

EDI Project Knowledge Sharing and Learning: Q&A with BAAL and UKALTA

Introduction to EDI Small Grants Funding

The [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) Project](#) is a joint programme between The Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS), its member social science societies and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The purpose of the programme is to encourage and facilitate greater awareness of, and actions to support, EDI across member social science societies, by working together to share resources, learning and to maximise the potential to effect real and positive change. As part of this partnership, AcSS and ESRC have given small scale grant funding to support EDI initiatives and interventions. Social science societies were encouraged to submit bids, either at an individual societal level or as a partnership/consortium of learned societies, to support work to pilot or scale up EDI initiatives or interventions.

About BAAL and UKALTA's funded EDI Initiative

The British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) and United Kingdom Association for Language Testing and Assessment (UKALTA) were awarded funding to hold two workshops prior to their annual conferences to contextualise and place EDI issues at the heart of academic leadership. In this Q&A, Professor Zhu Hua, former chair of BAAL, and Professor Lynda Taylor, President of UKALTA, talk about the process of embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into leadership workshops for applied linguists and language assessors.

Q&A with BAAL and UKALTA: EDI with language at its heart

What prompted your decision to focus on leadership in EDI, and what challenges were you seeking to address?

Zhu Hua: My decision to focus on leadership in and for EDI came from the realisation that at the heart of EDI matters, it is really about people -- people whose voices often go unheard and people whose actions could make a difference and provide leadership. I believe that by keeping the focus on people, i.e. leadership in and for EDI, we can develop future EDI leaders who seek to integrate EDI considerations into their everyday decisions and explore how professional agency and leadership could make valuable contribution to EDI matters.

Lynda: My thinking process was similar in its focus on action. Attention to ethical issues in language testing and assessment, especially as they relate to EDI, has grown significantly in recent years. While our disciplinary field is much better sighted on the issues nowadays, it can be challenging for us to move from policy and principles in this area to implementation of both in actual practice, especially across a disciplinary field that is itself increasingly diverse. The development of well-informed and confident EDI-focused leadership skills seems key to achieving this, so that practical commitment to and implementation of both principles and practice is distributed across our academic community as widely as possible.

What did you learn from the process of working with another language-related association in putting these workshops together?

Lynda: Collaborating with a sister association in the field of applied linguistics and language education (i.e. BAAL) proved to be a very constructive and collaborative experience, allowing opportunities for sharing and learning from our differing while overlapping perspectives. It heightened appreciation of the priorities and concerns we have in common as well as our distinctive differences as learned societies relating to language. We hope it will strengthen mutual bonds for the future and underpin further collaboration going forward.

Zhu Hua: I share Lynda's views. Having a sister association working alongside BAAL not only brings valuable perspectives but also reinforces the message that EDI truly matters. It allows us to explore EDI issues specific to language use and assessment, a broader scope than our usual remit. We are also deeply grateful for the support of the Academy of Social Sciences. Their funding gives us both the confidence and the mandate to develop a new people-focused approach.

What are your personal reflections on how your workshop went and the key takeaways?

Zhu Hua: BAAL and UKALTA planned and coordinated together and then each organised an EDI leadership workshop, BAAL as part of our annual conference and UKALTA as a pre-conference event. I was delighted to see the EDI matters given a dedicated space within the BAAL conference and, with an open call for speakers, we were able to attract a number of new faces to the workshop. The discussion was rich and engaging and there was a genuine sense that while our EDI priorities may differ, there is strong common ground and mutual respect that enable productive exchange of perspectives. EDI leaders can sometimes feel isolated, but I believe that by adopting a bottom-up approach, learned societies have an important role in bringing people together.

Lynda: I was also pleased to see how the UKALTA workshop came together coherently despite varying contributions. The level of interest expressed from diverse individuals and groups associated with EDI in language testing and assessment was very encouraging. It is clear that people welcome structured opportunities to ask questions and to discuss complex, and sometimes sensitive, issues with peers and expert colleagues.

How have the workshops, and the process of organising them, changed your association's thinking on and understanding of EDI, as well as how you might address EDI-related issues in future?

Lynda: Hopefully, understanding of and commitment to EDI policy, principles AND practices are more broadly embedded across the field thanks to the workshop. Individuals and groups will feel better equipped and empowered to address the issues in their own contexts going forward. The workshop undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of EDI considerations within our field.

Zhu Hua: Within BAAL, we have long believed that attention to EDI matters must be threaded through all that we do – and we continue to believe that! However, the workshop made us realise that this is not always enough, and that we must sometimes put the spotlight on EDI-related matters; by this I mean focusing publicly on the issues raised by EDI and making visible our commitment to tackling challenges to EDI. The workshop was the first time that EDI had been so prominent at our conference, and we were struck by how much our participants appreciated this attention. Going forward, we would like to look for ways to widen our net and persuade a wider range of members to contribute to EDI discussions and activities.

What would your key advice be to other associations planning to carry out a similar project?

Zhu Hua: My key advice would be to work collaboratively and have a succession plan. I was fortunate to have several colleagues who co-organised everything with great passion and dedication. This kind of distributed leadership is especially important when an association changes leadership periodically. The EDI project began in my final year as Chair of BAAL, and I was lucky to have the strong support of Caroline Tagg, the current Chair, and Alex Leung, the current Secretary, who have both been instrumental in carrying the work forward.

Lynda: I agree. One of the most challenging issues in this respect is finding the time and resource required to undertake initiatives such as the collaboration we engaged in with BAAL, and to extend and sustain the outcomes for the longer term. Everyone involved in the project took on this initiative ON TOP OF existing busy workloads and other commitments. This invariably makes project delivery schedules quite difficult to adhere to, especially if unforeseen circumstances intervene. This means that scoping the project realistically at the outset needs careful consideration to try and allocate adequate resources from the outset in term of personnel, anticipated outcomes, timescales, etc.