Podcast Transcript - How are we breaking down barriers and building inclusion in the property and construction sector?

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Michael Dunn	AHR
George Hooton	Hootons
Khwezi Mdlalose	Third-year student at the University of the West of England

Karle Burford: Hello and welcome to the AHR podcast, where we engage in captivating conversations about the built environment and its influence on shaping a more positive future. I'm Karle Burford, an AHR director and the Southern Region Lead. I've always been passionate about building diversity to serve our clients and the communities for which we work.

I believe that by everyone having a voice, feeling valued and being able to share their perspectives, that we can shape space in the buildings in a better way. I'm also part of the commission for the Bristol Property Inclusion Charter, which is the first citywide property inclusion charter in the UK and is a vehicle to promote and drive diversity and inclusion, particularly in the Bristol property sector.

Although important progress has been made in recent years, equity, diversity, inclusion across the property and construction sectors has much further to go. In today's episode we'll be discussing what barriers are faced within the sectors and question if they're being addressed and what can be done to make things better.

Today I'm joined by, and a big welcome to, Khwezi, a third-year architectural technology and design student at the University of West of England, and George Hooton, a property surveyor at Hootons, as well as my colleague Michael Dunn, who is an associate and works within our Manchester office. So, firstly Khwezi, can you give us a brief background about yourself please?

Khwezi Mdlalose: Hello, my name is Khwezi Mdlalose. As you know, Karle said, third year architectural technology student. I'm from Essex. I'm currently redoing one module, then I'm set to graduate next year. In terms of experience, actually, I've had experience in two civil engineering firms previously throughout college and throughout my GCSEs.

So yeah, currently trying to, you know, make it in construction and the architecture industry.

Karle Burford: So, it's one of the kinds of the first stages of your career?

Khwezi Mdlalose: Yeah, pretty much at the beginning right here.

Karle Burford: Yeah, that's, that's great to see.

So welcome George. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your role?

George Hooton: Yes, absolutely. And thank you for having me. So, I am George Hooton. I'm a commercial property surveyor and my firm is Hootons. We're a general practice based in Bristol dealing with everything from agency, lease advisory, valuations and property management. I suppose I'm on. This particular call and podcast as a wheelchair user, which is highly unusual in my industry.

And so, through that have become something of an advocate in the EDI space and specifically on disability. So, I am like you, Karle, on the commission of the Bristol property inclusion charter, as well as chair of EDI at the Bristol junior chamber.

Karle Burford: That's brilliant. Thank you very much. And finally, Michael, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?

Michael Dunn: Yes, I'm Michael Dunn. I'm an Associate Architect at AHR. I'm here, I suppose, to talk about my experience in being gay in the property and construction industry and LGBT inclusion generally. I've been practicing for around 10 years with six of those being at AHR Manchester. In the last couple of years, I've kind of fallen really into getting involved in the EDI sphere, specifically LGBT plus inclusion.

Karle Burford: Great. Thank you very much. Well, personally, I feel there's still many, many barriers to career paths in both architecture and the property sector. If you bear with me a little bit, I've got a few stats to begin with. Of UK qualified architects, less than a third are women. And that's against, I think, 52 percent-ish within society, so, way down. And that's always been the case and doesn't seem to be improving. And the figures are unsurprisingly much worse for those in senior management roles. 88 percent of architects are white, um, and that's against 82 percent in society, which may not seem a great difference, but when you look at it from the other end of the perspective, only 1 percent of architects are black against 4 percent in society.

So that's four times more people, black people in society than are qualified. So, it's quite shocking figures. And this is of course reversed in the lower skilled sectors. Again, if you look at the figures who identify as non-white and are in management positions, the proportions are much, much worse. A quarter of the UK population identify with either physical or mental disability.

I don't have the figures for the property sector, but it would still be very high and reflect this kind of large proportion. So, just thinking about my own perspectives on this and experiences as I came into the profession, many, many years ago, I might add, it was a long time ago and, in some ways, it seemed easier, but it was still very difficult in many different ways.

