East Midlands business approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion

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Introduction

2025 should be a 'year of action' for East Midlands businesses in prioritising equality, diversity and inclusion, building on an improving picture in the region in recent years.

The research outlined below – conducted by East Midlands Chamber alongside Strategic Partner emh Group – took data from over 300 businesses in the region, exploring attitudes and approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

EVOLVING APPROACH IN THE EAST MIDLANDS

The research, which took place in 2024 following a similar study the year before, identified a growing number of businesses seeking to develop related policies in the workplace and the types and extent of barriers they felt existed, including around leadership, understanding and lack of time.

The second research study intended to highlight to what extent things had changed and whether any new lessons could be drawn. The results were discussed by a group of employers and support organisations to examine their interpretation and any emerging recommendations.
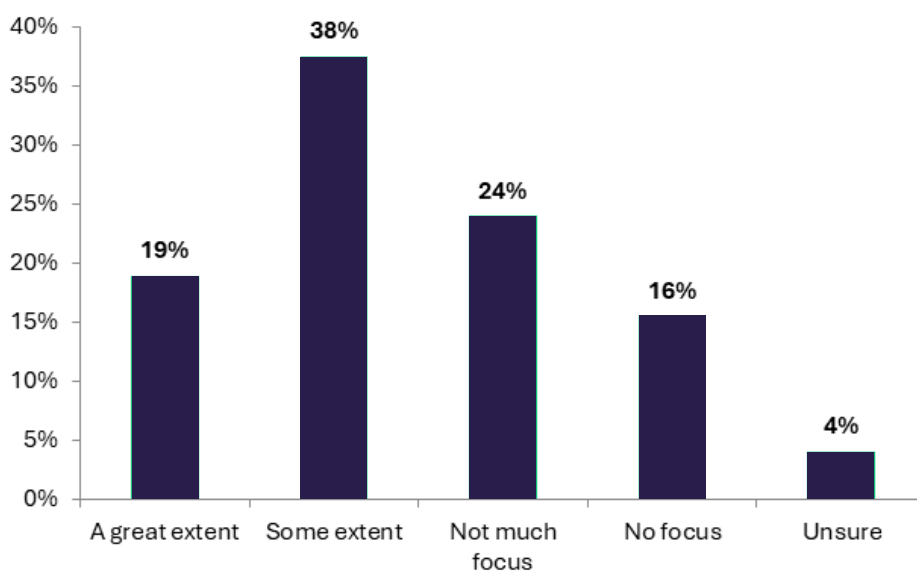
Q1 Does your organisation have a specific EDI-related policy?

Bar chart showing:
- Yes: 67%
- No: 29%
- Unsure: 5%
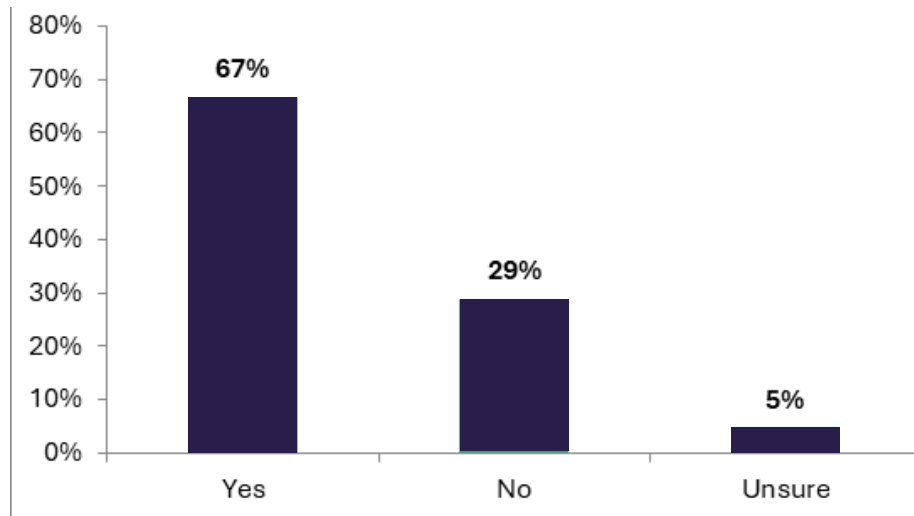
67% of businesses reported that their organisation has a specific EDI policy, representing strong growth on the previous year (54%) and the year before that (48%). There was a decrease in those answering 'unsure' from 9% in 2023 to 5% in 2024, suggesting a growing awareness.

Q2 To what extent does EDI form a part of discussions/strategy amongst your senior leadership team/Board?

Bar chart showing:
- A great extent: 19%
- Some extent: 38%
- Not much focus: 24%
- No focus: 16%
- Unsure: 4%

There has been a small increase in EDI forming a significant part of leadership discussions, with 19% saying this happens to a great extent (15% in 2023), although this increase comes mainly from a drop in those saying it happens to some extent (38% down from 41% in 2023).

