

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Embedding EDI
into leadership,
people strategy, and
operational practice:
A best practice guide
for senior leaders

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Image courtesy of Equinor

Introduction

The offshore wind sector is central to the UK’s net zero ambitions. As the industry rapidly expands and adapts to meet future demands, our leadership approaches must also evolve. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are critical levers for long-term sector sustainability.

Culture change starts at the top. Senior leaders are not just decision-makers: they are culture-setters and signal-givers. Every word you speak, every priority you set, and every behaviour you model has the power to reinforce or reshape how inclusion is understood and practiced in your organisation.

This guide is designed to support senior leaders in making EDI part of core business. It offers practical actions, critical questions, and real examples to help you integrate inclusion into everyday leadership. You will find guidance on how to develop inclusion not only for those already in your workforce but also for those yet to join.

The case for EDI
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is a strategic enabler for the offshore wind sector’s long-term success. When done well, EDI drives innovation, attracts and retains talent, and strengthens our licence to operate. It is also essential to meeting the UK’s twin goals of energy security and net-zero.



Image courtesy of Equate Scotland

The business case

Research consistently shows that diverse, inclusive teams make better decisions, solve problems faster, and deliver stronger financial returns. For the UK offshore wind industry, EDI underpins our ability to grow and compete globally. Delivering the UK’s ambitious offshore wind targets is critical both to achieving net-zero and to reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels. Meeting these targets demands rapid industry expansion and a workforce that can scale with it. A strong business case for engaging in EDI is outlined in the points below.

- Skills shortages in key technical and professional roles are already evident. To keep a strong pipeline of engineers, technicians, and project leaders, we must attract people from a much wider pool.
- Inclusive workplaces draw in that talent and help keep it: 81% of engineers consider diversity important when choosing an employer, and companies that value EDI see higher application rates and lower attrition, especially for women and underrepresented groups.
- Teams with inclusive leaders are 17% more likely to report high performance and are better at spotting risks and generating new ideas. Diversity expands creativity and strengthens competitiveness, helping UK offshore wind stay ahead of other sectors and the global market.
- As offshore wind becomes a major contributor to the UK’s energy mix, the workforce must mirror the diversity of the customers and communities it serves. Doing so builds trust, improves social licence to operate, and ensures solutions meet varied needs.
- Failing to attract and retain talent will be expensive and disruptive, driving up recruitment costs and delaying projects. Embedding EDI safeguards jobs, protects investment, and keeps the industry on track to deliver energy security and net-zero.

Statistics: Royal Academy of Engineering

The moral Case

Systemic inequalities have historically limited opportunities for many groups. EDI seeks to correct these imbalances not simply to meet compliance requirements, but because it is the right thing to do. As a sector delivering sustainability, we must ensure a just transition that includes those historically excluded from energy and infrastructure decision-making.

The sustainability case

EDI is central to environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance. Social sustainability means ensuring clean-energy jobs and benefits are equitably distributed and that organisational practices do not reinforce existing inequalities.

The legal case

Under the Employment Rights Act 2025, employers are required to prevent discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to promote equality of opportunity. Proactively engaging with EDI mitigates legal and reputational risks while demonstrating accountability and good governance.



Image courtesy of Copenhagen Offshore Partners

Senior leaders: driving cultural change

“Leading is about authenticity and encouraging people to work in an environment where they feel safe and included”

– Head of People and Culture



Senior leaders have unmatched power to influence workplace culture through everyday decisions, language, and visibility. This guide is designed to help you lead inclusively and strategically, ensuring that EDI becomes integrated at every level of your organisation.

Inclusion is heavily influenced by what leaders say, what they prioritise, and what they tolerate. When you talk about inclusion, you are sending a message that it matters. This does not just mean talking through EDI reports but in business updates, site visits, and team briefings. Staff notice when leaders value diversity.

Furthermore, representation at the top, when combined with visible advocacy, can drive meaningful change. People feel safer and more optimistic about their own futures when they see others like them being welcomed, celebrated, and promoted.

Lastly, research found that successful EDI initiatives in the sector were those with clear and visible backing from senior leadership. When leaders actively supported this work, teams were more likely to secure the resources and funding they needed, and staff across the organisation were more engaged. Strong leadership commitment consistently emerged as a key driver for meaningful progress and long-term impact for EDI initiatives.

