

Actuaries Institute Podcast

Title: Diversity and Inclusion Working Group - 2019 wrap up

Date: 5 December 2019

Interviewer: Lesley Traverso

Speakers: Helena McGeorge, Ricky Au

Duration: 14:54

Introduction

Lesley:

Hello, and welcome to the Actuaries Institute Podcast. I'm Lesley Traverso, Convenor of the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group. I'm joined by Helena McGeorge and Ricky Au, who are both members of the Working Group and passionate advocates for diversity and inclusion. Thank you so much for joining me this morning.

Helena: Thanks Lesley, nice to be here.

Ricky: Yeah, it's good to be here.

Lesley: As we approach the end of the year, we thought this would be a good opportunity for us to reflect on our learnings and highlight some key issues in this space, and other things we should be thinking about in 2020. So, Helena, what do you think has been a highlight for you this year?

Helena: I think something that's been really notable this year has been the number of fresh faces that have joined our team. It's been really nice to have a whole bunch of new members join the group and bring their own personal angles to diversity and inclusion.

So, for example, an area which we probably hadn't looked at previously in the first 18 months of this group was Indigenous diversity and inclusion, and so that's been something that's been very exciting for me. I don't know a lot about that area, and I wouldn't pretend that I do, so it's been really interesting to get some perspectives on that.

Ricky: So, for myself, just like Helena was talking about there, I'm one of the new faces here. So, I transitioned from a member, reading, or guilty of not reading, the content prepared by the working group, to joining the working group. So, from that

transition, I guess the highlight was more before I engaged with the working group, I was expecting more typical topics of diversity, gender and maybe different races.

But now that I get to work with these people, just like what's been mentioned, Indigenous and LGBT and also not just different particular identity, but the concept of diversity of thought is also one of the topics that the Working Group look after, or at least try to explore and get a head start on. I think that sounds great, and we will have meetings and bring some idea to try to plan for the New Year as well, based on the meetings we just had recently, I'm pretty sure we have at least one new topic in the bag already.

Lesley: We've always had the philosophy of diversity of thought and making sure that people keep diversity to the front of their minds, hence why we've been encouraging lots of contributions to Actuaries Digital. I think in terms of feedback from our members, one of the highlights that I noticed this year was when we incorporated the rainbow logo around Mardi Gras. We had a tremendous response from that, and a couple of people actually wrote in to say that they actually felt accepted by the profession now because of that one little act. So, that for me was a particular highlight.

So, maybe looking forward to what we're trying to do over next year and what we're interested in feedback from the members as well, what would be some ideas that you think that we could be doing next year to expand and to continue to do this work?

Helena: So, I think going back to an area that we've probably been looking at for a little while has been gender diversity, and we've focused on this in a number of Insights sessions that we've run over the last two years or so. It's been really interesting getting an understanding of the fact that gender imbalance in our profession really stems from High Schools. So, our continued focus on the High School Program and what we're doing to market the profession to younger students to really raise awareness and get some engagement at that level will really help us to see diversity come through in the university students, and then in our graduates.

So, I know that the Communications and Marketing team have been working really hard with some input from our guys to work on videos and that sort of thing, so I'm quite excited to see where that could go, and particularly, we have volunteers that go out and visit schools but where they can't get there, what more can we be doing from an online angle, to really start engaging with younger students.

Lesley: So, if people out there are listening and are also interested in being able to help with the Schools Program, what do you think that they could potentially do?

Helena: So, we are always looking for volunteers who are willing to go out and talk to students from schools, but I think otherwise, we are starting to generating more and more video material, so anyone who is willing to showcase what they do or was willing to help us work on the brand of actuary and make that a more appealing professional option for younger students would be very helpful in terms of... yeah, I think we're definitely still trying to really build a strong base of appealing content for younger people.

Lesley: There was also some statistics that I read that show that a number of female members will drop out early, passing the year-to-year exams but perhaps not going on to Fellowship. What do you think perhaps can be done maybe once people get into the workforce to help with that gender balance?

Helena: So, that's a very tricky question Lesley, and I don't think we would pretend that we'd be able to solve that in this morning's podcast, but I think we're definitely actively thinking about this and trying to understand the different potential situations that our members are facing, and the conscious decisions they make around their progression through the actuarial profession.

So, we'd be really keen to hear from the membership if they've got any personal stories or insights around where this is coming from, because I think we want to be careful of not lumping this issue in being specifically related to, say, the incidence of people taking maternity and paternity leave and those sorts of things, and trying to have a bit more of an open mind as to what could be driving the progression from Associate to Fellowship, say, for example. So, we'd be really keen to hear from the membership on their personal insights on this.

Lesley: So Ricky, you've been working on a survey around the membership and again, leading on this theme of individual experiences within the profession and then what the Institute can do to support members, could you tell us a little bit about the project that you've been working on please?

Ricky: Yes. So, early in the year, and hopefully some of the listeners have seen them in emails and Facebook and the LinkedIn profile from the Institute, that we asked members to share their stories, whether they experienced firsthand or they have seen as a bystander, discrimination of all kind. We started the topic with LGBT and we slowly expanded to other disciplinary of discrimination as well. It was actually really good to hear our

members sharing some really touching stories, and we are trying to work and find a way to simplify them, and obviously de-identify them, and relay it and re-use back into future content of the Working Group. Hopefully we'll have some brand new material for our audience sometime next year.