I undertook all my studying via a part time route. It took 12 long, long years, but I benefited from a grant in those days. And I think I came out with £700 debt, which seemed huge at the time but by comparison, of course, is not in these days. I think there's a staggering average £70,000 debt expected by most architectural students when they come out at the end, and some have much more than that, which is an immense figure.

And of course, this is a barrier to most that can't rely on their families to bail them out. What was difficult when I started was a lack of awareness, I think, coming from a kind of low waged and perhaps uneducated family background meant that my route into architecture, not that I really knew what that was, was very unclear and very difficult.

I was the first from our family to go to university and, basically, I was actively discouraged by the school, to be honest. I kind of entered my eventual career path almost by accident. It was really, really difficult. Now tuition fees and living costs put off those from the lower age background, and I really don't think awareness has improved.

That's why the work at the Bristol Property Inclusion Charter is so important, which endeavours to mentor and go into schools and colleges to encourage and inform. Also, we try and get businesses to sign up to the charter and get involved. There's certainly a long, long way to go.

We now turn to our guests to talk about some of their personal experiences of their education and career paths within the sector.

So firstly, I pick on you, George, perhaps. Do you want to share some experiences?

George Hooton: Yeah, absolutely. So, I suppose the reason for me getting into the property industry came out of a natural love for the built environment. I was really always curious with buildings and design, but also how design could shape feelings, emotions, reflect society in a way. I thought it was artistic, but practical.

I just had a natural love for it. I think like quite a lot of people, my parents as a means of keeping me and my sister occupied would take me to National Trust houses and seeing those, I think maybe shaped my appreciation for buildings in the built environment.

So, I suppose I thought I would always be an architect like everyone else on this podcast, but no, I went into surveying. So, I think I also, recognising that my disability started at a young age, the built environment, well, I loved it and enjoyed it, but actually probably didn't love me back very much in the fact that it was very restricting.

I was very conscious of the barriers, the physical barriers that were there for me. And so, I thought it was an industry where I could maybe make a bit of a change. I'm conscious that in the UK, as you say, it was some of the statistics, there's 16 million people in the UK with a disability, roughly one in four or 24 percent of the population.

And I see that really only getting worse as it typically does with age. And the fact that we have an aging population, that this is not a problem that's going to go away through any sort of means and actually it's a worsening issue, but also as we talk about entry into industry property or any industry as it were, I think it's important to recognise, at least from disability, that those with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed and that the gap between disabled and non-disabled working people has not changed in the last 10 years.

While there has been some really positive steps in the EDI space and on inclusivity, it really doesn't seem to be affecting at least those with disabilities maybe as much as we would like to see almost certainly. So, my experience getting into the industry was a few years ago now, not too long, so I do remember it.

Immediately you could spot barriers and bias. A recruitment bias was there where you would fill out forms for companies and they would ask your gender, your race, maybe your sex, but disability was not an option, it was not considered. And so, you realised maybe there was a gap in that.

I found the offices weren't always accessible when you went there or the events that they held. A lot of standing around, you know, not a lot of seating options and really just wasn't considered at all and so that was incredibly off putting. They’re really not making any considerations or thoughts to that sort of thing.

And so that was the first introduction to it. And also, I suppose, you know, I maybe don't have the statistics as to representation in the specific property industry, but I think, I've never been to an event in the last sort of five plus years where there has been another wheelchair user and I suppose that speaks volumes as to where we are with representation.

So, that was my sort of first inkling into joining the property sector which wasn't a great one. But, persisted, and I still think it is an industry full of amazing people. It's a great industry to get into, but as I say, it still seems to be quite shut off. And I think the barriers that are still there, the physical barriers is the main prevalence.

As well as obvious biases there. So, it sounds all doom and gloom. I assure you I've enjoyed my time as being a surveyor, but I think it's also important to recognise that there are a number of challenges still present.

