Northern Gas Networks

Young Innovators Council

Session 3: Creating a Truly Inclusive Business

April 2025

Facilitated and written by Solutions for the Planet

Contents:

1. Executive Summary

Northern Gas Networks' (NGN) Young Innovators Council (YIC) met online on Wednesday 30th March for the third session of 2025. The YIC were joined by members of NGN's Sustainability and HR departments, who are working on a new **Belonging and Inclusion** Strategy. These departments were keen to understand the **YIC's perspective on what would make Northern Gas Networks a truly inclusive business**.

In advance of the session, the YIC were asked to watch a video about **allyship**, to research **what other companies are implementing in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) space** and to read through the Inclusion and Belonging section of **NGN's most recent sustainability report**. Given the sensitivity of this topic, Solutions for the Planet spent some extra time at the start of the session reminding the YIC about their group agreement and highlighting the different ways they could engage, depending on their comfort level.

The YIC shared their **reflections from the pre-work activities**, which demonstrated a good starting level of understanding about the session's topic. The Panel then heard from Claire Allcock – HR Director – and Hannah Jewison – Business Sustainability Lead – about the **specific context of Inclusion and Belonging at NGN, and the challenges that the business faces**. With this understanding, the YIC were presented with 8 short-term actions that NGN could take in their Inclusion and Belonging challenges, and members voted for the first 3 they would prioritise.

An external Expert Witness was invited to the session to share their perspective on inclusive workplaces and youth talent. Rob Muranda – Operations Manager for Bristol Future Talent Partnership – talked about **culture, understanding, language and unconscious bias**.

The YIC then joined breakout rooms to discuss the Inclusion and Belonging challenges in **4 NGN departments: Senior Executive Roles, Engineering and Field Operations, Customer Service and Stakeholder Engagement, and IT and Data**. They thought about a **2030 vision** for the departments, agreed on **3 priority actions**, and discussed the **data that would need to be captured in order to measure impact**.

2. Overview of session

Background to the Young Innovators Council

2025 marks the fifth consecutive year of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC). The YIC continue to be the voice of young people at Northern Gas Networks, and the business ensures that these young people's thoughts and opinions are put at the heart of decision making.

At the end of 2024, Northern Gas Networks published its 5-year business plan for 2026-2031. It is clear from this plan that the business has taken the YIC's contributions into consideration, with multiple references to the importance of their unique, youth perspective.

14 members of this year's YIC were also part of the programme last year, with one member entering her fifth year on the YIC. This demonstrates the value that young people are also finding from their experience.

Background to the Session

Northern Gas Networks are working on a Belonging and Inclusion strategy, in collaboration with Business in the Community (BITC). Some of the key challenges faced include: a lack of engagement in the topic from the workforce, a hesitancy from the workforce to share DEI data, and inequality in the workforce, with gender inequality being the most obvious (83% of NGN's headcount are male).

Inclusion and Belonging has been explored by the YIC in various sessions since the Council was established in 2021. They have explored 'what future customers would expect a 'sustainable' business to be doing', they have reflected on physical adaptations to the workplace, and they have looked at the question of diversity in recruitment as well as in supporting vulnerable customers. At the start of 2025, the YIC met and voted on the business priorities they felt were most important for NGN to focus on in the coming period; 'ensuring all company policies are inclusive' received the third highest number of votes out of 27 priorities across responsible business, environmental sustainability, and company values.

YIC 2025 Session 3: Creating a Truly Inclusive Business

Total length: 1 hour 45 minutes
People involved: 2 S4TP facilitators, 2 NGN Stakeholder Engagement Team, 3 NGN Facilitators, 2 NGN Witnesses (HR Director and Business Sustainability Manager), 1 ISG Observer, 1 External Witness
Date and time: Wednesday 30th April 2025, 5.15pm – 7.00pm
Panel attendance: 19
Apologies: 9

Objectives:

- To understand the YIC's perspective on what an inclusive employer looks like
- To understand the YIC's perspective on how NGN can better reflect the diversity of the communities it serves
- To understand the YIC's perspective on what actions NGN should take to make underrepresented groups feel welcomes and supported
- To understand the YIC's perspective on how NGN should measure success in DEI – what would it look like, how would it feel?

Prior to the session the YIC were asked to read and complete the following tasks:

- Watch this video on allyship: https://youtu.be/Qgk3k4dzbUM?si=XvGJ5PkSdPxseJxx
- Choose a company that they think does Diversity and Inclusion well and find an example of what they are doing. Why do they think it is working?
- Read the latest NGN Sustainability Report, focus on the section called 'Build a diverse workforce and eliminate inequality': https://www.northerngasnetworks.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Sustainability-Report-2024.pdf

Agenda

Time	Activity
5.15	Welcome, objectives, You said…so we…
5.29	Context setting and Pre-work Sharing
5.43	NGN Context: Real-World Challenges in DEI
5.50	Menti Poll – Prioritising First Steps
5.55	External Expert Witness: Reflections on Inclusive Workplaces and Youth Talent
6.03	Breakout Challenges: "Blueprint for Belonging"
6.44	Feedback and Reflections
6.54	Wrap-up, next session, survey
7.00	End

3. Attendees

Young Innovators Council

Akorede	Joe
Ben	Lucy
Divya	Mubashir
Ellie	Noor
Emilia	Orla
Florence	Ralph
Fran	Ronan
Grace	Thomas
Hassan	Zinedine
Idris	

