



# Recognising and Promoting Equality and Diversity: Good Practice

The European steel industry provides an important forum against which to benchmark the recognition of diversity issues and the promotion of equal opportunity among its workforce. The industry is characterised by a predominantly male and ageing workforce. Addressing the issues of diversity and equal opportunity against such a background is a challenge, but one that needs to be addressed as steel workforces of the future are likely to be more diverse and varied. For the industry and Social Partners to meet that challenge, lessons can be drawn from practitioners who have sought to implement policies and training/learning programmes within the industry (plus benchmarking with practitioners outside of the industry). These experiences provide a picture of what 'good practice' could look like.

**Legislation:** Legislation provides a foundation for best practice, but it is only a starting point. To illustrate the point, consider one of the most critical issues to steelworkers: health and safety at work. It is clear that safe working practices do not derive from legislation alone.

Legislation plays an important role in embedding a 'safety culture' in the workplace. The personal prosecution of managers is however, a remote deterrent and the fear of discipline or dismissal seldom occurs; the risk to personal safety remains where serious injury to the point of fatality is present. If a 'safety culture' cannot be achieved through threats of the consequences, then there is little chance that the recognition of diversity and the promotion of equal opportunity will be achieved simply by recourse to the legal consequences. As safety professionals fully understand the problems are primarily 'behavioural' and, similarly, it is

'behaviour' which lays at the heart of both the problems and the solutions to implementing Diversity and Equal Opportunity policies in the workplace.

**Developing a business case:** How can a Diversity and Equal Opportunity policy be promoted? Experts often recommend the development of a business case to gain board level support for developing such policies. It is important that such policies are relevant to the current organisational culture, the organisation's progress to date on equal opportunities or diversity, as well as the challenges anticipated for the future. For example, it may be relevant in the steel industry (where a previous Equal Opportunities policy may not exist and the workforce may be predominantly male and close to retirement) to focus on future recruitment and retention. The development of a Diversity or Equal Opportunities policy and the awareness training to accompany it, could then be focussed on the practicalities of ensuring equal opportunities for all job applicants and the promotion of diversity in all aspects of the recruitment and induction processes.

Other business case arguments include:

- Improving cross-cultural awareness as a response to increasing globalisation;
- Addressing specific organisational problems e.g. labour turnover, absenteeism, employee flexibility, motivation, and skill shortages;
- Enhanced customer awareness and improving image and reputation in the market;
- Improving customer service by better understanding the needs of an increasingly diverse customer base.

**Bullying / ill-treatment / intimidation:** There are many forms of behaviour at the workplace, which fall short of the illegal behaviours of harassment or victimisation. Whilst such behaviours may not necessarily be directly related to Diversity or Equality legislation, they are nevertheless equally unacceptable. These behaviours may be addressed both within and without the context of diversity and equal opportunity. In order to address the underlying values and beliefs of individuals in the workplace, it is necessary to tackle attitudes towards such behaviour as part of a successful Diversity implementation initiative.

**Policy development:** An Equal Opportunities or Diversity policy should be a relatively succinct document that states the commitment of the organisation's board to the process. Standards of behaviour can help to explain the expected conduct of each and every employee. It is important that all social partners are involved in this process.

Policies should include bullying/mobbing, ill-treatment and intimidation. In addition, policies should refer to internal complaints processes such as counselling, mediation and the established formal grievance and disciplinary procedures.

**Policy implementation:** Almost by definition the fact of 'recognition' and 'promotion' requires some sort of launch or high-profile initiative backed up by communication, training, images and materials. Inevitably there is an element of a 'one-off' to this approach. However, accepting that there will be the elements of a publicity campaign followed by a lull, it is important that the initial momentum is not lost entirely. One possibility is to have a staggered process of implementation and action plans, so that the initial impetus is not lost.

An example of 'good practice' studied by the EDLESI project team is development of a comprehensive Diversity awareness programme by Corus in the UK. The literature and posters produced by Corus deliberately chose images of 'children at play' (see picture opposite) for its booklets and posters. The context was changed from the 'workforce at work'

(often used to reflect Diversity but open to the charge of being 'atypical' or, worse, favouring specific groups/individuals largely perceived to be atypical of the workforce as a whole) to 'children at play' (symbolising health, family, fun and friendship). The idea is that this is what everyone wishes for children (or loved ones).

Corus issued its posters on a staggered basis over a two-year period following an initial launch, and sent a booklet to all UK employees at the same time. This was to keep the issue alive whilst training was rolled-out on a business-by-business basis.



These training and materials will need to be regularly refreshed and thought will have to be given as to how the process can be revived at periodic intervals to maintain momentum.

**Training delivery:** A number of studies have demonstrated low levels of literacy and numeracy among significant sections of the industry's workforce. In addition, in some countries there may be language issues that need to be addressed. Thus, the value of densely worded Powerpoint slides and detailed hand-outs for training delivery is highly questionable. Other techniques, such as the use of visual images and experiential (activity-based) learning techniques may work better. Fun and competition is one other way to deliver a message – the Corus materials, for example, contained a quiz that most people would be able to engage with (covering sport politics, entertainment; steel facts

and figures) and gave a prize for the group with the most correct answers.

