

Equality,
Diversity &
Inclusion
Engagement
Fellowship
Pilot

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AHRC
Funding
Scheme
Report
2020—
2022

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Diversity &
Inclusion
Engagement
Fellowship
Pilot

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Funding
Scheme
Report
2020—
2022

Dr Manuella Blackburn
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Executive summary

1

This report provides an assessment and commentary on the AHRC's 2020–22 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Engagement Fellowship (EDIEF) pilot observing the successes, challenges, and benefits of its existence during its first iteration. The report aims to support subsequent rounds of EDIEF funding by highlighting lessons learned from the application process and the awarded projects so that improvements can be made to future calls.

The need to diversify the researcher community in AHRC disciplines is well-evidenced, particularly on race, disability, and gender. This provides clear rationales for targeted positive action such as the EDIEF pilot scheme. The AHRC's efforts to launch the EDIEF are commendable for their innovation and ambition, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Feedback from award holders on their experiences of the EDIEF pilot identifies specific areas for enhancement in the running of the fellowship, as well as policy and procedural suggestions to enhance EDI in AHRC funding schemes more broadly. Some of the recommendations could be easily adopted to mitigate or eliminate inequalities, whilst others reflect broader and systemic inequalities, which may take longer to change.

The research for this report sought out and engaged a variety of stakeholders including applicants, award holders, research assistants, project partners and AHRC colleagues, to comment on the processes the AHRC has for welcoming applications, reviewing proposals, awarding funding and project delivery support. These voices (many of which are from underrepresented groups and have EDI expertise either professionally or through lived experience) have contributed to the below recommendations so that the EDIEF pilot can evolve effectively and support mainstreaming of innovations in other AHRC activities.

The report recognises the EDIEF's position as part of the strategic roadmap in meeting the aims and objectives listed within the AHRC's EDI Statement and action plan (released 29th April 2021). It is important to consider the relationship of the EDIEF pilot call to the overarching mission of the AHRC to:

- “Position itself as a leading voice for EDI in the arts and humanities.”
- “Achieve greater representation of racial and ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities in arts and humanities research.”
- “Offer and advocate support for arts and humanities researchers from racial and ethnic minorities and with disabilities through the various stages of their research careers.”

- Understand and address “the lack of representation from Black and Minority Ethnic researchers and researchers with disabilities among our award holders.”
- “Address barriers to equality and diversity in arts and humanities research and encourage the development of programme content to enhance the diversity of its component disciplines.”

This report, in part, observes the extent to which the EDIEF pilot contributes to fulfilling and achieving these goals set out by the AHRC, while the recommendations included in this report provide a means to better realising the above mission.

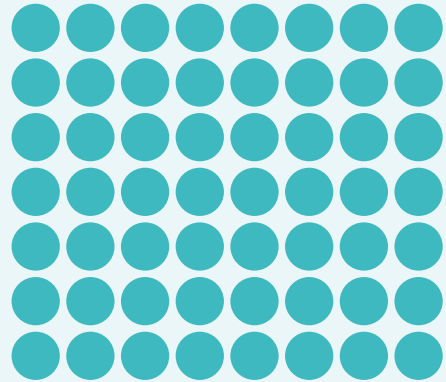
Pilots, by their very nature, require refining with the intention of establishing optimised versions. This pilot was no exception, and this report explores the EDI issues associated with this call to ensure future provision can mitigate against any disadvantage to individuals or groups who were unable to apply in this round. Time has been taken to observe the barriers and hesitations associated with responding to a call, specifically focusing on EDI, and the report documents the full effect of offering funding where PI costs are ineligible. The timing of this call and support issues for award holders are further headline features of this pilot that, with tweaking, can inhibit exacerbation of further EDI issues for those already marginalised or unrepresented in the landscape of funding for academic research.

« Time has been taken to observe the barriers and hesitations associated with responding to a call, specifically focusing on EDI, and the report documents the full effect of offering funding where PI costs are ineligible »

Statistics on applications

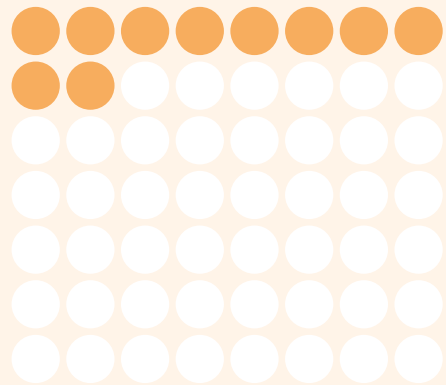
Number of applications

56



Successful applications

10



Applicants who declared disability

EDIEF pilot call
(56 applicants)

Standard research
grant scheme 20/21
(566 applicants)

4%

16%

Statistics on applications

Ethnicity

EDIEF pilot call (56 applicants)

63% White

14% Asian

9% Black

5% mixed

9% undisclosed

Standard research grant scheme 20/21 (566 applicants)

80% White

4% Asian

1% Black

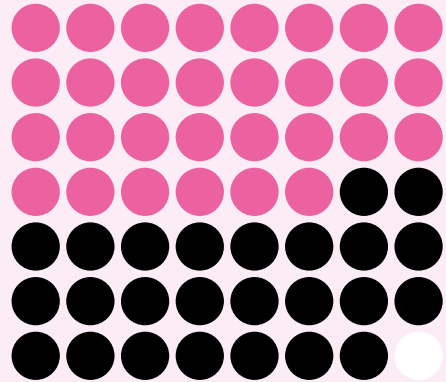
4% mixed

5% undisclosed

Statistics on applications

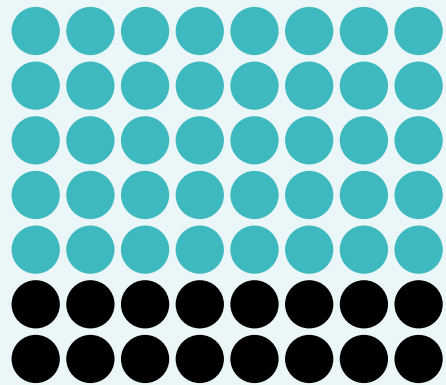
Gender of applicants

30 female
25 male
1 undisclosed



Application record to AHRC

40 repeat
applicants
16 first time
applicants



« 28% of applicants to the EDIEF pilot were of Asian, Black or mixed ethnicity. Only 9% of applicants to the standard research grant scheme were from a minoritised ethnicity »

Statistics on applications

EDI categories explored within the applications

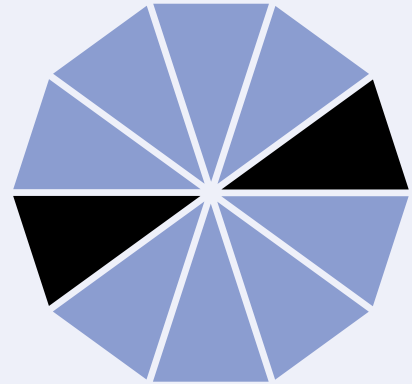
27% race	2% academic engagement
15% disability	2% colonial history
12% diversity	2% decolonisation
7% LGBTQ+	2% film technology
5% age	2% intersectionality
4% gender	2% refugees
4% inclusive practice	2% religion
4% museums and archives	2% spaces
4% socio economic status	2% user experience design

The main theme of each proposal was extracted from the application, however it is recognised that many projects explored multiple intersecting themes, so this data provides only an indication of topics explored without this intersectional profile on display.

Statistics on funded projects

Gender of award holders

8 female
2 male



Application record to AHRC

8 repeat
applicants
2 first time
applicants



EDI categories explored within the funded projects

40% race

10% gender

20% disability

10% inclusive practices

10% diversity

10% LGBTQ+

Statistics on funded projects

AHRC investment for individual projects

Overcoming Sonic Stalemates: representing cultural diversity in sample packs	£46,090
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Fast Forward, Women in Photography, putting ourselves in the picture	£100,429
---	----------

The Beat of Our Hearts— staging new histories of LGBTQIA+ loneliness	£100,134
---	----------

EDI in Scottish Heritage	£99,142
-----------------------------	---------

Creative Approaches to Race and In/security in the Caribbean and in the UK (CARICUK)	£100,779
---	----------

Race and Reviewing in the UK— The Ledbury Poetry Critics	£100,529
---	----------

CVI and ART, (CVIART)— Sensing things differently	£64,487
--	---------

Social Artists For Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (SAFEDI)	£100,609
---	----------

Freedom in the City: Festival of Learning	£96,998
--	---------

Inclusive Description for Equality and Access (IDEA)	£100,668
---	----------

Total investment	£909,865
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Recommendations

2

Recommendations for future EDIEF calls

- 1 Continue to offer the EDIEF call so that impact-focused EDI work continues to be funded.** This ongoing support will sustain enquiry and engagement across a variety of EDI-related areas. Consider the ways this call can be optimised to engage diverse communities, broaden research areas and engage, sustain and retain diverse researchers in the academy.
- 2 Establish a parallel EDI-related call that funds primary research. Funding primary research could engage more diverse researchers and research areas thereby broadening the research base within AHRC disciplines.** Participants highlighted the need to fund both primary research as well as impact and engagement as targeted in the EDIEF pilot. Participants highlighted the high esteem that AHRC funding has but that the scope and availability of its funding were limited and harder to access for minoritised researchers. Primary research requires a longer funded period than impact-focused funding and this needs to be factored into any new scheme. Addressing this directly through the funding call may support the retention and progression of minority researchers and widen the academic research undertaken. This would provide immediate redress to current underrepresentation in funding whilst allowing for systemic changes to be made to mainstream funding calls. A future call allowing researchers to initiate primary research specifically in EDI will foster a broader research profile and will not marginalise those who have yet to build research track records or those without fully established partnerships (see **Funding EDI-focused primary research**, page 158).
- 3 Ensure the lived experiences of minoritised and intersectionally minoritised people are included in the conceptualisation, development and marketing of the call so that research and the researcher community can draw on the broadest range of perspectives and thereby reflect the communities more fully.** This draws on the equality slogan 'Nothing About Us Without Us' and the idea that 'research begets further research'. Delivering this requires consideration and reflection, balancing the need to draw on both expertise and to reflect diversity in the researcher community. The EDIEF call (and other funding schemes) should remind applicants about the centrality of lived experience when exploring EDI work. The review panels should be tasked with identifying the lived experience within applications, whether that be in the form of the PI, Co-Is, RAs, project partners, consultants, and advisory boards, where relevant, to ensure the blend of voices and experience is more impactful (see **Acknowledging lived experience**, page 153).

4 Introduce an Expression of Interest (Eoi) model for applications to reduce application hesitancy around Je-S submissions.

Consider the lessons learned from the COVID Research and Recovery call where expression of interest (Eoi), 'light-touch' applications were used in rapid response mode funding, with Je-S submissions only required for selected applications. Formalising this model could remove the barrier of the over-burdensome application process in thematic calls or where timelines are short. Further, consider establishing a smaller grants Eoi form for smaller awards under £100K, since the Je-S application system creates a disproportionate administrative burden on the PI and submitting institution, which may disincentivise applicants. Differentiate the model based on the size of the grant (see *The Je-S application system*, page 95 and *Hesitance*, page 97).

5 Include salary and costs for the Principal Investigator (PI) in future EDIEF calls.

Multiple issues were identified by respondents due to the ineligibility of costing PI time at the application stage. While the ineligibility of PI time in the costing suggests that their role is not time-consuming, this does not correspond to the real demands of the role and renders the scheme unattractive for individuals and institutions who have to find the resource for this time. Beyond this, the lack of PI funding failed to consider the precariousness of some employment contracts for the PIs, required cross-subsidy between projects by different funders and fostered a hierarchy of perception between funding bodies and calls (see *PI buyout*, page 87).

6 Include research assistant (RA) mentoring time as an eligible cost for PIs within future calls.

Significant PI time was directed at mentoring for RAs since the professional development of junior colleagues was a required key impact of the EDIEF. Include at least a fractional or minimum time allowance, around 0.1 FTE (equivalent to half a day a week) to ensure the professional development of the RA(s) is not compromised and to mitigate against any negative impact on the PI in providing their time (see *The PI role*, page 124).

7 Provide sufficient time for project partner input at the application stage.

Longer call periods for submitting applications are needed to facilitate meaningful co-creation of project proposals that are shaped in a way that benefit both the project and partner(s). Longer call periods of at least 5–6 months will provide more realistic timeframes for soliciting letters of support from external organisations (see *Application deadline*, page 108).

- 8 Provide timelines that include sufficient time to recruit RAs and other project staff.** The notification of award needs to consider standard university protocol for recruitment allowing 4 months (minimum) before a project commences after the notification of award. This timeline not only enables institutions to complete advertisement and recruitment processes, but more importantly, given the nature of the call, ensures equality of opportunity in recruitment (see **Naming and selecting research assistants**, page 103).
- 9 Ensure parity of esteem between the EDIEF award and other AHRC awards to avoid perceptions of hierarchy in award quality or prestige.** Participants noted that AHRC awards were highly regarded by colleagues and the researcher community. However, differences between EDIEF and other AHRC funding schemes were observed, such as the absence of PI costings, the relatively smaller size of the funding and the absence of ongoing fellowship support, left awardees and institutional colleagues with a perception that the EDIEF may have been a ‘fig leaf’ or ‘after thought’ to address identified inequalities in mainstream funding. These perceptions may deter future prospective applicants and challenge an otherwise effective longer-term AHRC strategy to develop and redress inequalities in funding (see **The call**, page 82).
- 10 Publish guidance on any new or non-standard attachments required at the application stage.** EDIEF applications required a new ‘Head of Department EDI statement’ attachment in addition to the full Je-S application and standard attachments. Guidance on this new attachment would ensure that institutions are fully aware of what an EDI statement requires to convey the level of commitment to EDI working in this award. Further to this, consider the rationale for including the HoD EDI statement and how requiring institutional backing could (in some cases) create trust issues that are not present in standard mode funding call applications regarding the merit of the researcher, or the research area being pursued (see **Special attachments**, page 101).
- 11 State and define how reasonable adjustments and special circumstances are considered and handled for PIs and RAs carrying out the funding award.** Decide and formally document whose responsibility this should be (institutional or funding body) to bring clarity to the situation where and when it is needed (see **Award duration**, page 92).

12 Establish accessibility requirements regarding the creation of outputs from award holders to ensure that all outputs are fully accessible from the start and encourage accessibility to be given appropriate consideration in the application process. Provide exemplars of good practice (for institutions and academics) with accessible media forms, text-based outputs and integrate costs for achieving this requirement within the application process and secured funding (see recommendations on resource development, page 27 and Acknowledging lived experience, page 153).

Recommendations for improving the EDIEF award holder experience:

13 Define the term ‘fellowship’ and provide clarity about what a fellowship call is offering to its respondents. Fellowship has different meanings in the academy and there was confusion about what was included in the EDIEF. Consider offering a definition for fellowships where conditions and provision are offered uniformly across the AHRC’s portfolio of funding to ensure equality across awards (see Fellowship, page 138).

14 Provide and appoint a programme director for the EDIEF. The EDIEF operated without a programme director (previously referred to as ‘theme leader’) in place, which resulted in a lack of fellowship and networking opportunities for award holders. Appointing a programme director (a common feature within other AHRC thematic calls) prior to the commencement of the award will ensure an organisational support system is in place for the duration of the thematic working. The programme director’s responsibilities would extend to fostering a network of researchers, enabling fellowship, sharing and communication across project working and coordinating joint dissemination and impact work, with a brief to create a legacy for the call. A programme director position for the EDIEF (and in other AHRC fellowship schemes) would negate the ‘fund and forget’ perception where awardees work in relative isolation once the funding is devolved to the institution (see Fellowship, page 138).

15 Provide a dedicated support service for EDIEF activity. This may include resources, toolkits, support services and/or remain entirely within the remit of the programme director for the EDIEF. Given the range of projects and project-related issues (including anti-racist project work, trans inclusivity, practical resources for disability inclusivity, developing and delivering intersectionality in projects, age inclusivity for online working, delivering effectively online and in blended formats for projects, engaging with internationalisation, neurodiversity in project delivery, managing burnout and the emotional burden of EDI research) expert EDI support could catalyse the effectiveness of the EDIEF and mitigate against the risks of undertaking EDI-related activity. This support would safeguard the researchers against potential negative impact and provide intelligence to the AHRC when they arise rather than in post-award evaluation. Clarity in responsibility will demonstrate AHRC leadership and commitment to the researchers working in potentially contested areas (see **Fellowship**, page 138).

16 Consider updating the award terms and conditions at the award acceptance stage to explicitly state how AHRC funds are to be used by the institution. Institutions differed in their handling of EDIEF funds, in some cases to the detriment of EDIEF projects. Terms and conditions clarification would negate institutional differences in managing finances where costed time, salaries and directly allocated costs are channelled away from the award for different purposes (see **Finances**, page 123).

17 Adopt safety net and interim funding provisions for PIs and projects where maternity, paternity, parental/caring or sick leave impacts upon award holding so that RA positions are protected. In the landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants experienced actual hardships due to COVID-19, caring and parenting responsibilities and restrictive funding for parenting leave. As an EDI-related funding call, the EDIEF needs to embed EDI best practice. Providing more robust guidance and measures for thematic award holding would ensure that individuals are not unfairly affected by AHRC spend pressures in these situations (see **Logistics and timeframes**, page 119).

18 Commission further reporting activity to explore the RA experience with the intention of gaining insight into better support, training and professional development requirements of junior staff within AHRC funded projects. Gathering perspectives of the challenges or benefits of undertaking AHRC RA work may help refine the experience for future funding calls and support future RA management. Undertaking this work will address the RAs as underexplored voices not prevalent in funding body discussions. From this research into the EDIEF pilot scheme, it was observed that provision for training, research time and professional development would add value and incentive to the AHRC RA experience (see **Research assistants**, page 140).

Recommendations to support the AHRC in fostering a more inclusive research environment

19 Appoint a Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within the AHRC to replace the role that was lost part way through the EDIEF pilot year. While the mission to make EDI everyone's responsibility across the AHRC as an organisation is admirable, the journey to reach this goal is incomplete and not yet fully established. To effectively meet the targets of the AHRC EDI action plan, and to scaffold support for a funding scheme focused on EDI work, a dedicated role in this area remains essential. Mainstreaming EDI work enables an organisation to make EDI the responsibility of all staff. However, where the practices of the organisation need to be developed to make the outcomes delivered more inclusive, mainstreaming may pose a risk by removing expertise (through the absence of an expert lead) within the AHRC delivery team who is accountable for the development and operationalisation of practice that can shape organisational culture and processes. Respondents to the research project highlighted that the dedicated EDI expertise available at the start was not consistently available throughout the project and that the need for a dedicated role will help to enhance future calls, the awarding process, the support package and management of the scheme. It will also enable better recording and recommendations for internal EDI policy and practice management for the AHRC (see **Support gaps**, page 136).

20 Aspire to achieve mainstream funding schemes that reflect and capture the diversity within the applicant pool. Feedback from participants highlighted the poor diversity representation of AHRC funding recipients and the systemic failure to engage with minoritised researchers and the broader community, particularly on race. While the prestige and esteem of AHRC funding were not doubted by any respondent, concern was raised over systemic issues which were believed to result in bias against minoritised groups, which may be due to the research/discipline biases, non-traditional career pathways of minoritised researchers, and precarious contracts that are disproportionately held by researchers from minoritised communities. It was recognised that the EDIEF may provide learning and recommendations that could help the AHRC to redress inequalities. To realise this, there needs to be a conscious and intentional focus on capturing, translating and mainstreaming learnings from the EDIEF into all AHRC funding calls, with clear multi-year diversity targets for awardees, the peer review college, engaging EDI expertise and building EDI consideration into the design, promotion and selection of recipients (see *Increasing diversity within the applicant pool*, page 150).

21 Ensure that funding calls (including the EDIEF) consider broader EDI impacts and that appropriate mitigations are made. The EDIEF pilot call was released during the pandemic when there was limited support available for carers, especially over the summer holidays. Exacerbated by the heavy burden of the standard Je-S submission, due consideration of mitigation options needs to be made and acted upon. This includes allowing for a longer time to prepare submissions (beyond 4 months), opting for less onerous submissions forms and drawing in EDI expertise in the design phases of preparing the funding call (see *Timing of the call*, page 82, *Applying in the time of COVID-19*, page 107 and *Application deadline*, page 108).

« There needs to be a conscious and intentional focus on capturing, translating and mainstreaming learnings from the EDIEF into all AHRC funding calls »

22 Establish equity procedures within the review stage to value, embrace and engage with applicants who have unconventional, atypical routes, career trajectories and track records in entering research.

To do this effectively, this EDIEF review panel needs assessment criteria and guidance that recognises and values the differences in career pathways into research so that the AHRC can access the broadest range of researchers and research activities within the disciplines. To mitigate against the risks of homophily, the AHRC needs to ensure review panels and peer-review college members reflect the targeted diversity rather than the established research community. Additionally, EDI expertise is needed to advise, participate, and moderate the design, selection, and delivery phases of a call, and ensure appropriate EDI and related good practice training is available to all participants, including measures of inclusive research excellence. The AHRC is commended for the efforts undertaken in seeking to diversify the review panel for the EDIEF pilot which was recognised as good practice (see *Hesitance*, page 97).

23 Recruit a pool of project partner representatives to feature on review panels for the EDIEF scheme and other funding calls that focus on impact.

These individuals could be approached based on their experience of AHRC funding via their project partner roles. Including this perspective on review panels would further diversify the panel membership and would ensure the project partner's voice is included and reflected in the decision making. Their time would need to be remunerated (see *Project partners*, page 143).

24 Develop an equity statement regarding research methods and research outputs to give confidence to practice-researchers that funding proposals integrating creative methods and outputs will be fairly assessed, considered, and not dismissed.

Respect that "there is no one definitive way of knowing: we gain truly rounded knowledge of a subject from multiple perspectives." (Bulley, J., Sahin, Ö., *What is Practice Research?* 2021, page 6). Ensure this statement reaches all parts of the funding ecosystem (funding body individuals, review panels, institutions, research offices and researchers) to ensure practice-research is cultivated appropriately within applications from an early stage (see *Hesitance*, page 97).

- 25 Offer training for panel reviewers about how to assess proposals that focus on or integrate practice-research.** Continue to work with the Practice Research Advisory Board (PRAG) with the ambition of developing guidance for institutions and applicants about preparing research applications where practice-research is the focus or forms an integral component of the project. These actions will ensure that practice is not dismissed or further marginalised (see *Hesitance*, page 97).
- 26 Review and mitigate the need and impact of budget restrictions imposed by short deadlines (spend pressure) that particularly affect thematic calls (including the EDIEF).** In designing thematic calls, which by their nature are shorter, consideration of the funding period and the timelines to submit or respond to calls needs to reflect on the impact that these restrictions may have on prospective applicants from marginalised groups or with other equality related circumstances, such as a disability or caring responsibilities. These factors may adversely affect both the ability to make an application or perceptions of prospective applicants' ability or capability to participate due to their circumstances (see *Timing of the call*, page 83).
- 27 Clarify the strategy and position of the EDIEF in future calls more transparently to communicate the intention of achieving greater diversity within the applicant base as a long-term goal.** The EDIEF pilot delivered on increasing diversity in the applicant pool for this call, however achieving this in the mainstream, such as the AHRC standard route research grants and other AHRC calls is a long-term goal on the roadmap to improving the diversity of applicants it attracts, which currently remains unaccomplished. To overcome the view of the siloed EDIEF scheme, work must continue in reflecting and capturing the diversity within the applicant pool via the learning from the EDIEF (and other strategies articulated in the AHRC EDI action plan) (see *Attractiveness of the call*, page 85).
- 28 Capture the diversity of all people involved in the funding application process (funding body individuals, applicants, review panels, advisory board members) in more detail to include aspects not currently available.** Data is key to supporting the AHRC to understand the diversity of the different stakeholders involved in the project (AHRC staff, EDIEF applicants, peer reviewers). However, diversity in the academy extends beyond the legally protected characteristics, including contract types (permanent, fixed term, etc.), career stage, previous applications to AHRC, geography, socio-economic background, and seniority. Monitoring provides baseline data and would enable specific targets to be set for ensuring that the calls reflect diversity and the priorities set out by the AHRC (see *Statistics on funded projects*, page 15).

