

28th March 2022

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser
UK Research and Innovation
58 Victoria Embankment
London
EC4Y 0DS

Dear Professor Leyser

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) is a single unified voice, representing a diverse membership of individuals, learned societies and other organisations¹. We are committed to ensuring that we provide the Government and other policymakers, including funders of biological education and research, with a distinct point of access to authoritative, independent, and evidence-based opinion, representative of the broadest range of bioscience disciplines². The RSB is dedicated to promoting inclusive, accessible and diverse participation in the life sciences³. We aim to create a bioscience environment that attracts and benefits from the broadest possible range of experiences, skills and qualities⁴. The Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

*Here we highlight our key messages in **bold text**. As a member of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science and Health (EDIS)⁵, we have also fed into the EDIS consultation response.*

Accessibility

An executive summary with a diagrammatic depiction describing the overall key messaging which forms UKRI's theory of change would be enormously helpful. We welcome the transparency this document provides on UKRI's EDI journey and the planned processes and actions to enable growth. A brief document avoiding repetitions would be helpful.

Ambition

The RSB supports the proposed ambition which clearly **recognises the value of a collaborative approach across the research ecosystem**, acknowledging that progressing EDI is a shared endeavour across multiple stakeholders, and creating sustainable change is a long term commitment.

Cornerstones for change

UKRI is clearly taking constructive steps to elicit change within the organisation and sector. However, organisational **priorities should continue to be proactive, build on knowledge and expertise from cross-sector engagement, and retain a level of reactivity to unanticipated societal concerns**. We urge UKRI to maintain open communication with the community and learn from constructive criticism. This type of feedback is crucial for accountability and is instrumental in the development of inclusive practices.

Objective 1: fostering an inclusive and diverse research and innovation system, 'by everyone, for everyone'

We agree that UKRI has a leading role in redefining success and motivating change within the sector. **Through collaborative efforts (with national and international partnerships), incremental steps of change can be driven.** Working with peers widely across disciplines such as

¹ A list of RSB Member Organisations is available on [our website](#).

² Further outputs from the RSB, providing relevant policy advice and evidence, can be found in our searchable [Policy Resource Library](#).

³ The integrated EDI element of our strategy: '[Biosciences For All](#)'

⁴ The RSB Strategy and three-year business plan 2022–2024: https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_Plan_2022-2024_.pdf

⁵ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science and Health (EDIS): <https://edisgroup.org/>

the social sciences, maths, engineering and beyond to share good practices is beneficial. Policies that support UK scientists to readily access equipment and knowledge exchange facilities (such as conferences) locally and overseas; and that support positive movements between different sectors, such as academia and business^{6,7} are vital areas for opening the diversity of people across all career stages. Several organisations are very successful in providing specific support to underrepresented communities to work in STEM. Lessons could be learned from their tried and tested initiatives so that successful support could be designed and scaled up for greater effect^{8,9}.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown light on the growing wealth of evidence¹⁰ documenting inequalities suffered by underrepresented communities in STEM, and in many cases may have acted to exacerbate this disproportionate effect. The Society recognises **the opportunity to 'build back better' and learn from our experiences to address inequalities and create an inclusive environment within the STEM sector** to allow a diverse future workforce to thrive. The crisis of the pandemic has also produced flexibility in funding structures, processes and policies, along with the evolution of new collaborative ways of working that will be useful to apply to further areas of research¹¹. The RSB supports the recognition, celebration and support of diverse people across multiple roles as a positive step to counteract imbalance.

Objective 2: advancing equality and inclusion through our investments and how we work

We believe **a diversity of voices and experiences is integral to good decision making**. Prior to future investments, funding discrepancies must be addressed in salaries, infrastructure development and research funding opportunities, with open acknowledgement of why there are gaps within the system and how the deficits can be mitigated in the future, thus ensuring everyone can benefit. We would welcome the development and sharing of good practices to increase participation and representation across educational stages. For example, accreditation by the RSB recognises and supports the advancement of skills and education in the biosciences, throughout the UK and with a growing international focus. Graduates from accredited degree programmes are equipped with well-rounded knowledge and skill sets, making them highly employable both within and beyond their chosen field¹².

