

We value difference - Inclusion and Belonging Statement



together
we are
the **network**

Introduction

At NGN we value difference—we need a range of perspectives, experiences, and personalities to deliver better outputs for our current and future workforce and users. We want to help all individuals and communities thrive and maximise their potential.

We're at the beginning of this journey, and know that we have far to go, but in 2020, a year when the need for inclusivity became increasingly clear we began taking active steps. It's important that we're transparent about our actions and progress, and so we have prepared this statement in which we will outline:

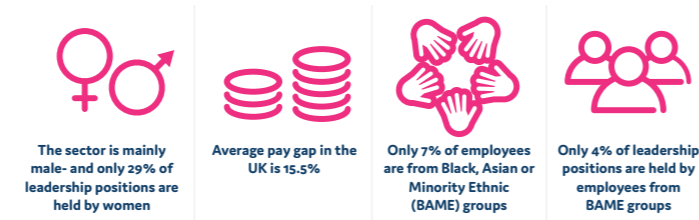
- Our drivers
- Our starting point
- The actions we've taken this year
- Our future approach

Our Drivers

We want NGN to be a workplace where everyone feels included, that they belong and can use their voice authentically. Inclusivity drives better decision making, greater levels of staff satisfaction/happiness and improves wellbeing.

We recognise the importance of hearing a diverse range of opinions but from research conducted by Business in the Community (BITC) we know that in the UK many employees feel excluded at work- and women, younger workers and those from black, Asian and ethnic minority communities are most likely to face 'non-inclusive behaviours' at work.

The UK and the utilities sector:



Research about inclusivity in the workplace often pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic, but one thing is for sure, the existing inequalities have only widened in 2020, making this a key time to take action to embed inclusion. Many of our communities have long faced challenges of deprivation, and covid-19 has deepened these challenges significantly. We see our role as a responsible business to remove barriers to opportunities for people from all backgrounds. It is clear that we must do as much as we can for our communities, our customers, and our colleagues, while continuing to keep them safe and warm, and in 2020 we signed the Social Mobility Pledge to commit to this publicly.

In addition to the above, we saw a strong message from our stakeholders that Inclusion and Belonging should be prioritised:

- Around eight in ten customers feel it is important for NGN to encourage a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace
- Around two thirds of customers want NGN to be transparent in its diversity and inclusion reporting
- Over three quarters of our Customer panel said it was important to them that NGN focus on inclusion and belonging for staff within the workplace,
- 84% of our customer panel said that as customers it was important or very important that NGN works to make sure as many diverse voices as possible contribute to shaping their business plans

Inclusion in our communities as well as our workforce

One of the largest problems currently facing the country is that of low social mobility and uneven distribution of opportunities. Social mobility is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background, has an equal opportunity to progress in life. In a society that is socially mobile, every individual has a fair chance of reaching their potential. However, in today's Britain, where people start off in life has a disproportionate impact on where they end up, both in terms of careers, and earnings. Their destination in life is often determined by the careers of their parents, their parents' level of income, or where they're born geographically. In essence, Britain has a postcode lottery of opportunity.

By signing the Social Mobility Pledge NGN recognise that they have a role to play in shifting social outcomes in their workforce, but also in their wider communities.

Social mobility is not simply about accessing and developing new talent, it is also about removing any internal barriers within the company. By enabling employees to educate themselves through training programmes and to build their careers at NGN, with fifty to sixty individuals being promoted per annum, the engagement and enthusiasm within the company can be maintained successfully. Whilst externally NGN embeds inclusion in to its practices in communities, when recruiting or offering work experience opportunities.

Our commitment to sustainable development

In 2020 we made a public commitment to support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; identifying the 6 priority goals below.

Our priority goals



Many of our business objectives map across to the UN SDGs, for example the social mobility pledge covers a number of the goals. In addition to supporting the 6 priority goals, we still work towards achievement of all of the goals. As our approach matures, we will continue to align our commitments to the goals.

Under Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth) we made a commitment to reduce our gender pay gap and to join the Energy and Utility Skills Partnership Inclusion commitment.

