

# LEADING INCLUSION

Since its founding in 1904, ACCA has had a key role in facilitating a profession that is open to all as a core value. Inclusion, along with integrity and innovation, are now ACCA's three core values which link back to the unique reasons why ACCA was initially created more than a century ago. They reflect the difference that ACCA has brought to the global profession and the need to express them in a way that reflects our world today. However, it is important never to be complacent in this area. Ensuring that we are a profession that is open to all and enables us to play a full and valuable role in society is fundamental to our reason to exist. It strongly supports our ethical stance.

## Accountancy and finance professionals – a role in achieving inclusion

ACCA received over 10,000 responses from a survey of its members, affiliates and future members that was conducted in October 2020<sup>1</sup>. In addition, approximately 20 roundtables were held in a variety of locations across the globe reflecting the views of members and future members. The key results from the survey are shown below (Figure 1).

### What do we mean by diversity and inclusion?

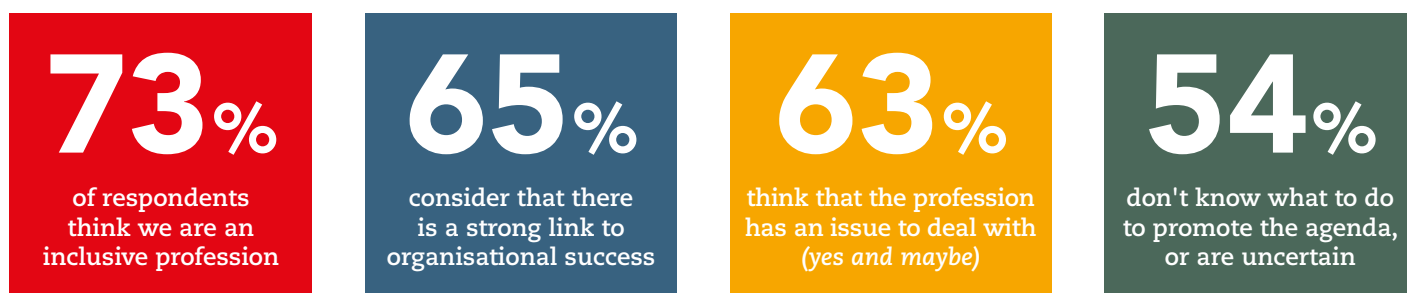
Each of us may well have our own definitions of these terms. Our understanding of them will be influenced by several factors including the environment in which we grew up, our education, our workplaces and our social communities. **Diversity** can be reflected upon as the breadth of society that we live in, be that

defined by a variety of categorisations some of which may be visible, many of which are not visible. **Inclusion** is how we bring every dimension of this rich society into the equation and ensuring that the mix works together. **Equity** is about bringing fairness to the equation, ensuring fair treatment for each of those experiences. As a profession, the collection of individuals that we are a part of, it is important that we strive to achieving inclusion and equity.

### Why is this agenda important?

As a collective of members and future members that has diversity and inclusion at its core it is important that we strive to continue to impact this agenda. The pandemic has, in many cases, reinforced some of the challenges that societies face. The need to bring social justice and to treat each other in an

FIGURE 1: Key responses from ACCA survey



<sup>1</sup> The survey was open to ACCA members, affiliates, and future members. The results given are in relation to those who chose to respond and are not statistically representative of the membership as a whole. Full details of the methodology adopted is given in Appendix 4 of the report.

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equitable manner are fundamentals of the societies that we live in. As accountancy and finance professionals we need to be at the heart of that agenda. Our survey suggests that nearly three-quarters of the respondents saw themselves as part of an inclusive profession. For many roundtable participants this was principally defined by the geographic spread of the profession and how opportunities could be created for all. Yet is this enough? Just under two thirds felt that there was more that the professional should be doing. Perhaps through providing more opportunities to those who do not have a strong educational background, those with unseen disabilities that may challenge their examination performance or to work to equity in other issues such as gender and race where for many locations around the world there are issues to be dealt with. Acting as a strong voice for social justice is essential.

## Biases

Our brains take short cuts in our thinking. They can process about 40 pieces of information every second consciously, but as many as 11 million pieces unconsciously. These unconscious processes are taken based on past experiences, our history, and our background. This is where we introduce unconscious biases. They are a reality. Understanding the impact of these biases is important.

As individuals we can never eliminate biases, we can accommodate them, and we can do this by appreciating how they impact our perceptions and the views that we take, the networks that we form and the approaches that we take.

## Inclusion in the workplace

Accountancy and finance professionals have fundamental roles in our workplaces. Nearly two-thirds of the survey respondents saw a strong link between the diversity and inclusion agenda and organisational success. For half of the respondents the link to diverse teams was one of their top three factors with just over 40% making the link to better decision making. Whether we are finance business partners at the heart of facilitating growth in

organisations or are audit and assurance professionals working with clients we need to approach our work from an inclusive perspective. To ensure that a range of views and opinions are included. Decision making that is representative of our customer base is essential in today's consumer centric economy. The pandemic has reinforced the ethical lens that many consumers apply to organisations through the 3Ps of purpose, people, and profit. Having a strong purpose centric lens that focuses on people (the human capital) and the good that is contributed to society are important.

## Fulfilling our potential

Just over half the survey respondents either did not know, or were uncertain, as to the appropriate steps to take to support the diversity and inclusion agenda. Doing the right thing is often a challenge but doing nothing is not acceptable. Having a focus on what we should do is important.

To ensure that, as accountancy and finance professionals, we know how to play our full part we should consider the following:

- Do we know the diversity goals of the organisation and how these align to the business goals?
- Whether we participate in surveys and discussions as honestly as possible?
- Do we do enough to actively engage – can we become a mentor and / or mentee?
- Do we take time to appreciate diversity?
- Do we treat people as they wish to be treated rather than how you would be treated yourself?
- Do we speak up when something is wrong?
- We should welcome ideas that are different to your own; to support our colleagues.
- Understand what we can bring to the organisation.
- We should commit to continuous improvement.
- Above all, we should help others.