BR-UK: APPROACHES TO EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

SUMMARY & REFLECTIONS

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BR-UK Reflections: EDII Progress

Background

The Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub (BR-UK) was established following a successful application to the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) National Capability in Behavioural Research (NCBR) funding call. BR-UK began on 1st November 2023 with a five-year timeline and a remit to conduct interdisciplinary behavioural research to contribute to addressing societal challenges.

The BR-UK Leadership Hub is committed to recognising and highlighting Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality (EDII) as part of leading best practices in behavioural research and its translation.

Science effects everyone and the pursuit of scientific research should be equally available for all who wish to pursue it. We recognise that equal representation across a range of backgrounds and characteristics enhances the working environment. A broad range of research contributions makes for a fairer scientific environment that produces better outputs that can be of direct use and relevance for societal issues, including those which directly affect minority, underrepresented and easy to ignore groups.

We recognise inequalities can relate to but not only, race, ethnicity, wealth, class, health, gender, region, education, and disability.

We aim to create a transparent organisation and network with the principles of EDII embedded in their work and practice. Our EDII practice will be enabling and dynamic, regularly reviewed and updated throughout the lifetime of the Hub. This document outlines our approach and our reflections on progress in the first 18 months of the project and the importance of EDI.

Introduction

We live in extraordinary – but challenging – times where individuals have differing rights and opportunities. Despite some historical progress, for some groups, their rights are being diminished or continue to be unheard or ignored. If left unaddressed inequalities will continue to grow.

Addressing these disparities enables everyone to contribute meaningfully to society and offers numerous benefits, including:

- Fostering a sense of belonging and reducing social tensions, building trust within and between diverse communities.
- Providing equal access to education, which enhances skill levels and future opportunities for all.
- Boosting workplace productivity, leading to a larger, more dynamic economy.
- Increasing innovation and creativity by incorporating diverse perspectives across all sectors.

Ultimately, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for everyone aligns with ethical and moral standards that promote fairness and reduce discrimination. Recognising the value of others,

respecting their right to inclusion, and treating them as we wish to be treated is a positive approach in all aspects of our lives.

What is behavioural research?

Behavioural research involves studying how people act, make decisions, and interact with their environments. It seeks to understand the factors that influence human behaviour using diverse methods and approaches to gather data and insights.

Why is EDII relevant?

Embracing our differences is crucial when we attempt to accurately predict behaviour. It's important to represent diversity in our research teams and among participants to ensure that the outcomes are inclusive and impactful. In the current political context, there is an increasing chorus of voices that question the value of equality, diversity and inclusion policies. This is amplified in some sectors – including higher education – due to fiscal and political pressures.

In BR-UK, we believe that providing equitable opportunities for people to be involved in our research ensures that the resulting research is unbiased, of higher calibre and produces outputs with broader insights that are a fair representation of systems and behaviours.

Teams with diverse backgrounds bring varied perspectives and problem-solving approaches, leading to more innovative research designs and solutions. Findings from inclusive research, that accurately reflects the diversity of the groups and communities at the centre of the research, can inform policies and develop practices that are more applicable and sensitive to the needs of those communities.

It is only through inclusive research that we can begin to identify and address disparities in behavioural outcomes amongst different groups.

Finally, a commitment to EDII can help build public trust and increase the credibility of the research when those not involved in the research can recognise themselves (or those they feel affinity with) in the research and its findings.

What did we do?

Our first point of action after was to review the approaches of similar research projects to identify learning and avoid reinventing the wheel as many of the academic partners already have existing guidance on equality, diversity and inclusion within their own governance and training procedures. As a result, the policy that we have developed should be seen as complimentary to existing institutional resources.

Actions & Input

Living Documents
One of the core benefits of diversity is that there are many different approaches to overcome challenges and it is only when we engage and invite input from everyone can we identify gaps and find innovative solutions. We never assume that the approaches we have proposed are the absolute or only way to best support EDII development and implementation.

All BR-UK policy and guidance documents are classed as living documents that can be updated and edited as and when required, with any member of BR-UK (or external

stakeholder) able to provide comment and feedback for consideration. Those comments and feedback will be carefully considered and changes enacted where appropriate and reasonable to do so.