Solutions for the Planet

Claire Fitton	Youth Insights Programme Manager
Lauren Gupta	Youth Insights Coordinator / Interim Comms Lead

Northern Gas Networks

Alex Brightman	Energy Futures and Net Zero Educator
Eleanor Glyn-Smith	Asset Risk and Strategy Analyst
Hollie Scott	Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator
Jenny Wilkinson	Stakeholder Engagement Lead
Kati Sexton	Customer Care Officer
Caire Allcock	HR Director
Hannah Jewison	Business Sustainability Manager

External Witness

Rob Muranda	Operations Manager - Bristol Future Talent Partnership

Observers

Phil Broome	Independent Stakeholder Group Member

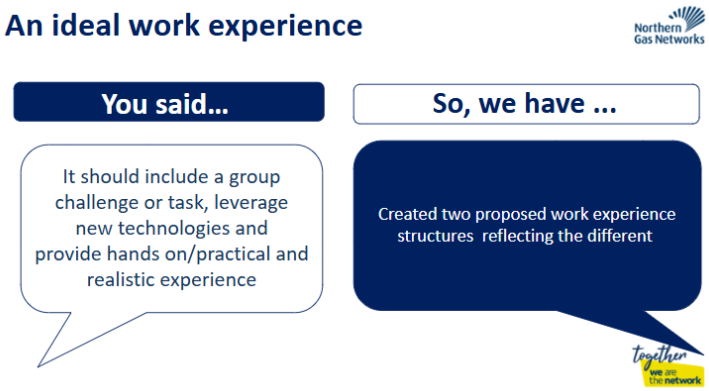
4. Key discussion points

Setting the scene

Given the sensitive nature of this session's topic, NGN and S4TP agreed to allocate some extra time at the beginning of the session to setting the scene, running through expectations and highlighting the current, global, context to questions around Inclusion and Belonging.

You said…so we…

The panel heard from Jenny Wilkinson, Stakeholder Engagement Lead, who shared feedback from the previous session on developing an 'Ideal Work Experience'. Using the insights from the YIC, Northern Gas Networks has developed two proposed work experience programmes that it hopes to pilot with members of the Council. In this session's feedback survey, S4TP asked the panellists whether they would be interested in taking part.



Pre-work Reflections

The discussions started by asking the YIC to share their learnings with the whole group and also via a Menti link from the pre-work.

- What did you learn about allyship?
- Which businesses did you reflect on, and what Inclusion and Belonging work are they doing that you think is good practice?

THOMAS

Reflecting on recent rollbacks of DEI policy in the United States, Thomas remarked that Europe appeared to have joined together: *"we will all stand together and keep doing this and including everyone because it's the best thing to do"*. He noted that this was mainly Denmark but was backed by many other European countries.

RONAN

Ronan researched the top 50 most inclusive companies in the country, and National Gas came up as the top ranked. He noted that they had allies for neurodiverse employees, for example.
"I thought the video was quite interesting, I hadn't really heard about it (Allyship) before"

FRAN

Fran looked at rankings for both international and national companies. On an international scale, companies were often ranked well because they did DEI work across their international branches.
She particularly noticed a scheme that helped women come back into work after taking a break. *"I thought that was a good scheme for inclusivity of women"*

Prework feedback:

Key Learnings on Allyship:

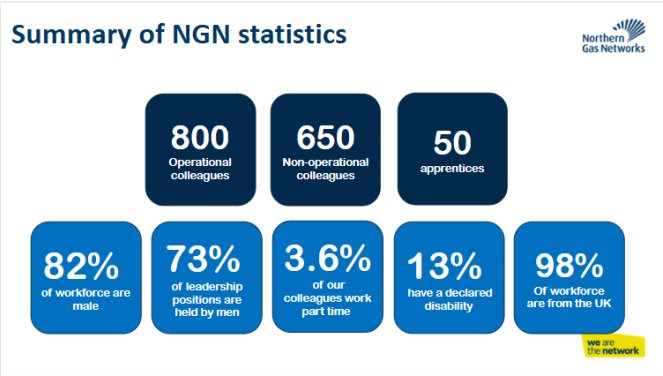
- **Allyship is active, not passive**
  It's about *speaking up*, *stepping in*, and *challenging non-inclusive behaviour* — not just offering private support.
- **Allyship means using privilege to promote equality**
  Allies use their *position, influence, or platform* to advocate for marginalised groups and create safer, fairer environments.
- **It's everyone's responsibility**
  You don't have to belong to a group to support it — caring for others is a *collective duty*, regardless of identity.
- **It builds inclusive workplaces**
  Strong allyship, embedded in company values, makes workplaces more *welcoming* for underrepresented employees and increases *belonging*.
- **Allyship is a learning journey**
  Many reflected they had *not understood the full meaning* of allyship before and now realise its role in *driving workplace inclusion* and *societal change*.
- **Global companies lead with structured allyship**
  Organisations like *Google* and *Microsoft* have formal allyship programmes and *culture celebration days* that encourage employee storytelling and inclusion.
- **Visible leadership matters**
  Questions were raised about whether companies like NGN have a *DEI/Allyship lead* or *president*, as seen in other businesses.