Karle Burford: I'm sure. And like, firstly, I would say, you know, it's never too late to become an architect, so, you know, don't give up yet if that is your chosen profession. But seriously, you know, I think in terms of bias, do you see if there's been any improvement or any change over the years of your career, or was it pretty much the same as it was?

George Hooton: I think the property sector probably has typically been a step behind a lot of other more progressive industries, but obviously there are industries interlinked with pretty much anything else and any company that uses or requires space or buildings will interact, and therefore, I think it's more of a case of other industries placing greater emphasis on inclusion, EDI, accessibility, has made it more of an important factor. So, I think it's getting much more visibility, people are talking about it more, people are more conscious. But I think there's still quite a fair bit of bias.

Michael Dunn: How do you find, George, just as you're talking about, you know, going to interviews and things like that, or events where maybe they're not accessible and maybe, you know, for a wheelchair user, if there's steps at the door or whatever it is, how do you find the reaction from people when they're kind of confronted with that fact? In terms of their space being inaccessible?

I suppose, specifically because we work in, I would say, a sector where awareness of what somebody who uses a wheelchair needs is fairly prevalent, you know, a lot of us can reel off what corridor widths need to be or door widths, you know, passing spaces, all that kind of thing, we're fairly aware of, but to then be confronted with that in person that actually your office isn't suitable for somebody who uses a wheelchair.

George Hooton: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think awareness is the key word there. So, it's amazing where even if I go around with friends or family, unless I point it out, they don't always clock the fact there's stairs there, or that there's some sort of barriers. They don't think about, even if you can get in, can you get to where you need to be within that building? Or do they have bathrooms or facilities or what have you there?

I think the awareness is the big point you almost have to sort of physically point out and I think it's very rarely if ever malicious or deliberate. I think it's just not at the forefront of their mind and so typically it's, you know, apologetic and, you know, people are sorry for the disruption and the thoughtlessness, but, at the same time, it still amazes me that people I've known for years know that I'm coming, and yet, you know, it still won't be accessible.

I think it's getting better. You know that the unfortunate thing is myself and many others like me almost have to take the initiative each time. You know, we have to double check and we have to call ahead, and we have to you know, ‘are you sure it's okay?’ That sort of thing. So, I don't think it's deliberate, but I think the problem is a general lack of awareness and consciousness for it.

Karle Burford: I think it was interesting what you were saying about being sometimes the only person in the room who, visibly, has that same disability being in a chair. Often, you know, I've talked about before, often there's one black person or a few black people and you know, what do they, what would they feel like being in that room of 500 people at that dinner? And obviously, considering gender and so on as well, the same kind of thing applies. But actually, you know, I've, you know, I've been to events when you've been there, George, and you are the only person in the chair and it's an interesting position to be in in many ways

George Hooton: You stand out, I mean, you know, use it to your advantage if you can. But I think the point is you have to be very resilient. That is off putting for a lot of people. If they don't feel represented, included, or considered, or, you know, they don't share similarities or familiarity with someone, then they’re not going to feel particularly comfortable or welcome.

So, as I'm sure we'll go into the idea of retention is a big problem, it’s not just a case of getting people into the industry, it's making sure that they stay. But I think at the same time, and another reason for I'm on, you know, on this, is someone has to be an advocate. I didn't have anyone that I could

particularly look to within my industry as an example for someone to do it. And so, I think there has to be some sort of advocacy to encourage more.

Karle Burford: Yeah, yeah, certainly. We'll move on to Khwezi now, if you'd like to, you know, say a few words and get into it, any points you'd like to make?

Khwezi Mdlalose: Yeah. So, my background is actually quite interesting. I won't even say background, more like my situation. So, I am an immigrant. I was born in South Africa. I came over here, back and forth, because my parents would work here. My mum's the one who came here originally, started working here, and then she'd bring me along.

