

**Interview with Fiona Jackson, Radius Consultant (“FJ”)
and
Simon Langley, Royal London Group, Inclusion and Diversity Consultant (“SL”)**

Names	Commentary
FJ	...wonderful. So, erm, it might be useful actually if you can explain you the organisation you work for as well Simon when answering the first question, you can put in who you work for and sort of what you do. That might be quite handy I think in terms of context. So...
SL	Yes, okay.
FJ	...if I start with...so, what's the value...what's the value of networks to your business, Simon?
SL	So, we see networks as a key element of delivering our inclusion strategy as a business. So, I lead on the inclusion strategy for the Royal London Group. Royal London is the largest mutual insurance and pensions provider in the UK. We also have an asset management business with around £140billion in assets under management. And we're located in Edinburgh, in London and in Wilmslow primarily with business also in Ireland and in Glasgow. So, we're not a huge business. We're about 4,000 employees and we are relatively early in our journey as an organisation that's trying to become more inclusive. We are very values driven and, as a mutual, we are owned by our members and practically all of our employees are members because they are part of our pension scheme, which we obviously manage. So, values is very much at the core of who we are and what we do. Networks are a key component in that. We have a thing we call the "People Strategy" and, within that, we have people commitments and, for a couple of years now, diversity has been one of our key people commitments. So, we want to make our workplace inclusive. We want to make our workplace a place where people from all sorts of diverse backgrounds can succeed and networks are a key component in making that happen.
SL	I should probably say most...that we have four networks. So, we've got a network for gender, a network looking at ethnicity, a network looking at LGBT Plus issues and a network looking at disability. Of those, the BAME Network, the Pride Network and the Disability Network are all relatively new. They only launched this year and the end of last year. Our Women's Network is a little of two years old. So, the network scene in Royal London is relatively new.
FJ	Oh, okay. So, within that context – that's quite interesting actually for other networks that may be new – what resources and what help have you given them to set up and what resources and onward development do you give them to keep running?
SL	So, each of the networks when they've been set up, they've been very much employee led. I created a template for all of our networks to follow which helps them to understand how to put together a business case, to support their existence, how to prepare a budget, how to start looking at what it is they actually want to achieve as a network.
SL	For me, networks are a business resource as well as clearly something for the employees and I've always said that there should be three strands to their argument for existence. The first should be what do the members of the network get out of it and why would I want to become a member of any particular network? The second should be what does the business get out of it? So, if the business is going to support the network by giving people time to attend events and to manage the Steering Committees and so on, then what does the business get back? Those sorts of things are like using the network to educate the rest of the business, particularly those who don't see themselves as diverse - as to what it means to be a member of a

BAME community or to be somebody who identifies as transgender, or whatever it might be.

FJ Mmm.

SL So, it's a really key role to educate. And then the third is what will the community – the broader community – get out of that network? Less emphasis on that because some networks tend to be more inward faced. Other networks can be more outward faced. But I think the key thing was sort of getting that in place to start with.

SL And, from there, the next thing we've done is set them a budget. So, I have a reasonable amount of money for them to be able to use and that is then used to fund events, to pay for expenses, to buy, you know, whether it's branded pens and things like that, so all sorts of different things. I also encourage the network to set up a proper Steering Committee so that they have an Executive Sponsor – a member of the Group Executive Committee – and then they have either a Chair or Co-Chairs who have the day to day responsibility for running the network, supported by a Steering Committee which looks at sort of secretarial, newsletter and communications, events planning, financial management.

SL In the early days of any network, those tend to be people in quite senior roles but one of the things that I want them to look at is how they can encourage people from within the network who would benefit from some professional development, to take on those Steering Committee roles particularly when they're in areas where they're not doing as their day to day jobs. So, for example, if the network has a Treasurer, it would be really good not to use an accountant because whilst an accountant can run the treasury of a small network with their eyes shut, it's, it would actually be good practice for somebody who's not that experienced in it to be able to learn and may be use that to broaden their skills. Similarly with things like, you know, running newsletters and so on – it's great to get people who've maybe not got professional comms experience to learn from somebody who has and to broaden their skillset and, ultimately, build transferable skills that can be used within the business.

SL In terms of other support, I've always encouraged our network leads to go on programs, so whether that's those that are run by it could be Radius or it could be other organisations who run events to help network leads and network Chairs to understand how to run a network. I think those sort of things are very valuable. And then, I provide as much personal support as I can. So, although that I'm a team of one, I see it's important that I attend all of the Steering Committees of all the different networks. So, whilst I'm not there trying to usurp what they're doing, I try to let them be as independent as possible, I'm there in an advisory capacity and they can run things past me for the giggle test if nothing else.