Key challenges

A focus group with senior leaders in the sector highlighted several key challenges around leading EDI. These challenges are important to acknowledge if we want to make meaningful progress. Below, we outline some of the most common issues raised and offer practical guidance on how to address them.

- ### Curiosity over perfection

 - **Why it matters:** Senior leaders worry about “getting it wrong.” But this fear blocks action.
 - **Guide Action:** “Model curiosity, not correctness.” Show that asking questions and learning openly sets a psychological safety baseline across the organisation.
- ### Resource constraints are real

 - **Why it matters:** Multiple leaders raised lack of time, headcount, and capacity.
 - **Guide Action:** “EDI is not an extra, it is how you do what you do better.” Invest proportionally to your growth stage. Prioritise smart: start with one high-impact initiative per quarter.
- ### Managing backlash carefully

 - **Why it matters:** An over-policing tone or metrics can alienate allies.
 - **Guide Action:** “Balance passion with pragmatism.” Make space for mistakes. Make feedback about improvement, not blame. Recognise intent and support growth.
- ### Celebrating progress without complacency

 - **Why it matters:** The sector is doing good work, it just does not always pause to acknowledge it or reflect on it.
 - **Guide Action:** “Recognise wins. Then raise the bar.” Celebrate culture change, not just metrics. Share stories, not just stats.

The importance of personal reflection

Taking time to reflect on your leadership is one of the most powerful things you can do. It helps you understand how your actions and decisions affect those around you and gives you the insight to lead with greater purpose and clarity. Reflection allows you to recognise what’s working, where you might need to shift your approach, and how your values show up in your day-to-day leadership. This can help you stay connected to the kind of leader you want to be. Next, are some reflection EDI related prompts to help you understand where you are making a difference and where there is still work to do.

Start With Power: acknowledge it and use it
Senior leaders set the tone. When you visibly prioritise EDI, it signals to the whole organisation that inclusion matters and should be taken seriously. A key action is to name it in the boardroom. EDI shouldn’t be “slipped in under AOB.” It should be on agenda with KPIs and targets.

Move beyond signing off initiatives, consider sponsoring or visibly championing one to demonstrate commitment. Sponsor an EDI related network or an inclusive hiring pilot.

- Consider:**
- How often do I talk about inclusion in business-as-usual settings?
 - Do people see me as a visible, credible advocate for equity?
 - Who do you mentor, promote, include in key decisions? Who do you not?

Make EDI a strategic priority

If inclusion is truly a business priority, it must be integrated into strategy and not sidelined as a compliance task or HR initiative. That means aligning EDI with your goals on workforce development and measuring progress in a way that goes beyond headcounts, looking instead at employee experience, progression, and voice. Without leadership-level ownership, EDI efforts can lose direction or momentum.

- Ask yourself:**
- Is EDI visible in our strategic priorities and KPIs?
 - How do we track whether inclusion is genuinely improving?



Build pathways for underrepresented talent

Leadership teams must take responsibility for diversifying the pipeline. That requires redesigning systems that may unintentionally hold people back. Every process should be reviewed for equity and accessibility such as recruitment and succession planning to performance management, Sponsorship, mentorship, employee networks, and tailored development opportunities can help underrepresented staff access equitable opportunities. But critically, these need to be backed by leaders who actively open doors and remove barriers.

- Reflect on:**
- Who is missing from our leadership and decision-making tables?
 - What systemic barriers, visible or invisible, are still in place?

Recognise Overlapping Barriers:
People’s experiences are shaped by multiple, intersecting aspects of their identity. For example, a black woman may face both gendered and racialised barriers, and someone who is disabled and from a working-class background may encounter additional challenges in progression or access to networks. These overlapping experiences can amplify exclusion, and leaders need to consider them when designing policies, reviewing data, and allocating resources.

Inclusive culture through leadership behaviours

“One of the first things senior management said was that it was great to have me on board. They are actively trying to get more women in and want to reach a point where diversity is so embedded, we don’t need to talk about it anymore—that’s their ambition.”

— Female, Duty Site Lead

Culture is often defined by what leaders walk past, excuse, or ignore. A psychologically safe workplace is where people feel able to speak up and share new ideas. This environment can only exist when leaders consistently model inclusive behaviour. Leaders can contribute to this by being open to feedback and challenging exclusionary behaviours. This also involves demonstrating curiosity and a commitment to learning alongside your teams.

