

# SPENCER OGDEN



## DIVERSITY IN RENEWABLES

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**A Global Assessment**  
August 2021

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# Introduction

At a time when the world is collectively working to reduce carbon emissions for the future of our planet, the renewables energy sector is undoubtedly booming. An explosion of innovative large-scale projects across the US and beyond has created unprecedented demand for talent. However, a snapshot of our sector indicates that we must do more to attract and retain professionals from a wider pool of talent if we are to not only meet accelerating skills demand, but also reap the benefits that diverse businesses bring.

In data which we released earlier this year, we revealed that, encouragingly, over a third of professionals working across the renewables sector globally (34 per cent) stated that the industry had become more diverse in the last 12 months and a further 14 per cent indicated it had diversified in relation to specific under-represented groups such as females. However, almost half (47 per cent) felt that nothing had changed or that renewables had, in fact, become less inclusive.

According to IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency) women only account for 32 per cent of the workforce in renewables. Statistics from the Offshore Wind Industry Council (OWIC), meanwhile, indicate that representation of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) individuals is also shockingly low across the whole energy sector, with this group representing just five per cent of the entire workforce.

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Against this backdrop, in 2021, Spencer Ogden hosted a virtual roundtable where HR and Operations Directors from across the renewables sector were invited to share their own experiences, challenges and successes around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I). The discussion and key recommendations are summarised on the following pages.



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## The Experts



Sharon Greenberg - COO  
Able Grid Energy Solutions



Kate Kennedy – People and  
Culture Consultant - bp



Aaron Chavez – HR Director,  
Business Partner, Americas  
Region - Lightsource bp



Mindy Prefling – Senior  
Manger for Client Services -  
Spencer Ogden



Henry de Lusignan – Americas  
Director - Spencer Ogden



Maritza Jarbath – VP of HR and  
Administration - Onward Energy

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## An Industry for Future Generations

On the day, all our panellists agreed that the future of the renewables industry is undoubtedly bright. According to the IEA, the share of renewables in global electricity generation jumped to 29 per cent in 2020. That's expected to rise to 45 per cent by 2040. This can be attributed to a number of external factors, not least support from current government administrations in countries including the US and UK.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that our panellists felt optimistic about the future of their businesses and the wider sector. As Sharon Greenberg noted; "Our pipeline is significant and we are not the only ones. You can read any industry news website and you are going to see all these people are breaking ground on all these new energy storage projects. It's really exciting to see it happen, not only are we a growth industry but we are also crucial for the lives of future generations."

Kate Kennedy added; "In 2020 BP's strategy transitioned from an international oil company to an integrated energy company. I think that says a lot about the future of renewables for us, and the fact that our aim is to grow, in the renewables space, to 50 gigawatts by 2030. This is exciting for our employees and our organisation as well as elsewhere in the industry. It is a great time to be a part of the renewables business as we see it blooming and growing."

Looking specifically at the future of talent attraction, Aaron Chavez noted that; "It certainly helps to have the Biden administration now on our backs to help support that. I think that it creates a buzz around our youth and those up-and-coming in their careers". To offer an example, he added; "I was just looking at some offers that went across the other day and there are a lot of really young talent that want to join our space."

However, our experts noted that, in this rapidly expanding sector, an acute and immediate need for highly experienced engineers can be a barrier to building diverse teams in the short-term.

Sharon Greenberg highlighted frustrations around finding experienced talent and Maritza Jarbath confided that her business is facing similar challenges;



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When we have taken the time to do due diligence, we have found that we are actually able to find and secure diverse top talent for positions.

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Similarly, Aaron noted this is something he has also witnessed; “When I first started, I saw a lot of ‘hiring for our pain’ and also ‘pain for our pain’ as well. And usually, what that means is we are going to go for that white male, and we are not going to take the time to say, ‘we are going to put that position on hold until we can fully exhaust ‘good faith’ efforts in trying to attract diverse individuals: we need the people now, so whoever they are, we are going to bring them on board.”

However, he also highlighted the benefit for businesses which have the benefit of time and resources – namely the ability to lead best practice and drive change; “When the business is able to do it, when you can push back and say, ‘No. We are going to stop here, we are going to continue to recruit’. What do our good faith efforts look like in order to bring on board these individuals into the organisation?”

Kate echoed this sentiment, sharing that; “When we have taken the time to do due diligence, we have found that we are actually able to find and secure diverse top talent for positions.”

