



Is DEI Dead?

Combined Insights from the IoD Jersey Community Workshops – June 2025

IoD Jersey's People, Leadership & Strategy Subcommittee held two workshops in June 2025 engaging with over 50 voices across Jersey's business and civic landscape.

The workshops were kindly hosted by Kate Wright and Paul Milbank who summarise the findings below.

Executive Summary

"Is DEI dead?" was posed not as a provocation, but as a prompt for deep reflection. What emerged from two in-depth workshops with over 50 representatives of the IoD Jersey community is clear: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is not dead – but it is at a crossroads.

The overwhelming consensus? DEI must evolve or risk irrelevance. It must become more human, less corporate; more values-driven, less jargon-heavy; and fully embedded in culture, not confined to compliance.

Key Takeaways

DEI Is *Not* Dead - But It *Is* Exhausting, Divisive, and Misunderstood

- DEI as currently practiced is often seen as tokenistic, technical, or overly politicised.
- Many questioned whether DEI ever truly *lived* in Jersey – citing its historic surface-level application.
- Fatigue is widespread: from buzzwords, tick-box exercises, and misaligned corporate messaging.

"It's become a label, not a lived value."

"Performative. Exhausting. Sometimes divisive."

Reframing the Opportunity

A Rare Chance to Reset



- The discomfort and debate signal an opportunity for renewal.
- Participants urged a shift away from language and initiatives that feel imposed - towards those grounded in shared values, belonging, and ethics.
- This moment could mark a revolution, not a retreat.

“It’s not a death – it’s a transformation.”

Revolution Over Evolution

- Workshop 2 revealed a powerful appetite for *disruption* – a clear message that gradualism has failed.
- Many business leaders expressed a desire for bolder cultural interventions, especially as younger generations expect more authentic engagement.

“We need a step change. Not tweaks.”

From Policy to Practice

- The ambition is to embed inclusion into organisational DNA, moving from external optics to internal integrity.
- Leaders must move beyond policies to shape inclusive behaviours, psychological safety, and brave cultures.

“Inclusion should be something we *do*, not something we *say*.”

Emerging Challenges

Leadership & Culture Gaps

- Leadership commitment remains patchy and often driven by optics rather than values.
- Disruption is often tolerated, not embraced – with DEI siloed in HR or seen as a ‘side project’.
- There’s a tension between commercial justifications and social imperatives.

“It’s only real when the people with power are walking the talk.”

Performative Inclusion & Polarisation

- DEI efforts have sometimes excluded those they intended to support, due to lack of intersectional understanding.
- Polarisation and fear are rising – many feel unsure what to say or do, while some voices remain unheard.

“We’re afraid of getting it wrong – but that fear is silencing important conversations.”



Equity Over Optics

- A significant shift was noted: equity (e.g. addressing pay gaps, systemic barriers) is now seen as more critical than representation alone.
- Jersey's culture is slowly shifting from visible diversity to meaningful inclusion.

"Representation without power is hollow."

Shifting Perspectives

Simplicity Over Jargon

- A call to ditch corporate speak and embrace clear, emotionally intelligent language.
- DEI must be normalised, not exceptional – integrated into everyday leadership and operations.

Generational & Sectoral Gaps

- While younger professionals show growing support for DEI, older generations and some sectors (like finance) still see it as compliance-driven or peripheral.
 - Workshop attendees identified this generational shift as a key lever for future progress.
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The Jersey Lens

- Jersey's DEI journey has been cautious, sometimes surface-level.
- However, many now see local leadership stepping up – especially in education and the third sector.
- Global standards are helpful, but must be adapted to Jersey's unique social fabric.

"Compared to five years ago, Jersey has changed. Slowly – but meaningfully."

A Call to Action

Redefine DEI as *Culture Work*

- The future of DEI lies in deep cultural change, not token initiatives.
- It requires emotionally intelligent leadership, collective responsibility, and the bravery to challenge norms.

"It's no longer about being politically correct. It's about being ethically courageous."



