



**Minutes of the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UK Research and Innovation External Advisory Group for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion held on 24/02/2021 via Zoom**

EAG Attendees	
Karen Salt (Deputy Chair)	Zabeen Hirji
Rosanna Duncan	Eugene Oteng-Ntim
Dina Belluigi	Giovanni Razzu
Tom Welton	Wendy Loretto
Claire Murray	
UKRI Attendees	
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED] (Secretariat)
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
UKRI Guests	
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Apologies	
Zamila Bunglawala	Simon McKeown

## 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the first 2021 meeting of the year, acknowledging the challenging time during the pandemic and gave thanks to the EAG's continued support and advocacy. UKRI remains committed to tackling COVID-19 related impacts on inequalities and recognized the disproportionate impact the pandemic is having.

Apologies were given for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who were unable to attend.

## 2. Minutes and actions from the last meeting

The minutes were approved without further comments. The secretariat provided updates for the following actions from the previous meeting in December 2020:

**Action 1: The group to provide some reflections and insights to [REDACTED] through a short submission.**

UKRI has been working closely with BEIS to support the development of the People and Culture Strategy. BEIS are developing plans for sector-wide engagement. It was suggested that any additional reflections for [REDACTED] are picked up in the People and Culture strategy discussion.

**Action 2: To understand what has already been done to make the new UKRI website accessible and what is planned for future iterations.**

A brief note was circulated as a follow up with further information from the UKRI web team on how accessibility was being considered in UKRI communications.

[REDACTED]  
This will be discussed at the April meeting.

**Action 4:** [REDACTED] will be in touch by correspondence to arrange meeting dates for a 6-month period for 2021.

This has been completed - meeting dates have been confirmed until June 2021.

**Action 5:** [REDACTED] to circulate a short declarations of interest form for members to complete, following the meeting.

This action was completed but some members have not yet returned the form. UKRI is required to record this as part of our conflicts of interest policy. Members were reminded to complete and return the declarations of interest form.

### 3. People and Culture Strategy

[REDACTED] introduced the People and Culture (P&C) Strategy and provided an overview of the current approach.

- This is a Government led strategy following on from the R&D Roadmap publication. The P&C strategy will be a short document which will call on the sector to work to make changes within the research and innovation system. UKRI is working closely with BEIS on this and is considering the key levers to make sustainable change.
- The scope of the strategy is framed around 'People', 'Culture' and 'Talent' and will aim to cover the entire sector. The strategy is expected to result in building a programme of work for the next 5 years, which will involve sector wide engagement to create interventions together, taking a systems-led view of the issues, and regular evaluation of what works.
- There is recognition of the need to attract diverse talent to address long standing issues, which have been thrown into stark relief due to COVID-19, adding to further challenges such as financial sustainability.

[REDACTED] introduced the questions for the EAG to consider:

- What are the levers and drivers for sustainable and positive change across the R&I sector that will support the delivery of excellent, diverse and impactful research, of the highest quality and integrity?
- How might UKRI develop its priorities to ensure that a diversity of skills, experiences & roles in R&D are recognised, valued and supported across the sector?
- What are the opportunities to widen the diversity of people in the sector, and develop and retain talent?

[REDACTED] invited the EAG to provide their reflections noting that multiple actors will need to play different roles to enable change.

EAG members noted that these are big questions for the EAG to tackle, commenting that they done a lot of thinking to support the development of a UKRI EDI strategy, and asking to what extent do they need to think of in addition to this? The EAG were advised that, as the P&C strategy is a government strategy, the scale and scope are wider than UKRI. There is an opportunity to influence across different areas, such as the elite talent and science super-power type language.

The EAG advised that the Government needs to decide what this strategy is for and define what it is trying to do. The vision is less clear. Diversity of skills and experiences is good but huge swathes of society that do not get access to the research and innovation system.

In discussion, the EAG made the following points:

- EAG members welcomed the interest in people and culture at a Ministerial level and recognised this was an opportunity to grasp. It noted the need to use the evidence already produced – e.g. UKRI evidence reviews, which showcase the problems within the system.
- We are thinking ahead, the focus is on the how not the what. There are areas that have not yet been fully defined, such as excellence.
- There is an opportunity to use economic incentives with substantial budgets and therefore be bold with funding. Funding applications are still vague in terms of diversity and inclusion.

- The strategy needs to consider the whole system and how it integrates, for example with children and young people who are clearly part of the pipeline. It was noted that BEIS are liaising with the Department for Education but there is an outstanding question of how UKRI and its work integrates with other parts of Government.
- It was also noted that language is important. The presentation uses 'diversity' wording within the presentation, but this is soft. If the focus is on underrepresented groups, then it needs to say so. Strategy needs more boldness in calling out the issues.
- The strategy as presented doesn't discuss much around culture such as inclusive leadership, respect, harassment, and appears to be framed as a people/HR strategy.
- There was discussion on 'taking more risk at the outset', and whether this refers to taking risk on the quality of people being hired. [REDACTED] clarified that the strategy focus is on taking risk by doing new and innovative things that have not done before.
- In terms of widening the diversity of people in the sector, the EAG noted the need to not just widen but also deepen to make the sector more sustainable. This needs to address UK's broken and narrow pipeline and those that are minoritized. We need to place people with track record in EDI into powerful positions and also consider retention and sustainability.