I guess for me, I started getting involved in construction off a whim. I was always interested in engineering. That alone was very tough. I was actually talked into not studying engineering by my engineering teacher because she was like, 'Maybe you're more into creative stuff like that, we have a lot of boys here, it's just the environment's rough, I wouldn't recommend it', But when I went home and I told my mom that she said, absolutely not. You're doing engineering. You're not letting something like that hold you back.

And I was like, OK. So, I did it, and I'm so, so glad I did. When it came time to do work experience in about year 10, I actually hadn't found work experience. I didn't even know how you looked for work experience. I had parents that didn't know who to ask, how to do it.

We were actually like one of the very few black families in our area. Essex, very, very conservative, white area, so they didn't even know where to start. We had a guidance counsellor who reached out to me. She offered me a position to do work experience at a civil engineering company. And I'd say that's pretty much what started my path, knowing that that's the avenue I really wanted to go down.

In terms of things that I've experienced, what haven't I experienced? My family. I have a disabled brother, so nonverbal autistic, and I have a mum, currently, who is disabled. So, my upbringing is very much, 'carer', but also dealing with misogyny and racism on the side, and then barriers with being a carer.

So, in terms of barriers that's like, for example, things I've had to pull out of. So, I took a break between my second and third year to look after my brother and my mom because of, you know, the situation at hand. And I guess when I came back in third year, that's kind of what made me open my eyes in terms of other things that other people might be going through.

And that's why I kind of joined the student consultation panel at my university, as well as the equity program. It's where you kind of just get put in focus groups and they get you talking about things and it just makes you realise, you know, just how many margins and barriers people kind of have to try to figure out and navigate how to overcome.

Because I grew up in an area where I was basically the only black person for a while, when I came to university I was very much used to being like the only black person in the room I'm like, well, we've done this before like kind of know the hurdles, but you also don't really know how you're supposed to navigate when you get certain comments, or when you're treated a certain way, when you get off handed comments by your lecturers, by your tutors, how to navigate having people in your class make certain comments and then you're grouped with them in a group project and it's like, how are you supposed to navigate that?

So that's one of the things I was kind of looking into when it came to the construction as well as the architectural field. Architecture as well, you just don't really hear about it a lot. It's also a field, I'd say, when you are a person of colour, sometimes even your own family members will push you away from it just because they know the things that are to come.

So, it's, you know, first of all, not a lot of people being in it is a huge thing that you get. I remember I had to like really, really, really try very hard to convince my parents to even be encouraging of me being in this field. Just because they were like, just because of what we've seen, we don't hear much about it. We don't see a lot of black people in it. We don't know.

And that can be very, very challenging. And also, as someone who is technically a carer, for example, I don't have like a driving license. We also are a low income as well. That's another barrier and it's something that can kind of pull you back. So, do relate with you, George, in the sense that it's like you kind of have to put yourself in a position where you have to be the forefront in terms of just what people have to consider.

In terms of other things that I've experienced, I think I did mention microaggressions. In terms of microaggression, hair, accents. The accents one I've gotten a lot just because of how my name is. A lot of people assume that I am going to just come here with a very, very strong, probably very generalised African accent.

That is not the case, but sometimes people frame it as if that's a compliment that my accent sounds like this. So that's another thing that you kind of have to just hear and be like, OK.

I experienced it from as early as four in terms of things surrounding my name. When my parents tried to enrol me in a school, the head teacher that they were trying to, you know, set a meeting up with, that person said, are you sure you want her to go by this name? Aren't you afraid people are going to call her crazy? And I can confidently say that has not changed. It's just, you know, that kind of thing.

In terms of, I guess the good though, I would say in terms of coming from Essex and being here, I would say the diversity is a lot better. Going, to say, fairs and being in certain classrooms, you do meet people that are like you. I have a very good friend now, also black, from Nigeria, a Nigerian woman, who I ended up bonding over because she also grew up in a household with a disabled sibling. We were able to bond over that, and I'd say that's one of the things that has been good about the field.

It's not perfect, there's still work to be done, but I'm just saying in terms of barriers I've spoken about and like just improvements that I've seen, especially since this is something that I've been involved in since I was 16, that has been nice. But you know, like George said, retention is a big one.