Recommendations for AHRC resource development and use

- 29** Develop clear accessibility standards for text and media production ensuring media formats and information is available in a readable format for individuals with disabilities, for example, videos that are captioned, use BSL, have audio description and audio transcription. Resources on accessibility will inform AHRC applicants and award holders about accessibility standards, which need to be adhered to as a condition of funding. Whatever the level of expectation regarding accessibility, the AHRC needs to provide clear guidance to prospective applicants so that this can be factored into the design, budgeting, and planning of applications (see **Acknowledging lived experience**, page 153).
- 30** Develop a resource on good practice in impact-focused EDI work, drawing upon the review panel feedback document (**Appendix 4: Consolidated Panel feedback for EDI Engagement Fellowships scheme—general observations**). This will support future EDIEF applicants or those applying to other AHRC schemes such as Follow-on Funding, where impact features strongly. Draw upon the existing knowledge and body of work produced by the first cohort of EDIEF projects to develop a co-created resource as a means of strengthening the information and guidance available for future applicants (see **Review panel feedback**, page 113).
- 31** Signpost applicants and award holders to existing resources on inclusive and ethical recruitment of artists in commission work. Commissioned artists featured within at least 50% of the funded EDIEF projects. Guiding the labour of commissioning via existing resources such as Axis' 'Commissioning guidelines' (developed through the Social Art For Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI) AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship between Social Art Network, Axis, Manchester Metropolitan University School of Art). This resource documents ethical artist recruitment, promoting good practice in the recruitment of artists in future funded project work (see **Engagement activities and impact**, page 132).

Continuing EDIEF good practice

The delivery of the EDIEF pilot has not only facilitated innovation but also role-modelled some good practices that need to be recognised so that these are included in future calls. The rationale for the development of the EDIEF pilot is a response to the data showing low levels of diversity amongst the researcher community. This practical innovation has provided opportunities to broaden both the areas of research and the researchers receiving funding. Additionally, specific innovations that are distinct to the EDIEF were implemented and should be continued in future calls:

- **Continue to offer feedback to all applicants of the EDIEF call.** The attractiveness of the scheme to new applicants was a positive outcome of the EDIEF pilot. The provision of feedback to all EDIEF applicants enables learning and can support future successful applications (see *Review panel feedback*, page 113).
- **Continue to convene bespoke review panels for the EDIEF to account for the range of diverse topics and the need to increase the diversity of reviewers.** This innovation recognised the limitations of the current peer review college and enabled considerations of both diversity and the emotional impacts associated with diversity work to be factored into the selection process. Whilst the AHRC has committed to increasing the diversity of its review panels, until this is realised, the bespoke panel approach used in the EDIEF should continue in future calls (see *The EDIEF review panel*, page 111).
- **Continue to offer opportunities for RAs within the EDIEF to gain valuable experience on research projects.** The inclusion and opportunities for RAs supports the engagement, retention and progression of talented people interested in undertaking research activity related to EDI work. This is positive given that greater diversity of researchers enables more innovation. In this way, the EDIEF enables and supports the longer-term development of a talent pipeline. It creates further opportunities to provide support to areas of hitherto low or under-researched topics (see *Research assistants*, page 140).

- **Continue the efforts to have more diverse review panels (peer review college) and engage EDI expertise to advise, participate and moderate the call in its design, selection, and delivery phases.** In addition to ensuring a diverse panel, EDI expertise has provided support to the successful development of the call. The expertise needs to be available throughout the duration of the call and throughout the delivery period in order to ensure that questions and specialist knowledge can be addressed and embedded into the EDIEF and that learning and examples of good practice are captured and mainstreamed into the AHRC main funded activities (see *The EDIEF review panel*, page 111 and *Support gaps*, page 136).
- **Continue to undertake evaluations of the EDIEF calls and practices where learning needs to be captured for future improvement.** The EDIEF pilot has provided opportunities for innovation and learning. The call enables the piloting and hotbedding of different approaches to funding research. Planning and resourcing evaluations of the EDIEF calls allows for the effectiveness of the learning to be captured, with the opportunity to refine and possibly mainstream innovation into main calls for funding (see *Aims of this report*, page 31 and *Next steps*, page 159).

« The delivery of the EDIEF pilot has not only facilitated innovation but also role-modelled some good practices that need to be recognised so that these are included in future calls »

Introduction



Background to the EDI Engagement Fellowship Pilot (EDIEF) call

In May 2020, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) launched a new pilot funding call for Fellowships aimed at arts and humanities researchers whose work both reflected outstanding quality and contained a significant Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) dimension. This pilot call emerged as both a result and legacy of Common Cause research (an AHRC-funded project examining the landscape of academic-BAME community group partnerships, published in 2018) and was simultaneously driven by the AHRC's commitment to improving EDI processes as outlined in the recently published EDI Statement (<https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/equality-diversity-and-inclusion>). Common Cause research documented the barriers and enablers to building collaborative research partnerships between universities and artists, civil societies, educational and cultural organisations from Black and Minority Ethnic communities and produced a set of recommendations for university leaders, academics, community organisations, funding bodies and other national bodies. Recommendations targeted at funding bodies encouraged proactive leadership in developing partnerships, improvements to the accessibility of funding, prioritisation of capacity building alongside innovation and encouragement of initiatives where the training, supporting and employing of staff would reflect the diversity of their local community. The AHRC took these recommendations and developed the EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot (EDIEF) with the intention of offering a funding provision that integrated communities and project partners more directly than in standard research grant opportunities. The AHRC's broader intention for establishing the EDIEF was to harness the discovery research engaged with debates around EDI (existing research or projects funded through AHRC standard mode response schemes) and offer a dedicated space to scale up and repackage this research so that it would be useful and more beneficial for communities, networks and stakeholders.

Aims of this report

This report presents a reflection of the experiences, perspectives, and observations of those directly involved in the EDIEF pilot, including voices from applicants, award holders, research assistants, project partners and AHRC representatives involved in setting up and managing the pilot call. By reflecting in this way, this report aims to:

- Bring focus on the mechanics of the application process from advertising the call, including measures to attract greater diversity in the applicant profile and ensure diversity in the peer-review process.

- Highlight the successes and challenges in delivering EDIEF-funded projects, especially in the context of the EDI agenda and the unique challenges of operating in the pandemic.
- Draw out perspectives on the benefits and risks of targeted specialist EDI funding (thematic mode) calls versus mainstream standard route (open mode) funding calls.
- Make recommendations for the AHRC to understand how best to support impact-focused EDI work. This delivers on the AHRC's commitment outlined within the AHRC's EDI action plan (published 2020) that will impact both future EDIEF calls and widen access to funding opportunities in AHRC schemes and beyond.

A broader and overarching intention of this report is to deliver on the AHRC's own EDI action plan "to produce a report based on feedback received from applicants and assessors to understand how to evolve the pilot most effectively". With this report and recommendations list in place, it is intended that the AHRC, and funding bodies more generally, can understand how best to support impact-focus EDI work in the future.

Methods

Data collection for this report took place in the follow-up period (September 2021–February 2022) via a mixed-methods approach including online interviews and surveys, video case-study creation and online workshops. Online interviews were conducted by an independent EDI consultant (Kevin S M Coutinho, Windsor Fellowship and Chair of the Higher Education Race Action Group (HERAG)) who was recruited for his independent and impartial status, and for his expertise in Higher Education EDI consultation activity. Online interviews were comprised of semi-structured questions focused on the separate stages of the EDIEF (the call, application process, review, award notification, award holding, post-award period (if applicable) and general reflections). The interviews were offered to each EDIEF Fellow and Research Assistant(s) (RAs) and labelled as optional, rather than obligatory or contractual. In total, 12 online interviews were conducted in this stage of the process. A further interview was also conducted with a key AHRC representative who held the position of Head of Cultural Value and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, AHRC 1) to provide insight into the conception of the scheme prior to its release. This structured interview was based on the individual stages of the EDIEF (background, award conception, call release, review procedures and reflections). Recordings of interviews were transcribed and anonymised. Quotes from the transcriptions were extracted from these interviews to illuminate the separate stages and issues belonging to the EDIEF pilot and were used to construct a narrative within this report (See **EDIEF stages**, page 80).

In addition to interview data, written feedback was also obtained from prospective applicants at the call release stage (May–September 2020), which was collected by the AHRC as part of their monitoring systems that requested feedback about the pilot call. Eight pieces of feedback about the call were provided which offered detail about specific EDI issues related to the call.

Two online workshops were held in January 2022 and February 2022 (the February workshop was replaced with a Padlet asynchronous version due to UCU strike action coinciding with the planned event). Workshops consisted of presentations from EDIEF award holders, Q&A sessions, discussions on ‘Engagement activities during the time of COVID-19’ and breakout groups exploring recommendations for future EDIEF calls. PIs, RAs and project partner representatives participated in the online workshops. Discussions explored the experiences of the PI, RAs and project partner representatives and these discussions were recorded and transcribed. The workshops were facilitated by Manuella Blackburn, Hayley Suviste and Kevin S M Coutinho.

Video case studies were conducted by biggerhouse film (award-winning videography duo, Stephen Clarke and Tom Stubbs) and sought to explore each project’s EDI area of focus and subsequent impact. Video case studies were filmed on location, often situated in project partner venues and spaces, and took place between November 2021–March 2022. The video case studies included voices from the PIs, RAs, project partner representatives, participants, beneficiaries, and audiences (where applicable), presenting a snapshot of those involved and the change agent work each project invested in. The video case studies provided a window into the engagement activities of each EDIEF project (filming workshops, project work and performances) and demonstrated how project input has tackled specific EDI issues, making positive impacts within communities, processes, and policy. Accessibility for video production was weaved into the methodology of the filmmaking to ensure completed videos provide accessible content for all. These videos include the following accessibility features:

- British Sign Language (BSL)
- Audio description
- Downloadable audio transcription
- Subtitles

Consultation and training with VocalEyes (registered charity identifying and removing barriers to access and inclusion for blind and partially sighted people) from the outset of the videography process (November 2021) has ensured filmmaking takes account of accessibility issues from the conception of each film, as opposed to being an afterthought or 'bolt-on' to the filmmaking process. Working in this way has impacted the creation of these videos, changing the usual processes and conventions used by the videographers. As a result of this methodology, the 10 accompanying videos running parallel to this report evolved with space for audio description, including self-description for all interviewees and were paced accordingly with regards to the audio description and BSL interpretation time needs.

Key features

The EDI Engagement Fellowship (EDIEF) pilot call offered an award ceiling of £100,000 per fellowship, for up to 12-months to establish a series of engagement activities to further the impact of existing research. A key feature of the EDIEF was to support impact and engagement activity, as opposed to funding new research. The EDIEF call stipulated that "engagement should be built around existing outputs that the applicant feels would have further impact potential through a period of sustained support."

The call contained several features unique to the EDIEF, setting it apart from AHRC standard route response mode funding calls and existing follow-on funding schemes supporting impact. These features specific to the EDIEF centred on requirements for (i) eligibility, (ii) application detail and (iii) proposed projects, which were all embedded into the wording of the call (see **Appendix 1: The AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot call (web publication)**):

Eligibility requirements:

- Eligible projects must be "impact-focused and cannot be used to conduct substantial new research... this fellowship cannot be used for theoretical research on particular EDI topics, groups or communities."
- Eligible projects are those that "consider the process and practice of engagement with stakeholder communities as a vital component of their research."
- "Funding will be provided for researchers who have a strong track record of integrating their research within communities, engaging stakeholders with their research and/or communicating with the public."

- “Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have robust existing relationships in place with the networks, platforms or partners necessary to deliver their programme of engagement.”
- Funding is “intended to enable researchers to take high-quality research outputs outside of the academy; to strengthen, scale-up and highlight their work; to provide new opportunities for the communities and networks they are part of; and to ensure that their knowledge and outputs are fully accessible to all.”
- “The focus is on the UK context.”

Application requirements:

- “The applicant’s host institution should use the fellowship as an opportunity to consolidate and solidify an ethical commitment to any community or interest groups they are partnering with as part of a wider organisational engagement strategy. The host institution will be required to set out how this commitment will stimulate additional and sustainable partnership activity and should be prepared to indicate how they will support ongoing relationships beyond the life of the fellowship.”
- An EDI statement attachment from the Head of Department is required to outline “the institutional commitment to EDI, how it will be embedded in the fellowship and sustained beyond the life of the award.”
- “Costed staff time for the PI is ineligible.”
- “Estates and indirect costs are ineligible under this call.”

Project requirements:

- “...award holders will build in development opportunities for junior colleagues, practitioners or partners who have potential to enhance the EDI aspects of their work.”
- “...there is an expectation for applicants to include explicit commitments to mentoring or partnership working with researchers earlier on in their careers in order to facilitate sharing of expertise and access to relevant networks.”
- “Successful fellows will be required to engage fully with the AHRC (and UKRI where applicable) to capture and evaluate learning from their award in line with the developmental aspect of the call scope.”

Landscape of AHRC research disciplines by demographics for PIs—representation and award rates

As part of its broader agenda, the AHRC has identified issues that need to be addressed to meet its long-term commitment to EDI:

- further diversifying the Peer Review College and other decision-making structures to more accurately reflect the diversity of UK society
- understanding and addressing the lack of representation from Black and Minority Ethnic researchers and researchers with disabilities among our award holders and across our doctoral funding schemes
- because many EDI issues are systemic and not specific to arts and humanities research, committing to working more closely with central UKRI and other Research Councils on the wider structural EDI challenges faced by researchers, students and institutions
- diversifying AHRC itself as an employer at all levels.

Focusing on the PI researcher community, there are specific low representation issues in relation to race and disability. Whilst the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) estimates that 11% of the potential PI community is Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic², the historical awardee profile (2015–2020) is 8.5%, although this has improved in 2018–2020. Whilst the percentage of total minority ethnic awardees is low, the success rate of applicants is in proportion to the applications received for funding and applicants from these groups have a higher average award rate (35% against 32% for White applicants).³

Over the same period, PIs without declared disabilities had higher award rates than applicants with declared disabilities, ranging from 26–29% (declared disabled applicants averaged 24.3%). The success rate for disabled applicants increased to 27% (compared to 29% for non-disabled applicants) in 2019/20, making up 1.5% of the awardee profile.

Gender profile data for PIs is more balanced. HESA estimates that 59% of eligible staff are male compared with AHRC male award profile rates between 44% and 52% (2015–20). Female applicants for AHRC funding had an award rate ranging between 30% and 43% (averaging 35%). The corresponding range for men was 28%–38% (averaging 32%). Whilst these headline figures are more positive for female applicants, the data available is not provided intersectionally, so it is hard to gauge the representation of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic women, for example, to provide some nuance to the narrative and support the identification of specific gender targets.

Summary

Whilst the availability of data on UKRI webpages is to be commended, the availability of detailed data is not consistent across all protected groups and there is no intersectional analysis available. Given the strategic roles of research funding councils, having complete data sets would enable holistic analysis and the identification of targeted positive action measures. This is especially important in trying to understand and explore issues related to intersectionality. The current Tableau provision on the UKRI website needs to be further developed so that it allows users to manipulate data to explore a range of different issues intersectionally. This will support a better understanding of EDI issues. UKRI may need to work with other agencies, such as HESA, and stakeholders, such as universities, to progress this.

« Given the strategic roles of research funding councils, having complete data sets would enable holistic analysis and the identification of targeted positive action measures. This is especially important in trying to understand and explore issues related to intersectionality »

EDIEF Fellows and Projects

4

The EDIEF funded 10 projects to further the impact of their equality, diversity, and inclusion research:

**Overcoming sonic stalemates:
representing cultural diversity
in sample packs**

Dr Manuella Blackburn
The Open University 4

**Fast Forward, Women
in Photography, putting
ourselves in the picture**

Professor Anna Fox
University of the Creative Arts

**The Beat of Our Hearts—
staging new histories of
LGBTQIA+ loneliness**

Dr Charlotte Jones
University of Exeter

EDI in Scottish Heritage

Dr Churnjeet Mahn
University of Strathclyde

**Creative Approaches to Race
and In/security in the Caribbean
and in the UK (CARICUK)**

Dr Patricia Noxolo
University of Birmingham

**Race and Reviewing
in the UK—The Ledbury
Poetry Critics**

Professor Sandeep Parmar
University of Liverpool

**CVI and ART,
(CVIART)—Sensing
things differently**

Professor John Ravenscroft
University of Edinburgh

**Social Artists For Equality,
Diversity, and Inclusion (SAFEDI)**

Professor Amanda Ravetz
Manchester Metropolitan
University

**Freedom in the City:
Festival of Learning**

Professor Shawn Sobers
University of the West of England

**Inclusive Description for
Equality and Access (IDEA)**

Professor Hannah Thompson
Royal Holloway University

Principal Investigator

Dr Manuella Blackburn
The Open University

Website

[www.instrumentsindia.wixsite.com/
discover](http://www.instrumentsindia.wixsite.com/discover)

Project Partners

Milap
Loopmasters

Investment

£46,090

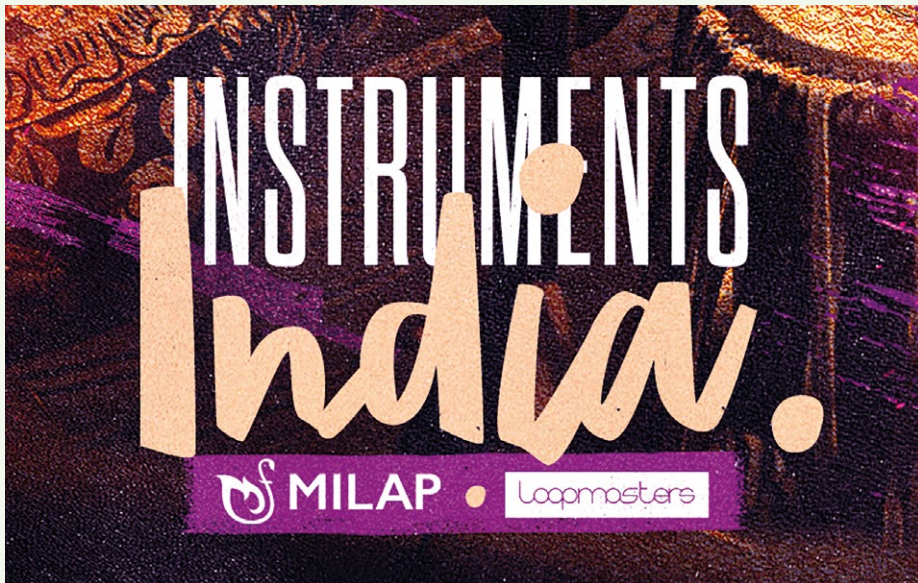
Research Team

Hayley Suviste
Research Assistant
The Open University

Jonny Batchelor
Studio Technician
School of Electronic Music

Overcoming Sonic Stalemates: representing cultural diversity in sample packs

Dr Manuella Blackburn



Above

Instruments INDIA sample pack artwork

Image credit: Loopmasters

Below

Jonny Batchelor demonstrating the Instruments INDIA sample pack at the School of Electronic Music (SEM)

Image credit: Ben McFarlane

The work of the project, research team and partners

This project takes the Instruments INDIA sound archive (established in 2013), with its five hours of sound recordings of 28 Indian musical instruments, as a central resource to engage others with diversity in sample pack creation and distribution. Working in partnership with Milap (the UK's leading Indian Arts Development Trust) and Loopmasters (a leading sample pack distributor and sound design record label), a sample pack has been created and distributed together with new guidance on sample pack content, labelling and representation. By creating a sample pack from this archive of sound material for use amongst the wider sample-based music community, recordings of Indian musical instruments will be accessed and applied in new creative works not limited to the scope of single genres, styles or functions.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

Sample packs have a history of placing 'world music' labels onto their non-Western sound offerings and many conform to stereotyped notions of what is regarded as Indian music. In addressing these incorrect and often prejudiced perceptions, conversations can take place between musicians, creators, sample pack distributors, educators and academics to consider sound's role in reflecting, appreciating and celebrating cultures. Foregrounding contributing musicians within the process of sample creation provides an opportunity to make visible the authors of these unique sounds, enabling their voices to be heard in the digital landscape of sample downloads. The engagement activities within this project have taken a bold step in asking who is being represented in the sample pack business, who makes these materials and who decides to promote and profile this content.

« Sample packs have a history of placing 'world music' labels onto their non-Western sound offerings and many conform to stereotyped notions of what is regarded as Indian music »

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

- Commercial sample pack distributed with Loopmasters (launch date: 31st March 2022).
- Meet the Musician videos, connecting sample pack users with the musicians that feature in the sample pack.
- Young Creator's Competition (August 2021) which encouraged young producers to create new works of any genre, exclusively using a selection of sounds from the Instruments INDIA sample pack. We received over 30 submissions from around the world, with the winning tracks being chosen by an expert judging panel. A podcast episode was released on the Instruments INDIA Soundcloud page announcing the winners.
- A guidance document of good practice for developing sample packs containing diverse sounds.
- Music Diversity in the Classroom—based on workshops held with school teachers, a forthcoming resource that will be useful within Key Stage 5 music curriculum, using the Instruments INDIA sample pack content as a reference material for discussions.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

Through this work, we have documented the process of sample pack development, demystifying a process that is often hidden amid technological jargon or viewed as a 'closely guarded trade secret'. In the process, we have challenged labels and representation of diversity in the sample pack industry, observing classification and distribution practices. Through the sample pack and the Young Creator's Competition, we have engaged a broader demographic of music creators with sonically diverse material. The musicians involved have also benefited financially, gaining an additional income stream through the commercial sample pack, at a time when musicians have notoriously struggled and lost income due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Next steps, future plans for the project

- To reflect upon and document the process of creating the Instruments INDIA sample pack.
- To continue hosting the Young Creator's Competition as a yearly event in collaboration with Milap, as part of their commitment to providing digital skills to their community.
- Continue to develop educational resources to be used in the classroom.