- Pause and ask:**
- Do our people feel safe enough to be honest with leadership?
 - Am I modelling the inclusive behaviours I expect from others?

Who is in the room?
Consider whose voices shape your most important business decisions. Are diverse perspectives represented when strategy, investment, and operational priorities are set? Creating inclusive decision-making forums, and acting on diverse input, leads to better, more robust outcomes and greater employee trust.

Make inclusion tangible, not aspirational

Workforce retention is just as important as talent attraction. People do not leave because of strategy, they leave because of micro-behaviours that go ignored.

- Consider:**
- When I witness exclusion, bias, or inappropriate behaviour, do I step in—or stay silent?
 - Am I taking ownership of EDI as a leader, or am I expecting others to carry the responsibility?
 - Have I committed real resources to support inclusion—such as funding audits, staff networks, or other initiatives—or is it still an unfunded priority?

Invest in inclusive capability

Inclusive leadership can be a learned skill therefore, it is worth embedding it into leadership development and performance reviews to ensure it becomes the norm. That includes equipping middle managers and site leaders with the tools, training, and confidence they need to lead inclusively. Inclusive leadership should be as valued as technical excellence.

When this is reflected in how people are hired, rewarded, and promoted, a shift in culture follows.

- Think about:**
- Are we investing in inclusive leadership development at all levels?
 - How do we reward inclusive leadership in our organisation?

Fix the system, not the individual

Do not expect underrepresented groups to adapt to a model that was not built with them in mind. Instead of asking individuals to fit into outdated systems and norms, we should focus on changing the structures, cultures, and practices that continue to exclude them.

- Consider:**
- Are our PPE, welfare units, offshore rotations, and rosters designed with everyone in mind, or do they still reflect a one-size-fits-all model?
 - When making promotion decisions, do I value inclusive behaviours as much as technical skills or am I still prioritising “culture fit”?
 - Am I supporting flexible and hybrid working in all areas of the business including offshore or am I accepting outdated assumptions without challenge?

Lead sector-wide change

Your influence as a senior leader extends beyond your own organisation. You influence the norms and expectations of the wider offshore wind ecosystem through procurement choices, partnerships, and industry forums. By championing EDI publicly and holding supply chains to inclusive standards, you drive change that extends across the sector.

- Consider:**
- How can we use our voice and position to raise the bar across the industry?
 - Are our contractors and partners aligned with our values on EDI?

Supplier diversity and inclusive procurement:
Your organisation’s influence extends into the supply chain. Review procurement criteria and ensure they encourage supplier diversity. For example, actively engaging with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), women-owned businesses, social enterprises, and suppliers committed to inclusive employment practices. Supplier diversity not only drives innovation and resilience but also supports local economic development and strengthens your social licence to operate.



Image courtesy of Ørsted

“The reason I took the job was because I saw female leaders at the top. It really shows the importance of having advocates and visible role models whether that’s women, ethnic minorities, or LGBTQ+ people in leadership. When you see someone like you doing it, you believe you can do it too.”

— Female, Site Manager

Conclusions

Changing culture does not happen by chance, it happens when you as a leader make inclusion a clear priority. How you show up, what you focus on, and how you support your workforce all send a powerful message about whether inclusion truly matters. These reflective questions are designed to help you examine your own approach to EDI, offering key points to think about how you can lead more effectively and authentically. These questions also make a valuable discussion tool, bringing them into the boardroom and exploring them with your wider leadership team can spark important conversations and shared accountability.



Senior Leader EDI commitments

Turn EDI into visible, strategic action. Use this checklist in board meetings or leadership reviews to keep inclusion on the agenda.

Action	Details	Your reflection
Put EDI on the agenda	Ensure EDI is a standing item in leadership meetings, and linked to strategic KPIs.	
Model visible commitment	Sponsor an EDI initiative, and attend inclusion events.	
Resource the work	Allocate budget, time and people to EDI priorities.	
Build inclusive capability	Embed inclusive leadership expectations into development programmes and performance reviews	
Lead beyond your organisation	Champion inclusive practice across supply chains and industry forums to raise the bar sector wide.	

About the authors

A broader collaborative project between the University of East Anglia and Anglia Ruskin University informs this best practice guide.



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With thanks to:

