who request facilities to be put in place.

"I am part of a breastfeeding community. We share advice and support and it's a problem that I know a lot of people have had going back to work. They're very concerned about how their employer is going to react when they ask for facilities."

Jenny recognises that not all new mothers have the positive experience that she has had and feels that if these women are not supported by their employers it could result in some not feeling able to return to work.

To support the general wellbeing of their staff, Jenny feels that employers can take a positive step by availing of the advice and support offered by a range of organisations, such as from breastfeeding associations and health services, to learn how they can best provide facilities for breastfeeding mothers.

"There's lots of help out there for employers. There's breastfeeding associations and the health service associations that have advice for employers about what they should be providing and how they can provide it and how they can support breastfeeding mothers on their return to work."

People

In Jenny's opinion, she was well supported by her line managers in making a smooth transition back to work, with all the necessary facilities in place upon her return. Her managers also facilitated a phased return, allowing Jenny to work reduced hours, which she feels was an 'excellent support'.

"I was very well supported in the post I was in at that time, when I was pregnant. And going back to work I actually changed post so I could go part-time. Which again is a great support for breastfeeding mothers. It was an excellent experience – I was very lucky."

Jenny feels that she is working for an organisation that gives their employees the opportunity to "fulfil their potential" and supports individuals to progress in their line of work in whichever way is appropriate to them. The Northern Ireland Civil Service is such a large organisation with many branches; however, Jenny believes that they are effectively looking out for the wide range of needs of their staff body.

"supporting the rights and needs of different groups of people…….and very comprehensive procedures and policies that cover literally anything you can think of. [The organisation] are very much protecting and supporting diversity and inclusion."

When asked what advice she would give her younger self to improve her experience in the workplace, Jenny said:

"To make yourself aware of what support is out there. Both inside and outside the workplace - and to avail of it. To make use of policies that are in place, to ensure that are applied as they were intended."

Steven, NICS

Background

Steven has worked for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) for 20 years, moving department a number of times during his time in the organisation. He started his civil service career in the Department of Agriculture before moving to the Laganside Courts in Belfast. Following this, Steven spent 11 years in the Child Support Agency (now known as the Child Maintenance Service) before taking up his current post within the Land and Property Service.

At an earlier stage in his life, Steven sustained an injury which permanently damaged his eyesight. Throughout his career, securing reasonable adjustments has been challenging for Steven, which he attributes to a lack of awareness towards disability issues in the workplace. However, in his current role, Steven has been made to feel supported and included within the organisation. Reasonable adjustments have been made which allow him to do work safely and productively.

> **"The management and those within the organisation have been very supportive. Although sometimes they do make assumptions, 99% of the time their intentions are good".**

Structure

Steven explained that within the NICS policies are in place to ensure that those with disabilities are supported and included and have access to reasonable adjustments. While in other branches he has worked in, these policies have not always been adhered to, in his current branch policies are implemented consistently which has enhanced his sense of security.

The Workable Programme, funded by the Department for Communities and signed up to by individual employers, has been an invaluable support to Steven over the years. He has been provided a support worker who can make recommendations if he needs adjustments and can advocate on his behalf. Even though Steven is able to speak to his own management if he needs additional support, he feels confident that his support worker can liaise with his employer if necessary. The Workable Programme have also provided training for a software package Steven uses to enhance his vision, have taught him to touch type and have facilitated relevant workshops and events.

> **"Somebody that's there to support you and reassure you… it's actually been invaluable to me over the years."**

People

Steven described a culture of leadership within his organisation that has permeated throughout the workforce to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Steven highlighted how important it is for management not only to respond to requests for additional support or reasonable adjustments, but to sensitively anticipate what these needs might be. Recently, during discussions with a senior member of his team about working arrangements during COVID-19 lockdown, they suggested that Steven should be provided with a laptop which has the software Steven uses pre-installed. Steven described his sense of comfort that management proactively anticipate his needs without him having to ask.

Steven also described other examples of how management have anticipated his needs and ensured his inclusion. When a former manager was considering changing arrangements to the seating plans in the

office, they consulted with Steven first before announcing it to the wider team so that he could choose the desk which was most suitable for his needs.

> **"It made me feel that…that they had taken into account that there were needs without me having to go and challenge them every time, which would have happened [in a previous role]."**

In another example, management adjusted his processing targets for housing benefit claims to something that he could reasonably achieve in a day. Steven highlighted that this made him feel included given that this was anticipated rather than him having to ask for it to happen.

> **"They adjusted my target, without being asked, to what I was capable of doing in a day because I'm a wee bit slower at processing because of my eyesight."**

Illustrating how Steven's colleagues are also proactive, a former manager once asked him for his advice on a presentation for a training session she was delivering. While Steven was not attending the session, she wanted it to be accessible and easy to read for those who may have visual impairments. Steven gave her advice on the font sizes, contrast and amount of information that appeared on screen.

> **"She actually included me in the process… that was an exceptional sense of awareness."**

Such leadership in terms of welcome and inclusion has permeated throughout the organisation. Steven explained that seemingly small things that people do can make a huge difference for him, such as a colleague reading out a report to him, someone pointing to a screen with a pen rather than their finger, or someone walking over to show him something rather than pointing to it from a distance.

> **"These are really wee subtle things, but they do make a big difference… it makes me feel that people aren't just dismissing that there is a problem."**

When asked what advice he would give his younger self to improve his experience in the workplace, Steven said:

"Don't be so reluctant to ask for things and to point things out but to do it in a way that it is recorded rather than letting things build up to a point where it becomes confrontational."

Sean, Disability Action

Background

Sean studied law at Queens University Belfast and worked briefly in the education sector. He started work in Disability Action in 2011 and has progressed over the years to become one of the most senior disabled people in the organisation.

Sean has experienced a culture of inclusion within Disability Action that he is passionate about other organisation's emulating, which he believes is possible with the appropriate adjustments in place to allow disabled talent to advance.

Workplace culture

Sean described the culture within Disability Action as very welcoming and inclusive. A culture of welcome is set by intentional recruitment practices which seek to broadly reflect the society in which they operate. A large majority of staff within the organisation are people with disabilities. From Sean's perspective, this is very visible and noticed immediately by those who come into the building, thus promoting a message of inclusion.

> **"Culture within the organisation is very important, and it's hard to quantify that but it is something that people comment on."**

This culture of inclusion is also advanced by the physical space within Disability Action as their building is one of the most accessible in Northern Ireland. As an organisation they have endeavoured to go beyond the minimum requirements of accessibility such as wider doors and lifts, to also consider the importance of appropriately placed handrails and tactile surfaces. As an employee, these measures add to Sean's sense of confidence and inclusion within the organisation.

Sean also highlighted that the some of the organisation's strategic decision-making processes advance a positive culture of inclusion. Disability Action have a Strategic Advisory Group made up of disabled people within their staff and external members who scrutinise decisions made by senior management and advocate for and on behalf of disabled people. For Sean, this process goes beyond a 'tick-box' exercise and gives him confidence that his organisation is constantly reviewing decisions to ensure that there are no barriers to disabled people.

Line management

Sean's experience of effective line management has hugely impacted his sense of inclusion and progression within Disability Action.

