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Opportunity for access, growth and progression - What the experts say

Sam Stensland, BITC Cymru has advice on how you can provide the opportunity for access, growth and progression to your employees.

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Business in the Community (BITC) was formed over 40 years ago, and our network of business members are leading a movement to create a fair and sustainable world in which to live and work.

In recent years, we have noticed a greater sensitivity from employers and policymakers who are mindful of the fact that people need more opportunities to grow, learn and develop in their work, attain promotions, and map their future career path trajectories.

From my personal experience, working to advise corporate and high net worth philanthropy, and delivering CIPD accredited training, as well as being a trustee of Women Making a Difference, I have seen first-hand that fundamentally, there is a huge business case for providing accessible learning and training in equality and diversity.

At BITC, we know from our member businesses (many of whom are on the FTSE 100, but which also include smaller to medium-sized enterprises) that having more diverse voices around decision-making tables allows better decisions to be made that support people's lives.

There is an imperative in a business sense for this to be the case, but also on a more personal, employee level there is still that imperative because there is a huge wellbeing benefit when people feel trusted, respected and cared for at work.

We have noticed that businesses who have started to implement some of these changes really benefit in terms of the deals and agreements they are able to make, particularly in a Welsh context where we have the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

With those more granular policy angles like social procurement and ethical purchasing, we tend to find that businesses are benefiting from driving positive social value in their everyday practice.

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From an employee standpoint, the last few years have been really tough. People have been adapting to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and wider entrenched structural challenges. But we do find that employers who are taking a more caring and holistic approach often see benefits in terms of retaining staff, helping them to feel more engaged and boosting their wellbeing, which obviously all support good business growth.

This additional thought and care in an employer's approach also applies to being able to attract diverse talent because organisations must have policies and practices in place that support them.

Employers are going to be left behind if they do not get on board with treating their staff fairly, particularly as the pandemic amplified how inequality affects people across society.

Within the categories of race, gender and age is where we have seen real change recently, though as recent media coverage of pay gap reporting demonstrates, there is much still to do.

We work to help organisations to become more comfortable addressing and changing the dialogue about race. Part of this involves workshops to help people understand the lived experience of those they work alongside and comprehend some of the challenges they face.

This opportunity to learn from one another has been invaluable for all attendees.

Within the gender space there is significant recognition that balancing caring responsibilities is unnecessarily hindering people from getting on at work. This is not just about people who are going for promotions, but anyone and everyone.

Going into the at-home working situation during the pandemic, a lot of people, whether it was young people or older, had to look after someone, and often that would fall on the shoulders of women within the family.

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As a result, we are finding that employers are waking up to that fact as we are now seeing more appropriate and co-designed caring policies put into place

In terms of what the future holds, there is something to be said for how this pillar plays into the wider corporate responsibility conversation.

What a lot of businesses are now realising, and we will see more of this over the next decade, is that they cannot just do this on paper. They cannot just do this in policy or in conversations with their colleagues. They have also got to think about the connections between the way they manage their people and their wider environmental and community impacts.

To give a hypothetical example, if you are supporting your carers and giving them more flexibility, that means they could do more volunteering in their communities, which could be a huge economic benefit for Wales.

Weaving questions around opportunity for access, growth and progression into the wider context of making the world and the planet a more sustainable and reasonable place to live will be a big future angle for employers and employees.

In the current climate, businesses need to take care to ensure that any impactful, well-marketed recruitment marketing campaigns also have real substance.

However, it is incredibly encouraging to see members of BITC in Wales thinking deeply, critically and fairly about what they as an organisation can offer their people.

Contact

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Call Business Wales on **03000 6 03000** or visit Fair Work | Business Wales Skills Gateway (gov.wales) for further information, free advice and support.

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