

ACCESSIBLE ASPIRATION

SMART
WORKS

EQUITY,
DIVERSITY &
INCLUSION
WORKS

OUR EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGY

Our commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion



Everyone is welcome at Smart Works

Our mission is for anyone who needs our help to be able to find their way to Smart Works and access our service. We want every client who comes through our doors to feel respected, listened to, and leave with confidence in their abilities. We believe passionately that everyone should have an equal chance of success and feel they belong, regardless of who they are and their life experiences.

Our vision is to nurture a culture of diversity and inclusivity, woven into the fabric of our organisation. We want Smart Works to be a place where everyone feels accepted, valued and able to thrive – whether they are staff, volunteers, trustees, partners, supporters or our clients.

Our approach will remain considered and consultative, with our clients at the centre of our strategy and decision making. For our service to be accessible and impactful for all, it is important for our community to represent our clients. This is why we are committed to removing any barriers and behaviours that prevent Smart Works from being a truly diverse and inclusive community.

As we take active steps towards a better future, we take our responsibilities seriously. This is our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion at Smart Works.

Our Strategy

Everyone at Smart Works is committed to a set of values - our principles for how we behave and treat people. During the creation of this Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) strategy, our value of 'Accessible Aspiration' has been a golden thread. This is the promise that Smart Works will always be approachable and inclusive, empowering others to thrive and fulfil their potential. For us to live out this value and be accessible to anyone who may need our service, it is essential to have a clear strategy to make this ambition a reality.

We have already learnt a lot about how best to deliver change in this space. Since our first EDI Action Plan in 2020, we have seen the power of formally integrating the voices of our clients into decision making, evolving our recruitment practices, and the benefits of providing structured EDI training for our trustees, staff and volunteers. We have learnt from the lived experience of those in our community, listened to external voices who have shared their insights and feedback, and have been inspired by the important work of fellow charities and experts. We have made a good start, but we know there is more work to be done.

The following strategy has been born out of conversations with our community. In March 2023, we ran an anonymous survey for our staff and trustees, asking for feedback on how we were progressing in this space and for their input and ideas on what more we could do.

It was completed by 68 people, and 57% agreed that Smart Works was a charity with EDI at its core. We want this to be better, and by 2025 we will increase this to at least 80% of respondents.

Smart Works is a charity led by women, for women. In order to deliver sustainable and substantial change, we have decided to focus on **three key indicators** where improvements will be most impactful for these women: **ethnicity, disability and lived experience of unemployment.**

We hope and anticipate that this strategy will have a positive benefit beyond these three key indicators, and that we will build upon our priorities in future years.

Smart Works is currently in a stage of transformational growth, delivering a Three Year Plan that will double the number of clients we support by 2025. As we extend our reach and raise the profile of the charity, it is a timely moment for Smart Works to be bolder, louder and more ambitious about our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.

This strategy is our public commitment to change and our collective roadmap for how change will be achieved. It shows how we will work together to genuinely nurture a culture of equity, diversity and inclusivity - for our staff, our volunteers, our trustees, our supporters, and most importantly, our clients.

Our Roadmap for Change

Our vision:

Everyone is welcome at Smart Works. Our vision is to create a charity and service where every person who comes through our doors feels accepted, valued and able to thrive.

Our priorities:

Based on what we have learnt and heard from our community, Smart Works has identified five priorities that will frame our work. For each priority, we have identified areas of activity that will deliver real change by 2025.



1. OUR CLIENTS MUST ALWAYS BE AT THE HEART OF OUR DECISION MAKING



As a service delivery charity that exists to support unemployed women, it is essential that every aspect of our work is client-centric. To achieve this, we want to increase participation from those with lived experience of unemployment and the Smart Works service, so that their perspective, knowledge and feedback directly inform our strategy and decision making.

OUR MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY ARE AS FOLLOWS →

Expand our Client Advisory Group

Our UK-wide Client Advisory Group, made up of 10 former clients, will meet quarterly with the Chief Executive to discuss strategic topics and act as a key touchstone in decision making, with learnings shared directly at the Smart Works Charity Trustee meetings and across the charity. We will maintain balanced and diverse representation to benefit from wide-ranging feedback.

Launch a Client Champions Programme

We will launch a new initiative, where former clients are appointed as Client Champions and become spokespeople for the charity. They will take part in a range of opportunities, covering outreach in their local community, media engagement and speaking at events. This will help us to reach more women and ensure that clients are always at the forefront of our work.