> **"[My line manager] absolutely espoused the idea of advancing disabled talent."**

This particular line manager was quick and proactive to ensure that reasonable adjustments were in place to allow Sean to thrive within his role and remove any barriers that could affect his progression. Sean's line manager did not only want him to be able to do his current role effectively, but actively sought out opportunities for his advancement within the organisation by putting long-term development plans in place for his career trajectory. In Sean's experience, this approach is not common in many other organisations in Northern Ireland as many employers do not move beyond employing and retaining disabled staff to thinking strategically about the idea of how they can progress and advance.

"A lot of disabled people, particularly when they are starting their career, can be knocked back and lose their confidence. [My line manager] was an absolute master of giving people the sense of 'what is the bigger goal here?' Any disabled person, like anyone else in the world, has goals and aspirations- so where do they want to go in their career? It's conversation that doesn't happen an awful lot and it's something that [my line manager] was very open to with all of her staff."

The attitude and culture set by this particular manager permeated throughout the organisation and positively impacted Sean's own progression pathway within Disability Action.

"That culture of bigger thinking, of understanding the specific talent sets that disabled people have …. has allowed me to progress into areas that otherwise mightn't have happened."

Policy and procedure

Generally, Sean feels supported by and proud of the policies and procedures in place in Disability Action, including sickness absence policy, flexible working and the formal recording of reasonable adjustments.

Disability Action's approach to reasonable adjustments is to go beyond the minimum to consider every possible option for a disabled individual. For Sean, his reasonable adjustment plan included the ability to start his work day at a flexible time, the provision of I.T equipment so that he could work from home and lessen the burden on his energy throughout the day, the ability to take extra breaks during the day if he needed to, and putting mechanisms in place to ensure that meetings were arranged close to his office.

"We look at absolutely everything when it comes to reasonable adjustments… we go beyond providing a desk and a chair."

In Sean's experience, this approach goes beyond policy and procedure and has become part of the lifeblood of the organisation. Employees are encouraged to have open conversations with disabled colleagues to find out what working arrangements work best for them and their needs and then work to ensure that these are met.

"When you have a conversation… those things come out very quickly and people feel comfortable to share what they need – it then just becomes common practice."

When asked what advice he would give his younger self to improve his experience in the workplace, Sean said:

"Don't stop looking up. There is a tendency in society to put certain ceilings in place. We're all very conscious of the glass ceiling that exists for others, including women, but that very much exists for disabled people too. Those around you, not meaning anything negative by it, can influence that as well in a way that can hold you in that position. Whereas, if you keep looking up, and you keep working, there's no reason why you can't get to where you want to be."

*Rachel, NICS

Background

Rachel has worked for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) for more than 30 years and has worked in different departments within the organisation during this time. She was initially attracted to a career with the NICS due to the stability and flexibility the organisation has to offer.

Rachel is happy in her current role and feels that the organisation has positively changed in recent years, with new office set-ups meaning that colleagues work more closely together.

Please note, for privacy reasons the name of the employee has been changed and does not relate to anyone within the organisation of the same name.

People

In Rachel's opinion, over the past 5 years her department has become more 'open', compared to a time where staff working at different grades would have worked in separate areas of the office. Rachel feels this is a positive thing as it allows for more collaborative working and makes employees feel part of a 'team'.

> **"Because now, there isn't a case of 'you're a manager – you're stuck in an office down the corridor'. The section would be together, but it would that everybody's sitting together, no matter what grade you are. And it means that there's everyday discussions because you know the people on a day to day basis, it's easy to talk to them or give your opinion on something."**

Rachel feels that since the time when she first started in the organisation attitudes towards diversity and inclusion have made positive progress over the years.

> **"It's a lot more positive, it's a lot more welcoming and it's to the extent to where if somebody did say something slightly wrong, people would comment on that."**

Reflecting on how culture around equality and inclusion in the workplace has changed, Rachel feels that a younger generation who are coming into the organisation are helping to contribute to a more open and accepting attitude in terms of diversity. This is something that she feels has a positive influence on the rest of the workforce, with older generations learning from younger colleagues and perhaps being challenged to think about their own attitudes.

> **"The greatest thing that I think has helped, is a slightly younger generation who have come in. They've just grown up with a greater acceptance of people….to me, a lot of the younger ones are very accepting of everybody and I think that's great."**

Structure

Rachel highlights an online training course on diversity in the workplace, which was introduced as a mandatory course in the last couple of years. She feels that this is a very positive tool to inform employees of diversity and inclusion issues, especially in an organisation as large as the NICS.

> **"I do believe it was an online thing. It goes to all staff. And they've made it mandatory……"**

The online format for the training is considered effective as Rachel believes that people may not feel confident at this point in time to discuss these matters openly in the workplace. At the same time, Rachel feels that in a face-to-face training session, some people may disengage from the subject matter, whereas when given the opportunity to complete the training alone, the content may encourage them to better reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs.

"Maybe it will sink in with them better if they think, 'maybe I am a bit like that?' or 'maybe I'm not like that?'…..whereas sometimes I find on the courses, like if somebody comes along and gives you a bit of a seminar….you can glaze over a bit."

To continue to educate employees on diversity and inclusion, Rachel suggests that the organisation could prompt employees to complete refresher training on the subject as they do with other mandatory courses, such as Fire Safety.

"Being reminded…. whether it's like a refresher type course, but it's also mandatory. It would just keep it in people's minds."

Rachel feels that the NICS are 'doing as much as they can' to ensure they have a diverse and inclusive workplace – that they are giving people the opportunities to engage in training around diversity and inclusion, signposting them to the issue in a non-coercive way. Ultimately, Rachel feels that it will depend on the individual as to how much they will actively engage in the subject of diversity.

"There's something that needs to spark it off, and it could be the diversity training course or the information on the noticeboards. Ok [people] might not be stopping like robots and thinking, 'I'm going to read this whole noticeboard', but one poster might flick something in their mind…"

Thinking of her own personal experiences, travelling to diverse cities where it is the "norm" for people of all walks of life to be accepted as they are, Rachel feels hopeful that one day diversity and inclusion training may not be needed, as people within her organisation and wider society would naturally become more open and inclusive.

"You see, I would love to get to the stage where there's no need for diversity training ... where it's just part of the past."

When asked what advice she would give her younger self to improve her experience in the workplace, Rachel said:

"Get to know more people… and be open to more people, or maybe share a bit more about yourself. Listening – listening is great. You have to listen to other people, because your world is just a very, very, small part of society. Listening to other people can actually help you with your own thing – because everybody will have good days and bad days… and try to be as nice a person as you can."

Adele, Utility Regulator

Background

Adele completed a degree in hotel and tourism management before she began working in the field of PR, communications and events. She has worked for a range of organisations, including private sector and public sector. Adele has worked for the Utility Regulator for almost eleven years. She is a Corporate Affairs Executive and deals with external communications, manages their website and social media channels, is responsible for internal communications and responds to information queries from members of the public, politicians, businesses and consumer organisations.

Adele enjoys her role in the Utility Regulator, particularly the wide range of people she works with on a daily basis, and feels welcomed, included and supported in the organisation. Adele feels that the Utility Regulator is a welcoming and inclusive environment, to people from all different backgrounds, cultures and identities.

Management and policies

Adele feels that the management and policies within the Utility Regulator are flexible and supportive of family life.

Adele transitioned from working full time to part time hours in order to spend more time with her family. She may also request to work term time and has availed of this in the past by taking a couple of weeks unpaid leave over the summer to be available when her children are not in school. She also has a laptop and a work phone so that she can work from home on an ad hoc basis if she needs to complete work away from the office.