Our starting point

Every year since 2017 we have reported our Gender Pay Gap, but other than gender, we don't record protected characteristics (characteristics such as age, sexual orientation, marriage, and others which are protected by the Equality Act). We're working on gathering the data to understand the make-up of the business and have engaged utilities industry equality experts The Equal Group to help us with this. The Equal Group have also worked with us to build our Inclusion and Belonging strategy and associated principles.

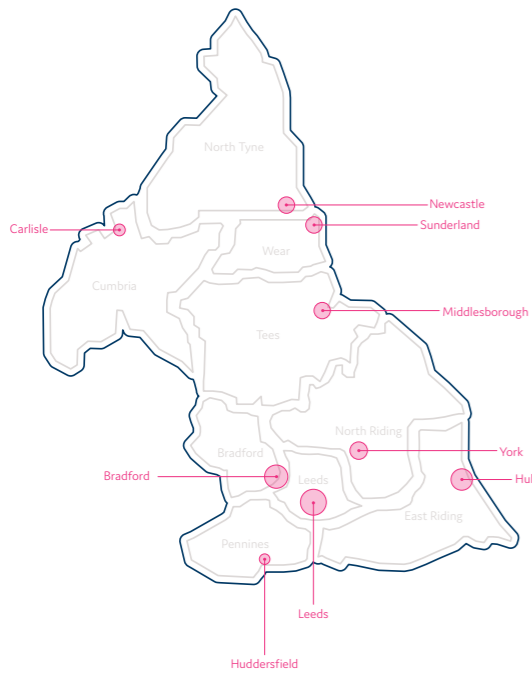
- Our vision:** NGN values difference—we need a range of perspectives, experiences, and personalities to deliver better outputs for our current and future workforce and users. NGN helps all individuals and communities thrive and maximise their potential.
- Our principles:**
- All NGN staff are encouraged to maximise their potential
 - NGN is at the forefront of EDI and sector wide best practice
 - Our success is linked to the success of the communities we serve
 - We are interested in all things related to NGN –processes, people and users
 - NGN cares about the work we do and how we do it
 - We want all staff and all users to genuinely be happy due to NGN

The NGN area has:

- a total population of approximately **6.7 million people** – 12% of England's total population
- an estimated **1.27 million people who are aged 65+**
- **20,500 adults and children with learning disabilities**, 0.4% of the total population. That proportion rises to 0.5% in Hartlepool and 0.6% in South Tyneside.
- **1.04 million people hypertension**, approx. 590,000 aged 18+ who suffer from depression, and approx. 12,400 children with autism known to schools.
- **38,000 people who are registered as blind or visually impaired**, with the largest numbers in Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield and County Durham
- An estimated **1.165 million people have hearing loss** (of at least 25 dBHL) – 17.6% overall. The proportion rises to over 20% in the Cumbria patch and to local areas within North Yorkshire and East Riding
- Nearly **625,000 people have health which restricts their day to day activities 'a lot'**. The proportion is higher than nationally and particularly marked in areas such as Barrow-in-Furness.
- The **proportion of customers in the NGN area from an ethnic minority varies massively by locality** – ranging from 25% in Bradford to around 1-2% in large parts of Cumbria, North Yorkshire and the North East.
- **2.5% of households (as of 2011) did not have anybody who spoke English as their main language** – approx. 66,000 households in total. This proportion rises to 6% in Newcastle and 7% in Bradford.

NGN workforce statistics

 <p>Our workforce is 80% male, 20% female. In top leadership positions there is a 19% female representation</p>	 <p>Our gender pay gap (2019/20) is 16.2%</p>	 <p>We don't know the protected characteristics of our workforce</p>	 <p>None of our senior leaders are from BAME backgrounds</p>
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Actions we've taken in 2020/21

In the coming sections we'll explain the actions we've taken in 2020/21. Including:

- Setting up our **Inclusion and Belonging Working Group**
- Enriching our **engagement** with a range of stakeholders to understand best practice
- **Removing barriers to recruitment**
- **Involving colleagues to help shape our approach**

Our Inclusion and Belonging Working Group

Our Inclusion and Belonging working group was established in July 2020 and brings together colleagues and leaders from across the business who are passionate about inclusion and in a position to make a difference for our workforce. This group has been the driving force for the engagement and removal of barriers work outlined in the sections to follow.