Good Practice in Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) from other businesses:

- **Inclusive Recruitment Initiatives**
    - *Microsoft* – Neurodiversity Hiring Program and Inclusive Hiring Initiative.
    - *Accenture* – Diverse leadership team and strong DEI strategy.
    - Businesses actively using a **diversity-focused recruitment strategy**, particularly for underrepresented groups.
- **Support for Career Returners**
    - Programs designed to support *women returning to work after career breaks* were recognised as impactful.
- **STEM and Early Talent Outreach**
    - *Rolls-Royce* – Uses **STEM outreach and inclusion programmes** to support young people from diverse backgrounds.
    - Work placements specifically designed to improve **access for underrepresented groups** were highlighted as a good practice.
- **Visibility and Transparency**
    - Businesses praised for **sharing D&I progress and statistics publicly**, showing accountability and commitment.
- **Representation at All Levels**
    - Noted good practice includes **more women and wider age diversity in leadership and executive roles**.
- **Empowerment and Inclusion Programmes**
    - *Bentley's BEinspired* – A programme focused on **empowering women** and increasing representation across all business areas.
    - *Microsoft* – Use of **guest speakers**, **scenario-based videos**, and **facilitated sessions** to build inclusive skills and behaviours.
- **Cultural Commitment and Integrity**
    - Reflections included a positive view of *Europe-wide efforts* to support inclusion and protect the integrity of equality work across the region.

Expert Witnesses: Claire Allcock (HR Director) and Hannah Jewison (Business Sustainability Manager)

For the next part of the session, we heard from Claire Allcock and Hannah Jewison. They firstly talked about diversity in the energy industry more broadly, before focusing on the Northern Gas Networks context.



The presentation was followed by a short Question and Answer opportunity, where one of the YIC members asked a question…

YIC Member: **"How big is your gender pay gap?"**

Answer: **"We report a year behind. Our most current one is 26%. The high level of males and high level of senior males really drives that gap."**

> "[The most interesting or thought-provoking part of the session] was seeing the summary of sector and NGN statistics as it made me realise and truly appreciate just how much of a lack of diversity and inclusion there is in the business sector and within NGN itself, and why this was such an important issue that needs addressing"
>
> YIC Member

Menti Poll: Prioritising First Steps

As Hannah Jewison had mentioned during the presentation, one of the things that NGN wanted to learn from the YIC was which actions it can prioritise to make change in the short term.

The YIC were presented with 8 short-term actions that the business is considering, and we asked them to choose their top 3 priorities.

KEY:
10 or more members = **DARK GREEN**
Between 5 and 10 members = **LIGHT GREEN**
Less than 5 members = **ORANGE**

Action	Number of YIC members who chose this as a top 3 priority
Implement diversity hiring strategy	12
Launch a new work placement scheme, with a focus on diversity	11
More women in senior positions	10
Go for 'best place to work' accreditation	6
Launch allyship training	4
Gather workforce data so that we understand the demographic of our workforce	4
Run dedicated mentoring / coaching / development programmes for women	2
Implement a colleague satisfaction survey	1

Expert Witnesses: Rob Muranda (Operations Manager for Bristol Future Talent Partnership)

Rob joined this session to share his expertise on inclusive workplaces and youth talent. In particular, he talked about social inequality, culture in the workplace, understanding and language, and unconscious bias.

Rob spoke to the panel about the different ways inequality and inclusion show up in society and the workplace. He highlighted how factors like access to private education, tutoring, and financial or parental support can create social inequality and impact young people's opportunities. In the workplace, he explained the importance of culture—how shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices shape how inclusive an environment is. Rob also discussed the need for clear understanding and inclusive language, emphasising the value of promoting diversity, inclusive practices, and ongoing training for staff, management, and stakeholders.

> "[The most interesting or thought-provoking part of the session] was the speaker – Rob – who talked about there needing to be action on diversity and inclusion, not just box-ticking paperwork / policies"
>
> YIC Member

Breakout Activity: Blueprint for Belonging

The Panel moved into breakout rooms to discuss inclusion and belonging challenges in a specific department at Northern Gas Networks. The business provided short 'scenarios' in advance, which helped to contextualise the conversations.

ENGINEERING AND FIELD OPERATIONS

CONTEXT

This is where the hand-on work happens - involving gas engineers, maintenance teams, and site supervisors.

Traditionally, this environment has been dominated by men, often older workers with extensive experience.

The role demand 24-hours availability, with 12-hour shifts being the norm

Your challenge:

How can we create a welcoming atmosphere for young people, women, parents/carers, and ethnically diverse individuals?

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

CONTEXT

This is where direct communication with customers happens, sometimes in their homes or over the phone answering questions or dealing with complaints.

This role tends to be mostly female, with a very changeable and unpredictable working day that often involved dealing with challenges and problem-solving in a fast-paced environment. It is largely a 9-5 role that is office-based, but some customer care officers work remotely, supporting engineers in communities.

Your challenge:

How can we make this feel welcoming to parents/carers, men and ethnically diverse individuals?

IT AND DATA RELATED ROLES

CONTEXT

These professionals analyse and interpret complex data to support decision-making. Their analytical skills and attention to detail help drive business insight and strategy. This includes software developers, cyber security, programmers and IT support. It is a dynamic area with a variety of roles, skills and perspectives.

This field is male-dominated, often with younger graduates and involves remote working or office roles. It is well suited to exceptional attention to detail and problem solving skills.

