

## EDI Forum – Chair’s Report

26 June 2023

### New College Management structure

Since the membership of the new People and Culture Committee (PCC), chaired by the President, largely duplicates the current membership of the EDI-SG, it is proposed to transform this to a new EDI Advisory Group (EDI AG). This proposal will be discussed at the PCC on 06 July 2023.

Membership will be drawn from across the College. It is envisaged that the EDI AG will have time to delve into some of the complex issues that arise in the EDI space. The group, composed largely of people who have interest and involvement in EDI work, would be able to develop discussion papers and recommendations that could be presented to the PCC for further deliberation and decision-making (or strong recommendation to UMB).

Within this new framework, the EDI Forum will continue as before. It retains its important function as a ‘listening post’ and a place for exchange of good practice. Issues and ideas raised by the Forum would likely pass first to the EDI-AG for consideration before being relayed to the PCC.

### PCC meeting (06 July 2023) – EDI issues to be discussed

- Briefing on Imperial’s relationship with Stonewall. This briefing aims to keep the senior leadership team abreast of events in the public domain and the HE sector that may impact the College’s relationship with Stonewall. It also addresses issues, raised at the last EDI Forum (and discussed within the Stonewall Action Committee), of how to ensure that the language we use in describing our approach to a range of EDI issues strikes the right balance between our duties to freedom of speech and promoting our EDI ambitions.
- Conference policy review. The College’s conference policy, which aims to promote safe and inclusive planning of conferences, workshops, and other events, is overdue for a review. A number of tweaks have been proposed to clarify the aims of the policy, and emphasise the principles of proportionality and feasibility. We aim to give the policy more prominence in future.

### Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill 2023

*Thanks to Jack Williams (EDIC) for preparing an initial draft of this summary*

The [Higher Education \(Freedom of Speech\) Act](#) became law on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The act places responsibility on higher education institutions, as well as student unions and the Office for Students, to protect freedom of speech within HE settings. There are two main ways that this responsibility is described in the act:

- The use of premises cannot be denied to an individual or body based on their ideas, opinions, policy, or objectives. This may encourage some groups to invite speakers who have expressed controversial views, since they may claim protection from the act. Conversely, there may be more caution around invitations to controversial speakers if event organisers are concerned about the risk of claims for redress, should the event not go ahead.
- Universities must also ensure that teaching staff have the academic freedom to question thinking or put forward controversial opinions without fear of losing their job or future career opportunities. This may impact disciplinary procedures and could lead to conflict between academic staff and students, if for example, students strongly disagree with beliefs expressed by staff members.

The bill provides for the appointment by the Office for Student of a Director of Freedom of Speech. Arif Ahmed, a Cambridge philosophy professor was [appointed to this position](#) on 01 June 2023. According to a Guardian report, Ahmed has said of the new legislation that:

*as well as no-platforming external speakers, other potential breaches of the new law could be institutions enforcing “ideological” anti-bias training, whether for staff or students, and disciplining academics for what they say on social media.*

## **New EDI Strategy**

*Thanks to Susan Littleson (Deputy Director, ODI) for a very substantial contribution to the words and thoughts presented here*

Imperial’s 2018 EDI Strategy articulated why EDI is important to the College’s success as a high-calibre university and set out seven main commitments (accompanied by an extensive action plan). These commitments were to:

- integrate EDI into all management processes
- integrate EDI into the student experience
- take positive action to improve the opportunities and experiences of under- represented groups, especially women, and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic, LGBTQ+ and disabled staff and students
- reduce the incidence of bullying & harassment
- gather & publish data to monitor our progress
- collaborate internally & externally to develop good practice
- be open to dialogue & challenge on our work on EDI

Most of the items in the Strategy have been delivered, thanks to the efforts of a great many people across Imperial. Some high-level examples are given below (along with other closely related developments in recent years):

- Reorganised committee structures (EDI-SG and EDI-Forum created), providing representation and high-level engagement and oversight. This will be continued through the PCC, EDI Advisory Group and the expanded EDI Forum.
- Race Equality Charter (achieved Bronze award for first time in 2021)
- Athena SWAN Awards (renewed silver in 2022; all but one dept now also has an award)
- Sexual Harassment working group (leading to Report and Support online tool and Sexual Misconduct Policy)
- Stonewall Action Committee and Action plan established
- Re-vamp of the Disability Action Committee and action plan
- Women at Imperial week campaigns
- Conference policy
- Provision of Toilets policy
- Free period products
- Declarations policy (including statements on Antisemitism and Islamophobia)
- EDI training such as Inclusive Leadership sessions for senior leaders, and Active Bystander training
- People management skills sessions
- Work on recruitment including workshops, dashboards, gender de-coding tool, Know your Pool approach.
- Work on Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gaps, including dashboards
- Reverse Mentoring programme
- Family friendly benchmarking and improvements
- Positive Action Programmes such as Impact and Calibre.
- EDI seed fund
- Imperial Together Action Group

- History and Legacy Group
- Research Culture Toolkit

This list shows inputs delivered, rather than outcomes, which are more difficult to determine. However, outcomes are being tracked through various routes, *e.g.* monitoring of the Athena Swan and REC action trackers, regular reviews within relevant committees.

