

EPSRC Inclusion Matters Transcript from the Workshops on 19th and 25th September 2017 at Glasgow and Bristol

Summary

EPSRC launched an open, competitive call to fund projects aimed at improving equality, diversity and inclusion within the engineering and physical sciences. This call is the first of its kind in the Research Councils and is being managed as a pilot by EPSRC as part of the Research Councils' collective approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion during the transition to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

We would like to see ambitious and inspiring applications that focus on the development and implementation of new approaches aimed at tackling and accelerating culture change and activities that disseminate and embed best practice more broadly. We are looking to add value by building on current activities with new knowledge and ways of working, to incentivise a culture change across the engineering and physical sciences academic research sector.

Funding of up to £5 million is available to support around 10 inspiring applications with duration of up to 24 months to promote a more diverse, fair and inclusive engineering and physical sciences community. There is no limit on how large or small requests for funding can be.

Funding will be awarded to institutions to aid with culture change and piloting new approaches, as well as disseminating and embedding best practice across the sector. We encourage institutions with complementary equality, diversity and inclusion challenges to consider forming consortia to address common challenges. **Institutions will be permitted to lead on one application and may be involved as co-applicants / partners in applications led by other institutions.**

We consider partnering with institutions on equality, diversity and inclusion activities as key to success of this Call and we therefore expect strong indications of matched support from institutions. We encourage potential applicants to consider analogous learning from outside of the higher education sector and therefore encourage the involvement of Project Partners (collaborating organisations) that can bring new perspectives and capabilities. Project Partner support can be in the form of a financial contribution and/or in kind support e.g. secondments, trainers, sharing of expertise and experience, hosting visiting researchers, supporting events or collaborative work focussed on exploring issues or actions relating to the academic research environment. This call has two stages. In stage one, the outline stage, an independent assessment panel will evaluate and subsequently select a number of applications **anonymously** (i.e. without the panel knowing the identities of the institutions) that will be taken forward to stage two of the process. Stage two will be full applications followed by an interview.

Before the deadline for outline applications, EPSRC held two briefing workshops in Glasgow on 19 September 2017 and Bristol on 25 September 2017. These workshops enabled applicants to discuss challenges that might be addressed through applications to the call, participate in a question and answer session with EPSRC staff, and explore any potential synergies across institutions.

Below is a transcript of question and answer sessions from the workshops. Please note this has been edited for brevity and to ensure anonymity.

The call document can be found at this link <https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/calls/inclusionmatters/>

Don't forget the deadline for outline proposals is 7th November 2017

AUDIENCE: You said that the diversity inclusion work with IOP has been going on since 2006. How big a change have you seen within that, especially in terms of diversity? Obviously equality's taken a forefront in a lot of the discussions. What about the diversity side of it as well?

IOP: It's changed at the academic and it's changed at the local level. And one of the examples I always give is, when I started this work, workload allocation models were dirty words. I was not allowed to go into a department and say, "Where's your workload allocation model?" Because people hadn't even thought about it, it was something that they didn't want to go there within a department. And now, the question I ask people when I go into departments is "Have you gender tested your workload allocation model?" Because it's become so accepted within the academic community that we've got to move to a fairer way of allocating workload for example. And certainly, I've seen a much greater increase of acceptance of these issues, discussing these issues openly, people actually having full and frank discussions and really looking at where their action plans for change are coming from.

AUDIENCE: If you consider gender equality or any kind of equality, you really need to have people in academia to support them. But if we are not getting the numbers in academia, how can we offer enough support by allowing us to go and talk to schools and have public engagement activities? This is the only way for us to increase the number of females or people from different races coming into academia. So I just wonder whether there is any mileage to consider this and to work in this area as well?

IOP: We've done a huge amount of work in schools over the years, but what we've found, particularly in our recent work, is you have to work across the whole school. There's just no point trying to get more girls to do A-level physics. That's not the solution. Actually, the solution is breaking down the gender barriers within school. And actually, we still have the pipeline within physics. We still have to work on our pipeline. We've still got 20% A-level, 20% undergraduate, 20% post-graduate, and then we start to fall off a cliff. So for us, anyway, there is still a clear amount of work to be done at that level to encourage people to go into research careers. And what we've found with PhD students and with post-docs is women's intentions and women's wanting to have a career in research science declines throughout the PhD, and declines throughout the post-doc. And actually, there's a lot that we can do to encourage women to stay. Really talented women are dropping out of research and we don't know why.

