

Equality, equity, diversity and inclusion strategy

2023-2026

Introduction

Equality, equity, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) are important. They are not only words which look good on paper or a form a list of principles to tick off. EEDI is vital to a fair, open, welcoming organisation which values the skills, experiences and abilities of all people. Putting EEDI at the heart of an organisation makes it a better place for people to work and volunteer, recognises that everyone has strengths and challenges and that allows everyone – people with criminal records, volunteers, trustees and employees to be heard, valued and play a part in bringing about equitable life chances and experiences for those facing stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

At Unlock, we recognise the above as vital to our work, our culture and how we challenge the status quo. We recognise that listening, learning and doing will always be necessary in ensuring EEDI is embedded into all of our work. And we know there is much for us to do to improve our approach to EEDI.

This strategy and corresponding action plan set out our goals and activities in this area. It reflects commitments as set out in our current 5-year strategy relating to diversity which covered both the need for Unlock to be a diverse space that welcomes and celebrates different views and experience, and for the external activities of Unlock relating to offering support and advocating for change to reflect the needs and experiences of minoritised or marginalised communities. In our overarching strategy, Unlock made a commitment to treat *“everyone fairly so everyone feels welcome and valued, challenging discrimination, stereotypes and unfairness wherever we see it. We are conscious that our team is not as diverse as it could and should be, and we are committed to improving diversity and inclusion in our workplace.”* Our EEDI working group was set up with the purpose of considering and recommending changes to achieve this aim. Secondly, in respect of our externally facing work, under our third priority, we made a commitment to *“ensure that we maintain a focus on increasing diversity and inclusion, with the aim of being representative of all sections of society”*.

Unlock has always been committed to making sure that people with criminal records are at the core of everything we do. We are therefore proud that we have people with criminal records at all levels of the organisation, including volunteers, staff and trustees. Specifically, it is vital to our mission that our advice and helpline team all have their own lived experience. We will continue to ensure we have people with criminal records at all levels of Unlock by taking an inclusive recruitment approach, encouraging people with lived experience to apply whenever we have vacancies.

We are aware from its ongoing evaluation of helpline users that there is work to be done to make sure our services are accessible and useful for younger people as well as those from specific minoritised communities. This strategy will be used to support the first step which is to collect more data and analyse where we can do better.

Aims and objectives

1. Provide appropriate and relevant support for minoritised communities
2. Illustrate a clear commitment to diversity and understanding of intersectionality
3. Ensure we provide a representative voice for minoritised communities
4. Provide a supportive and welcoming culture for people from minoritised or marginalised communities
5. Develop structures and policies to embed EEDI into all aspects of Unlock

What would success look like?

- More diversity in respect of people accessing our advice and support services
- Build confidence and trust in marginalised and minoritised communities that Unlock understands and reflects their needs and experiences
- More diversity at Unlock in respect of trustees, staff and volunteers
- EEDI is firmly embedded in Unlock's culture and in its policies and practices
- Benchmarks to assess impact of EEDI strategy

What we mean by equality, equity, diversity and inclusion

Legal definitions

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

The Act defines certain characteristics as protected. This means it's against the law to discriminate against someone because of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Unlock sees the above list of characteristics set out in the Equality Act as a starting point for any EEDI strategy but are committed to going beyond the minimum expectation and considering EEDI in a more holistic way. As part of this commitment, we believe it is important to consider societal progress, which has in many examples gone beyond the definitions as set out in the Equality Act. Therefore, Unlock does not see EEDI as something which is only applied to people

with protected characteristics. There are other characteristics which may cause people to experience stigma, discrimination and prejudice such as having a criminal record or coming from a particular socio-economic background. We also recognise the importance of intersectionality in respect of this issue – which is where specific characteristics interact with each other, resulting in someone experiencing unique and cumulative challenges. We want everyone to be treated fairly, without unnecessary barriers and feeling welcome, able to participate fully in the way that best suits them.

Language and the terms we have chosen to use

Equality

Making sure every individual is not unfairly discriminated against due to their characteristics. It is important to remember that equality before the law is fundamental, and that for some groups, this either has only recently been achieved or has yet to be achieved. Beyond this – equality should cover both equality of opportunity as well as equality of outcomes. Equality of opportunity means that people should be able to compete on equal terms – having the same chance of being able to achieve a goal, regardless of their inherent characteristics. An example of this would be to ensure a fair recruitment process. Equality of outcome ensures there is no disproportionality in the outcomes or results due to inherent characteristics. An example of this would be to assess access to our helpline by different groups and responding to any disproportionality identified. By being conscious of and actively challenging bias or prejudice no-one is treated less favourably because of who they are or what makes them different from other people – or any visible or invisible barriers they face.

