

ACADEMY
of SOCIAL
SCIENCES

EDI Project
November 2025

Progressing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the social sciences



Economic
and Social
Research Council

Introduction

In 2022 the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) and the UKRI Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) entered into a strategic partnership to advance Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the social sciences. The initial three year programme (2022-2025) was unique in that it addressed inequalities and inclusivity at the discipline level through the AcSS extensive member social science societies network which includes all the main social science disciplines and many of the sub-disciplinary areas. Recognising that the issues vary between disciplines, the programme drew on the reach, knowledge and understanding each society has of their discipline, its academic staff and its students at all levels in higher education (HE); whilst recognising that societies are each at different points on the 'EDI journey'.

The purpose of the programme was to build capacity for leadership in EDI among the societies in the social sciences, and to advance their work in understanding and enhancing inclusivity initiatives in their own activities and more widely across their discipline communities in HE. It was a co-created programme by the Academy, its member societies and ESRC. It responded to the aspirations, needs and capabilities of the AcSS' member social science societies in advancing EDI. It harnessed the desire of many of the societies to take a leadership role which befits their status as national subject bodies. The programme has created and mobilised a mutually supportive and knowledgeable network among the learned societies in the social sciences, and beyond, and demonstrates a proven commitment to knowledge sharing between them, maximising the potential to effect real and positive change at both the discipline and sector level.

The co-designed and pragmatic work programme combined the provision of EDI-related data, good practice resources, knowledge sharing, capacity building, and funding support for piloting and sharing innovative approaches to meet identified needs. The scope included the societies' own organisational operations, the work they do with their members, and their reach beyond into wider HE communities in advocating for their disciplines. The programme outputs are freely accessible to anyone via the AcSS website.



This has been a great initiative, pushing learned societies to consider EDI-focused initiatives and giving them the means to carry them out, as well as a structure in which to do so and the ability to learn from each other.

Chair

British Association for
Applied Linguistics



The main workstreams of the joint programme were:

1. To provide up to date, systematic and summarised data for the social sciences as a whole and for each main discipline on the main protected characteristics of students and academic staff in HE.
2. To create an online hub populated with good practice guidance on embedding EDI in the main operational activities of the learned societies.
3. To foster knowledge sharing through an active working group, and the co-creation and delivery of a programme of knowledge sharing events.
4. To enable innovation by the learned societies designed to enhance EDI in practice, the learning and outcomes of which will be shared for wider benefit.

The programme of work between the Academy, its member learned societies and ESRC took place between 2022 and 2025 and aligned with the strategies of both organisations at that time. The purpose was to work together to help foster an inclusive research and training ecosystem, driving change within the system through an disciplinary approach, so that everyone is supported and able to thrive. The term Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is used throughout the programme and this report and was at the time the most widely accepted.

The Academy is grateful to ESRC for providing funding and input to support this partnership, which was also partly funded by an in kind contribution of staff time from the AcSS. The Academy would especially like to thank Dr Elizabeth Norman-Sargent, EDI Programme Manager, Dr Sarah Jones, Director of Operations, and Dr Rita Gardner CBE FAcSS, Chief Executive, for their significant contributions to the EDI Project.



The AcSS ESRC EDI programme has enabled a real focus on tangible projects that tackle issues that are relevant to learned societies and our communities. The impact of the activities and outputs will continue to resonate as we embed the learning across our organisations.

Chief Executive
The Royal Statistical Society



Systematic EDI data monitoring

The '[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) in the social sciences: summary data report](#)' drew on 2021/22 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to present a top-level summary of EDI data for the social sciences, for both academic and teaching staff and for student populations in UK higher education. It presented an overview of selected protected characteristics (sex, ethnicity, nationality and disability) under the Equality Act 2010 and included a selection of socio-economic indicators. The overview allowed for comparisons between the social sciences sector and UK total academic staff and student populations, and for comparisons between disciplines within the social sciences sector. While much of the data indicated the social sciences as a whole were broadly comparable with the data averages across the total, sector-wide, UK HE staff and student populations (including medicine, STEM, social science and the humanities and arts), there were some notable variances both between sectors and between disciplines in the social sciences.

For academic staff these included:

- There were higher proportions of female staff in senior management positions (45%) and professor roles (36%) within the social sciences than within the sector-wide HESA dataset (42% and 30% respectively) but, even so, there remained twice as many male than female professors within the social sciences sector¹.
- Within the social sciences there was a higher proportion of the total male academic staff employed in research and teaching functions (65%) than there were total female academic staff (58%), however, there was a far higher percentage of total female academic staff employed in research and teaching functions compared to the average across all sectors (39%).