Culture, especially when, when it comes to just things that can affect you. So, I remember BLM was a big one for me. That was when I kind of had to be like, ‘Oh this is really, this is a very, very emotional time’, but it's also where I had to kind of open my eyes to like how my school responds to things, how people I'm in class with every day respond to things, you know, and that's a very, very hard time.

But luckily, I went to a university that reached out, you know, affirmed their support, stated how they support you through tough times like that.

Karle Burford: Absolutely fascinating stuff there. And obviously you've got, you've certainly got a lot on your plate.

I have mixed parentage. My dad is black, but I kind of go under the radar. Not everybody realises that. So, I hear racism because people think that it's acceptable to say it because there's no black people around. And I don't hear it often, in a professional basis, but I do hear it. So, through the years, I've heard that, but you know, I see the racism and often I've talked about dinners earlier about you sometimes go there and there's only a few black people and they're generally serving you, you know, it's, things have not moved on at all, and there’s a long, long way to go.

Before we move on to Michael, I just want to make one other point about, you know, the difficulty I had coming eventually into the profession is actually, although my parents didn't really understand

what I was doing because it was very alien to them, actually my dad's kind of blackness was interesting that he didn't want to meet any of the people I worked with because he didn't want them to know he was black, and my parent was black, because he thought he might hold him, hold me back.

That was unspoken but it was very evident and that was very uncomfortable I've got to say in my growing years.

Anyway Mike, over to you if you want to give us some of your thoughts?

Michael Dunn: Yeah so, I suppose to carry on from what kind of George and Khwezi have said there, I'm originally from the North East, I'm from a place called Peterlee in County Durham. What I tend to say is, if you've ever seen Billy Elliot, that's where my parents are from.

So, I kind of grew up in an environment where my dad had worked in the pits. He was a policeman. I grew up in a fairly kind of working-class area. The North East, I think, is still proportionally, the whitest place in the UK, I believe. So, it's a fairly sort of conservative area. There aren't a lot of big cities.

I then went to university in Newcastle when I was 18 to study architecture, which, you as a gay person, you know, going to university at 18 was kind of my clean break. That was me, kind of, going there, I'm going to be out at university and that was going to be it.

One of my first experiences at university was in Freshers Week, the first day we sat down, and they paired us all off together and we drew each other's portraits and wrote some things about each other, and you know, you kind of get into the general chit chat, ‘Oh do you have a girlfriend?’ And all that kind of thing. And I said, ‘Oh, well, I'm gay actually,’ and the guy I was paired with said, ‘Oh, do your parents know? And I said, ‘No’. And he wrote that on this portrait. And then at the end, we all put these portraits up on the wall and all read out these facts about each other. And he read that out about me, to, you know, the hundred people that I was put on this course with, on the first day. It hadn't occurred to me at all to say, ‘Don't say that out loud to everyone, that's a very personal fact to just announce to the entire room.’

But yeah, the kind of whispers went throughout the course. There’s quite a lot of moments like that throughout my career. I think conversely to George and Khwezi, the barriers I would say I face are much more kind of social than, you know, physical because, my queerness, my gayness is something that I can choose to divulge to people.

I always say it's kind of something that other people knew about me before I did. You know, I can recall things being shouted at me from vans when I was a kid and things like that. You know, my friends being girls at school meant a certain thing about me. But yeah, the fact that I'm able to sort of conceal that part of myself, if I choose to, I suppose can put me in a privileged position in some ways.

But in other ways, it means that I have to make that choice. And, you know, it's whether I'm comfortable in a situation to divulge that about myself. I've got a statistic here from Stonewall that 35 percent of LGBT staff, have hidden who they are in the workplace. I would certainly count myself among that number.

At some jobs, or you know, at the beginning of jobs, you kind of have to make a conscious decision as to, you know, ‘How was your weekend? Do you have any kids? Are you married?’ You know, you have to say the word ‘partner,’ and then somebody might ask like, ‘Oh, what does she do?’ Actually, he is an architect as well.

