

Towards equity, diversity and inclusion in the molecular biosciences

A position statement from the Biochemical Society

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Introduction

The under-representation and under-recognition of certain groups in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, research and employment is a problem with complex roots stemming from wider societal inequities. Today, there continues to be a multitude of barriers to entry into STEM that are acutely felt by marginalised and under-represented groups. Some of these barriers include lack of access to quality education and lack of diverse role models^{1,2,3}. Lack of equity and inclusivity can also drive those who have been able to enter a career in STEM out of the sector or prevent them from progressing to senior positions¹.

In addition to preventing equality of opportunity, underrepresentation diminishes the pool of talent available to STEM fields. The Biochemical Society believes that diversity in the molecular bioscience field is imperative for conducting high-quality research and innovation – an improved outcome and results can be attained when differing people, with diverse experiences, perspectives and ways of thinking are brought together. Improving diversity within our discipline is inextricably linked to the wider STEM sector, and requires mechanisms that provide the broadest range of people possible with access to quality STEM education. By developing, supporting and driving a culture of inclusivity for all who participate in the STEM ecosystem and that welcomes and values all, is the only mechanism for developing a genuinely world-class sector.

We believe that progressing towards an equitable, diverse and inclusive sector is imperative to delivering our charitable mission of supporting and advocating for the future of the molecular biosciences. As such, we have made [equity, diversity and inclusion](#) (EDI) a core focus of our strategy and while we have made some progress, we know that we still have a long way to go!

Our manifesto for change

Our approach to improving EDI in the molecular biosciences encompasses promoting awareness, action and accountability, within our organisation and beyond. By remaining vigilant and continually building on the activities described in this statement, with the concerted efforts of our members, networks and partners, we hope to contribute to building an equitable, diverse, accessible, inclusive sector where all can thrive, ultimately enhancing the contribution our discipline makes to society.

Awareness

We maintain and foster awareness of EDI principles

We aim to maintain and foster awareness of EDI principles within our organisation and membership and amongst the STEM community at large. Our annual [EDI data surveys](#), which we introduced in 2020, is an important tool used to collect data on the makeup of

our community, providing actionable evidence on areas where improvement is needed. For example, our survey has shown that while we have a vibrant community in which there is much diversity, there is a need to reflect this in our governing committees and panels and increasing representation and diversity within these groups remains an area of focus.

We aim to foster and promote this thinking amongst members by clearly communicating our commitment to EDI. This will be achieved through our communications and website where we provide resources related to further understanding of EDI-related topics. We have EDI representatives throughout our governance structure who work to promote and embed EDI through all aspects of activity and decision making and who together, form our dedicated EDI Advisory Panel and drive these discussions across the Society.

In the wider STEM sector, we strongly welcome the fact that the issue of EDI has been brought to the fore in recent years. Many other STEM organisations and institutions are placing EDI central to their strategies, and it is the focus of many cross-sector coalitions, with many valuable initiatives being produced. Indeed, in the UK, diversity and inclusion has garnered parliamentary attention⁴. The positive impact of this increased level of awareness and attention on EDI must also translate into meaningful and effective action to further it.

Action

We advocate for systemic change

Advancing EDI in the molecular biosciences requires robust and sustained action at all levels, from individuals, organisations and government; everyone in the molecular bioscience community has a part to play. We use our position as a champion of the molecular biosciences to advocate for systemic change to the causes of EDI-related issues. Contributing our members' perspectives to public consultations, we [inform decision-makers](#) and recommend mechanisms for positive change in this area. Indeed, at a systemic level more must be done and targeted policy interventions in STEM education and research are needed to facilitate meaningful and sustained improvement. By collaborating with cross-sector partners in our policy work, we combine our voices to exert greater influence in pursuit of this change.

We adopt best practices across our activities

Guided by our [EDI Advisory Panel](#), we aim to ensure our offerings and activities are as widely accessible as possible and to foster a sense of belonging amongst those engaging with them. We are adopting best practices in our internal systems and processes ensuring these are aligned with our EDI agenda, including applications for positions within our governance structure, applications for our grants, attendance at our events and submission to our journals. We aim to remove barriers to participation through our grants programme, where we support those with [care or assistance needs](#) to attend our events and in our outreach and public engagement work, we aim to reach audiences who have the least opportunity to engage with molecular biosciences. Specialised support is provided to [early career](#) and [industry scientists](#), reflecting the unique challenges facing these groups and supporting the progression of varied career paths within molecular bioscience.

We support external projects and schemes to advance EDI

We also promote and recognise external efforts to further EDI by [funding projects](#) that support and address issues relating to inclusion and diversity in science conducted by individuals, groups and charities. This programme has funded a variety of projects promoting the inclusion of

women, minoritized ethnic groups, those with special educational needs and many more who are traditionally underrepresented in science. Projects have also reflected on the experiences of those already studying or working within STEM, raising awareness of intersectional barriers and wider cultural and societal challenges. In addition, we support [In2Science](#), which promotes social mobility and diversity in STEM through its placement programme for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Accountability

We know we have a long way to go

As a champion of the molecular biosciences within the UK and globally, we know it is our responsibility to act to improve EDI within our sector. Despite the above detailed efforts, we acknowledge we still must improve. We have committed to EDI on a long-term basis, embedding EDI in our organisational strategy and integrating EDI firmly into our governance and longevity of data collection through our EDI data survey will enable us to track our progress year on year. The results of the survey will be shared openly with the community on our website.

We collaborate to achieve our aims

By maintaining a two-way conversation with our members and community and working together with our sectorial partners who have a strong focus on EDI and similar objectives in this area, we hold ourselves and others within the molecular biosciences and wider STEM sector accountable. Through our collaborations with partners such as [EDIS](#) and the [Royal Society of Biology](#), we seek feedback, advice and guidance to challenge our thinking and maintain momentum on our EDI journey and come together to share insight and support each other. Through this, we strive together towards a better sector, uniting to louden our voice and maximise our impact on EDI across our individual disciplines and all of STEM.

Reference list

- 1) APPG on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM. [Inquiry on equity in the STEM workforce, final report.](#)
- 2) APPG on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM. [Inquiry on equity in STEM education, final report.](#)
- 3) Pew Research Centre. [STEM jobs see uneven progress in increasing gender, racial and ethnic diversity.](#)
- 4) House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. [Diversity and inclusion in STEM, Fifth Report of Session 2022-23.](#)