Host a Client Forum

To mark our tenth year as a charity, we will explore a new initiative for engaging with former clients - an annual webinar open to anyone who has been supported by Smart Works. The purpose of the event is to connect with clients and conduct a pulse survey from which we can learn, as well as to bring together our clients for support, connection and celebration.

Client Feedback

We will continue to actively seek feedback from our clients at their appointments, which will be improved by investing in digital data collection to maximise the quantity, consistency and quality of feedback we receive. As part of this, we will invite feedback from clients on the range of clothes offered to them and identify opportunities to diversify our wardrobe (e.g. with modest clothing and a greater range of plus-sized items).

By elevating the voices of our clients, decision makers across the Smart Works community will hear more from those who are experts by experience and gain a deeper understanding of those we support. In 2023, 86% of staff and trustees felt that Smart Works had done well in ensuring clients were at the heart of our service. We will maintain this statistic, continuing to implement effective processes for clients to share feedback and integrating their insight into our operations and strategy.

2. OUR INTERNAL COMMUNITY MUST BETTER REFLECT AND REPRESENT OUR CLIENTS

We know that across our three key indicators (ethnicity, disability and lived experience of unemployment), there is disparity between the demographic makeup of our internal community (staff, trustees and volunteers) and our clients.

For our service to be accessible and impactful for everyone, it is important to close this gap through recruitment and increase representation as the charity grows. This will further develop deep empathy and strong connections between our internal community and our clients.



OUR MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY ARE AS FOLLOWS

Establish Data Capture

Smart Works does not hold robust enough data on the demographic makeup of our staff, trustees and volunteers across our three key indicators. Our crucial first step will be to capture this data and establish a strong baseline. For staff and trustees, we will reach at least 75% data capture by 2024 and 100% by 2025. For our larger volunteer community, we will reach at least 50% data capture by 2024 and 75% by 2025.

By capturing this data, we will gain an informed understanding of the demographic makeup of our internal community. This will give Smart Works the ability to set real, tangible and meaningful targets and accurately measure progress against these.

Recruitment Policy & Training

We will develop a fair and accessible recruitment policy, establishing best practice applicable across all vacancies. We will onboard an Applicant Tracking System, enhancing our application process and reducing the risk of potential bias in recruitment practices. To ensure the policy and its practices are correctly and consistently implemented, we will conduct mandatory inclusive recruitment training for the People team, all line managers and those recruiting volunteers.

Expanding our Volunteer Community

To remove barriers to volunteering, we will cover reasonable travel expenses where needed and introduce more flexible, ad-hoc volunteering opportunities, particularly in our wardrobe. We will advertise opportunities with referral partners and local community groups, to reach potential volunteers who better represent our clients. Alongside this, we will create opportunities for former clients to volunteer at Smart Works and gain valuable work experience with skills-based opportunities.

Trustees, Patrons & Ambassadors

We will actively seek trustees, patrons and ambassadors with experiences that better reflect those of our clients and are currently underrepresented in our existing communities, particularly referring to our three key indicators. For trustees, we will always conduct open recruitment outside of our networks and will remove barriers by covering reasonable travel expenses and only asking for qualifications where strictly necessary.

Recruiting Staff

We will advertise all vacancies across varied recruitment platforms, having audited our job adverts to ensure they speak to and support a broad range of candidates. We will establish early careers opportunities such as internships and apprenticeships, and review the reach of our Graduate Scheme. We will introduce an initiative where any client who has used the Smart Works service and meets essential role criteria will be guaranteed an interview for live vacancies.

By establishing strong baseline data, we will gain the ability to set tangible and meaningful targets to measure progress against. We will deliver real change in the demographic makeup of our staff, trustee and volunteer communities, particularly across our three key indicators. In 2023, 40% of staff and trustees agreed that Smart Works had been effective in minimising the disparity between the demographic makeup of our staff, trustees and volunteers, and our clients. By 2025, this will be at least 60%.



3. OUR CULTURE IS INCLUSIVE, WELCOMING AND NON-JUDGEMENTAL

Smart Works strives to be a community where everyone can thrive and be themselves, confident that every aspect of their identity, culture and background is valued and respected. To foster a truly inclusive culture, it is essential that we take proactive steps to educate and celebrate all experiences, enabling our community to demonstrate and champion equity, diversity and inclusion, always.

OUR MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY ARE AS FOLLOWS →

Recognising Difference

We will work with training partners to increase awareness on topics across our three key indicators, and other important topics, as chosen by our networks. These learning resources will be readily available on our intranet ('Smart Works in a Box'). We will review internal policies and practices to ensure they genuinely support difference, such as leave for religious holidays and diversifying our parental leave offering.