Adele worked closely with her manager in order to secure the working hours that were most suitable for her and her family. She put forward her request for reduced hours and this was considered by management. While it took a little while for this to be negotiated, eventually Adele was granted the changes that worked for the office and her, and this has made a huge difference to her experience in work and has enhanced her work-life balance.

"I've worked with my manager to get the hours that suit me best."

The policies and procedures in place at the Utility Regulator benefited Adele's application to reduce her hours. Adele explained that policies in relation to working hours, such as term time working, are regularly publicised on the intranet and circulated to staff before the application deadline closes. Adele was therefore able to actively refer to these policies when she was negotiating a change in her working hours.

Emphasis on mental health and wellbeing

Adele explained that one of the key reasons she believes the Utility Regulator is a welcoming and inclusive employer is its emphasis on employee mental health and holistic wellbeing. They have an annual health and wellbeing event in November to December which includes a range of activities aimed to enhance physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

This programme of activities includes a medical assessment which Adele has availed of and views as beneficial. Adele commented that there have been a few instances in which a health issue which had

gone undetected was picked up before it was too late. Health and wellbeing month has also included relaxation sessions, such as mindfulness, yoga, reflexology and massage. Adele commented that this emphasis on employee wellbeing has made her feel valued as an individual.

"Knowing that your employer wants to focus on you- they want to make you a focal point for one month and help you – that really is good."

For Adele, the emphasis on employee wellbeing transcends the annual wellbeing events and permeates other aspects of work life. The organisation facilitates yoga every Friday and Pilates every other week. Other wellbeing initiatives are also in place, including mental health first aiders and stress awareness courses. The HR team will regularly share tips and pointers for protecting employee mental health throughout the year and will publicise resources received from NICS or Business in the Community. The cumulative emphasis on wellbeing has enhanced Adele's sense of value as an employee, and she believes this in turn helps employees to respond reciprocally by working hard for the organisation.

"Work is putting this on for our benefit, to improve and to help us with our mental health so I think it's important to use those services because it can only help…They obviously do care about employees… they want to keep their employees happy and healthy because that means we produce better work."

Importance of communication

Adele commented that effective communication is a challenge for any organisation. The Utility Regulator recognised that inconsistency in communication across teams can cause problems and therefore they are actively trying to improve this within the organisation. An internal communications structure has been put in place so that key events and updates are communicated to all staff in a consistent manner.

Key to this process was telling senior members of staff how it felt to an employee when things were communicated incorrectly and equipping them to lead by example so that pertinent information is communicated in a structured way. For example, an internal communications procedure has been developed so they key information is given to heads of branch and then to managers so that it is filtered down to every member of staff in a structured way.

"It is important that when things need to be communicated that they're done in that structured way so everybody who needs to be communicated with can receive that information at the same time."

Adele believes that this will help improve employee experiences in the workplace and help everyone feel more valued and included.

*Sarah, NICS

Background

Sarah graduated from Queens University Belfast with a degree in politics. Following this she worked in a number of different jobs, including a large I.T company. Sarah worked in a local authority in England as an I.T training manager before moving back to Northern Ireland and taking up a post with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) in 2007, working in the Executive Office (formally OFMDFM). Sarah has loved working in the Executive office, as this is more closely aligned with her politics degree.

Sarah is a single mum and suffers from arthritis which can cause curvature of the spine and can attack any joint, causing pain and inflammation.

Please note, for privacy reasons the name of the employee has been changed and does not relate to anyone within the organisation of the same name.

Family friendly environment

As a single mum, Sarah feels pleased that family life is highly regarded within NICS. Sarah feels supported by management and confident that she can put her family first.

> **"I feel very lucky… My managers, my department are very supportive of family life."**

Sarah commented that she has felt able to come in late or take time off because her daughter is unwell without impacting on how she is perceived or undermining her progression within the organisation. Her experience in the NICS contrasts to her experience of a former private sector employer in which she was made to feel that her job was under threat should she need to take time off or prioritise a family matter.

> **"I can do those things [in NICS] without fear of it counting against me."**

Being able to prioritise her family and being given flexibility and trust by her management has enabled Sarah to feel confident and secure in her workplace.

Disability

Generally, Sarah believes that the NICS is a disability friendly organisation. Sarah suffers from arthritis which began to severely affect her leg a number of years ago. While in the past Sarah may not have considered herself to have a physical disability, through a work event about disability she realised that others who have the same condition are able to access reasonable adjustments. Sarah then contacted HR to arrange for a disability assessment and as a result was given an ergonomic office chair and a standing desk which have made a huge difference to her working day.

> **"I really appreciated those two things… they made an amazing difference… it's a lot more comfortable to sit in and I can now spend most of the day standing… I found that absolutely brilliant."**

Due to the pain in her leg and subsequent difficulty in driving to work, Sarah requested a laptop to be able to work from home. This was also recommended by the physiotherapist who conducted her disability assessment. This was not as easy to arrange as other adjustments as her department did not have a specific working from home policy in place. However, this has now been resolved and Sarah is now able to work from home.

Diversity and inclusion

Sarah highlighted that there has been a culture of subtle homophobia in her workplace over the years which has made her feel very uncomfortable at times. However, she feels this has greatly improved in recent years partly due to the NICS LGBT network raising its profile within the organisation. The LGBT network hold regular events and their activities are regularly published on the intranet. Many staff now have rainbow lanyards which she feels has enhanced a culture of tolerance in the workplace.

> **"I'm glad to see more recently… people were provided with a rainbow lanyard… I'm glad that everyone is given the opportunity to show a bit more support for LGBT colleagues."**

Sarah believes that these efforts will help advance a culture of tolerance and make it increasingly unacceptable for people to make casually homophobic comments. However, she commented that there is still some work to be done for this to become the norm.

Structure and policy

Generally, Sarah feels a greater sense of safety and security in the public sector compared to the private sector. This is largely due to the emphasis placed on workers' rights which are codified within policies and procedures. Sarah feels that employees are made aware of the policies and procedures which are in place. They have a handbook and codes of practice which are available 'at your fingertips' on the intranet and are sent electronically to employees each year.

Sarah has had to take a couple of instances of long-term sick leave due to her disability. She reflected that if she worked in a private sector company, she may feel anxious about returning to work, or feel that her employer may find a way to 'get rid of her.' However, in the NICS she feels that her rights are protected by policies and procedures which are applied consistently. She commented that if the protections afforded to her by NICS were not in place she would feel stressed and anxious if she were to become ill.

Sarah also feels an enhanced sense of security in her workplace due to her membership of a Union. Recently, she was made aware that a pay rise for 2019/2020 had been secured as a result of Union activity. This experience contrasts with Sarah's experience of a previous employer where workers' rights were not a priority and they were not permitted to form a union.

> **"I personally see value in [being in] a union, I think it's really important… that people are in a union and workers have a voice."**

When asked what advice she would give her younger self to improve her experience in the workplace, Sarah said:

"Be a bit more cognisant of the law and what your rights are and don't be frightened to use that knowledge."

*Connor, NICS

Background

Connor has worked in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) for over 30 years. His experience working in different parts of the NICS over the course of his career has shaped his attitudes towards welcoming and inclusive workplaces. In Connor's view, to create a harmonious workplace it is important that he and all his colleagues are able to enjoy their work and feel well supported.

