

THE IMA, LMS AND RSS RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT UKRI EQUALITY,
DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

28 March 2022

1. As a document, how accessible is the draft EDI strategy?

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| The content and wording of the draft EDI strategy was easy to understand | Disagree |
| The format and layout of the draft EDI strategy made it easy to read | Disagree |

The strategy as it is currently written is too long for a strategy but incomplete as an action plan. It could be made more accessible by clearly setting out the CEO's intro, ambitions, cornerstones (which would be more appropriately given as values or behaviours) and strategic objective sections. A separate document should lay out the implementation plans together with an evaluation framework, after further consultation on those particularly. Ideally, the language should be as clear and concise as possible, and it would be helpful to have a graphical presentation of the main dimensions (the ambitions, values, and objectives) and how they interact. This would allow interested parties to evaluate whether the values and objectives are sufficient for achieving the stated ambitions.

2. Is the EDI strategy's proposed ambition clear?

No

3. What do you like most about the EDI strategy's proposed ambition? How do you think the EDI strategy's proposed ambition could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

UKRI's ambition is for a research and innovation system where:

1. everyone feels included, is heard, respected and able to be their real self
2. different people, ideas, ways of thinking, skills and perspectives are valued
3. people and ideas thrive, are supported and encouraged
4. everyone can participate in, contribute to, and benefit from, our investments in research and innovation.

It is critical to think hard about how the first ambition, related to inclusion and belonging, will be implemented in a system that still is unlikely to fund all researchers at the level they would desire. The word "everyone" is so ambitious in this context as to be meaningless.

There is no consensus over what the notion of 'excellence' means or how it should be recognized in the UKRI research system. We recommend reframing the first and second ambition to highlight that the concept of excellence in people and ideas that has traditionally determined the funding has led to the exclusion of individuals from the community. How notions of excellence are used, and what functions they serve needs to be examined and disrupted if UKRI is to achieve their ambitions both for inclusivity and for truly world-leading research.

The second ambition of course also relates to this need for disruption and re-evaluation of our values and standards. Additionally, it should be expanded to emphasise the team nature

of most research. Furthermore, how funding is to be allocated needs to permit for the selection of the best-balanced combination of overall funded researchers, rather than funding those who individually may seem “best”. There is considerable research showing that the excellence of a team is only very weakly related to measures of individual excellence of its members. Thus, the funding strategy needs to aim not only to make grants for teams available, but to see the overall portfolio of funded researchers as the UK’s research “team”, and decision-making mechanisms within panels should permit for consideration of how to achieve this.

The fourth ambition is good but should give more weight to the consideration of the human diversity of research. Not only in terms of the teams undertaking the work, but the individuals, communities, and industries that shape research objectives and can benefit from the research that is funded by UKRI. It would be worthwhile to look at the work of the GenderNet Plus project, including in particular the recent evaluation published by the Irish Research Council of their previous, successful Gender Strategy, which included an aspect of sex and/or gender dimension in research proposals.

4. Cornerstones

The cornerstones shape and inform UKRI decisions, actions, and behaviours, and describe how UKRI will work to achieve our ambitions.

4.1. Thinking about UKRI today, how well is UKRI exhibiting the behaviours set out in cornerstone 1?

Cornerstone 1: We will foster an inclusive, equitable, just and diverse research and innovation system by championing and focusing on systemic and structural change.

UKRI is consistently exhibiting the behaviours set out in this cornerstone

Disagree

UKRI needs to better understand how its processes themselves drive behaviours that are often unhealthy for research and the individuals in the UK research system. These processes can lead to exclusion for individuals from certain demographics, whose careers have not followed an idealised trajectory of continued funding and success. An example of this is women, who spend longer at mid-career and have lower funding rates at this level . It also excludes individuals from institutions that are not perceived to be the major producers of research in the UK. UKRI should move away from a deficit model of behaviours to a model of “diversity by design”, considering for each of its programmes how that programme will affect research culture, and how it can be implemented in such a way as to ensure that the UKRI’s goals regarding inclusion are reached.

