NIHR | School for Public Health Research

A STRATEGY FOR EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

2023 - 2027

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Summary

Our strategy aims to create an environment where equality and diversity are considered at all stages of the research journey, with any individual impacted or involved with the School, feeling included and valued.

We have built this strategy around four key principles, agreed in consultation with the full membership (through representatives on the EDI Committee) and informed by the NIHR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy (2022).:

- **EDI is everyone's responsibility**
- **Science benefits from the talents of the whole population it serves**
- **An inclusive culture strengthens research quality and the wellbeing of all**
- **A culture of learning promotes reflection and continuous improvement**

The strategy incorporates the above principles in all working areas of SPHR, including our: Research Community, Research Projects, Research Participants, Public Engagement and Involvement Activity, Stakeholder Engagement, Capacity Development and Dissemination and Impact Activities.

To have clear impact within these areas an action plan has been developed for each area. These actions will not only ensure that EDI is at the forefront of all SPHR activities but will also enable us, through the EDI Committee, to carry out monitoring and evaluation of how well the strategy is being implemented. This strategy is a living document and regular reviews will be conducted to identify areas of improvement and things to be celebrated.

Through conscious effort and carefully considered actions we will drive forward the EDI agenda and continue to learn and grow, making SPHR a truly equal, diverse and inclusive school to work with and within.

Introduction

Background

Inequalities are deeply embedded in many organisations and our society, and impede progress and achievement of excellence. Stigma, prejudice and discrimination are contributing factors, with structural racism, sexism, ableism and heteronormativity being widespread. Addressing these inequalities requires recognition, acknowledgement and action at multiple levels.

This document sets out the strategy for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), including an action plan, for the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research (SPHR). In this document the term equality (ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents) is sometimes used to mean equity (actions to ensure fairness and impartiality), depending on context.

Aim

Our aim is to create an inclusive, welcoming and equitable research and training structure and environment that celebrates diversity and values, respects and recognises contributions from all.

NIHR SPHR is committed to research excellence. Ensuring the principles of EDI are followed within our School will ultimately help us with this commitment by leading to better science which is more relevant and responsive to our partners and the diverse UK population served. A School with this ethos will benefit from an excellent reputation, attracting a more diverse pool of researchers and developing future leaders with credibility and grounding.

Our strategy provides a vision and direction of travel, focusing on the role of NIHR SPHR as a national leader in developing, conducting and disseminating high quality, relevant public health research, as well as developing public health research capacity. We endeavour to embed these fundamental EDI principles throughout all areas of the School, acknowledging that approaches and actions will need to continue to adapt and evolve with experience and learning within and beyond this quinquennium.

Our Principles

Our strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

- **EDI is everyone's responsibility**

Everyone involved and associated with NIHR SPHR has a responsibility for delivering our EDI agenda. The School will develop mechanisms to actively identify research talent and create opportunities for participation from all communities. We will initiate monitoring and reflection in key areas to ensure this is impactful. We will aim to ensure those working in all areas of the School are aware of and involved in these processes.

- **Science benefits from the talents of the whole population it serves**

We will strive to ensure that our processes and programmes are open and accessible to all (as researchers, research participants and public participants, and stakeholders in research). We will seek to understand the challenges and barriers to participation in each of these groups, to eliminate discrimination and create an inclusive environment that values diversity, equity and equality.

- **An inclusive culture strengthens research quality & the wellbeing of all**

We will promote a culture that celebrates diversity; and importantly respects and recognises contribution from everyone regardless of personal characteristics including but not limited to: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

- **A culture of learning to promote reflection and continuous improvement**

We will actively reflect on our action plan and use feedback as an opportunity to improve. We will aim to create safe, non-judgemental spaces where everyone feels comfortable to speak their views and concerns around EDI. Our aim is to support one another to understand and acknowledge a range of perspectives. We will cultivate a responsive culture where we act upon discussion and implement change where needed continuously moving forward.

Aligned Strategies

Within NIHR's EDI strategy there is a clear focus on *'Improving the diversity of research participants in the studies we support..'.* Through the ambitions listed below, including within our '*Research Participants'* section, over time SPHR will add value specific to this aim. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2022-2027/31295

Our Committee

The role of the SPHR EDI Committee is to provide oversight of the strategy and the action plan, to highlight areas within SPHR evidencing strong EDI, and identify areas where this could be improved, making recommendations for action where appropriate. Some elements of the action plan require time and resource, for which the EDI Committee encourages members to apply for the EDI pilot funding call.