FJ I love that. A giggle test. That's just a bit of a sense check is it?

SL Absolutely, yes. Yup.

FJ And what challenges are you finding that the networks are facing in general and how they are overcoming them?

SL I think, I mean there's no question right now – COVID is a massive challenge. We're in a position where we have, we've got a permanent workforce of about 4,200 people and a contingent workforce beyond that of another 1,800 or so. So, those are sort of contractors and other non-direct employees. And we've got about 98% of that workforce – the permanent workforce – working from home, which is an extraordinary position to be in. We literally have less than 200 people working in our office spaces at the moment. And that has presented a significant challenge. So, I think, you know, we're all getting used to the use of Zoom and Skype and various other tools, but actually, people working from home has been quite difficult for some people. Some people thrive on it but I think others – even those who actually do thrive on working from home – are missing the face to face contact and I think networks

generally work very, very well when there is face to face contact happening. It's sometimes quite difficult to do some of the sort of activities that networks want to do when it's all being done remotely. I think that's probably been the biggest challenge; that sort of trying to keep the motivation up when you can't actually just, you know, nip across the floor and have a word with somebody. I mean that applies to work in general but I think it is, it is impacting the networks particularly. That said, I think they're stepping up to the challenge. I think that, erm, where they've been really creative is in some of the stuff they're organising for outside work. So, there's a definite sense that all of the networks are looking to, to create virtual experiences whether it's, you know, in the case of our Pride Network running quiz nights outside of working hours where anybody can just come in and join on Zoom or whether it's running virtual events. So, we're planning an event at the moment...we're one of the sponsors of the England Cricket Team. We look after...well, we sponsor the One Day series and we also sponsor the One Day Tests for women as well and we're going to have...

FJ Mmm, mmm.

SL ...one of the women's cricket – England Cricket Team – will be coming to do a virtual talk for our BAME Network. We're just in the planning stages at the moment. So, we're trying to, to use the virtual technology a bit better but just recognising that challenge around that lack of personal contact.

SL I think probably another challenge if I'm honest...

FJ You talk there about...

SL Sorry, go on.

FJ Yes. No, no, no, carry on with it. Another challenge.

SL I think the other challenge I suppose that all networks face, particularly in their early stages, is how you sort of keep that initial early momentum going. So, you know, when a network first launches, yes there's lots of good intent and things sort of get going. And then, over a period of time, I think that initial enthusiasm can wear a little bit and it's important I think when you're, when you're looking at networks as they mature or even, you know, shortly after they've launched, to watch out for that sort of dip that's going to come in initial enthusiasm and work through that and try and be careful about you sort of plan events to re-enthuse people and keep them engaged and keep them involved. That would be a sort of top tip for me on the, on some of those challenges anyway.

FJ Okay. Yeah. I see what you mean. How...can you give me any examples of one of your networks and the sorts of things they've been doing to do that then? What sort of...is it something you think about the timing of the events or the content of the events or...what sort of...bring that to life for me Simon.

SL I think it's a combination of things that you need to do. So, I think...networks are very reliant on their membership and it's how do you, how do you keep your existing membership enthused but how do you also then look at how you get more people engaged with the network? Whether they go on to become sort of full blown members or whether they just engage with what the network is doing. And I think there are a few that things you can do in there. So one of the things which we haven't yet built in, in Royal London, but I will definitely be looking at for the future, is looking at things like cross-company mentoring schemes. So, I've used them in the past and either co-mentoring or co-coaching – slightly different. But these are schemes where by tying up with a group of other organisations, often outside our own sector, we can...we can get our network members some experience and some education from peers but within different organisations and from different sorts of sectors. So that if you're...we're in financial services clearly, we've got quite a number of people who've only ever worked in financial services and might have no

understanding for instance of what it's like to be in the Civil Service. And so one of the things I might want to do in due course is to create some sort of connection with networks within certain Civil Service organisations, so that we can start to tie those things up. Similarly, co-coaching, I think...sorry, co-mentoring which is, as I say, a slightly different version, I think that can be quite powerful but works well within the sector because you wouldn't really want to mentor outside sector. I think another element within so, within there then is...so that's sort of looking at how you enthuse members by saying these are, these are things that you can get involved in which will actually help your own personal and professional development. I think the other thing is encouraging attendance at sort of more wide events. So, I think, I think just as a general principle, it's a really good idea for company networks to match up and meet up with other company networks. So within the LGBT space for instance, there's quite a well established set of, set of erm, inter networks they are called. So, you'll find that there is Inter Law and there is...