The Inclusion and Belonging Working Group is comprised of the 'Community Voices' from our Colleague Communities which we established in 2021, including:

- Womens community
- LGBTQ+ community
- Mens health community
- Parents/carers community
- Disability

These communities act to empower our colleagues and ensure that we're hearing the authentic messages that this community has to offer, whilst ensuring senior level buy in via the central group.

Engagement

We're not the experts, and so we have spent this year talking to colleagues and leading businesses to understand how we can build meaningful change.

- Working with other utilities companies (Thames Water, NG Bailey, Yorkshire Water, Tarmac) to embody our intellectual curiosity and learn.
- Surveying over 1000 customers to understand their perceptions of inclusion and its importance for us.
- Speaking with our Citizens Jury (a group of customers who are representative of our customer base) in detail to understand whether our principles for inclusion are the right ones, and to understand their desire to see transparent reporting.
- We have partnered with EU Skills to share best practice and experiences including engagement and communication.
- We're working with our colleagues to raise awareness of diversity in our workforce, for example we led a campaign around how the women in our workforce help to 'shape the world'

Removing barriers – from recruitment

In 2020 we redesigned and refined our recruitment process with diversity and inclusivity in mind:

- We embedded a fair and consistent interview process by mandating standardised supporting materials and introducing diverse interview panels to ensure inclusivity. To underpin this new approach, we have raised awareness of unconscious bias with all interviewers prior to them undertaking any interviews.
- When advertising roles we now use a gender decoder to remove gender specific language from job adverts, to ensure that people do not feel excluded from applying for any role. In line with actions agreed in our Social Mobility Pledge Opportunity Action Plan we removed specific job requirements for driving licences and degrees where possible to increase accessibility and reflect our commitment to social mobility.
- We also worked with WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) and the Engage Transform Group to improve our reach with ethnic minorities when advertising jobs.

Success! Our #ICanBeMe apprenticeship recruitment campaign saw us triple our female engineering workforce, simply through using a gender decoder in our job adverts and advertising to different groups.



Actions we've taken in 2020/21

Involving colleagues to help shape our approach

Across the organisation we embedded inclusion and belonging in to new strategies and to understand how we could improve:

- We codesigned our new well-being policy with our workforce and BITC to ensure it aligned with our Inclusion and Belonging principles.
- Worked with the CIPD to establish a parent returner programme including refreshing our flexible working and job-sharing policies to remove barriers.
- We canvassed opinion of our female engineers to understand the barriers and difficulties they face- we are now sourcing Female PPE and sanitary facilities for our female emergency workers.
- We implemented a buddy system for new cohort of apprentices to provide additional support network and improve retention
- We are working with our recognised Trade Unions to ensure effective engagement with all colleagues. We're also leveraging some of the Trade Unions relationships to seek best practice that's fit for our organisation.