Inclusive Leadership

We will empower our leaders across Smart Works, such as Line Managers and Chairs of Board of Trustees, to operate in the most inclusive way. We will create a Line Manager handbook and provide Inclusive Leadership training. All staff working at 'Head of' level and above will have an objective focused on EDI, with key results relating to their role.

Staff Networks

We will introduce networks for groups in our community, built and led by members of staff. The purpose of these networks is to enable those with shared experiences to foster connections across our community and increase their sense of belonging at Smart Works. There will be the opportunity for the networks to support with the delivery of the EDI strategy, if there is appetite to do so.

Celebrate Difference & Diversity

We will use important dates in the calendar as a chance to celebrate difference and diversity at Smart Works, such as Disability Awareness Day and Black History Month. Led by established networks, we will host internal events, share knowledge and raise awareness to truly show that we celebrate everyone.

Embedding EDI from the Start

Upon starting at Smart Works, we will introduce every trustee, staff member and volunteer to the values that guide Smart Works. This will continue to develop and maintain our inclusive and supportive culture. Our current EDI training, designed specifically for Smart Works, will become mandatory for all staff and trustees.

In 2023, 74% of our staff and trustees agreed that Smart Works values diverse opinions and ideas. By better equipping our teams and nurturing an environment where everyone can be themselves, fulfil their potential and feel a sense of belonging, this will increase to 80% by 2025.

4. OUR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES ARE BEST IN CLASS, CHAMPIONING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKPLACE



As a charity that supports people into employment, we want to lead by example when it comes to employment practices. We believe that having a job should be a positive, empowering and enjoyable experience for everyone, and we are committed to providing this for our community.

OUR MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY ARE AS FOLLOWS

Female Unemployment Index

We will continue to undertake research and publish rich insight into the experiences of unemployed women looking to enter the workplace. We will do this by publishing the Smart Works Female Unemployment Index on an annual basis, providing a platform for unemployed women to be heard and to drive change.

Real Living Wage

We will become an accredited Living Wage employer, paying the real living wage. We will champion high-quality job opportunities through our service delivery and partnerships, such as when sharing vacancies and hosting job fairs.

Commitment to Inclusivity

We will identify employment schemes and initiatives that signify our commitment to greater inclusivity in the workplace. This will include participation in schemes that recognise good employment practice, such as the Disability Confident employer scheme and the Care Leaver Covenant, and continued membership of the Employers Domestic Abuse Covenant.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

To promote an open culture around mental health, we will provide mental health support and resources via our internal intranet ('Smart Works in a Box') and launch an Employee Assistance Programme. We will also train at least one Mental Health First Aider in every centre, to support all staff and volunteers.

Professional Development & Pay Transparency

All staff should feel informed about their progression opportunities and be empowered to further their professional development if they want to do so. To support this, we will introduce a mentoring scheme, establish a pay policy, and we will continue to never recruit a role at Smart Works without an advertised salary.



In 2023, 74% of staff and trustees agreed that Smart Works championed good employment practices and built positive experiences in the workplace. By investing in our staff and championing positive employment practices and behaviours, we will increase this to 80% by 2025.

5. OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IS BOLD AND WIDELY UNDERSTOOD

If this strategy is to be successful, it must be clearly understood, and publicised internally and externally. By being more vocal about our EDI strategy, we will align our trustees, staff and volunteers to a shared vision and ensure that everyone understands their important role in making Smart Works more diverse, accessible and inclusive.

OUR MAIN AREAS OF ACTIVITY ARE AS FOLLOWS

Clear Accountability

It is vital that everyone at Smart Works clearly understands what their role is in implementing the strategy. To achieve this, we will create an Activation Plan, detailing who is responsible for delivering the priorities. The local and Group Boards will nominate an EDI trustee to oversee progress and we will form a staff Working Group to meet monthly and move forward work in this area, ensuring all centres remain accountable.

Public Commitment

Our commitment to EDI is a public commitment. We will publish this strategy on our website and will share an annual update on how we are progressing against our priorities. We will also take this opportunity to review our marketing and communications, and make it very clear that Smart Works is able to support any woman, including transgender women, and non-binary people who feel they would benefit from our service.

Transparent Reporting

We will report on our progress at the annual Smart Works Conference, attended by all trustees and staff, and progress against the Activation Plan will be introduced as a standing item at all quarterly Smart Works Board of Trustee meetings. We will be honest about what is working and what is not, and will not be afraid to innovate as we learn and respond to the changing landscape.