As Mindy Prefling summarised, “Hiring out of desperation is hard to avoid... if you need a construction manager on site, what are you going to do? Wait six months to hire that person? It depends where the project is at, but we don’t always have that luxury.”

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## Where is the dial?

In order to change the dial, we must know where we currently stand. When asked the round table attendees to reflect on the fact that almost half of all renewables professionals said diversity hasn't improved at all in the last 12 months, none of our experts were particularly surprised. Maritza noted that that the statistic wasn't shocking;

**“Within my own organisation, I can count on my hand the diversity from a surface level. We have taken great strides in gender but, even there, there is work to be done as it tends to lean and skew to admin and accounting versus the engineer or wind site manager, who will still predominantly be white male”.**

Kate shared her own similar experience; “I've only been in this space for six months and from what I've seen, it is male dominated. On average it is 80 per cent males versus 20 per cent females with low minority levels, particularly at the higher levels of the organisation”.

She continued; “If you look around the leadership table, even for myself, I'm the one female - and I work in HR, so I think that's indicative of where we're at. But I also think that we need to recognise that diversity comes in different forms, and I think we need to tap in and be a bit more creative in that space when it comes to ex-military, LGBTQ+, disability etc. and be a bit more creative as we grow in the renewable space.”

The prevalence of white males across the sector is, indeed, well documented. A previous study by NASEO (National Association of State Energy Officials) found that white energy workers are more likely to report working in leadership roles compared to racial and ethnic minorities. Around 80 per cent of white survey respondents indicated that they are either a company executive or that they supervise employees; about a third (35 per cent) noted that they are company executives. By comparison, only 17 per cent of Black or African American energy workers reported that they are company executives and only 19 per cent of Hispanic or Latinx workers reported the same.

Mindy noted the significance of the fact that no panellists had seen dramatic improvements in diversity levels over the last year, despite the fact that the industry is very conscientious about the problem. However, she also recognised that; “Everybody feels it is a topic of conversation and there are a lot of good faith efforts that are going in affecting that change – and change takes time. I'd like to think, on the positive side, that it will change with all the efforts we are making, it's just a matter of when and how.”



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## Focus on Retention

Diversity levels can, of course, be bolstered through targeted recruitment – but retention was also recognised as an important mechanism for building equality within an organisation. As Kate highlighted; “Another part is looking at the talent that we do have and retaining that talent through building an inclusive culture: enabling individuals to feel that they can bring their whole selves to work so that they reach their full potential.”

Following this point, Henry de Lusignan shared official US figures, which revealed that, in April 2021, four million American’s quit their jobs and also that 60 per cent of the American workforce is currently open to a new position; “While there is an immense effort at the moment to hire in staff, there must be equal – if not more – effort on how you develop and retain them... there is a need to look after what you’ve got”. He also noted the importance of supporting workers who, in many cases, have gone through a stressful work environment during the pandemic, emphasising; “Show them that you recognise and appreciate that”.

Kate added that many individuals have lost jobs during the pandemic, and these are primarily females and people of colour; “What came to my mind is, is there an opportunity, then, to reskill individuals that may have lost jobs during the pandemic as a creative solution if we are in this candidate-short environment?”

As Mindy succinctly summarised, “DE&I isn’t strictly about recruitment: it is about recruitment, retention and promotion.

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## The Power of Partnerships

When quizzed on steps they are taking at an organisational level to tackle inequality in their workplaces, our panellists shared inspiring real-world examples. Although the strategies shared were many and varied, consistent themes included: the need for timely and measurable objectives; the value of committees; the importance of training programmes; and the power of partnerships.

Sharon outlined how, since she became the executive sponsor of her business's DE&I committee, the organisation has drafted an official DE&I policy and philosophy, as well as providing specialist training for every team member to help them understand and manage unconscious bias. She has also recently hired a consultant who will work with the group. As she explains;

"We don't want to have a committee for the sake of having a committee. I want to see, 'here are our actions this quarter, let's put these in place' and 'Is this action achieving what we wanted it to accomplish?'" She advises others to; "Have goals - and hold yourselves accountable if you haven't reached those goals". On the value of partnerships, Sharon notes that; "Our recruiters who recruit for us need to bring us a variety of people, with a variety of skill sets and some diversity in there as well. We can't always hire the diverse candidate – believe me, I want to... but it's really important for us."