4.2. Thinking about UKRI today, how well is UKRI exhibiting the behaviours set out in cornerstone 2?

Cornerstone 2: We will be open, transparent, and inclusive in our approaches by listening, influencing and working in partnership.

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| UKRI is consistently exhibiting the behaviours set out in this cornerstone | Disagree |
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UKRI does not itself have the expertise to undertake the analysis of research culture that is required to fully understand the current experiences of researchers in the UK, both those who have and those who have not been funded through their programmes, or the barriers that may exist in the systems, policies and practices that are currently used. For example, the data that is currently published does not permit the sort of interrogation that would be needed to examine various hypotheses that have been proposed by researchers who study funding systems about what might explain the observed inequalities. UKRI should collaborate through funding or through contracts with a range of experts in these areas, as well as with individuals and groups that have been engaged with diversity activities in their research professions to get a fuller understanding of the experiences and barriers emerging from the current system, and design improved approaches to achieve UKRI’s EDI ambitions.

Some aspects of the design of past consultations – especially the practice of asking already well-funded organisations and individuals to help design calls for funding – have the effect of suffocating diversity in certain areas. It represents a conflict of interest to ask already well-funded organisations to design the scope and form of calls in their research areas when they are likely to be responding to those calls themselves. First, it means that the design suits their needs, capacities and interests better than those of smaller research groups or less eminent researchers in the field. Second, it means that those who participated in the design have much earlier knowledge of the form and content of the call, and thus an advantage in putting together proposals.

4.3 Thinking about UKRI today, how well is UKRI exhibiting the behaviours set out in cornerstone 3?

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| Cornerstone 3: We are committed to leading, taking action and being innovative. We will use evidence, data and learning from ourselves and others to inform our actions and how we work. |
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| UKRI is consistently exhibiting the behaviours set out in this cornerstone | Disagree |
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UKRI, like other funding agencies, is in a difficult position in that it needs to claim that it is doing an excellent job to make the case to the government for continued high levels of funding. This makes it harder to perform meaningful and honest evaluation of where it has done well and where it has not. For example, there is very little evaluation of grant outcomes to determine if those who received funding were any more productive than individuals who did not. This is particularly relevant when two such individuals compete for further funding. The data suggest that individuals who have previously been funded are viewed as “good risks” or “known quantities” although there is no examination of the cost to benefit ratio of their previous funding. This leads to the “Matthew Effect”, which is known to be a major barrier to inclusive funding. This has to change. To change this, an appropriate evaluation and data collection method must be put in place and carefully analysed.

4.3. Thinking about UKRI today, how well is UKRI exhibiting the behaviours set out in cornerstone 4?

Cornerstone 4: We expect every individual in UKRI to be inclusive in all that they do, and we will hold ourselves to account for our actions as individuals, as leaders, partners and as an organisation.

UKRI is consistently exhibiting the behaviours set out in this cornerstone

Disagree

The staff of UKRI are certainly committed to serving their research communities. However, it feels like they are disempowered from making any changes to funding policies or programmes that might enable them to be more effective in achieving inclusive outcomes. There needs to be more flexibility and autonomy for teams and divisions to permit them to work together with their research community to identify how they can collaborate to achieve the ambitions of both UKRI and the communities they serve. This is particularly important because whatever intentions UKRI might have regarding what sort of researchers and research should be funded, the decisions are ultimately in the hands of the peer reviewers and panels, who are from the research community. So UKRI cannot achieve its aims without the chance to talk through with constituents how these can in practice be achieved.

5. Strategic objectives

5.1. Are the proposed EDI strategic objectives clear?

No

The strategic objectives are broad. As mentioned above, it would be better to separate this part of the document and link it both to evidence from UKRI data of the current status of UKRI programmes against these objectives, and specific actions with SMART objectives. It would be useful for UKRI to treat this as an exercise akin to Athena Swan and Race Equality Charters, or to the Science Council and Royal Academy of Engineering Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework. In particular, it is not sufficient to provide data in a general sense. It needs to be provided in a way that illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and gives specific targets for improvement.