**Group needs:** Just as learning styles vary from group to group, so it is important that 'group needs' are clearly identified before engaging in awareness development. The steel industry, for example, comprises a number of diverse groups – apprentices/trainees, graduate intake, older shop-floor workers, trade union representatives, office workers, technicians, supervisors, managers, senior executives, contractors – all of whom, for practical purposes, it might be considered appropriate to train or communicate with separately. Whilst the virtues of an 'integrated' approach are strongly recommended, there are practical considerations to be taken into account when delivering programmes or events tackling diversity and equal opportunity issues. The training materials used need to be sufficiently flexible to address the needs of these and other groups, if relevance is to be demonstrated. Facilitators of such learning events also need to be flexible so that the 'concerns' of different groups are adequately addressed at the time. It is also useful to organise a means through which issues can be addressed subsequently outside the programme (a feedback loop).

The programme should meet the concerns of different groups and, where possible, be steel industry relevant. One way of ensuring this is using a catalogue of case studies, vignettes or scenarios, which are relevant to the organisation and to the industry. Corus, for example, employ in their training 9 such 'scenarios' all based on real life cases that had been encountered within the company over the previous decade. Training facilitators are asked to select 5 scenarios that they consider the most relevant/appropriate for the group(s) undergoing training. A number of facilitators write their own cases reflecting local situations/problem areas.

Another tool that can help address 'group concerns' and ensure relevance is to identify via group discussion the local benefits and concerns relating to Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy. Whilst, there is no formal outcome to such awareness

session, it nonetheless allows personal input into a group process, airing both positives and negatives. It also allows the group as a whole to focus on the key diversity issues facing them in the locality and culture in which they work.

**Integration into company culture:** Recognising Diversity and promoting Equal Opportunity practice should be firmly embedded within a 'company culture' for it to thrive. As with health and safety, it might be a 'culture' that is desired rather than achieved. In certain cases it may mean breaking down an existing culture that is unsupportive. However it is done, it has to be clearly aligned with stated company values. Finding the right vehicle is critical and will vary significantly between organisations.

To ensure that any diversity approach is fully integrated into the company culture, other existing policies and practices may need to be reviewed. Recruitment activity is a prime example of this practice, though equally important are the mechanisms by which employees engage in training, promotions and succession planning activities.

Organisations who have well established Equal Opportunities cultures may well have moved on to talk about Diversity. Other signs of progress towards an appropriate awareness of Diversity are other company policies that support the concept of respecting different employees' needs. Examples include: the adoption of work-life balance initiatives, such as subsidised workplace nurseries or childcare voucher schemes; flexible working practices (such as term time contracts, job sharing and part-time work); and, the adoption of family friendly policies.

**Mediation:** 'Good practice', in the Corus (UK) example, includes the adoption of internal processes of confidential mediation using trained counsellors (usually Human Resource practitioners familiar with the law). In this case, the issue/complaint is treated as confidential up to the point at which the complainant wishes to place it into a more public process such as the grievance procedure. The complainant may not wish it to go that far and the

matter may be resolved via a confidential process involving both complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made – separate meetings leading to a joint meeting as with other forms of mediating disputes. At all times the complainant is in control of how far they wish to take the complaint/issue/problem and, until such time as it may proceed into a more public process, it is treated in a non-adversarial manner.

**Measuring success:** Measuring the success of cultural change on such matters can be particularly difficult. Whilst standard employment statistics can be collated for gender and in some countries race and ethnicity, these should not be regarded as the sole or key performance indicators by which change can be measured. Cultural and associated behavioural changes can be manifest through a variety of mechanisms, including employee attitude surveys. If existing survey mechanisms are in place, additional questions can be added to address diversity issues.

Organisations embarking on the implementation of a new Diversity strategy should be prepared for the possibility that there may be an increase in the number of grievance issues raised by the workforce. In the same way that 'near miss' reporting can be seen as a positive when promoting a safety culture, increased grievances or matters raised with confidential mediators should be seen as a positive indicator that individual values and expectations have started to change.

### Good practice

- Legislation is a foundation of good practice – it is not the building itself.
- All aspects of Diversity/Equal Opportunity need to be embraced and not just selected 'target topics'.
- Issues seemingly unrelated to Diversity/Equal Opportunity need to be embraced and addressed at the same time e.g. bullying, ill-treatment and intimidation.
- Diversity has to be treated as a mainstream issue and not marginalised as something

only of interest to Human Resource professionals, trade union representatives or small atypical sections of the workforce.

- Training materials need to be flexible to reflect different learning styles of different audiences – know your audience.
- Specific 'group needs' should be addressed – develop a catalogue of case studies/vignettes to reflect those needs.
- Air both 'benefits' and 'concerns' – work the 'concerns'.
- Refresh and revive the process to maintain momentum.
- Integrate the process into the (desired) company culture.
- Develop online, accessible resources and channels of communication to deal with problems – feedback loops.
- Implement a confidential mediation process to help resolve disputes.
- Don't expect to change attitudes and behaviour overnight – it is a journey!

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Briefing Paper 5 is part of a series of 5 briefing papers coming out of the Equality and Diversity Learning in the European Steel Industry project:

- BP1: EDLESI: Executive Summary
- BP2: The Steel Industry in the EU
- BP3: Equal Opportunities Policy in the European Steel Industry.
- BP4: The EU Steel Industry: Experiences of Diversity and Equal Opportunities

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