The focus on the impact to be achieved is welcome. By **embedding the use of the tools into standard practice, systematic consideration of equal opportunities propels inclusive decision making** when planning novel activities. The development and sharing of impact measurement expertise and intervention management, such as the evaluation framework previously highlighted by UKRI¹³ is likely to be a key component in the development of effective and proficient EDI initiatives and outputs¹⁴. The RSB also recognises the value of equality impact assessment as a tool to decrease barriers and inadvertent discrimination.

⁶ The Royal Society of Biology, (2018). [Response from the Royal Society of Biology to the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee's inquiry on Balance and effectiveness of research and innovation spending](#). Paragraphs 2.1.1-3, pages 4-5.

⁷ The Royal Society of Biology, (2019). [Response from the RSB to Professor Adrian Smith's call for evidence on future frameworks for international collaboration on research and innovation](#). Paragraph 4, page 3.

⁸ The Royal Society of Biology, (2019). [Response from the RSB to Professor Adrian Smith's call for evidence on future frameworks for international collaboration on research and innovation](#). Paragraph 8, page 5.

⁹ The Daphne Jackson Trust: <https://daphnejackson.org/>

¹⁰ Public Health England, (2020). [Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups](#).

¹¹ The Royal Society of Biology, (2020). [RSB Policy Lates looks at the positives and negatives for research in 'the COVID era'](#).

¹² RSB Accreditation Programme: <https://www.rsb.org.uk/education/accreditation/what-is-accreditation>

¹³ UK Research and Innovation, (2020). [Equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation: UK review](#). Page 89.

¹⁴ The Royal Society of Biology, (2020). [The Royal Society of Biology submitted a response to the BEIS R&D survey consultation on the UK R&D Roadmap](#). Paragraphs 2.1-2.3, page 4.

Objective 3: everyone who works for UKRI will feel included, valued and able to contribute and participate

The Society supports UKRI **appointing champions across multiple job grades to develop, embed and communicate inclusion and diversity strategies and initiatives** throughout the organisation. Effective leadership is vital to support the development of an inclusive environment. Acknowledging the importance of diversity at all levels, and leading by example to facilitate and monitor rich and meaningful organisation-wide approaches to equality, brings benefits for workforce culture and builds new opportunities. Although the draft strategy prioritised inclusive leadership behaviours, an appropriate balance of leaders from underrepresented communities must also be met to truly be representative¹⁵. We encourage UKRI to commit to **investigating inclusive recruitment practices**, in particular the language^{16, 17} used to attract new post holders from a diverse talent and skills pool. Initiatives to directly promote, encourage and value diversity within the STEM workforce are essential to ensure that diversity is supported and equal opportunities are provided. For example, to retain talent, we believe employers should ensure they have incentives to recognise STEM workers partaking in 'team science'¹⁸ and develop alternative variables to measure and evaluate collaborative performance.

To ensure fair treatment, **accessible, constructive training**, including active bystander training (aiming to empower staff with the skills to challenge unacceptable behaviours), should be provided to create a more inclusive workplace. In addition, leaders should be trained in the implementation and handling of disciplinary procedures, if causes for concern are reported. We encourage the **development of clear and concise organisational development and competency frameworks** that can ensure the fair evaluation of performance. UKRI should invest in additional training incentives and provide beneficial opportunities for their staff, recognising the importance of professional development and maintenance of agreed standards by, for example, encouraging employees to work towards professional registration¹⁹.