The SPHR EDI Committee includes representatives from each School member, the School PI&E, Capacity Development, Knowledge Exchange, and Communications Committees, as well as a representative from the Public Partner Network (PAN), ResNet and Research Programme Leads. EDI leads from the NIHR School for Social Care Research and Primary Care Research have also been consulted and invited to comment on our developing strategy. The remit of the Committee is to develop the draft strategy in consultation with the groups represented, for approval by the SPHR Executive Group. Once approved, the Committee will meet quarterly. Task and finish groups will be established where necessary to complete key points from the action plan. Each year a report will be produced of key data and updates to feed into the SPHR Executive Group.

The SPHR EDI Committee endeavours to create a culture where barriers to participation can be raised freely. Reflection periods will be built in for the Committee to identify areas for discussion and update, address any concerns raised and develop mitigating structures and processes to ensure adherence to EDI principles irrespective of any personal characteristics.

Committee member bios are included in **Appendix A** of this document.

Strategy

Our strategy covers seven different areas relevant to all aspects of SPHR activities (detailed below), each accompanied by an action plan which sets out how we plan to implement the strategy and embed EDI within our School, as well as a monitoring plan.

The SPHR EDI strategy will shape and be shaped by the evolving EDI landscape. The importance of EDI in research is becoming increasingly understood and strategies are being adopted throughout the research landscape by a range of stakeholders and collaborators. Stakeholders include all parties, such as communities, organisations, researchers, relevant voluntary sector and charity members and local authorities, that impact upon or are impacted by SPHR research activities.

SPHR recognises that its remit will be defined by these actors and will need continual evaluation and re-alignment. SPHR will use existing infrastructure, including that of the wider NIHR, to maximise the impact of its strategy and be a leader in this space.

1: Research Community

All researchers and technical staff in member institutions with an interest in public health research will have fair opportunity to access training and contribute to research within SPHR.

Our research community is defined as each of our members, their researchers, professional and technical staff who share a passion for improving Public Health. In order to serve our public well, it is imperative that our research community reflects the diversity of our population. This relates to those currently part of the research community, but links with capacity development towards ensuring there is equitable access for those in member institutions to join and be continuously supported within the research community.

Actions:

1. Encourage better awareness of the characteristics of the current SPHR research community, highlighting areas of strength as well as where improvement is needed.
    a. Explore whether there are existing processes in place where information on member characteristics is available or could be collected to identify range of characteristics and how representative the EDI Committee is of the wider SPHR community.
    b. Explore the feasibility of a regular EDI survey to go to all SPHR member staff (baseline soon after EDI strategy is published, and 1-2 yearly thereafter). The survey will ask about member characteristics (if not available elsewhere), as well as their experience within the School in terms of opportunities for participation and training, and any concerns in relation to EDI. Examples of similar surveys from other institutions will be collected by a sub-Committee and the wording carefully considered to encourage participation, prevent alienation and preserve anonymity.
    c. EDI Committee to review survey results and other relevant findings and recommend any actions where appropriate.

2. Ensure safe spaces and processes are available for any member to raise concerns in relation to EDI within SPHR.
    a. The EDI Committee will consult on how this can best be done, including whether EDI champions should be appointed. Currently there is no formal process to raise EDI-related concerns, although these can be raised with the SPHR Management Group.
    b. The Committee will consider various options and make recommendations for a formal process to be put in place.

3. Ensure SPHR meetings and activities fully consider accessibility, including hybrid formats where feasible and appropriate resources are available for inclusive participation.
    a. SPHR will actively encourage and facilitate members to attend and fully participate in SPHR meetings, training sessions and events. Where there are logistical or other barriers that are not already covered through employment contracts, members can make a request for funding.

2: Research Projects

Research projects will ask inclusive research questions, integrating EDI throughout proposals, resulting in research that has real relevance and impact for everyone.

Researchers within SPHR will ensure their projects ask research questions that are representative of the interests of the public, including, and sometimes prioritising those underserved by research and seldom heard. This will require broader consultation processes that involve a degree of outreach, prior to application for SPHR funding as well as throughout the research process.