FJ Mmm, mmm.

SL ...Inter Banking and Inter Energy and these are sort of networks of networks. So the, within the energy sector, a number of the energy companies their LGBT networks are also members of Inter Energy and so they meet up and I think doing that and meeting people from your equivalent network in other organisations is, again, very powerful.

SL I think when you're looking to how you sort of get the broader enthusiasm going, I think you've got to be really creative with events. You know, we know that we are going to have events that run against the sort of typical annual, cultural calendar. So, there's going to be stuff around Diwali and Chinese New Year and Pride month and International Women's Day and so on. But actually, it's about being a bit more creative and I think the, the key to this is curiosity. You've got to get your broad audience and make them curious. You know, tease them with what's happening rather than being very explicit; just tease them and get them to want to find out what's going on and often that works really well when two networks or more join up.

SL So, previous organisation I worked in, we, we very strongly encouraged them to make sure that as many of their events were joint events as possible. So we would have, for example, we might have a session which said, do you want to come and meet an Olympic champion? And that event was actually sponsored by the Disability Network and the Pride Network and it was...the invitation was come and meet the most decorated Paralympian in UK history and, of course, it was Lee – oh God, his last name has just gone out of my head – the equestrian rider who, obviously, is quite significantly...has quite significant disability but also is gay. And so it was a joint event and it pulled a lot of people in and it was really, really well received. Another one we did was, do you want to meet a rugby hero? And that got the most men we've ever got – straight men this was – to an event ever cos the event was actually put on by the Pride Network and it was come and meet Gareth Thomas who, at that point, had just come out as gay. Other events were, you know, come and meet a sporting legend, a female sporting legend. Again, it was run between, erm, the Women's Network and the Pride Network and, in this case, it was Claire Balding. And I think that thing of mixing it up and creating interest that's beyond the narrow confines of a single network, I think is a powerful way of drawing people in.

FJ And that's more...I'm hearing a more generic attraction as well so...

SL Absolutely.

FJ ...for people because of their, their status and they're known and then you happen to also talk about the characteristics. So, there's an element of attraction for the person that it is that you wanna know a bit more about and then when you're there, you might learn something about protected characteristic that you weren't involved in before. Really clever Simon.

SL Yeah, absolutely. In fact we just...

- FJ Yeah. Very interesting ideas there. Thank you very much.
- SL In fact just before lockdown, we just ran an event just before the lockdown at Royal London. We had Ruth Davidson come in and speak in our Edinburgh office and, clearly, that...again, that was run jointly by our Women's Network and our Pride Network as Ruth sits in both camps so to speak.
- FJ Yeah. Yeah, very interesting. So, some really good ideas for network leads to take on board about being creative and thinking about that attraction. Have you seen any more interest in networks since COVID and lockdown? You know, by the leaders, by the members. Has that grown or has that changed? What...the engagement with networks at the moment?
- SL I think it's growing. I think there is, there is increasing interest. I mean, clearly there's not just COVID happening and the recent events in the US and the protests in the UK have very much pulled our BAME Network into focus and suddenly our Group Exec are looking to them for guidance. So I think that, I think crises generally are things that are going to spur an interest in what networks are doing. Our Disability Network is sort of brand, shiny new but we've got a well-established network of mental health first aiders who will be actively part of that Disability Network as it forms, as it builds out. And, unsurprisingly throughout the whole COVID activity over the last four months or so, we have been very actively engaged with our mental health and wellbeing champions. So I think there is a, there's a clear draw I think on networks and network experience and expertise when we're in times of crisis.
- FJ Mmm. Mmm. I was gonna ask actually how your networks are supporting employee wellbeing and I think that's the area you've just answered isn't it, in terms of getting the mental health first aiders are probably engaging more. Have you run any specific programs through that or any communication programs with your employees during that work?
- SL Yeah, we do, yeah. We've got a constant sort of drum beat of stuff happening. From sort of simple things like, you know, each day of the week has it's own function. So Friday is Fun Friday. So, we put stuff out on our internal intranet which just supports sort of fun activities. We have Wellbeing Wednesday for instance and, you know, a series of other, other things that we do over the course of the year...over the course of the week rather. So, Thoughtful Thursday – just looking at the little things that matter to people. Tips on a Tuesday. So, I think Monday is Mindful Monday. So, there are things that we do each day and information that we put out, just to help people sort get through this. We've put together some pretty good stuff around the whole, sort of, COVID-19 thing; a really good information pack and some really good stuff about working from home. And we've done...some, sort of, real basic stuff but also some quite powerful stuff. We've made sure that everybody's got a laptop that needs it. So you know, we went out a bought a lot of laptops...
- FJ Mmm.
- SL ...when the lockdown happened so that everybody who is working from home has got the capability to be able to actually do it properly. And actually that, this whole thing has sort of flipped our conversation...
- FJ Mmm.
- SL ...quite a lot around flexible working as well and a lot of the doomsayers from previously have definitely realised that, yup, it is actually possible to work from home or work more flexibly than maybe that they thought was possible prior to February.
- FJ Definitely myth busting at the moment this situation isn't it from that point of view?
- SL Very much so.