EPSRC: I completely agree with you that we need to look across the whole landscape, and what we're trying to do through this call is address the research aspects of it. As you just said, that might be picking up career development or career progression issues.

AUDIENCE: My question is about how good we can actually become. You talked about the Juno Excellence, so what's the typical profile of institutions that hold this excellence? What are the main characteristics?

IOP: Juno's different from Athena SWAN in that it doesn't rely on institutional engagement. Within Athena SWAN, you have to have an institutional bronze for a department to apply. Juno works with physics departments. To achieve practitioner champion physics departments have to look at their own cultures, their own action plans, break down those barriers within the department to really allow women or anybody from an underrepresented group to flourish.

AUDIENCE: If we're thinking about bids for this particular call, how would you expect us to demonstrate distinctness from what we're already doing as part of Athena SWAN?

EPSRC: There's no need to re-invent the wheel, and we absolutely recognise the good work that's already going on. I think the focus here is how you take that and transition that to an institutional culture change. For example with a different community, taking the lessons that you've already learned from Athena SWAN and other charter mark schemes.

AUDIENCE: I have two questions, actually. The first one is, all of the work that you have done as part of the Institute of Physics, especially with the gender representation, is that data publicly available? Is that data publicly available through your websites?

IOP: It's all available on our website so you can go on and look at all the reports and data that we collect.

AUDIENCE: The second question is, do you actually work with the engineering institutes as well, like IET, IMechE or do you just work with the chemistry one? Because obviously, physics has got those synergies with engineering.

IOP: We work closely with the Royal Academy of Engineering.

AUDIENCE: We talked a lot about cultural issues, and that's been the focus of this call. But I also get the impression that, in many situations, culture isn't actually the main obstacle, particularly when, in a subject like math, half the students are female. Of the staff we have hired in recent years, two thirds have been female. But when they arrive there, they arrive in an environment that doesn't actually support their work in the way that it should. So there are practical issues, often financial issues which affect staff with disabilities and staff with family duties, male or female. At that point, what's needed is not cultural support but cash, frankly, to help them take part in conference, travel, in the kind of scientific activities across the world that are very difficult for them, for their personal reasons. And at that

point, I sort of struggle to see how the cultural issue can get us further, and we need to actually take a next step and put real cash into supporting these staff. How does this call help us in do that is my question?

EPSRC: Cultural change has to translate into some kind of practical support for people. That's why we're not just offering a network and a forum to have a discussion about it, but we are offering financial support through this call for proposals.

IOP: I think if you connect with the professional bodies, we can put people in touch with sources of support. We have those links, we have those networks. I think we have to accept that culture change takes a very long time in some cases, but actually, if we can do some things that actually are going to break down an immediate barrier, then that's exactly what this funding should be for.

AUDIENCE: Cultural change takes a long time, as does research. In two years, you're not going to get an awful lot of research done, and then be able to use those findings to actually provide the evidence you need to get innovative initiative from activities. So why are awards only for two years?

IOP: Professional bodies have done a lot of research. It's all sitting on our websites. We have been investing in some of these issues for quite a long time, so it is really important that you use that and build on that and not just think we have to start again, and so on.

EPSRC: We're really looking for what can you do with this funding that you can't do at the moment. We think more evidence is certainly needed in some areas, and it would be really good to see that being developed. We're probably not looking for really fundamental long term research projects that you might submit to ESRC or AHRC or similar as part of normal research business. We're looking for maybe more short term things, or actually accessing some of that research and applying the results.

AUDIENCE: From your perspective in the Institute of Physics, are you seeing gradual improvement across different departments in the UK, or do you have any real beacon universities or institutes where we can really learn from best practise in those amazing places?