The RSB **promotes Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** through its professional registers, and, licensed by the Science Council, offers Registered Science Technician (RSciTech) status²⁰. Progression to higher awards is possible through Registered Scientist (RSci), Chartered Scientist (CSci), and our own professional register Chartered Biologist (CBiol)²¹. For our membership to achieve registration status, they must demonstrate evidence of meeting the standard for key competencies as well as a commitment to undergo continuing professional development and adherence to the RSB's code of conduct²². The RSB has an interest in identifying gaps in skill-sets, and identifying and contributing to areas for development in training, standards and frameworks. We would be pleased to engage with UKRI on these as they relate to EDI. The RSB welcomes the acknowledgement of staff surveys to capture evidence. However, we encourage and **facilitate open discussions and collaborating with individuals and allies in other creative formats**. For example, reverse mentoring can provide a basis and sounding board for ongoing work to ensure challenges are voiced and needs are listened to and met. In addition to promoting an inclusive culture and environment, we suggest investment in promoting wellbeing within the workplace. Research suggests employees retain a magnitude of benefits, including higher resilience, lower turnover and lower sickness absence that ultimately impacts productivity²³. The

¹⁵ The Royal Society of Biology, (2017). [Response from the Royal Society of Biology to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on measures taken to close the STEM skills gap](#). Paragraph 3, page 2.

¹⁶ ScienceDaily, (2018). [New study finds bias against women and girls when intellectual ability is sought](#).

¹⁷ STEM-CHANGE, (2021). [Towards Diverse Workforces: Transforming the Language of Exclusion and Bias in Recruitment](#).

¹⁸ Academy of Medical Sciences, (2016). [Improving recognition of team science contributions in biomedical research careers](#).

¹⁹ The Royal Society of Biology, (2017). [Response from the Royal Society of Biology to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on measures taken to close the STEM skills gap](#). Paragraph 21, page 5.

²⁰ The Royal Society of Biology RSciTech professional recognition award: <https://www.rsb.org.uk/careers-and-cpd/registers/rscitech>

²¹ The Royal Society of Biology Professional Registers: <https://www.rsb.org.uk/careers-and-cpd/registers>

²² The Royal Society of Biology [code of ethical and professional conduct](#).

²³ NHS Employers, (2020). [Evidence based approaches to workforce wellbeing](#).

Society also supports flexible working policies recognising the benefits for employee performance and engagement.

Objective 4: to develop approaches to monitor, measure and evaluate change

We encourage UKRI to **continue to build transparency and openness with its data and procedures**. The Society supports the publication of detailed ethnicity data for UKRI funding applicants and awardees²⁴. However, across the sector, obtaining representative data through voluntary surveys remains challenging. A focused strategy and clear communication of the reasons why we need to collect data is critical for continued improvement. The Society relies upon publicly available datasets which are used to make reasoned assumptions about similarities and comparisons with our community. We feel that collaboration towards standardisation and comparability of data collection could improve community understanding, including of the need for this data, improving diversity data survey response rates and validity, and monitoring of outcomes. The diversity and inclusion survey guidance (DAISY) developed by Wellcome and EDIS provides a model of good practice²⁵.

Finally, **benchmarking ambitions are very welcome**. Tools such as the Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework (developed by the Science Council and the Royal Academy of Engineering), which aims to help professional bodies assess and monitor their progress on diversity and inclusion²⁶ are valuable. We note here our firmly held view that UKRI must additionally describe the plan to report its progress and measure success against the objectives defined, also in the context of, and integrated with, the overall UKRI strategy²⁷. **Specific and measurable progress metrics on each of the outlined outcomes are essential** for evaluation, external impact reporting, and to efficiently and effectively direct future activities. As we take steps towards recovery from a devastating pandemic, we encourage UKRI to adopt a bold EDI strategy with transparent, realistic and achievable outputs that will have an impact at systemic and individual levels addressing sector-wide EDI concerns.

Please do contact me should you wish to discuss any further detail on the points raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mark Downs CSci CBiol FRSB,
Chief Executive

²⁴ UK Research and Innovation, (2020). [Detailed ethnicity analysis for ethnic minority awardees](#).

²⁵ Wellcome and EDIS, (2020). [Diversity and Inclusion Survey Guidance \(DAISY\)](#).

²⁶ The Science Council and the Royal Academy of Engineering, (2021). [Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework 2.0](#).

²⁷ UKRI strategy 2022 – 2027: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-strategy-2022-to-2027/ukri-strategy-2022-to-2027/>