Q3

What do you view as the main benefits of having an engaged approach to EDI in an organisation?
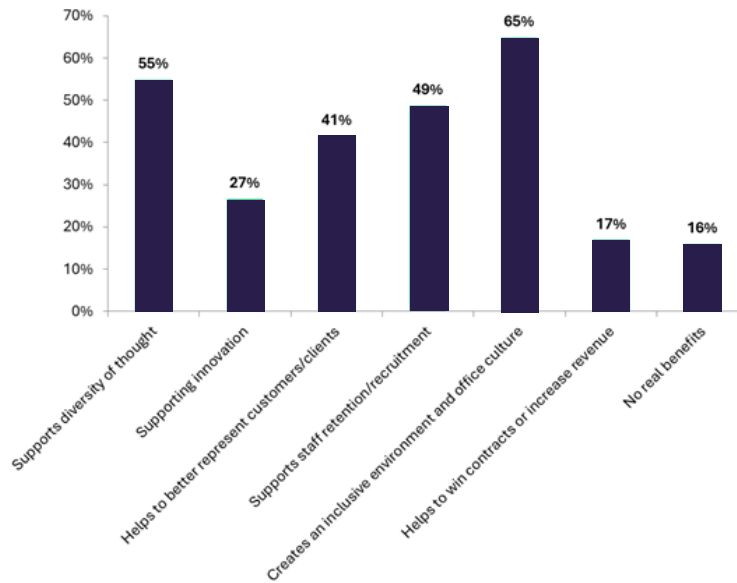
The main reported benefit of having an engaged approach to EDI was viewed as 'creating an inclusive environment', followed by supporting diversity of thought. There was a slight drop in those believing it supports staff retention and recruitment (49% down from 52%). There was no change year-on-year in those believing there to be no real benefit.

Q4

What, if any, do you think are the barriers to having an effective EDI policy?
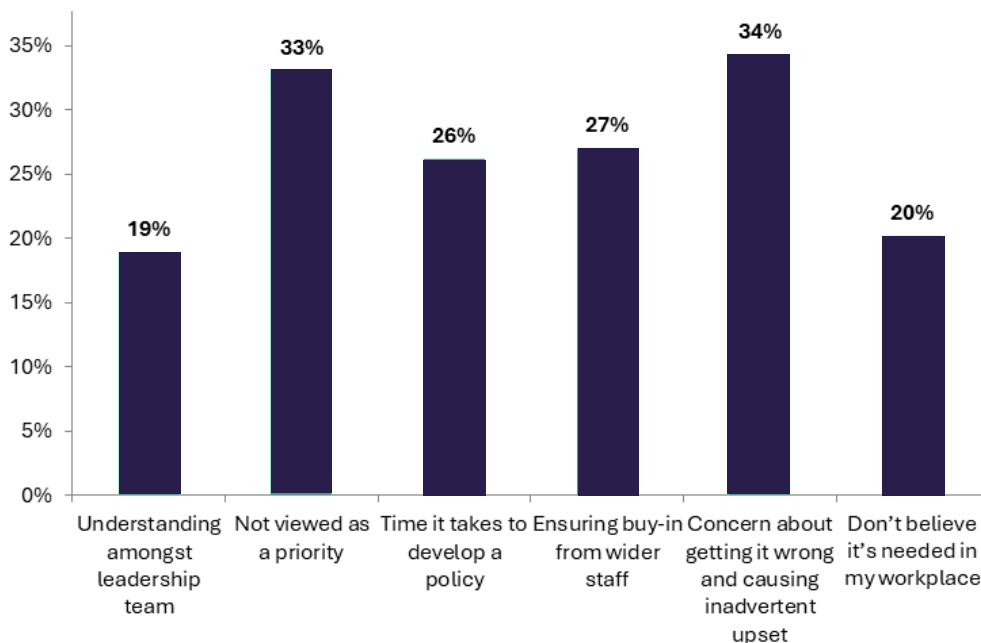
The largest potential barrier to having an effective EDI policy was deemed to be concern about getting it wrong and causing upset (34% in 2024 vs 30% in 2023). There was a significant drop in people reporting it as not being viewed as a priority – 33% in 2024 from 42% in 2023 – along with a drop in those reporting a lack of understanding amongst the leadership team (19% in 2024 vs 22% in 2023). 20% reported not believing EDI was needed in their workplace (22% in 2023).