IOP: I think that what we've found through Juno is that the beacon activities or really excellent activities, they tend to happen in one particular area in one particular department. For example, the physics department in Edinburgh actually employ PDRAs to help them do all their gender diversity in physics analysis to help them with the Juno and Athena SWAN at the physics level, and they've got a dedicated researcher doing that. And that's amazing, actually, when you think that they're willing to invest that amount of money, and it's great to see that level of innovation and that level of thinking. We've seen departments completely transform the promotions process to being something absolutely a world class example of how to really run an academic promotions exercise. I have to mention the Cavendish Laboratory because they're the only one that have got Athena SWAN Gold in physics and they've invested a significant amount of money in that exercise in order to be able to break down those barriers. It's about the journey that you as a department go through. It's not about a set of criteria over here that you have to meet. It's very much about determining where you want to get to and how you're going to get there.

EPSRC: One way to think about this, and think about the fact that there's a time-limited body of money on this, would be how would that establish future things that you can do in research? A discussion you might want to have with your institution is how the initial two years gets elongated, and gets institutionally embedded. So I think it'd be interesting to actually think about how to routinize this kind of research as part of your institution, not as a special project that comes every now and again, but as a routine part of what you do. As part of doing your practises, you're actually continually doing this research within organisations, or across organisational boundaries.

AUDIENCE: I was just wondering what opportunity is there for groups of universities to partner with EPSRC on a project for this call, to maybe tackle something around a peer review issue or something similar to that? Maybe something around the funding mechanisms and how universities interact with us and how funders interact with universities on that?

EPSRC: That's a really interesting idea. In terms of the governance of the call, we have to get through the funding decision stage, really, before we can get involved in any in-depth conversations about that. But in principle, we absolutely recognise that this is a community effort and I'm sure there's a lot we could learn from your institutions.

IOP: And also for the Learned Societies perspective, we've got our publishing houses, so there's another huge amount of work that we could be doing within our disciplines and working with our publishing houses.

EPSRC: We are working with a small group of universities in a pilot phase to work on peer review related issues. If you've got ideas that you think really need funding and would fit with this call, then it would be brilliant to see that.

AUDIENCE: It was mentioned earlier about some of the issues of 28% students not wanting to declare ethnicity. We have large proportions of our staff choosing specifically not to tell us. Not just not telling us, but choosing not to tell us. And that culture of, presumably, not trusting us with that information is significant. I was wondering with your IOP surveys whether or not you found the same thing, or whether or not you were seen as slightly more trusted, and people were more likely to declare some of those characteristics that they don't seem to want to tell their employers? And whether or not that would give us a route to getting more significant data through this?

IOP: The issue that we have is whether or not we attach diversity data to our member record, which is similar to you attaching diversity in employment circumstances. We've gone down the route of doing anonymous diversity surveys. We don't connect that with any individual, for lots of reasons, data protection being the main one. Within that context of anonymity, actually, we get very good disclosure rates. We were really surprised at our LGBT+ disclosure rates. We found that just around 10% of our members declared that they were LGBT+, and that's in line with population norms. So we were really pleased to see that. But actually, that was in an environment of complete anonymity.

RSC: We're doing a lot of monitoring. We have our own small funds. So really, if you want to have any more specific questions, then you can just email us at diversity@rsc.org.

AUDIENCE: The RSC have spent 20 something years working on this. I just wondered again, avoiding this repetition, whether or not you know anything about the fact that they've got 20 years' worth of more data, and whether that's informed things?

RSC: The data that we've had on a long term basis has often been more case study based than numerical and it's taken us a long time to start to really be able to get the resource to do the number crunching thing. The stack that we've been producing for 20 years now is it will be 70 years until we reach equality. For a long time, we didn't realise quite how much we had to do to stop the pipeline leaking quite so badly, but I think everybody has upped their game and accelerated. And this is a change that we've seen in the last, probably, five years or so. Things are getting better and better at an accelerating rate. And things like the EPSRC call can only help us with this. So I can echo again this feeling that we have of spending this two-year period focusing on the things that really work, and making sure that we're doing them everywhere, and not re-inventing the wheel. And if people do this across the UK, then we will be seen as a beacon, as a country for the physical sciences doing this. And hopefully it will roll out well beyond just this country, because we're doing better than many others.

AUDIENCE: When you say co-investigators, do you mean co-PIs? I raise the question because, in the university system, there is no way for anyone to get any recognition contributing to a grant, unless they are a co-PI. The reason I raised it is because, obviously, these applications are all going to be teamwork, and if there's only one lead, essentially there is actually no way in the universities' systems to enable anyone who's participated as a co-PI to be recognised. And I was concerned it was maybe continuing to undermine careers of people who are putting lots of effort into this type of thing.

