

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: The key to global research excellence, and excellence in global research support



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The author welcomes questions, feedback and opportunities to collaborate.



1. What is EDI?

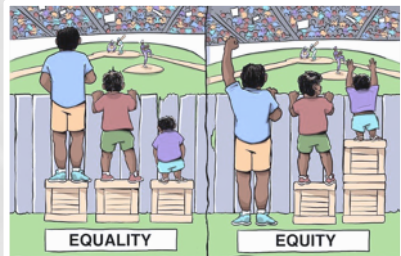
'EDI' stands for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and encompasses policies and strategic actions taken to ensure individuals or groups of individuals have equal and fair access to opportunities.

Equality: means equal access to opportunities

Diversity: means everyone is individual and differences should be valued

Inclusion: means systems should be flexible to incorporate varying needs at all levels

(Equity): means that treating everyone the same not necessarily fair, so target actions.



2. Motivation

Research development professionals in the UK higher education sector will be aware of the increasing data evidencing disparities across funding metrics by personal characteristics (gender, race, disability etc.), from academic representation², funding success rates³, and pay inequity⁴. For example, the latest diversity data published by the UK research councils UKRI over the 2019/20 period, showed that median award values for male lead investigators were 43% higher than for female leads, and white PIs' median award values were 11% higher than for ethnic minority leads⁵. Implications of these inequalities affect more than the individual. Inequalities in funding awards directly relate to loss of research income and research opportunity for institutions, premature turnover of research staff from underrepresented groups means lost expertise, and the narrowing of researcher perspectives ultimately compromises research integrity⁶.

3. Institutional context

LSE is ranked #1 in the world for social science and management. (QS World University Ranking 2020⁷). Our researchers and teachers are World-leading thinkers on critical issues and we produce research with significant global impact. Our central research support division helps develop, maintain and sustain an environment to make LSE the best place to do excellent and impactful research⁸. Our institutional strategy, LSE2030⁹, place EDI at the heart of how we operate and define institutional success.

4. Benefits of improved EDI

The University has historically strived to be an incubator for critical thought to improve society. A more technologically connected World yields a greater need for global teams and global research. EDI is often categorised as a student consideration, rather than a key strategic priority for top global research institutions. Research excellence is defined at the forefront of academia by diverse academic thought, and all demonstrable evidence for this hinge on institutional EDI practice being targeted and effective. The same approach is true for excellence in research support. Benefits of improved EDI metrics include:

1. Robust EDI values are core to becoming an active and respected international research partner who facilitates equitable working relationships.
2. Attracting, applying and retaining diverse skills within the institution and across global networks relies on fair access to opportunities, remuneration and career development for all.
3. National assessment frameworks and charter marks are globally recognised indicators of research excellence, and the EDI requirements defined within them are increasing every year.
4. Access to research funding itself is affected by heightened EDI requirements
5. Poor EDI management leads to decreased funding and research capacity, and increased reputational risk and litigation.

5. Objectives

To identify universal strategic opportunities within the university environment to facilitate research excellence through targeted equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives.

