



**Minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UK Research and Innovation External Advisory Group for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion held on 13 May 2020 via Zoom**

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

## 1. Welcome, wellbeing check-in & general update

[REDACTED] welcomed members to the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EDI External Advisory Group, the first meeting held entirely online.

[REDACTED] provided instructions for use of Zoom and online meeting etiquette.

[REDACTED] enquired about members wellbeing since the outbreak of Covid-19. Members discussed the importance of EDI work in the current climate and the desire to build new, better ways of working after the crisis. Members discussed the variation in approaches – across countries and institutions – to protecting vulnerable individuals.

[REDACTED] noted that formal membership of the group is due to expire in summer 2020 and that all members will shortly receive an invitation to extend their membership for another year. There will be an open recruitment process in autumn, followed by a staggered transition in membership. Members are invited to stay on but there is no obligation.

## 2. Minutes and actions from last meeting

Members agreed the minutes from the last meeting (EAG 20-03) without amendments. Outstanding actions will be reviewed at the next meeting.

### 3. UKRI complaints process

██████████ welcome ██████████ to the meeting.

██████████ introduced ██████████ role as UKRI Director of Risk and Assurance, noting this is a relatively new central function within UKRI (previously complaints were handled at individual Council level). A basic triage processes is established, but further work is underway to evolve it. The EDI team supports the complaints team with 'sensitive complaints' which are defined as requiring the CEO's or EDI Lead's attention.

130 complaints were processed by the team in the past year, half of which related to Innovate UK work, which covers a wider variety of initiatives than research councils. There are different types of complaints and this information is being monitored and analysed. UKRI will not investigate complaints relating to funding decisions (as opposed to the process by which they were reached). There are escalation routes, including contacting the parliamentary ombudsman.

A central data collection system for complaints is in the processes of being set up, which will provide statistics on outcomes for different types of complaints. Diversity information for complaints is available but has not been analysed yet. Work is also underway to develop better processes for dealing with vexatious complaints.

Members asked about UKRI's evaluation processes for the current system as well as the timeline for building up systems. They also suggested implementing a basic review of diversity information at the beginning of a complaints process, which could then trigger different routes for processing, e.g. complaints from individuals with certain protected characteristics should be handled more urgently. The point was raised that many complainants are reluctant to share their background out of fear that this will affect the way their complaint is handled. It is therefore important to raise confidence in the complaints system.

### 4. Closed discussion

This part of the meeting was not recorded.

### 5. UKRI EDI work: impact of Covid-19 and response

██████████ introduced paper Paper 20-04 (Impact of Covid-19 and UKRI response). ██████████ assured members that UKRI continues to prioritise EDI work during the Covid-19 crisis, including by providing advice to government and other stakeholders and through rapid Equality Impact Assessments to support and challenge new initiatives and policy decisions.

Ongoing work also includes data analysis, carrying out year-on-year comparisons of application rates (including analysis by discipline and location in addition to four protected characteristics) to understand the impact of Covid-19. Diversity data is also being monitored for specific Covid-19 calls.

In addition to dealing with the current crisis, UKRI is taking steps to address the impact of future uncertainty and the so-called 'lost year in R&D'. This involves considering productivity levels in the community given the impact of caring responsibilities and that many are excluded from the 'boom of writing'.

██████████ noted that Elsevier has observed a changed publishing pattern by gender and other characteristic since the beginning of Covid-19 and offered to make contact on UKRI's behalf to explore potential for join-up.

██████████ raised the concern that as universities try to mitigate income loss they will prioritise medical subjects at the expense of the social sciences and humanities, which could become a source of indirect discrimination.

██████████ suggested looking at positive opportunities too and how the crisis might correct practices that did not work before and pointed to a forthcoming report on this topic by McKinsey.

██████████ noted the importance of ensuring that the 'lost year' does not create a two-tier system with one group suffering disadvantage in the long term. To mitigate this risk, UKRI must engage with a wider range of stakeholder.

**Action 1:** Members to send suggestions to UKRI for further groups the EDI team should be engaging

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with, in addition to continuing to share general insight and information on the EDI impacts of Covid-19.

### 6. AOB

██████████ noted that 175 applications had been received for the post of UKRI Head of EDI. Interviews will take place shortly and it is anticipated that the appointment can be announced at the next meeting.

No other business was raised by members and ██████████ closed the meeting.