

# Diversity in the UK construction industry – building competitive advantage



*A report for the Equality and Human Rights Commission by Jan Peters in association with Melanie Allison*

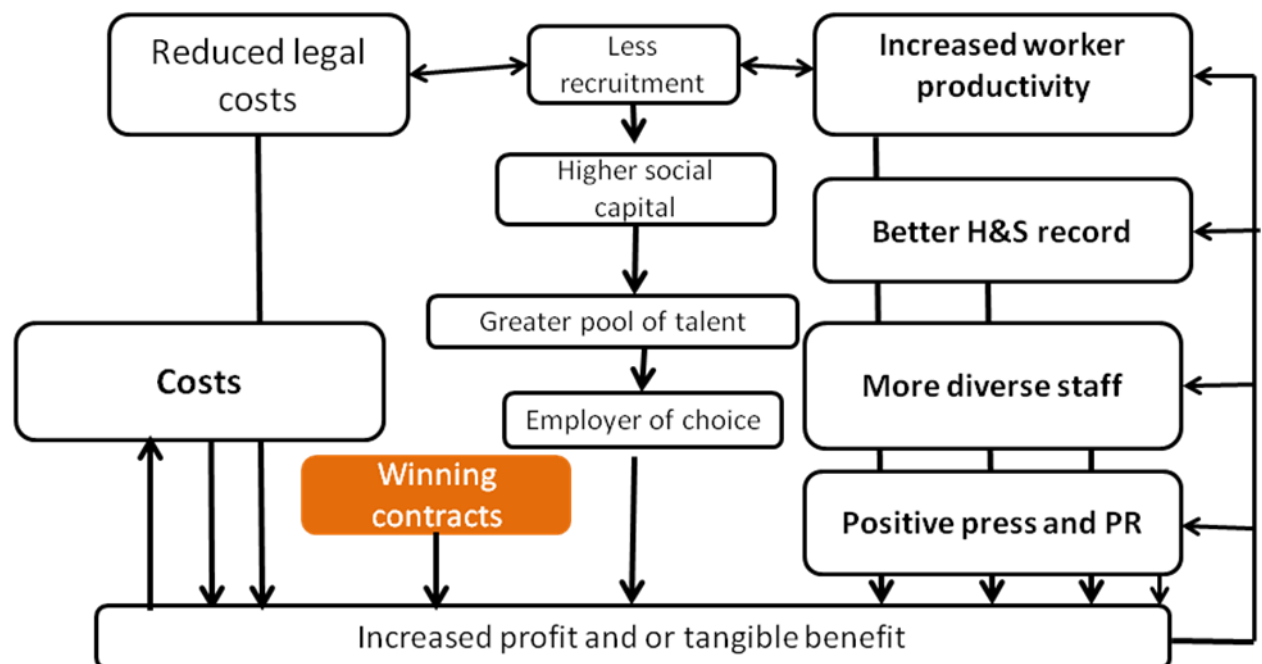
## Context

This report offers the first exploration of the costs of diversity initiatives for the UK construction sector. The fieldwork and literature review revealed important challenges for the industry in tackling areas of diversity where the research shows that it is sometimes struggling: disability, gender, race and age.

There is a bigger picture too, beyond these dimensions – for example such as in religious and lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender issues that were not covered in the remit of the original work.

The report presents a positive picture of good practice and progress being made – green shoots of spring. In addition, it highlights much more that can be done for construction firms to reap the full benefits in terms of competitive advantage and impact on business results.

The report presents a lifecycle approach to diversity for the construction sector; showing a clear link between the business opportunities to be offered by a focus on diversity and building a more inclusive construction industry culture.



### *Green Shoots - but companies fail to reap the full benefit*

Despite plenty of exciting anecdotal examples of good practice, in too many cases the good news - reporting and evidence in annual reports and on websites - was hard to find. Few companies were undertaking evaluation and most had little idea of the full costs and impact of their efforts to address diversity. These gaps led us, the authors, to develop a new model to help businesses small and large develop a strategic approach to diversity.