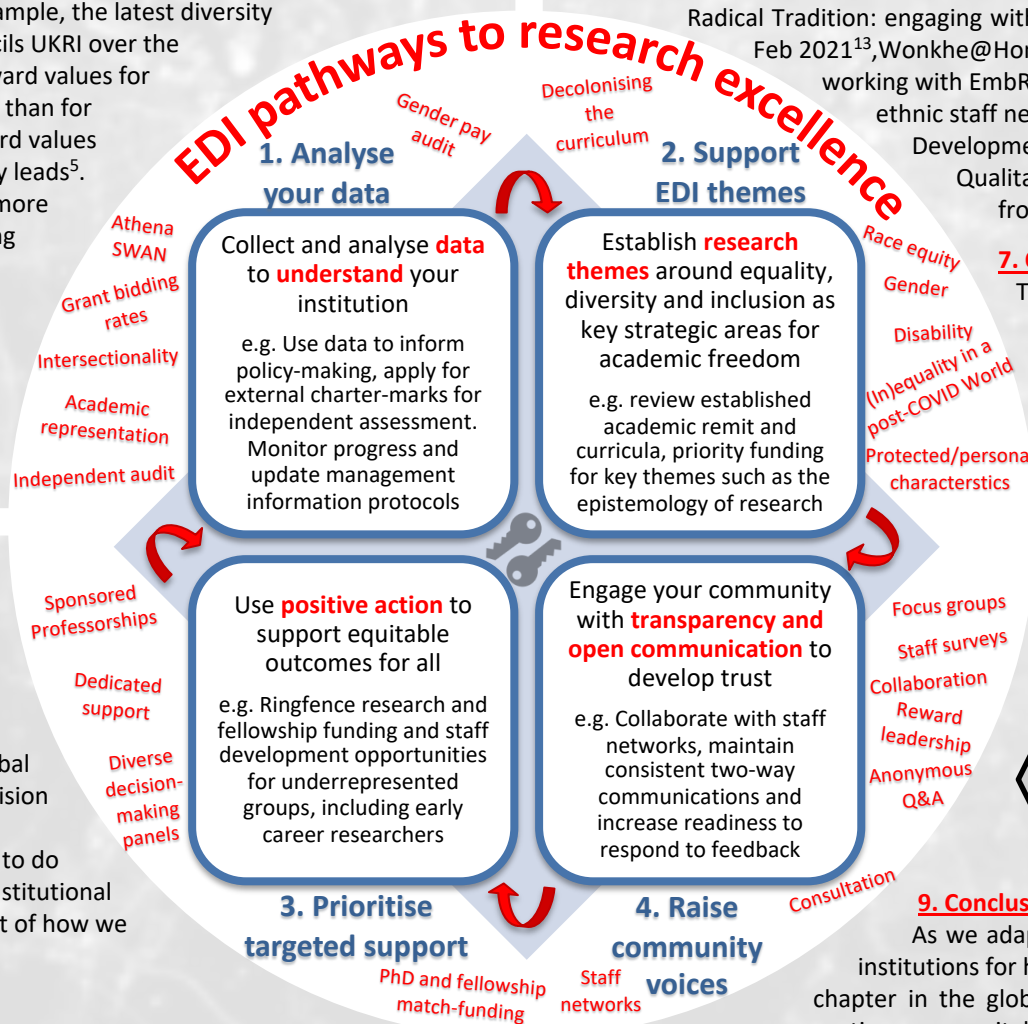
The sector is yet to define a universally adoptable approach to close the research inequalities evidenced in the data. Initial attempts address inequalities via education interventions¹⁰. Whilst this expands the pipeline of researchers entering the academic career track, this approach overlooks EDI's unique intersections with research activity. A strategic consensus of how EDI can support research development and vice-versa would help institutions target research strategy, action robust EDI initiatives and deliver higher quality research outputs.

6. Methods

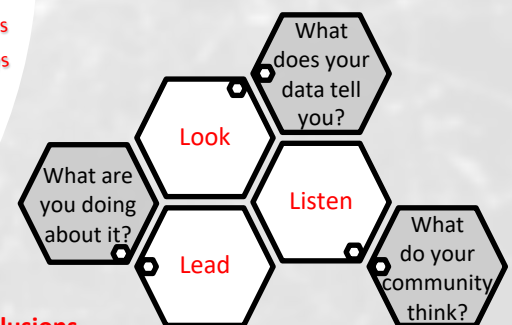
Information was gathered through structured discussions held at ARMA Conference 2019¹¹, the 2019 AdvanceHE BME Conference¹², Critical Race Theory and the Black Radical Tradition: engaging with structural racism in education event at LSE Feb 2021¹³, Wonkhe@Home - Black Lives Matter July 2020¹⁴. Also working with EmbRace committee¹⁵ (the Black and minority ethnic staff network at LSE), the LSE Research Development team¹⁶, and the LSE EDI Unit¹⁷. Qualitative and quantitative data was also sourced from publicly available funder publications.

7. Outputs

The EDI pathways to research excellence strategy (central diagram) provides a universal approach that research institutions can adopt to facilitate measurable progress in achieving equitable research outcomes, bespoke to your institution.



8. How to approach new challenges?



9. Conclusions

As we adapt our ways of working, we can prepare our institutions for healing a post-COVID World and the next chapter in the global movement for racial justice by ensuring our own operations are equitable, diverse and inclusive. Understanding EDI and its influence on every stage of the research lifecycle will unlock the potential you and your institution has to excel and thrive in the new global research arena.

10. References

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