Representative public involvement and engagement (PI&E) and stakeholder engagement are discussed below and will feed directly in to ensuring research questions are reflective of the needs of the population and our practice partners. SPHR EDI Committee will proactively assess training needs in this area and will respond reactively to matters that arise.

Actions:

1. SPHR Advisory Board will be requested to formally comment on EDI within their overview of research programmes and projects within SPHR.

2. Programme leads to report on EDI within and across the programmes, highlighting any areas that need attention.

3. EDI Committee to assess EDI section within current two rounds of project application forms and suggest revisions as appropriate for future rounds. In particular, this will consider:
   a. Word count/limit
   b. Sub-headings (to consider EDI within research team, research project, PI&E, ECRs, dissemination and impact plans)
   c. Text prompts
   d. A guide for reviewers on criteria for assessing the section and providing feedback

   Reviews will also be undertaken to ensure continuous improvement as learning develops.

4. We will encourage case studies to be collated to illustrate 'good' examples of EDI within research projects. Programme leads and all members will be asked to identify and suggest examples. There is also opportunity for a more detailed review and collation through a small grant.

3: Research Participants

Each research project will ensure that participants are representative of their target populations and EDI principles are applied.

We recognise that the value of our research, and its potential for implementation, can be maximised through the inclusion of diverse populations participating in research. Without this there are implications for research generalisability and quality as well as equity.

Research groups within SPHR will be expected to describe the use of EDI principles within the application process using relevant EDI and equity tools, where appropriate for their research question.

Actions:

1. SPHR EDI Committee to co-ordinate the compilation of a shareable resource on existing EDI in research documents and websites for use by all researchers. This will be done by asking all members for suggestions, and the resource renewed regularly. Any gaps in relation to EDI relevant to Public Health Research to be highlighted for new development.

2. Research projects will consider EDI in relation to research participants at the proposal stage. Project update reports will also include a section where research teams reflect on EDI (including in relation to participant recruitment and any barriers to participation identified) and report on this. These sections will be summarised and reviewed by the EDI Committee for overall feedback and to suggest any recommended actions.

3. Review of EDI barriers for research participants as standing item on Committee agenda with input from PI&E groups

4: Public Involvement & Engagement Activity

SPHR will embed inclusive and representative PI&E throughout its activity.

SPHR will support members in developing PI&E that is inclusive (integrating all population subgroups, especially those who are disadvantaged, have suffered discrimination, or seldom heard), and representative of target populations. SPHR aims to develop researchers who consciously consider EDI in their PI&E work and will engage with a diverse range of public contributors, including those who are seldom heard, to set and deliver the research agenda.

We refer here to the PI&E strategy for SPHR, where more detail surrounding this can be found.

Actions:

1. Develop, at School level, meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships with organisations addressing the health needs of minoritised and equity-seeking groups

2. Develop and implement, at project, programme and School level, methods for monitoring equity and inclusion in involvement and engagement

3. Consider how involvement and engagement capacity-building can better reflect equity and inclusion

5: Stakeholder Engagement

SPHR will share its vision and strategy with all stakeholders.

We will have clear messaging for our stakeholders to help understand SPHR's vision for an equitable, diverse and inclusive School. To ensure EDI principles are embedded throughout our engagement with these groups, we will understand how best to communicate to allow all parties to feel valued and connected to SPHR. Through meaningful engagement, we will establish effective communication lines and use appropriate language and information delivery formats for each party. We will also create pathways for feedback and strive to be responsive to this feedback.

Actions:

1. Within project proposal and update reports, the EDI section will ask for the research team to consider whether all key stakeholders were identified and engaged, and any barriers to engagement

2. Infographic will be developed to share with stakeholders, with the help of the comms team, to highlight our commitment to EDI in relation to:
    a. Our research community; e.g., our researcher pathway from intern to senior researcher, our support of professional services colleagues
    b. Our research projects and participants
    c. Our PI&E activity and networking with relevant charity, third sector, local authority groups
    d. Our dissemination and impact activities

6: Capacity Development

EDI will be integrated into the culture of SPHR to identify talent and create accessible opportunities for involvement.

As stated in the Research Capacity Development Plan, SPHR will begin to offer studentships and fellowships on a part-time and full-time basis to show our commitment to EDI in recruitment.