Principal Investigator

Professor Anna Fox
University for the Creative Arts

Project Partners

Autograph
Impressions Gallery
National Galleries of Scotland
Women for Refugee Women
Work Show Grow

Research Team

Maria Kapajeva
Research Assistant
University for the Creative Arts
Elizabeth Ransom
Research Assistant
University for the Creative Arts

Website

www.fastforward.photography

Investment

£100,429

Fast Forward, Women in Photography, putting ourselves in the picture

Professor Anna Fox



Above

The Walk from the project Putting Ourselves in the Picture
Image credit: Fast Forward, Hannah,
National Galleries of Scotland

Below

Putting Ourselves in the Picture group
at North Edinburgh Arts, Stills Gallery, Edinburgh
Image credit: Fast Forward, National Galleries of Scotland

The work of the project, research team and partners

Putting Ourselves in the Picture is a project working with refugee and migrant women learning to use photography and text to tell stories about issues that affect them in their lives. Three arts organisations: Impressions Gallery; National Galleries of Scotland, and Autograph (working in collaboration with Women for Refugee Women) hosted between 6 and 8 women participants for a series of skills-based and ideas development practical photography workshops, followed by a period of mentorship with the aim of developing a knowledge of photography and its possibilities alongside story telling skills and understanding of how to make a story work in photography. This was followed by three months attending a bespoke Work Show Grow online course on photography training, building confidence and networks. During the project we also expanded our manifesto for increased involvement of women in photography.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

Putting Ourselves in the Picture addresses issues of gender discrimination and marginalisation of women in society. Through developing strategies for women to tell their stories using photography, we intend to empower women to make photography work for them to promote new perspectives on our lives and living conditions. As a language without borders, photography has a power that few other mediums have. We have worked with groups of migrant and refugee women to enhance empowerment and well-being through collaboratively developing new skills, knowledge and networks. Our manifesto calls for increased involvement of women in photography and we continue to work on enhancing this; we aim to use the manifesto to campaign for change.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

- A series of five podcasts detailing firstly the manifesto and its aims, and then the mentorship and workshop project.
- A series of short films telling the participants' stories and discussing how they have used photography.
- A publication recording the project process and the selected photographs and texts from the participants (due May 2022).
- An essay discussing the project—currently for the publication and to be extended with findings explained in more detail for a potential conference paper.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

There are three main beneficiary groups from this project: impact on the groups of marginalised women who take part; impact on the women photographers and partners involved with the project, and impact of the new work on the photography community as a whole (including professionals, scholars and researchers) and on the general public. The benefits to all communities are enormous: it is vital to give marginalised women a voice and the opportunity to tell their stories, stories that have frequently been hidden. It is also vital to improve conditions for marginalised communities and photography has the ability to do this both through improving people's skills and knowledge as well as through the ability to tell stories in a way that neither the written nor the spoken word can do.

Next steps, future plans for the project

- Finalising the publication *Putting Ourselves in the Picture* with Trolley Books, London.
- Anna Fox is working on the article for the book and developing it for conference presentations and journal publication.
- We have been awarded further funding for the development of the manifesto for the increased involvement of women in photography and the Hyman Foundation is hosting a research workshop with 20 international participants to discuss this development.
- We continue to apply for further funding and are discussing exhibiting the work with the partners, some of whom are continuing to work with the participants.

« The benefits to all communities are enormous: it is vital to give marginalised women a voice and the opportunity to tell their stories, stories that have frequently been hidden »

Principal Investigator

Dr Charlotte Jones
University of Exeter

Website

[https://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/
beatofourhearts](https://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/beatofourhearts)

Project Partners

Natalie McGrath (writer)
Intercom Trust
Exeter Northcott Theatre

Investment

£100,134

Research Team

Dr Richard Vytniorgu
Research Associate
University of Exeter

Dr Fred Cooper
Advisory Team
University of Exeter

The Beat of Our Hearts—staging new histories of LGBTQIA+ loneliness

Dr Charlotte Jones



Above

Title treatment

Design: Frank Duffy

Below

Rehearsal

Image credit: Craig Fuller

The work of the project, research team and partners

This project draws upon previous and ongoing loneliness and LGBTQIA+ research and collaborations based within the Welcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health (WCCEH) at the University of Exeter. The fellowship began with a programme of creative workshops about loneliness and belonging with LGBTQIA+ communities in the Southwest of England, in partnership with the Intercom Trust, a local LGBTQ+ charity. This engagement work shaped the development of a playscript by local writer Natalie McGrath, which was previewed online as part of the Being Human Festival in November 2021, then staged at Exeter's Northcott Theatre during LGBT+ History Month in February 2022. The production was accompanied by a series of discussions and stalls, with input from LGBTQIA+ charities, groups, and initiatives.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

Loneliness can be a significant emotional and psychological expression of LGBTQIA+ marginalisation, prejudice, and exclusion, with repercussions for mental and physical health. It is a persistent but understudied and under-discussed phenomenon, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and related policies. The commissioning of this LGBTQIA+ play and production with a full cast and creative team is necessary progress, as LGBTQIA+ arts platforms are scarce in the Southwest of England beyond Bristol. Our engagement work has been informed by these rural geographies and the prospect of finding and building LGBTQIA+ community and belonging within local regions, with attention to intersecting disparities across age, gender, dis/ability, race, ethnicity, and class.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

Two series of creative workshops connected local LGBTQIA+ people with one another, to their rural environments, and with regional histories of queer experiences and literatures. The workshops provided a space for discussion and solidarity: sharing perspectives and stories of LGBTQIA+ loneliness and belonging; as well as for creativity: co-writing poetry, letters and taking photos. Through an active website, blog, and social media accounts, this writing and other creative work have been shared widely. The staging of Natalie McGrath's original playscript at the Northcott Theatre has also been a significant achievement at such a challenging time for arts organisations and creative professionals in the UK.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

Our production is an important addition to the Southwest's arts landscape, which still needs more meaningful and sustainable platforms for LGBTQIA+ stories, artists, and audiences. This collaboration contributes to a burgeoning creative practice which grounds performance in research and engagement, highlighting a diversity of voices and experiences, and creating a community of LGBTQIA+ contributors who were invested in and benefiting from the transdisciplinary creative process. The project has also involved engagement with the Northcott Theatre's EDI policies, programming, and production processes, with input from the research team, as well as our creative collaborators and partners.



Above

Rehearsal

Image credit: Craig Fuller

Principal Investigator

Dr Churnjeet Mahn
University of Strathclyde

Project Partners

Ali Cathcart
University of Stirling

Devon McHugh
Museums and Galleries
Scotland

Jeff Sanders
Society of Antiquaries
of Scotland

Research Team

Dr Audrey Scardina
Research Associate
University of Strathclyde

Website

www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/projects/equality-diversity-inclusion-in-scottish-heritage

Investment

£99,142

EDI in Scottish Heritage

Dr Churnjeet Mahn



Above

Heritage Trainee Hope Moore at
the Livingston Birthplace Museum

Image credit: Cal Hallows

The work of the project, research team and partners

The project is designed to create capacity to address EDI issues (with a special focus on race) in some of Scotland's largest and most influential heritage organisations, through working with closely networked partners from within the sector. This project works in partnership with the Scottish Government sponsored project, Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums (ESSM), which is a major investigation into the legacy of empire and slavery in Scotland's heritage sector. It includes a large public consultation, consultation with minoritised groups, and consultation with heritage professionals. It will produce recommendations for the Scottish Government in 2022 and this project is designed to directly feed into the process. Partners in Stirling and the Society of Antiquaries provide critical capacity in history, archaeology, and sector knowledge and practice for the project.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

Structural racism. We have taken an intersectional approach to the study of race, however, in the course of the work, and in the context of public discourse focusing solely on race and heritage, race has been the axis of difference that has galvanised attention. However, we have expertise in our team on queer, and class-based exclusions in heritage and have actively sought collaboration with disabled and queercrip activists to explore intersecting inequalities in the management and understanding of Scottish heritage.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

- Contributing to the design and implementation of the ESSM public survey.
- Contributing to the ESSM consultation through three specialist working groups on HR, proposals for the National Museum dedicated to Empire and Slavery in Scotland, and Research.
- Conducting community focus groups with BAME community groups on heritage in Scotland (with a museum focus) and conducting a survey of heritage professionals about race.
- Conducting training events with Intercultural Youth Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland.
- Collaborating with two anti-racist museum projects to develop exhibition material.
- The delivery of 8 placement opportunities for BAME young people.
- A series of talks about race and heritage in Scotland.
- A training collaboration with AHRC and ESRC DTPs.

Next steps, future plans for the project

This project has kick-started an enormous amount of collaboration, which will extend beyond this project, and like much EDI work, is based on inter-personal relationships and time spent working together which produces trust and the ambition to do 'more'. The PIs work on exhibitions with new partners, the ESSM consultation, and training and events with heritage organisations already extends beyond the funded timeline.



Above

Heritage Trainee Hope Moore at
the Livingston Birthplace Museum

Image credit: Cal Hallows

Principal Investigator

Dr Patricia Noxolo
The University of Birmingham

Project Partners

The Royal Geographical Society
The Geographical Association

Muna Abdi

MA Education Consultancy

Research Team

Dr Tia-Monique Uzor
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Rita Gayle

Research Associate
University of Birmingham

Website

www.caricuk.co.uk

Investment

£100,779

Creative Approaches to Race and In/security in the Caribbean and the UK (CARICUK)

Dr Patricia Noxolo



Above

Screenshot from 'Walking Old Lands, Drawing New Lines', a film by Annalee Davis

Image credit: Barbados Film Company and Jujuwanderer

Below

'Dreading the Map' art installation by Sonia Barrett in the Map Room of the Royal Geographical Society

Image credit: Damion Griffiths

The work of the project, research team and partners

CARICUK: Creative Approaches to Race and In/security in the Caribbean and the UK is a year-long collaboration between artists and educators. It aims to transform discussions about race in UK higher education institutions and redefines race as an in/security. This is based on the model of Caribbean In/securities, which sees security and insecurity as perspectival and relational terms that people negotiate in their everyday lives and through creative means. Understanding race as an in/security means that education institutions and black communities will negotiate better outcomes between them, with listening and change on both sides.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

Understanding race as an in/security in UK education means that education institutions and black communities will negotiate better outcomes between them, with listening and change on both sides. The implication of this is that CARICUK aims to push institutional race discourse beyond inclusion and deficits, and towards education institutions actively participating in anti-racist learning and institutional transformation.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

- Three artistic provocations were made, designed to stimulate discussion about Caribbean and racialised in/securities, each followed by public discussion events.
- The three artistic provocations were:
Walking Old Line, Drawing New Lines by Annalee Davis.
Dreading the Map by Sonia Barrett.
Caribbean In/securities Exhibition curated by Marsha Pearce, PhD.
- An online learning pack for schools, about Caribbean and racialised in/securities, lead into a large-scale arts participation and exhibition.
- Three short films and a publishing experiment pushed towards institutional transformation.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project impacts

Geography is a key discipline through which to engage a range of overlapping publics—academics, educators, black communities, and arts practitioners—in thinking about race as one of a range of shared in/securities. In addition to its expertise surrounding climate science, UK Geography is undertaking a slow and painful process of reflecting on the discipline’s historical and contemporary complicity in the explorations and exploitations that laid the groundwork for the racialised inequalities and global catastrophes that we now face. In particular, decades of calls to transform institutions and to promote anti-racist practice in secondary and higher education teaching and research are now building towards an effective shift.



Above

Promotional image from the Caribbean In/securities Exhibition, curated by Marsha Pearce, PhD

Image credit: Richard Mark Rawlins, 'Another Horizon'

Principal Investigator

Professor Sandeep Parmar
The University of Liverpool

Project Partner

Ledbury Poetry Festival

Research Team

Dr Alycia Pirmohamed
Dr Dave Coates

Website

www.liverpool.ac.uk/new-and-international-writing/emerging-critics

Investment

£100,529

Race and Reviewing in the UK— The Ledbury Poetry Critics

Professor Sandeep Parmar

Ledbury Critics 2021



Above

Ledbury Poetry Critics Cohort 2021

Below

Ledbury Poetry Festival editor Alice Spawls at a Ledbury Poetry Critics residency workshop, November 2019

The work of the project, research team and partners

Established in 2017 with an initial intake of eight critics, and expanding to twelve the following year, the Ledbury Poetry Critics programme has been at the vanguard of the rapid positive changes in UK poetry criticism. This year-long project builds on Professor Parmar's research on race and UK poetry, as well as on LPC's impact on diversity in reviewing, by extending both its qualitative and quantitative measures and aims to include and reach a much wider group of poetry critics, commissioning editors, arts and policy organisations and early career academics (Dr Alycia Pirmohamed and Dr Dave Coates). Dr Pirmohamed and Dr Coates received their PhDs within the past year and this Fellowship provides a strong and high-profile route for developing their careers as academics.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

A vital aspect of the mentorship programme's remit was gathering data on UK and Irish poetry magazines: we found that between 2009–2016, only 190 poetry reviews by BAME critics had been published in the UK, (4 per cent of the total, or just under 24 per year). In the three years since the inception of the Ledbury Programme, 2017–19, that figure rose to 201 (9.6 per cent, or 67 per year). In 2021 we expanded the programme to forty critics in total.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

All forty of our critics have received one-on-one mentorship with an experienced reviewer and many have undertaken paid editor-in-residence placements with major newspapers and poetry magazines, including the LRB, TLS and the Telegraph. Many of the new cohort of Ledbury critics have published reviews in high-profile platforms and some have already taken up paid editor positions at poetry magazines. Our report on diversity in reviewing for 2021 is forthcoming in May 2022. In April 2022 we will host a residency in London for all of the Ledbury critics, which will involve workshops and guest speakers on reviewing and critical culture more widely.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

The proposed programme will lay the foundations for long-term, sustainable participation and leadership in UK poetry for not only BAME writers, but for people at other intersections of oppression, including, but not limited to, gender, class and disability. The programme empowers BAME poets, critics and editors with the professional skills and networks necessary for a long and successful career in the industry, endorsed and enabled not by powerful white gatekeepers, but by a large and varied community of peers.

Next steps and future plans for the project

Ledbury Critics will continue to mentor the forty critics within the programme and to expand our activity to a research network about race, reviewing and critical culture.

« The programme empowers BAME poets, critics and editors with the professional skills and networks necessary for a long and successful career in the industry, endorsed and enabled not by powerful white gatekeepers, but by a large and varied community of peers »

Principal Investigator

Dr John Ravenscroft
University of Edinburgh

Website

www.cviscotland.org/mem_portal.php?cat_id=80

Project Partner

CVI Scotland

Investment

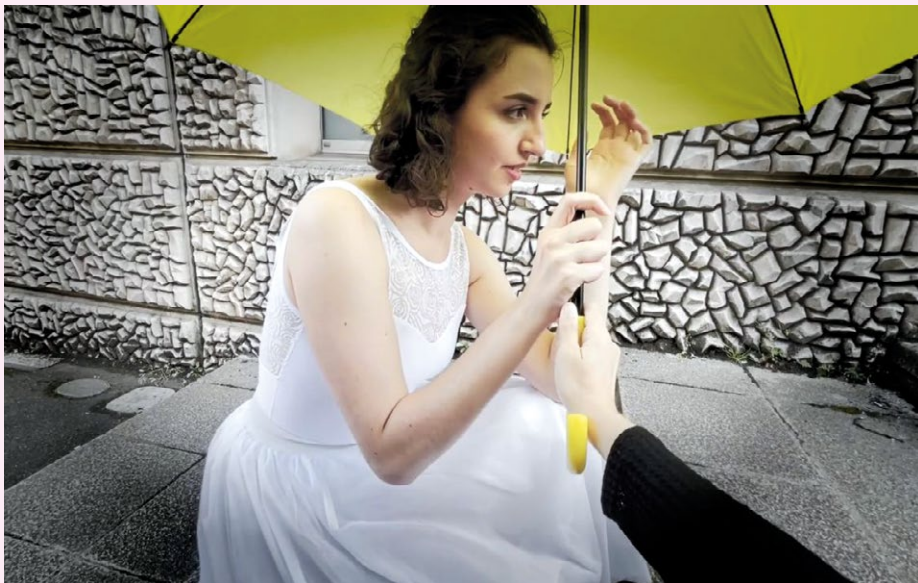
£64,487

Research Team

Dr Stephen Hollingsworth
University of Edinburgh

CVI and ART, (CVIART)— Sensing things differently

Dr John Ravenscroft



Above

We Slowly See by Dr Steve Hollingsworth

Below

Euryphaessa by Dr Wendy Timmons and DanceEd

The work of the project, research team and partners

The project focus was concerned to bring to light the manifold complexities of the neurological condition of Cerebral Visual Impairment by using the creative mediums of dance, visual art and music as a vehicle for interpretation. The intention was to communicate with audiences, away from academic texts, to truly appreciate what it is to see the world with a CVI. A decision was made to extend the project to include people with CVI who are artists, and leading CVI academics who use art in their work to emphasise the misbelief that we all see and understand the world in the same ways. A major online exhibition was held on the 26th November 2021, this comprised of talks by world experts in CVI alongside an exhibition of the commissioned work and CVI artists. A survey of attendees was held to capture responses, which were overwhelmingly positive. A more detailed survey asked the CVI community to consider the role of art in increasing quality of life experiences.

The EDI issues addressed through the research

Individuals with CVI, parents and carers were contacted and asked to participate in an online questionnaire to gather information on how engagement in arts activities has links to the condition, both in understanding and communicating its complexities and as an activity for people with CVI to create agency. Under the umbrella of art, a community came together as equals. Trained artists with and without CVI, artists who use their art as therapy, artists who use their art to teach, academics who use art for change and medical doctors who use art to communicate. The multiple art forms in the exhibition included photography, film, dance, music, poetry, sculpture, virtual reality and storytelling, to help further understanding of the extremely complex condition of cerebral visual impairment. The purpose of each work was to open a different gateway of understanding, to step into the world of a person with CVI and experience their reality, just by engaging in a performance for a few minutes, requiring no level of education, making the work widely accessible, particularly to the community of families supporting children with CVI, many of whom are from deprived areas with low levels of adult literacy.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

The core purpose of the project was always to see if art could be used in our understanding of the condition cerebral visual impairment, which in turn would lead to support. This is the first time the creative arts have been commissioned to communicate the complexity of CVI to a wider audience.

- Apart from the CVI Art Exhibition itself
3 unique pieces of art were created:
We Slowly See by Dr Steve Hollingsworth.
Kaleidoscope1 by David Wallace.
Euryphaessa by Dr Wendy Timmons and DanceEd.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

The whole CVI community, but particularly the children with CVI who need their condition and challenges, and most importantly their incredible abilities and potential to be much better understood. CVI ART was also picked up by the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-59431466). From our survey we discovered that 63.6% of participants believe that participation in arts activities is important to the quality of life of people with CVI. This is but one aspect of the way the arts have huge potential to open-up understandings of CVI to be a key driver of new research materials which would be of direct benefit to the CVI community. The research team believes that by commissioning new artistic interpretations of CVI we have been able to expand the reach and understanding of CVI. This has helped move reliance on academic texts for information to creative interpretations which are more accessible.

Next steps, future plans for the project

This project has clearly identified that art and creativity can be an important element in communicating difficult concepts. This approach which the project has identified can also be a key to developing original educational approaches both as interventions for the CVI affected and also to educate parents, carers and teaching professionals. We hope to secure future funding to extend research in this area for which the CVI Art project became a catalyst.

Principal Investigator

Professor Amanda Ravetz
Manchester School of Art
Manchester Metropolitan
University

Project Partners

Axis
Social Art Network

Research Team

R.M. Sanchez-Camus
Lead Artist/Producer
Dr Patrick Campbell
Dr Cesar Cornejo
Dr Anna MacDonald
Dr Kai Syng Tan
MMU artist scholars and
mentee researchers
Sally Fort
Evaluator

Website

www.safedi.org.uk
www.axisweb.org/safedi

Investment

£100,609

Social Artists for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI)

Professor Amanda Ravetz



Above

A painting made by co-author Cath Walsh as part of 'enSHRINE' artist Lady Kitt's SAFEDI commission

Image credit: Jules Lister

Below

'The Human Memorial' (2021), documentation of workshop with performers as part of Yuen Fong Ling's SAFEDI commission

Image credit: Yuen Fong Ling

The work of the project, research team and partners

The fellowship explored the co-creation of EDI policies with under-represented communities and cultural partner organisations via a nationwide social art programme. Six social artists/artist groups worked with six audience-communities affected by exclusion, in close partnership with visual arts and community organisations of varying sizes and scales. The artists, supported by the core research team, used practice as research to include the voices and experiences of groups of participants who are not listened to in debates about visual art. Four academics from MMU worked alongside the artists to help create connections between artistic scholarship and professional arts practice. National arts organisations, Axis and Social Art Network, led the artist recruitment and work dissemination in the arts sector. The evaluator adopted an embedded evaluation process to collect data from artists, partners, participants and research team to determine the findings, value and impact of the research.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

The arts are failing to reach people from the global majority, those who are disabled, excluded by gender/sexuality and /or those who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and the intersections of these characteristics. Those excluded are by the same token unable to influence cultural organisational policy in order to change this. The arts do not make best use of diverse talent in the UK and artists who work with under-represented communities are often from the same/similar communities to those they work with and are inadequately supported themselves. The arts and cultural sector is characterised by small and medium organisations, which despite their commitment, often don't have the expertise or resources needed to design and implement effective approaches to ensure that they are able to meet obligations outlined in the Equality Act 2010. Although artists work daily with some of the most under-represented communities in the UK, their skills and expertise are under-acknowledged and not sufficiently championed.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

- Achievements: organisational resilience increased; existing r(earch) and e(ngagement) networks strengthened; new r and e networks reached; marginalised people more valued & better represented; profile of social practice raised; new learning of EDI considerations/practice in arts/cultural organisations achieved; understanding of the support needed by social artists improved.

- Findings: EDI research processes need to model intended outcomes; artists report alienation from policy thru' negative lived experience—recognising HOW policy and practice co-relate improves inclusive policymaking for stakeholders; successful EDI co-creation requires the right time, right scale, right match (of what org. needs and artists can do) and right relationships.
- Outputs: 6 high quality artworks; website and online presence.
- Forthcoming: EDI-focused edition of Social Works; article for Journal of Cultural Management and Cultural Policy; partner research sharing session; public sharing session; conference presentation at the Social Art Summit 2022.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project impacts

- More inclusive and representative decision and policy making.
- More representative collections—e.g. artwork made by one of the commissioned artist groups has been accessioned by national arts partner organisation Baltic.
- Beneficiaries (incomplete): 45+ participants (final estimate by project end c60) = pregnant women/new parents/health professionals; chronically ill, Deaf/D, neurodiverse, disabled; Black and People of Colour; QTPOC; artists with mental health and chronic illness.

*Interim report as this data is still being collected and analysed.

Next steps, future plans for the project

Next steps include maintaining an ongoing relationship with partner arts organisations and Councils (ACE, AHRC) to support their ongoing policy making work as informed and strengthened by the arts. Supporting the further development of specific artists' work to continue the research around decolonisation through e.g. decommissioning of statues and monuments. The development of the conference presentation at Social Art Summit 2022 and through this, the creation of a network of policy changers and influencers across the UK. Presentations in 4 cities through Social Art Network of the research findings through public social art peer forums. The establishment of SAIL—social art inclusion lab—a new research cluster and impact narrative at MMU with mentee research staff as core members.

Principal Investigator

Professor Shawn Sobers
University of the West of England

Project Partners

Fairfield House
Bath Ethnic Minority
Senior Citizens Association
(BEMSCA)
Digital Cultures
Research Centre
Bath Abbey
Imperial Voice Radio
Black Families Education
Support Group
Critical Race and Culture
Research Network

Research Team

Jennifer Sharratt
Nick Triggs
Sarah Barnes
Dawn Limbu
Theo Edkins
Kyesha Nelson

Website

www.freedominthecity.org

Investment

£96,998

Freedom in the City: Festival of Learning

Professor Shawn Sobers



Above

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo
Church Service at Bath Abbey
Image credit: Naomi Williams

Below

Unveiling of Freedom In the City billboards
posters displayed across Bath and Bristol
Image credit: Dawn Limbu

The work of the project, research team and partners

Freedom in the City: Festival of Learning was a series of events from April–November 2021. The festival explored the legacy of the Ethiopian Royal Family living in the city of Bath and was a wider celebration of Ethiopian and Rastafari cultures, and connections with the UK. This ambitious interdisciplinary project used a wide range of approaches to explore its themes from multiple perspectives, drawing upon expertise from all walks of life. The festival comprised of the following:

- 28 events, 70 speakers, 9 lectures, 7 symposia, 4 school events, 3 film screenings, 7 podcasts, 1 Ethiopian Orthodox at Bath Abbey service, 13 billboards, 1 fixed pianola, 1 opera performance, 3 commissioned music productions, 2 commissioned poems, 2 commissioned film productions, 1 BBC Radio 4 doc.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

The EDI dynamics of the project were varied and intersectional. A selected summary of which is as follows (in no particular order);

- **Age:** Events by and for elders from the African Caribbean community, through working closely with the Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association.
- **Ethnicity and Culture:** Ethiopian and Rastafari communities are 'minority within minority' groups, often rendered non-visible in relation to broader African diaspora discourse.
- **Gender:** One of the three themes of the festival was 'The Queens Stories', to ensure the perspectives of women were centred in the narrative.
- **Knowledge Equity:** The festival stage was given to individuals with knowledge of the subject regardless of social position or profession, at equal status with no hierarchy or need for explanation.
- **Representation:** Turned hard to access civic spaces into safe spaces for African heritage narratives and audiences, and through a billboard campaign amplified these voices into the public realm.