Please note, for privacy reasons the name of the employee has been changed and does not relate to anyone within the organisation of the same name.

Leadership

For Connor, leadership is central to a harmonious workplace and he refers to a particular manager who he feels had this supportive quality.

He recalls a range of innovative initiatives which she brought in. The first of which was a 'meet & greet', utilising games and activities not just to get to know her new team but to encourage existing colleagues to understand each other better. The manager then set up a range of working groups to undertake specific tasks designed to create a more supportive environment for colleagues. This resulted in a variety of activities to promote wellbeing, such as talks on mental health awareness, advice on healthy eating and a physical space in the office for colleagues to take time out away from their desk.

To mark World Mental Health Day, she encouraged staff to take an hour away from the office and use the time for themselves, such as to get a coffee or go for a walk. For Connor, it highlighted her dedication to the team's wellbeing and he describes it as a 'tradition' that has lived on.

> **"It shows commitment, that she's prepared to spend some of her 'capital' – i.e. our time – to encourage us to be better at dealing with stress."**

Another example of good leadership which Connor has observed is the way in which this manager eased hierarchical barriers by empowering more junior members of the team. On one occasion, for instance, she tasked junior staff with developing an initiative of their own as part of a team-building exercise. They organised a treasure hunt and, in the process of doing so, gained experience in project management and conflict resolution which helped them with their career development.

> **"She made them feel valued [...] and it made me feel like this is the place I want to work in."**

Connor felt that this manager recognised the need to create a more inclusive environment for colleagues and addressed issues of staff wellbeing directly. By showing commitment to this cause and ensuring everybody was included in the process, she had a positive impact on his experience at work.

> **"It felt that she cared and was prepared to listen, and I felt like I belonged."**

People

Reflecting on these initiatives, Connor also recognises the role that other colleagues played in making them a success and embedding inclusive values within the team. Whereas in his first job in the civil service, which he described as a more formal environment, his current team in contrast are more

collaborative. This sense of empowerment at all levels, for Connor, is key to creating harmonious workplaces.

For instance, Connor was part of a group tasked with improving the physical office environment as part of the range of initiatives brought in by the manager. This involved a general office-wide clean up as well as putting team photos and project updates up in communal areas to encourage a sense of purpose and belonging.

> **"It allowed us to see how our work was feeding into the wider programme. It gave us an opportunity to say that we're a part of it. All of that brightened up the office and it brightened up the mood."**

These experiences highlight to Connor the importance of both good leadership and having a supportive and committed team which is unified in purpose.

> **"From the experiences that I've had, I've felt genuinely that the people involved in setting up some of these programmes and delivering them, they weren't in it for themselves, although they did benefit from it too. They were there to make the workplace a better place for everyone."**

Thinking about the future of the NICS, Connor believes there are opportunities for skills and good practices to be shared more widely across the organisation.

When asked what advice he would give his younger self to improve his experience in the workplace, Connor said:

"You've got to want to be positive and look to improve things for your customers, your colleagues and yourself."

03

Employer stories

Deborah Richards, IBM

Background

IBM is a global technology company bringing innovative solutions to a diverse client base to help solve some of their toughest business challenges and 'build smarter businesses'.

Deborah Richards joined IBM 22 years ago as a management consultant specialising in organisational change. Having trained initially as a speech and language therapist, she considers people and inclusion to be a core part of her DNA. Deborah has been in focused diversity and inclusion roles in both the UK and Ireland for the last 15 years.

Deborah describes the workplace culture at IBM as having been built on a legacy of inclusion, encapsulated most recently in the hashtag, #BeInclusive and the idea of bringing your 'whole self' to work:

> **"The culture is very focused on #BeInclusive – bring your whole self to work. Our mantra is: I believe, I belong, and I matter."**

Structure

Deborah highlights the numerous ways in which the company's structures are designed to support employees 'from hire to retire'.

In order to create opportunities for people from a broad range of backgrounds, IBM engages in a number of recruitment activities. Some of these are aimed at groups who are often under-represented in the technology industry. For Deborah, overcoming these historic barriers starts in education. A specific recruitment initiative is currently underway in Northern Ireland, partnering with schools and colleges to encourage neurodivergent individuals into the industry. The recruitment process is adapted to suit the needs of people who think and learn in different ways. IBM also have a range of paid internships, work experience opportunities and university placement schemes reaching out to people from different backgrounds.

> **"All the time we're thinking about the next generation. Kids can do tech subjects in college, get work experience, get mentors and ultimately get jobs without necessarily going to university."**

These approaches have helped bring under-represented groups into the industry. IBM monitors this in various ways, such as through the return rate of placement students and engaging with employees to understand the first point of contact with the company; they have found in many instances that employees come into the business through these outreach activities. In Deborah's view, having a diverse approach to recruitment results in a diverse workforce, which is a business imperative:

> **"We're always looking for a diverse range of candidates. That way, we are more creative and more representative of the communities that we serve."**

Once in the organisation, IBM supports its employees with a host of initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusivity. The company invests heavily in training through a centralised platform and employees are encouraged to complete a minimum of 40 hours of training a year. Some training is mandatory for all employees, such as unconscious bias training, and some is role-specific, such as 'positive leadership edge', which helps managers build inclusive and resilient teams.

There are also a range of Constituency Groups to allow employees with shared characteristics or life experiences to join together in their workplace. The groups are represented by employees from across UK; the co-chair of the LGBT+ group is based in Northern Ireland.

One initiative that Deborah has been running for some time is reverse mentoring, which connects senior people with members of Constituency Groups. She describes reverse mentoring as 'a very powerful way of changing perceptions', enabling colleagues to understand the lived experiences of others and creating more empathetic working relationships.

IBM has introduced an LGBT+ Ally Programme, and, in Northern Ireland, mental health first aiders have recently completed their training. These highlight practical ways in which colleagues are encouraged to step up and support each other at IBM.

People

Another challenge facing global companies in creating welcoming and inclusive workplaces is achieving consistency and fairness across the organisation, while also understanding and respecting different cultural, political and societal attitudes. Deborah identifies strong leadership and line management as imperative in driving initiatives forward and embedding them successfully across an organisation. At IBM, 'leading from the top' is particularly important. The UK general manager at IBM consistently shares a 'people first' message which is emphasised in all communications to employees.

Line managers are also provided with guidance materials to help them facilitate the different needs of employees, such as in making reasonable adjustments or managing cultural differences.

IBM invests in inclusivity and diversity with dedicated roles. Deborah's job, as she describes it, is to be 'the grit in the oyster', challenging teams to think about how they are represented. Having this focused role helps to ensure best practise is embedded throughout the company.

Flexibility

The drive to improve how people engage with each other and to improve the effectiveness of training and initiatives comes from the willingness to engage with employees. Annual employee engagement surveys are just one of the tools that IBM use to gather insight on how the company is performing on inclusivity and diversity.

In 2019, Deborah launched a census to gather more data, highlighting areas where IBM could better support its employees. For instance, the census identified those employees with complex caring responsibilities, who were struggling to balance these with work but not informing their manager. Out of this came a new policy for carers and a 'carer's passport', allowing employees greater flexibility to manage their day. It is this 'continual evolution based on the feedback' which, in Deborah's view, allows IBM to push boundaries and make positive changes for its employees.