These policies will reflect the '*EDI in Recruitment of NIHR SPHR Pre and Post-Doctoral Fellows Guidance*' to allow researchers of all backgrounds, including those from underrepresented groups, opportunities to contribute. SPHR will continue to provide ongoing support and mentorship throughout the tenure of these studentships and fellowships because equitable recruitment is only the beginning.

Actions:

1. Work with the training team and leads to continuously evaluate the recruitment process and guidance for all SPHR training awards

2. Report on the EDI monitoring information from all training recruitment rounds

3. Add online case studies of SPHR trainees who are balancing careers and home life, working part time and flexibility

4. Include EDI training for SPHR trainees as part of the 'added value training offer'

7: Dissemination and Impact Activities

Research findings will be shared with diverse audiences in an accessible and appropriate manner.

SPHR recognises the importance of disseminating research findings effectively and creatively. We recognise that knowledge users include diverse publics as well as people working within local, regional and national third sector organisations; each with different communication channels, i.e. languages, audio, pictures.

We welcome bold, innovative dissemination ideas to reach these groups and will support researchers with implementing these where possible. We will generate our own expertise through use of tried and tested methods, collated through drawing on existing experience throughout the School. It is crucial that all dissemination and impact activities look to reach and include groups outlined in the aim and that excellence within this area will be recognised by SPHR.

Actions:

1. Ensure dissemination and impact activities are inclusive and accessible

2. Work with SPHR Communications Manager to develop a 'Dissemination SOP'
    a. Case studies starting at different research stages
    b. Variety of mediums and formats to consider for dissemination activities, targeting different audiences
    c. Menu of suggestions for target audiences

3. Work with SPHR Communications Manager to encourage a culture of early PI&E involvement to ensure effective dissemination activities

4. Ensure EDI is fully considered in SPHR Communications Strategy

4. Include an EDI section in the Impact Accelerator Award applications

8: Monitoring and Reporting

1. Celebrate examples of excellence in EDI in research, through nomination of projects / teams / people that demonstrate effective and inclusive practice, with awards at the ASM (to include categories including: PI&E, stakeholder engagement, research participants, dissemination, professional services support)
    a. EDI Committee to develop marking criteria and nomination process
    b. EDI Committee to send recommendations for awards to Executive Group for approval

2. Understand EDI reporting requirements from NIHR and ensure actions encompass what is necessary

3. Collate current reporting being conducted through SPHR and identify potential for adding questions where appropriate, supplemented by regular EDI survey (if feasible – see section on Research Community)

4. Review of EDI sections of research proposals and update reports as EDI Committee agenda item, with recommendations as appropriate.

In order to support projects and initiatives that facilitate the implementation and evaluation of aspects of the EDI strategy, SPHR has agreed to pilot a round of applications for small grants that focus on promotion of inclusive practices across SPHR. Once this first round of funding is reviewed, there will be a decision on whether further rounds will also be held.

Appendix A: EDI Committee Members

Peymane Adab, Chair of the EDI Committee

Peymane Adab is Professor of Chronic Disease Epidemiology & Public Health at the University of Birmingham (part of PHRESH), and Deputy Director of SPHR.

Jo Coast, Representative for University of Bristol

Joanna Coast is Professor in the Economics of Health and Care at the University of Bristol. She has published more than 120 research papers in academic journals and received major grants from the Medical Research Council and the European Research Council. She is Senior Editor, Health Economics for Social Science and Medicine.

Callum Mattocks, Representative for University of Cambridge

Calum Mattocks is a Research Associate at Cambridge Public Health. His research has focused on ageing and in particular, age-friendly communities and their facilitators and barriers. This work has included leading on systematic reviews and qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Nicola Heslehurst, Representative for Fuse

Nicola Heslehurst is a Senior Lecturer in Maternal Nutrition in the Population Health Sciences Institute (PHSI) in Newcastle University Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS). Nicola is the Chair of the PHSI EDI Committee and is a member of the FMS EDI Committee at Newcastle University.

Sonia Saxena, Representative for Imperial College London

Sonia Saxena is Professor of Primary Care. Sonia believes that a fair society benefits everyone and is an essential goal. Addressing historical disparities in public health will lead to better science, engage the future academic workforce and lead to better health in the whole population.

Heather Brown, Representative for LiLaC

Heather Brown is Professor of Health Inequalities at Lancaster University (LiLaC). As representative for LiLaC on the SPHR EDI Committee, she is particularly interested in ensuring that the whole research pathway is inclusive.