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen Asfaw left their former residence, Fairfield House in Bath, to the city in 1958, as a gift to be used for ‘aged citizens’. Fairfield House continues to run as a day centre for BEMSCA elders and is a community space and site of pilgrimage for Rastafari and Ethiopian heritage people. Freedom in the City Festival was the opportunity to celebrate that gift with the wider city and, thanks to online platforms, with the world. The festival engaged with an attendance of over 2252 audience members and worked with people from 5 to 80+ years of age. The festival proved there is a wide interest in the history and culture of Fairfield House, and how the related stories are of interest to previously unengaged general audiences, as well as specialist groups with prior interest.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

The festival was successful in raising awareness of the historical and contemporary connections between Bath and Ethiopia, and highlighted the precarious financial situation that Fairfield House now finds itself in—still owned by the council but not being financially invested in or maintained. The festival was a platform to form relationships and facilitate conversations, for civic leaders and the local community to see the value in the culture of Fairfield House and position it squarely as an asset for the whole city.

Events at the festival produced a range of impacts, such as, on a participation level—seeing young and older people engaged in new activities such as producing podcasts, and attending African events at key Bath civic spaces such the Guildhall and Bath Abbey. On a governance level—such as facilitating a conversation at a public event where a city leader agreed to work towards including Fairfield House’s narrative the city’s UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

Next steps, future plans for the project

- Producing a publication which Fairfield House can distribute for a suggested donation price (Easter 2022).
- Pianola recital events as a fundraise events for Fairfield House.
- Producing an illustrated book about the pianola (Easter 2022).
- Developing an annual lecture programme.
- Discussing with current and new partners to explore how to keep the Freedom in the City brand alive, and possibly allow transfer of curatorial ownership.

Principal Investigator

Professor Hannah Thompson
Royal Holloway

Project Partners**Audio Description Providers**

VocalEyes

Mind's Eye Description

Totally Inclusive People

Theatre Companies

Shakespeare's Globe

Donmar Warehouse

Mind the Gap

Royal Exchange Theatre

The Octagon Theatre

Research Team

Dr Rachel Hutchinson

Website

www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk/about/research/inclusive-description-for-equality-and-access

Investment

£100,668

Inclusive Description for Equality and Access (IDEA)

Professor Hannah Thompson



Above

Hannah Thompson and Miranda Yates at the Globe, interacting with flowers on set.

Image credit: Rachel Hutchinson

Below

Hannah Thompson standing outside the Globe

Image credit: Rachel Hutchinson

The work of the project, research team and partners

The project has supported and enabled theatre professionals and audio describers to engage with and explore the findings of the 2020 'Describing Diversity' report in order to promote the creation of inclusive audio descriptions, which celebrate diversity in ethical ways. We have worked with directors, casting directors, actors, access professionals and front-of-house teams at five producing theatres / theatre companies and put them in dialogue with audio describers and audio description users in a series of pre-show workshops and post-show public Q and A sessions to promote the value of AD as both a communicator and a driver of equality, diversity and inclusion.

The EDI issue(s) addressed through the research

How can a person's 'protected characteristics' (such as race, disability, gender) and their other physical features (such as height, body shape) be described in ways that give blind people equal access to information available to non-blind people whilst also treating people being described fairly?

What happens to an audience's understanding of underrepresented groups when they are not described, or described less specifically, than other groups?

What happens to everyone's access when the use of audio description is generalized, even normalised? Who benefits from inclusive and ethical audio description?

Key achievements, findings, outputs and outcomes

- Futurelearn MOOC 'Creating Audio Description: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion': a free online course aimed at audio describers; arts, heritage and media managers, technicians, administrators and creatives; access and EDI professionals and the interested general public: a four-week course in which learners access articles, videos and audio resources and undertake engaging activities and discussions; 1,000 + enrolments to date.
- Inclusive AD Forum: a web-based discussion forum for audio describers and audio description users to share resources and techniques around inclusive practice; 120 + regular users.
- Self-Description for Inclusive Meetings: an open-access, shareable resource for business.
- Information video 'Inclusive Theatres: Describing Diversity' a free online (YouTube) video explaining the practical and ethical benefits of inclusive audio description.

Main impacts and the beneficiaries of the project

- Actors, theatre managers and administrators, access professionals and creatives understand the crucial role of audio description as a way to represent and express equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Audio description users have an improved understanding of diversity on stage/screen.
- Theatre and film audiences appreciate the importance of audio description and its benefits for a wide and diverse public.
- Audio describers have access to actors and creatives which enhances the quality of the provision and increases their confidence.

Next steps, future plans for the project

- We have plans to translate our video and self-description resources into 17 languages.
- We are developing and delivering training sessions for theatres and drama schools.
- We are producing a short film to encourage creatives to collaborate with audio describers.
- The MOOC remains available.

« The project has supported and enabled theatre professionals and audio describers to engage with and explore the findings of the 2020 'Describing Diversity' report in order to promote the creation of inclusive audio descriptions, which celebrate diversity in ethical ways »

EDIEF stages

5

The following section of the report feeds back on the experiences of applicants who both responded to the EDIEF pilot call and the EDIEF award holders (PIs, RAs and project partner representatives) who carried out their fellowship work during this pilot year. This section is set out chronologically, visiting all stages of the award process from the release of the EDIEF call all the way to the post-award period. In this approach, a more detailed view of the individual stages of the EDIEF can be observed and examined. A narrative is provided for each stage of the process, and quotes from individuals are used to highlight issues and reflections from each stage. All quotes are anonymised and have been directly sourced from the interviews, surveys, workshops and feedback processes associated with this EDIEF report follow-up project. It should be noted that due to the nature of the chronological structure, themes reoccur at several points in the following stages, which reflect the different challenges at the application stage versus the reality of the challenge in the award holding stage.

The call

The EDIEF call was published on 21st May 2020 on the UKRI/AHRC funding opportunities website and included a deadline of 17th September 2020 for application submissions.

Timing of the call

Applicants were given approximately four months from the call launch to submit applications via Je-S (Joint Electronic System). The call launch occurred two months after the first lockdown announcement in England, Scotland, Wales (23rd March 2020) and Northern Ireland (28th March 2020). The pandemic had shut down face-to-face public services, presenting a new reality for the population to acclimatise to, thus the timing of the call drew commentary from prospective applicants, as the following statement describes:

“The timing of this call isn’t optimal. The call was issued in late May and the deadline is early September. This period includes all of the school summer holidays at a time when due to COVID there are few holiday camps, and also encompasses a period when many schools had closed prior to summer holidays. This means the barriers to application facing working parents (most likely mothers, in particular) are very high. This is all exacerbated by the fact that the deadline is only a week after the schools are due to reopen. I hope that there will be plenty of future calls and that some thought could be given to the timing with respect to the school timetable.”

The timing of specialist funding calls, as in the case of the EDIEF, can have a significant impact on the demographics and range of applicants submitting to funding calls. The pandemic had imposed a situation on working families that prevented access to usual summer holiday clubs and childcare that would have, in normal circumstances, enabled parents to continue working throughout the summer. It is worth noting that other informal forms of childcare such as grandparents, relatives and babysitting/childminding services were also not advised or fully operational during this time (due to COVID-19) with which the EDIEF funding call coincided. Caring responsibilities, especially for those in the first wave of the pandemic were intensified since respite or operational services were cut off overnight. Running the EDIEF call over a summer holiday may well have impeded the period of focus of parents (and especially mothers), therefore excluding them (or making it harder for them) from applying. The reality of what this looked like for working mothers who chose to apply to the EDIEF is reflected in this account from one applicant:

“I was juggling home-schooling, childcare and full-time work commitments during pandemic... the little, tiny bit of time I should have been using for downtime, I used it for writing an [EDIEF] application. On the one hand, it was hard. But on the other hand, it gave me a focus, and the pandemic time had not been good for focus at all. So, it did bring a sense of purpose during that very aimless time.”

Applicants to the EDIEF also faced challenges with this timeline that impacted the level of research support over the summer period. The summer period is not typically used as a submission window by the AHRC for thematic calls as institution research offices tend to be quieter due to periods of annual leave:

“Also, universities are shut down, so the amount of support you actually get to put in your bids in is not great.”

Further to these timing conflicts, the call’s launch also had proximity to the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, prompting readings of the call regarding its influence and purpose as one applicant questioned:

“What was the motivation for doing it [releasing the call] at that time, at that moment? That wasn’t very transparent... that of course makes you wonder if you are coming at it the right way.”

Summary

Run the funding calls over a period of time that takes account of those with parental, caring and career-related responsibilities, such as teaching. The summer period is not a suitable timeframe for releasing thematic calls since it presents a barrier to applying for parents and carers, particularly when any support provision, such as childcare or extended family support, may be more restrictive or less available as a result of changes stemming from the pandemic. Funding calls also need to be sensitive to the changing context and environment to examine how calls are received in relation to their proximity to significant movements and world news.

Attractiveness of the call

The EDIEF call drew interest from 56 applicants (1 of which failed the sift process due to being incomplete after the submission deadline lapsed). Applications were motivated to apply by the fit of the project work in relation to the EDIEF call, which offered the opportunity to develop the impact of existing research, while being an EDI specific call:

“[A] really exciting opportunity when it came up. Seemed to fit our ideals nicely, and our very specific logistical needs. Felt like it ticked a lot of those boxes. The reason we applied is because we needed those resources, but we also wanted a continuity of the work we were enjoying. [It was] about doing it ethically, making sure that everyone involved were receiving appropriate resources and remuneration. And that we were doing it on the scale that it deserved.”

Other applicants noted the AHRC’s status as an integral attraction to applying for the EDIEF:

“The AHRC funding is really prestigious and very competitive. The AHRC has got a reputation for being difficult to get, which means when you get it, people look at you differently... I’ve never had AHRC funding before and I applied and thought, ‘let’s give it a shot.’”

The view of the PI’s institution regarding the AHRC’s funding calls and status also had bearing on the call’s attractiveness:

“The AHRC is the best source of funding, it’s the one that is most respected in my area... it’s definitely worth a go. It is seen as prestigious by my institution.”

A similar sentiment was expressed by another applicant:

“The AHRC has been my primary funder. They have been good at having calls for my interest alignment... which is impact-facing humanities research, which values collaborative work with community partners. They have had a number of calls throughout my professional life that have spoken directly to that and valued that.”

The EDIEF’s features, such as its opportunities for junior staff employment, provided the motivating force for applying, for some applicants:

“...the motivation for doing this project was to provide employment for an ECR so it could empower someone and train them, give them the critical capacity to do the work... address some of the questions simultaneously.”

Some applicants had built an awareness around types of funding calls and their experimental nature. Applicants viewed the EDIEF as welcoming of risk and a call which would accept 'learning-by-process' methods as this applicant described:

"...ways in which they have delineated their calls and responses that they are having... you can see that in the call development... they often have critical engagement with academics to help them to design the calls... there is a lot of groundwork that happens before the call is put together... you can tell that. For the person applying... for someone like me it gives a greater sense of confidence that they will get some of the things that might seem like riskier bits of your research, whereas the outcome might be less tangible, or it might not work because you can evidence that the process is going to be part of the learning and can be beneficial and I think they're really open to that."

There was a discernible amount of praise for this new pilot funding scheme:

"I think it's a really great call... the way it operated worked well."

But equally, there was concern about the need for a funding call specifically on EDI areas:

"There shouldn't be any need for it [EDIEF]... there's always something quite sad about having to have very specific calls around equality and diversity... there ought to be equality and diversity in the offer anyway. We all ought to have equal opportunity to draw down funding and much larger sums of funding for longer periods."

This quote reflects the reservations about the need or nature of the EDIEF and EDI funding more generally. The belief is underpinned by the expectation that mainstream funding opportunities should attract and represent the full diversity of academic researchers and research areas. However, it was also appreciated that until this equality of opportunity and representation is reached, targeted calls, such as the EDIEF, present one way of mitigating the lack of representation amongst its award holders and topics, and the unrepresented nature of funded recipients in academia.

« PI costed time was unavailable within the EDIEF. The lack of PI buyout time as presented in the EDIEF call generated the most feedback from applicants »

Summary

AHRC funding is viewed as desirable and prestigious by respondents. Whilst the need to redress inequalities raised some comments about the need for AHRC to mainstream EDI and recipient-diversity within its main funding calls, particular features of the EDIEF, such as its support for junior researchers, and its function as a practical mitigation of existing equalities, were highlighted as contributing positively.

The EDI dimension of the EDIEF call acted as a motivating force, appealing directly to researcher interests, alongside the call's capacity-building ambitions. These drivers for applying demonstrated a healthy interest within the research community in responding to a new funding call based on impact-focused EDI work. This also confirms the need to sustain the EDIEF as a recurring funding call to retain the broad breadth and range of eligible project work existent in the application base.

The EDIEF pilot as an EDI-specific funding opportunity generated critical feedback about its siloed position (being a standalone call). This indicated the need for greater effort from the AHRC in communicating the EDIEF's strategic position within the larger roadmap seeking to develop and sustain a more diverse applicant pool in the mainstream, such as their standard route funding calls.

PI buyout

PI costed time was unavailable within the EDIEF. The lack of PI buyout time as presented in the EDIEF call generated the most feedback from applicants:

"Because the above fellowship does not allow me to recoup staff costs, I am effectively unable to apply for this fellowship, even though I have the skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a project in this area. Given the disproportionate number of academics and researchers with protected characteristics who are also on temporary contracts, the structure of the above fellowship is effectively marginalising the community it is seeking to benefit from within HE itself. Those individuals with protected characteristics will often also be highly skilled at building the kinds of spheres of influence described as desirable in the fellowship details. But the fellowship's structure prevents those individuals from making progress in areas in which they are so skilled. I am one of those individuals."

This feedback indicates the larger issue of funding calls and academics holding fixed-term contracts (FTCs), precarious, or casual roles. HESA data shows that minoritised academic staff are more likely to hold less senior and more insecure (e.g. fixed term) contracts⁵ and, anecdotally, likely to have career pathways that do not fit into conventional models, with, for example, multiple careers before entering the academy, holding multiple roles and multiple focuses of research activities. Combined, these factors pose challenges for creating equality of opportunity and seed additional risks to perceptions of suitability for funding. To mitigate the risk, work needs to be done to highlight role models of successful careers and ensure that peer reviewers are provided with guidance on this risk and data on the demographics of applications, shortlisted and finally selected applications.

The lack of PI buyout time was perceived as a barrier to applying by specific demographics, namely women, BAME applicants and early career researchers (ECRs) as explained in the following quote:

“I noticed that costed time for staff PI is ineligible. This is incredibly worrisome for a funding scheme meant to address EDI concerns, especially when women and BAME applicants, who are most likely to want to apply for this grant, often take on extra teaching and pastoral roles in their departments. As an EDI officer at my University, I wanted to bring your attention to this because it will certainly result in potential applicants being unable to apply. As you probably know from many recent studies, women’s academic careers often advance far more slowly than men because of complex, private and professional inequities that result in a de-prioritization of women’s research time—that is, teaching and family often override the pursuit of more public-facing research projects. The current COVID crisis has illuminated this inequality starkly.”

The additional workloads of marginalised groups (of those who work within academia) have been observed widely as the demands on time increase in terms of committee board memberships or undertaking additional work that is not directly related to the academic research areas but does contribute to a more inclusive academic environment, such as participation in Athena Swan or Race Equality⁶ charter self-assessment teams or widening participation outreach activities.

Without PI buyout, successful applicants were not entitled to any change to their usual pre-award workloads while undertaking PI duties. Applying and securing an EDIEF award was in addition to pre-existing academic workloads, without extra pay, teaching relief or acknowledgement of the academic input. The potential extra workload generated, if securing an EDIEF award, was enough to dissuade applicants from submitting applications to this call:

“As a working mother there is no way that I could teach a full course load and facilitate the work necessary for a successful series of impact events, while also maintaining my research and publishing schedule.”

The barrier to ECRs was further articulated in the following applicant feedback:

“Not costing in the PI... is a barrier to ECR PIs / less-established academics from applying and gaining recognition for the very EDI / impact work that may well have diverted their energies from the publications of more senior profs.”

While not explicitly stated in the call, the EDIEF appeared to be encouraging applicants with more established track records of research and existing partnership connections, commensurate with senior level academic experience. This wording indirectly discriminated against early career researchers who would not have accrued the research or partnership working required for this funding opportunity:

“I think this will be a barrier to eligible researchers, working on EDI, interested in applying to the scheme. It also seems counter to the practice that other fellowship/impact and engagement models (offered by the AHRC and other UKRI funders) which do allow for PI time. Staff costs do seem to be eligible for ‘junior’ colleagues to be involved in activities, according to the call guidance, but there is no other detail about this. This may also discourage PIs who are defined as ‘Early Career’ in applying to the scheme. In order to encourage applications to this scheme, it would be helpful to have at least some notational allocated cost for the PI.”

Those successful in securing EDIEF funding expressed concern around the lack of PI buyout once in position as award holders. One academic explained this as a difficult situation to be in, which threatened burnout, impacting on their individual wellbeing:

“It’s made my year so difficult... I could have really enjoyed this project but basically you are doing two jobs across a year, and I am really tired now... it’s exhausting... and not great for any of the people involved. Nobody can get full satisfaction from what they’re doing because you are doing such a lot without any buyout, whilst doing all your other stuff... It feels exploitative if I am honest, it’s the biggest bugbear. It would have been really helpful to have teaching relief.”

Some fellows reported back on the stigma within their institutions when applying or attaining a grant without PI buyout offered as an eligible cost:

“You are doing work that is a burden on the university, since it’s a drain away from teaching resources [as your time is not bought out].”

These feelings of culpability extended to another award holder who demonstrated acute awareness of this encumbrance:

“[it would have been good to have] PI time to satisfy the head of school.”

A reported reaction from some institutions to funding opportunities without PI costed time was to forcibly dissuade academics from applying in the first instance and if successful, refusing offers of funding which come with this caveat. One view on this action observes the institution’s seemingly protective stance with regards to academic workload and wellbeing, however this decision is more likely motivated by the allure of bigger income streams and opportunities (that offer buyout), avoiding backfill costs which the institution would need to find, and as a means of safeguarding any jeopardy to teaching and the student experience. One applicant describes the process of working against institutional dissuasion when applying to the EDIEF due to the lack of buyout. This account simultaneously encapsulates the challenges of finding adequate time and space for writing grant applications in the first instance, within the context of full-time academic positions where teaching and administrative workloads are all-encompassing:

“I had to work really hard to convince them [institution] that this was worth doing. I had to show them that I had enough time available... the only reason I can do it is because I am on sabbatical. It [the sabbatical and unpaid leave] enabled me to apply for this... there was no way I could have done the grant or have applied for the grant if I was doing a full-time academic job without a sabbatical.”

This level of gatekeeping regarding what bids institutions were willing to support, specifically bids inclusive of PI costed time trickled down to the academics making applications to the EDIEF as one applicant recalled:

“I have heard from higher up in the research office that they ideally want us applying for things that have PI buyout time.”

The issue surrounding PI buyout extended more generally to the suite of funding the AHRC offers. It was not entirely clear to applicants and award holders why some AHRC schemes allow for PI time to be bought out and in other schemes PI time is not a permitted cost. Applicants and award holders were left to come to their own conclusions as to why this might be. A common perception was that of a hierarchy where there are ‘better grants’ to go for that have more ‘value’ for research and to the respective institution. The EDIEF scheme was thus felt ‘less than’, or as one individual put it, **“second rate”** in comparison to other awards since it offered no PI buyout, provided a low funding ceiling and a relatively short funding duration.

“During [an internal] peer review process... I can't see no buyout time... so it is not a fellowship, not really. A fellowship would mean I would get replaced; this is not a fellowship.”

Some fellows perceived the lack of PI buyout time as financially offset by the ability to use funding to support partnerships and partnership activities. The EDIEF provided funds to set up and run engagement activities, which in many cases were joint ventures with project partners as one fellow explains:

“On the one hand I really like the fact that a lot of the money goes to the project partner... they really need the money more than my institution does. The thing about PI buyout time, depending on your institution, a lot of the money that you need to account for in the grant actually ends up going to estates, and overheads... the institution adds a lot... you don't get much for your money basically. It's better value for money to give the money out, outside of the institution.”

Summary

The absence of PI funding created surprise within institutions and a perception of hierarchy between different AHRC funding calls, with the EDIEF perceived possibly as being lesser than other calls. The absence of PI buyout time in the EDIEF as presented in the call did not reflect the actual diverse needs and management support required by the PI of the project and the supervision and support needs of the RAs. Whilst the desire to support the career progression of research assistants and engage community partners are desirable, the expertise needed, short funding period, the acute challenges of the pandemic and staff project management expectations combined to necessitate significant input from the PIs (as experienced by PIs in the award holding period). This additional labour placed stresses on some PIs, whose personal circumstances, such as childcare responsibilities or the PI not being on permanent contracts or able to secure buyout time for the additional work, exacerbated this.

Impact-focused EDI work can be better supported with PI buyout time included in the funding offer to reduce excessive workloads for the PI, bring focus onto the project's goals and would protect time for professional development of RAs involved in the project. Offering PI time in future calls will likely stimulate a greater application rate, appealing to individuals initially warned off regarding feasibility or logistics concerns.

Award duration

Thematic calls such as the EDIEF are often dictated by budget spend pressures and have less flexibility regarding deadlines for project start dates and completion deadlines. There was ambiguity around the EDIEF's allowance and flexibility for part-time researchers and those with disabilities who required reasonable adjustments with regards to extra time (beyond the specified 12-month duration offered in the call). This uncertainty raised questions about the flexibility of the award duration to take account of reasonable adjustments as one applicant queried:

“First, is there scope within this scheme for the fellowship to be applied for jointly where applicants work part-time and/or have disabilities that have an impact on time?”

Summary

The impact of the pandemic was an omnipresent challenge for the EDIEF call and delivery. However, there was limited mitigation of contingencies to the rigid timeline. This was particularly challenging and at points, ironic, given the call's EDI focus and posed particular risks for disabled applicants and those with caring responsibilities, including pregnancy and maternity.

Building in contingency funds and the means to offer flexibility in the award duration in thematic calls will provide a more hospitable space for those in need of reasonable adjustments due to disability, maternity leave, caring responsibilities, or part-time status.