Reflecting on ways in which other global organisations based in Northern Ireland can create welcoming and inclusive workplaces, Deborah referred to mentoring and having someone on the ground who can be a cultural awareness guide:

> **"We always say in IBM, think global and act local. It is about taking the time to take a sensitivity check. To see how messages land. To see how to frame them. There may be unexpected stakeholders who need to be consulted. It's that kind of subtlety that is often missed."**

When asked what advice she would give her own organisation that would have a positive influence on the experience of employees today and in the future, Deborah said:

"Be curious, be prepared to make mistakes and try new stuff. And just be brave. We have to keep pushing barriers and boundaries."

Robert Fitzpatrick, Donnelly Group

Background

Donnelly Group is a motor dealer operating in 9 locations across Northern Ireland, employing around 700 members of staff.

Robert Fitzpatrick came into the business in 1992 as a marketing executive, before moving on to develop the Human Resources (HR) department in 1997. Since 2017, Robert has led on learning and development (L&D) while covering some HR functions intermittently as well. In Robert's view, having a learning and development focus in the business is vital in creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace:

> **"It's so important to empower people to deal with their employees better. We understand the psychological contract which exists with staff to make it a good place to work."**

Robert describes the automotive industry as competitive and employees are set performance goals. Donnelly Group's workplace culture is one of good communication and transparency. The senior leadership meet daily to discuss resourcing, business needs and issues around the workplace to ensure employees feel supported in their roles.

> **"There's a lot better communication with our people so they're well aware of what the business needs are, and they have a voice and a place to voice any concerns that they have."**

Structure and monitoring

Donnelly Group launched an Employee Valuation Proposition (EVP) in 2019 which recognises the skills employees brings to the company and the rewards they can expect in return. This has helped improve internal communication and has led to a number of wellbeing activities, such as a football tournament between sites, a master chef competition, abseiling down the Europa, a Christmas choir and other fundraisers.

As a large organisation across multiple sites, Donnelly Group ensures that the company ethos of inclusivity through transparency is embraced in all locations.

A structural gap in the organisation's monitoring of performance was highlighted when it became apparent that some managers felt they were not necessarily equipped to discuss sensitive performance issues with their employees. In response to this, learning and development has become more fully integrated in the organisation, with dignity at work training due to be rolled out. The aim of this is to give managers cohesive guidance on handling difficult situations and ensuring managers are aware of the legal and emotional implications of fully supporting their teams.

> **"It's all about the people and giving them real feedback. They need good feedback on where they are. It shows that you're willing to support and willing to give help."**

Robert also refers to a new "Working Together" programme which has been designed for young people in the organisation to embed dignity and respect at work. The training drew on individuals' experiences and teaches younger employees about the importance of considering their language in maintaining a harmonious and inclusive workplace.

"We serve all parts of the community – race, sexual orientation, religion – so we personify what that is."

Learning and knowledge sharing

For Robert, listening to staff is an important part of the cycle for making improvements. Exit interviews provide one way to understand the extent to which the organisation is creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace.

Robert feels the support provided by the Commission is incredibly valuable. Donnelly Group were able to avail of this training to support an employee after a grievance was raised. The individual was invited to a training session with the Commission on respect in the workplace and this had a positive impact on them. Reflecting on the experience later, the employee felt they learned a lot and appreciated the support that Donnelly Group and the Commission were able to provide. The employee who raised the grievance was also satisfied that the issue had been handled appropriately.

Robert considers consulting with external organisations, such as Disability Action, to be another important way of ensuring that to company continues to do the right thing by employees. Furthermore, Donnelly Group has partnered with Parkanaur, a specialist further education College in Dungannon, to arrange placements and apprenticeships for neurodivergent students. From Robert's perspective, there is a strong business case for doing this, recognising that while it helps the students in getting work experience it also consolidates their reputation in the community as an inclusive employer.

Despite the competitiveness of the industry, Robert believes it is valuable to share knowledge with other organisations. Donnelly Group are members of industry groups and use this channel for sharing and learning best practice

"We have common structures so can work together on this."

When asked what advice he would give his own organisation that would have a positive influence on the experience of employees today and in the future, Robert said:

"Do it for the right reasons. The reason why you do these things is because you want to be inclusive of your staff and make a good working environment for everyone. You have to practice what you preach and if you support your staff, they remember that."

Adèle Davidson, NIFRS

Background

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) provides fire and rescue services across Northern Ireland, with 68 fire stations spread across four operational command areas (Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western). Adèle has proudly worked for NIFRS for 20 years, with experience working in policy research, employment policy management, equality and inclusion management and health and wellbeing within the organisation.

> "I'm very proud to work for the fire service, and what that stands for."

When Adèle joined NIFRS she was involved in promoting firefighting for females at both a local and national level, contributing to the development of the National Equality Strategy, which also allowed Adèle to write the NIFRS equality strategy (2010-2020). From a personal perspective, Adèle is a strong advocate for disability equality and learning disability equality.

While health and wellbeing have always been at the heart of NIFRS, the culture at NIFRS has changed over time. In recent years it has been more widely recognised that the organisation must meet statutory responsibilities and make decisions that are fair and robust, including gender equality matters.

> "I've been there a long time and I've been part the equality and inclusion agenda as it evolved over the years."

NIFRS also have good working relationships with representative bodies such as the Fire Brigades Union, NIPSA and Unite the Union. NIFRS works collaboratively with these bodies and their individual representatives.

> "I personally feel it's very important to work hand-in hand with the unions on [equality]."

People and knowledge sharing

Reflecting on the under-representation of females within the service, Adèle feels there are positive signs of progress, with female firefighters increasing from a total of 2 to over 70 women in the last twenty years. She believes that societal norms may have prevented women from joining the fire service, as a predominantly male-focused environment may not have been a welcoming prospect for women in the past.

Adèle explains that a slow pace of change for gender and minority ethnic equality can be attributable to low attrition rates (with a job in the fire service being seen as "a job for life") and the relative infrequency of recruitment. NIFRS takes great care to make sure they are recruiting the right people to the service.

> "We're always really conscious of not being tokenistic, or not diluting our processes so much to try and fit the narrative that we get our numbers up."

The organisation works closely with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on its proposals for aptitude testing, adhering to advice to avoid having arbitrary elements to testing.

"We feel that our recruitment is as robust as it can be. And now, the challenge for us going forward is continuing to attract increasing numbers of the right people and having healthy numbers of women in that mix."

To try and overcome this challenge, NIFRS has an Equality and Inclusion steering group which dedicates time to a number of workstreams, including gender equality, mentoring and development. The focus on widening participation includes planning a "come and try" scheme for women to give them a taste of what it is like to work within the organisation.

Learning from new experiences is another way in which NIFRS continually develop and improve on policies. Previously, Adèle worked collaboratively with an employee who was going through a gender transition to support them in their journey at a time when the organisation did not have appropriate policy in place or the experience of supporting their staff on transgender matters. Adèle feels this is a good example of how the organisation responds thoughtfully, considering the best interests of employees now and in the future. NIFRS have had the opportunity to share their learning in this area with other organisations.

"We have had the experience of sharing our learning considerably with other organisations in terms of coming from a position of not having adequate policy provision to support an employee in those circumstances, to actually working with that person throughout their transition, developing the policy, getting the organisation to the place where they could support that individual and their family and educate the rest of the workforce."

