



Diversity and Inclusion progress and IP Federation activities in 2020

Opening access to, as well as improving the diversity and inclusion of, the UK's IP profession is of more importance now than ever. It is clear to all that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are far reaching and are likely to impact on practically every area of society for generations to come. In the longer term, the economic impact is likely to have a particularly profound effect on social mobility, with the damage caused leading to fewer job opportunities, which will in turn likely fuel greater inequality of opportunity. The disproportionate impact of the disease on the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community is also well known and actively being discussed.

Even before Covid-19 really hit in March this year, the topic of Diversity and Inclusion (in all its forms) in the IP profession was already top of my mind, as well as for others in the IP Federation. The IP Federation has a great history, turning 100 years old in April 2020, and as an industry association we have a great culture of respect for each other. Several of our Federation members helped to establish and support in its early days *IP Inclusive*, a pan-professional diversity task force committed to making the IP professions more inclusive for all those who have the necessary aptitude, regardless of their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, wealth or background. The Federation is also a member of its management board. Our collective response to Covid-19 shone a light on the care we have for one another, as described in our article "*IP owners step up to the plate*".

Showing clear leadership on this topic was called into stark action this year, after the unlawful killing of George Floyd at the hands of US law enforcement officers on 25 May 2020 and the resulting riots in the US in May and June 2020. These events resulted in my penning of an open letter on racism and inclusion, where I state: "*As the President of an organisation that nurtures and promotes diversity and inclusion, I want to say this: no one should be discriminated against because of the colour of their skin. It is counter to my values and the Federation's values, and there is absolutely no place for it within any professional organisation, or else-where. It should not happen, but let's be honest, it does. It is going to happen today, tomorrow and the day after. Things will only change when we start having honest conversations, when we call it out when we see it, and when we stand up and support each other.*" Fortunately, that open conversation was immediately able to be had, as in August this year *IP Inclusive* organised and hosted a roundtable event on BAME matters in the IP profession, the output of which was endorsed by the IP Federation and is summarised on the *IP Inclusive* website. Unfortunately, however, we still need to be challenging misguided, as well as openly racist, behaviours within the profession, pushing the topic out into the open and supporting each other as we learn.

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On top of the more obvious economic impacts of Covid-19, specifically the increasing unemployment rates in the UK, the school closures and classroom restrictions are likely to have a considerable impact on all school pupils, with the largest impact likely falling on those from the poorest families. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are already *twice as likely* to leave formal education without GCSEs in English and maths, compared to their better-off classmates. We already know that time away from school, as happened during the lockdown, only widens this gap. Furthermore, due to the ongoing economic crisis caused by the pandemic, many more families will be facing other challenges which indirectly impact on attainment, such as increased poverty and food insecurity.

Free school meals (FSMs) are often used as a guidance for how wide this gap is and there are currently around **1.3 million** (and increasing) children in England alone who are entitled to FSMs, with the percentages of children on FSMs being greater in the North and Southwest, when compared to the more affluent south east. I will add that I was one of those pupils who benefited from FSMs and, if it hadn't been for a series of fortuitous events, I would not have been in a position to access, and then take advantage of, the opportunities I've had. As such, I would not be sitting in my home office writing this article today. I know there are others in the profession who have likewise stories, but we cannot leave it simply to luck and fortune in the future.

So, knowing my passion on the topic, when I handed over the IP Federation presidency to Scott Roberts at the end of July, Scott pressed me for action on the topic in my vice-presidency year. He said to me, "*Suzanne, I know this year has been difficult what with Covid, Brexit and all the Free Trade Negotiations, but it really is time we actually did something about this [the topic of social mobility]*". So, in August this year, after a period of research, we engaged directly with one of the charities in the social mobility sector, *In2ScienceUK*, providing them with an agreed 3-year donation plan, with a review every year by the IP Federation council. Furthermore, knowing that there are several charities already active in trying to narrow the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and to lessen the number of "Lost Einsteins"¹, in September, we jointly hosted a second 'think tank' style event with *IP Inclusive*, on "access to the IP profession and social mobility". The event was opened by *IP Inclusive* Lead Executive Office, Andrea Brewster, and me, following which we had an introduction to why the topic is so important to UK government from Tim Moss, Chief Executive of the UK Intellectual Property Office. Following this, we also had a few words from Scott Roberts as to why this topic is also very important to British business, as well as to him personally.

After the opening speeches, the participants were split into various working groups across a multiple of topic sessions. There were a number of "outreach" sessions - looking at how we make what we do more visible and attractive to the many, many people out there who have no idea what we do and worse still, perhaps the wrong view. There were also "access" sessions, looking at barriers to entry and how we remove them, as well as "career development" sessions, looking at career switches

¹ Those children who could "have had highly impactful innovations" if they had been able to pursue the opportunities they deserved - Alex Bell et al., 2019. "Who Becomes an Inventor in America? The Importance of Exposure to Innovation," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol 134(2), pages 647-713

and barriers for progression within the profession itself. A summary of the main outputs follows:

1. Improve the image that we project to people upstream.
2. Reach new people and places, widening the range of educational and training establishments we engage with, including to target students before they make career-limiting choices.
3. Recruit more fairly, using objective and contextualised decision-making to overcome biases that could arise, not only on selection, but also in advertising and outreach.
4. Address financial barriers to entry and progression, finding ways to support less-wealthy recruits through training, re-training and career changes.
5. Explore bold systemic changes to entry requirements, for example new apprenticeship schemes and changes to qualification and assessment regimes.
6. Gather data to help us target our outreach work towards improving social mobility and to monitor our progress.
7. Work together as a sector, and where possible with government agencies, to maximise the effectiveness of these measures.
8. Further involve the outreach charities, to help us reach the right people in the right way.

The final formal report has been published on the *IP Inclusive* website. So, whilst we have achieved a huge amount this year, despite all circumstances, there is still plenty more to be done, and I welcome the support of Federation members in that task and to walk with me on this journey.

Suzanne Oliver, Immediate Past President