« Thematic calls such as the EDIEF are often dictated by budget spend pressures and have less flexibility regarding deadlines for project start dates and completion deadlines »

Award ceiling

The award ceiling was set at £100,000 for applications in the EDIEF call guidance. The call did not stipulate how many applications would be funded and what quotas, if any, would be implemented. Funds were available to cover the research assistant(s) salary and for establishing and running engagement activities to further the impact of existing research. It was acknowledged by some applicants that the award ceiling was modest and limited in its scope:

“It’s not a sufficient amount of money to be career changing.”

Applicants regulated their proposed expenditures in their applications to fit their plans within the constraints of the budget. One applicant shared their thought process on the challenges of budgeting amidst the uncertainty of COVID-19:

“Was the funding going to be enough? I brought my costs down a little bit... how am I going to do this in COVID?”

The AHRC awarded 10 fellowships via the EDIEF call, totalling a cost of £909,865. 8 out of 10 of the successful projects chose to use the maximum award ceiling available.

Summary

The award ceiling for the EDIEF was modest, although comparable to AHRC Follow-on Funding provision (a scheme which also offers up to £100,000 across 12 months), which is a funding scheme also focused on impact and engagement. The investment into this pilot scheme was approximately £1 million (see Executive Summary, funding investment figures).

The application process

As in the case of AHRC standard route funding schemes, the EDIEF required a set of attachments when submitting to the call via the Je-S system. The EDIEF required a Case for Support, CVs of the PI and RA(s), Publication lists, Justification of Resources and Letters of Support, where applicable. The standard Workplan attachment was omitted, and a Head of Department EDI Statement was instated as a new attachment (a document outlining the institutional commitment to EDI, how it will be embedded in the fellowship and sustained beyond the life of the award). Applying via Je-S is a system used for all AHRC/UKRI funding calls (bar the AHRC Rapid Response COVID-19 funding call released in April 2020 which offered an expression of interest (Eol) application process). Je-S form completion and attachment compiling are the same for all AHRC funding applications, regardless of the size of the grant being sought.

The Je-S application system

The application process required a time commitment for completing forms and for writing the research project details in prose form. A completed Je-S form can be approximately between 30–40 pages in total.

“I think that all grant application processes could be streamlined, and a little bit shorter. And we have seen examples of that in COVID, those first turn around applications that are really short, and I think you can still make sure it is fair and responsible, whilst keeping it brief. It wasn’t the worst example of its kind, but it could have been briefer”.

This quote points to the AHRC’s Rapid Response COVID-19 call (the AHRC’s funding scheme calling for projects in the Arts and Humanities that explored solutions to the urgent problems created or exacerbated by the pandemic). This funding scheme released in April 2020 required a 10-page word expression of interest (Eol) document, for applying for AHRC funding. If an Eol was successful, the applicant was then asked to complete the full Je-S system application for more detail on the project. This Eol system was implemented to enable a rapid response, with a turnaround time initially offered in 10 days for submission outcomes.

The timing of the EDIEF pilot call release, coupled with the time commitment needed for a full Je-S application created a barrier to applying to the funding call. The Je-S system, with its multifaceted components and taxing nature can be off-putting as one applicant explained:

“Applications are incredibly time-consuming and that puts a lot of people off.”

The sheer time commitment for populating the Je-S form was felt by many EDIEF applicants to be a barrier to applying. The need for experience as a pre-requisite to navigate the funding application system was also a concern. Adding this to the relatively low success rates for AHRC schemes (Research Grants: 17%, Research Networking: 30%, and RDE Fellowships: 23%) created a system that deters rather than incentivises applicants:

“Just the balance between the amount of effort and the success rate... I knew it was going to be a tough one, I don’t think I would have applied unless I knew I had a pretty good application.”

Applicants well versed in applying for AHRC funding were aware of the demands of completing Je-S applications and case for support documents. This foresight, experience and privilege of seniority proved useful for knowing one’s way around the application system. This, together with the tight deadline for submitting to the EDIEF may have worked against less experienced, less well-supported ECRs interested in the call. For those uninitiated with Je-S or writing AHRC applications, the workload involved most likely exceeded the four-month submission period allowed for within the EDIEF pilot application process:

“I knew that form filling and the Je-S form would take over my life, and it did. Because it’s just so complex, the way it lays out the questions and the attachments. You spend a huge amount of time developing the case for support, I knew that was ahead of me because I had applied for grants, I had been through it many times before”.

Strategic decisions were made when applicants considered applying to the EDIEF due to the workload involved in completing an application for AHRC funding. Applicants became selective on where their research application writing time would go:

“[I] apply to other places more, because of the amount of work [AHRC applications] take. I couldn’t have the sustainability to be applying for AHRC projects unless I was really certain it’s going to come off. Or that the work you are going to put into it is going to go somewhere, as it takes so much effort.”

Some applicants noted the need for greater transparency and clarity within the EDIEF call document itself. The need for directness was stressed as one applicant explains:

“The guidance was a little bit challenging to process and read, I had to spend a lot of time with it, it wasn’t easy reading. It felt like it wasn’t straightforward, and that I had to read between the lines sometimes and double-check things. It didn’t make sense on the first read. I found that frustrating.”

Summary

The Je-S system is a lengthy application process, which created an over-burdensome route to securing funding. The extensive form filling and attachment writing created a hurdle for prospective applicants. Applicants can perceive developing an AHRC application as a time risk where a demanding process of application has such small odds of success. The EoI application model offers one means for reducing the burden of the application process and provides a less riskier time commitment for individuals who wish to apply but do not have the time available for example, those on fixed term contracts, part-time academics, carers, and individuals already over-committed.

Hesitance

Hesitancy (the uncertainty, scepticism, or complete avoidance) in applying to the EDIEF pilot scheme manifested itself in a variety of ways ranging from issues around terminology used in the call's title, to the uncertainty of the funding's scope over what it would or would not permit. The 'EDI' and 'impact' labels attached to the EDIEF call generated a degree of disinclination amongst some applicants since these terms held less weight or value in comparison to research within funding schemes. The EDI label was also observed as having a siloing effect for the applicant whose research can become side-lined in favour of their EDI expertise, as one applicant described:

"It's a concern for me, I don't want to be seen as the person who does EDI... it tends to be a kind of waiting room in which black careers disappear and die... my role is not EDI, and I wasn't appointed as EDI, and I want that to be really clear to people, that I am an academic, as them, alongside them, on the same status. So, I do always feel slightly worried about applying for something that has EDI stamped all over it, because it shouldn't have to, and because I think it gives people the impression that that's why I am there. Which you know, is quite a racist view... so yeah, I did have some qualms about it."

For some, hesitance in applying to the EDIEF was generated as a result of the AHRC's stance on excluding co-investigators (Co-Is) as an eligible feature and cost within applications. For one applicant, the omission of collaborating researchers felt at odds with their project's ambitions:

"I think if there had been the option to have Co-I's, that I would have taken that option, especially if they could be community collaborators or artists, so, that was a slight hurdle for me. Working out those relationships and making sure that everyone felt happy about how they were represented as part of the team."

Hesitancy in applying to the EDIEF further stemmed from the judgements that might be made on an individual's career or eligibility by the AHRC's peer review process, where measures of research excellence and success are formed on them through comparisons to typical white male candidates and their trajectories of success:

“There [are] several threads to my research interests as I haven't had a straightforward career... like most black people and like most women, there is not one line in my career... which I actually think might work against me with AHRC sometimes... my career doesn't look like a white bloke's career, it's not linear... I've had to duck and dive a bit. I don't look like the world's expert on one thing, which I think might count against me.”

This quote encapsulates the challenges faced by applicants who are marginalised or from unrepresented groups, where using standard measures and markers of success and achievement may be unduly excluding such applicants who apply for funding. There are systemic barriers faced by individuals from underrepresented groups that prevent conventional career trajectories associated with academic privilege, thus applicants not in possession of CVs or career progressions typically seen amongst successful applicants face hurdles at the peer review stage to convince review panels of their standing or ability to undertake research project work. This varied spectrum of experience is often held by minoritised groups, Black and Asian, international staff in HE, women, working mothers, LGBTQIA+ people, ECRs and those on precarious, fixed-term contracts (FTCs). These groups already face marginalisation, suggesting the need to use the data to develop proportionate responses through equity-based EDI strategies to eliminate disparities amongst underrepresented groups that feel these impacts most acutely.

Members of the practice-research⁷ community expressed curiosity regarding the EDIEF pilot's openness to practice. More generally and over time, hesitancy has formed within this community towards the AHRC's funding calls and its attitude toward non-text outputs and process-focus projects. One applicant articulated this barrier to applying by explaining how this perception affects specific disciplines in different ways. This commentary also articulated how feedback from peer review processes created hesitancies and hierarchies towards research formats:

“In terms of the way people talk about it within my own academic community... people see the AHRC as a very academic organisation and so that its only particular sorts of projects that one would apply with... I might have had a worry about it [the application to the EDIEF pilot call] not being academic enough, but it was a very different call to the regular AHRC calls. Practice-based research projects are more difficult to articulate in the kind of academic language that one imagines the AHRC is interested in. Some of the other grants I’ve applied for... one applied for back in probably 2002, [a] fairly big fellowship, and the response was that “it wasn’t an academic enough project”, that’s why I didn’t get it. There is a sense generally between my colleagues that one needs to have a fairly strong academic rationale context for an AHRC application.”

Other feedback on the position of practice-research demonstrates the perception of bias in relation to AHRC funding schemes. This quote from an applicant encouraged the view that artistic research is both knowledge acquisition and research:

“The AHRC tends to want everything to be filtered through brain work... and complicated language in order for it to look like research. Because artistic research and social art are so important in allowing us to come to terms with things and allowing us to communicate what we need to communicate... that it should be made more of a priority than has been. There needs to be more effort made by the AHRC to really understand what is this thing, ‘artistic research’... it’s very hard to get funding for it because it doesn’t look like traditional knowledge production... ‘it’s just art’, it’s not just art, it’s knowledge, it’s research.”

There is an observable conflict between the linear timelines and processes set out by funding bodies and the more fluid, reflexive arc belonging to practice-research. The concept of extending impact through the EDIEF pilot (based on using existing research) posed challenges for practitioner-academics when responding to this call due to this clash of perspectives over where and when impact takes place. From the feedback gathered, there is a collective sense that practice-research applicants regularly flex to conform to the model the AHRC (and other funding bodies) provides, but in reality, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of how practice-research works and where impact occurs within this process.

“The way the research councils expect... somehow, they still have this notion that research happens in a bubble, in your disciplinary area, then you go and engage people with that stuff that’s already been done... and then that has an impact... and artistic practice doesn’t work that way. When looking at this bid, it was sort of a chance to have those things fit more comfortably together, it was still an uncomfortable fit... because of the linearity of the way it is strung out... it’s not how I want to work.”

Practice-research applicants were keen to see future EDIEF calls fund research as well as engagement and impact to acknowledge that for some researchers and discipline areas, these entities are inseparable and that focusing on engagement alone marginalises academics that do not operate with traditional linear visions of research:

“The call should be much clearer on what is being asked for and it should include the possibility of doing new research, on the condition that new research is carried out in an engaged way—i.e., co-created with non-academics. Artistic research is a great opportunity to co-research with ‘publics’ whilst creating positive change together, as part of one integrated and shared movement. But at the moment, this can sit uncomfortably [with] a more linear conception of research, followed by engagement with the findings, followed by impact. We were very interested in doing all three together, iteratively.”

The EDIEF later proved to be a significant facilitator of practice and artistic output as evidenced through the creation of new visual art, musical compositions, dance choreography, digital multi-media artworks, photography exhibitions, theatre productions and an opera. Practice can offer a pathway to impact via the engagement opportunities associated with its dissemination. Practice-outputs are original contributions of knowledge that by their very nature reach non-academic audiences. Practice is not, however, solely an impact-generating device; the process of making generates new knowledge where the process is often the research, and the process of practice spurs on research enquiry. The process of making can also be the site for engagement and impact, further confirming the range of non-linear approaches that practice is situated in. Appreciating the variety and range of ways practice is used within research trajectories is important. Communicating this understanding to the peer review college and review panels members is essential in countering the dismissal and exclusion of research funding proposals engaged with non-text approaches.

Summary

Je-S forms are lengthy to complete, placing burdens on applicants that could be mitigated by using EoI applications forms that are used for other funding calls. Given the lower success rates of minoritised applicants when applying for research funding, lengthy application forms create barriers. These can be exacerbated where there is limited pre-existing connection or relationship between the applicant and their institutional research office. These positive relations were identified by successful PIs as critical to preparing successful applications.

Future criteria for assessing funding applications must value a range of career pathways in the review stage to attract those applicants who may not perceive themselves as eligible or suitable to apply. These efforts need to be combined by opening up the peer review college to include those whose careers are diverse and those who can represent strategic EDI perspectives.

The AHRC team should be recognised for their efforts to create a more diverse review panel as part of the EDIEF (See **The review process**, page 110) and its ongoing efforts to diversify the peer review college.

Whilst valuing and recognising the AHRC as a highly esteemed funder, there are perceptions regarding the 'type' of researcher and research that it funds. This includes the need to be highly academic and within currently recognised areas, which lead to perceptions of exclusivity and risks increasing self-exclusion from eligibility. This can be mitigated by actions highlighted in this report, such as in promotion of the call, making applications easier and ensuring calls highlight the availability to a broad range of research activity. This is particularly relevant to misunderstandings about what practice-research is, and perceptions of this throughout all parts of the funding application ecosystem (funding bodies, peer reviewers, applicants, research offices and institutions) which have, to date, marginalised practice-research.

Special attachments

The EDIEF pilot call requested a new attachment within the application submission entitled, 'Head of Department (HoD) EDI Statement', which was a space for articulating the institutional commitment to EDI, how it would be embedded in the fellowship and sustained beyond the life of the award. The new attachment was required to confirm "the ethical and inclusive partnership working [where applicable], the extent to which the fellowship will build capacity in the partner organisation/s and leave them strengthened" (**Appendix 2: AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot call guidance document**). This mechanism, brought in exclusively for the

EDIEF pilot call, was appreciated for its agenda-pushing functionality within the institutional environment regarding its own internal policies and procedures. The benefit of such a process was seen as a positive, change-agent mechanism as described by one applicant:

“My department had to earn back the proposal and commit to some institutional change.”

The HoD EDI statement was an opportunity to reflect upon the institution's own EDI commitments and how these more generalised institutional ambitions and values could be translated into the specifics of individuals' EDIEF applications. Demonstrating commitments to EDI actions at both institutional and individual application levels are an important step in presenting a united front at the funding application stage and to signal the priority of EDI working from the institution. This letter required content that would indicate an understanding of the PI's partnership(s) and the value of such collaborative ventures. The challenge with new attachments of this kind was the absence of any detailed AHRC guidance on what was needed in constructing this statement:

“The only issue was, they [institution] had no clue, like the rest of us, because it was a pilot. They were often scratching their heads, going ‘well, we don't have any reference point for this, so we don't really know what some of this means in the guidance’. But I think everyone would have been feeling that, not only me... it was a step into the unknown for my institution.”

The lack of guidance for the HoD EDI statement posed some concerns and challenges for some applicants due to the lack of knowledge of what an EDI statement should contain. The HoD's responsibility for constructing a supportive EDI narrative was pushed back onto one applicant as this account shows:

“Your head of department had to write a letter of support indicating their commitment to EDI, so that was something new, and when we got to that stage, my head of department asked me to draft it for him. Also, there wasn't much guidance on it, we didn't know what was needed from the letters of support. I wondered; would this one letter be the downfall of my application?”

The construction of a credible HoD letter of support proved to be essential for the review panel in building confidence “that the fellowship would lead to greater sustainability” (See **Appendix 4: AHRC Assessment Panel General feedback for EDI Engagement Fellowship scheme—general observations**). It was noted by the panel that “the level of institutional support was highly variable across the proposals” and “the most successful proposals had realistic and sincere head of department statements.”

Summary

The innovation of an EDI statement may have enabled senior engagement with the applications and highlighted the funder's expectations on institutional engagement, however, this placed additional burdens on applicants and left many institutions (including research support offices) confused, due to the lack of precedence or experience in completing these. Clear guidance on AHRC changes to the applications process or requirements should have been provided to reduce burden on applicant and institution. This would allow the benefits of the EDI statement to be understood at the institutional level and enable learning to be embedded into institutional memory.

Naming and selecting research assistants

The EDIEF pilot called for the inclusion and costing of new, junior member(s) (referred to as RAs) of staff to undertake the work of the fellowship. When applying to this call, applicants could choose to name RAs or leave these unnamed. In situations where RAs were unnamed, a recruitment process would be required (if the PI was successful in securing EDIEF funding). With the short turnaround between the award notification letter (received 17th December 2020) and the project start date of no later than 1st February 2021, the timeframe did not allow for institutional hiring procedures to take place; an issue particularly exacerbated by the Christmas holiday and periods of closure.

“If I had had to recruit [an RA]... that would have been a nightmare and quite delayed.”

In some institutions, the hiring process took a period of three months to complete, proving impossible to hire RAs in time for the project start date using the timeframe specified by the AHRC. Those fellows who chose to leave RAs unnamed were challenged to satisfy open recruitment requirements within their home institutions within the tight timeframe. One fellow describes this in relation to the hiring of a Knowledge Transfer (KE) Associate:

« Demonstrating commitments to EDI actions at both institutional and individual application levels are an important step in presenting a united front at the funding application stage and to signal the priority of EDI working from the institution »

“The KE Associate was appointed by an open recruitment call... [this was a] huge problem, if you have an open call and you have to advertise a position, there is no way you can get someone to start on February 1st. The start date we had was more like March 22nd for my KE Associate, which meant I was doing the work. I was working almost full time on the project, while doing my academic job, while having a full teaching load... the letter we got was pretty strict about when the project had to start. I take it seriously when you sign that, and you say the project is going to start. My KE Associate was appointed and joined; that was part of the process of selecting him, was that he could start fast, and the absolute fastest we could get him was March 22nd.”

Another Fellow reiterated this same challenge where the struggle to bring an RA in ready for the start date was impossible, even when then RA was named:

“HR couldn’t get the person [RA] in post by the start date... she basically started two weeks later than I wanted her to. For the first two weeks of the project, I was doing this on my own.”

In many cases, the successful applicants overcame this hiring process obstacle by opting to name specific people who they were already on familiar terms with, as one Fellow describes:

“I knew of someone else who had just finished her PhD, whose research interests were perfect for the project, and I know she had organisational skills as she worked at another BAME focused writers’ group, so I knew I could rely on her, so she was well placed.”

Another Fellow corroborated this same issue:

“I did name both of my junior colleagues. I knew both of them prior to their appointment. But in the application process we didn’t know if we could name people, it wasn’t clear from the guidance. We wanted to maybe put a call out for these posts, but there was no time in between to put a post listing out, we can’t hire as we need at least 3–4 months minimum. Because the start date for the grant, if successful, had to be January or February 2021, there was no way, they [institution] said, that they could have this as a vacancy. It forced me to name them at the application stage”.

This issue was later flagged during a peer-review workshop for this applicant, demonstrating a conflict with more inclusive hiring procedures:

“This is not very equal opportunities if you are naming people, because you haven’t given people the chance to apply... being allowed to put a post out and to see applicants apply for that would have ensured access and equality. However, what it has led my project to do... it’s homophily, as she [RA] is already in my circle, so I went to her... that’s not the best or fairest way. Unfortunately, I didn’t get to see those other applicants.”

There are clear pros and cons to the homophily mentioned in this above account; on the one hand PIs are well placed to know and identify suitable ECRs for RA positions in their field of research and can assess their fit and calibre for carrying out research, particularly given the relatively short period of funding. However, there should be in parallel, a timeframe that supports an open call for recruiting new staff members when expertise is needed and can be sought in a fair process. Without the ability to hire RA staff fairly, the EDIEF call jeopardised the completion of applications as this account recollects:

“We are in a tight spot where we were left to put people in these positions, but without knowing the full range of expertise out there, and that’s something I do feel quite strongly about, and I think that was a bad move not to allow for vacancies. There were these moments where I thought I might not even reach the point of submitting, because of the naming the research assistant issue”.

Different institutions had their own ways of dealing with this issue of naming research assistants with an eye on the tight turnaround if the PI was successful in securing an EDIEF, as one fellow recalled:

“At the application stage... I had to set up the paperwork for recruitment as part of the application... HR needed to see a job spec, see a salary... it needed to be ready so they could put it on the system.”

While this practical step by the institution helped alleviate the rush on paperwork and form filling when the RA started work, this additional recruitment labour fell to the PI even before they were notified of a successful outcome from the AHRC, extending the expected time and input commitment needed in applying to the EDIEF pilot call.

Summary

Establish timeframes that allow for recruitment processes to take place. Institutions on average require 3–4 months minimum to set up a recruitment process to comply with open and fair recruitment practices and institutional system requirements. The short turnaround time between communication of award and project start date did not allow for these timelines to be respected unless the application included a named research assistant. Whilst this may have reduced the time needed, it does create a tension with the desirable goal of open and fair recruitment and reinforces insider-outsider dichotomy tensions, where those individuals who are already profiled secure additional access to opportunities.

Institutional support

All successful applicants to the EDIEF pilot cited institutional support as essential for preparing applications to the pilot call. Specifically, this related to budgeting, costings of engagement activities and Je-S form completion. Support from research officers proved fundamental to applicants responding to the pilot call, where no knowledge base or examples of good practice (successful bid applications) existed. Institutional support also came in the form of encouragement for applicants responding to a call specifically based on EDI issues. This institutional backing and support for bid writing associated with EDI is described by the following account:

“It was fantastic from [institution], I can’t really fault the experience of the support there. What I would really credit is the research support from the faculty. The research director, [named person] was completely on it, and saw this opportunity, and saw how keen I was to apply, so as soon as he saw that, he rallied around me, got a team of humanities researchers to look at my proposal and created a workshop just for me, which I was stunned by... people just added helpful comments, got my application on a shared screen, and we all just fed into it, and it seemed like a big deal for them, as EDI at [institution] was strong and was a key element. And I could feel and sense that EDI was important to them.”

The close working relationships and familiarity with institutional research officers proved to be a common thread running through all applicants successful in securing EDIEF funding when recounting the application process as one applicant recalled:

“[I] worked really closely with a research manager in the Digital Cultures Research Centre, with [named person] who knows the system inside out, in terms of AHRC forms and internal university forms and systems. Without him, I don’t think I would have been able to navigate that by myself... I don’t find the process of applying for the AHRC intuitive at all... so many hidden other sections... really difficult. [Thinking about] early career researchers, who have never applied before, how they would navigate that if they didn’t have someone there alongside them... impossible.”

The majority of successful EDIEF applicants commented and credited their good working relationships with research offices and individuals that had been cultivated over several years. These relationships provided access to funding application knowledge, establishing an inside track on the workings of application systems, that for many academics, remains elusive or mysterious as a process. Operationally, within institutions there is an insider-outsider risk, with those on the outside probably less able to make successful applications. This risk further marginalises those on fixed-term contracts, ECRs yet to establish working relationships with research offices, or individuals who can offer support. A system that depends on good relations with research office individuals favours established researchers, and those with the privilege of a sustained (unbroken, interrupted or patchy) career in an institution.

Summary

University research offices were highlighted as critical to success, providing information, advice, costings, and practical support to all applicants. Pre-existing personal relationships between successful applicants and staff members within the research offices enabled support to be more easily accessed and facilitated the meeting of deadlines.

In designing the call, the AHRC needs to be mindful of application requirements that increase the necessity for close relationships between applicant and institutional research offices. Given the experiences and profiles of minoritised staff, the short turnaround time for the call and the impact of the pandemic, these well-established relationships may not exist and so result in fewer applications from the diverse profile of applicants that the funding call seeks to engage.