¹Sex is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and is the term used by HESA. At the time of publishing, data on gender were not being collected. The data reported is for female/male only with numbers of other/unknown sex in the data not meeting the minimum threshold for reporting (as per the Jisc guidance on rounding).

- There were notable differences between the social science disciplines in the proportions of female and male total academic staff; with subjects including Education, Health Science (social), Psychology, and Social Work including Social Policy, for example, having a higher proportion of female than male staff.
- Disability data for academic staff in the social sciences were broadly in line with sector-wide UK HE staff.
- Ethnicity data² for academic staff in the social sciences showed that there were higher proportions of White, Asian, Black and Mixed staff in permanent/open ended contracts than there were within the sector-wide HESA dataset. Those of Asian and White ethnicity showed the highest proportions across the social sciences, with 82% of Asian staff and 82% of White staff being in permanent/open ended contracts.
- There existed differences between disciplines in the social sciences in terms of ethnicity. For example, Business and Management and Economics showed lower proportions of White total academic staff (Full Person Equivalent - FPE), in contrast to other disciplines, such as Communications, Media and Journalism or Sport Studies, Leisure and Tourism. The proportions varied between 73% and 94% across the social science disciplines.

For social science students in 2021/22 these included:

- At undergraduate level, a higher percentage of female students were awarded first class honours classification than male students.
- Black undergraduate students received a lower proportion of first-class degrees than other ethnic groups; the difference being 12% compared with 25% across all social science undergraduate students. 28% of White students graduated with first-class honours.
- 28% of total students studying in the social sciences were international, and when disaggregated by level of study, the greatest proportional difference is seen in those studying at postgraduate taught level (PGT) where the social sciences are known to attract high numbers of international students, especially in Business and Management courses.
- POLAR4 data was used to measure participation levels in HE across the UK. It shows differences between disciplines, for example, Demography, Social Statistics and Methods, Geography, and International Studies and Development are underperforming in attracting students from the lowest participation neighbourhoods compared with the wider HE sector.

²The terminology used to report ethnicity reflects the [terminology used by HESA](#).

The report was a snapshot in time and presented and analysed just a selection of the data obtained from HESA under a JISC licence. Additional discipline data analysis on the raw data was conducted by those member learned societies wishing to do a deeper dive. The report made essential data available to organisations that could not otherwise afford to purchase it, and, in doing so, made the same systematic data sets available for each discipline, thereby ensuring comparability of base data use – and comparisons – across the disciplines.

Introductory training to the data set and its use was provided, delivering a cost-effective solution to a fundamental need identified by the learned societies. As part of the programme's commitment to monitoring EDI data, the 2021/22 data are also being compared with the most recent data release (2023/24) to enable any significant changes to be identified. The summary data report was well received and was covered by [Research Professional](#). It was also amplified by some of the societies, for example the Political Studies Association who published their own [Report on EDI in the Social Sciences \(An Overview\)](#) and an article entitled: '[How Diverse Are Politics and IR Departments?](#)'



With a relatively small funding pot, this initiative has shown that Learned Societies have the power to punch considerably above their weight when it comes to furthering EDI in academic communities. I applaud the ESRC for supporting this work in partnership with the Academy of Social Sciences and I hope they will look to create further funded programmes which learned societies can access to achieve positive change across the research ecosystem.

Chief Executive
The Political Studies Association



Knowledge sharing through resources: online EDI hub

Launched in September 2023 and hosted on the Academy's website, the [EDI hub](#) has grown to encompass more than 100 resources sharing good practice in EDI, and which are organised by the main learned society functions:

- Governance and leadership
- Research funding
- Membership
- Organising events
- Publishing
- Research groups and networking communities.

These resources act as a directory of information to help organisations embed EDI into their day-to-day working practices. The hub provides an efficient way for those working in these areas to access up to date and carefully reviewed good practice from outside of this programme; as well as guidance and reports written by the Academy and the outputs from the learned society small grant funded programmes that were associated with the project. The latter includes seven new reports/knowledge sharing documents; and more than 25 Q&A documents, blogs, narrated presentations and 'How to guides' including how to set up an inclusive small grants programme. The hub continues to be updated regularly and shared widely via social media channels.

A selection of published reports:

- [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) in the social sciences: summary data report](#) by AcSS and ESRC
- [Advice for setting up and running a grants programme for learned societies](#) by AcSS
- The [BAM Guide to Decolonising the Business School Curriculum](#) by the British Academy of Management
- [Active Bystander: Taking responsibility and intervening – the 4 Ds](#) by the Royal Economic Society
- [Improving Member Data - How to maximise the potential of your membership data](#) by the Royal Statistical Society
- Diversity and the Built Environment: student experiences and challenges with accessing the labour market by the Royal Town Planning Institute
- Developing and an EDI strategy, Society for the Advancement of Management Studies



The hub is a fantastic resource and well-maintained.