Representative & Accessible Materials

We understand how the materials and imagery we share publicly can create barriers to participation at Smart Works. We will ensure that our digital and printed materials accurately reflect the diversity and breadth of experiences within our community, as well as amplifying the voices and visibility of underrepresented groups. We will also add features to improve the accessibility of our digital platforms, such as adding subtitles on videos and including alt-text on photos and social media posts. As part of our website development, we will consult experts to improve the content and design from an accessibility perspective.

Always Listening

Our work on EDI will be live and ongoing, with staff, trustees and volunteers always invited to input ideas on how we can develop in this space. We will continue our annual EDI survey for trustees and staff, which will provide honest feedback on how we are progressing and areas for improvement. We will introduce a new form on our intranet ('Smart Works in a Box'), for anonymous suggestions and new ideas to be shared with senior management on an ongoing basis.

Looking Beyond Smart Works

We know that we don't have all the answers and want to continuously learn from our peers in the charity sector. We will dedicate time to reviewing the work of other charities, building relationships and learning from experts in their field. By publicising our own annual updates to the public and speaking with others about what we have learnt, we hope to contribute to the sector becoming more inclusive.

By being clearer and bolder about our commitment to EDI, we will see an increase in the proportion of staff and trustees who feel that Smart Works clearly communicates its EDI strategy with staff and trustees, from 55% in 2023 to 80% in 2025. This increased understanding will maintain accountability and fully integrate EDI into our work.

Summarising our priorities

In March 2023, we ran an anonymous survey for our staff and trustees, completed by 68 people. We asked for feedback on how we were progressing in this space and for their input and ideas on what more we could do. Alongside reviewing the qualitative feedback, we will use the quantitative feedback to measure the success of our strategy as already set out in each of our priorities.

In 2023, 57% agreed that Smart Works was a charity with EDI at its core. We want this to be better, and by delivering our strategy, we will increase this to at least 80% of people by 2025.

Priority 1: Our clients must always be at the heart of our decision making

In 2023, 86% felt that Smart Works had done well in ensuring clients were at the heart of our service. We will maintain this statistic by further elevating the voices of our clients, so that decision makers across the Smart Works community hear more from those who are experts by experience and gain a deeper understanding of those we support.

Priority 2: Our internal community must better reflect and represent our clients

In 2023, 40% agreed that Smart Works had been effective in minimising the disparity between the demographic makeup of our staff, trustees and volunteers, and our clients. We will deliver initiatives that result in our internal community better reflecting and representing our clients, increasing this statistic to at least 60% by 2025. Crucially, establishing strong baseline data on the demographic of our internal community is key to the success of this priority.

Priority 3: Our culture is inclusive, welcoming and non-judgemental

In 2023, 74% agreed that Smart Works values diverse opinions and ideas. By better equipping our teams and nurturing an environment where everyone can be themselves, fulfil their potential and feel a sense of belonging, this will increase to 80% by 2025.

Priority 4: Our employment practices are best in class, championing positive experiences in the workplace

In 2023, 74% agreed that Smart Works championed good employment practices and built positive experiences in the workplace. By investing in our staff and championing positive employment practices and behaviours, we will increase this to 80% by 2025.

Priority 5: Our commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion is bold and widely understood

In 2023, 55% agreed that Smart Works clearly communicated its EDI strategy with staff and trustees. By being clearer and bolder about our commitment to EDI, we will increase this statistic to at least 80% by 2025. This increased understanding will maintain accountability and fully integrate EDI into our work.

Looking to the future

This strategy is our collective commitment to improving equity, diversity and inclusion at Smart Works. It is a starting point, setting out our roadmap and priorities for change by 2025.

We know it is not exhaustive and will take continuous action and improvement, beyond 2025. In parallel to these immediate actions, we will develop our plan for the long-term and what change could look like beyond our Three Year Plan.

It may be the first public Smart Works EDI strategy, but it will not be the last.

We also acknowledge that we do not have all of the answers. We will continue to draw upon the insight and expertise of our clients, our community, and the sector, so that we can evolve our thinking and further our work. This might mean that our plan needs to change, so that we can meet the needs of the people we represent. We will not hesitate to adapt, adjust and innovate.

In light of this philosophy, we want to hear from you and start a conversation. Whether you are a client, supporter, fellow charity professional, staff member, trustee or volunteer, please email **EDI@smartworks.org.uk** if you would like to talk to us about this strategy.



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