5.2. What do you like most about objective 1?

Objective 1: fostering an inclusive and diverse research and innovation system, 'by everyone, for everyone'

In the first strategic objective UKRI demonstrates its commitment to the use of evidence for policy-making, reviewing how peer-review is used, and creating discipline-led activities to improve inclusion in specific areas.

5.3. How do you think objective 1 could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

The first objective should clearly set-out UKRI's strategy for collecting qualitative and quantitative data, using expert knowledge about the mechanisms of exclusion in research, and analysing and evaluating this data to build evidence for what changes may be effective, as well as suitable success measures. Additionally, work is needed to develop a strategy of

how to collect data on other protected characteristics, such as LGBTQ+ status and disability, and on how to support researchers in these groups.

5.4. What opportunities can you see for you or your organisation to work with UKRI in achieving this proposed objective?

The IMA, LMS and RSS have considerable expertise in the design and analysis of quantitative data amongst their membership, including data relevant to social issues such as inequality. Additionally, there are an active group of diversity and inclusion experts and strategists engaged in understanding the barriers to inclusion and effective mechanisms for overcoming them for decades. The societies would be very pleased to have the opportunity to work on this critical project, in particular, working closely with EPSRC on developing strategies in the areas of its remit.

Objective 2: advancing equality and inclusion through our investments and how we work

5.5. What do you like most about objective 2?

The second objective is firm in its desire to achieve greater understanding about root causes, and evaluating effectiveness of interventions. In addition, it is strong in its willingness to change the decision making processes.

5.6. How do you think objective 2 could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

UKRI should permit external evaluation and research into policies, procedures and outcomes to ensure that a wide net is cast in seeking creating and effective solutions. Again, UKRI should demonstrate a clear willingness to be honest about what has not worked as well as what has. Often organisations seeking evaluation of initiatives are reluctant to admit when things did not work and examine why they did not. Finally, UKRI should be more explicit about the importance of anticipating the needs of diverse populations of potential users of research by asking PIs to comment on this.

5.7. What opportunities can you see for you or your organisation to work with UKRI in achieving this proposed objective?

As mentioned above, the decision-making process in funding is a collaboration between the funder and the research community, the latter of who provides referees and panellists. In general, the community often has a clearer sense of the barriers and opportunities within itself than the funder. The IMA, LMS and RSS would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with UKRI and the EPSRC on changes to funding strategy and to refereeing and panel culture to enable both UKRI and our community to achieve our EDI and research goals. This could, for instance, occur through meetings that permit a discussion of values and goals and how to best achieve them together. In particular, the IMA, LMS and RSS can bring examples of internal and external quality assurance processes, independent reviewers and observers of decision making processes to help review current practice and possible ways to improve them.

Objective 3: everyone who works for UKRI will feel included, valued, and able to contribute and participate

5.8. How do you think objective 3 could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

As mentioned above, UKRI should employ a framework – such as the Science Council and Royal Academy of Engineering’s Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework – to achieve its EDI goals.

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| Objective 4: To develop approaches to monitor, measure and evaluate change |
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5.9. What do you like most about objective 4?

In the fourth objective UKRI demonstrates a strong commitment to evidence-based and evidence-informed decision making.

5.10. How do you think objective 4 could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

UKRI should target evidence evaluation at particular hypotheses of what mechanisms are causing the inequalities, not just at observing that the inequalities exist, which is already well-established. Ensure also that the evidence collected is of high quality, and in particular, a good proxy for the things that are actually important, and are not just the evidence that is easiest to collect.

5.11. What opportunities can you see for you or your organisation to work with UKRI in achieving this proposed objective?

The IMA, LMS and RSS have substantial and relevant expertise to collaborate on the design of an effective data collection and analysis plan for UKRI. However, this requires resources and investment. We would be interested to discuss how UKRI could provide the requisite financial resource as well as information to make this possible.