Your challenge:

How can we make this feel welcoming to parents/carers, women and neurodiverse individuals?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE ROLES

CONTEXT

This is where the big decisions take place, involving leadership and strategic thinking, setting the long-term vision and direction for the business, leading and inspiring teams, fostering a productive work environment and managing finances and relationships with important stakeholders (board members, investors...)

In NGN there are 8 director roles with an average age of 50. Currently 25% are female, 88% are from the UK, 12% are from Australasia, 13% work part time and 13% have a disability.

Your challenge:

How can we support more diversity in all aspects of the executive team, particularly in terms of gender and ethnicity?

The Panellists' rooms had 5 tasks to complete:

1. **Create a 2030 vision:** what would an inclusive department look like?
2. **Design a 3-step fast start plan:** what 3 actions would you prioritise in the next year?
3. **Define how to measure success:** what data, stories or feedback would need to be collected in order to know if your plan is working or not?
4. **Get creative:** Invent a #hashtag campaign that NGN could launch internally to boost inclusion
5. **Get extra creative:** are there any other creative elements you could add into your plan – events, webinars, speakers, celebrations…

The YIC had 30 minutes in their breakout room to discuss their department. Their insights are summarised in the tables below.

Engineering and Field Operations	
Question	**Insights**
Create a 2030 vision	Childcare commitments are a hindrance to parents or carers who are interested in and qualified for the job role. There could be subsidised childcare or even an on-site provision for NGN employees. NGN links up with initiatives such as Women in STEM to ensure that their roles are appealing to younger women. Safety of female employees is taken into consideration, especially when working at night out on the streets across the region. NGN ensures that teams are always working in groups and are trained to look out for each other. The needs of different cultures and religions is taken into consideration. For example, adjusted shift patterns for those observing Ramadan, or the ability to manage shifts for those wanting to celebrate Christmas with those who would prefer to celebrate Eid. This department engages with schools and colleges to ensure that young people know about these roles and feel encouraged to apply to them. This could involve assemblies, but more interactive experiences would be preferred such site trips and tours. Aim to build consistent relationships with schools and colleges, rather than only offering one-off opportunities. Summer Schools are offered to young people, targeted to specific groups e.g., Women or people from the Global Majority. This would allow their 'first' experiences of this role to be in a more comfortable environment where they see other people like themselves.

	Scholarships, with financial support, are available for specific groups of people that NGN wants to bring into the business. For example, those who have been raised in the UK but are on their parents' visas who cannot afford to pay the significantly higher overseas student fees and therefore will not have access to the same opportunities despite their memorable life having been in the UK. Consider those with disabilities or other medical needs when allocating employees to different sites. For example, if someone has a medical condition that could result in them requiring a hospital, is there a hospital close to that site?
Design a 3-step fast start plan	1. Put childcare support in place, whether that be through financial subsidies or on-site provision. 2. Rethink the 12-hour shift requirement. Could it be reduced to 8 hours? Or would it be possible for employees to job-share and do a shorter shift and then switch so that the 12 hours is still covered? 3. Have a comprehensive school / college engagement plan that builds relationships over a period of time and challenges the stereotypes around engineering roles.
Define how to measure success	
Get creative - hashtags	
Get extra creative	
Other reflections	The 12-hour shifts are likely to be a deterrent for women and single parents who have responsibilities for children. It might also make the role less appealing to those with disabilities, e.g., someone with a medical condition that means working continuously for 12 hours is not possible. Also, for young people, 12 hours would be a big jump up from their college hours (usually around 8 hours) and so they might be put off the roles. Further, for people with disabilities, it might not be possible to guarantee the accessibility or safety of a site and, therefore, it could even be seen as more inclusive to *not* include them in that team.

Customer Service and Stakeholder Engagement	
Question	**Insights**
Create a 2030 vision	There are monthly inclusion surveys that capture feedback on how people are feeling in the department. These surveys include thoughtful questions about the workforce and the interactions between members of staff, not just the job roles themselves. Flexible working is available for parents and carers who may otherwise struggle to stick to a strict 9-5 role due to caregiving responsibilities, school pick-up/drop-off, etc. For those who are new to a fast-paced work environment, mentors / buddies are provided to help them settle into the new routine. They can check in weekly or even daily until the new joiner feels comfortable. Motivational tools are used to encourage a more diverse pool of applicants. For example, 'employee of the month' with some kind of reward attached may be more appealing to men. There is a DEI representative in the department who is the port of call for any questions relating to Inclusion and Belonging. The wider department knows who this person is and feels confident that there is someone who will understand any concerns.
Design a 3-step fast start plan	1. Set up a mentoring / buddy scheme for new starters, especially to support those getting used to the fast-paced nature of customer service work. 2. Launch motivational policies to attract more men to the department. For example, offering some kind of reward or incentive such as 'employee of the month'. 3. Establish a Inclusion and Belonging representative who will be the main point of contact for any issues in the department.
Define how to measure success	- Conduct a regular survey with employees in the department - Ask questions that aim to understand the interactions between employees e.g., "Did you leave that conversation feeling comfortable?" - "Do you feel that the work environment is very inclusive / supportive?" - "Do you feel that the work environment is diverse and that there is no discrimination?" - Ask questions that can build on progress e.g., "What is one thing your department could do to improve inclusion?"