EDII Working Group
In our EDII Statement we identified several key actions which included establishing an EDII group that would meet approximately three times a year. We invited all members of BR-UK to self-nominate to join our Working Group to assist us with the delivery of the points of action outlined in the statement and to monitor and review of our progress towards ensuring EDII is considered throughout the BR-UK research timeline.

The Group developed the Terms of Reference (ToR) describing how the group would operate which was subsequently ratified by the BR-UK Leadership Team. The ToR noted that it would have a remit to review and appraise progress/action required to address the nine action points outlined in the position statement including:

- o Considering how we partner with wider science, policy and practice communities including various minoritised groups
- o Communicating our work and our findings in ways which are inclusive and broad ranging
- o Widening our expertise in science-related EDII issues & embed these in research practice
- o Providing advice and assistance to members of the Hub as and when needed
- o Bringing together learning from all parts of BR-UK.

The current members of the BR-UK Working Group are:
Co-Leads: Professor Ann Phoenix, Dr Sharon Cox, Ms Sancha Martin
Members: Dr Julze Alejandre, Dr Nia Coupe, Professor Oliver Escobar, Dr Laura McGowan, Professor Graham Moore, Dr Lesley Uttley, and Dr Lisa Zhang.

Outputs

EDII Statement
An initial EDII statement was initially created by Professors Sharon Cox and Ann Phoenix. The statement was designed to explain definitions, expected behaviours, set objectives and outcomes as they relate to EDII within BR-UK. The statement was then open to all in BR-UK to review, edit and provide comment on. This provided the opportunity for all members to shape the statement to provide a sense of ownership for this approach and an agreement of the terminology we proposed to adopt. [Read the full BR-UK EDII Statement]

Website Presence
We have dedicated a section of the BR-UK website to EDII. Whilst this remains under development, we have provided summaries of our approaches and recommendations, details of the members of the working group and the option to download all our EDII documents detailed below for reuse by others. This report will be published on the website.

General Guidance
We produced an (initially) internal guidance document designed to indicate areas to consider in general day to day activities and the potential ways to consider and address EDII issues and challenges as they arise. This document statedly clearly that BR-UK members have a number of responsibilities including:

- being familiar with the BR-UK expectation around EDII

- thinking proactively about barriers and challenges that make it difficult to implement EDII policies
- identifying actions that can be taken to apply EDII principles effectively and meaningfully
- identifying ways to appropriately evaluate outcomes and impact (such as identifying metrics for success).
- engaging with opportunities to maximise the impact of EDII and remove barriers to implementation.
- Reviewing and revising work plans to ensure EDII principles are incorporated in all aspects of our work – including research and operational activities – whether currently under way, in planning, or in dissemination of the completed work.
- Implement, revise and learn from successes and failures.
- Share learning with others both internally and externally.

The Group has also delivered direct support and guidance to research teams considering inclusive research. For example, we discussed EDII considerations related to the stakeholder consultation workshops being planned by our Capability Scoping Colleagues in addition to those leading Work Package Three and others. [Read the full EDII Guidance Documentation].

EDII Calendar
The BR-UK EDII Calendar summarises academic, public, religious and other holidays that may influence operational planning. Whilst we have made a best effort to confirm dates and identify dates of potential significance for team members, we cannot say that it captures everything exactly as it should be. We are confident that the list contains an informative list that can be consulted when planning meetings and events to avoid requests to travel or participate in meetings during times that may not be convenient to members or to plan support/provision of quiet spaces where possible. The Calendar has been added to the Edinburgh Research Archive and is available for others to download and reuse. Feedback from one user noted: "*This version looks fabulous, easy to implement and love the inclusion of the awareness months. I can't see anything to add.*" [To obtain a copy of the calendar, please email enquiries@br-uk.ac.uk to receive the latest version].

Communication Guidance
Everyone should feel empowered to challenge and avoid offensive terms, discrimination, and stereotypes. This applies to all communication formats and platforms. We have produced guidance on ways to adopt and use inclusive communication. Whilst the language around inclusivity is constantly evolving and there are valid limitations and critiques of different terms, we recognise the need to be open to correcting our language. When talking or writing about people, the guidance notes that the simple, important principles to adopt are:

- Always ask, never assume
- Write for context
- Write with care, kindness, and respect.
- In recognising that there is a broad range of information available and to encourage teams to review and reflect on alternative approaches, we also developed a list of additional reading for others to review and reference.