Training and support

While employees recognise that equality and inclusion training is important Adèle also appreciates that time needed to maintain the various training commitments in the organisation is precious. In order to pique interest, Adèle has sought to ensure that training is as engaging and "thought-provoking" as possible, incorporating icebreakers and group exercises to make the content as relatable as possible.

"I don't want to be delivering the same patter to people who got it, 2 or 3 years before, because it needs to stay fresh."

Adèle highlights "unconscious bias" training as a module that is enjoyed by employees. It is linked to decision-making and focuses on when unconscious bias is a useful tool, and when staff should take care, paying attention to possible unconscious biases (e.g. when recruiting).

Wellbeing and inclusion are perceived to go hand-in-hand, according to Adèle – higher wellbeing amongst employees has a positive impact in the workplace. NIFRS recognise that staff wellbeing is fundamental to a successful workforce.

"The more positive impact you have on morale, the better outcome you have on attendance, and generally on workplace culture."

Given the challenging nature of their job, NIFRS are invested in providing continued support to their employees, through employee assistance programmes, counselling and cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT). Staff can avail of 24-hour support, with a partnership in place with Inspire Workplaces to facilitate this. A "Critical Incident Stress Management" programme to protect the mental wellbeing of those employees who may have been exposed to more distressing situations. The organisation has also worked collaboratively to support employees with dyslexia (including the provision of professional

assessment), which has benefitted those employees who wanted to go for promotions but may have found dyslexia to be a barrier to the process.

> **"Some people would have deselected themselves from that because they knew there was some form of written assessment."**

Adèle feels that other organisations could learn from NIFRS's Reasonable Adjustments Panel model, which considers employees who become disabled throughout the course of their employment, or those with a temporary impairment, supporting them into roles to keep them working.

> **"We have adjusted so many roles for people to enable them to stay in work and that's for a whole range of things from musculoskeletal issues through to mental health matters, through to autoimmune issues."**

According to Adèle, the organisation has been able to formalise a robust approach to reasonable adjustments that is reasonable and fair, with a qualified panel in place and communication between the employer and the employee that follows a collaborative process, ensuring that the employee feels listened to.

When asked what advice she would give her own organisation that would have a positive influence on the experience of employees today and in the future, Adèle said:

"I would ask the leadership to maintain making its decisions from an equality-proofing perspective and a gender-neutral lens. And that we continue to adapt to become a more flexible and agile organisation, allocating our resources where they are most needed. I would advise NIFRS to keep doing what it's doing – and to keep striving to improve. So, for example, we have revised our mission, vision and values and I'm very pleased that accountability, inclusion and respect is referenced and being embedded as a personal responsibility for all employees and not just those working in the field."

Janis Simpson-Mahoney, Gel Ltd

Background

Janis Simpson-Mahoney is the Managing Director of Gel Ltd, a multidisciplinary management consultancy firm based in Derry/Londonderry which delivers a wide range of services for businesses. Gel Ltd also participates in the Steps 2 Success programme run by the Department for Communities which helps unemployed people build the skills and experience to secure and sustain employment.

Janis describes the workplace culture at Gel Ltd as open and collaborative. She values partnership in her organisation and has worked to build an environment where her team feel they are included and well supported. As a result, Janis has observed members of her team grow in confidence and have stayed in the business for many years.

> **"What we've always tried to do is work collaboratively. I've tried very much to create a culture where people feel able to come up with ideas and suggest ways to do things differently. It's a very comfortable and supportive environment."**

Communication

Maintaining an inclusive and welcoming workplace can be a challenge for small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) compared to larger businesses which often have plentiful resources and larger teams which mean issues can diffuse more easily. In contrast, SME's tend to have more limited resources and less anonymity, meaning that employees tend to know each other very well which can lead to workplace issues becoming magnified. But for Janis, this challenge highlights the importance of investing time into creating a harmonious workplace, because as a business, they ultimately reply on their staff to be able to operate.

> **"We are only as good as the people we have delivering the services under our name. If a big organisation loses three of their staff, it probably doesn't make a big impact. If a small business does it could stop us trading. We need to value people."**

Furthermore, with a background in psychiatry and mental health, Janis also recognises the importance of creating safe spaces in which employees feel able to share how they are feeling at work. For Janis, the key to overcoming the challenges of a small business environment and to create a safe and inclusive workplace is communication.

> **"My concern has always been that you don't have people who are bottling things up and struggling on."**

At Gel Ltd, the team meets regularly for kick-off meetings at the beginning of the day and round-off meetings at the end of the day. This helps to maintain a collaborative atmosphere, allowing the team to catch up regularly, highlight any concerns, and seek advice and support from each other.

> **"There are two points in the day where people have an opportunity to chat about anything they are concerned or worried about and that seems to have worked really well."**

Exit interviews are regularly conducted with outgoing staff to evaluate the extent to which employees experienced a welcoming and inclusive workplace culture while at Gel Ltd. Janis highlighted that the organisation has very low staff turnover and also has never received any complaints while running the

Steps 2 Success programme. She attributes this positive record to the collaborative culture, whereby staff feel they are listened to, valued and able to develop.

> **"Staff know that we're doing our best so rather than shout at us, they tell us. We're collaborative, we value partnership and we all come from different backgrounds which allows us to share experiences."**

Gel Ltd also offers regular one-to-one supervision to ensure employees feel supported, able to deal with work pressures and free to focus on the positive aspects of their work, such as the sectors they are most interested in. Janis feels this is especially important given the nature of the work they do.

Policy and flexibility

Gel Ltd has a number of company policies in place to ensure a welcoming and inclusive workplace, such as equal opportunities and diversity, reasonable adjustments and flexible working. On flexible working, Janis reflects on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and feels that the UK government's lockdown measures, which necessitated working from home on a larger scale, have highlighted how efficient a flexible working arrangement can be.

For Janis, trust is at the heart of a flexible working policy. At Gel Ltd, if an employee feels that there is work that can be done at home and it suits the employee to do so, then this is discussed and arranged. Ultimately, it is acknowledged that flexible working offers mutual benefits, with employees able to deliver their work as effectively whilst achieving a better work-life balance for themselves.

> **"You've got to treat people as adults."**

As an organisation that provides consultation services to other businesses to help them create a more diverse workforce, Gel Ltd recognises that rigidity is a barrier to diversity and inclusivity. For Janis, valuing people and being flexible with employees is a business imperative, but something that is not yet widely understood or embraced in Northern Ireland.

> **"The more flexible you are, the more likely you are to get people who want to work for you. Yes, there's times that you can't be flexible because you need to deliver on the needs of the business. But where you can, there's no reason why you shouldn't look at it."**

Speaking from the perspective of an SME, Janis feels that small businesses in Northern Ireland can build sustainable business models if they invest properly in creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace for employees. This is what Gel Ltd advises their clients and what it strives to achieve for its own employees.

> **"When we're working with businesses, we're trying to tell people that everything they want to do with their business depends on the people delivering the service. Everything comes back to people."**

When asked what advice she would give her own organisation that would have a positive influence on the experience of employees today and in the future, Janis said:

"Keep going, keep it real and keep communicating."