Embrace Disruption as a Force for Good

- Disruption should be welcomed as a driver of evolution, not feared as a threat.
- Brave, uncomfortable conversations are needed – especially across difference.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Participants called for collaborative leadership across business, education, civil society and government.
- Jersey now has an opening to craft a new social contract – one rooted in justice, inclusion and shared wellbeing.

Conclusion

So – *is DEI dead?*

Not in Jersey.

But it's outgrown its old identity and is ready for reinvention.

Now is the moment to shift from labels to leadership, from performative actions to purposeful culture.

“Let's not mourn DEI. Let's reinvent it.”

Appendices

Workshop 1: 10th June 2025

Themes: DEI disillusionment, leadership inconsistency, exclusion within inclusion, equity over optics, schools and early socialisation.

Workshop 2: 19th June 2025

Themes: fatigue and polarisation, overly technical language, lack of impact, the need for narrative and personal ownership, Jersey's unique pace of change, future-proofing inclusion.



Appendix A: Workshop 1 Summary

Date: 10th June 2025

Theme: "Is DEI Dead?"

Overall Themes

- **Disillusionment with DEI:**
 - Seen as performative, exhausting, and divisive.
 - Buzzwords and superficial gestures have led to disengagement.
 - DEI may never have truly existed in Jersey; perceived as surface-level.
- **Shifting Focus Needed:**
 - Desire for new terminology and approach rooted in values and lived experience.
 - Push for clarity, relevance, and integration beyond HR.
 - Normative, inclusive culture should be the goal—not checkbox exercises.

Challenges Identified

- **Leadership & Ownership:**
 - Inconsistent and reactive leadership.
 - Employee-led networks are promising but need strategic support.
 - Disruption is often tolerated, not embraced.
- **Exclusion Within Inclusion:**
 - Some DEI efforts unintentionally marginalise others.
 - Intersectionality frequently overlooked.
 - Disenfranchised voices remain unheard.
- **Differences in Perspective:**
 - Generational and sectoral divides.
 - Tension between commercial goals and ethical/social drivers.

Equity, Representation & Education

- **Equity Over Diversity:**
 - Calls to focus on pay gaps, structural inequality, and systemic access.
- **Role of Schools:**
 - Schools are seen as critical for socialisation and change.



- Ongoing debate around single-sex education and inclusivity in early years.

Looking Forward

- **Reimagining DEI:**
 - Need for simplicity, human language, and cultural embedding.
 - Suggestions to drop the DEI label entirely.
 - **Actionable Shifts:**
 - Leadership evolution.
 - Creation of safe, brave spaces for honest dialogue.
 - Integration of inclusion as part of an organisation's core identity.
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Appendix B: Workshop 2 Summary

Date: 19th June 2025

Theme: "Is DEI Dead?"

Core Themes

- **Exhaustion & Division:**
 - DEI feels like a "trend" or "tick box" exercise.
 - Risk of alienating people due to complexity and perceived preaching.
- **Too Technical, Not Tangible:**
 - Language around pronouns and processes are too complex for practical use.
 - Visible metrics (e.g. gender pay gap reporting) don't equate to cultural change.
- **Performative vs. Personal Ownership:**
 - DEI must move from policy to personal responsibility.
 - Requires passionate leadership and accountability at all levels.
- **Inspiring Purpose:**
 - Clear articulation of "why" DEI matters is missing in many orgs.
 - Lack of local data hinders understanding of DEI's true impact.
- **Global vs Local Context:**
 - Jersey seen as conservative and cautious, though improving.
 - Global benchmarks help, but must be contextually adapted.



- **Future-Proofing Inclusion:**

- Need to evolve DEI to address intersectionality, AI bias, and human rights.
- Avoid zero-sum perceptions—focus on collective benefit.

Emerging Insights

- **Visibility Without Substance:**

- Representation without power is insufficient.
- Cultural transformation needed to support visible inclusion.

- **Need for Brave Leadership:**

- Emotional intelligence, humility, and courage are key.
- Emphasis on creating spaces for dialogue, empathy, and shared learning.

Key Recommendations

- Shift from "safe spaces" to "brave spaces."
 - Replace DEI jargon with emotionally resonant language.
 - Anchor DEI in everyday values and practices.
 - Encourage cross-sector collaboration for systemic change.
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