Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research

A working document for institutions, researchers and research teams

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

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The Open University

Contents

Section 1. Background 4

Introduction 4

A statement of principles 6

Institutional commitment 7

Section 2. Research activities 9

Building a research team 10

Some questions for researchers 11

Possible approaches 11

Case study 11

Formulating research questions 12

Some questions for researchers 12

Possible approach 13

Case study 13

Considering citational politics 13

Some questions for researchers 14

Possible approach 14

Case study 15

Designing a methodology **15**

Some questions for researchers 15

Possible approaches 17

Case study 17

Analysing and interpretating the data **17**

Some questions for researchers 18

Possible approaches 19

Case study 19

Disseminating the research **19**

Some questions for researchers 20

Possible approaches 21

Case study 21

Section 3. References and resources **22**

References **22**

Resources **23**

Section 4. Acknowledgements **24**

Contributors **24**

Author contributions **24**

Section 1. Background

> All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions-and society-so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom.

hooks (2014, p. 34)

Introduction

This *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Research* document is intended to open a conversation amongst researchers (postgraduate, emerging and established) and their research teams in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS). It contributes towards accomplishing The Open University's (OU) mission of being open to people, places, methods and ideas by cultivating a research culture that values Inclusion, innovation and responsiveness. Other groups within and beyond the OU are welcome to make use of it to further their EDI aims.

Having laid out the background, principles and institutional commitment in the first section, the second section on Research Activities is divided into six sub-sections. The first sub-section considers the equitable building of a research team. It is followed by five other sections which outline the EDI implications of

research activity: from asking equitable research questions to inclusive dissemination.

This document represents a commitment to:

- Ensure fair and appropriate in-research decision-making processes
- Foster a diverse and inclusive culture in all research activities
- Value and promote all institutional research activity equitably
- Build a network that encourages progress in higher education and works to make academia and research more accessible to the broader community.

Grounded in a series of ethical principles, this EDI in Research document draws attention to the benefits of research activity for all persons and contexts linked to and impacted by research. It highlights the wider responsibilities of higher education institutions, individual researchers and research teams to society at large. Sympathies, assumptions, and predispositions are hard-to-avoid aspects of our research. They can be only countered through critical reflexive action.

The crafting of this document does not emerge from a singular epistemic position; it reflects a diversity of views. We acknowledge the Western, Anglophone context in which we are writing and that this will be reflected in our assumptions, positionings, and knowledge sources. As such, the document does not offer a series of tightly bound prescriptions. It aims, instead, to cultivate the ethical imagination of those for whom the enactment and embodiment of EDI in research matters. This document reflects our commitment to providing a research environment that is supportive, inclusive, equitable, facilitative of good

practice and based on principles of research integrity, enabling communities of researchers to undertake their best work.

A statement of principles

This WELS EDI statement calls for a full recognition that:

- The research community has the greatest potential to thrive when members are diverse and research protocols, systems and practices are inclusive.
- Institutional equity is accomplished when actions are taken to dismantle systemic barriers. To accomplish this, the obstacles faced by identifiable groups must be acknowledged, understood and countered.
- Research excellence, innovation and creativity are heightened across all disciplines and careers when EDI principles are integral to research participation, the research itself, research training and learning environments.
- Research should have a transformational impact on all communities, privileging no group's interests at the expense of others.
- Research with, by or of relevance for marginalised people is best when it aligns with policies and practices identified through ongoing engagements with those peoples. We accept Charlton's rallying cry: "Nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 1998).
- Attention should always be given to minoritised research students, including strengthening the pipeline into academic careers and informing

and influencing policies that affect minoritised students' experience at a strategic level.

At the same time, this statement also acknowledges that research itself is diverse and that representativeness is not appropriate or possible in some situations, for some projects and within some research paradigms. In these cases, we remain alert to the wider benefits, implications and limitations of our work and the opportunities for greater inclusivity.

Institutional commitment

It is recognised that individual researchers and research teams work within wider structures, and that sustained change requires resource and institutional support. To enliven and enact this EDI commitment institutions should:

Build awareness, recognise excellence and celebrate success. Ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion in research is a continuous process of cultural transformation that requires leadership in communication, awareness-building (creating inspiring conversations) and recognising excellence.

Strengthen professional development (skills, training and tools). Developing skills and expertise are a key building block for creating a diverse and inclusive research environment.

Provide institutional support and infrastructure. Guidelines, conditions and incentives to integrate EDI are required to ensure sustained results.

Measure needs, evaluate performance and document lessons learned. Clear, realistic and measurable goals, targets and indicators will allow us to monitor progress, to take lessons from actions conducted, and to identify the adjustments required for a sustainable change in the culture of EDI in research we aim to create.