You tend to try and have to kind of make a point of saying that to people. I've never had a bad reaction in the workplace, but there is that kind of pent up moment, you never know how people are going to react.

Similar to something that Khwezi was saying about, you know, her accent. You will get the comments like, ‘Oh well, I didn't know, I didn't guess, I didn't know that about you,’ as though it's intended as a compliment, with the implication being that it's a negative thing, and that I shouldn't tell people, that I wouldn't want to be visibly gay.

I'm at a point now, in terms of my, I suppose seniority at AHR where I maybe you would feel slightly more comfortable in some situations in speaking up, but there are a lot where you do sort of freeze, you don't know how to react, because you are slightly sort of under the radar.

You do think I should just keep quiet and not kind of exacerbate this. So, I suppose it's a strange one, because, I suppose, me being gay is, I think people see it as something very personal about me, whereas I think of it as just, it's an intrinsic part of who I am. I wouldn't be who I am if I wasn't gay because of the experience that I've gone through. So, it's kind of, ‘Should I be sharing elements of my personal life in the office?’ I shouldn't necessarily have to, but I should feel like I'm able to.

The tough element in the workplace is, I think people feeling almost entitled to know quite personal information about you. You know, what is my relationship with my parents like? When did I tell them? When did I know I was gay? All of these things that if I, you know, flipped around the other way and asked them those questions, you know, the classic one is just, well, when did you know you were straight? You know, when did you tell your parents you were straight?

Those aren't questions that you ask. I have had those. I mean, generally from older people as well. I think that the way to go about improving that is, as the other guys have said, it's kind of visibility and awareness. I think as I'm getting older and trying to be a bit more involved in the kind of EDI, I think being sort of open about who I am and the experiences that I face, I've had experiences at work now where there are people who've come up to me and said, ‘I'm pleased that, you know, we had that conversation,’ and kind of shared personal things about their lives with me, which is really encouraging.

Karle Burford: Do you see there's a different way, or do you have a different experience if you're in a creative environment, i.e. the office versus a client meeting versus on site, if you go on site and so on,

Michael Dunn: Definitely.

Karle Burford: What's your experience of that?

Michael Dunn: Definitely yeah, I mean, I wouldn't say, even now, I wouldn't make a point on a construction site of talking about my personal life because I just don't know how people are going to react. I mean, not even necessarily, you know, with the ‘lads’ on site, sometimes just with the contractors, you know, it's very rare that on site any of the contractor team aren't men, because, you know, generally, I know that's maybe a bit of a generality, but quite often kind of homophobic comments will come from people like that. And, you know, I've been in situations where there have been homophobic comments made around me on site. You know, as you say, Karle, without any consciousness that it's kind of directed at me almost. And you know, if I was more overtly queer, you know, would they be saying those things?

But I would say, I mean, it's easy though, to say that in architecture, it is a lot better, and I would say that it is generally, but it's still not great. I don't meet that many other gay people in architecture. The proportions are certainly significantly less than they are in the general population.

Yeah, and I mean, to talk about financial inclusivity, you know, in terms of those kind of social barriers to actually getting into the industry, that's personally not something I faced. I was very fortunate. I was encouraged to go to university by my parents. I've been really well supported by them. But in terms of LGBT youth, you know, there’s something like five times more likely to experience homelessness

from being kind of kicked out of the house at young ages, which is obviously a major barrier to getting back into education, getting back into work generally.

So, there is a big disconnect between the amount of LGBT+ people in the general population versus just the workforce, not even just architecture and construction.