Getting to know our team

We asked team members to participate in an entirely voluntary survey to gain insights into the characteristics of our team. Team members could choose to answer some questions and not others as they wished.   Approximately 66% of the team in post at the time of the survey provided responses.

Location
BR-UK is a multi-institutional consortium which operates across Great Britain. The highest percentage of respondents to the survey were based in London (43%), closely followed by Scotland (17%). As the Hub is led by Edinburgh and UCL, these higher responses are expected. The remainder of the respondents were spread across South East England, Yorkshire & The Humber and the North West (10% in each area), 5% based in Northern Ireland, 2% in Wales and the remaining 2% preferred not to answer the question.

Position & Career Level
83% of respondents were directly funded by the award from ESRC and the remaining 17% funded through in-kind contributions. The majority of those who completed the survey predominately work within the academic/HEI sphere (80%), 14% within the business sector and 2% within government. 6% preferred not to say or noted that their career level was not described.

Within academic respondents, almost half are professors (48%), 14% were lecturers and 23% identified as early or mid-career researchers on a research contract. The percentage of early/mid-career team members is expected to rise in the next few months as recruitment of our remaining Research Fellow positions completes. The remaining respondents were evenly split across late career researchers, PhD students, professional services staff or did not answer the question

Personal Characteristics
The team is composed mostly of women with 33% of respondents describing their gender as male and 2% preferring not to say. BR-UK may benefit from the inclusion of additional genders within the team.

More than half of the team have no caring responsibilities and the remainder care for children or other relatives. 5% care for both children and relatives. Overall, this indicates that team members may need additional support to maintain their work/life balance at times and further consideration to ensure they have equitable opportunities for participation in events by minimising travel requirements (for example by focusing on hybrid meeting options) or ensuring a significant lead time is provided where travel is required.

The age range of the respondents indicates a broad spread between the age ranges of 16 to 65+ with a higher number within the 40-44 age bracket.

20% of the respondents to our survey have a disability or long-term health condition and 7% are neuro-divergent. This may mean some team members require additional time and support if they feel that their health conditions require it. Team members should be encouraged to discuss their support needs as much as they are comfortable doing so. They may speak in confidence to the Hub Manager at any time should specific additional support for wider BR-UK events and meetings be helpful.
We also surveyed the team to ask about sexual orientation. 76% of respondents identified as heterosexual, 17% identified in an even split across the categories of asexual, bisexual, gay man, lesbian/gay woman or queer and the remaining 7% preferred not to say.

Religion
Team members reported that they did not hold any religion or belief in the main, however 12% held Christian beliefs, 2% Hindu beliefs, 5% noted their religion or belief system was not listed

and the remainder preferred not to say.   Point of learning: Action on this question will include revising to include the option for non-practising choices.

Ethnicity
Whilst the team demographics indicate a range of answers in response to the question about how individuals would describe their ethnicity, the team has a high proportion of white team members at almost 80% (including those identifying as White – UK, White – Irish and White – ethnicity not listed.   The remaining self-described ethnicities were: Asian – ethnicity not listed; Asian – Indian; Black – Caribbean; Black – African; Multiple ethnicity/heritage; Ethnicity not listed; and preferred not to say.

Suggested amendment to this question: 5% of respondents noted that their ethnicity was not listed and the as such the survey choices will be extended to include the following options in future: White – American; Asian – Chinese; Asian – South East; European; Turkish; White – Canadian; White – Galician.

Disciplinary Background
We asked team members to describe their disciplinary background - the responses were transformed into a word cloud (below). Whilst this may not be relevant directly to individual equality, diversity, inclusion or intersectionality issues, it may provide insights into which disciplines require further diversity – although this is not a function or topic of research at this time. Unsurprisingly perhaps, there was a strong emphasis on understanding human behaviour with a focus on health. Responses did indicate that the interdisciplinary collaboration that we are striving for does exist with fields such as the built environment, health and philosophy mentioned in addition to others.