Section 2. Research activities

Whilst recognising that individuals work within, and are constrained by, wider power structures, we call on researchers and research teams to mobilise their networks, resources and privileges to embed EDI principles where appropriate and possible into their research.



Figure 1. Research activities

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the research process divided into six activities: Building a research team, Formulating research questions,

Considering citational politics, Designing a methodology, Analysing and interpretating the data, and Disseminating the research.

Below there is a series of questions and considerations which have been posed for researchers to draw upon when developing, carrying out, writing about or disseminating the outcomes of their projects.

> The emancipatory research paradigm must be seen not in terms of one single project or projects but as a process.
>
> **Barnes (2001)**

Building a research team

This section considers the institutional arrangements that sit behind EDI in research. It is concerned with the systems and structures that frame research activity including who, how and under what terms or conditions research teams are employed. It encourages individual researchers and teams to consider where they can feasibly make a difference.

> It was in the disagreement, negotiation, contestation, and agreement of the team, and particularly in the opening up of spaces for interpretation, that knowledge was constructed.
>
> **Creese and Blackledge (2012, p. 318)**

Some questions for researchers

- What institutional support do you need to build a diverse team of co-applicants, collaborators, research personnel, critical friends and/or partner organizations?
- How can you use your role on a project to support others in developing a research profile?
- How can the research process encourage informal and formal leadership opportunities in the day-to-day operation of the research project, above and beyond PI and work stream leads?
- What role and status do research participants have, if any, on your project team? To what extent can they be positioned as meaningful participants in all or any aspects of the research process?"

Possible approaches

Consider how to draw on, and credit, the diverse expertise of colleagues and postgraduate researchers who may not be on your research team but who have a range of research, reading and lived experience backgrounds.

Consider how your own positionality – your background, identity, experiences and views – shape your engagement with team members and every aspect of your research.

Case study

<ADD examples here>

The following audiovisual resource provides accounts of EDI in research in specific contexts: Developing (as) a research team | OpenLearn - Open University

Formulating research questions

This section explores the formulation of research questions, considering who is involved and how. The who is involved and how includes consideration of the literature that informs research questions. Your research project emerges from and is grounded in a literature review.

Some questions for researchers

- Who can inform the formulation of your research questions? Are your questions relevant to diverse communities or marginalised groups?
- Are your research questions consistent with the priorities of the participants?
- Where relevant, do your questions consider the legacy and impact of colonial histories and behaviours?
- How do you identify and step away from a predefined view of marginalised groups with or about whom you are researching?
- How do you identify and mitigate against embedded predispositions and implicit stereotyping?

Possible approach

Consider enhancing your understanding of diverse communities or marginalised groups, and including them in your formulation of relevant research questions.

Case study

<ADD examples here>

The following audiovisual resource provides accounts of EDI in research in specific contexts: Formulating research questions | OpenLearn - Open University

Considering citational politics

> Citation is […] memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow.
>
> **Ahmed (2017, pp. 17)**

The literature you read and cite is always selective and partial, and it is important from an EDI perspective to reflect on who and/or what is excluded from your research.

Some questions for researchers

- What key words could be used in your searches of the relevant literature to gain deeper and broader knowledge of who might, or might not, be impacted by or contribute to the research?
- Have you read the work of authors from diverse and/or marginalised groups?
- How can you ensure your literature comes from beyond the dominant canon to include the work of diverse and/or marginalised groups?
- How might your use of search engines and AI be skewing your search results and the literature you access? How can you mitigate against this?
- How have you recognised that marginalised groups talk about everything; the relevance of their voices is not limited to experiences of marginalisation?
- Does your literature review critically address relevant EDI considerations (e.g. gender inequality, race discrimination, linguistic hierarchies)?
- What kind of institutional support do you need to ask for to gain access to knowledge produced by marginalised groups or their members?

Possible approach

Consider ways of conducting a literature review that includes resources in different languages. Specially consider including literature in languages other than English and particularly in languages of minoritised communities.

Case study

<ADD examples here>

The following audiovisual resource provides accounts of EDI in research in specific contexts: Citational politics | OpenLearn - Open University

Designing a methodology

This research activity includes reflections on methodological approaches, data collection instruments, data analysis.

> Equity-based design thinking advocates that those at the margins should hold the most power in the design process. Ceding power doesn't necessarily exclude anyone who isn't directly impacted by the problem but calls for aid to radically rethink 'expert' roles, recognise the 'process as product', ceding power where necessary, and listening.
>
> **Oddy (2021)**

Some questions for researchers

- Have you ensured a fair selection of participants? Does your research value and include marginalised groups?
- How can you build and maintain constructive, trusting and respectful relationships with participants who are different to you?