Q5

Thinking about your business plans for the coming 12 months, how much of a role do you think consideration of EDI should play in supporting the success of those plans?
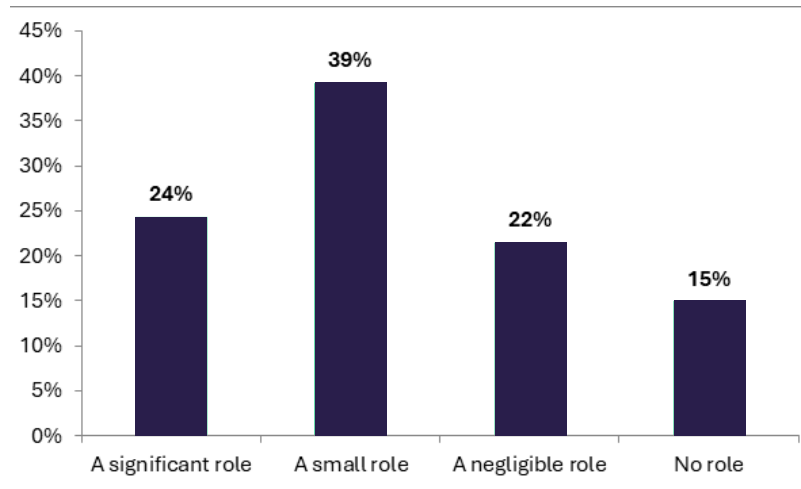
There was year-on-year growth in those reporting that EDI should form a significant role in their business plans – 24% up from 19% in 2023, although most of these came from those previously reporting it should only play a small role (39% down from 43% in 2023). Those feeling it should play no role fell to 15%, down from 17% in 2023.

Q6

On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think consideration of EDI is to the success of your organisation?
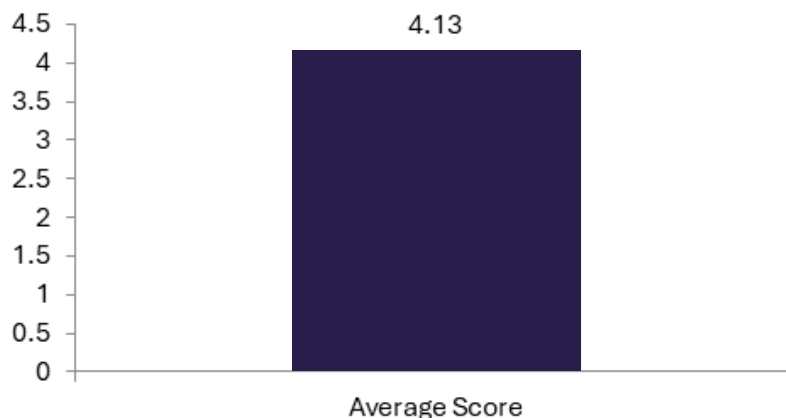
When asked to put a score on a scale of 1-10 on the importance of a consideration of EDI to the success of the organisation, the average score given was 4.13. This is a decrease from the previous year where the average score was 5 and runs counter to previous questions where responses suggested a greater understanding and engagement with the EDI agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESSES AND POLITICAL LEADERS

To support businesses in their EDI journey, creating more inclusive and successful workplaces, businesses and those that support them should:

- Celebrate EDI best practice and raise awareness of business benefits this can bring by using case studies as "champions"

- Embed EDI learning within wider leadership training, including support for how to achieve staff buy-in and resources on what a successful EDI policy looks like in practice

- Curate business support programmes on how to develop EDI policies and procedures

- Bring together organisations that are leading on EDI to discuss best practice and explore partnership opportunities in forums such as roundtables

Political leaders can support the agenda through:

- Collaborating with employer representative bodies to develop EDI training and development programmes

- Advocating for EDI in the supply chain by embedding it into public sector procurement exercises

- Working with businesses to develop messaging that highlights the importance of EDI engagement to overall business success, as well as how it involves a continuous learning exercise

- Providing toolkits and resources to businesses on best practice in recruiting and retaining diverse talent

1. Respondents

The survey ran from 13 May to 10 June 2024 and received 303 responses. Of these:

Manufacturer vs Service Sector

35% can be broadly classified as Manufacturers

65% as Service Sector businesses

Business Size

41% of respondents were micro

32% were small

21% were medium-sized businesses

6% of respondents were large businesses

Geography

36% Derbyshire

32% Leicestershire

30% Nottinghamshire

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"This is the third year of our joint EDI research and once again I'm delighted with the level of engagement we have seen, a huge thank you to all who took part. There's clearly a strong recognition of the benefits of EDI in the workplace and its role in creating an inclusive environment.

We've seen a positive shift in the number of members with an EDI policy compared to last year. The desire from participants to 'do the right thing' around EDI is also reflected in some of the barriers that have been reported - these give us a clear focus for future discussions, collaborations, and support. In addition, there is more to do around sharing practices that demonstrate the tangible contribution of EDI to the bottom-line success of a business. We look forward to working closely with the Chamber and its members to make a real difference within business and communities across the region."

emh Group Chief Executive Chan Kataria OBE

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"These findings show that awareness continues to grow in the East Midlands around the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Where more work is arguably needed is around the understanding of what exactly this means, what good practice can look like and the benefits that getting this right can bring to an organisation. Taking an EDI-informed approach to business isn't just the right thing to do from a fair or just perspective, it can also give an organisation a competitive edge, regardless of size or sector.

The Chamber will continue to work with all members to support growth in that understanding and showcase the great practice that already exists in the region, helping cement the East Midlands as the most exciting, innovative and successful place to start and grow your business."

East Midlands Chamber Director of Policy and Insight Richard Blackmore