	- For easy-to-understand statistics, it's useful to get a satisfaction level like a score / 10
Get creative - hashtags	#fuelinginclusion #energyforallvoices #connectedbydifferences
Get extra creative	Share stories of people who love their jobs and have grown because of their experience. Particularly if there are any men in the department already.
Other reflections	Parents and carers may well be attracted to this role because of the demand for skills like empathy and the emotional side. Therefore, with a more flexible offering that considers their caregiving responsibilities, this job may well attract more people from that group. Gender stereotypes need to be broken down in this department e.g., 'men do the physical jobs while women sit at desk jobs'.

IT and Data Related Roles	
Question	**Insights**
Create a 2030 vision	There are community support groups for women, either a 1:1 peer support offering or a large 'women in data' community where they can share experiences and support each other. Job descriptions are clear and long sections of text are broken down to make them easier to understand for neurodiverse people. Informational workshops are offered to parents / carers via schools and colleges that highlight the benefits of working at NGN e.g., stability, benefits, wellbeing support. Engaging workshops are offered to students in schools, that are tailored for the age group or subject-area. There is a small amount of talking from NGN representatives, but the focus is on practical activities that really show the participants what a role in IT and data might look like. For example, coding for beginners or using Scratch to design a pipeline system.
Design a 3-step fast start plan	1. Ensure that decision-making is collaborative, so that any key decisions being made in the department include all voices. 2. Implement taster sessions specifically aimed at the groups of people you want to attract more into the

	department. So that they can see and learn that NGN is an inclusive place. 3. Where there are women, people of different ethnic background, and neurodiverse individuals in these roles already, highlight their experiences. Ask them to share their stories via social media, at job events, or networking evenings. What do they do? How did they get there? How do they feel accepted at work?
Define how to measure success	- NGN would need to collect data and be able to compare it to previous years in order to track real progress. - "How many more people from different backgrounds are there in roles now?" - "What about retention. How many people are staying in their roles or in the department?" - Ask all employees if they know what has been happening in the department with regard to DEI initiatives. Do they know what changes have been made?
Get creative - hashtags	#dataforeveryone #ngndiversityintech
Get extra creative	NGN could implement a monthly podcast where people from the IT and data team could talk about their journey. How have they got there? What challenges have they overcome? What do they hope for the future? It could be called something like 'Behind the Scenes at NGN', 'Hack for Humanity', or something about 'through the pipelines'.
Other reflections	

Senior Executive Roles	
Question	**Insights**
Create a 2030 vision	Senior leaders at NGN demonstrate their support of diversity through 'show not tell' initiatives such as badges, lanyards and posters. This shows other people that just because not all leaders look like you, doesn't mean they won't support you. At least one Senior Executive role at the business is set aside for an ethnic minority, ideally a woman, so that there is always a role model for other people in the business to aspire to. There are Inclusion and Belonging champions across the business who offer support, mentoring, and identify up and coming talent.

	Existing Senior Executives are educated on the importance of diversity and, in turn, educate other people about why having a diverse and inclusive leadership team is important. Senior Executives are encouraged to find a work-life balance that suits them, and policies encourage this. This means that more people feel comfortable putting themselves forward for senior roles, knowing that their personal circumstances will be catered for.
Design a 3-step fast start plan	1. Start with getting more women / ethnic minorities into these positions. The current statistics are quite shocking. 2. Ensure that there are clear and supported routes for all employees to progress through the business and towards these senior roles. 3. Review policies to ensure that senior employees are encouraged and able to find a work-life balance that meets their personal circumstances.
Define how to measure success	- Focus on gathering more statistics from NGN staff. Even the fact that more people are willing to share their data will be a good sign of progress. - Use a combination of quantitative 'numbers' as well as qualitative 'stories'. The numbers are easy for people to understand and allow comparison over time and between companies, whilst the stories show how people feel about being at work. Both tell a different story and both are important. - Interview those from different ethnic background and women who are at the business now. Find out how they feel, what they struggle with, what blockers they feel there are to their progress. These should be conducted by other women and / or people from ethnic background to ensure that the interviewees feel comfortable.
Get creative - hashtags	Having a hashtag minimises the issue somewhat, so NGN should consider whether or not it's a useful tool. People want to see real change and action. #leadwithequity #morethanahashtag #sheleadswethrive
Get extra creative	
Other reflections	

> "[The most interesting or thought-provoking part of the session] was the topic we did in the break out room, it was very interesting as we had a small group to communicate our thoughts more effectively"
>
> YIC Member

Wrap-up

The session was wrapped up by hearing some quick reflections from Northern Gas Networks' witnesses – Claire Allcock and Hannah Jewison. They were very positive about what they had heard and noted that some of the suggestions were things they hadn't considered before. Finally, we said thank you and goodbye to Ellie Glyn-Smith, who has been a Northern Gas Networks facilitator with the Young Innovators Council for the past 2 years.

Post-Session

Following the session, the YIC were asked to reconsider which of the 8 short-term actions they would prioritise. Northern Gas Networks was interested to see if their perspective had changed having heard from witnesses and having engaged in deeper conversations in the breakout rooms. The table below compares their first prioritisation with the survey prioritisation.