- FJ From...in terms of what you've been doing around wellbeing, what you have been doing with wellbeing and flexibility, how much of your network's been engaged in that and been a focal point for some of what you're doing and how much of that is, you know, what you're doing within your own role?
- SL I think it's a combination of both because the networks don't stand separate so where we can use them, we do but, at the same time, we have a more broad approach to all of this. So, we run learning campaigns each month. So, in April/May, the learning campaign was around wellbeing and was more broadly than just the networks because, you know let's be fair, networks are important to us but their membership is a relatively small percentage of our overall workforce. I think it's about 25% of our workforce are actually active network members and so, you know, we have to...
- FJ Mmm, mmm.
- SL ...build out for everybody as well. So I think it would be fair to say that, again it's still relatively still sort of early days for three of our networks, it's early days as to whether, you know, precisely how we would use those, I'm not entirely clear at the moment. But they definitely are there supporting wellbeing because apart from anything else, they provide a forum and a venue outside of the normal day to day work stuff for people with a shared experience or shared interest to meet. And this month's campaign – so for May into June – was all about inclusion. So, you know it's...we're pointing people out to the networks and saying, you know, these groups are there to support you and help you so they become a key component of that. But I wouldn't say that we're sort of doing something different with the networks from what we're doing more generally with the business.
- FJ Okay. Okay. And what about the future of networks – if we move down to that? Where do you see them going? You've said they're quite new, your membership is 25% which is not bad but, you know, could be better. What are you thinking about in terms of how they are gonna help you shape your future at Royal London?
- SL Oh, I see a key component of what networks do is helping us do things like develop people's strategies as we move forward, a testing ground for...Sorry, we used the Women's Network for example when we did a whole load of re-working of our family friendly policies. The Women's Network were a key component in helping develop those policies. I think in the future, I see us probably having a few more networks, possibly looking into slightly more nuanced areas like caring responsibilities, but I see those as being sub-nets if you like. So, a sub-network of both the Disability Network and the Women's or Gender Network potentially is a Carer's Network. I see the Women's Network developing much more into a Gender Balance Network. I see networks working together more but actually long-term, I can see potentially the networks merging and the lines, the demarcation lines, becoming less clear. Simply because of the intersectionality that there is within the whole diversity space you know. We are, all of us, possessors of all nine of the Equality Act characteristics and, you know, they play in different ways at different times. So, you know, a woman who is also from an ethnic minority background and may have a disability, there will be times when the fact that she's a woman is the thing that is most important or maybe is causing greatest challenge. There will be other times when it's her ethnicity. There will be other times when it's the disability that she has. And, so I think you know, we need to be conscious of that and see and allow networks to develop and blend as it feels natural to them.
- SL I am really sorry, I've got a call at half past one which I've just realised, I have to go to.
- FJ Yup.
- SL It's critical. So, have you got enough?
- FJ That's okay...

SL If not, we can set up a further...

FJ No, that was definitely the last question. No. I was just going to say thank you at the end of that. That's our last sort of element of the interview. So, really appreciate your time Simon. Good luck with it all at Royal London and perhaps we can catch up for a coffee personally at another time and...

SL Yeah, that would be nice.

FJ ...chew the fat and see what we're doing with our lives.

SL Yeah, absolutely. Let's do that.

FJ I'll drop you a line on LinkedIn.

SL Okay then.

FJ Take care. Thanks a lot.

SL Alright. Cheers now.

FJ Bye.

SL Bye.