Four key themes are presented and the message for companies is simply to 'do one thing' but ensure they do one thing in each theme. The four themes are illustrated in figure 1 and focus around how the sector works –

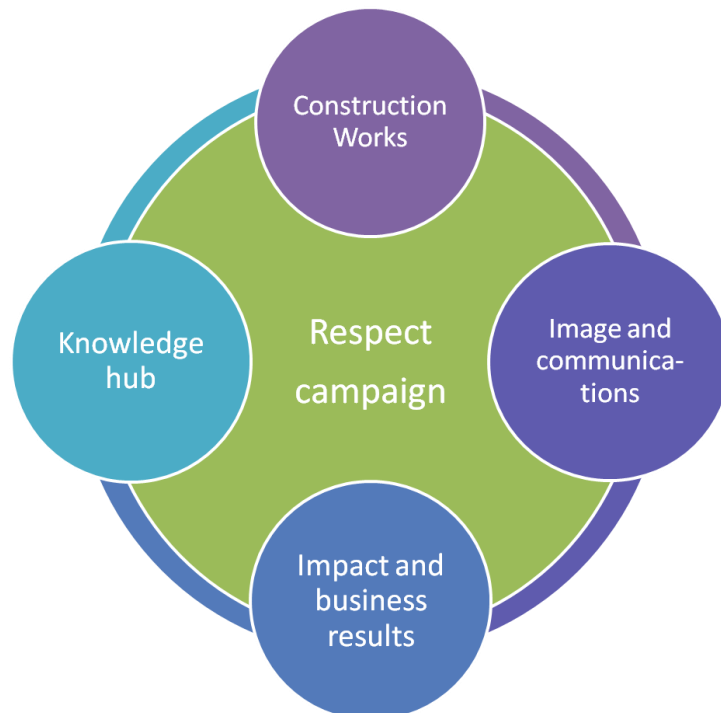
- the culture or working environment,
- penetrating the mass of knowledge available and making it more accessible,
- relating the diversity agenda to business strategy,
- ensuring that performance indicators and impacts are understood.

Above all that, communication is key.

The report recognises the competitive nature of the sector, bidding for high value contracts but urges an industry wide effort to raise standards and the impact of diversity programmes. The two are not mutually exclusive, the authors suggest.

### *It's all about respect*

Building on pockets of good practice and business values in places such as the Olympic Park and elsewhere, the report urges the sector to collaborate on a respect campaign. This universal principle should be embedded into existing site training and induction programmes and all companies should sign up to achieve the goal of 'respect for all, regardless of individual difference'.



The construction sector, in some circles, is perceived as being macho, dirty and stuck in the old ways of doing things and not open to change. The success and impact, to the public, of the considerate contractors' scheme shows that change is possible.

*"Jan Peters, director of Katalytik said: ' The goal of this research was to bring together an illustration of the costs of delivering diversity with an outline of the benefits. We found lots of exciting and innovative ideas as well as potential for further action, especially with the sector joining up to share knowledge, research and success.*

*For a sector that is so focused on where every penny goes, we would like to see companies learning from those making most progress. To treat diversity like other business change initiatives. To see the metrics relating to the impact of programmes being shared.*

*Co-author and associate Melanie Allison, of Embankment Consulting, added that the way ahead was now clear.*

*" In the report we have proposed a simple four point plan to help companies get started on building a great place to work. And underpinning all this, we have recommended a clear, no nonsense sector-wide campaign to get through the message that equality and diversity isn't political correctness. It's a straightforward, clear and businesslike message based on mutual respect for each and every individual."*

*Dr Peters concluded by looking ahead on a positive note:*

*"Construction companies seem caught up in competition, when the reality, hard as it may seem now, is that over the next few years there will be massive skills and labour shortages. Engaging with more diverse communities will open up new talent pools and enable companies to build better relationships with the communities in which they are building."*

The report urges strong leadership from industry trade, training and accreditation organisations which could yield unprecedented engagement and collaboration across the industry. This report is a powerful force for positive change. Based on what really works in practice, the recommended framework for action is presented in a practical and relevant way that will add value to construction businesses' bottom line.'



## **The Authors**

The report was commissioned from specialist consultancy Katalytik, led by founder Dr Jan Peters, in association with co-author Melanie Allison of Embankment Consulting.

They continue to work together, in strategic partnership with construction industry stakeholders, to help steer, advise on and guide the practical business of implementing the report's recommendations.

If your organisation would like a briefing on the report findings and recommendations, or to discuss ideas for implementation, please contact Carol Rothwell of Katalytik

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The full report is available to download from the Equality and Human Rights Commission website. <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

## **About Katalytik**

Katalytik facilitates collaborations and connectivity across industry and academia/education boundaries. We specialise in issues around equality and inclusion in science and technology.

Our approach is to help our client base to step out of the ordinary and develop ways of achieving stretch objectives to effect change and impact.

## **About Embankment Consulting**

Embankment is the first independent UK consultancy to specialise in diversity-related advisory and strategic leadership development services. Creative client partnerships help strengthen and sustain the strategic engagement of Board-level executives in organisational efforts to enhance diversity.

Through our unique triform consulting model, we support client executive teams to integrate inclusive leadership perspectives into their strategic decision-making. Well-equipped and informed Board leaders can then drive a more diverse competitive edge to their business. . [www.embankmentconsulting.co.uk](http://www.embankmentconsulting.co.uk)