Marie Brown, Foyle Women's Aid

Background

Marie Brown is the director of Foyle Women's Aid, a charity based in Derry/Londonderry which provides domestic abuse and sexual violence support services in the region. Marie's background is in nursing and she joined the charity in 1994, initially working with children and young people and then progressing through the organisation to become the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Marie encountered victims of domestic abuse throughout her working life and became aware that various services had limited understanding of the complex issues surrounding domestic violence. This has fuelled her interest in supporting the people affected by domestic and sexual violence.

"Women's Aid for me has been a journey where I have progressed and learnt. There have been a lot of opportunities for development. I feel very passionate about ensuring these services as it is an equality issue."

Considering the workplace at Foyle Women's Aid, Marie described culture of acceptance and understanding which permeates the organisation both in terms of the support they provide to service users and the support of colleagues internally.

"Foyle Women's Aid is a values-based organisation. We work hard irrespective of peoples' background to be understanding. It's not about what your views are, it's about accepting the organisation's values in working with clients and each other."

People and values

As a values-based organisation, which holds that a workplace culture should be based on a set of guiding principles embraced by all, Marie ensured that staff from across the organisation were included in the process of developing the values. She feels that the team is unified under a common purpose and that colleagues are more committed to the values having helped to shape them.

The values are printed on desks and on walls in the office to as a constant reminder to colleagues:

"The values remind us that when we're working with clients or working with each other we're doing so respectfully and non-judgementally."

Structure

The physical presence of the values around the office is also reinforced in a staff charter. This is a document that outlines what is expected of colleagues and what colleagues can in turn expect from Foyle Women's Aid. Marie feels the team is committed to the values and their meaning, and that the staff charter has bolstered the culture of solidarity.

"It's about providing fairness and equality. It's sort of like a roadmap for how we can all progress and move forward together."

Training, reward & recognition

As a charity, securing necessary funding presents a constant challenge to Foyle Women's Aid and Marie touched on pay as a key equality issue for women, one that exists across sectors and industries. Among

those working in the charity and voluntary sector, it is acknowledged that salaries tend to be lower, and that job satisfaction is derived more from the sense of contributing positively to society.

However, at Foyle Women's Aid, there is an emphasis on other ways to recognise and reward staff such as development opportunities. Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) are undertaken with colleagues on a quarterly basis to regularly review career development. Marie described the various ways in which Foyle Women's Aid supports staff to pursue areas of personal as well as professional development, such as conferences, policy training and role rotations. The organisation has recently created two training posts to place a dedicated focus on learning and development.

"We have developed opportunities for staff to give them an opportunity to work in an area that they like."

Marie also highlighted other reward and recognition activities, such as an annual trip in the summer months organised for staff to say 'thank you' for their hard work and to facilitate deeper team bonding. Marie believes it is important to show regular appreciation for the work that her staff do, to boost morale and ensure all in her team feel included and valued. In return, she feels she receives commitment from her team. The staff retention rate at Foyle Women's Aid is a testament to this emphasis on development, reward and recognition.

"It's important to say thank you."

Despite funding challenges, Marie maintains that it is necessary for charities and small businesses to protect the budgets that help to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for colleagues. In Marie's view, doing so protects the quality of the organisation and the work being done, making it a business imperative.

"Your staff are your most important asset. You've got to look at how you protect that. Women's Aid would be very difficult to run without the staff working in the way they do."

04

Appendices

Appendix 1: Employee discussion guide

==INTERVIEWER NOTE:== *Before starting the usual introduction, please spend some time talking to the participant informally to help ease them into the interview. Follow up on any things discussed during the initial recruitment/scheduling calls.*

Introduction (5 mins)

Introduce self/Ipsos MORI – stress role as an independent organisation and that we are here to hear your story.

Outline background and objectives of the project: We have been commissioned by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland as part of their programme of work about 'shaping a welcoming and inclusive workplace'. The purpose of this project is to learn from your individual experiences in work. You have been identified as a suitable candidate because of the responses you gave during the online survey, which indicated that you have had a positive experience in the workplace. We want to write a case study about your experiences. The case studies will help the Equality Commission to support organisations in creating good and harmonious workplaces, through training and guidance. The case studies may also be published on the Equality Commission's website to show examples of good practice.

Explanation of discussion 'rules': There are no right or wrong answers today – I just want to hear and understand your experience.

Discuss anonymity/confidentiality: With your permission, we would like to be able to attribute your story to you as an individual. Whether you want to be identifiable or not is completely your decision. We will ask for your permission to identify you at the end of the interview. If you are happy for us to do this, we will send you the case study to review and approve before it is shared with the client. You can change your mind about this at any time. If you choose to remain anonymous, you will also have the opportunity to review your case study.

==Do you have any questions at this stage?==

Mention recording/ obtain permission to record: I will be recording the interview today, and that is purely so that I can listen back to what you have said and ensure I am reporting it accurately. This will not be shared beyond the Ipsos MORI team. The recordings are securely stored and then securely deleted once the project has finished.

Consent: before we get started, I just need to read out some statements and ask you to verbally confirm your consent to take part:

- I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided to me by the Commission and Ipsos MORI.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.
- I understand I can withdraw at any time and without giving reasons.
- I understand that, with my permission, the case study will be attributed to me and/or my organisation.
- I understand that I will be able to review and approve the case study before it is shared with the Commission.
- I consent to being contacted in the future about this study for validation purposes.

- I consent to being audio recorded during the interview.

Focused life/employment history (10 mins)

To get us started, I just want to find out a bit more about you.

- Tell me a little [more] about yourself/your family?

- If you were to walk me through your work history, what would be the key events that stand out? *Interviewer try and establish a timeline of the participant's employment history. Plot events out on a timeline and probe on all milestones, asking about the experience and the impact on the participant's life/emotions experienced. Other possible probes:*
  - *Did they leave school at 16 or did they go on to further study?*
    - *What other qualifications might they have?*
    - *What sort of career aspirations did they have when first entering the workforce?*
  - *Are they long-term employees of an organisation or have they had different jobs over time?*
  - *Where else the participant has worked, how long for, some details about the organisation, how they found it there...*
  - *Are they still in the same job as they were when they completed the online survey last year (March 2019)? If not, what has happened since their participation in that survey?*
  - *Reflecting on your working history, would you say your career has been what you expected it to be? Why/why not?*
  - *Looking ahead, what are your plans for the future? Probing to understand any possible career moves, further education, retirement plans etc.*

Details of the experience (20 mins)

Now I want to talk more about the things you mentioned in the online survey and hear about your experience(s) in detail.

You said in the online survey that.... *Interviewer identify areas for further discussion from the participants' online survey responses. Let the participant tell their story in their own words, probing where appropriate to build a comprehensive and detailed account of the experience. Overlay the main timeline with another timeline for plotting the key events.*

> Examples:
> - Experience of unwanted behaviour which was resolved through formal company procedures or informally through line managers or team members.
> - Experience of line manager being flexible and supportive.
> - Support from other team members.
> - Overcoming barriers.
> - Policies/initiatives that the participant has benefitted from.
> - Experience of being a member of a trade union.

<u>Reflection on the meaning of the experience (20 mins)</u>

- Reflecting on this experience, can you tell me how you felt at different points? *Interviewer track back through the story and probe fully to gain an understanding of the emotional journey alongside the events.*

- What do you think your organisation, or other organisations, can learn from your experience?

- What does the idea of fairness in the workplace mean to you?
  - To what extent did this apply to your workplace? Why/why not?
  - Does it [*still*] apply now?

