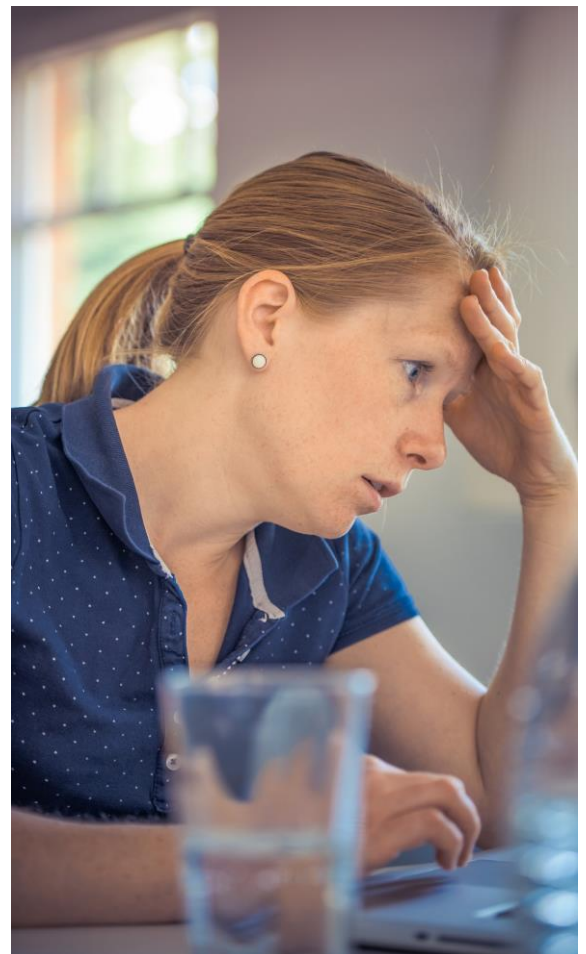# Diversity and Inclusion
during a Pandemic

The new normal

This time last year, none of us predicted the "new normal" in which we now find ourselves.

COVID-19 is having, and will continue to have an impact on the economy, society and our way of life. It will be some time yet before we know what this will look like. In the meantime we are adapting to living and working differently during these unprecedented times.

People reacted positively to government advice, helping to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, and prevent the NHS from becoming overwhelmed. We now need to work with the effects that the huge changes brought about by the pandemic have had our working lives.

Inclusion needs to be a primary consideration for both leaders and employees in the current climate, to ensure that Defence people feel a sense of belonging that drives increased performance results and creates collaborative teams who are innovative and engaging.

Inclusive Working

The pandemic has led to some fast-paced and monumental changes in terms of the way we work and live in a very short space of time. A crisis creates many pressing priorities and could, if unchecked, allow Diversity and Inclusion to slip off the radar and provide unconscious bias with an opportunity to resurface.

If we aren't vigilant in making sure that Defence people feel included, individuals could feel excluded from a team and feel resentment, withdrawal and a lack of confidence. If employees feel isolated or misunderstood, they might lose faith in the organisation to create a successful future.

The Diversity and Inclusion Team have produced an Inclusive Working Practices Guide to help you to consider the different types of staff working from home and their varying needs.

How COVID-19 may affect protected groups

Recent changes have enabled both opportunities and challenges in terms of Inclusion.

For example, some people with disabilities may welcome the growing normalisation of remote working and the improvements in providing workplace adjustments to colleagues at pace and scale.

On the other hand, for other groups, such as LGBTI colleagues, home may be a hostile environment. Work may be a safe place where they are able to be their authentic self and have access to support networks and supportive colleagues.

Diversity and Inclusion teams across government have been working with staff in these protected groups to better understand their lived experience and how they are being affected in the current context. This information will then help to inform local decision making and action.

Communicating with colleagues is so important at this time. We need to check in with those disproportionately impacted by the crisis, be conscious of all our biases and demonstrate compassion and empathy.

This document contains further information around the potential amplification of Unconscious bias in a crisis situation and considers how each protected group is currently being affected both positively and negatively. It is separate from, but informed by, the work to understand how Civil Service culture is being impacted by coronavirus and changes to working practices

Creating, building and maintaining inclusive teams and leaders

Now is a time for Diversity and Inclusion to thrive.

