



‘The thing about diversity is that it’s a litmus test for everything else’

Fiona Cannon OBE, Responsible Business, Sustainability and Inclusion Director at Lloyds Banking Group, talks to *Governance and Compliance* about environmental sustainability and attempting to reduce domestic violence.

INTERVIEW BY KIRSTY-ANNE JASPER, DEPUTY EDITOR OF *GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE*

What projects are you currently working on?

I have quite a broad portfolio but the big piece that I’m doing at the moment is really around environmental sustainability and at what we as a bank can do to play our part in supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy. We’re very keen to be a leader in that space. At the moment, we’re working through the kind of things that we should be doing to support our colleagues and our customers and also to use our voice on a UK level to support that transition, given how urgent an issue it is for organisations now.

The other big piece is around domestic abuse. Our purpose as a bank is to help Britain prosper. If we look at the numbers around domestic abuse, one in four women and one in six men are likely to experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives. So, for an organisation like us who has 65,000 colleagues and about 25 million customers that means at any one time there’ll be people who are dealing with domestic abuse.

We’re looking at what are the kinds of things that

we should be doing to support both our customers and our colleagues around mental health and that’s around raising awareness, reducing the stigma. The mental health issue is really around well-being. We approach it through the view of four projects really, healthy bodies, healthy minds, healthy relationships and healthy finances. Because all of those things can be triggers for mental health. And, also, we look at the loss to the economy around mental health as well.

Do you think that your stakeholders have committed to being more responsible?

There’s no doubt that our stakeholders are looking to us to take a lead in this space. So, from the investor perspective, of course, environmental sustainability is really high on every investors’ agenda at the moment and has been for a while, but interestingly, mental health now as well. And, I mean, again, diversity, generally has been very much on the investors’ agenda, but the mental health now is too. So, I think these are issues that our investors are absolutely

interested in. From a colleague perspective who are, obviously a huge stakeholder for us, these are issues that they're looking to us to support them with.

I think from our colleague stakeholder group they're looking for us to do more of this stuff. And, of course, from an external perspective around millennials looking to come and work for Lloyds. They're looking for different things from an organisation now. They want to work for organisations that have some real values where diversity is just a given. That whoever they are they can come and work for you and feel included. They can work in a flexible way. All those kinds of things. So, our future workforce and, of course, then our broader stakeholders around government and our customers equally.

How did you come to be involved with diversity and inclusivity?

It's where I started. When I began work 30 years ago now I didn't quite know what I wanted to do, but I knew that I wanted to work, at that point, around gender equality. Now, everybody's got a diversity manager. When I first started in the UK, I think there were four in the private sector. There was nobody. I worked for an organisation called the Industrial Society and worked in their unit called the Pepperell unit, which was named after Elizabeth Pepperell, who was the first woman to run women-only development training in the UK.

That's where I started and then that grew to start looking at working with employers. And, so I've always considered myself, I guess, a campaigner, I could have gone into politics and I could have joined a campaign organisation, but I felt having started working with organisations I could see how powerful employers could be and what kind of impact they have, so that's when I started working in diversity for TSP at that point. Of course, my portfolio has just got bigger now to do responsible business and environmental sustainability.

What are the biggest changes you've seen during the course of your career?

If you think what the UK looks like now; even from things like gay marriage and the way that we talk about LGBT issues. That's an entirely different place than we were 30 years ago. 30 years ago there was no flexible worker legislation. There's been an understanding that organisations need to change and society needs to change to reflect who we all are.

When I first started, even things like disability, there was nothing happening. And, disability was quite political at that point, so it was this whole idea that it's actually society that disables you and that remains true today rather than your disability. But, now you see things like spaces on buses where you can have the wheelchairs and the ramp and buggies and all that.

The thing about diversity is that it's a litmus test for everything else. If one group is feeling uncomfortable at whatever, or if something's difficult for one particular group, it's probably difficult for everybody. So, the ramp for wheelchairs is one example, but actually, if you've got a buggy you're looking at the

same problem. So, it works for everybody.

What kind of discussion do you think there needs to be in the boardroom in order for these changes to happen?

It's interesting actually my experience of boards is that they are having these conversations. And, I think the way we've approached the mental health and well-being thing is this whole idea that we all have mental health just as we all have physical health. And, so for all of us, I think it's about raising awareness, reducing the stigma, talking about these issues. But, that principle which is we're all on the spectrum and at any one time we're either thriving or struggling and I think that's the conversations that we need to be having more.

Over the course of your career what are some of your biggest challenges and achievements?

When you think about the way most organisations are set up, they are based on what you might call 19th century infrastructure, we're basically factories. So, nine to five, five days a week, everybody commutes into the centre of town and everyone is established in their career by the time they're 35. That model is really difficult because it's predicated on the idea of somebody being at home, normally the woman; somebody being at work, normally the man. And, all our systems are based on that. So, what you end up trying to do is to fix an individual issue in a big organisational system and so you're just fiddling around the edges.

We need to do a big system change. And, I think that's fundamentally the biggest challenge; to manage the system change which recognises that the world is different, our lives are different, how we operate as customers is different, what we want is different. If we don't change then we're going to constantly struggle to move forward because it's based on one model of work and that's just not going to work. The biggest achievements I think are, having said that, some of the things that have been put in place to start to move the debate.

There's a task force set up by government called the working parents task force to look at how do we make sure we get more parents into the workplace and support them. And, that led to the flexible working legislation, flexible working for all. I've been involved in putting some of the pillars down that allow the conversation to take place. So, I don't think there's one achievement that I would think, okay, that's been the most powerful. But, I think for me it's about moving the debate forward and being part of those changes.

I was deputy chair of the equal opportunities division and the work there that we did around women and pensions and pregnancy discrimination. All of those things start to create the debate and to make sure that people are aware about what's going on. I think it's a lifetime of small things that lead to something that is, hopefully, a bit better, certainly for younger women coming through now. n