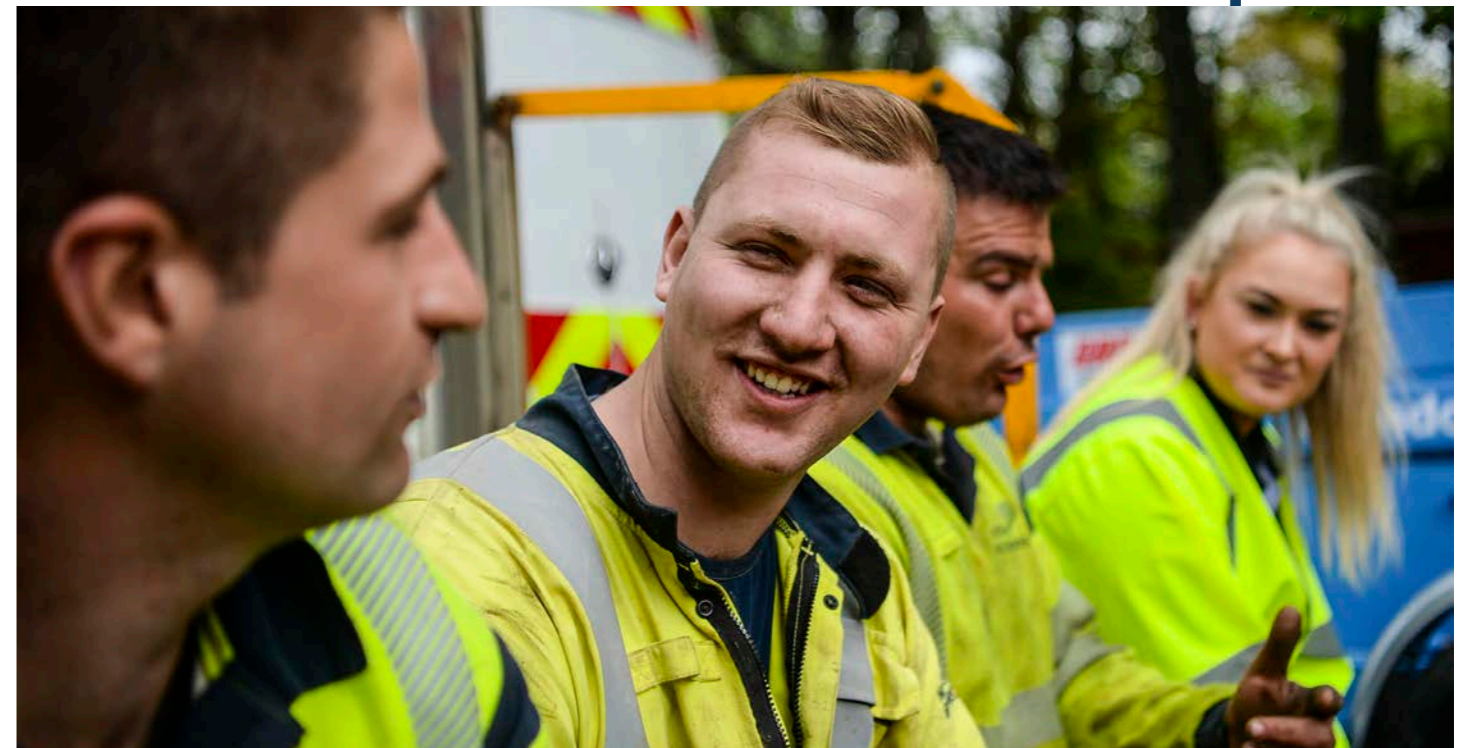
Removing invisible barriers- We identified that there may be some invisible blockers which present a challenge to people accessing work experience or developing skills. We are engaging with specialist organisations to understand and overcome these barriers. One example of this is our partnership with the Lighthouse Futures Trust. The Lighthouse Futures Trust provide internships for 16-25-year olds with neuro-diverse needs, and we worked with them to place a student in our IT team. We have designed a 1 year work experience programme through which they will help shape the IT team's strategy and provide fresh perspectives, such as how we can use gamification and augmented reality to solve our business challenges.



Our future approach

We recognise that we are at the start of this journey and there is still plenty to be achieved. In the short term there are some key pieces of work which will help us achieve a truly inclusive workplace where all employees feel they belong:

- We'll continue to work with the Equal Group to gather data about our workforce which will help us to identify key areas to focus on when creating our strategy and associated objectives
- We'll embed our Colleague Communities so that they feel able to input into our overall Inclusion and belonging strategy, and that we can celebrate key events in the calendar which relate to those groups with an authentic voice.
- We'll develop clear actions through our social mobility pledge opportunity action plan to reducing barriers for employment and experience to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for instance, we'll look to formalise our work placement offering in 2021 and offer a minimum number of placements per year.
- We'll engage our workforce in awareness raising sessions to help them understand the importance of inclusion and belonging and how their actions can help.



Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this report, it is the first of its kind that we have published, and we'd love to know what you think. We're still developing our thoughts on all of the topics we've covered, and we'd love to learn from others, both in and outside of our sector. If there's anything you would like to get in touch about; comments, thoughts, ideas please contact us via the inbox below

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