There are many positives that have come out of our current situation. We are now working successfully in a way that we may not have imagined possible.

We have also had to consider all the varying needs of our workforce to keep everyone focused and engaged, from moving work-based adaptations equipment from the workplace to home, to considering how we communicate effectively, ensuring that the digital channels are inclusive for all.
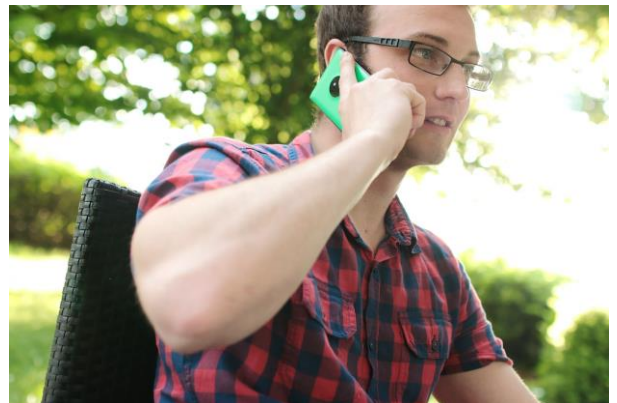
Creating, building and maintaining inclusive teams and leaders

One of the key messages derived from Senior Leaders during a recent Town Hall was that Defence must learn from our current experience and use it as an opportunity to change for the better. We need to gather the good practice that has taken place in the last few months to build a stronger, even more capable work force. We need to lead the way as a department to embed inclusive and innovative ways of working as "business as usual" and reflect the diversity of the people that we serve.

The Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy; 'A Force for Inclusion', sets out our ambition *'to be an inclusive employer where all staff can fulfil their potential and feel confident that their unique perspectives and talents will be valued'.*

Creating, building and maintaining inclusive teams and leaders

An inclusive workplace is one where everyone has a strong sense of belonging, authenticity and voice. This gives us a sense of community and support in our teams and the organisation, so we can be ourselves at work.

It also means that our opinions and contributions are listened to and acted upon, where possible. A more inclusive culture in Defence can help us build greater creativity, improve job satisfaction levels and increase staff motivation and engagement. This in turn drives performance and leads to a stronger and more resilient Defence community.
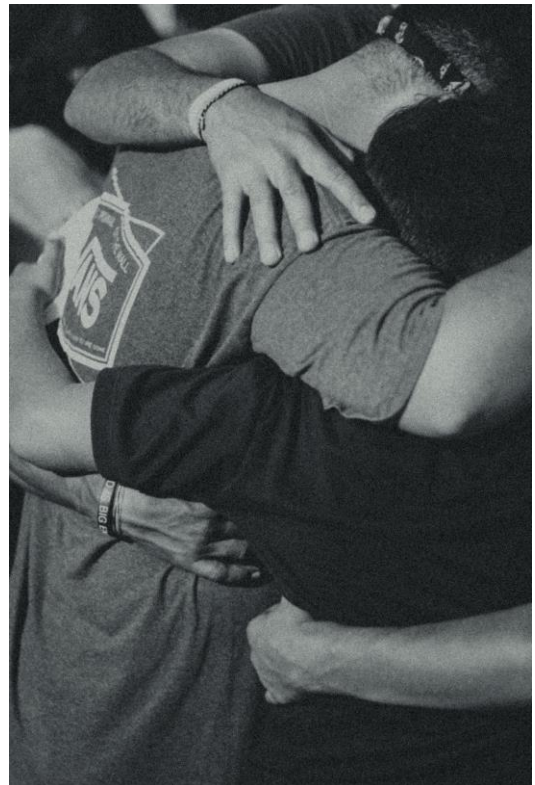
Creating, building and maintaining inclusive teams and leaders

The following links are useful to gain further information for individuals, leaders and Senior leaders around building and sustaining inclusive teams and working environments:

- Empowerment Best Practice- Building inclusive Teams
- How to be an inclusive leader through a crisis
- The Inclusive Recipe Book

For any further support and advice, please contact the central Diversity and Inclusion team People-Diversity-Inclusion@mod.gov.uk