

Submission by the Daphne Jackson Trust to the UKRI draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

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

The content and wording of the draft EDI strategy was easy to understand (*Strongly disagree, disagree neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree*)

Neither agree nor disagree

The format and layout of the draft EDI strategy made it easy to read (*Strongly disagree, disagree neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree*)

Disagree

Are there any further comments you would like to provide on the accessibility of the EDI strategy?

Presenting the strategy as a webpage rather than a Pdf document made it more cumbersome to read and navigate without clear delineation provided by formatting or page numbers. However, the headings and the option to download the strategy as a Pdf document was helpful. UKRI could explore other means to disseminate their finalised strategy to engage as wider an audience as possible. Use of short videos and animations that explain the content succinctly could help.

2. Did you use assistive technology to read the EDI strategy?

For example: a screen reader or similar text-to-speech device

- Yes
- No

No

If yes, were there any issues? Please provide details

EDI strategy: Our ambition

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

- Yes
- No

If no, please provide brief details of what is unclear

No

The language could be made more specific to clarify how each component of the ambition relates to EDI. Otherwise, the ambition (and to some extent, the entire strategy) risks being too woolly and difficult to follow.

For instance: "people and ideas thrive, are supported and encouraged" is very generic. Is this a general ambition for the entire research and innovation landscape? How does it relate to EDI? People and ideas already do thrive in research – but not for everyone in a fully inclusive manner. Perhaps the ambition could more specifically mention the desire to tackle the inequality of whose ideas thrive. For the sake of clarity, we would suggest that this component is either

reworded, or removed as the general principle is already covered by: "different people, ideas, ways of thinking, skills and perspectives are valued".

2. What do you like most about the EDI strategy's proposed ambition?

Please provide brief details on what you like most about the EDI strategy's ambition

We are pleased that UKRI recognises the action plans are a 'living document' and liable to change, particularly as EDI learnings and best practice continue to emerge. Continued engagement with organisations such as the Daphne Jackson Trust would allow UKRI to alter the specifics of the strategy as required.

We are also pleased to see specific mention of not-for-profit organisations that share many common aims with UKRI from an EDI context.

It is also reassuring to see UKRI's willingness to share experiences, successes, challenges and learnings. This will benefit the sector – and the EDI movement – as a whole.

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

Please provide specific suggestions where possible

A small point of clarification would be that the UKRI EDI strategy should be read in conjunction with the BEIS People and Culture Strategy, as its proposed ambition (and subsequent initiatives) inter-relate. It would be helpful to mention this upfront to create more cohesion between these two documents.

We recommend more specific emphasis is placed on the different components of EDI throughout the ambition section. Inclusion is less well recognised and understood, and sometimes overshadowed by equality and diversity initiatives. From the perspective of the Daphne Jackson Trust, researchers that have taken non-linear career paths commonly report feelings of exclusion by their peers as they do not fit traditional career moulds. This behaviour is the antithesis of inclusion and must be remedied. We encourage UKRI to champion non-linear research careers more explicitly through a new ambition emphasising the importance of "inclusion of people from all walks of life and all career trajectories". The Daphne Jackson Trust would be happy to work with UKRI on the development of this.

EDI strategy: Our cornerstones for change

In this section we would value your thoughts on our cornerstones for change and the reasons behind your scores. This section will allow us to better understand:

- how UKRI is perceived externally
- where we are doing well
- where we may need to develop further
- where we may need to provide further support or strengthened plans.

This question is asked about each of the cornerstones for change: Thinking about UKRI today, how well is UKRI exhibiting the behaviours set out in the cornerstones? (*Strongly disagree, disagree neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree*)

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

Neither agree nor disagree

Systemic and structural change in the research and innovation landscape has not happened since UKRI was formed. It is therefore difficult to assess how well UKRI is exhibiting behaviours linked to this cornerstone. We acknowledge that large-scale change takes time, however, change will never happen unless someone is bold enough and makes radical proposals that may initially seem impossible to implement. UKRI is large enough and wields sufficient power to do this. It therefore needs to be bolder if it is to meet this cornerstone.

An example of this would be for UKRI to advocate for a change to research contract systems, whereby more Early Career Researchers (ECRs) are given permanent contracts after a probationary period while very Late Career Researchers (LCRs) move to shorter term contracts. This would give more ECRs greater career security in the crucial early years of their careers. This suggestion was made by the Chief Executive of the Daphne Jackson Trust at a recent Royal Society roundtable event convened to discuss changing working lives and the research environment. Whilst some roundtable participants welcomed this radical approach to help alleviate the issues that can cause under-representation of minority groups in academic STEM research, there are many complex barriers that would need to be addressed and UKRI is in a position to do that.

