

IP Inclusive Annual Report 2020



2020: Well!

Foreword by Andrea Brewster OBE

In January 2020, we were enjoying our first ever full-day diversity conference. It was standing room only as we heard updates on 2019 achievements and shared ideas for the next twelve months.

By the end of 2020, the only way we could meet was online.

Covid-19 threw everyone's plans in the air. I confess I feared that diversity and inclusion would be a low priority compared to the chaos of the lockdown, the need to set up new working arrangements and the associated economic uncertainty – not to mention the human cost of such a ferocious pandemic.

In fact the opposite turned out to be the case. Wellbeing and inclusivity became more important than ever. Deprived of their corporate finery, the professions recognised that their most valuable assets are in fact their people and how well they function together. The trauma of the pandemic made it vital to look after the mental wellbeing of isolated, often anxious, staff members. At the same time, new ways of working emphasised the importance of different needs, personalities, perspectives and approaches – and also made them easier to accommodate, giving a new depth to the term “inclusivity”. And the need to respond quickly and creatively to massive upheaval highlighted the fact that more diverse teams can often be more productive and innovative, another incentive for change.

The killing of George Floyd in America in June 2020 brought a heightened sense of urgency to the call for racial and ethnic equality. Social and economic fall-out from the lockdown, including in the education sector, exacerbated social mobility constraints on diversity in the workplace. Problems over access to health care and child care made life even more difficult for some disabled people, carers and parents – and overall, women were more likely to bear the brunt of that. Thus, in many different respects, diversity became a more pressing issue during 2020.

Once we'd shaken ourselves down it became clear that IP Inclusive could still achieve much of what we'd set out to during 2020, but in a different way. We could harness the changes that were going on around us and tailor our work to suit people's new priorities: mental health came to the fore, as did support for individual IP professionals as opposed to their employer organisations. And we were incredibly well placed to take

advantage of the move to virtual working. With so few resources of our own, we were now able to organise events more easily. We could gather participants and reach people we had previously struggled to, making it feasible for us to host several high-level discussions during 2020: sector-wide round-table meetings on BAME representation and social mobility, and a “think tank” for senior representatives of private sector patent and trade mark firms. In this new, more accessible, world it became easier to communicate with our supporters and provide them with new and better resources, including our own videos and event recordings.

An amazing band of volunteers, particularly in the five networking and support communities and the regional networks, played a key role in bringing people together during these difficult times. As a result, IP Inclusive became a source of reassurance and guidance for many, providing an inclusive and supportive community at the heart of the IP sector thanks to our unique pan-professional positioning. Informal “coffee dates”, hosted online of course, proved a popular forum for Women in IP and IP Futures and brought us many new supporters. A great deal of progress was made on encouraging and supporting “allies”, across all of the diversity strands.

Our Careers in Ideas task force also worked incredibly hard in 2020. “Careers in Ideas Week” brought a plethora of events, projects, resources and contacts, especially with relevant charities and outreach organisations. The events for potential recruits were over-subscribed, their audiences including higher BAME levels than we’ve seen before and many students from non-Russell Group universities. They are sure to have widened awareness of IP sector careers and we hope that that in turn will diversify our intake.

So, at the end of 2020, we look back and find that we did after all manage to progress the objectives we’d set ourselves. Previously we’ve structured our annual report around the original four IP Inclusive workstreams, but this time we’ve aligned it with the strategic priorities in our plans for the year, to show what we’ve achieved for each of them. Considering the year it’s been, we’re really proud of this. We’re proud of the way that so many IP sector organisations – individual businesses, membership bodies, regulators, mental health charities and the Intellectual Property Office itself – have come together to support the work we’ve been doing. What an amazing sector we’re in.

We believe our campaign for diversity and inclusion now has more relevance and value than ever. It’s a good time, then, to be thinking about moving to a more formal and sustainable footing, which is what – based on the encouraging responses to our stakeholder consultations – we will progress in 2021. With more resources and a better structure, we’ll be able to continue building on what we did in this unprecedented year.

As life hopefully returns to something more “normal” through 2021, it will be important to preserve the gains made in terms of flexibility and inclusivity, and not relapse into less people-focused models. The outcomes from our key 2020 events will help to inform and drive the work we do next, assisted by the results of our second benchmarking survey and of our stakeholder consultations. The leaders’ think tank will provide extra impetus and practical support for the patent and trade mark professions, and doubtless knock-on effects in other areas. We also need to work on engagement with our Charter signatory organisations as well as with individual volunteers. 2021 could be a big year for us.

Thank you to everyone who has helped to get us this far, particularly through such a difficult twelve months. We hope you find this report of our 2020 achievements a basis for your ongoing trust, support and involvement.

Andrea Brewster OBE
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IP Inclusive