We have received a few very amazing and very touching submissions, I have to say. I guess one of my takeaways, before we can share a lot more insights with our members, is that discrimination is not just an act that you say something or behave in a certain way towards someone else.

Ricky: Being a bystander or an ally, you actually have a lot more powerful influence than you think you might have. So, next time you hear anything and see anything, even someone else passes it as a joke in the office, whether it be against, simply, sexism joke, racist joke, or against LGBT. Probably, the time for us to stand up and say a thing or two.

Lesley: Yeah, I think that's a really important point Ricky, and reminds me of a workshop I attended as part of the Dive In Festival a few months ago. The key thing that came out of that was exactly that, we often see examples of discrimination done in a jokey sort of way in the workplace, and we're often nervous about actually calling those out, and it's really important to do that, to be able to eliminate that sort of discrimination and to support the person because everybody has their own individual ways of looking at the world and their individual ways of being, and it's important that we respect everybody as equals.

Ricky: Yes, definitely. A lot of the times, people don't recognise that they are actually wearing multiple minority tags on their own. So, make sure that whatever you say, if someone else put it towards you, towards your identity of minority, would that be okay? I think that's a great checking point to make sure that all the behaviours and words that we choose are appropriate.

Lesley: So, that's great. We've been talking a little bit there about the membership. What's also important is to look at the composition of some of our Institute committees. There's a core group of committees and the profession is very well-known for its commitment to volunteering, but it tends to be a certain cohort that does that, and the Institute really wants to encourage a greater diversity on those committees, whether that's people at the beginning of their careers, further through their careers, from different backgrounds. So, we'd like to encourage everybody to put their hands up, even if they feel that they don't match the standard volunteer. We really, really want to encourage greater diversity in our committees and working groups.

Ricky: Yeah, I guess to add to that, it's also a reminder if you have not volunteered in any of the working groups with the Institute, I think this is definitely the time to think about it, something to add to your New Year resolution. I can definitely attest to volunteering in different working groups, it has a wide range of opportunity. I guess the benefit for myself, it's the diversity of thoughts outside your own working industry bubbles.

Helena: So, it's a really interesting point that you raise, Lesley, about the representation on committees and working groups, because I think we've also tried to start paying some more attention to what attendance we're getting at the Insight sessions and other events that the Actuaries Institute is running. And similarly, there can be a narrower cohort or representation that is frequently attending, and we're really trying to look at what we can do, whether it's through the speakers that we invite to present or the topics that we're choosing. We're really actively looking at how we can make those sessions more appealing to a broader range of the membership, to really improve the engagement there.

Lesley: So, looking forward to the future, and you mentioned just now Helena, about the Indigenous aspect, and I think that Indigenous representation in the profession is very low. So, that's one area that we've just started to do some really good work on which will be progressed through into next year, and it'd be interesting to hear from anybody in the membership for their views, who have worked on work around Indigenous issues before. We'd be very pleased to get some input from the listeners on that as well.

Helena: Definitely. I think, me personally, I'm very keen to better understand the issue and the root causes of this issue, and what we can actually do to make a real tangible impact in this space. I think it's been really interesting to hear some of the people that we have been lucky enough to talk to around this, have opened my eyes around what we can do in terms of scholarships and really around the recruitment side of things, and how you can identify the talent and help foster talent to improve the Indigenous representation that we see in the profession.

Lesley: So, Ricky, what are your thoughts about the future?

Ricky: Yeah, so alongside with the concept of Indigenous, we also started LGBT-focused this year. So, those two programs are kind of in their infancy, so we really want to push it forward to not just show the world that actuaries are capable of a lot of different perspective beyond what they would expect, which we did receive some feedback earlier this year, and we definitely want to try to continue to shine through those and hopefully one day all the hard work that we put in will become a basic

consciousness of people being aware of their surrounding and their choice of words.

Lesley: Yeah, thanks for that. We've got a lot of ideas, but we'd really welcome some more ideas from the listeners as well and from the membership. And if anybody out there would like to come along to one of the meetings and talk about a topic that they're interested in, no commitment necessary for joining the group unless you want to, but we'd just be really interested to have you along as a guest and really learn about your issues and thoughts on a day-to-day basis, that we can incorporate into plans moving forward. So, please reach out to us.

Helena: Just echoing that Lesley, I think the more direct engagement we can have with the members, the more relevant we're going to be in the work we're doing, so it would be really fantastic to get to speak more directly with some of the members around their personal concerns or thoughts around what we can do better.

Ricky: And just want to put it out there, you don't have to wait to join our committee and sit in. Please start either sharing the podcast with your friends or talk about it with them or leaving comments would be a good start.

Lesley: That's great. Thanks both of you for joining me today. It seems we've definitely had some good progress in the last year but there's an awful lot more to do going forward, and it's a very exciting group to be a part of.

So, we hope, listeners, that you've enjoyed the discussion. Please check out the Actuaries Institute podcast for more diversity-related content. Write in with questions and comments, as we said. Ideas, thoughts, criticisms, whatever you like. We'd really love to hear from you, and please get in touch. So, I'm Lesley Traverso, and bye for now.