EPSRC: The statistics on gender and co-Is are interesting. There's a higher proportion of co-Is. I think this isn't an issue that is universal across all institutions, but if your institution won't recognise co-Is, I think there's an issue for the institution as well. The reason that we want institutional bids is to signal the commitment from the institution at the highest level. We do this with our large investments and equipment where we want a clear, strategic commitment from the institution. And one of the things we want to do in terms of starting a step change is to get that level of commitment.

AUDIENCE: I totally agree with that position, but that doesn't exclude the possibility of having co-PIs on the grant.

EPSRC: It does if your system lets you encode co-PIs. Our systems don't. So it is actually a very simple, practical matter of coding on grants. One thing I would welcome input on is how would we signal that status of co-PI when the system would record it as a co-investigator? And we're happy to do that, we're happy to do that in a conversation with framework universities, and conversations with PVCs themselves to signal that importance, and to signal that into the institutions themselves.

AUDIENCE: I think you can still demonstrate institutional commitment without the Pro VC being the PI. Because I think we're trying to promote diversity, but we're going back to the traditional scheme where we could have people here contributing significantly to a grant, and maybe a Pro VC outside the science and engineering warranting the grant.

EPSRC: I think there's some flexibility there. It can be your Pro VC for research, it can be deputy Pro VC for ED&I. But it has to be somebody from the university leadership level. We're really keen to see other people named on the grant as co-investigators and the contributions can be described in the proposals

AUDIENCE: You said we should be bold and ambitious. Instead of saying a Pro VC has to be the PI, would it be a way of getting institutional support and commitment in other forms so that there is a conversation with senior management at institution? And I agree, there needs to be that commitment. Otherwise the change won't happen. But is there another way that you would accept that commitment in some sort of contract or a commitment from the institution?

EPSRC: We want proposals to come from the leadership in the university, as it's a great way of helping you open those conversations to get buy-in because they have to be involved. I hope they're going to be super keen to be involved. Actually, we want to be really inclusive in this call. We want people to be involved from all across the universities, not just people with a particular protected characteristic, or from a particular background.

AUDIENCE: My query is about the interviews. Will that be interviews for the lead institution or interviews with the whole team?

EPSRC: The whole team.

AUDIENCE: You mentioned in the briefing about institutional support. Could you give us some sense as to what you mean beyond obviously having their support, do you mean financial or in kind or have you got any further thinking on what the institutional support should look like?

EPSRC: It really depends on the package of activities that your institution wants to implement through the call. We haven't been prescriptive about what that institutional support might look like, but the overall ethos of the call is to accelerate a culture change within the institution, so ultimately it would be for the panel to decide what the best way of implementing that should be. But we'd expect strong institutional support because otherwise that's not going to be a feasible approach.

AUDIENCE: I was just wondering about the remit of the call, so the title is "Inclusion Matters in Engineering and Physical Sciences", but you said a few times that you're doing it on behalf of UKRI, is there a science remit or not to the call?

EPSRC: It is just EPSRC funding at the moment. So it needs to be predominantly in engineering and physical sciences, but we are working closely across all the Research Councils and with Innovate UK and Research England colleagues as well, so actually we're watching this really carefully. What could we learn from this? What could we build on?

AUDIENCE: What sort of participation from industry are you expecting? How do you see the industry partner coming in and what sort of activities you see to be supported by this call?

EPSRC: It depends on what your activities are. These issues aren't unique to the higher education sector, so if you can involve companies or project partners that have a shared interest in the problem then we would consider that to be suitable.

AUDIENCE: Is funding for activities related to undergraduate studies or access to university allowed?

EPSRC: We want to focus on the areas that EPSRC works in, so focusing on schools, or focusing on undergraduate isn't what we were looking for in this call.

AUDIENCE: I understand that the applications are anonymous, and I just wanted to get your advice in terms of how we would perhaps disguise some of the regional networks that we're working with. How do we get around that?

EPSRC: I think actually you probably answered the question yourself: in talking about regional networks trying to be quite vague in terms of your geography, and your specific set of circumstances while not losing the essence of your bid. We know this is challenging, we have done this before in various pilot calls and it has worked quite well and there's the full proposal stage if you're successful where you can go into a lot more detail as to what those networks are and how they'll operate.