[REDACTED] noted that [REDACTED] expressed admiration for the EAG and will be very preceptive to observations, critique and challenge and how to move forward from the group. There was an offer for the EAG to be more involved in the P&C strategy through sub-groups or providing a more formal response from members.

#### **4. Disability in research and innovation: rapid synthesis review**

[REDACTED] introduced the item. UKRI is prioritising disability as a key focus area and the role it can play to minimise barriers, whether in its own policies or working with others to influence change in the system. UKRI has conducted in house desk research to better understand this area and produced two synthesis reports that consider a wide range of literature. These are split into a report considering the wider system and a report on UKRI policies and processes.

An overview of the synthesis reports was provided, which looked at 3 main questions:

- What are the barriers for disabled researchers and innovators?
- What are current interventions in place across the system?
- What is the policy landscape? What are other stakeholders in this space doing?

The key themes emerging indicate some of the barriers being:

- The burden placed on disabled researchers and innovators to continually seek adjustments
- The role of culture in shaping safe and trusted environments – this can have a big impact on people's trust to share information
- The role identity plays and therefore the need to take an intersectional lens to UKRI's work
- UKRI report shows that there are policy and processes gaps for example in lack of consistent reasonable adjustments policy across UKRI in this area

The review has opened up more questions for engagement, to understand what works, what is UKRI role in this, issues around data collection and reporting.

EAG members were invited to provide input and reflections:

- EAG members welcomed the prioritisation of these sets of issues.
- The EAG noted that there are low hanging fruits in terms of what can be done and next steps; for example, taking a systematic approach to reasonable adjustments, Disabled Students Allowance and access to work. On the data front, more granular data on different disciplines and sectors can improve our understanding.
- It was also noted that the under-reporting question is also about culture and safety and some of the politics associated to that rather than just getting more people to disclose their disability.

- It was discussed that with chronic illness, such as diabetes, many may not declare it as disability so potentially fall through the cracks. The EAG advised that UKRI might want to invite contributions on what people might want or need as well.
- There is an opportunity to flag intersectionality in the more short-term for example looking at older age and employment and discrimination. For example, one member noted a drop-off in those applying for funding for those after 55. Age-related illnesses have an impact so need to consider this angle.
- UKRI should consider institutions and what they do to support disability to provide leverage in changing culture.
- EAG discussed the different ways to describe disability, noting international differences. The engagement approach could be used to explore this further.
- UKRI should also note campaigning around LGBTQ+, which might provide good comparative work for the disability programme. For example recognising that it is important not just to see the issue as whether to disclose as to a potential feeling of 'outness' e.g. to what extent am I comfortable to talk about it. It is therefore helpful to subsequently consider not just the reporting but also how those that are choosing to disclose are supported.
- These are big questions for organisations to grapple with, qualitative points that have been raised in the discussion need to involve further work with [REDACTED] and organisations such as National Association of Disabled Staff Networks.

UKRI is looking at how we engage with disabled researchers and innovators as part of this conversation and it's work here needs to involve those with lived experiences to drive the questions UKRI should be asking, and the solutions needed. The team will be bringing this back for further discussion at the EAG.

## 5. EDI data and analysis update

[REDACTED] introduced the item. 2020 data and analysis highlights were discussed, which included the publication of the harmonised diversity data publication, gender pay gap as well as the disaggregated ethnicity analysis.

[REDACTED] presented an update on ongoing and future data plans for 2021, noting work on:

- Intersectionality – challenges included small sample sizes but would look to bring this back to the group to address in appropriate way
- Peer review data
- Disability
- Work on improving data categorisation in the new funding service
- Research culture
- COVID-19 analysis – looking at protected characteristics

Emerging evidence of COVID-19 impacts has shown that burden on women and disabled people has increased. Preliminary UKRI results does not appear to show major short-term impacts in the data and the PhD extensions diversity data is also forthcoming. Following the publication of the disaggregated ethnicity analysis, it was noted that other funders are also interested at looking at this type of data publication.

Members queried whether UKRI is looking at nationality data as part of the EDI data analysis. EAG suggested UKRI should also look at this data cut given how EU exit and ODA cuts are also impacting and noting how international PhD students' data is recorded will be changing.

There is an opportunity to link with the REF submission data. The requirement for the sector to monitor EDI in this cycle has increased and the EAG would be interested to see any patterns. Members queried whether it is possible to link REF data with UKRI data.

Members discussed how we better communicate UKRI data with a wider group of people. UKRI needs a better understanding who the audience is and how it communicates this data and what it's approach to sharing data with the wider public is.

## OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

EAG discussed who ultimately will be accountable if in 2 to 3 years' time, UKRI does not see changes in its data. Members queried how UKRI is looking at success rates data by region. [REDACTED] noted that Place data will be published end of March. UKRI is also looking at developing a publication schedule which can be published to show to UKRI communities when to expect data publications.

### 6. AOB

[REDACTED] discussed plans to widen recruitment at Edinburgh for academic and professional support by reaching to wider network and asked for recommendations of organisations that can support different ways to widen pools. Members were invited to send any recommendations to [REDACTED] who can collate and share with [REDACTED]

An update on EAG recruitment was provided. Members should expect an update on the process in due course. UKRI is considering representation, serving multiple communities, and is keen to get different voices at the table. An update on the process will be done by correspondence and UKRI would like members to be involved in the recruitment process.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions in the meeting.

There was no further business.