

## Interview: Carolyn Clarke on diversity, equity and inclusion



We discussed diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within the internal audit profession with Carolyn Clarke, former Group Head of Audit, Risk and Control at Centrica plc.

She said that “creating an environment where everyone can be equal is about thinking more creatively about the way in which our careers work, we have to create the models and ask why they can’t be made to work.”

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### Flexible working

For CAEs, flexible or part-time work as part of an executive team can be challenging within a framework of critical meetings that traditionally happen according to the diary of the board.

Extending the idea of flexible working, Clarke suggests that it should be possible for all but the largest organisations to utilise portfolio CAEs where they have a variety of part-time roles: working smarter, delegating more, managing co-source teams and bringing diverse thinking to the organisation. There are barriers that might need to be addressed such as overcoming hierarchy to enable a senior auditor to attend meetings traditionally only attended by executives, but nothing is insurmountable. It is an approach that may lead to increased diversity through mobilising the role.

In addition to being beneficial for individuals, she also said the model was “desirable for good governance, desirable for the company” as they can afford a higher quality individual pro-rata than full-time. She used Carillion with its fully outsourced IA function as a learning point that “sufficient capability to lead an internal audit provision in-house” should perhaps be a requirement of good governance.

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## Barriers and biases

In terms of career progression Clarke noted that there is: “definitely a perception that the CAE has to come from a financial/external background in most instances, it’s not always the case but it does make it more difficult to get that diversity.” This potentially limits the attraction of talent and audit committee chairs have a role in addressing recruitment criteria.

As organisations mature and develop their risk frameworks, IA is driven to audit a wide range of risks for which Clarke says “we need people with engineering backgrounds, health and safety backgrounds, cyber experts, a full range of expertise, and we need to look in different pools to find it.” Over time this also has the opportunity to diversity the talent pool for future CAEs.

IA is subject to the same barriers and unconscious biases as any other part of the organisation, although our awareness of them means we are better placed to overcome them to create an inclusive environment in which to work. Clarke was positive about the future, “because we operate across lots of different dimensions, because our role is within the organisation but independent, the opportunity to create different careers, different models that are more credible and provide a higher quality service is there. It’s more a case of opportunity than dealing with barriers.”

*Catch our [special interview](#) with experienced Internal Auditor Paul Skinnider on the related matter of authenticity in the workplace.*