- What does a positive workplace culture mean to you?
  - To what extent did this apply to your workplace? Why/why not?
  - Does it [*still*] apply now?

- What does diversity and inclusion in the workplace mean to you?
  - To what extent did this exist in your workplace? Why/why not?
  - Does it [*still*] apply now?

- *If experience relates to trade union membership*: what does being a member of a trade union mean to you?

<u>Postcard to the past exercise (5 mins)</u>

Before we finish, I'd like you to think of your younger self. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give young [*participant's name*] that would have a positive influence on their experience in the workplace today, or in the future?

<u>Post-interview: identification in the case study</u>

As mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, the Equality Commission would like to be able to identify the individuals in these case studies. At this stage, based on everything you have told me, are you happy for me to write this up with your name attributed to it, or would you prefer to remain anonymous? *Moderator assure the participant that they will be able to review the case study once written up and will be able to change their mind if they wish.*

<u>Guidance for moderator if needed</u>

If the participant becomes distressed during the interview, please signpost them to the following resources (as appropriate):

- **Equality Commission advice line** – 02890 500 600 (please note that this will **not** direct the participant to any members of the client team, but to trained commission officers who can provide advice and assistance for people who feel they have been discriminated against.
  - https://www.equalityni.org/Home

o **Labour Relations Agency** workplace information service provides impartial and confidential support and can help with resolving workplace disputes.
  - o 03300 555 300
  - o https://www.lra.org.uk/

o **Law Centre NI** for information and advice on employment law or for legal assistance:
  - o 028 90244401
  - o admin@lawcentreni.org
  - o https://www.lawcentreni.org/

ECNI have also provided a comprehensive list of other sources of support depending on the participant's situation, these are charities and organisations dedicated to the following groups:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Trans-people
- Carers/dependents
- Race/religion

The document can be accessed here.

If the participant says something that indicates harm to themselves or others, please raise this immediately with the project team.

Appendix 2: Employer discussion guide

Before starting the usual introduction, please spend some time talking to the participant informally to help ease them into the interview. Follow up on any things discussed during the initial recruitment/scheduling calls.

Introduction (5 mins)

Introduce self/Ipsos MORI – stress role as an independent organisation and that we are here to hear your story.

Outline background and objectives of the project: We have been commissioned by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland as part of their programme of work about 'shaping a welcoming and inclusive workplace'. The purpose of this project is to learn from your experience as an employer. You have been identified as a suitable candidate because of the responses you gave during the online survey, which indicated that your organisation had taken positive steps to shape a more welcoming and inclusive workplace. We want to write a case study about your experience. The case studies will help the Equality Commission to support other organisations in creating good and harmonious workplaces, through training and guidance. The case studies may also be published on the Equality Commission's website to show examples of good practice.

Explanation of discussion 'rules': There are no right or wrong answers today – I just want to hear and understand your experience.

Discuss anonymity/confidentiality: With your permission, we would like to be able to attribute your story to your organisation and you as an individual. Whether you want to be identifiable or not is completely your decision. We will ask for your permission to identify you at the end of the interview. If you are happy for us to do this, we will send you the case study to review and approve before it is shared with the client. You can change your mind about this at any time. If you choose to remain anonymous, you will also have the opportunity to review the case study.

Do you have any questions at this stage?

Mention recording/ obtain permission to record: I will be recording the interview today, and that is purely so that I can listen back to what you have said and ensure I am reporting it accurately. This will not be shared beyond the Ipsos MORI team. The recordings are securely stored and then securely deleted once the project has finished.

Consent: before we get started, I just need to read out some statements and ask you to verbally confirm your consent to take part:

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- I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.
- I understand I can withdraw at any time and without giving reasons.
- I understand that, with my permission, the case study will be attributed to me and/or my organisation.
- I understand that I will be able to review and approve the case study before it is shared with the Commission.

- I consent to being contacted in the future about this study for validation purposes.
- I consent to being audio recorded during the interview.

Focused organisation history (10 mins)

To get us started, I just want to find out a bit more about you.

- Tell me a little [more] about yourself and your time at [*organisation*]?

- If you were to walk me through the organisation, what would be your perception of the workplace culture here? *Interviewer probe to understand changes over time in the organisation/sense of progress.*

Details of the experience (20 mins)

Now I want to talk more about the things you mentioned in the online survey and hear about your experience(s) in detail.

You said in the online survey that…. *Interviewer identify areas for further discussion from the participants' online survey responses. Let the participant tell their story in their own words, probing where appropriate to build a comprehensive and detailed account of the experience.*

Examples:
- Embeddedness of equality and diversity values:
    o Business plans (how they are implemented, monitored and acted upon)
    o Training (on what subjects, how often, who's invited, levels of attendance, impact)
    o Briefings (how often, who's invited, attendance, impact)
    o Regular agendas
    o Job descriptions
    o Measuring staff awareness (how, frequency, monitoring, change management)
- Policies in place, probing on:
    o Development
    o Implementation (benchmarking, external consultation)
    o Monitoring
    o Investigations/complaints handling
- Openness of channels
    o Approachability
    o 'Whistle blowing' mechanisms

Reflection on the meaning of the experience (20 mins)

- Reflecting on this experience, can you tell me how you felt at different points? *Interviewer track back through the story and probe fully to gain an understanding of the emotional journey alongside the events.*

- How would you describe the impact of [experience] on the organisation? *Interviewer probe fully to understand the impact of any business plans/initiatives/policies on employee experiences at work*

- What do you think other organisations can learn from your experience?

- What does the idea of fairness in the workplace mean to you?
    - To what extent did this apply to your workplace? Why/why not?
    - Does it [*still*] apply now?

- What does a positive workplace culture mean to you?
    - To what extent did this apply to your workplace? Why/why not?
    - Does it [*still*] apply now?

- What does diversity and inclusion in the workplace mean to you?
    - To what extent did this exist in your workplace? Why/why not?
    - Does it [*still*] apply now?

- What are your views on trade unions?

Postcard to the future exercise (5 mins)

Before we finish, I'd like you to think of your organisation's future. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give [*organisation's name*] that would have a positive influence on the experience of employees in the workplace today, or in the future?

Post-interview: identification in the case study

As mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, the Equality Commission would like to be able to identify the individuals in these case studies. At this stage, based on everything you have told me, are you happy for me to write this up with your name attributed to it, or would you prefer to remain anonymous? *Moderator assure the participant that they will be able to review the case study once written up and will be able to change their mind if they wish.*

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    - https://www.equalityni.org/Home

- **Labour Relations Agency** workplace information service provides impartial and confidential support and can help with resolving workplace disputes.
    - 03300 555 300
    - https://www.lra.org.uk/

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- Trans-people
- Carers/dependents
- Race/religion

The document can be accessed [here](#).

If the participant says something that indicates harm to themselves or others, please raise this immediately with the project team.

Ipsos MORI's standards and accreditations

Ipsos MORI's standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a 'right first time' approach throughout our organisation.

ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos MORI was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.

ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos MORI was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.

ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.

Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos MORI endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation.

Data Protection Act 2018

Ipsos MORI is required to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018. It covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.

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About Ipsos MORI Public Affairs
Ipsos MORI Public Affairs works closely with national governments, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its c.200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. Combined with our methods and communications expertise, this helps ensure that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.

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