Equity

It is becoming increasingly common for equity to be referenced alongside equality to acknowledge that treating people equally may be insufficient to ensure either equality of opportunity or equality of outcome. Therefore, consideration of equity can be helpful to ensure that people are treated in a certain way so they are not unfairly prevented from accessing resources and opportunities. For example, if an individual does not speak English as their first language, then treating them the same during a court process might leave them without a translator, and therefore at an unfair disadvantage. Equity means making sure no one has an unfair advantage but understanding that to ensure fairness, some people may need to be treated differently.

Another important aspect of both equality and equity is to look at processes, rather than just the treatment of an individual. There are still structural inequalities that need to be identified then reformed to result in long-lasting, positive change. One oft used example relating to recruitment was criteria in the past for people to be at least 5'10" to become a police officer. One impact of this was to indirectly discriminate against women, as overall fewer women met the minimum height requirement. Evaluation and analysis are an important step to identify any inequalities or disproportionality, then processes have to be assessed to ensure there are no structural reasons either supporting inequality or preventing change.

Just giving everyone the same opportunities is not always the best way to create equality of outcomes. Rather than giving everyone the same thing, equity seeks to give people what they need for fair access.

While fairness may involve different treatment for different people, it is important not to unfairly advantage anyone due to their personal characteristics and a commitment to diverse recruitment will not lead to less qualified individuals being employed into roles beyond their experience or skill set.

Diversity

Diversity recognises we are all different in many ways. People with differing identities, backgrounds and experiences should all have equitable access to resources and decision-making. It is also important to celebrate diversity by recognising the value that diverse views and experiences can bring to Unlock.

Inclusion

Proactively making sure people of different backgrounds, experiences and identities feel welcomed, respected and fully able to participate. It is creating a culture where individuals can be their full selves.

Background

In 2022, Unlock commissioned Diverse Matters to undertake an audit of our practices, procedures and culture with regards to EEDI. We did so because of an acknowledgement that, while understanding and demonstrating some positive work in this area, the Unlock team has gaps in our knowledge, skills and experiences. And because we want to learn about the things we do not know as well as improve the things we do.

The audit involved a comprehensive self-assessment, a survey to employees, volunteers and trustees, a set of 10 interviews and a review of our HR policies and procedures and our online platforms and their content. The result was a comprehensive report outlining Unlock's current strengths, where we can build on practice which requires work and where we have gaps. It included a set of recommendations for us to take forward. The recommendations include putting in place a strategy to drive forward our EEDI activities in an open, questioning and accountable way. The report and recommendations were discussed by staff and trustees, who all fed into this strategy and our three year action plan.

Building on our strengths

EEDI is not something that is ever 'done': we appreciate that it is important to keep moving forward and self-reflect to ensure we are doing as much as we can. However, we also want to celebrate the work we have already done. We are proud to be an organisation that is inclusive for people with criminal records. In addition, the audit report outlines other areas in which we are either doing well or have built the foundations. These include:

- A good working atmosphere – friendly, supporting and welcoming and there is a strong buy-in to Unlock's values and mission.
- Awareness there is more work to do around EEDI and commitment to improving
- A speak up culture which supports appropriate challenge
- Awareness of inequity – high level of awareness that there are systemic barriers for marginalised communities, in respect of the criminal justice system this is particularly relevant for Black men.
- Pockets of good practice such as providing adjustments to improve helpline accessibility

- Policies are clear, cover all protected characteristics, additionally consider people with criminal records and gender-neutral language is used throughout
- Accessibility of external communications including website is addressed and the Unlock Style Guide gives sensitive and appropriate guidance on inclusive language around race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability.
- Positive changes in recruitment practises to minimise bias such as the introduction of 'blind recruitment'.
- Examples of good practice within policy and advocacy work.