George Hooton: I'd be really interested, actually, to get everyone's sort of perspective on intention. Like everyone sort of describes, you get the odd comment or thing that's defamatory or, you know, discriminatory or rude, prejudiced, whatever it may be. But I find it quite awkward navigating a response based on the intention. See, 90 percent of the time, I know they're not deliberately trying to be offensive. It's not trying to hurt or maim. They are just ignorant or unconscious of what they're saying and how that's received. And so, it's difficult, you know, understanding, do you call them out on it? Do you say, that's offensive? Or do you realise that they didn't mean to hurt, be discriminatory, or rude or offensive, but just that they weren't really thinking. And where's the line? Because I always tend to respond based on what I think their intention is. But maybe that's not appropriate now we are in, you know, the 2020s and people really should know better?

Karle Burford: You know, through my 30 odd year career, I have come across it. And I think generally I'm clever enough to judge it quite quickly and easily. I think you know when someone is trying to be offensive purposely, and that does happen. I have 100 percent experience of where people are trying to be offensive, not necessarily aimed at me, but sometimes it has been aimed at me, but certainly aimed at other people who I would know.

And you have to then judge that situation. If it's a staff situation you, you do call them out, yes. If it's a down the pub thing, you've got to judge whether what the danger is of doing it. And quite often you, you have to just walk away, but sometimes it's right to call people out on it.

I once had a client of mine called out by his boss, a very senior person, called out by a very much more senior person in the middle of a meeting about something he said, which was pretty extreme. And I thought after, even though he was very senior, I thought you're going to get a written warning on this, 100 percent, you could tell. And I thought, ‘Wow, that's good. That's pretty good.’

Everybody else chose not to hear it. So, you know, it does happen. It’s timely at the moment where we're hearing about banter in the news and certain individuals doing banter, you know, it's always put down for banter, isn't it? And, for me, you know, I'm reasonably easily offended anyway, but that whole banter line doesn't really do much for me. What do you guys think?

Khwezi Mdlalose: I always think it's good to say something. When I was a part of the equity program, we had to do some workshops. And one of those was how to respond to situations like this. It was 6 PM and I was going to go home and miss it, but I'm glad I didn't because I did learn.

It is actually very, very important to figure out how to navigate situations like that. And one of the things that I took away from it was, it's very good to say something. Approach is something that should be considered, yes. But I always think, because I had an incident as well, where one of the classmates was Welsh, and I ended up asking her because I said I tried to pronounce her name, but I ended up asking her later, ‘By the way, is there a specific way that like I'm supposed to pronounce your name?’ And then she kind of said you know, ‘To be honest with you, people pronounce my name like this, and I always prefer it like that.’

That has changed how I approach people from then on, you know. So, I always think about how you are going to approach it, but always tell someone, especially if it's something very, very offensive, because more than likely you're not the only one that's thinking, ‘Isn't that kind of offensive? Someone should really say something in the room.’ And you're probably doing a big favour too, if they go and repeat whatever it is they've said to somebody else. But that's just what I've learned as someone that used to not say anything. Nowadays, it is good and it's good to take in as well. It's good to also learn from somebody else. You can really change someone's outlook when you do say, ‘Hey, did you know

that this is actually quite offensive or?' You know, I'd rather you, you know, this can be offensive for that group of people, or this can be, you know, you'd never want to be authoritative or anything like that if you're not a part of that group, but still, you know, it can really broaden someone's thinking, get them to look in. If that doesn't work, then, you know, now, you know.

Karle Burford: Well, we've all made mistakes, haven't we?

Khwezi Mdlalose: Exactly.

Karle Burford: Every day is a learning day, Mike?

Michael Dunn: Yeah. I mean, I think probably just to echo that, Karle, it's to do with intent and respect. I think from my point of view, you know, if you can tell us if somebody is saying something explicitly to insult or there are offhand phrases that people might say that actually I've maybe been called that throughout my life and that's maybe not something that I like to hear in this environment, but I think we've all kind of talked about maybe negative experiences where people have said certain things, but there's, I guess, the reverse of that where people being afraid to ask questions, there being a bit of a nervousness about terminologies, I mean, specifically with, LGBT+ issues, you know, there's such a range of kind of terminology that people are maybe unfamiliar with that they might be scared of using it wrong or calling someone the wrong thing, or, you know, using the wrong pronouns or something like that, and I think as long as, as Khwezi is saying, asking somebody how to pronounce their name, asking someone how they prefer to be referred to, or if somebody says that I'm pansexual or something, there's nothing wrong with saying, I don't know what that means, would you mind telling me what that means? So, like I say, if it comes from a place of respect, and the kind of intent is to kind of learn and understand, then questioning things, there's nothing wrong with that.

