

# Inclusive recruitment: How HLM Architects are shaping inclusive practices



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This case study examines how [HLM Architects](#), a UK-wide practice working across the built environment, has been rethinking its approach to recruitment to improve access to the profession. Through honest reflection and conversations with external partners, the team began to notice where parts of their recruitment process might unintentionally create barriers. In response, they introduced small changes such as offering different ways to apply, adapting interviews when needed, and placing greater emphasis on candidates' strengths. This case study outlines what they did, what they learned, and how minor adjustments can make recruitment more inclusive.

## **Starting points and motivations**

Participation in Business in the Community's (BITC's) [Opening Doors](#) programme, alongside conversations with the Voice and Influence Team at Sheffield City Council, prompted the team to take a more critical look at their recruitment practices and what inclusive recruitment could mean in practice. As Karen Mosley, Social Impact & Inclusion Director, reflected, 'We started to think, are we actually unintentionally creating more barriers when we're recruiting and what would it look like to open our doors even wider to people who've historically been overlooked?'

This led to a review of everyday recruitment practices, including how roles were advertised, how applications were assessed, and whether traditional interview formats might discourage some candidates. In doing so, the team realised they needed to look inward as well as outward, and to understand how their own processes might be shutting people out.

This shift marked a turning point, laying the foundation for more flexible, transparent and supportive approaches, and for the practical changes that followed.

## **Partnerships and outreach**

External relationships helped broaden HLM's understanding of the barriers candidates may face. HLM work with [Opportunity Sheffield](#), the employment and skills service within Sheffield City Council, which supports local people into work, apprenticeships and training while helping employers build diverse workforces. HLM are Ambassadors of the [See it Be it](#) programme, which creates opportunities for employers to visit schools to discuss career pathways, and many of their staff support students with interview techniques, CV writing and the development of portfolios (with 50% of their work experience placements reserved for schools in low social mobility areas). Their relationship with BITC also deepened their understanding of the key drivers of the [Opening Doors](#) inclusive recruitment campaign and the importance of aligning with, and listening to, the voices of underrepresented groups, reinforcing collaboration with the Voice and Influence Team. These partnerships provided practical insight into common recruitment challenges, including the development of a [board-game-style tool](#) that highlights the barriers often faced by people with care experience. This encouraged staff to move beyond a 'tick-box' approach to fairness and to think more practically about how recruitment processes could remove barriers for applicants.

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**“We'd been focused on what others were doing, but realised we first needed to understand how our own processes might be excluding people.”**

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## Internal development

Internal training and the development of HLM's 'I-BELONG' framework supported a shift in mindset across the organisation. Built around the principles Be Thoughtful, Be Curious and Be You, the framework encourages staff to focus on strengths, challenge assumptions and reflect on their own judgement. Leadership training on how identity shapes people's experiences, alongside sessions focused on curiosity, helped to embed this approach.

As Karen put it, 'We need to focus on what people can do rather than what they can't, and start paying attention to the strengths and potential that each individual brings'.



**"We're staying curious, because when we stop asking questions, we stop seeing who our decisions affect."**



## Rethinking the recruitment journey

HLM's recruitment process continues to evolve as teams test more flexible and inclusive approaches. A key learning moment came when a candidate disclosed their deafness and requested adjustments to the interview format, including joining via Teams and using a British Sign Language interpreter. HLM adapted, and the experience highlighted where processes could be improved.

Since then, several changes have been introduced:

- An applicant tracking system (Teamtailor) to widen access to shortlisting and track candidate journeys.
- Multiple application formats (CVs, video, work samples) to allow candidates to present their strengths in different ways.
- More flexible interview and assessment formats, including informal conversations and studio visits.

- Clearer job adverts, avoiding unnecessary requirements and jargon.
- Ongoing training for hiring managers on bias, inclusive assessment and onboarding.

These changes reflect a shift from assessing what candidates lack, to recognising what they can contribute and how the organisation can create the right conditions for people to thrive.

## Constraints

HLM's progress has not been without its challenges. Some structural factors slowed change. For example, funding was not always available for the tools and training they wanted to introduce, and certain architecture roles require accredited qualifications, which limit entry points. Internally, the organisation focused on unpicking differing team approaches and shifting mindsets, so that widening the net was not seen as slowing down recruitment.

There were also challenges in striking the right balance between offering support and avoiding assumptions about what candidates might need. As Karen explained, "We're still learning how to provide genuine support while respecting people's boundaries. Helping without assuming and listening without expecting disclosure". These reflections showed that the work is ongoing and requires continual adjustment and learning.

## Looking ahead

HLM's journey is still unfolding. The team continues to explore how to maintain momentum, ensure consistency, and adapt to new insights. Their step-by-step approach remains guided by curiosity and a commitment to making recruitment both fair and thoughtful.

## Get in touch

Belen is part of the cross-sector, collaborative team working on the '[Good Work and Better Business](#)' work package of the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP). Contact [Belen](#) to find out more about this case study.

## Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP)

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