Applying in the time of COVID-19

Applications to the EDIEF were all completed during the time of COVID-19. The UK had started to emerge cautiously out of the first lockdown at the point when the call was published. One applicant recalled the impact the pandemic had on the writing of their application in summer 2020 when the uncertainty of COVID played havoc with planning live events. Planning a timeline involving future live events and engagement demanded a COVID contingency plan if restrictions were to limit in-person events:

“Having to weigh two proposals into one was a challenge.”

Applying to the EDIEF required a degree of foresight, double planning, and the ability to anticipate the trajectory of a global pandemic as one applicant described:

“At the time of applying, we were anticipating that the pandemic might limit our options, in terms of how we were able to meet with people and the kind of events we were going to be able to hold. I was really hoping with all of my heart that the production would be able to be held in person... And I still am, so at this point we are still assuming that that will be held in a theatre in person.”

Summary

The context of the pandemic impacted on how applicants framed and articulated their proposed engagement events. There was a level of ‘crystal ball forecasting’ or second-guessing highly unpredictable situations to anticipate what in-person activities would be possible, while simultaneously devising online alternatives, at the application stage. This raised anxieties amongst applicants and those interested in the call, which were heightened by the tight delivery timeline. Reasonable contingencies in relation to timelines are needed to support the realisation of EDI principles in practice.

Application deadline

Applicants were given approximately 4 months from the call launch to submit applications via the Je-S (Joint Electronic System) system, with a deadline of 17th September 2020 for application submissions. This relatively short time period to prepare submissions presented a challenge for applicants working with project partners, who were themselves affected and interrupted by the pandemic, where national restrictions impeded normal operation. The live events industry has been shuttered since the start of lockdown and by the application deadline, this industry had already experienced five months with very little to no activity. Many applicants proposed partnerships with theatres, music organisations, dance companies and creative sectors; all industries heavily hit by the pandemic, which were facing challenges with timelines, calendars, and ability to forward plan. The knock-on effect was felt by applicants seeking to formalise project partners with creative organisations and for assistance on bid writing. Time pressure for securing project partner letters of support whilst facing ambiguity over the future was felt severely as one applicant describes:

“My main challenge was getting buy-in from partners... because of COVID a lot of the theatres were closed or coming back slowly and didn't necessarily want to commit to anything. Getting the letters of support from some people were easy, but for others this took a while... I started working on it as soon as I saw the call.”

Soliciting letters of support requires time in normal circumstances, but the double issue of undertaking this in the time of COVID-19 and seeking to include creative industries within project proposals was a challenge faced by many EDIEF applicants. Later in the review process, the consolidated feedback for the EDIEF from the AHRC Assessment Panel remarked that “the letters of support were not specific enough around the commitment that the partner was prepared to make. This often undermined the whole project, particularly where the participation of that partner was integral to the successful delivery of the fellowship.” (See **Appendix 4: Consolidated Panel feedback for EDI Engagement Fellowship scheme—general observations**). The level of specificity required in letters of support from partners is thus important to the success of an application. Ensuring ample time is provided to gather supportive documents together, which effectively conveys the relationship, should be provided, but also the context in which project partners are expected to respond in should be acknowledged.

Other applicants remarked on the tight deadline in putting an entire Je-S application together as a barrier to applying further reiterating the remarks in *The Je-S application system*, page 95

“The speed of having to put it [application] together... the timing was a real obstacle for me... it's not something you can apply for without having the inside track on, without having good advice, and that's to do with how the Je-S system works too. There is not so much transparency as there should be when applying.”

Summary

The timelines for the application were tight for normal circumstances, but during the pandemic, with limitations on many caring support services, institutional services and homeworking; the pressures were more acute and challenging. Future calls need to allow for longer call periods that overlap with term time at some point if covering the summer holidays (for example, an application period could run from March to September). Timelines need to reflect realistic durations required in the co-development of applications involving project partners and to also take account of the time needed in soliciting letters of support.

The review process

The review process for the EDIEF involved a one-step review system, known as 'straight to assessment panel', without a 'right of reply' stage. Schemes with a 'right of reply' stage (used in all AHRC funding except the Research Networking scheme and Follow-on Funding schemes) allow a PI response for feedback generated at the peer-review stage, then followed by a moderation panel where an outcome is decided. The EDIEF's one-step, straight to assessment panel review system enabled a quicker turn-around for application outcomes, which were decided via a bespoke EDI review panel.

The EDIEF review panel

The AHRC put together a tailored review panel of people that had EDI expertise. This panel comprised of members from the AHRC advisory board, members from the AHRC peer review college and non-academic specialists as the (then) AHRC Head of Head of Cultural Value and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion explained:

"We tried to put together a panel which reflected what the call was trying to do. You could argue that some of this stuff was not necessarily around academic research. It was more around engagement and impact and working directly with communities and that sort of thing. So, we wanted people who had that sort of expertise. But we were also aware of the kind of EDI issues within academia and within universities as well, so they can understand how these projects could be led and driven by fellows who are based inside academic institutions."

The bespoke review panel construction for the EDIEF proved to be a challenge, indicting the systemic issues preventing more diverse panels being convened for all funding schemes in general:

"The panel that we picked... was deliberately constructed to be diverse, and I think that's potentially a bit of a problem for us as an organisation, to construct genuinely diverse panels, because the tools we have to do that, our peer review college structure, is not diverse in itself. Then you get the issue then... the issue of black academics, you end up approaching the same people to do panels all of the time, on the basis of their ethnicity, rather than their expertise, which I think is not an ideal situation... some of the things we heard from people around that were quite alarming and unpleasant really."

Review guidance

Guidance for panel members was produced specifically for reviewing applications to the EDIEF. This document included an introduction to the call, UKRI's commitment to EDI in the assessment process and guidance on assessing applications to the EDIEF. The AHRC held the EDIEF applications review meeting over two days and used the introducer system to approach each review (the introducer system involves establishing a 'first introducer' who reads an application in its entirety, considers the project against the assessment criteria, and assigns a grade. The first introducer leads the discussion on the application at the panel meeting. A 'second introducer' repeats this process but does not lead the discussion, instead focusing on issues where their assessment differs from the first introducer. The remaining panel members are encouraged to contribute fully to the discussion of each application after reading applications, however they are not expected to formally review proposals on which they do not have an introducer or reader role). Establishing the bespoke review panel and EDIEF review guidance helped solidify the commitment to embedding EDI in the review process and the panel membership as the then Head of Cultural Value, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion stated:

"I think the panel stuff was really good, I think the way the panel went about it, and asking them also to kind of reflect on their experience of reviewing... that also helped me to think about some of the work that we then have done around the diversification of our peer-reviewed college as well."

« Establishing the bespoke review panel and EDIEF review guidance helped solidify the commitment to embedding EDI in the review process and the panel membership »

Reflections on the review process for the EDIEF pilot call have inspired future action around training and induction events for peer reviewers and peer review college members. As this quote indicates, more work is needed around facilitating discussions on EDI as well as the need to capture this learning so that future review panels of EDIEF applications learn from this pilot:

“There were some really interesting conversations... around things like the use of terminology, and also triggering, because some of these things were very emotive issues that were being talked about... it made you become very aware of when your language is clumsy... what’s appropriate and what isn’t appropriate. So, one of the things that we really wanted to do with this was actually to try and put together some guidance for peer review panels, and peer reviewers actually... on how to constructively criticise EDI... When we are on board with the new generation of EDI peer review college members, I really want our EDI training that we do at our induction events to be much better, and also the support and guidance that are made available to peer reviewers... to be much better. Some of that came out of the conversation that we had around the panel for this, because you know the panel was quite intense and we all... had to reflect a little bit on our own. You know... how we might run that better in the future. Trouble is, a lot of that wasn’t really documented because it was... quite sensitive and personal feedback, so it was tricky... Well, that’s one of my recommendations for the AHRC, is that we need to do much more work on... you know, how do we... safeguard panels and how do we enable people to talk about difficult, controversial, EDI questions that are brought up by grant proposals that they are viewing, in a way that’s not going to polarise opinion on things, and yeah, you can have actually a sensible kind of nuanced conversation about it, and some of the proposals that came through to this call actually started to do that. You know, they started to realise how important that was to... let people know what was okay and wasn’t okay, and how to actually bring that stuff up.”

Review panel feedback

The review panel provided application feedback for all 56 applications to the EDIEF. This feedback offered on average four bullet points of feedback focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the application. This practice of individualised feedback for all applicants is not a standard provision of AHRC calls but was viewed as good practice, especially considering the scheme’s pilot nature. This feedback provided an evaluative tool for all applicants and offered constructive ways to improve application writing for future bids:

“I really valued the feedback when I was notified of the outcome of my [EDIEF] application. In previous applications I don't recall receiving feedback and I've often felt in the dark about why I didn't get funding. Having a 'no' and no feedback is disappointing as there is no way to understand what went wrong or how to improve. Considering the time it takes to write an AHRC application, receiving a 'no' at the end of all of this can be hard to reconcile.”

Summary

The AHRC proactively aimed to design and increase the diversity of the peer review process, ensuring that the panel was more diverse, despite the challenges that this posed. Additional efforts were made to be inclusive in terms of language and terminology, while recognising the emotional labour that EDI work imposes on those who are engaged with it. The AHRC recognised the need for greater diversity in its peer review panel and efforts to realise this may need to be complemented by proactive positive action to attract, support and retain diverse panellists. These efforts should not be limited to those with minoritised protected characteristics but consider other factors such as career pathway, staff profile, type of academic endeavour (for example practice research); with data captured from existing peer review college members to provide baseline information and inform the development of targets on peer review college diversity. Existing panellists may benefit from training on the AHRC EDI priorities and ensure that robust briefing is provided for each call, in order to highlight the distinct EDI aims and priorities.

Award notification

Application feedback

In addition to the individualised feedback from the review panel, a 'General Observations' feedback list was sent to each EDIEF applicant summarising the commonalities and areas of weakness across the cohort of applications (see **Appendix 4: Consolidated panel feedback for EDI Engagement Fellowships scheme—general observations**). General observations included comments on the disconnect between programmes of engagement and impact generation, and the failure to articulate accessibility considerations within proposed public outreach events. These general observations provided a useful overview of application issues submitted to the call and itself, lays the foundation for a resource on EDI good practice within impact-focused application writing.

« The notification letter came two days before Christmas [break]... there were two weeks where I couldn't do anything »

Start dates and turnaround time

Out of the 56 submissions, 10 EDIEF applicants were awarded Fellowships. All applicants were notified on 17th December (3 months after the submission deadline) regarding the outcome of their applications. The proximity of this outcome notification in relation to the Christmas break period caused some frustration for award holders since the start date for all EDIEF projects was required to be between 1st January 2021–1st February 2021.”

“The notification letter came two days before Christmas [break]... there were two weeks where I couldn’t do anything.”

EDIEF award holders were keen to set up their projects and ensure RAs were in place for the required start dates. However, the notification of award date prevented set up activity at a time when institutions annually shut down. On the administrative side, little could be done before the Christmas break, which pushed the timeline for all projects beyond the initially stated 1st January 2021 start date.

“Typically, with so many of these experimental AHRC schemes, the timeline was incredibly short, that puts a huge amount of pressure on people.”

On returning from the Christmas break, EDIEF award holders had less than a month to set up their projects and to ensure named RAs associated with the project were set up as new employees on institutional systems. This challenging timescale was observed by one Fellow:

“Experienced admin workers were not used to turning around an employment contract in that length of time.”

Summary

There is a need to align project timelines bearing in mind the time of year (summer or Christmas holidays) and university recruitment protocols (allowing up to three months) to both enable delivery and EDI good practice in relation to open and fair recruitment. Do not assume that all awardees have named RAs that would not necessitate open and fair recruitment in compliance with institutional policy requirements.

Award holding

Logistics and timeframes

The impact of a short turnaround time in between award notification and the start date deadline had implications for the timelines of the EDIEF projects where schedules proposed in applications were pushed forward, while the rapid turnaround time affected the standard processes associated with project set up and new employee administration:

“It took a bit of time to get going... there were all these processes to get people on the books. It was stressful to have such a short turnaround time... of course it was fantastic to have it go ahead... we did hit the ground running, but we couldn't keep everything on track. We've had a staggered delivery... and then we asked for an extension, so we have an extension to the end of April [2022].”

This account demonstrates the implications of offering short turnaround times of less than one month. The rush to get a project started creates a stressful situation for all involved and the implications of negotiating administrative hurdles required in project set-ups exacerbate tensions, causing problems for project progression later down the line. In this case, an extension was needed to resolve the problem caused by a short turnaround time.

Extensions and timescale adjustments were needed in other EDIEF projects. In one case a named RA took up another post before the project start date, which forced the PI to go through a recruitment process that required 3 months to formalise. The AHRC permitted a later start date of April 2021 for this project to commence:

« The rush to get a project started creates a stressful situation for all involved and the implications of negotiating administrative hurdles required in project set-ups exacerbate tensions, causing problems for project progression later down the line »

“[The RA] received a job offer shortly before we found out that the project was successful, so he could no longer work with us which was a real shame. But I was sure that we would be able to find someone else that was great through recruitment. But that was really difficult as well, because obviously set us back quite significantly, in terms of timing. The AHRC were really supportive with that, and that was no problem. So, we started our project about 3 months later than planned, in late April. [This] was a really long process through HR... in some ways that seems a little bit unfair, because obviously it seems a shame to have that closed selection, that someone always has to be already in mind. In that case it did work quite well for us... We did end up recruiting through an open process... a lot of applications, a really competitive approach. Felt a little bit uncomfortable because it was a 0.5 post, 12-month contract, and as someone who had a little while ago been on quite a few of these types of contracts, I felt a little bit uncomfortable that I was advertising that and didn't especially want that to be the way that someone got involved with this project. So, I approached the university and asked if there might be a way that we could top up that contract to make it a full-time 12-month post, so it would be at least a little bit more attractive and a little bit more supportive of the person who would take that post. And they said yes. Because of the 3½ month delay in start date, because we had to recruit... we had this space to work with, 3½ months, that was extra time to work out some of the logistics of the grant in other ways, and this was really valuable time in terms of budgeting for us... There were a lot of negotiations, there were some tax issues that didn't get picked up by the research office, they had overlooked something, which caused some problems for us. Huge problems at the time actually... and also in the legal contract, which were really complicated, the collaborations were complex... the university and the partners didn't have the same understanding of what a contract should look like”.

The short turnaround issue posed an additional burden for the fellows who spent extra time resolving administrative issues for research assistant start dates and registration. These issues had long term implications for the duration of the fellowship as one fellow explains:

“There was a lot of stress about getting the research assistant and technician into post, with only a month in between all of that. Scrabbling to write the job specs and hand that all in. I think the biggest stress around that was ensuring they got paid on time... because of the rush, I don't think they got paid correctly on the first pay date. There were all sorts of problems... I felt that this had put us on a bit of a bad start really. A lot of my time throughout the fellowship was spent investigating these issues, when it should have been about the project. That was completely a result of the rush of getting the project started.”

The rapid pace of the call, notification, start date and overall timeline of the EDIEF was noticed and questioned for the potential compromise it created to the quality of the work achievable in these rushed circumstances:

“The speed of it is detrimental to equality. It’s hugely accelerated in terms of how our institutions run and how AHRC projects usually run... I was unsure whether I would be able to get it done in time to the good quality that it needs to be, in order to stand a chance.”

The need for flexibility in proposed schedules was a common aspect within the EDIEF award holders’ feedback. Observing the differences between what a timeline looks like on paper versus the reality of organising engagement events and activities was quite different as one fellow explained:

“When we got to the timeline, I sketched this out in my application, but what actually happened in reality was completely different. And I think time just went out the window with my project. I had specified [a number of] months, starting in February, and everything I had said, all the engagements I had set up and planned, seemed to sort of move. And that had to happen, as we needed more time for everything.”

Time is needed for ambitious work. Pilot funding calls like the EDIEF require time to explore how things operate and work, while setting up engagement events in the time of COVID-19 provided a unique context to maintain and keep to proposed schedules. In many cases, timelines for activities took much longer in reality. This learning curve around time constraints is described by one fellow:

“You learn how long these things take... you think an artist can rattle something up in minutes... but it takes months... much longer than what I thought in my head.”

Other fellows reported on the nervousness in keeping to proposed schedules in response to the evolution of their project work and for the sake of impact later down the line:

“Letting go of the schedule that we proposed at the beginning... so that the commissioned artist could ethically and authentically deliver to the benefit of their participants. There was some trepidation around that.”

One fellow reflected on the EDIEF’s timescale that had implications for her maternity leave, which occurred in parallel to holding an EDIEF award. This experience indicates several issues with AHRC policy that (a) leaves RAs in unpaid positions if the PI takes full maternity leave and (b) disincentives the PI from taking periods of maternity leave longer than the statutory amount:

“I took maternity leave during the year, but I only took two months maternity leave because if I had taken longer than two months my post-docs would not have been paid as they were otherwise unwaged, so I didn’t take a year, as I would have otherwise might have done... because there was no way... I couldn’t suspend the project... I took the statutory minimum eight weeks and came back straight to work, otherwise everything would have fallen apart. If I had suspended the project, there would have been no way to pay [the post-docs] while the project was suspended... it would have been difficult as it would have pushed them [post-docs] to another academic year and they would have had other commitments and we also we had 30 people hanging in the balance who were involved in the scheme and they wouldn’t have had the promised plan of events that we had committed to at the beginning of the year. There was no way I could take leave and the project couldn’t move on without me. Because I was both running the project, so I was instrumental to the project, and also the post-docs were reliant on me and the bid to be paid.”

This commentary demonstrates that taking maternity leave (beyond the statutory 8 weeks) jeopardises RA positions regarding pay and employment. This unfortunate correlation should be avoided and overcome by considering safety net and interim funding provisions that keep RAs in play whilst the PI is on maternity leave. Whilst the AHRC permits “requests for a Fellowship Grant to be placed in abeyance during the absence of the Research Fellow for parental leave” this does not deal with the RAs associated with the project and operates on the assumption that interim funding for RAs would fall to the institution to take responsibility for their own staff in an appropriate way.

Summary

The EDIEF timeline was a challenge for all award holders to keep to. The AHRC’s start dates and turnaround times for successful applicants forced many award holders to seek extensions which could have been avoided if turnaround times were built into the provision.

Given the short funding period, the challenges of initiating and running projects during a pandemic and the reality that many of the research areas are highly specialist, and often dependent on the PI (and their personal circumstances), the EDIEF would benefit from a safety net provision in the form of interim (or contingency) funds to ensure RAs are kept employed when circumstances merit it (for example, in maternity or sick leave). Clarifying who provides these funds (institutions or funding body) would remove the ambiguity around this issue.

Finances

Challenges with finances were commonly reported by EDIEF award holders. These issues appeared to stem from the time pressures created by the short turnaround described earlier (See **Start dates and turnaround time**, page 117 and **Logistics and timeframes**, page 119). Delays in receiving funds from the AHRC created issues further down the line for one award holder as described in this account:

“There was a delay in receiving the funds from the AHRC. I think that was on the AHRC’s end because we were chasing for some time. The university was able to pay the post-docs for the first three or four months before the money came in. Our sign language person did not get paid until quite late because we didn’t have the funds to pay them.”

Clarity around costings associated with the EDIEF was not always clear or transparent. Procedures for managing the salaries for the RAs varied from institution to institution, which impacted durations of employment as this fellow describes:

“There was some issue with the money, which meant less funds would go to the post-docs. The university could recoup those costs through full economic costing [FEC]... the university was delighted to take money from the bid... which they wouldn’t be spending on offices and support for the post-docs. I wasn’t able to have my post-doc for as long as would have liked on the project. They were only on for 9 months; the project is a year long... and the rest of time I am doing the work that they should have been doing... that was one of the issues.”

Understanding how costings work and translate in reality were not always fully appreciated until the award holding experience was well underway. Some fellows reported learning more about the financial side of costings while the award was in progress. This suggests that more could be done to clarify and communicate how funding operates in the award holding stage to assist applicants when considering costs and developing justification of resources (JoR) documents. One fellow recounted how the institution used the funding for the RA colleague salaries to pay various institutional contributions, which reduced the overall take-home pay for the junior staff associated with the project:

“The thing that really caught me out though, was when the costings were done for my two research assistants... for some reason... I didn’t fully appreciate that those costs wouldn’t be translated like for like, so when we got those two people in, they wouldn’t see that money in reality, they would see less. This was a failing on my part to understand costings”.

Issues around finances also extended to long delays and challenges around using EDIEF funds to pay individuals and organisations. Paying individuals, artists, commission fees and consultation costs were all reported as challenging by EDIEF award holders with such challenges stemming from the institution side, where bureaucratic systems and paperwork delayed this flow of money for overly long periods of time. One project partner representative recollects a strategy for overcoming this inefficiency in accessing EDIEF funds for paying individuals:

“Payments were tricky. It was easier for us as a partner to pay people than it was for the university. As a named partner we could pay people and invoice this back. There was a bit more onus on us. I don’t know how legit this was.”

Payment delays and navigating institutional finance systems created barriers to more effective project work due to the sheer amount of time consumed by these issues. One fellow described the detrimental effect of complex finance procedures:

“I’ve had to apply for a no-cost extension to the EDIEF to figure out the university finances.”

Summary

Given the opportunity to attract applicants from non-traditional backgrounds, it could benefit future rounds if there were clear guidance and/or briefing that included information on managing finances. This could include guidance for institutions on funder expectations and how to ensure that there are similar approaches between award holders in different institutions.

The PI role

As previously mentioned in **PI buyout**, page 87, on PI buyout, the PI role within the EDIEF was initially presented as a minimal duty, overseeing the project while supervising the RA(s) where needed. This feature was framed within the EDIEF FAQ documentation (**3: The AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot FAQs document**) under the question “How many hours should the PI work (as they can’t claim salary costs)?” The response stated the PI/Fellow’s input should be “a management or oversight role.” Without PI buyout, this role could not be more substantial as it had to operate alongside full teaching and administrative workloads. Despite these restrictions, PIs reported providing giving greater input to the EDIEF projects as the situation demanded so:

“I had more than an oversight role... I think I’ve been quite hands on.”

PI time and input given to the EDIEF accounted for more than a managerial or oversight role. Coordinating the schedule of engagement events, developing content and project outcomes, as well as managing the RA(s) quickly stacked up into significant workloads that were not fully appreciated at the application stage and were costs that were ineligible for funding as set out by the EDIEF call conditions:

“I was overseeing the project and managing the RA. I would say in terms of time this project is taking me... at least 3 days a week [equating to 0.6 FTE].”

The workload generated by the EDIEF for the PI was all in addition to the workload existent in their academic jobs (teaching, administration, and research):

“Ideally, in future, this role [PI role] should be given at least 0.5 FTE. Day to day teaching is probably something that is too much to be having in addition to all the work I did.”

EDI work often engages individuals for whom the work is personally relevant, drawing on personal lived experience to add value to the input. PIs felt morally and emotionally obliged to provide greater support and supervision than was allowed for in the EDIEF pilot budget. Whilst showing ownership, good will, and support ensured that the EDIEF pilot projects were delivered successfully, the risk of exploitation or perception that exploitation was occurring was a recurrent risk and moral conflict heightened by competing obligations:

“I have dedicated a lot of time to the project, which has been a really important thing for me, because I am really dedicated to this work, really excited by it, and really want to spend a lot of time on it. But for me, I was already working full time across other research projects.”

This perspective is reiterated here by another fellow who reflected on the emotional weight of the EDI work they undertook:

“I always knew it was going to be a huge amount of emotional labour... doing any anti-racist work in the UK right now, at any time, is hugely difficult, doing it through the pandemic is difficult.”