Chief Executive
Society for Research
into Higher Education



Knowledge sharing through events

The programme's EDI working group comprised representatives from 17 social science societies, ESRC and AcSS. They worked together to co-create the programme and empower organisations, both those in the working group and those beyond, to embed EDI across their activities. Coupled with the small grants projects (see section below) the programme delivered 14 events including knowledge exchange sessions, roundtable discussions and EDI training.

The events programme, in date order:

- Academy of Social Sciences, data reporting workshop – May 2024
- Royal Economics Society, Women's mentoring – June 2024
- AcSS, EDI champions roundtable – June 2024
- The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei), EDI training for staff – September 2024
- Royal Economic Society, Active bystander – September 2024
- Royal Economic Society, Consciously inclusive mentoring - January 2025
- Royal Society of Biology Support, Experience, Acknowledge, Train (SEAT) – February 2025
- Royal Economics Society, Peer learning sets – March 2025
- Royal Statistical Society, Future leaders programme - March 2025
- Academy of Social Sciences, presentation to ESRC EDI management group meeting – June 2025
- Royal Statistical Society, Improving member data Q&A – August 2025
- Academy of Social Sciences, British International Studies Association, Leisure Studies Association, Royal Statistical Society and Society for the Advancement of Management Studies, Learned Societies CEO meeting – September 2025
- British Academy of Management - planned for November 2025
- Political Studies Association - planned for November 2025



Being part of the EDI working group has had a very tangible and meaningful impact for us at the RES. We have been able to continue our focus on EDI initiatives in a collaborative way, sharing our learnings and experiences beyond our own discipline. This further enriches our learning and increases our potential impact.

Member Operations Director
Royal Economic Society



Enabling innovation: EDI small grants fund

To further support progress within the social science community, 13 projects put forward by social science learned societies were funded competitively to help stimulate, pilot or scale up initiatives to bring about positive change in EDI through their disciplines. Learned societies in the social sciences were able to bid via an open call, in two rounds, with proposals being independently reviewed by an expert panel. All projects funded demonstrated transferability, and all grant holders were required to, and did indeed, share their learning in different ways with the community as noted in the sections above. Below is a summary of each project funded.

- The British Academy of Management published a 'Guide to Decolonising the Curriculum in Business Schools', sharing advice on how to replicate this in other disciplines.
- The British Association for Applied Linguistics and the UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment developed an emancipatory academic leadership initiative. As part of their learning, they shared a report on the project's key issues and recommendations; video-recorded conversations with speakers, which are freely available online and for potential use in focus group follow-up; and developed a briefing handbook on the concept and organisation underpinning the project for dissemination to other interested parties.
- The British International Studies Association (BISA) undertook a website accessibility review and implemented the necessary changes to meet current requirements. BISA also examined the diversity of applications to, and award of, their prizes and grants to identify awarding gaps; sharing valuable insights for other organisations undertaking such reviews.



We have really appreciated the opportunity for different learned societies to come together to share their understanding and learning on inequalities within their disciplines has been invaluable. And then to have the opportunity to receive funding for ideas to tackle these issues and share the experiences from that also meant it wasn't just another talking shop but a practical way of addressing systemic inequalities.

Chief Executive
British Educational Research
Association



- The British Psychological Society and British Educational Research Association developed a pilot teaching resource for secondary school students based in deprived areas to help students learn about the history of IQ and psychosomatic testing to address this problematic part of psychology's past. The learning shared included guides on how to develop EDI teaching resources and how best to work with schools to deliver these.
- The Development Studies Association (DSA) undertook a review of retention and progression of academics of colour in their discipline through workshops, training, and qualitative methods. The DSA produced a report from this wide range of reflections that provides good practice guidance for supporting and retaining academics of colour.
- Discover Economics (Royal Economic Society) held in-person events with 15-17-year-olds from state schools and sixth forms, to inform addressing the issues of gender and socio-economic disparities in economics entrants into HE and shared their learning about how other disciplines could replicate this.
- The Leisure Studies Association co-designed and implemented a new EDI strategy with their membership; and shared learning about what worked and what didn't work well and why.
- The Political Studies Association reviewed and developed more inclusive networks, working to increase engagement of historically marginalised scholars through the Diverse Voices programme. Focusing on PhD students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to help understand and address the inequalities in the pipeline into political studies.
- The Royal Town Planning Institute worked with a group of professional organisations to produce a report looking at the disparity between the diversity of students that start on institute-accredited courses and those that join the workforce, to help address the awarding gap that exists.
- The Royal Economic Society led four EDI initiatives (a Women's Committee Mentoring programme; a Consciously Inclusive Mentoring training; a Peer Learning Sets programme; and an Active Bystander programme) and shared learning through reports and roundtables with other learned societies on how to develop programmes such as these in membership organisations.