On why the DE&I agenda is central to her business, Sharon makes an important point; "There are plenty of studies out there which talk about how diverse companies are more successful. So, there is a financial reason to do this as well, not just bleeding heart, liberal, me here in San Francisco. There are scientific reasons to do this."

Elsewhere, other panellists are also directing resources in a targeted way and forging partnerships with specialist organisations to help reach their diversity goals.





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In addition to providing diversity training for her people, Maritza also demands diversity awareness is ingrained across the hiring process; “When we seek recruitment assistance, it is stressed that having a diverse pool of candidates comes first and foremost in terms of our desire. We also post on various diversity sites such as Able or Women and Energy: we look for where we can broaden the appeal in terms of the eyes that see the posting”.

Maritza is also working hard to build future pipelines through engaging with emerging talent. For example, via Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). “One of the things that is troubling within the HBCUs space generally is that degree programmes which were focussed on energy are going the way of the dodo bird on some campuses” she notes, “so, finding the talent which has the inherent drive and want to be in that space is something that we struggle with.

We are deep within the communities where we have operations. We offer scholarship programmes. We work with Kid Wind to reach even younger demographics and help build the pipeline, that eventually we can recruit when they are of age. We are thinking of as many different ways that we can approach it so there is a pipeline of ready talent in the future.”

Aaron supports this approach. “Developing future talent is important: if we can’t find it, then let’s get ahead of that. So, that is one of the things we’re looking at as well: how do we make those partnerships with universities to develop that pipeline?” He also notes that Lightsource bp has a formal statement and a framework and that recruitment partners are important; “One of the things that Lightsource bp admires in Spencer Ogdon is its experience in and commitment to diversity. We intentionally want to partner with recruitment agencies that have that same passion. Looking at job descriptions, making sure they are gender neutral and posting on certain job boards.”

At BP, Kate also has a Framework for Action which encompasses transparency, accountability and talent. Delving deeper, she shared some specific actions her firm is taking to boost inclusion; “Around accountability, each US employee needs to have a DE&I objective that is tied to their performance and compensation. We have a talent development programme specific to black and African Americans and we are going to expand that to other ethnic minority groups as we progress in the future”.

However, she admits that, “Although we have made some progress, there is so much more work we need to do in this space.”

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## Summary

There is now a universal understanding that diverse businesses outperform the competition and statistics continue to highlight this fact. For example, data shows that gender-balanced teams drive more sustained and predictable results at all levels of an organisation. According to research by McKinsey, a 10% increase of women in senior management has demonstrated a 3.5% increase in company returns in the UK. From what we saw on the day, our panellists and others in the industry clearly recognise this – and are taking strides to shift the dial on diversity.

There is no doubt that, as international efforts to tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions accelerate, the renewable energy sector will continue to see huge growth in the coming years. This is creating a huge opportunity for firms to tap into underutilised talent pools as the renewables workforce expands organically.

There was a firm consensus on the day of our roundtable that increasing inclusion at a grass roots level will create organisations which are sustainable for the long term, and many in attendance are already looking to schools and colleges to pipeline skills for the future. In the short term, however, passionate HR and operations professionals are looking at how they can boost diversity more rapidly, through focusing on training and retention as well as inclusive recruitment.



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## Key takeaways

-While immediate demand for specialist skills can hamper diverse hiring in the short term, that doesn't mean that due diligence and good faith efforts should be abandoned.

- Diversity initiatives must reach beyond recruitment – retention and talent development are equally as important.
- Embrace the power of partnerships – engage with specialist consultants, training providers and schools and colleges to broaden your knowledge and talent pools.
- Have goals and hold yourselves accountable if you haven't reached those. Diversity objectives should be SMART if they are to lead to meaningful change.
- The renewables energy sector is growing rapidly – take the opportunity to pipeline skills now to ensure the future workforce is not only sufficiently skilled, but also diverse.

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## About Spencer Ogden

Spencer Ogden are global recruitment experts in energy and infrastructure. We provide leading recruitment services to our clients and candidates that they won't find elsewhere.

With technology at the heart of the process, from financing to operational execution, we break new ground at every stage of the project life cycle.

It's our mission to create a dynamic and sustainable legacy in the ever-changing landscapes we cover. Our industry leading services are delivered in a flexible, autonomous way, with offices in the UK, Europe, Asia Pac, Australia and the US.



# Our Offices



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