Supervising RAs in carrying out this work created its own demands on PI time, furthering the workload associated with carryout an EDIEF. This role added to the direction, organisation, oversight, and partnership work involved in running engagement activities:

“I would say I am working 2–3 days a week on this project. I would say that it’s produced a humongous workload and emotional strain on me because I am someone’s line manager, and I am holding together all these different threads... I do the work as I am passionate about it... yeah... it’s coming at a cost.”

The AHRC intended the professional development for RAs to be a key impact of the EDIEF, however a conflict emerged through the process since PI buyout was unavailable within the award, thus dedicated time for mentoring and professional development from the PI to RA was technically unavailable. Insisting on professional development for RAs without the means for achieving such an aim demonstrated an oversight of the levels of support required from the PI to action this ambition. The AHRC guidance on costings stated, “Staff costs should be limited to the involvement of junior colleagues [RA] where their professional development is seen as a key impact of the overall fellowship”. The role of mentoring RAs provided a fundamental strand to their professional development; however this PI role was assumed, additional and uncompensated to what was outlined in project proposals:

“One of the criticisms I would raise... it has the kind of logic to it which is that there is someone who is permanently based within an institution who has the time and the capacity to be able to mentor people who are being brought on under the scheme and to produce all this kind work and to do various things without any actual compensation for that person. I think the assumption might be perhaps in that, that this person might not be being affected by EDI issues necessarily, because if the work of EDI is being taken on by those impacted directly... these people need time... so for myself... the additional work of mentoring is not compensated particularly in the scheme.”

As this account stresses, uncompensated time places burdens on individuals who are already more likely directly impacted by EDI issues themselves (due to the nature of the research area), whose time is already stretched and committed. Professional development for RAs comes in all shapes and sizes, but the fundamental aspect of this process relies on PI time to meet, guide, instruct, and demonstrate how things are done. Additionally, mentoring takes a more pastoral and influencing form, ensuring the RA(s) is supported and scaffolded for the next steps in their career. The expectation that this time commitment for mentoring and professional development comes with no cost and no PI time underscores a mismatch between a funding scheme’s goals of professional development and the comprehension of what it takes to achieve such ambitions.

“Mentorship does require labour, but the assumption is that perhaps the mentors are not themselves people of colour or people or who may be at a career stage that they need support themselves, that while I don’t qualify for the latter, I think that if that is the case, the fellows themselves should not be doing a great deal of work. I didn’t build that into the project that I was handing it over to the two people, because I am the fellow, I would do the work too.”

This responsibility of the PI holding the fort, steering the project development and carrying out the work and engagement duties for the EDIEF was evident in all the 10 funded projects. Despite the absence of PI buyout time, all PIs felt a strong degree of responsibility and commitment to personally carry out the work. The EDIEF call and AHRC guidance suggested the work would fall to the salaried fixed-term junior colleagues (RAs), however the directing, structuring and progression of the projects could not have been left to junior researchers.

“I was doing a lot of the kind of operational work as well alongside the post-docs... they were not given decision making powers, it’s very hard to hand over the reins to someone working for 9 months... they were not going to be able to take over the roles I had done... so I was very much involved.”

The AHRC guidance envisaged that “the fellow would have a management or oversight role, with the workload shared with ‘junior colleagues’ or community partners, whose time can be costed.” (See Appendix 3: The AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot FAQ document). The management and oversight role proved somewhat idealistic since the EDIEF scheme included RAs rather than co-investigators (Co-Is) or experienced researchers. The premise of the EDIEF also sought the exploitation of existing research that belonged to the PI. Handing PI research over to an RA or project partners, along with the accompanying background context and contacts needed to develop impact did not translate into reality as one fellow described:

“It couldn’t possibly just be an oversight role because I am working with a research assistant, who needs direction, who needs to be told what the project is about and what we are doing on a weekly basis. So, I can’t just leave them to go and expect them to return results. The thing is, it is my conception, the project is something that I had written and spent a long time cultivating and it’s a fellowship that is based on existing research and that research is mine. So, I can’t just let it go and hope for the best.”

The skills needed for RAs to take more active roles in carrying out the work of the EDIEF are the sorts of skills accrued by going through the process of project work. Experiential acquisition of skills is part of the journey toward professional development, thus expectations that RAs will automatically carry out work without guidance and without the PI in a position to offer mentoring and support risks a detrimental outcome for all involved. One fellow describes the reality of their involvement in supporting a junior colleague:

“It was a plan I could deliver, but it’s not a plan a person someone just out of a PhD necessarily has all the skills to deliver. That meant a huge amount of mentoring and support. I have built relationships with partners in [location] and organisations over a number of years... you can’t just hand them over; you have to be the human being in the room brokering relationships and facilitating all of it. There is a training aspect for my KE associate, but there is also the brokering of relationships, and then there is the strategic overview because this is a fellowship that has different aspects to it, actually that requires project management. Initially I thought I’d be just doing that project management, that all the bits would be ticking along, and I would be coming in and problem solving if something happened, which it does... I didn’t expect the level of involvement, that’s for two reasons. One, is to do with the level of support my KE associate has needed. Understandably, this is not a criticism of him at all... it’s a big ask... it would have been helpful if mentoring costs has been costed in... as anyone would have needed it.”

For award holders on fixed-term contracts, the PI role and lack of buyout were felt particularly acutely, placing additional time pressures on top of existing job commitments elsewhere.

“One of the other grants that I had applied to previously would have given me an extension to my contract, would have given me some buyout, and that’s the way that I’d understood that it would work, that I would have more time in this fixed-term contract. So, in terms of precarity, that would have been a really helpful thing for me... I would really love this pilot, this grant stream, to be supportive of ECRs, I think that is really vital. And I would love to see more ECRs doing this fellowship. But I do think that that might be one way that would support them potentially. Because my contract hasn’t been extended by any buyout time, it has meant that everything has been quite condensed and squeezed into quite a short period. So, it has been quite a stressful time to try and make sure that I am doing it adequately in the way it needs to be done.”

Summary

PIs need buyout time to support the effective management of projects and ensure that RAs have the management support. Its absence placed additional unaccounted, and for some unreasonable, pressures on PIs and risks undermining the EDI benefits and messaging regarding inclusive research culture that the EDIEF represents. There were implicit assumptions in the funding structure about the PIs' contractual security and permanence, which was not in fact a true reflection of successful applicants. Whilst the selection of PIs from non-traditional backgrounds has been a success of the call, the realities of marginalised researchers need to be incorporated into the funding framework.

« Experiential acquisition of skills is part of the journey toward professional development, thus expectations that RAs will automatically carry out work without guidance and without the PI in a position to offer mentoring and support risks a detrimental outcome for all involved »

COVID-19 implications for award holding

The combination of the pandemic coupled with a thematic mode funding scheme which was centred on impact-focused engagement activity created an unusual and unprecedented situation for the 10 award holders who carried out their projects through an ongoing pandemic with AHRC timelines and deadlines still intact. The interruptions and implications of award holding during a pandemic were largely unknown, plus the concept of carrying out an award heavily reliant on public engagement during an unpredictable time of continually changing in-person restrictions created anxiety:

“It’s impossible to divorce the delivery of this [EDIEF] from the fact that we’re living through the pandemic time... not only does it affect the workflow, it’s affecting everyone emotionally... and it’s incredibly anxiety inducing for everyone. I’ve managed to get through the whole process without catching COVID even though my whole family had it... these are things that punctuate the process and it’s ongoing.”

COVID-19 undoubtedly affected these projects in a multitude of ways. Projects had to continually respond to the changing levels of restrictions where increasing waves of infection and multiple lockdowns played havoc with the planning of live engagement events, but equally the removal of lockdown measures caused its own set of challenges as one account showed:

“The timeframe became quite condensed... this also had to do with being in a period of lockdown... and then we came out of lockdown, and as you probably remember, there was an incredible rush to deliver and September was just such a difficult month for everyone as everyone wanted to do that they hadn’t done in months.”

EDIEF projects with significant live engagement event content were particularly hard hit by the ongoing pandemic. Live events often had to be moved online and when they were possible as in-person events, they were rescheduled to enable these to be hosted safely:

“As the project was a festival, intended to be face-to-face, elements had to be moved online. And key in-person events, such as the opera, had to be carefully timed so they could be held in person.”

Whilst remote working was conducive to the delivery of some types of engagement events, there were unforeseen costs associated with ensuring full accessibility for remote events as one fellow described:

“...I’m having to pay for BSL interpreters... this would have been in place if the work was in person.”

In some cases, extensions were needed to counteract the impact COVID-19 had on EDIEF projects:

“The assumption I think at the time we applied, was that COVID would be over, however we have had to apply for a 3-month extension partly because of COVID and many of our events were moved virtually.”

The pandemic forced a new way of working remotely that all EDIEF projects had to get to grips with from day one. In some instances, RA's first encounters with their PIs were via remote means on Zoom or Teams. While remote working enabled greater connectivity with individuals, community groups, stakeholders and audiences, it also brought with it a level of invisibility in terms of project development where partners were concerned, as one RA described:

“The projects are not micromanaged... the projects as case studies were allowed to unfold on their own. [The work] it's a real leap of faith... because it's all remote working... you're not there, you're not seeing, you don't know what's happening, you're just communicating by these platforms and email, you know that there are these deliverables, but there's a kind of believing the process and letting go.”

Holding engagement events online afforded greater accessibility for many of the EDIEF projects. Many fellows reported on the advantage which enabled larger audiences than what would have been achievable in person:

“I've had many more people online [at the exhibition] than I would have in person, so the impact is bigger.”

Working remotely has itself raised questions about what is achievable in this dissemination mode, but it has made many involved in the EDIEF consider the exclusionary position of in-person events that create barriers to access, limiting a broader audience or participant base to contribute. The need to consider the accessibility of events and activity in future calls and award holding must remain a priority. In-person and online participation must continue to co-exist in a hybrid form to take account of accessibility needs. Capturing the knowledge and resources around this continuing way of working, which prioritises accessibility in engagement events, should be invested in and shared with researchers and institutions as guidance on good practice going forward.

“You do lose something from [online public events], but I think you also gain something, and it's brought in more national/international audiences, and that's been really lovely. It's more accessible for those who might not be able to attend in person.”

The pandemic highlighted the need for greater flexibility within award holding during times of environmental change. The need for funding bodies to respond and react to external environmental upheaval placed significant, unprecedented demands on the EDIEF award holders, which could have been alleviated through additional time:

“If anything, we could have done with longer than normal to set things up.”

Summary

The pandemic affected project delivery, however, project teams were able to innovate in their delivery, using on-line and virtual channels that opened projects to wider audiences and provided potentially more, though different, engagement opportunities than originally envisioned. The innovation of the approaches used has been the result of pandemic-learning and should be captured to complement the breadth and form that engagement with stakeholders can take.

Engagement activities and impact

Engagement activities and events dominated the award holding experience for the fellows and RAs since the focus of the funding was to support wider engagement with existing research. Engagement activities focused on EDI issues were seen as:

“A big responsibility of caretaking.”

The AHRC’s use of the term ‘engagement’ stirred up debate regarding the power dynamics it sets up:

“Who are the participants and who are the partners? We have an issue in that we are working with artists who are also participants in the communities that they are working with... Which categories do you fall into? It’s relational... How do you make the case? It needs decolonising, this whole notion of outreach, there are people somewhere beyond the hallowed halls of learning that somehow need help and knowledge... let’s go and engage with them... structurally it is set up that way.

The segregation and focus of engagement from research was a challenge to interpret as one fellow describes:

“[The call stated] it’s not new research, you’ve done your research... now you are going to go out to proclaim it to the world and get other people interested. That’s not how it works... you can’t do anything with other people without finding out new things.”

The wide-ranging impact emerging from the 10 funded EDIEF projects provided evidence of the transformative work taking place within the first cohort of this pilot scheme. The targeted and directed approach of each fellowship has already left its mark upon different sectors of the arts and humanities through reaching broad audiences in a variety of engagement events. Impact is evident across all EDIEF projects spanning areas of education, statistical data, policy changes, diversification and representation on media platforms, awareness campaigns, accessibility reforms and cultural enrichment.

Evidence for impact has already become available at the time of writing this report:

“Statistical data on the amount of people [of colour] reviewing for newspapers and magazines, which has gone up by something like 3% to 10%.”

Active engagement with stakeholders and community groups funded through the EDIEF has led to substantial outcomes that show meaningful change taking place:

“...another highlight for me has been working with student teachers and educational practitioners in developing the learning pack... it was a chance to sit with them and think about the geography curriculum, and how they put it into practice in their classroom and how much of that adaptation it requires to be an anti-racist curriculum. It feels very hopeful like the discipline is actually changing at GCSE level, more black and brown young people are choosing Geography at GCSE level... that’s enabled me to really emphasise in this project that the future of the discipline is simply more diverse... so if they want to remain relevant... they will have to respond... to the diversity of young people and their urgency around climate change... they can’t sit back doing colonial stuff when actually everywhere is flooding or burning down... it has excited me about the discipline to see educational practitioners working hard on anti-racist geographies.”

This type of impact-focused EDI work has left very visible outcomes and benefits for a range of user groups and communities. Witnessing a funded project’s significance was of great value for those involved in EDIEF projects as one project partner describes:

“It would be a great idea to continue. It’s great to see tangible benefits coming out in these projects, it’s a fantastic concept.”

The EDIEF offered a mechanism to scale up research outputs so that these could be made accessible to others. As a funding scheme, the EDIEF provided a space for producing a variety of outputs that would assist others in their own EDI goals as one fellow described regarding the creation of an online audio description course:

“[The] Future Learn course... free online course. It felt really relevant to the rest of the world... it was an absolute highlight... we’ve already had around 1000 learners. A space where describers can explore... different disabilities ... [also] a guide for inclusive meetings, which has been picked up by Microsoft... so I’d say that’s quite an impact.”

The reach and significance of EDIEF projects is further reiterated by another fellow who expressed the gathering pace and trajectory of their EDIEF project:

“The project grew arms and legs... the volume of enthusiasm that the project was met with and the sheer number of collaborating partners we have ended up with and the significance of our contribution to this government consultations could not have been entirely anticipated... however it is a likely outcome of the kind of work we’re doing. If you are doing this kind of impact-facing work and you have good networks and you have experience, people are going to bite your hand off.”

Impact was also observable as attitudes and behaviours changed because of the fellowship work:

“We had tangible evidence that theatres were changing their practice... because they became more aware of audio description, they made a change in the design in the production... the facts and figures were read out by one of the actors... at every single show the actors read out the figures [instead of being inferred]. At one time we got the audio descriptors on stage at the end of the play and had them applauded... for me that was a really important political recognition of the value of audio description.”

EDIEF engagement activities took place in high profile venues and were disseminated on national broadcasting platforms that garnered much media interest, opening further discussion:

“Media responses and feedback [from] a Radio 4 special episode on the Bath Abbey church service.”

Similarly, though in contrast, local impact to challenge and change perceptions of the understanding of historical diversity was delivered through innovative dissemination, for example the use of billboards, to profile historical connections with an African Emperor:

“We had a billboard campaign running from September and October... it wasn’t advertisement for the festival, they were literally quotes from Emperor Selassie and other members of the community to talk about how significant it was for their lives... The festival investigates the legacy of the Ethiopian royal family living in the city of Bath and its wider exploration of the Ethiopian and Rastafarian connections with the UK.”

Many EDIEF projects were structured around creativity and artistic processes, which themselves, are sites of impact. Theatre productions, opera stagings, dance performances, music commissions, and photography projects were all deliverables of the EDIEF projects featuring as either a part of the engagement events or emerging from these events. Importantly, creative ventures brought together different demographics and user groups together as one fellow describes:

“The young creator’s competition explored the connectivity between musicians and end-users that do not usually interact or do not engage with each other in the sample pack world. Bringing together the contributing Indian musical instrument musicians with members from the music production community overcomes the faceless transmission of sample packs so common in this part of the music industry. Allowing the musicians to hear and comment on the use of their sounds was important for everyone involved. It gave the musicians an insight into a whole new industry, and it gave young creators access to high quality audio from world-leading Indian classical music artists. I really appreciated listening to the entries, and it was so nice to see so many people on SoundCloud listening to them as well.”

This process of connectivity and community building was a sentiment shared in the following fellow’s account:

“The process of the project gives you infrastructure to rapidly accelerate the connecting of people and structures and ideas that may have happened in the long term that didn’t materialise in the same way because you have a set of objectives and key words which people gather around and connect them and fight about and disagree about and agree with, and that means part of the project has been able to achieve... it’s provided lateral connections between a series of individuals and organisations and groups who are working on decolonising or democratizing heritage in [location] right now. That creation of communities of knowledge and practice that can think together rather than thinking in silence is amazing.”

Negotiating and overcoming the challenges of COVID-19, and all the changing levels of restrictions during the funded period, was for many award holders, an achievement in itself:

“One highlight was the ambition of it, being able to realise most of the ambitious part of it... despite COVID and despite everything. Having the engagement... and learning both ways where everyone is enriched. Everybody involved feels in a stronger place than they were when they started... We all feel to some degree or other empowered and we’ve enhanced our knowledge.”

Similarly, those EDIEF projects that followed through with live engagement events and received large audiences felt an intense sense of accomplishment for putting on in-person events against all odds:

“Big ‘physical events’, opera, Guildhall, Ethiopian Orthodox Service at Bath Abbey, closing events [commissioned musicians, artists and filmmaker to produce new works] were proud moments.”

Summary

Acknowledge and understand that impact-focused EDI work is demanding. As typified in the first cohort of projects, the scale of the implementation and engagement often exceeded expectation but also required greater amount of planning and curation. The innovation and diversity in approaches for sharing impact has been a key success of the pilot and provides evidence of success as an AHRC funding scheme.

Support gaps

Converting in-person events into online events due to COVID-19 restrictions came with its own set of issues regarding learning new technologies for interfacing with large numbers of people online. Working out equivalent ways of delivering the planned events provided significant points of learning for performative and creative events. There were other technicalities and hurdles to overcome as one fellow reported:

“Zoom bombings [where] online events had been hijacked by racists.”

In this case, this prompted the decision to not use Zoom, and instead use Crowd Cast where live events could be hosted online with greater flexibility and security. However, it was noted that Crowd Cast was not very intuitive, which required many technical runs to build literacy and useability:

« With this pilot scheme, support was needed to push, highlight, and disseminate EDIEF public events to show the level of backing and commitment from the AHRC »

“We had to upskill and learn very quickly.”

Ensuring the online space was secure and safe for attendees became a priority for many EDIEF award holders. Tools and resources for effective remote public engagement appear increasingly more necessary as does online safety. The above quote also suggests the need for support and care for fellows engaged with anti-racist agenda delivery, which may have been in the form of an EDIEF theme lead or support service, both of which were absent here. A further support gap was identified in the EDIEF for advertising events associated with the EDIEF engagement work. With this pilot scheme, support was needed to push, highlight, and disseminate EDIEF public events to show the level of backing and commitment from the AHRC regarding EDI work as one fellow described:

“Quite early in the fellowship, I contacted AHRC’s advertising people—who had contacted me, as part of the advertising of the fellowship. And I said, look, we are doing some events now, can you advertise them for us? Well, heck no, they couldn’t. And so, you know, that to me feels like you get a cohort of 10 people together, then you’re like, swim, just swim, and I would have expected that they would have done what they normally do for a cohort of people”.

Summary

Support gaps were exposed in this first iteration of the EDIEF scheme. Fellows were challenged by the demands of remote working and navigated unwanted intrusion from internet trolls. Navigating the world of video conferencing tools for online streaming and sharing of information was something many projects needed to get grips with rapidly due to the changing contexts of the pandemic.

While institutions themselves may have provided technical and support services for such challenges, the AHRC does have a role to play in scaffolding pilot calls where the terrain and territory is widely unknown and, in some cases, treacherous (with negative outcomes for individuals facing online abuse alone). A support service, an AHRC point of contact or programme director could all have been useful in assisting PIs and RAs as they ventured into difficult and challenging situations. Such scaffolding should wraparound, supporting PIs looking to disseminate and publicise engagement events and the successes of their EDIEF work. To evidence the commitment to EDI work, the AHRC should ensure their publicity efforts reflect their innovation and EDI work they support by showcasing EDIEF project work as part of the fellowship package.

Fellowship

The EDIEF did not include a programme director as part of the provision. Programme directors for AHRC thematic calls are not a standard provision, however they are common and provide integral roles to the running, coordinating and collegial aspects of fellowship working. AHRC provision for programme directors is often dictated by priority areas and whether programme director individuals are available or in place to commit to these leadership roles. As a pilot scheme, the EDIEF required a programme director to steer conversations on EDI and oversee the cultivation of a much-needed network of EDI expertise. One fellow described this omission of the funding provision, which raised questions regarding parity with other AHRC fellowship schemes:

"I've had an AHRC Fellowship before back in 2013 where there was a theme leader [now referred to as programme director] who established a network for all the fellows and researchers working under the call. He did a great job of bringing everyone together to share research, to learn from each other and to explore the thematic area of the call. We had scheduled events to participate in and the theme leader came along to some of my dissemination events. He was supportive and gave me the sense that someone was interested and invested in my work. He constantly asked for updates on my project to share on his blog and Twitter feeds. I later used him for references and for critical friend advice. I assumed this support provision would be in place for the EDI Engagement Fellowship project, but it wasn't."

At the application stage, prospective applicants were informed that "award holders will benefit from the support and expertise of the central UKRI EDI team and the opportunity to reach colleagues across the disciplinary spectrum, and will be invited to reflect on AHRC and UKRI funding policy in the area of EDI." (**Appendix 1: AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot call (web publication)**). Further to this, at the start of the award holding experience, the then Head of Head of Cultural Value and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion communicated the intention to bring the cohort of EDI Fellows together to meet and share information and feedback about the projects. This indication of support and fellowship at both the call and award holding stages felt at odds with the PI experience where once funds were allocated, PIs were then left to carry out the project work without meetings or engaging with other fellows or the AHRC team:

"There wasn't any communication, never got to meet the other people on the fellowship, no shared space... was expecting to meet the other fellows. Only found out about the other fellows' projects from the AHRC website when they announced the projects."

Confusion around the fellowship term stemmed from expectations of communion and camaraderie that are usually associated with AHRC Fellowship schemes, which offer opportunities to network and engage with other award holders. It was noticed that the EDIEF's fellowship element was missing:

“What is a fellowship? I’m not quite sure what a fellowship is. There hasn’t really been any shape to it, or conversation. There hasn’t been any conversation with anyone since being given the money from AHRC... Would have been good to be part of a cohort going on this journey together... but as soon as we were given the money, we’ve kind of just been left to our own devices. [It would have been] good to be in a room, sharing and talking.”

Fellows noted that an opportunity had been missed to establish networking as a cohort of PIs, RAs and project partners from the start of the award holding experience:

“It would have been good to have conversations about what EDI means, what does it mean in practice? It’s a missed opportunity.”

Some fellows remarked on the experience of the EDIEF and the inconsistencies this had with their expectations of fellowship working:

“If they are going to be fellowships, make them proper fellowships with buyout, even if it means having fewer of them... 5 instead of 10... in the same way as the other fellowships, this would be important from an equality point of view.”

