

Special feature: Focus on People, Diversity and Inclusion: Our strategy and how it benefits our clients

Over the last 2 years GAD, like many other businesses, has had to adapt to working remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic. Even now with restrictions lifted, our people continuing to work remotely for a proportion of the week.

There are many advantages to hybrid working, including added flexibility and reduced commute times for our staff. However, it does mean that we need to work harder to ensure that our people are supported, happy and continue to work together effectively for our clients.

GAD aims to be a diverse, high performing team, 'One GAD'. As part of our vision for our people, our staff networks help to enhance wellbeing and promote diversity and inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)

Diversity is acknowledging difference such as sex and sexual orientation, race, religion and disability. Inclusion is valuing these differences so that staff have equal opportunities and thrive at work.

In June 2021, the UK government issued a declaration on government reform. The declaration, included a commitment to setting a new standard for diversity and inclusion.

The declaration was followed up by the publication of the Civil Service D&I Strategy 2022 to 2025.

The strategy emphasises that diversity is essential for improved organisational performance. Benefits include the ability to attract and retain the best talent, increased employee satisfaction, improved outputs and better organisational performance.

GAD's D&I strategy and equality objectives

D&I is essential for a happy and productive workplace and is an important factor for our clients and employees. We have embraced the Civil Service D&I Strategy and we are continuously developing our own D&I objectives to ensure maximum benefit for everyone.

In June 2022, we launched our D&I strategy, aligned with the Civil Service strategy and the GAD Strategic Plan 2022 to 2025. Our 3 priorities are:

- Culture: enhancing our inclusive and supportive culture
- Connections: enabling staff to develop both internal and external connections
- Continuous development: develop our staff to serve the needs of our clients.

Our objectives ensure that we:

- develop capabilities and support our people to reach their full potential
- recruit inclusively and have a diverse workforce at all levels
- encourage an inclusive culture that welcomes diversity in all its forms
- provide high quality service to our clients

Attracting talent from more diverse backgrounds with more diverse experiences and views gives us the ability to challenge established ways of thinking.

Crucially, diverse perspectives lead to innovation and creativity, which help us to provide alternative or improved approaches to our clients' problems.

The Civil Service is increasingly diverse. By prioritising diversity within our own organisation, we are working to ensure our ability to understand our clients changing needs.

Staff networks

Our staff networks are a key part of our D&I strategy. They provide platforms for employees to be heard, support staff and provide a safe space for sharing issues. Each network is sponsored by a member of the management team who provides a conduit for bringing issues to the attention of management. Our networks work together and with wider Civil Service networks to build an inclusive and supportive culture.

In December 2021, we launched 3 staff networks to support our people, the:

- Women's Network
- Trainee and Analysts' Network
- Business Professionals' Network (for non-actuarial staff).

Staff networks: focus on the Trainee and Analysts' network

We have many staff who are training to become actuaries, as well as professional analysts who have varied expertise which supports our technical work. The network gives them a forum to discuss issues which are impacting their demographic.

"The Trainee and Analysts' Network has been a great opportunity for me to

develop my leadership and presentation skills. We share experiences and knowledge with others, leading to a broader range of skills within the network.

We hope to expand the scope to encompass both professional and social activities. This will lead to greater collaboration across GAD and our wider networks.

Being a member of this network has had a positive impact on my quality of work." We have many staff who are training to become actuaries, as well as professional analysts who have varied expertise which supports our technical work. The network gives them a forum to discuss issues which are impacting their demographic.

External partnerships

Civil Service

We work with other departments across the Civil Service to share knowledge and best practice. This includes attending the Government Analysis Function's D&I programme board and the Cabinet Office Heads of D&I meetings. We also participate in the Civil Service Inclusion survey, the results of which are published on the GOV.UK website.

As most of our clients are part of the Civil Service, knowledge sharing ensures that we are aware of D&I developments which impact our clients.

The Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA)

The IFoA launched their D&I strategy in 2021, highlighting the 'triple gain' from a more inclusive and fairer society, which are improvements in:

- productivity
- mental health
- life expectancy

GAD is accredited by the IFoA's Quality Assurance Scheme (QAS). This is a voluntary scheme to promote confidence in the work of actuaries and identify issues which impact their work. QAS has identified D&I as a key issue and to become QAS accredited an organisation must demonstrate proactive promotion of D&I, specifically:

- appreciating the impact of D&I
- fostering an inclusive working environment
- valuing all colleagues and being able to raise D&I issues without fear of retaliation

Our progress is published in our annual report and accounts and in our annual D&I impact report.

Internal events

Regular knowledge sharing with our staff is key to achieving our D&I plan. We have a D&I calendar of events with a different focus each month. These include Pride month and Wellbeing month. We have also organised events such as listening circles during International Women's Day to learn and share experiences with colleagues.

D&I calendar: Focus on Pride month

This month (June) is Pride month, and our D&I group have run various sessions.

One was to discuss issues that LGBT+ colleagues may experience in the workplace, particularly the question of whether or not to 'come out' at work. Colleagues had an opportunity to share their own insights and reactions to what has been said and seen.

"It's been great to see GAD involved in pride month and raising awareness of LGBT+ experiences across the business. GAD has increased its involvement year on year and I'm looking forward to seeing how this develops in the future. It was helpful to see colleagues participating in events, wanting to learn and becoming allies to their LGBT+ colleagues.

Knowing who your allies are makes it easier to come out and to build more open and meaningful relationships with colleagues. I hope that this will have a positive impact on my work."

A poll taken revealed that:

- 12% of attendees rated themselves as having a very good or reasonable understanding of LGBT+ colleagues' experiences at work, but
- 50% admitted limited or no understanding with 38% saying that they were unsure.

The session was run to build greater awareness, understanding and empathy. We hope that these statistics have and will continue to improve. Staff commented that the examples helped them to gain a better understanding of the issues faced at work by LGBT+ colleagues daily.

Wellbeing month

In May GAD focussed on wellbeing. As part of wellbeing month, we marked Mental Health Awareness Week which is one of the largest awareness campaigns in the UK. We held several staff events all linked to this year's theme of loneliness. These helped to raise awareness of the importance of looking after our own mental health and supporting colleagues with theirs.

Moving forwards: our vision for inclusion

People and Inclusion are priorities in the GAD Strategic Plan 2020 to 2025, As we approach the halfway point, delivery is progressing well and we are on track to achieve our vision for D&I within the timescale.

We are constantly working to improve inclusion at GAD, with the aim of enhancing both our staff and client experience.

Although our current Strategic Plan runs to 2025, there is no finite point at which we will have achieved inclusion. Our people strategy will continuously develop as the world and our working environment changes. We are constantly learning and strive to be adaptable, maximise potential and provide the best support possible to the UK government and wider Civil Service.