KEY:
10 or more members = **DARK GREEN**
Between 5 and 10 members = **LIGHT GREEN**
Less than 5 members = **ORANGE**

Action	Number of YIC members who chose this as a top 3 priority **in session**	Number of YIC members who chose this as a top 3 priority **in the post-session survey**
Implement diversity hiring strategy	12	10
Launch a new work placement scheme, with a focus on diversity	11	10
More women in senior positions	10	5
Go for 'best place to work' accreditation	6	7
Launch allyship training	4	5
Gather workforce data so that we understand the demographic of our workforce	4	6
Run dedicated mentoring / coaching / development programmes for women	2	6
Implement a colleague satisfaction survey	1	5

From this small sample, the YIC continued to feel strongly in favour of quick action on a diversity hiring strategy and a diversity-focused work placement scheme. Following the session, they gave more votes to the mentoring programmes and colleague satisfaction surveys, which were both suggestions that came up in numerous breakout room conversations.

5. Key Reflections for Northern Gas Networks

The business should refer to the summary tables in the previous section of the report to reflect on all the insights from the YIC. Below, are some key points from each department and from the discussions on impact measurement

Key reflections for Northern Gas Networks for the Engineering and Field Operations departments

1. **The demands of 12-hour shift should be reconsidered and childcare given more thought.** This was a key talking point for the group, who spent time considering shorter shifts and job-sharing models. The YIC felt this was important for attracting parents, carers, women, and younger people to the roles. With regards the childcare, the YIC suggested some form of subsidy and even floated the idea of an on-site childcare facility.
2. **Challenging gender and ethnicity stereotypes from school-age is important.** Young people need to be able to see themselves in these roles and be given opportunities to feel comfortable. The YIC suggested 'summer-schools' targeted at specific groups, interactive workshops, and site visits for students.
3. **Religious, cultural, and health and safety considerations need to be taken into account for this department.** This might mean ensuring that those observing Ramadan are given flexible shift patterns at that time, or those wanting to celebrate their cultural holidays are able to do so. Those with medical conditions should be near medical facilities, should they be required, and women's safety when in the field needs to be reviewed.

Key reflections for Northern Gas Networks for the Customer Service and Stakeholder Engagement departments

4. **Caregiving responsibilities need to be catered for.** For those who are responsible for children or other family members might not be able to stick to a rigid 9-5 routine as they will need to pick-up or drop-off. Allow flexibility.
5. **Consider a mentoring / buddy scheme for those new to the department, specifically to help adjust to the fast pace of work.** Particularly for young people or for those new to a fast-paced role, a weekly or even daily check-in from a more experienced buddy would be beneficial.
6. **Look at different kinds of incentives, particularly those that would appeal to men.** The YIC felt that some kind of motivational tool, financial or otherwise, might help to attract more men to the role. One suggestion was an 'employee of the month' award.

Key reflections for Northern Gas Networks for the IT and Data departments

7. **Set up communities in this department, specifically for women.** Community support groups, whether 1:1 or larger groups, would help women to share their experiences and challenges and feel more supported at work.
8. **Reach out to schools, build ongoing relationships with them, and offer interactive opportunities to learn about IT and Data.** The stereotype of these roles being male-dominated needs to be broken down. This can be done through workshops targeted to age-groups and subject-areas and could also involve parents / carers. These should be informative, but mostly practical so that people can actually see what kind of work is done in these roles.
9. **Review job descriptions and ensure they are accessible to neurodiverse individuals.** Small changes, such as breaking down chunky sections of text, could make a big difference to potential applicants.

Key reflections for Northern Gas Networks for the Senior Executive roles

10. **Prioritise diversifying the Senior Executive roles**. The YIC in this group felt that the statistics were quite shocking. They suggested that some sort of positive action should be used and that at least one role should be allocated to someone from a non-white ethnic background and, ideally, a woman. Beyond that, clear pathways to leadership roles should be made available to all people across the organisation
11. **Those already on the Executive Board should demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion through 'show-not-tell' actions and learning**. The 'show-not-tell' actions might be wearing a lanyard, a badge, or putting up posters – demonstrating their allyship. Through learning about the importance of diversity in senior roles, they can then educate the wider organisation and make it more welcoming. – 'Train the top first.'
12. **Work-life balance should be promoted and included clearly in policies.** Having caregiving responsibilities should not be a Hindrance to those wanting to occupy more senior positions in the business.

Key reflections for Northern Gas Networks for the impact measurement of any Inclusion and Belonging initiatives

13. Almost all the breakout rooms talked about implementing more **regular surveys** for collecting data.
14. **Questions should collect quantitative data** e.g., 'how many more people of different backgrounds are in these roles compared to before?' or 'do you feel that the work environment is diverse and there is no discrimination?'. **And this data should be complemented with qualitative data that tells more of a story** e.g., 'how do you feel about the interaction in your department' or 'what more things could your department do to be more inclusive?'
15. **Consider interviewing existing colleagues within the groups that you want to attract more**. Find out about their journeys, the challenges they've faced, the barriers they feel there are in the workplace. Ensure that these interviews are conducted by people who are also from a diverse background.

6. Conclusion

Session 3 tackled a topic that was more emotive and personal than in previous sessions. Northern Gas Networks in partnership with Solutions for the Planet took care to ensure that all participants were prepared for the conversations and provided support throughout.

Given the diversity of the Young Innovators Council, it was no surprise that the conversations in each of the breakout rooms were varied, with many of the members drawing on their personal experiences to illustrate their points.

The discussions and outputs from this session highlight the thoughtful, informed and ambitious approach that the YIC continue to bring to complex organisational challenges. By focusing on both practical short-term actions and long-term cultural change, their insights offer NGN tangible steps towards building a workplace where all colleagues feel respected, represented and supported. This session further demonstrated the value of embedding young voices within strategic conversations on inclusion and belonging.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Post Session Survey Feedback on NGN Engagement. As of 14/05/2025 14 of those who attended have completed the survey.