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

Agree

We are very grateful for the support UKRI has provided to Daphne Jackson Fellowships. We believe this is an exemplar initiative that will help to create systemic and structural change and remove the stigma associated with career-break researchers, particularly in the academic community.

There is however further scope for the partnership with the Daphne Jackson Trust to develop, such as support for new types of Fellowships for technology specialists and supporting longer length Daphne Jackson Fellowships to improve the long term prospects of those undertaking them.

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.

Neither agree nor disagree

No comments here.

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.

Agree

No comments here.

EDI strategy: Strategic objectives

In this section we would value your input on the proposed strategic objectives in the EDI strategy.

The first question is about the clarity of the objectives as a whole. The following questions will ask for more detailed feedback on each objective, and the opportunities you can see to work with us in achieving them.

1. Are the proposed EDI strategic objectives clear?

- Yes
- No

No

If no, please provide brief details of what is unclear

The strategy sets out priorities for the near (year 1) and medium term (years 2 to 3). It would be more helpful to list these priorities upfront as a summary of actions to aid interpretation. Taken together, they are somewhat disparate. We would encourage UKRI to concentrate efforts in its specific areas of strength rather than spread efforts too thinly. Some of the commitments – for instance in objective 2 – “implementing change informed by the review of peer review” are very large, structural undertakings that require significant planning in themselves. It is unclear how this will be done alongside the myriad of other activities in a carefully planned and orchestrated manner.

The strategic objectives themselves are also difficult to interpret. Each objective (1-4) has been subdivided into various commitments and priorities (A and B), with subsequent actions (near- and mid-term). It is unclear which refers to which, or how they relate to one another.

Specific detail is provided under each objective in the following answers.

Objective 1

Fostering an inclusive and diverse research and innovation system, 'by everyone, for everyone'

What do you like most about this proposed objective?

Please provide brief details on what you like most about this objective

We are pleased that UKRI has explicitly committed to work in partnership with other organisations to influence change. The partnership with the Daphne Jackson Trust is incredibly important to us and the researchers it supports. We are grateful that UKRI recognises the specific role that the Daphne Jackson Trust plays in this regard.

We are also pleased that UKRI has committed to continue publishing EDI data, and will be transparent over how those data will be used to inform subsequent actions. As part of this, we would welcome UKRI to also publish the methodology over how these data are collected and analysed. This would help to create a harmonised approach for this activity across the sector so that more organisations can learn effective ways to collect, analyse, use and report on their EDI data.

How do you think this proposed objective could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

Please provide specific suggestions where possible

Some detail on this objective is missing and it is difficult to marry the commitments with the statements under priorities 1A and 1B.

For instance, the commitment to “proactively champion and support inclusion for all” sounds very sensible, but what does this mean in practice? The text under priority 1A offers little clarity, suggesting that UKRI will continue its evidence reviews, engagement, publish EDI data, recognise diversity through initiatives such as 101 jobs and the #10000BlackInterns programme. The mid-term actions for designing and delivering evidence-led policies, as well as evaluating and learning from interventions offer limited further understanding. Other than the examples stated, exactly how will UKRI “proactively champion and support inclusion for all”? And what might these evidence led policies be?

UKRI could be bolder in this respect and offer more ideas under this objective. For instance, it could change the way that grants are assessed and awarded, with peer review also covering

how applicants build inclusivity into experimental planning and design. It could offer specific targeted funding to under-represented groups – including career break researchers – to act as bridge funding between grants. It could even mandate that all UKRI grants have the flexibility to be undertaken full-time or part-time for all named research staff, thereby building inclusivity into its own structures so that individuals unable to work full-time are not excluded. Even though such policies may already be in place in certain areas, they must be supported by a clear communications framework so that the messaging is continually reinforced.

“Embedding EDI in how we catalyse, incentivise and invest in research” is similarly vague. What does this mean in practice? And how will UKRI measure the change it has created in meeting this commitment?

