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IN THE SPOTLIGHT: **SECURITY**

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Diversity and inclusion

Sam Folley and Nicola Ihnatowicz explore the wider social and stakeholder push for better diversity and inclusion for employers in the airports sector.

The pandemic has resulted in a complete shift in working practices. The advent of flexible working is an obvious change, but there has been a fundamental shift in the dynamic between employers and employees.

In the current environment, airport operators must be prepared to listen to the needs of staff and adapt accordingly.

Fostering a diverse and inclusive culture is an important step for an airport operator to take in order to attract and retain talent, but how can flexible working be made to work in an operating environment that by definition is about location?

What is inclusion?

Inclusion is usually mentioned in the same breath as equality and diversity, but it often gets overlooked in favour of the other two, more measurable, objectives.

Inclusion goes to the heart of employees' sense of belonging in the workplace, and the feeling that they are being seen, heard and valued, as individuals.

It goes beyond supporting those with the characteristics protected under legislation, like the Equality Act in the UK, and is more about removing barriers and helping employees feel safe to be themselves at work.

Neurodiversity, the menopause, gender identity, fertility and caring responsibilities are all topics that now form part of the workplace conversation. When it comes to inclusion, doing the basics well is a great place to start.

Offer agile working practices

Where airport operators can, offering a flexible and personalised approach to working hours and overall working practices plays a vital role. Agile working practices can offer real support to

those with caring commitments and can also give a great boost to disability inclusion.

Flexible working doesn't have to be solely about working from home, and for roles which do need to be in person, can other flexibility (such as hours or shift patterns) be accommodated, or additional benefits to make commuting or working unsociable hours more attractive.

Put proper policies in place

It will be important to have transparent and accessible equality, diversity and inclusion policies in place, with regular training to ensure that they are implemented effectively and properly embedded.

It won't be enough just to draw up these policies and leave it at that. Regular and meaningful consultation should be built in, as well as monitoring and appraisal to make sure that they stay relevant and properly aligned with day to day working practices.

It is not enough for employers to simply tick the box and move on to the next project.

In a [survey](#) we carried out on being an inclusive employer last year, only 12% of those responding thought that their organisation was doing well in terms of having policies and procedures in place to facilitate an inclusive culture, while 80% thought that their organisation was not doing enough or could do better.

Inclusivity training is often carried out as part of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives, but not all organisations are doing it. Airport operators may want to consider specific inclusion training rather than providing it as part of an EDI package.

This should cover all levels of staff, and not just be part of induction. It should also be regularly refreshed.



Consider taking positive action

In the UK, The Equality Act 2010 contains positive action provisions which enable employers to encourage people who share a protected characteristic to overcome or minimise the identified disadvantages or participate in activities in which they are under-represented.

In order to feel included and supported in the workplace, it's important for employees to see themselves reflected in the organisation. Low-cost initiatives such as mentoring, shadowing, targeted training courses and positive action in recruitment can all help to identify pinch-points and move organically towards a more inclusive environment.

The survey we carried out last year on being an inclusive employer showed that 40% of those responding used positive action to promote inclusion, while 34% didn't but were planning to, and 26% did not, or were unsure whether they did.

The UK government issued some guidance, 'Positive Action in the Workplace', back in April. It is intended to help employers understand how they can use the positive action provisions in the Equality Act 2010 appropriately to remove barriers to diversity in their workforce and enable equality of opportunity.

The guidance covers positive action and what it is, how to implement positive action lawfully, the difference between positive action and positive discrimination and how to monitor and review the use of positive action. It contains some practical examples.

There is also guidance, 'A step by step practical guide to using positive action when making appointments', published by the Government Equalities Office (GEO). The GEO guide points out that recruiting from the widest possible pool of people will give employers access to more talented candidates and a wider range of skills.

Having a more diverse workforce can also bring better insight into the needs of a broader range of airport users and can help to identify and open up new markets and opportunities.

Engage in meaningful dialogue

Employees themselves are the ultimate benchmark for measuring inclusion. A huge part of enabling an inclusive culture is the ability to actively listen to what employees want from working at an airport.

Airport operators who keep talking to their employees about their lived experiences, what is important to them, what their challenges are and how they can best support them will be those who ultimately deliver on their inclusivity goals.

Conclusion

A truly diverse and inclusive culture cannot be built overnight, and getting the balance right will be a challenge for airport operators. Mistakes will inevitably be made, initiatives will be tried which do not work, and there will be many learning points along the way.

By listening airport operators will gain an understanding of what works, not only for their employees but also for their organisation as-a-whole.

Investing the time to get things right will reap the reward of staff loyalty and deliver a strong message that the employer is committed, and adheres to values, which will make it attractive to prospective employees.

It will also lead to increased productivity, better retention rates and higher levels of employee engagement.

The pandemic acted as a catalyst for greater inclusion; the array of personal circumstances and blurring of work and home life meant colleagues seeing each other through a different, more human, lens.

An inclusive culture undoubtedly creates a more diverse and creative workplace, with employees feeling empowered to play to their strengths and work in a more personalised way. But what many employers have been surprised by is the 'bottom-line' value that this shift in focus has brought.

Increased productivity, improved attendance, better retention rates, higher levels of engagement and an all-round happier workforce – who can say no to that?

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About the author

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