AUDIENCE: How do you define a stakeholder? Is it society or government?

EPSRC: Any of those really, or companies. There are some companies that have done really great work, like GSK for example, so you might involve them.

AUDIENCE: I'm curious about how you'll ensure the Equality Act will actually be enforced throughout this course. I read the impact assessment. It was very brief, it didn't really seem to have an answer to all the particular decisions that have been made by the EPSRC in designing the call. It doesn't seem to have the sort of analysis that I'd expect from the equality perspective, so it would be interesting in how it would be enforced.

EPSRC: Clearly we're all aiming to comply with that legislation, there's no doubt about that. One thing we have asked the applicants do is make sure their institution is well and truly behind the application. We've asked for pro-vice chancellors or pro-vice chancellors for ED&I to be named as the principle investigator on the application, and therefore one would hope they would understand all the legal implications of what goes on and make sure that gets addressed.

AUDIENCE: If someone's got a good idea and they're outside the system and they're from the grassroots, why can they not just put the application through from the grassroots without having to go through the university?

EPSRC: From our point of view, in terms of managing public money, we want to make sure that the institution really does get behind the whole thing, that we embed the results in the institution. It's really the outcomes that we want to make sure get taken up by institutions. I would hope that your institutions would be very open to new ideas, since the whole point of the call is that there are ambitious, bold, new ideas. I really hope that they would take that view. If it turns out that you're not getting listened to for good reasons, then absolutely contact EPSRC and let us know.

AUDIENCE: There's a problem with this call for me, which is you're not having public engagement as part of the call. Unless we can engage with the public and change the attitudes of people who are younger, then we're not going to change anything in some of our disciplines.

EPSRC: The whole problem is so deep rooted in our society. It stretches right back into early stages of education. However, that should not stop us from really making good progress in things we can make good progress in. We should not be turned off by the fact that we have got this really big problem to try and solve. There are lots of things that need to be changed. Completely acknowledge the problem, but let's fix what we can now. We all need to keep working on the longer pipeline problem too.

AUDIENCE: The funding's available for two years, when does that two year period kick in?

EPSRC: From when the grant starts, it's just going to be a normal EPSRC research grant, so you get a bit of time to get it started.

AUDIENCE: It says in the documentation that training or post-graduate training isn't eligible except for equality and diversity training. What does that mean?

EPSRC: You can't fund doctoral students on this grant. You could do work with your doctoral student populations.

AUDIENCE: Could you give us a little bit more detail about the panel membership and reassure us about how that's going to be put together?

EPSRC: We pretty much have the panel membership for the outline panels sorted. It's people from a mix across the research community and people from business and similar.

AUDIENCE: To what extent are you looking for ideas that surround the actual content of research that is being done and the education of research is about diversity dimensions in research topics for the future?

EPSRC: We're open minded about the scope. Getting good data is a really important aspect to all this. By no means, take that message as it's about data collection. Let's not lose sight of the objectives, what we're trying to do here. If you have an idea that will change things and you'd like to try it as a pilot, give it a go.

AUDIENCE: It's quite clear that proposals need to be engineering and physical sciences focused. It would be quite a strong idea to have social sciences researchers involved in the research side. What's the balance between this being an EPSRC call focussed on engineering and physical sciences and also including others where they can bring in new knowledge?

EPSRC: In EPSRC we put great store by interdisciplinary work; the objective is what can we do for engineering and physical sciences? Let's not lose sight of that, but having good social science advice to help us frame that would be absolutely sensible.

AUDIENCE: You've said that you want a broad approach to dissemination. What's your idea of broad? Is that national, is it international, is it just within an institution, is it going across disciplines?

EPSRC: It's about what you think might have an impact. Certainly at the institutional level, it needs to be understood, driven, subscribed to by the institution. That's where it starts, at the institutional level. If that is successful and it starts to look as if doing it this way would help folks, then why not be ambitious? Let's talk about national rollout of something that we pilot.

AUDIENCE: Did you consider whether EPSRC could use this opportunity for ED&I of only giving money out to those institutions who have Athena SWAN Bronze?

