Professionalising Diversity Practice

Launching the Diversity Professionals’ Institute – Background and Next Steps

May 2006

1. Introduction
This paper provides the background to development work undertaken by Melanie Allison and Dr. Gillian Shapiro since June 2004 to lay the groundwork for an initiative to professionalise diversity practice by establishing a professional body for those working in this field. It tracks the outcomes of their informal and small scale consultations with diversity managers and consultants, public bodies and other professional institutes, to reach the current point where senior diversity professionals from 16 exemplar organisations have agreed to support a formal study, the results of which will act as the backbone to a Diversity Professionals’ Institute (DPI) – our working title for the professional body.

Evident benefits of a more professional approach to diversity practice are:
- to provide a consistent quality standard governing the delivery of consultancy services and in-house diversity practice
- to support the career development of diversity professionals
- to gain improved strategic influence for diversity as a key function within organisations
- to represent the collective voice of diversity professionals as a bridge to dialogue with Government and other bodies such as the new Commission for Human rights.

2. The DPI Originators
Melanie Allison and Dr. Gillian Shapiro are independent Diversity Consultants. Since 1997 Melanie has been the London and National Campaign Manager of Opportunity Now, the Gender Diversity Advisor to the Board of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and European Diversity Manager at a global investment bank and established her own consultancy practice in 2004, supporting the strategic leadership of diversity. She enjoyed a 20-year career as a public servant, latterly as a senior manager in the Ministry of Defence.
Gillian established her diversity consultancy business in 1998. She has worked across a range of sectors including technology, health, higher education, banking and central government to help enable organisations improve their performance on diversity. She has also worked with Opportunity Now, Race for Opportunity and the Employers’ Forum on Disability to develop their benchmarking surveys. Before establishing her own company she spent ten years as a senior researcher at the Centre for Research in Innovation Management at the University of Brighton. Here she conducted some ground breaking research into how positively managing employee diversity can act as an essential element in supporting workplace innovation. Her PhD research focused on women progressing senior managerial careers.
3. Background Leading to the Concept of the Diversity Professional’s Institute

The Originators, perhaps like other diversity managers and consultants, have been concerned with the issue of professionalising diversity and the lack of standards in its practice for some time. These thoughts were reinforced by the results of research published in 2003 by the London Central Learning and Skills Council\(^1\). The research reviewed current developments in the qualifications marketplace as they related to diversity and evaluated the potential for an equality and diversity qualification. Overall, the research highlighted the current lack of formal vocational qualifications and career path structure in the diversity field and concluded - from its survey addressing just 100 small, medium and large businesses - that equality and diversity practitioners are in need of a professional competency framework to support their career development objectives.

With this factual context, the Originators began to conduct informal discussions with other diversity consultants and managers – revealing a key finding: the current lack of professional status for diversity was creating problems that were potentially undermining the successful achievement of equality and diversity progress within UK organisations.

Fundamental issues raised in discussion proved equally revelatory:

- There is currently no single body that can represent the views of people working on diversity to the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.
- There is no career structure in the diversity field. One consequence of this is that individuals leave the field resulting in a loss of knowledge and experience.
- It is difficult for purchasers of diversity services to judge the quality of consultants and training providers.
- Individuals working in the field have difficulty in identifying training and education to meet their development needs.

The Originators sensed from this work a growing need for a professional body that could act as a centre for excellence for the development of first class diversity practice in the UK. It could act as a single representative voice for those working in the field. It could set the standard in skills, competencies and experiences required in different diversity roles and provide a clear career development path for practitioners to enter the profession and progress to senior positions. In addition, a professional body could also usefully perform other functions, filling gaps such as: research, signposting training and development that supports standards and career development, providing a forum for exchange of knowledge and experience etc.

4. The Senior Diversity Leaders Forum

The Originators invited a small number of senior diversity managers to meet as a formal Forum – kindly hosted by Merrill Lynch - on 28 April 2006 where they discussed the idea of developing a Diversity Professionals’ Institute.

The organisations represented at this ground-breaking Forum included:

---

\(^1\) *The Development of an Equality and Diversity Competency Framework*, by Afua Yeboah and Connie Jackson, Amos Recruitment and Training Ltd, funded by London Central LSC.

The contents of this document, including concepts and actual content are the copyright protection of Embankment Associates Ltd. and Shapiro Consulting Ltd.
Alliance and Leicester Group
BBC
BDO Stoy Hayward
British Council
IdEA
Merrill Lynch
Morgan Stanley
The Cooperative Group
UK Film Council

Invited organisations interested in the Forum but unable to attend included:

- CitiGroup
- Ford Motor Company Europe
- HM Land Registry
- KPMG
- Lloyds TSB
- Microsoft
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers
- Royal Bank of Scotland Group/Coutts Bank

The Forum agreed that in the first instance, the focus of the DPI should be at the senior level, with a longer-term view to extending this over time, to encompass all diversity professionals. The Forum saw it as critical to start to professionalise diversity at the strategic level initially - this would then lay the foundations for extending the DPI in the future, the benefits of which would be:

- Setting the standards for senior diversity professionals
- Providing the framework for effectively influencing change and positioning diversity at the strategic level
- Establishing a single authoritative voice for senior diversity professionals
- Supporting new and existing senior diversity professionals with structured career development and knowledge sharing
- Assist professionals to sustain corporate progress – providing longevity and consistency of experience for their organisations.