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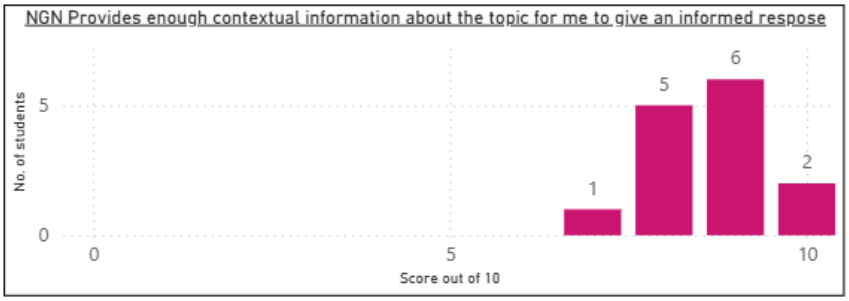
Average



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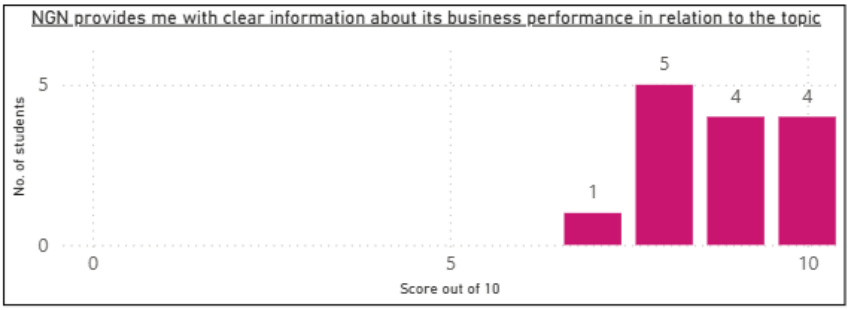

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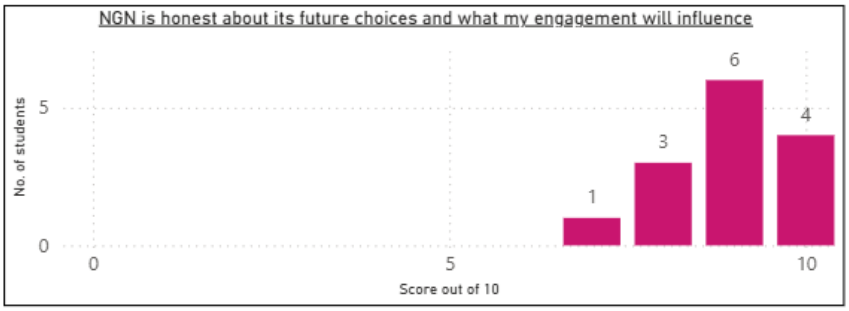

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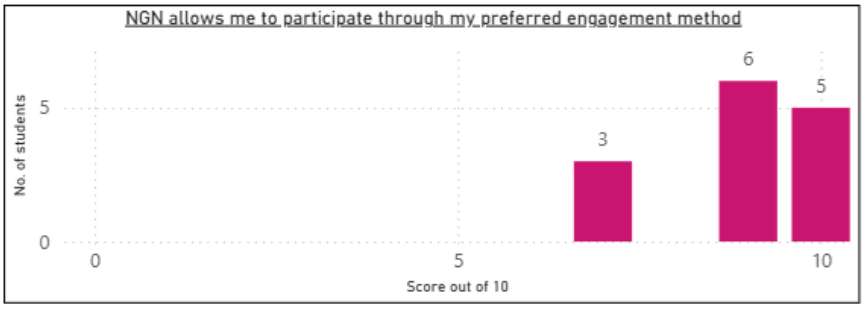

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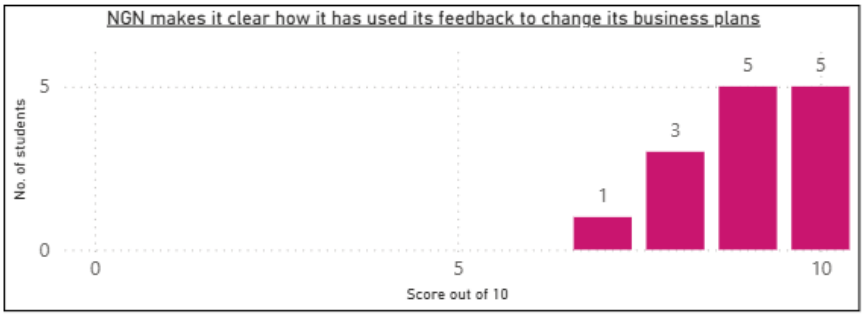