Sarah Ronzi, Representative for London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Sara Ronzi is an Honorary Research Fellow at LSHTM and Liverpool University and has been a member of the SPHR EDI Committee since September 2021. Sara was awarded an NIHR SPHR Launching Fellowship in 2020 (based at LSHTM) and specifically focused on EDI aspects related to patient and public involvement in place-based public health research.

Adewale O Adebajo, Representative for University of Sheffield

Professor Adewale Adebajo is EDI Co-Lead for NIHR Sheffield Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) and he was awarded an MBE in 2021 for services to inclusive research. He has published extensively on the subjects of ethnic minority health as well as patient involvement in research, both of which he is extremely passionate about.

Ameeta Retzer & Afroditi Stathi, Representatives for PHRESH

Ameeta Retzer is a Research fellow at the University of Birmingham based at the Centre for Patient Reported Outcomes Research and the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration West Midlands (ARC WM) Public Health theme. She is also ARC WM EDI lead and representative for the PHRESH Consortium.

Afrodti Stahi is Professor of Physical Activity and Community Health at the University of Birmingham. She is part of the EDI Committee and leads the Health Inequalities Theme of the PHRESH Consortium of the NIHR School for Public Health Research. The EDI agenda sits firmly within Afroditi's research focus on complex multi-centre trials of behaviour change interventions to reduce mobility limitations, whilst avoiding health inequalities in older adults.

Lora Fleming, Representative for University of Exeter

Lora Fleming is a physician and epidemiologist at the European Centre for Environment and Human Health in the University of Exeter Medical School. Her research is focused on various aspects of international and interdisciplinary environment and human health, particularly oceans and human health, including environmental justice.

Nuzhat Shakaib, PI&E representative

Nuzhat Shakaib is a PAN member, as well as Research Assistant working at the University of Bath, focusing on research into virtual/remote rehabilitation for axial spondyloarthritis.

Katie Powell, Representative for SPHR ResNet

Katie Powell is a Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield. Her research uses participatory methods to evaluate community interventions to reduce inequalities. As an SPHR EDI Committee member, Katie desires to use her knowledge of the causes of inequity to support the development of more inclusive research practices.

Emma McFadyen, Representative for Professional Services

Emma McFadyen is the Research Manager for SPHERE (School for Public Health Environments Research at Exeter). She wanted to join the SPHR EDI Committee to bring a professional services viewpoint to discussions and planning.

G.J. Melendez-Torres, Associate Director for Public Involvement & Engagement and representative for PI&E

G.J. Melendez-Torres is Professor of Clinical and Social Epidemiology at the University of Exeter, where he leads the University's membership of SPHR. He is also SPHR's Associate Director for Involvement and Engagement and Deputy Academic Career Development Lead.

Peter Kraftl, Representative for SPHR Programme Leads

Peter Kraftl is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Birmingham (part of PHRESH), and co-lead for the SPHR Children, Young People & Families Programme. He is committed to ensuring that EDI is embedded within all of the School's Programmes, strategies and activities - for researchers at all career stages, and within our impact and PI&E work.

Susan Bowett, SPHR School Manager

Susan Bowett is on the EDI Strategy Committee in her capacity as School Manager with responsibility to operationalise the strategy with colleagues from across the School. As the lead for professional services (PS) staff in the School, she brings a PS staff lens and voice to the Group.

Andi Sull, Representative for Academic Career Development

Andi Sull is the SPHR Academic Career Development Training Manager. Her main focus on the Committee is to ensure we are continuously working towards an equal, diverse and inclusive research culture through all the capacity building activity in the School.

Amy Johnson, SPHR Communications Manager

Amy Johnson is Communications Manager for the School and ensures EDI is integrated into all SPHR communications; she believes this is crucial to engage audiences with our research.

Lucy Oakey, coordinator for EDI Committee

Lucy Oakey is Programme Manager for PHRESH within SPHR. The idea that we can create processes to mitigate discrimination and inequalities is a driving force for Lucy's involvement in the Committee. She looks forward to working with the group to enhance the experience of all researchers working with the SPHR.

Alana Whatmore, administrator for the EDI Committee

Alana Whatmore is PA to Professor Peymane Adab and PHRESH administrator.

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For more information, please contact sphr@ncl.ac.uk
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