The Forum went on to agree three actions to build the DPI launchpad:

i) Conducting an evidence based fact finding study to:
   a. establish the potential size, characteristics and interests of the membership base
   b. gather the required information on current skills, competencies, knowledge and experience at the senior diversity level - and gaps
   c. in order to develop a competency framework for senior diversity managers.

The results of this study will form the backbone of the DPI.
ii) Putting in place the appropriate infrastructure and governance for the legal formation of the DPI membership body.

iii) A Communication Strategy covering publicity for and launch of the DPI.

5. Other Work in Development
It is unsurprising that other initiatives in this arena have developed more recently – it is a hot topic. As part of their background development work to date, the Originators have identified a number of relevant projects and initiatives, and dialogue is underway with each of the organisations leading these. It makes good sense to consolidate resources and, where possible, work in partnership with these initiatives to achieve common aims and to share our 2 years of development experience on this theme. The distinctive and defining feature of our work towards the DPI is its focus on establishing strategic level standards for practice among senior diversity professionals – no other player has this vision.

- The Commission for Racial Equality have recently undertaken a consultation with diversity consultants to assess the feasibility of establishing a standard of practice on race equality for consultants.
- The London Development Agency (LDA) - as part of their Diversity Works For London programme - are developing a concept to establish a Diversity Academy that will extend beyond 2008 (the life of the programme). Its three key areas of focus include – engaging public, private and voluntary sectors in promoting equality; championing workforce and supplier diversity; seeking out and promoting business best practice
- The National Learning and Skills Council is currently proposing to support the development of learning opportunities for practitioners working in the field of equality and diversity, and accrediting individual achievement. This work is scheduled to complete by the end of 2007. Perhaps through a professional body, the LSC are focusing on accrediting externally provided equality and diversity courses and providing new courses and qualifications where necessary.

6. Work Required to Establish the Diversity Professionals’ Institute
The Forum of Senior Diversity Managers held on 28 April 2006 called for a Diversity Professionals’ Institute focused in the first instance at the senior and strategic level of diversity practice, as explained above. In establishing the senior level DPI through its three launchpad actions, commitment in principle was given to support this phase of work through funding contributions and volunteering.

It is aimed to complete the preparatory work within 6 months with a view to launching the DPI in early 2007. The three strands of this phase of work will be under the direction of Working Groups, headed by the Originators and supported by volunteers from the Forum. The broad scope of these Working Groups is set out below and will be refined by the contributors as their work strands develop.
i) Fact Finding Study – Groundwork to Establish the DPI
This working group will be led by Dr. Gillian Shapiro. The objectives of the Fact Finding Study to establish the DPI are to:

a) Establish the potential size and characteristics of the senior level DPI membership base
b) Identify what services potential members seek from the DPI
c) Identify the current range of knowledge, skills, competencies and experience held by those in senior level diversity posts
d) Identify the key gaps in knowledge, skills, competencies and experience held by those in senior level diversity posts required to position diversity at the strategic level in organisations and achieve change.
e) Build a senior diversity competency framework that will form the standard for achieving a strategic level of practice.

The study will be carried out under a restricted invitation to tender in two stages. Objectives a - d will be tendered first, followed by a second tender invitation to undertake objective e.

The parameters for the study are as follows:

- The study will be conducted among senior in-house diversity professionals in both the public and private sectors and will include selected consultants working at the strategic level.
- The study will also consult with senior industry leaders to seek their view on what helps and hinders the positioning of diversity at the strategic level within organisations.
- The study will cover all industries across the whole of the United Kingdom.

ii) Infrastructure and Governance
This working group will be led jointly by Melanie Allison and Gillian Shapiro. It will:

- Review existing professional body models to establish the most appropriate organisational structure for the DPI.
- With legal counsel, identify the most appropriate legal structure for the DPI.
- Draw up terms of reference for the DPI and nominate responsible officials
- Establish the services and activities to be undertaken by the DPI
- Establish the financial infrastructure for the DPI to enable it to function
- Identify the roles and responsibilities required for the DPI to operate.

iii) Communication, Publicity and Launch Event
This working group will be led by Melanie Allison. It will:

- Identify key organisations and individuals that should be included in consultation and communications in the lead up to the DPI launch. (This includes, among others, Equality Commissions, the future single Commission for Equality and Human Rights, the equality employers’ campaigns and other organisations conducting similar work - e.g. the LSC and the LDA).
- Plan communications and media publicity for an event to launch the DPI, including attracting ongoing sponsorship and a media partner.
7. Funding
An estimate of the total costs required to progress the work to a point of formally launching the DPI is around £70K, broken down as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. Days</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fact Finding Study</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study framework development, managing tender process &amp; set up</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>£300</td>
<td>£2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study project management &amp; oversight</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>£300</td>
<td>£1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct study &amp; establish professional competency framework (max value of tender contract)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infrastructure and Governance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure management, including review of existing professional models, terms of reference, services, roles etc (set up of DPI)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>£300</td>
<td>£7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal costs (assumed rate*)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>£2000</td>
<td>£7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication, Publicity and Launch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning of DPI with stakeholders, finding media partner, launch host</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>£300</td>
<td>£3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch costs including publicity and marketing (assuming hosting donated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site development including content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* We will seek a pro-bono sponsor for the legal work which makes up a large proportion of the costs.