- Does your proposal consider the different forms of support required (e.g., financial, logistical, cultural, linguistic) to ensure that the individuals or communities involved in the research are able to meaningfully participate in it?
- How might you guard against cultural predispositions in your research design? Who is likely to challenge the values, norms and roles in your research? How will you engage with those challenges?
- What are the power relationships between you as the researcher and those participating in your study? How can you minimise the impact of such power? (Power could be held by the researcher or the participants.)
- How could you get closer to your participants' world to show sensitivity to the needs of others? Does your research understand and respect cultural preferences, taboos and confidentiality?
- Have you ensured that the language used to generate research data is accessible to diverse groups of people? Have you explained your study in a manner adequate to ensure fully informed consent?
- Is there a risk of reinforcing the damage of oppressive ideologies while undertaking this research?
- Would another methodological approach be more inclusive and accessible to your participants, whilst allowing you to achieve your research aims?

Possible approaches

Consider co-designing elements of your research design with members of the participant community.

Consider designing your instruments and collecting your data in local languages where appropriate.

Case study

<ADD examples here>

The following audiovisual resource provides accounts of EDI in research in specific contexts: Equity-based research design | OpenLearn - Open University

Analysing and interpretating the data

Data analysis is not a technical process. In this section we invite you to consider the EDI implications of which stories are heard, and how, through data analysis and interpretation.

> There are always vacancies: there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known.
>
> **Greene (1995, p. 15)**

Some questions for researchers

- How will you ensure that your analysis of your findings is explicit and sensitive regarding who it applies to?
- How might your use of data analysis software and/or AI shape your findings, and how can you harness their advantages whilst mitigating against any homogenising or marginalising effects?
- If marginalised groups were not included in your study, is this discussed and acknowledged as a limitation of the study?
- Have you accurately measured a variable(s) of interest to the relevant participants?
- How will you ensure an unbiased interpretation of your data?
- Can you allow any (including marginalised) groups involved in the research the opportunity to participate in the interpretation of the data and the review of research findings before the completion of the project?
- What are the implications of doing multilingual research or research with multilingual participants for your data analysis and interpretation?
- Can you share digital ownership of your data with your participants, and how?



All stories have structural underpinnings and material consequences. All stories are political.



Rohrer (2016, p. 189)

Possible approaches

Consider the following techniques:

- Use scales to measure categories such as sex, sexism, gender identity, gender roles, and/or gender expression, depending on the study question.
- Use Quantitative Critical Race Theory or QuantCrit (Gillborn et al., 2018) as an approach to critically rethinking quantitative methods.
- Introduce methods, such as corpus linguistics and other quantitative methods, that can help identify and address biases.
- Think about the assumptions that are built into the groups, categories and models you apply.
- Pay attention to how the same data is interpreted by different researchers; i.e. where the blind spots are.

Case study

<ADD examples here>

The following audiovisual resource provides accounts of EDI in research in specific contexts: Data analysis and interpretation | OpenLearn - Open University

Disseminating the research

In this final section we invite consideration of how the outcomes of your research might be shared. Academia values publication in peer reviewed journals, but given that many of these are behind paywalls, other more creative or collaborative approaches may be necessary. Such approaches can disrupt

normative dissemination vehicles and their tendency to reinforce hegemonies which forestall epistemic justice.

Remember that diversity also relates to the representation and inclusion of languages by, for example, publishing or disseminating research in languages other than English.

> Research […] is valid and meaningful knowledge if it is clearly linked to children's and families' wellbeing according to local cultural norms and values.
>
> **Sam (2011, p. 315)**

Some questions for researchers

- How are you presenting your results to diverse audiences?
- How do you recognise diversity within an audience?
- When deciding what and how to disseminate, who are you excluding in your dissemination choices, including consideration of paywalls, language, choice of format, clarity, and access preferences?
- How do you find out what your audiences need and want, rather than assuming and inadvertently imposing?
- What strategies enable you to recognise different ways of knowing and valuing other than your own?

- How have you explicitly acknowledged the impact of your positionality on all aspects of your research?
- To what extent does your dissemination plan include collaboration and codesign?
- How diverse is your imagery, and to what extent does it maximise the likelihood of wider identification and positive, diverse role models?
- What decisions might be embedded in AI-generated text and how can you equip yourself to challenge these?

Possible approaches

Check which journals are included in the open access scheme to avoid your work being accessible only from behind a paywall.

Work with publishers and editors who are conscious of accessibility work and ensure your formats are accessible (e.g., using alt captions).

Ensure oral presentations are delivered in an accessible and inclusive way.

Case study

<ADD examples here>

The following audiovisual resource provides accounts of EDI in research in specific contexts: Disseminating across the margins: bridging communities and academia through a Black feminist lens | OpenLearn - Open University

Section 3. References and resources

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Resources

These are some online resources that may help you think about EDI in your research.

EDI in research: a collection | OpenLearn - Open University

The TRUST Code. A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships

CRediT – Contributor Role Taxonomy

CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics)

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