Identifying and resolving challenges

However, in order to keep moving forward, it is important to identify where we can do more. We know we have the ambition but without clearly defined actions, we cannot embed any positive change that is needed. Unlock commissioned Diverse Matters to tell us what we do not know and to make recommendations as to how we address our EEDI challenges. We were pleased to receive a report that did just that. In order to resolve the challenges identified, Unlock will work towards:

- Embed EEDI as a core value and ensure everyone at Unlock has the expertise to do this
- Ensure we have processes to regularly review how we work to ensure we are as inclusive as possible
- Improve the representation of Black, Asian and other racially marginalised communities in Unlock. This is especially important as these groups are disproportionately represented among people with criminal records. For example, we will be improving recruitment, inductions, career development and retention to increase diversity (for staff and trustees)
- Ensure everyone at Unlock has consistent and quality EEDI training so they understand how EEDI relates to their role and their day-to-day tasks and also have the skills to have uncomfortable conversations
- Ensure we consider age and neurodiversity where we already consider race and LGBTQ+
- Ensure we have an internal focus on EEDI, which will include senior leadership being visible in what they do around EEDI.

Our EEDI principles

Knowing our challenges is important, but tackling them is vital, as is the way in which we do it. Below are the principles under which we will take this strategy forward

- Going beyond the legally recognised protected characteristics – understanding that there are other groups affected by inequity such as people with criminal records and people from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Being kind, considerate, measured and respectful of people's views, knowledge and experiences
- Bringing challenge in discussion in a kind, considerate, measured and respectful way
- Understanding that EEDI is not a short-term project with an end goal, a way to look better as an organisation or a just a legal requirement. It's also a fair, people centred approach involving continuous learning.
- Recognising that discussing EEDI topics, challenges etc. can be difficult. The conversations can be uncomfortable but that is okay.

- Creating safe environments to discuss, disagree and debate so everyone is included, heard and valued.
- Having an openness to learning, looking through different lenses and making changes to the way we behave and operate.

Who is responsible?

The point of an EEDI strategy is that it's for everyone. We all have a responsibility to learn, question and change so we have an inclusive, diverse and equitable organisation both internally and externally for the people we work with and for. Our strategy therefore applies to volunteers, trustees and employees.

On a practical level, it's necessary to have some people to lead, monitor and evaluate the process of our EEDI strategic priorities.

- Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion working group - A small group of trustees and employees to lead the process, currently Mandy Mahil, Ruth Davies, Mark Day and Jo Easton. This group reports and makes recommendations to the board of trustees and liaises with employees and volunteers.
- An EEDI champion to inspire and support change – Ruth Davies (Jo Easton during maternity leave)
- Line managers and volunteer managers – to inspire and support team members, demonstrating a visible commitment to Unlock's EEDI strategic priorities
- Employees – to engage in training and self-learning, input into development of EEDI related activities, reviews and understand how EEDI is important to their role.
- Volunteers – to engage in training, input into development of EEDI related activities, reviews and understand how EEDI is important to their role.
- Board of trustees – oversight of EEDI strategy, sign-off of significant changes, development activities and financial costs, and engagement in training, development and discussion and analysis of EEDI at Unlock. The trustees also lead on the [Charity Governance Code including the relevant EDI sections](#).

We can't do this all ourselves

There's a lot of work and learning for the team at Unlock to do. We recognise the importance of working alongside others to implement this strategy. By partnering with relevant stakeholders, individuals and organisations we will seek feedback about our work and plans and actively listen to their perspectives and experiences. This is vital to ensuring our actions are responsive and relevant.

Unlock is very aware that minoritised communities will experience stigma and discrimination in unique ways, and many people have different characteristics that interact leading to intersectionality of experience. It is important to ensure the voices of marginalised individuals are heard and in order to support this, Unlock will engage and lift up organisations that represent specific minoritised communities. We recognise that these organisations have expertise that we cannot replicate and rather than just 'using' that expertise, it is important to lift up the organisations themselves. For example, if asked to comment on issues specific to a group that Unlock does not feel we represent, we would instead signpost to other, more relevant organisations.

How we'll do it

Having a comprehensive set of recommendations from our Diverse Matters audit means we're in a good position to learn and change so Unlock is a more equitable, inclusive organisation with a greater diversity of people throughout. The recommendations were discussed in line with Unlock's wider strategic aims and workplans, leading to an agreed plan which covers all the recommendations over a three-year period. The activities themselves are separated into operational and strategic – with the former being activities staff can lead on and the latter being things to be taken forward with Board support and input. The detailed plan of activities for the next three years is provided below in the Annex but the main strategic priorities for the first year are as follows:

- Add EEDI to risk register
- Develop new Workplace Adjustment policy to include reasonable adjustments, flexible working and a menopause policy
- Consider EEDI as an important part of any recruitment process
- EEDI training for staff, volunteers and trustees
- Monitoring and evaluation