Karle Burford: You know, overall, I think there's clearly a lot more awareness today than there was in previous years and try and kind of end on some positivity of, you know, things moving in the right direction. You know, George, can you see any positivity out of all this at the moment from your own perspective?

George Hooton: Yeah, absolutely. I definitely think so. These conversations are happening a lot more frequently, they are very much more at the forefront of how companies are thinking, you know. Diversity is now being considered less of a social piece, but actually of an important aspect of business development and growth. Having strong, talented team often means that it comes from a diverse source, and so I think people are approaching diversity much more favourably than they did.

And then with that inclusion comes, because if you want to attract and then retain a diverse workforce, then you will need to think about what is currently putting people off from joining our sectors? So, I definitely think that there is a strong appetite for changing the way that we do things and the way that we think. I definitely think that that's the way it's going. But I think everyone's also very conscious that this is going to take a very long period of time, because if we're talking about getting people into architecture or surveying or anything like that, you need to start encouraging those in the GCSEs and the A levels, sort of time to go into those industries.

So, it's going to take a long, long time to get that generation up into a senior position where we can really see inclusion and diversity throughout a corporate structure. So, I think there is positivity as well as well as, some of the stuff that we've discussed. Yeah absolutely.

Karle Burford: Khwezi?

Khwezi Mdlalose:

I actually agree with George as well. I do think that it is good that first of all, we are having discussions like this, but I'd also add on that, it's good that we're not shying around it. We use the right words for

what is going on and are effectively saying change. You know, we are using words like, this is homophobia we are using, this is racism we are using, this is ableist. And then we are talking however, to try and create change, and I've been seeing that a lot more.

Universities and schools as well, I'd say, honestly, secondary schools, that's something that's going to take a while, but universities definitely, definitely been seeing a lot of positive efforts to try and make change.

My university definitely has been coming out with what I'm a part of right now. The consultation thing that is pretty big, you know, getting students together that are from different backgrounds to try and figure out how to change and also, showing the change being done and what's come from that. And you do see that, especially when you're on campus and you're in all these different spaces.

Llike George said, it's going to take a while, but I definitely, definitely do see some positivity there.

Karle Burford: Great. And Mike, last couple of words before we finish?

Michael Dunn: I think probably just to echo George and Khwezi's point is, kind of, representation and visibility does seem to be improving. I mean, at the kind of base level, you know, having things like pronouns in emails, putting rainbow flags up at Pride. I mean, there's a lot of criticism in terms of, you know, businesses and corporations using rainbows during Pride or doing kind of Black History Month logos and all that kind of thing. But on the surface, those are good things. They get people talking about it. They get people aware of it. And awareness is the entry point, really, so it's good to at least see that.

Karle Burford: Yeah, totally. And, you know, being polite and fair and nice, and all those sorts of things just comes with all this. And that’s got to be a plus point. And, you know, people forget it's also, it is good for business, you know, a diverse workforce make for better import, better decisions and a better product for our clients as well, you know, to kind of just finish on that kind of business point of view, but ultimately this is about being nice and fair, I think, to all and getting everybody involved.

So that's been great. Really interesting. I really appreciate your personal insights because, you know, for some, it's quite difficult to talk about these things. And hopefully this has perhaps, sparked a few questions rather than answers with people who are listening in and hopefully we'll get them to think a bit.

And I just thank you, Mike, Khwezi and George. Thanks very much. You can find all podcast episodes on our website, or you can subscribe via your preferred podcast platform. Thank you so much for listening. And we look forward to you joining us again next time. Thank you.