Learning from others

We acknowledge and reference the influence of the ACCESS Network's operational approaches and expectations as outlined in their Guiding Principles which include three main themes: Environmental Sustainability (ES), Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Knowledge Co-production (KCP). The team also highlighted the need to evaluate, reflect, learn and repeat. We have also reviewed and taken learning from the Flex Fund reflections report which summarised the learning of the team and helped to shape the approach that BR-UK has been developing for the management and distribution of the Commissioning Fund

later in 2025. This includes considering the option of a blinded application process, reiterating the need for a diverse peer review panel and ensuring that applicants have considered EDII aspects within their applications.

Additionally, we shared our documents externally with partners at CENTRE-UB to review. This approach helped to highlight any oversights and gaps identified. We are grateful to Dr Gerald Jordan for his time and consideration.   Dr Jordan highlighted a need to: emphasise equity over equality; include a bit more nuance in certain areas (i.e., disability); acknowledge wider systems of oppression; in addition to thinking about personal characteristics.

Sharing Our Learning

Internally

The team came together on January 22nd, 2025, to discuss the EDII approach proposed by the EDII leads and review the guidance that the working group have developed. This ensured that everyone would have a chance to hear directly from the EDII Working Group on the process of development, the value of including EDII considerations throughout the lifetime of a project and the expected behaviours and approaches that would/would not be acceptable within BR-UK. The meeting was recorded and made available for anyone who could not attend the meeting to review at a later date. The Hub Manager regularly reminds team members that they can suggest amendments or review of documentation at any time. The EDII working group has highlighted their availability to consult with team members on any EDII issues as needed.

As part of the BR-UK Capability Building initiatives, we asked BR-UK individuals about their needs related to public engagement and stakeholder involvement.   The results suggested that most of the respondents have some level of knowledge and training on the use of PESI in behavioural research. During this process, we identified a need to develop further support and training on how to consider and incorporate EDII considerations into public engagement and stakeholder involvement. We will be delivering internal training on this in the coming months and will share this training externally in 2026.

Externally

We have published all our existing documentation on the Edinburgh Research Archive where we have obtained digital object identifiers so that the documentation may be cited by others. The documents, with their relevant DOIs are also available from our website and anyone can download and re-use the content as is helpful to them. We will continue to update the documentation, as and when, changes are made.

On March 24th, 2025, BR-UK hosted an online webinar where speakers (Professor Ann Phoenix, Dr Julze Alejandre, Dr Niamh Hart, Sancha Martin and Dr Lesley Uttley) presented an overview of the importance of EDII, the informal results of a scoping review on the inclusion

of EDII within behavioural research projects, the importance of research culture and some practical considerations. 181 people registered for the webinar, 122 joined on the day with a maximum number of concurrent views of 85 individuals.

We asked attendees to rate the quality of speakers. All those who responded selected the option "presented and explained topics and ideas clearly and concisely and responses", felt that they had sufficient time to ask questions, and that webinar length was "about right". The free text feedback included the comments:

- *Knowledgeable, engaging, well-paced and articulated.*

- *Really enjoyed the variety of speakers, felt like just the right number for the length of time.*
- *Great speakers who clearly understood their objectives. Thank-you for a great event. Looking forward to more.*
- *Really good*
- *Excellent to Outstanding*
- *Some examples of good practice would have been good.*

Following the webinar, we shared links to the slides presented, the guidance document and to the case study with good practice that was shared. Additional examples would have been shared if there had been more time and more examples identified in the scoping review (see below). The recording of the webinar has been shared via two platforms: an ad-free platform hosted by the University of Edinburgh and on the BR-UK YouTube Channel. We have received a request for additional support for the webinars from participants who would like to include a British Sign Language interpreter. BR-UK did not include costings within its funding application to cover this support specifically unfortunately. We have investigated options within the platform that we use, and we have enabled closed captioning for participants but recognise that the translation can be variable depending on the speed and accent of the speaker. This is not a perfect solution and a point of learning in future would be for teams that plan to include webinars as part of their out-reach to include BSL interpretation costs where possible.

Scoping Review
Generating good quality, robust, and collective knowledge from behavioural research requires inclusion of diverse voices from various population groups. This can be achieved by meaningfully embedding the principles of equality, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality within the research design.