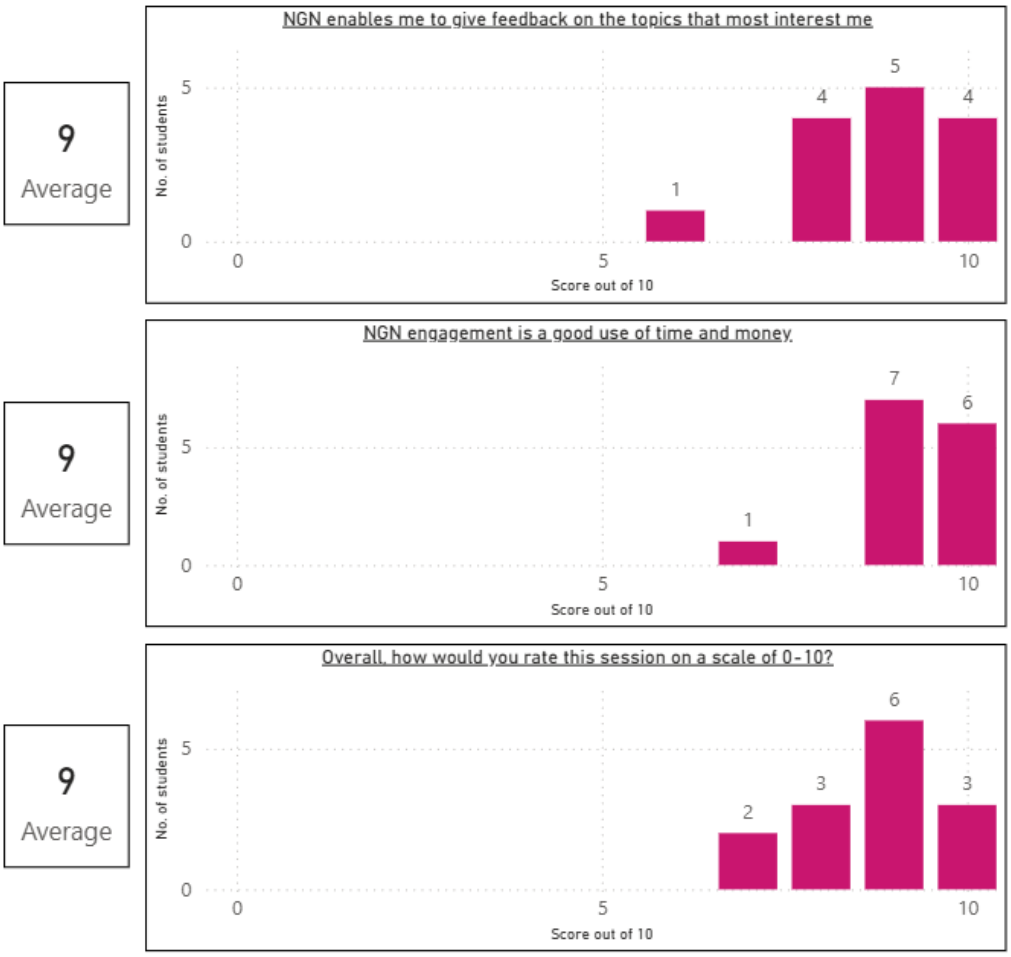

Appendix 2: Additional comments about the topic captured in the Survey

Allyship Is More Than "Supporting from the Sidelines" True allyship means stepping in and speaking up when you see non-inclusive behavior—not just silently agreeing or offering private support. As Shani Dhanda points out, it starts with accountability: **Believing that the problem exists** **Acknowledging that being a bystander makes you part of the problem** **Willingness to "stick your neck out" on behalf of others** This active stance—using your voice and privileges to intervene—is what moves allyship from a passive stance into real, systemic change **Small Individual Actions Can Drive Big Cultural Shifts** Nobel-laureate economist Thomas Schelling's segregation model shows that when each "square" softens its preference from needing three same-color neighbors to just two, the whole board becomes integrated. In organisational terms, this means that many individuals making small tweaks in how they act—calling out a micro aggression, amplifying a marginalised voice, offering mentorship—can collectively transform workplace culture toward true inclusion .
The importance of showing inclusivity in the workplace

Some action is better than no action - issues of overcoming a lack of diversity and inclusivity should not be overwhelming or exceedingly difficult - other companies are doing it! Why isn't NGN acting quicker??

Appendix 3: Sample of work provided via email by those who could not attend

Ethan: *Ask yourself this: How would you feel if you were one of the oppressed, marginalised minority employees, stakeholders, customers or targeted citizens and you were denied equal treatment because of your race/skin tone, religion, the sex you were born or the sexual preference you practice? What about if you were singled out or defined because of your height, your weight, your looks, your accent, your ability or disability or anything else that makes you "weird" or not "normal" in someone else's eyes, be they just as important as you, less important or more important in social standing, income, position in society or any other classification? Unfair - absolutely. Unmanageable - Of course not. Gandhi once said - be the change you seek.*

Olivia: On Senior Executive Roles: *To make the role more inclusive, Northern Gas Networks (NGN) could increase diversity data gathering by using anonymous questionnaires and clearer data. To meet goals like 40% female leadership by 2030, inclusion measures should be linked to compensation and incorporated into CEO performance reviews.*
Executives should actively engage their colleagues and seek their feedback when making choices. Mentoring and inclusive leadership training programs can help cultivate varied talent. Community connections and external collaborations should be strengthened to ensure that NGN's leadership represents the diverse populations it serves.

Sophie: On Engineering and Field Operations: *To encourage young people-Support programmes, apprenticeships: scholarships for individuals aged 16-24 to get them the relevant training to be a NGN engineer/ operative and then a guaranteed job at the end. Have a friendly representative which relates or is similar to the new recruit when they join that can introduce and include them. Parents and carers may be able to access some form of childcare bursary especially for those already skilled working so that they continue to work at NGN after having a child, therefore NGN won't lose its skilled workers.*