EPSRC: We talked about this within Research Councils UK. Absolutely, we're sending the message please do get your Athena SWAN awards. What we haven't done is mandated across all grant giving.

AUDIENCE: Anything to do with undergraduates is not eligible, is that right?

EPSRC: Not anything, but we expect the proposals to be working with the populations that we support, so doctoral students, post docs, other researchers, other people in their research population. You might well be drawing on things that have worked at undergraduate level and take some of that learning into the wider populations.

AUDIENCE: What about where institutional change overlaps with national issues? A lot of us have the same problems basically, and I know collaboration is important but they'll be some national issues where we might be able to address some change, and is that acceptable?

EPSRC: Cross-institutional proposals might be a step in the sort of direction which you're suggesting, and we'd be very supportive of that. If there is something that you think could work at national scale and could be pursued then by all means, give it a go.

AUDIENCE: On the anonymity requirement for outline proposals: how much detail is required on partners, particularly industrial partners where it will be fairly obvious that they're embedded with us? Does that negate how much detail do we go into?

EPSRC: We're encouraging people to be careful about what they disclose, so you can talk about partners in a general sense if you're involved in, for example a regional network then you can talk about a regional network.

AUDIENCE: Do you want to seek some sort of management structure in the outline proposal phase? How much financial detail is required?

EPSRC: We've been really keen not to narrow it down more than we feel is necessary in the call document. Where there aren't particular steers in the call document, you're free to propose your own management structures.

AUDIENCE: There's an opportunity for all of us to be required if we're submitting to have an element of outreach public engagement that we could do.

EPSRC: One of the things that we are expecting from this - these are two year awards - is to demonstrate relatively quick progress that can be communicated to the rest of the community, and we do envision some of that might involve dissemination beyond the academic community. So certainly sharing the outputs of your work in whatever form they're likely to have impact is something we'll encourage and we'll look to facilitate that process.

AUDIENCE: I just had a question about the collaboration which is mentioned in the call document, do you see that as a mandatory component and what are your expectations what that might look like?

EPSRC: It's not mandatory. If there's something you want to propose just for one university, then the door is open to do that. I think what we're expecting is a range of collaborations really, certainly between universities when you're working on similar things, or sharing best practise or sharing an idea that one's developed to try in some different disciplines. We know there's some great practise going on out in companies and we know there are some companies who would like to get involved in this call, so we're expecting some of those partnerships there. We've heard offers of support and joining together from the IOP, RSC, maybe RAEng, so we're expecting a whole range of partners.

AUDIENCE: What are the mechanisms that you have for the sharing ideas? How do we actually know if any other university people or any other groups are going to do the similar things? Is there a website of mechanisms that you're going to promote that kind of collaboration between universities?

EPSRC: The first thing is the two workshops. The other thing is if we see proposals that are very similar at the outline stage, then working with the panel that will looking at them, we might ask people to consider coming together then. Then there are your own networks. I hope you're all fairly well networked already.

AUDIENCE: You mentioned about the support from universities in terms of some resources and matching funding. What is your expectation on that? What is it that you expect universities to put into this call?

EPSRC: We've not mandated anything: it might be money from universities, it might be in-kind support. We are expecting something substantial.

AUDIENCE: How much are you looking for cross disciplinary work and how much can we focus on our own discipline?

EPSRC: It's very important that we use all the learning we can, and that was the idea of this workshop. Learning from elsewhere, whether it be from other societies, other industry and businesses is important, but a disciplinary focus is fine.

AUDIENCE: How can delegates get in touch with each other after the event today because none of us really know how to contact each other?

EPSRC: We can provide a delegate list because that's already been available. If you want to sort of hunt each other down over Google and LinkedIn.

[A LinkedIn group for potential applications have been established: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8635055>]

AUDIENCE: How can we collaborate with the learned societies?

1752 Group: If anybody's interested on working on improving sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual violence policies within their universities and trialling some great best practise policy then please contact us.

IOP: Please email Jenni Dyer at the IOP: Jenni.Dyer@IOP.org . She'd be very pleased to hear from you.

ECU: Email Ruth.Gilligan@ECU.ac.uk and then we can follow up to see how we can help and support you.

Vitae: If you want to get in touch with us then email Allison.Mitchell@vitae.ec.uk