The AcSS ESRC EDI Project has given us the resources we needed to take forward our EDI strategy to implementation stage. We have made strides in knowledge acquisition, benefiting greatly from being able to bring in outside experts. This led to the completion of two streams of work to make our association more equal and inclusive.

Chief Executive
British International Studies
Association



- The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) funded a cohort of new members from minority ethnic groups to serve as role models, mentors, and spokespersons for RSS and the statistics and data science professions; and shared learning about how to widen participation in other disciplines.
- The Royal Statistical Society also carried out a second project to understand the barriers and present solutions to gathering good quality member EDI data and produced a report on how to maximise membership data collection aimed at membership organisations in the social sciences.
- The Society for the Advancement of Management Studies undertook a scoping exercise around the diversity characteristics of their Council and Strategic Advisory Board, their journal Editorial Review Board, editorial team, active referees and authors to identify where inequalities need to be addressed. The findings were used to develop an evidence-based EDI strategy, targeted actions, and interventions. A report was published sharing guidance for others.



Obtaining funding from the AcSS ESRC EDI project has enabled us, as a learned society, to put into practice some of our ambitions regarding EDI. It sent a positive message to our members, and gave us the momentum and confidence to go on to spearhead other initiatives. We've also learnt a lot from the knowledge shared by other societies awarded funding. What is more, given its design and criteria, the project was a great opportunity to establish a relationship with another learned society with whom we will collaborate further.

Chair

British Association for Applied Linguistics



Image: School workshop © Discover Economics, Royal Economic Society



Why this programme mattered

- This programme has **empowered and facilitated organisations** that lead their HE discipline communities (learned social science societies) to engage with, and further, EDI in a meaningful, pragmatic, collaborative and well-informed way.
- It has succeeded in **building capacity and sustainability**, with many organisations putting in place EDI strategies, and EDI champions and leaders on their staff, on the trustees or in both groups, as a result.
- Organisations have been given **affordable access** to the aggregated HESA data on staff and students at all levels in their HE communities for the first time and are now better able to interrogate and understand their discipline specific EDI issues.
- Understanding the data is a **fundamental first step in addressing inequalities**. All the more so as the social sciences are the largest sector in UK HE with a total of 1.23m enrolled students and 64.8k academic staff (HESA, 2021/2).
- It has given organisations an **opportunity to pilot relevant initiatives** to enhance EDI in their operations and in their HE communities that they otherwise could not afford to do, and with the experience doing so through a competitive process.
- It has **provided impetus and structure**, through building the AcSS capacity, for sustaining a collaborative disciplinary EDI network across the social sciences into the future; and an appetite for further development.
- In short, this project has supported organisations in **embedding EDI principles, commitments, actions and ambitions** for the benefit of their HE communities; to learn in the process and to collaborate readily and effectively.
- The project has created **a strong platform** for, and much to be gained from, continuing and developing the AcSS (and member societies)/ESRC partnership at a critical stage in the EDI journey **to address structural inequalities and remove barriers** in HE.



Ultimately it would be great to encourage more initiatives like this that fund learned societies to do what it has considerable will and soft power to implement.

Chief Executive
Political Studies Association



Appendix

Working group members

- Association of Social Anthropologists (UK) - ASA
- British Association for Applied Linguistics - BAAL
- British Academy of Management - BAM
- British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies - BASEES
- British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society - BELMAS
- British Educational Research Association - BERA
- British International Studies Association - BISA
- Housing Studies Association - HSA
- Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association - MeCSSA
- Political Studies Association - PSA
- Regional Studies Association - RSA
- Royal Economic Society - RES
- Royal Geographical Society - RGS
- Social Research Association - SRA
- Society for Research into Higher Education - SRHE
- University Association for Contemporary European Studies - UACES
- UK Association for Public Administration - UKAPA



About us

The Academy of Social Sciences is the national academy of academics, practitioners and learned societies in the social sciences. The sector's leading independent voice in the UK, we champion the vital role social sciences play in education, governments and business. We showcase, champion and advocate for the social sciences, raising awareness of their immense value and helping to secure their flourishing future.

The social science disciplines include: anthropology, architecture and planning, business and management, criminology, development studies, economics, education, human geography and environmental studies, law, politics and international studies, psychology and behavioural sciences, regional studies, sociology, social work and social policy.

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