EDI work now has greater prominence at the College and is being more fully integrated into 'normal operations' For example, EDI considerations were already threaded through the Learning and Teaching Strategy (and will continue to be), and the recently announced Communications and Enabling strategies both have core commitments to diversity and inclusion. These are positive steps, even if we know that on many fronts, we still have some distance to travel.

Having launched a slew of new initiatives since 2017, the College is now in a very different place with regard to EDI. Arguably, we are entering a period of consolidation and integration. Our ambition should be undimmed – I think the seven broad commitments of the present EDI strategy should be retained – but the task before us, as we look to construct the next strategy, is to ensure that more and more EDI work becomes 'business as usual' and that we find ways to progress *faster*.

Having reflected on the work that has been done across the College in the past six years, I want to offer a view – very much informed by discussions with Susan Littleson and others – on what the underlying principles and priority areas of the next EDI strategy should be. These will be developed into more detail (and an action plan) on further consultation, and finalised under the leadership of the next AP(EDI) who will have a key role in ensuring delivery.

In terms of underlying principles, the next EDI strategy should aim:

- To remain ambitious in our EDI endeavours. We need to continue to raise awareness of the case for promoting EDI, internally and externally, and to share our vision that our work in this domain is essential to bolstering Imperial's future as a successful institution of research and learning that is committed to changing the world for the better
- To accelerate progress. On a number of key indicators (*e.g.*, staff demographics), Imperial is moving in the right direction (*e.g.*, the percentage of female professors has increased from 14% to 19% since 2014), but the rate of change remains slow. We should keep targets under regular review and seek to maximise opportunities to tackle the root causes of under-representation.
- To integrate our approach to EDI. This will entail not just bringing our various action plans into better alignment to ensure that we have a coherent view across the piece of the challenges we face, but also to continue the work we have been doing to ensure that EDI is woven into the fabric of the institution and is increasingly seen as a shared responsibility.
- To recognise the value and importance of prevention of inequitable treatment. Although we have made substantial efforts in recent years to bolster our mechanisms of redress, further work is needed to boost confidence in these systems (*e.g.*, Report & Support). A greater focus on prevention, through leadership, training, and the setting of expectations, will enhance the inclusiveness of the university.

Building on these principles, key areas of activity should be:

- To support the continued devolution of responsibility for EDI across the organisation – through awareness-raising and training of line managers. Enhanced people-management skills are crucial for building a culture and environment where people of all backgrounds and protected characteristics can thrive. This is also important to ensure we progress to the point where EDI considerations are fully embedded in university operations.

- To build a user-friendly EDI data infrastructure to support all academic and professional departments in delivering on their local EDI ambitions. Such an infrastructure will also help Imperial to be more transparent about the outcomes of its EDI work.
- To build confidence in the robustness of our approach to tackling bullying and harassment, which disproportionately affect staff and students from under-represented backgrounds. We have taken good steps forward with the implementation of Report & Support and new policy developments, but anecdotally there remains a sense that power imbalances still too often stymie reporting and protect perpetrators.
- To continue to use our primary external benchmarking schemes (Athena Swan, Race Equality Charter (REC), Disability Confident, Stonewall Workplace Equality Index) to stress-test our support for women, minority ethnic people, disabled staff and student and the LGBTQ+ community. However, these schemes operate at different levels of rigour and demand, and we should seek to put our action planning for disabled and LGBTQ+ staff and students on an equally visible, robust, and SMART footing with the level required by Athena Swan and REC.
- To ensure that EDI work is properly resourced. Funding of EDI work has expanded at departmental and College levels in recent years, and proper resourcing has been a key question in the formulation of Athena Swan and REC action planning. Nevertheless, pinch points still occasionally appear and will require monitoring (*e.g.*, more sustainable support for successful EDI Seed Fund projects, more tangible recognition for EDI activities that still rely on volunteer work).
- To improve the way that we communicate Imperial's EDI work. This refers firstly to care with language so that we can more clearly articulate how our EDI ambitions are balanced alongside our commitments to freedom of speech and academic freedoms. Secondly, it refers to the need to work harder to keep our community informed of the many and various strands of EDI activity. These are an important part of reassuring our community that we remain open to challenge and dialogue in delivering our EDI goals.

#### Operational and other points

- EDI Action plan should identify an achievable set of priorities, clear ownership for items, and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound objectives) supported by an infrastructure of discrete projects to deliver aims.
- Regular and informed oversight by the People and Culture Committee
- Close cooperation between the Associate Provost (EDI) and College functions that have a key role in the operational delivery of new policies and practices, most notably Organisational Development and Inclusion (HR) and the Education team.
- Sharpening and enhancement of the Athena Swan action plan through adoption of key recommendations from the 'What Women Need to Progress in Academia' scoping report.
- EDI strategy should support and inform EDI ambitions in our academic mission, in the three pillars of Research and Enterprise; Education and Student Experience; and Societal and Global Engagement.
- Consider a shift from 'equality' to 'equity', which is a concept more focused on addressing structural barriers to equality.

*Prof Stephen Curry*

*Associate Provost (EDI)*

*19 June 2023*