In priority 1B, further engagement with the sector to explain the ‘Good Practice Exchange’ and the “new deal for post-graduate students” is needed. Researchers who have had career breaks must be included in this. More specifically:

- The Daphne Jackson Trust could provide advice on how to better support research returners early in their careers so that they achieve greater success. This could be achieved through the membership of the Daphne Jackson Trust in the Good Practice Exchange.
- The deal for post-graduate students should put inclusivity at its heart by ensuring:
 - The deal does not have time-based eligibility criteria attached to postgraduates (e.g. XX number of years after a PhD) – as this excludes those who have taken a career break.
 - It recognises and encourages part-time and flexible working, and that all employers (and funders) should offer this.
 - The deal includes support that makes it easier to diversify career pathways and increase opportunities for researchers outside of academia. Greater collaboration and cohesion with industry and the charity sector to create routes that allow researchers to interchange roles between sectors through grants or ‘career diversification fellowships’ should be included as part of the new deal. Such a change would complement the Government’s Research and Development Roadmap.
 - There is a move away from the prevalence of fixed-term research contracts which, when combined with current research assessment criteria being focussed on cumulated research outputs and impacts, does not create a supportive sectoral environment for early career researchers that have taken a career break.
 - A commitment to increase funding and support for Daphne Jackson Fellowships to boost their number and length (from two to three years) in line with demand and to further benefit Fellows by giving them more time for retraining and reskilling. In addition, further funding and support for other returner schemes aimed at returners to STEM – not specifically research – would help a broader pool of candidates wishing to return with expertise in technical, technological or other specialities.
 - Other forms of support are built in to the deal. For instance, a scheme allowing for a paid period of ‘carers leave’ of up to one year (similar to parental leave) would help those who are currently forced to leave their employment to arrange care for relatives (e.g. end of life care for elderly relatives, caring for relatives with physical and mental ill health). More generous and accessible voucher schemes for childcare would also help researchers return to their careers more quickly after starting a family. Similarly, a voucher scheme to enable returners to access sectoral-specific retraining, via appropriate professional bodies, trade associations and charities would be a helpful intervention directly benefiting research returners.

Finally, the near-term priority to review how UKRI will use expert peer review is an important statement with potentially big ramifications across the sector. We encourage UKRI to ensure that this review does not just focus on the mechanics of 'what' research is funded, but also the decision-making process for deciding 'who' is funded. Work undertaken by the Daphne Jackson Trust has demonstrated in-built bias against returners in the peer review process. When compared against their non-career break competitors, returners have fewer research outputs, less impact, and are older. The career-break penalty is seen in full force when peer reviewers judge returners more harshly because of this – viewing them as somehow failing, or being less committed than other applicants. This should be actively remedied by UKRI's review of the funding allocation process so that people are not unfairly penalised because of life events.

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

Please provide specific suggestions where possible

The Daphne Jackson Trust would be happy to share its expertise as members of the Good Practice Exchange to develop, test, evaluate and highlight ideas to improve culture.

Objective 2

Advancing equality and inclusion through our investments and how we work

What do you like most about this proposed objective?

Please provide brief details on what you like most about this objective

We are pleased that UKRI recognises the need to mature the use of Equality Impact Assessments. It could share the methodology and publish these alongside their initiatives.

How do you think this proposed objective could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

Please provide specific suggestions where possible

Expanding the anonymised peer review process should be progressed cautiously. Anonymisation only works in large fields with enough researchers with similar backgrounds and proposals. It does not work well for career break researchers who are often in a niche group because of their background, and therefore more likely to be identified by their career break. This could lead to challenges in ensuring true anonymity. Rather than focusing on anonymisation, it may be more productive for UKRI to target bias in the peer review process directly with training and improved understanding rather than managing reviewers' bias through anonymity.

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

No comments

Objective 3

Everyone who works for UKRI will feel included, valued, and able to contribute and participate

What do you like most about this proposed objective?

Please provide brief details on what you like most about this objective

No comments on this objective

How do you think this proposed objective could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

Please provide specific suggestions where possible

No comments

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

No comments

Objective 4

To develop approaches to monitor, measure and evaluate change

What do you like most about this proposed objective?

Please provide brief details on what you like most about this objective

It is positive that UKRI has committed to advancing how change is measured and evaluated. The whole sector is grappling with this, and we support the proposal to develop scalable and effective processes that reduce burden.

How do you think this proposed objective could be improved? Are there any significant gaps?

Please provide specific suggestions where possible

As well as routinely publishing EDI data, it would be helpful for UKRI to share its methodology over 'how' EDI data are collected, securely stored and analysed. This would benefit many organisations who are all striving to find the best way of doing this. For instance, how has UKRI built trust with its communities so that they feel comfortable sharing EDI data? UKRI has an opportunity to lead from the front in this regard, using its experience and resource to develop best practice for the sector.

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

No comments