As part of efforts by our Work Package Four colleagues to study and understand approaches to public engagement and stakeholder involvement, Dr Julze Alejandre and Dr Niamh Hart have led work on a scoping review to assess the application of EII principles within the UK's behavioural research sector. The full details of the protocol and approach to this work are available from the BR-UK OSF site and the analyses is currently being written up.   Initial findings show that behavioural research still struggles with limited public representation and intersectionality, inconsistent engagement, and structural barriers to participation in research. This reaffirms the need to adopt an intentional approach and a methodological shift within behavioural research to embed EDII principles and report on successes/failures/challenges that relate to their inclusion.

Appendix: EDII Benchmarking Survey

All members of BR–UK are invited to participate in a voluntary survey to provide an insight into the current level of diversity within BR–UK's research team. The questions and options presented are shown below.

Please indicate your role as it relates to BR-UK *(List – single choice)*
A researcher (including co-investigator) funded directly by the BR-UK grant
A researcher funded directly by the BR-UK grant
Associated with BR-UK in a non-research capacity; not directly funded by the BR-UK grant
Associated with BR-UK in a research capacity but not funded directly by the grant
Role not described*
Working on BR-UK in a non-research capacity funded by the BR-UK grant

Which sector(s) do you predominantly work in at this time? *(List - multiple choices possible)*
Academia
Business/Industry
Government/Public Sector
Third Sector
Sector not listed
Prefer not to say

If you work in Academia, what is your career stage? *Please select the option which mostly closely matches your job grade, even if this is not your exact title.* *(List – single choice)*
Academic contract - Lecturer
Academic contract - Senior Lecturer
Academic contract - Reader / Associate Professor
Academic contract - Professor
Career stage not described above (please provide details)
Grant contract - Professional Services
Institutional contract - Professional Services
Prefer not to say
PhD Student
Research only contract - Early Career Researcher
Research only contract - Mid Career Researcher
Research only contract - Late Career Researcher

If you work in Government / Public sector - What is your career stage? *Please select the option which mostly closely matches your job grade, even if this is not your exact title.* *(List – single choice)*
Administrative Officer / Administrative Assistant
Executive Officer
Higher Executive Officer / Senior Executive Officer
Civil Service Grades 6 and 7
Senior Civil Service Grades 1 to 4
Career stage not described
Prefer not to say

For all other sectors (i.e., not Academia/Government/Public sector) or those working in multiple sectors, how would you describe your career stage? *(List – single choice)*
Early careers researcher
Mid-level (senior associate)
Senior Consultant
Senior manager

Please describe your disciplinary background (Free Text)

Where is your job geographically based? if you currently/mostly work from home, where is your institution primarily located? *(List – single choice)*
London
North West England
Northern Ireland
Prefer not to say
Scotland
South East England
Wales
Yorkshire & The Humber

How do you describe your gender? *(List – single choice)*
Woman
Prefer not to say
Man

Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were originally assigned at birth? *(List – single choice)*
No
Prefer not to say
Yes

What is your age? *(List – single choice)*
16-24
25-29
30-34
35-39
40-44
45-49
50-54
55-59
60-64
65+
Prefer not to say

How do you describe your ethnicity?
(List – single choice)
Asian - Ethnicity not listed*
Asian - Indian
Black - African
Black - Caribbean
Ethnicity not listed*
Multiple ethnicities/heritages
Prefer not to say
White - Ethnicity not listed*
White - Irish
White - UK (British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish)

How do you describe your sexual orientation?
(List – single choice)
Asexual
Bisexual
Gay man
Heterosexual
Lesbian / Gay woman
Prefer not to say
Queer

What is your religion or belief?
(List – single choice)
Christian
Hindu
None
Other not listed*
Prefer not to say

Do you consider yourself to have a disability and/or long-term health condition?
(List – single choice)
No
Prefer not to say
Yes

Do you consider yourself to be neurodiverse?
For example, are you autistic, have dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD etc.
(List – single choice)
No
Prefer not to say
Yes

/continues overleaf

Do you have caring responsibilities?
(List - multiple choices possible)
Children
None
Partner
Prefer not to say
Relatives
Multiple: Children + other relatives

What is the highest level of qualifications achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) by the time you were 18?
(List – single choice)
Bachelor (or similar) degree level qualification
No formal qualifications
Postgraduate qualification
Prefer not to say
Qualification(s) below degree level

Are there any other factors relevant to your opportunities or inclusion not addressed in the previous question that you would like to tell us about?
(Free Text)