



EDI Action Plan 2025-26

Context

In 2023 we defined [our EDI strategy](#), building on a range of initiatives and projects which we had undertaken over the previous years.

This strategy considered the roles which Access has in influencing the ecosystem at four different tiers (wholesale, retail, charity and social enterprise, and underlying communities being served), and at each level considered the makeup from a diversity perspective of decision makers in that organisation; Process, Practice and Culture within the organisation; and who is being reached through the organisation's activities.

From this strategy a detailed action plan was developed which has been incorporated into Access's operational planning. Progress against these milestones has been openly reported via the website.

Many of these actions have been completed. We have recently secured the next tranche of £87.5m of dormant assets for Access. It is therefore timely to review the strategy and update the action plan.

The board held a wide-ranging conversation on the topic at the away-day in May, and following that the staff team have discussed a number of priority actions which are reflected in the below action plan. This process involved reflecting on priorities and activities in other foundations. Many of these priority areas reflect areas where progress has not been so significant over the last few years and where we now feel progress can and must be made.

In addition to what and how we fund, the proposed actions also reflect the need for Access to show greater leadership on this topic through our communications and advocacy. Given the macro-political context, and the rise and emboldenment of intolerance and hatred in communities around the country, we must be clear in our support for the communities we exist to serve.

The confirmation of the next tranche of Dormant Assets is critical to this being enabled, as it will fund Pathway, support the Diversity Forum and other essential elements of sector infrastructure with longer term more stable funding, and give us the opportunity to work with all our delivery partners to embed new ambition, targets and accountability.

EDI and our Strategy

The EDI strategy, and its articulation of impact across different tiers of activity still feels an appropriate framework for us to consider the impact of our work in this area. It also closely reflects the priorities articulated in [Access's overall strategy](#) as refreshed in 2024, in particular the priority placed on:

- The ambitions of the Community Enterprise Growth Plan in finance reaching underserved communities and the creation of Pathway
- The centrality of two of the six key challenges in our strategy: "Finance is not always reaching the places and communities who need it the most", and "Social investment is confusing and not always trusted".
- One of our five KPIs: Proportionally more social investment is flowing to underserved communities and to organisations led by protected groups
- The signs of longer term success:
 - communities or led by minoritised leaders are able to access the finance and support they need
 - Social investment ecosystem reflects the communities it seeks to serve and its distribution reflects need
 - The process to take on investment is as simple and accessible as possible, and navigating the market is clear
 - Organisations actively seek out social investment

Refreshed Action Plan

Rather than redeveloping the strategy, we have focused our attention on refreshing our action plan, under three pillars:

- Our accountability and influence across the ecosystem
- How we support and hold our partners accountable
- Access's own diversity and culture

Under each heading below we outline the context, actions which are in train which will continue, and new areas of focus.

Our accountability and influence across the ecosystem
Why this matters: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As a wholesaler and market builder, Access has considerable power in the social investment ecosystem. We know that what we say, assess and measure in relation to our partners can drive behaviour and priorities. We will be as clear as possible about our goals for the ecosystem and the progress being made against them in order to inspire and encourage others.

What we will continue doing:

- Communicating our EDI vision and strategy, recognising that the whole social investment sector is on a journey, but also recognising the leadership role Access has.
- Measuring and reporting transparently on our EDI-related organisational KPI.
- Using our data to gather insight about where finance is and is not flowing, and to understand the nature of finance gaps and their underlying causes in different markets, enterprise models, cultural contexts
- Championing and amplifying the work of our partners who are tackling barriers to communities accessing the finance they need

Our priorities for the year ahead:

- Communicate more regularly and vulnerably about our progress (and lack of it in certain areas) – to increase transparency and understanding of our work. Be a louder voice on EDI in the sector, using our power to amplify our own and our partners’ lessons, achievements and challenges.
- Use that power to drive norms in terms of the aspirations and ambition which we expect from partners on this agenda and pro-actively identify opportunities among our partners for action.
- Focus specifically on better understanding our reach to disabled-led organisations, and expand our insight and influence in this area (we are doing worse on reaching disabled-led and LGBTQ+ organisations so will focus on these two areas over the next two years).
- Explore the ways we might measure social class and lived experience in our work.
- Through the development of our “One Pot” approach we will encourage the development of referral pathways with social investment providers and enterprise support originations to increase join-up across the sector and ensure the most appropriate products are available for charities and social enterprises

How we support and hold our partners accountable**Why this matters:**

- Our delivery partners are the crucial link connecting capital to the communities which most need it. The ways in which we make funding available to them, support them, and hold them to account for their performance are the key levers we have to shape the role they play.

What we will continue doing:

- Assessing EDI principles and issues of reach into underserved markets as a core requirement for all applicants to our programmes across blended finance and enterprise development. All proposals are reviewed on the contribution

they will make to this aspiration of reaching underserved communities and organisations.

- Ensuring that all delivery partners maintain a commitment to EDI within their own organisations. This has included applicants needing to sign the Diversity Forum Manifesto and evidencing ongoing action and progress.

Our priorities for the next year:

- As part of application processes we will establish specific requirements and KPIs for delivery partners based on their proposal and Access's priorities and will require partners to report on progress on a regular pre-determined basis.
- We will assess the diversity of the leadership of the partners we seek to work with and encourage them to monitor the diversity of their decision makers and establish appropriate targets which reflect the communities they seek to serve.
- We will place a priority in application guidance in supporting initiatives which can demonstrate that they can go beyond surface issues of equalities and inclusion (representational) and tackle these issues at a more systemic level.
- Offer comprehensive support to delivery partners to build their capabilities, share learning, insight and best practice in expanding their reach, and drive their own organisational diversity. This will be provided through infrastructure we expect to fund via the new DA pot, including the Diversity Forum and Equality Impact Investing Project. We will ensure that these infrastructure organisations are given a stronger and clearer mandate with longer term resourcing, and we will review where and how they are hosted. In addition, this will be supported by Access's relationship managers and member(s) of Access's Investment Committee, and other support as required.
- Standardise and improve the EDI support relationship managers offer to partners, by building our practice and capabilities including through training, with a specific focus on proactive management, having difficult conversations in relation to under performance. We will recognise the leadership role which many of our partners play on this agenda, but we will not always defer to others and we will use our power and influence carefully to ensure that we are driving change as effectively as possible across the ecosystem

Access's Own Diversity and Culture

Why this matters:

- In order to be able to effectively lead on this vision, Access needs to have diverse perspectives in its decision making and across the team, with colleagues informed and confident to lead relationships with partners and stakeholders.

What we continue doing:

- We will continue to improve the diversity of our board and governance bodies, through recruitment processes during 2025 and 2026, and seek to remove

barriers to participation. Our target is for the board to reflect the population of England in terms of protected characteristics, bring a diversity of skills and experience as defined in our articles, and bring lived experience from the communities we seek to serve.

- Our board and CEO will own our commitments to EDI and take responsibility for the delivery of our priorities.
- The board will undertake regular audits to assess its composition in terms of diversity and skills.

Our priorities for the next year:

- Progress on EDI goals will be highlighted at every board and IC meeting, and will be reviewed in detail in quarterly team meetings.
- We will prioritise our internal culture work, aiming to understand and break down the characteristics of dominant culture to support all team members to be able to thrive and best contribute to the organisation's work. We will build our confidence in having difficult conversations internally as well as with our partners.
- Provide more opportunities for the board to discuss issues around diversity, recruitment, dominant culture and behaviours, linking to the work underway with the staff team. Manage the timing of this with the significant turnover expected during the year.
- Review the resources needed for delivering on our EDI plans and ambitions, and bring in external capacity to support on this if needed.