

Changing Nature: Diversity and Inclusion Training in the Environment Sector

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About the research

The UK environment sector is notoriously one of the least diverse and there is a clear need to explore solutions for greater diversity and inclusion in the sector (Bell, 2021:2). Although these issues are well known to people working in the environment sector, there is a lack of time, resources, and actionable knowledge on the topic, which leads to low confidence to overcome systemic exclusion (Boss et. al, 2023).

Our project aimed to address this lack of confidence head on, through the delivery of bespoke Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training.

Over a period of two years, we worked in partnership with the environment sector, listening carefully to stakeholder needs, and ran a series of EDI training workshops led by our partners, [The Diversity Trust](#), followed by peer-to-peer support groups.

Here, we share key insights from the project, including ideas our participants are taking forward within their organisations. In doing so, we want to demonstrate the value of sustained, bespoke, and stakeholder centered EDI training, as part of a broader, sector-wide approach to tackling issues of inclusion.



Policy implications

- Generic Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training is often a 'tick-box' exercise and does not facilitate further conversations, because it is usually designed to be completed alone.
- Sustained, bespoke, and stakeholder centric EDI training stands out from the usual offer and is more likely to leave participants feeling empowered and excited to move forward.
- Setting aside a good amount of time (either a half or full day) is key for working through complex EDI issues and needs, especially as a collective. Creating plenty of breaks for networking and discussion is part of this.
- Within EDI training sessions, the aim should be to create a space where people feel confident to share their stories, concerns, and raise questions. It should be a place for uncomfortable conversations that are productive, stimulating, and leave participants feeling less alone.
- One of the key obstacles is having the budget to invest in EDI. Spreading costs by holding sector-wide sessions, sharing best practices on an ongoing basis, and providing blueprints for change is one of the ways that this can be meaningfully addressed.
- Local authorities and national government should create dedicated funding streams for long-term, collaborative EDI work in the environment sector, recognising it as a strategic investment in inclusive and fair transitions to climate change.

Key findings

In total, twenty-nine organisations participated in the training workshops, with fifty-eight individual participants, many of whom attended two or more of the workshops. We have captured the key themes that emerged over the project, as told by the participants themselves through interviews, surveys, peer-to-peer support groups, and notes written by participants.

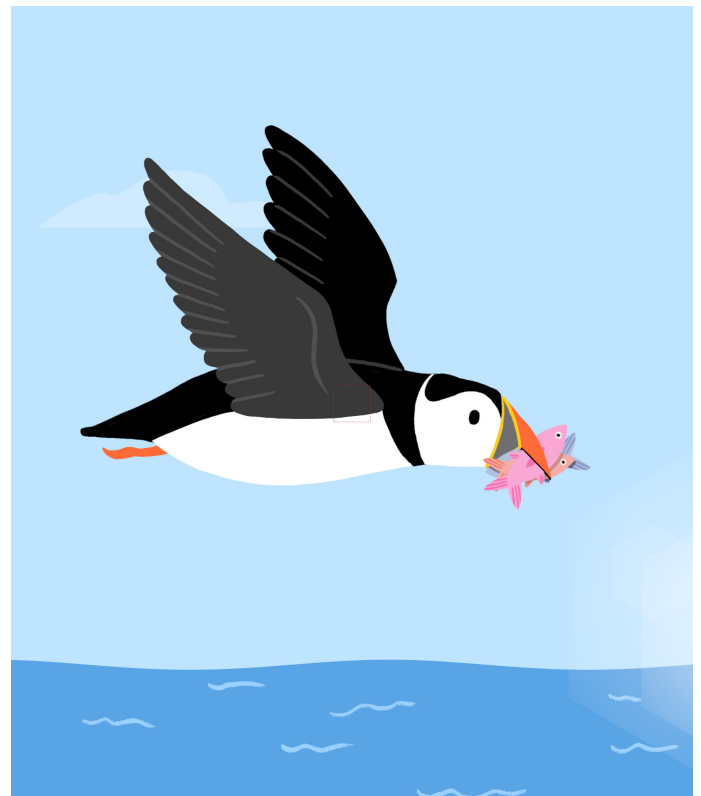
Time and space - intentionally setting out time and space for critical reflection on diversity and inclusion, rather than doing so in a tokenistic manner, is crucial for change. It is also important to note that meaningful change takes time and cannot be rushed.

Diversity is not inclusion - moving away from tokenistic diversity (e.g. number of people in a room from minoritised backgrounds, percentage of employees from protected characteristics) and towards meaningful inclusion is key to culture change. 'It is one thing to be a member of the team and sit on the bench, and another to play for the team!'

Leadership - taking responsibility for inclusion as a leader, whether of an organisation, a team, or even as someone with a privileged position within an organisation, is very important. Without buy in from the leadership, embedding culture change in an organisation will be difficult.

Brave space - creating a feedback-rich environment, where opposing views are not only welcomed but meaningfully actioned, with accountability mechanisms in place, are key for retaining staff and tackling EDI issues.

Diversity as opportunity - improving diversity is not a burden. Bringing in new skills and perspectives and improving productivity are co-benefits of inclusion. It is important to see people with protected characteristics for their potential.



Further information

The environmental sector is committed to protecting the planet's rich ecosystems but [our research in Bristol](#) revealed a critical lack of diversity within its own ranks. This current project evolved as a direct result of being asked to provide next steps for the sector, and our ambition to help make improvements.

Images designed by [Ruby Taylor](#) for this project.

Contact the researchers

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