The fellowship model offered in the EDIEF call presented conflicts with applicants’ plans for collaborative working. In this fellow’s account, the EDIEF’s leadership structure enforced a stratified setup, which diverged from the intentions of the project:

**« What is a fellowship?
I’m not quite sure what a
fellowship is. There hasn’t
really been any shape to it,
or conversation »**

“One of the concerns was the structure [and] the shape of the fellowship. What I had had in mind when I was looking for a grant for this piece of work, was not a fellowship, because I think, whilst fellowships are wonderful in many ways, and obviously give us the money to do excellent things, they are quite an individualistic model of academic leadership and success, I think. And what I’d really been trying really hard to foster with the group that I was working with, was a much less hierarchical structure... could see how I could write myself into this as the PI, but I was aware that everyone else had to be partners basically, or an RA if they had the credentials to be an RA... But that wasn’t entirely satisfying for me. I think for [RA] it was not actually a big problem, I don’t think she was worried about it, but for me it felt quite uncomfortable. I felt unsure about that sense of ownership... that I would be claiming these ideas, and owning this project, when I was really hoping to resist and challenge those ideas about who was in charge.”

Summary

Expectations of support were not realised during the project delivery phase. Whilst this did not impact significantly on individual projects, the opportunity to network, share practice and have structured support was missing. Consistency regarding the treatment of PIs between the EDIEF and the AHRC’s other funding provisions is a minimum expectation. However, given the strategic opportunities that the project has for innovation, particularly around EDI good and best practice, a structured and clearly communicated support framework would help manage expectations and add value and attractiveness of the EDIEF scheme in future iterations.

Research assistants

Reflections on the RA role within EDIEF projects indicated areas of learning that could be considered for future funding calls and the operation and management of the RA experience. RA roles varied in their FTE contribution. For one individual, taking on the RA role as a full-time post created an inflexible situation around teaching and professional development opportunities:

“I would have appreciated a 10% clause in terms of the time being available for professional development, for example, that would be teaching. It’s being extremely difficult to fight for anything like that. I can’t really afford to have a whole year without doing any teaching.

So, I think these fellowships, for the RAs particularly at post-doc level, where teaching is important... just any kind of professional development, it doesn't have to be teaching, but maybe 10% of time to be creamed off the top of that."

Some RAs commented on the professional development ambitions that appeared out of reach while fellowship work was in progress:

"I was thinking [before the project started] because it's 4 days a week I have the time and energy to spend some of that doing academic [work]... like publishing some of my research that I haven't done... I feel like some of that doesn't seem feasible."

These comments raise the issue of professional development opportunities for the RA during the award holding period. Whilst professional development is accrued through on-the-job experience, there are other means for acquiring this via training, research, study time, teaching and mentoring. Idealistically, RA development could follow on from PhD training (where the AHRC DTPs facilitate opportunities to equip students with skills and training in addition to their research) to provide further benefits and incentives for the individual. Taking stock of the RA experience may well reveal the needs and aspirations of junior staff who, while benefitting from AHRC posts, lack professional development opportunities. Furthermore, their experiences vary dramatically depending on their institution, project focus or line manager. The concern around this topic extends further when the RA is considered in terms of their precarious, fixed-term status. These temporary appointments offer desirable positions for junior staff, ECRs and those fresh out of PhD study, but the system's temporal provision does not marry with ambitions of post-award legacy or EDI longevity as one fellow described:

"The difficulty of taking on precariously employed academics... its really great to scoop up those who don't feel like they have a foothold in academia to give them this work... institutions should better support these... it can't be that we create projects for those post-docs who for whatever reasons suffer from EDI issues in institutions and they just get dropped back into the pool and institutions stay the same and benefit from the work they do for us... but if the real hope of a EDI fellowship is to give a leg up then I haven't seen any seen any evidence of it at my institution... I've benefitted from it [EDIEF], but I am fine."

RAs took time to acclimatise to the EDIEF projects and time was also needed for exploring the RA's position and voice within a setup where project work was already in swing, and project partner relations were already established. Finding one's way through these aspects was a challenge for some individuals as one RA described:

“The outcomes were predefined... in terms of this is what they’re going to, there was going to be a [engagement event], there was going to be these workshops, and in terms of the intellectual content it was basically already there, there wasn’t a lot of questioning or room for kind of... ‘okay maybe things are a bit more complicated than we thought’. I have anxiety about that, whether that really is research, obviously it’s engagement and I know the lines are blurred.”

Positive stories have come out of the RA positions offered in this first cohort of fellowships. Further opportunities have emerged for these individuals as a result of their roles and others have explored further education options as one RA explained:

“If I could do this all again, I’d do this really well! There are so many details that you learn and connections you make... because of this, I’m going to do another project in Bristol with a similar type of role. I am not an academic... I’d quite like to be, but I can’t always find a way in. [PI] was going to support me with some routes to study again. It’s really helped.”

It was sometimes uncertain and vague who RAs could turn to regarding their experiences and support needs within the context of award holding. As new employees to institutions, seeking support and someone to confide in was not signposted and ambiguous regarding whose role or responsibility this fell to:

“I felt lonely within the project... these issues can often conflict, I’ve not had many people I could turn to because [project-specific issue].”

« There is a need to explore the experience of the research assistant within AHRC project working. It would be worth commissioning research into the impact of RA positions and the ways these operate »

Summary

There is a need to explore the experience of the research assistant within AHRC project working. It would be worth commissioning research into the impact of RA positions and the ways these operate. It is necessary to consider the support role the PIs take within project leadership and provide guidance about what support the PI is expected to provide. This will ensure that the resourcing for this is made to facilitate consistency. While a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is unsuitable in these situations, there are some fundamental features of support that come as standard with project leadership with RA professional development in mind, for example, ensuring that continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities are structured into the role. The comments from this section further support the need for a programme director across the EDIEF who can facilitate and mediate PI-RA relations and support the embedding of EDI principles into the project.

Considerations about post-award RA employment are needed. Having delivered EDI project work and engagement activities, the end of an award signals the end of employment for fixed terms RA appointments. At the point when many projects gain traction and wider interest, there seems to be a need for extensions of RA contracts. Whilst follow-on funding schemes exist, funding for RA contract extensions or development could offer further opportunities to retain and support the progression of a more diverse researcher community.

Project Partners

Project partners in the EDIEF were key figures in the running and hosting of engagement events. Partners were embedded deeply into the fabric of many projects, which is exemplified in the project profile sections of this report and the videography case studies of each project. Viewpoints of project partners were consulted to observe their perspectives:

"We had a voice and were able to share what was going on. We were part of the project."

Project partners were often repeat partners of the PIs and had experience of funding awards for collaborative research. Partners provided praise and optimism about the EDIEF as a scheme:

"It's a positive scheme for the person who comes with the idea and comes to the partner."

Project partners were vocal about the benefits in being involved in the funded projects and associated activities. One individual recalls the value of participating in the project and the workshop activities established for collecting data for this report, indicating the necessity of fellowship activity for future EDIEF calls:

“For my professional development, just being more confident in talking about what I know... also understanding what this funding is about. Just coming to the meeting recently and seeing all those different people on the Zoom call and all the projects that were discussed. And actually, taking away something from that to develop some of the projects that I had, where I didn’t think of a way... it was just being with people that I wouldn’t see on a day-to-day basis, to hear from, that was interesting, that would make my learning... that I wanted to learn more and be more involved.”

Where criticism was raised, this was directed at financial issues stemming from interactions with institutions. Struggles with payments from institutions were consistently the biggest complaint:

“Payment for individuals was really difficult. It wasn’t clear who was getting paid and who didn’t. All payments from the university were a long process.”

Summary

Making payments to partners was a challenge given that these had to be processed through university payment systems that are often bureaucratic and slow, leading to potential hardships for partners. These could be mitigated by creating a lead community partner that would manage and co-ordinate all project partners, including payments. This would be done using a service level agreement (SLA) that would meet due diligence and compliance requirements, whilst reducing the number of small payments needing to be processed through the university payment systems. This would reduce burdens on the small project partners and provide greater opportunities to capacity-build, thereby increasing the scope and possibly the range of project partners engaged in projects.

Post award

Learning from the award

At the time of writing this report, some EDIEF projects were still in progress while others were finished or nearing the end of their project lifetimes, so it has not been possible to fully take stock of the post-award period. The content below instead provides reflections of the EDIEF and commentary on the learning acquired through the award holding experience. These lessons and discoveries provide general insights into what the EDIEF process had revealed:

- **Hierarchies of EDI issues:** “What we discovered was a hierarchy of EDI issues... some are more fashionable and attractive to people at the moment. Every theatre has a ‘we’re all about inclusion statement’ but they don’t extend that to access for non-able people, so they say ‘we really care about inclusion and diversity, look at our amazing casting, and look at how many non-white creators we’ve got’, but then I say ‘how many disabled people have you got?’ and they say ‘oh no, we haven’t got any of those.’ So, it was more about, not all EDI issues have the same visibility perhaps.”
- **Hierarchies in theatre:** “We learnt that there is a very specific hierarchy in theatres and people who work on access and inclusion are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and they don’t have much influence in the theatre, and they are always fighting to get time and space... what we should have done is target the managers and directors rather than the access workers. We also learnt that theatres really care about inclusion and diversity specifically at the moment in terms of race, but they don’t really think about audio description as about inclusion and diversity, they see it as an access tool, but it hasn’t occurred to them that it’s a way of promoting inclusion and diversity... The project is about how audio description can promote inclusion and diversity for audiences but also for actors and creators. I will give you an example, if there is a black actor on stage, let’s say he/she is playing Hamlet... the non-blind audiences can see that straight away ...the creators say this is colour blind casting, it’s not relevant to the plot so therefore we don’t want to mention it in the audio description. That means that the blind audience member doesn’t know there is someone black on stage, therefore they assume everyone is white so that means that diversity element is completely erased from the blind person’s experience which is the opposite to what the theatres want to happen.”

- **Learning of age-restricted positions:** “Our placements were designed for young people and doing this work has shown me, especially in heritage, our careers, and the way we progress through professions is so different, people are having to change and pivot at multiple points in their lives... I wish that if we had gone back... that those placements were not age restricted.”
- **Inclusive working for carers:** “creating a new model of working... you cannot deliver quickly... there are constant mistakes... from booking a meeting at a time you think everyone can do until you realise that one person is on a school run and then you’ve completely forgot that this is a time for school runs... and right there you’ve tripped up when trying to be as ethically inclusive as possible.”
- **Observing intersectionality:** “Intersectional issues... race... sexuality... you need to make sure you’re understanding the intersectionality of dealing with a project with women and how the condition is much more difficult for certain groups. I knew this already, but we got a much more in-your-face experience of it, let’s say, because the migrants were coming from different countries.”

« **What we discovered was a hierarchy of EDI issues... some are more fashionable and attractive to people at the moment** »

- **Integrity:** “This is where I had to make an intervention with the KE Associate because he didn’t have the experience or confidence. Sometimes projects have to pivot... we have to look at the terrain around you... we don’t just crash on ahead and say I have to deliver this, there has to be some integrity to the work you are doing.”
- **Equality:** “Working with partners where people in heritage are generally paid terribly... especially, if I think about all the people of colour I know that are working in heritage organisations, they are being paid half of their white peers... constantly thinking about the inequality, in terms of access to stability, finances... all of that takes a toll.”
- **Perceptions:** “I see this fellowship as research... but whenever this project is publicised and talked about within my department, it’s listed under EDI and not under research... it’s annoying... it’s not part of my department’s EDI and my colleagues’ work is listed under ‘research’ that has more status.”
- **Legacy for EDIEF projects:** “I would allocate more money to legacy... how are we going to maintain the momentum?”

Summary

EDI work is complex and multifaceted. The breadth of the funded projects highlights this. The EDIEF drew out these complexities and provided opportunities for challenges to be identified and innovative responses to be taken. Retain the EDI breadth of scope for the EDIEF, ensuring that the AHRC is enabling diversity and inclusion to be resourced holistically.

Discussion

Whilst the report has focused more on the challenges and opportunities for learning, the EDIEF pilot has enabled projects to be delivered, despite the challenges of the pandemic, and seen innovation in delivery that has engaged researchers, community partners and communities who would not normally engage in AHRC work. This has supported the broadening of EDI of those involved in AHRC projects. Whilst the need for focused EDI-specific initiatives highlights the broader issues of low representation and engagement of minoritised communities in research, the need for this approach to seed, engage, support and sustain diversity from minoritised groups is validated by the outcomes of the projects. Additionally, the pilot has innovated approaches to running calls, which need further reflection and consideration so that these can be embedded and refined for future calls and mainstreamed into AHRC work.

Increasing diversity within the applicant pool

There is a need to enable a diversity of applicants to access standard route research grants that have higher award ceilings, longer project durations and PI buyout time than what the EDIEF permitted. Allowing, enabling and encouraging EDI research areas to be proposed at the standard route research grant route would provide a strategy for mainstreaming diversity. Whilst the EDIEF provides a dedicated space for furthering impact of EDI-related research, it should not form a silo that is a satellite to more attractive funding schemes, which perhaps do not welcome this type of work. The danger of creating segregated funding schemes for specialist EDI projects is highlighted in this applicant's comment:

“Not only fund black people when they’re talking about EDI, also when they’re doing their subject areas... otherwise, black academics and researchers are going to get into this area, where they’re only being funded or listened to when they’re talking about EDI... I think there can be a tendency for black academics to become experts in EDI, when they might be experts in world history or sociology.”

This quote presents a timely account of the trend in EDI work (committees, boards, consultancy, and EDI research) falling to underrepresented academics whose own research and areas of expertise are sacrificed in place of these institutional EDI opportunities and commitments, which are calling out for diverse voices to uphold their own EDI policies and targets. An EDI funding opportunity such as the EDIEF needs to respect the research capacity of individuals via PI buyout to fully acknowledge the time commitment to highly valuable EDI work.

“It is about allowing black academics and other protected characteristic university researchers, to have the flexibility that all other researchers have as well. Not only when they’re talking about their own protected characteristics or identity, not only when they’re talking about diversity and equality, but with full academic freedom to be researching whatever they want to research.”

Due to historically low levels of diversity, the pipeline from PhD to RA is often not diverse. Despite best efforts, trying to improve this through a pilot or other shorter-term projects may not be possible and may leave some projects less representative of the protected groups than ideally should be the case. This highlights the need for longer interventions at earlier stages of the pipeline so that this can be addressed strategically over the medium term. The need to encourage diversity within the applicant base starts much earlier in the process and the report welcomes initiatives the AHRC has in place (and those under consideration) to continue diversifying the pipeline in and from PhD positions so that future academics and AHRC award holders reflect the diversity of society. This issue was significant for one fellow who fed back on the lack of diversity present in their respective discipline:

“The pipeline into PhD and into these research assistant roles, just from my conversation with project partners, they just couldn’t think of anyone who had the qualifications or a background in [discipline], or who was right for this position. So, they are well-connected in terms of their field, but they didn’t know anyone. This conversation went around and around forever... the bottom line was, there’s not many people there, who bring that diversity to the table, who are in [discipline] and are non-white... There is a problem with that and the arts, where there is a lack of diversity. So obviously the pipeline to and from PhD positions is therefore not diverse. Therefore, there is an issue about diversifying that early stage, and allowing people into these positions”.

Race equality is an issue that requires more considered and direct focused action. This is because both the AHRC and higher education sector measures to address racial inequalities in the subject areas are relatively nascent.⁸ One fellow remarked on the importance of ringfencing race as a topic for AHRC focus. This comment runs in parallel to the statistics for EDIEF applications focused on race that yielded the most interest from applicants, indicating the demand and focus in projects that are engaged with EDI from the perspective of race:

“AHRC are at a really early point in trying to address race... it’s easier for AHRC to wander off and start to look at other EDI issues... if you don’t address race quite directly it can get lost amongst the other issues... it’s a structural issue that requires proper attention.”

Summary

The EDIEF may have a diverse applicant pool and funding pool. However, if mostly white applicants are in the mainstream (non-EDIEF) research grant application schemes, whilst diverse applicants mostly occupy the EDIEF (which has less favourable features such as lower funding ceilings, no PI buyout and shorter project durations) the perception exists that there is a hierarchy of funding and that there is not equity. Focusing on diversity, without addressing equity, can be superficial and problematic.

It is arguable that if the AHRC wants to use the EDIEF to seed fund, develop the researcher community and broaden the research base for AHRC areas; providing additional support, and funding and incentives may help to realise these ambitions and redress structural inequalities. There is an opportunity to harness this innovation and optimise the longer-term benefits for academia. These may be lost if the strategic opportunity to invest, engage and demonstrate commitment are not seized upon in considered and deliberate ways.

To successfully encourage a more diverse applicant base, funding bodies should be open to considering candidates from varied backgrounds who have different and non-conventional CVs and career pathways. Opening up AHRC research areas is vital in order to harness and support a more diverse talent pipeline. This will necessitate greater openness to recruitment methods, selection criteria, selection panels and fundamental reflection on what good looks like within the researcher community.

Using the same Je-S system and the same reviewing criteria and process will continue to produce the same statistics on the diversity of applicants and diversity of researchers with successful applications. Increased investment in positive action, widening participation, PhD studentships and funded fellowships should be made to support engagement and retention of individuals from protected groups in AHRC subject areas.

Acknowledging lived experience

Lived experience played a central role in all EDIEF projects which was evident in the blend of voices of the research team and project partners. The blend of voices becomes an important feature of EDI work to ensure that representation is prioritised and acknowledged in the undertaking of the work. The slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us!” provides an essential reminder for the operation of the EDIEF that should remain at the heart of future EDIEF calls. One award holder commented on the position of academics as voices of authority, making the point that:

“It’s important to me that research is disability-led.”

This quote acknowledges that academic research and EDI work cannot be done in isolation of the users or communities who are directly involved or benefiting. Disability studies without voices from the disabled community ignore the very people it wants to support and reach. EDI research and impact work should go further than academics giving a voice or platform to those identifying as disabled, it should be about having a valued voice in every facet of daily life, being valued as integral and an essential contributor to EDI research. Equally, disabled applicants should be accepted for their research excellence and not just the diversity label they bring to the statistics.

Projects, resources, and outputs from the EDIEF made a strong point about communicating the experiences of marginalised and underrepresented groups for the betterment of the mainstream. This account of a disability-focused EDIEF project creating benefits for all people exemplifies this approach:

“Making everything that the AHRC does accessible to everyone... there is absolutely no point saying we care about EDI, then having a film that isn’t audio described, or captioned, or doesn’t have alt text, or there is a bad colour contrast... it needs to be much more than about ticking boxes or doing the minimum. Exploring ways that the lived experience of disability can benefit everyone... the things that start off being just for blind people are being funded because they are valuable for the rest of society, and they are taken seriously as art forms in their own right.”

Allowing this knowledge and lived experience to influence and illuminate research areas is essential in the plan going forward.

“Thinking ahead, the AHRC maybe needs to put some investment into resources for making accessible outputs... anyone who gets funding from the AHRC, should be made to think about that... thinking about the accessibility isn’t there. Left to your own devices, it’s perhaps easy to overlook this or not know what makes something fully accessible. Funding some resources into that.”

Summary

EDI work often attracts those with lived experience of minoritisation. This can add insight and value to work undertaken, engaging perspectives that are often excluded or unseen by others. It also, however, risks leaving individuals experiencing additional burdens of responsibility, vulnerability to personal sleight or attack when EDI issues are contentious and emotionally tied. With the additional support (such EDI expertise from the AHRC) these risks can be mitigated.

Findings from the EDIEF pilot evaluation highlighted the need for clear expectations regarding EDI inclusivity to be made by the AHRC to ensure consistency between projects and enable the inclusion of EDI requirements into the planning and application process, including allowing sufficient budget and time for consideration and delivery of these. This is particularly so regarding disability inclusivity expectation. Additionally, the EDIEF projects can also complement existing AHRC guidance and resources on project inclusivity if mechanisms for capturing good practice from EDIEF projects are developed and incorporated into the mainstream institutional practices and guidance.

« The EDIEF must continue to be offered as part of a broader strategy of longer term thinking so that the changes addressing the systemic issues can start to be delivered »

EDI as a shared responsibility

Fellows were keen to move past the individualistic approach to tackling EDI issues, so that the responsibility is shared amongst communities and workforces:

“I see EDI work happening, I don’t see it making any difference including decolonising the curriculum, I don’t see it making a difference to how we operate or teach necessarily, or to fill limited criteria. I don’t see it having an impact on hiring at all, or allowing us to radically change the curriculum... I am one of two people of colour in a department that is quite large... me and the other person of colour in the department are advocates of race in postcolonial theory as well, I don’t see that happening elsewhere... to make a kind of culture change in thinking... the women are not responsible for gender theory, the people of colour are not responsible for decolonising the curriculum, the one disabled person is not responsible in bringing disability studies into any particular module... the shared responsibility of that has to come from a critical mass and that critical mass is very far from being achieved in any of the EDI targets and numbers that we have.”

Summary

Whilst EDI work requires engagement of those with lived experience, the value of those who do not have this but may have some other attribute, such as positional power to lead or drive forward change, can be engaged effectively to support the development and progression of better EDI practice. This shares the burden and responsibility for driving forward change in more equitable ways but also ensures that all perspectives are engaged in identifying and formulating responses to EDI challenges.

Future directions

Whilst the EDIEF pilot enabled changes to take place, the need for systemic changes to the structure of research, universities, education, and funding that lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes remains to be addressed. The approach to fund the pilot enabled a start to be made, however, bigger challenges still exist and must not be lost sight of otherwise they risk being fig-leafed by symbolic opportunities. The EDIEF must continue to be offered as part of a broader strategy of longer term thinking so that the changes addressing the systemic issues can start to be delivered. One way, for example, for this to start is by the learnings and better practices from the EDIEF pilot being systematically fed-in to the AHRC mainstream work.

“People are always happy for diversity to exist... what’s more interesting is to see when you meet a tipping point culturally where one senses there is enough diverse voices in a field... there is a lot of... you hit a brick wall, you hit a glass ceiling... this was part of the bid to not just have critics working as reviewers but embedding them in institutions as editors. We had these 10 editor in residence placements... none of the newspapers were able to do it in their own infrastructure... how to work with more corporate–industry facing newspapers... but I think that you can advocate for diversity... people are ostensibly on board with it... but they don’t want to make room at the decision making level for those people to implement lasting change... this is where we are at... it’s important to not go backwards and the backlash is there of course in many ways... now that the conversation has properly begun I think it will be hard to go back to the way that things were... the success of the program has almost impeded its further success.”

The projects have highlighted the opportunity to research into EDI and EDI-related thematic areas. They have opened up conversations into how research can be made more relevant to different stakeholders, highlighted opportunities to explore complexities of experiences and intersectionality, devised practical ways to redress access issues and importantly prompted communities to reflect and reassess perceptions of diversity in ways that enrich and bring together a shared past that previously had not been understood or acknowledged. Future EDIEF calls should develop these explorations so that these openings can be sustainable and flourish, enabling other areas of research to emerge, both primary and impact-related.

“From the perspective of this project... I think that some of the intersections of LGBTQIA+ experiences should definitely be developed more. So, I think that we need to hear from more people of colour that are LGBTQIA+, we need to hear from more homeless people who are LGBTQIA+, the intersections of queerness and disability are really important. I think we need to talk more about intersex variations and variations of sex characteristics... looking at the intersections of the marginalisation that we are discussing... LGBTQIA+ mental health... range of topics around sexuality and gender identity. Trans people in particular, and their experiences of loneliness and poor mental health... all of these issues are really important to be explored more in research”.

Recent years have seen an increased focus on EDI, with #MeToo, Black Lives Matters and, more specifically in the higher education sector, awarding gaps (gender and ethnicity) and chartering (Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter, Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and Disability Confident/Disability Standard). This is recognised as adding value and continuity to EDI efforts. The AHRC has a role in sustaining and prioritising these efforts, with the EDIEF providing a tangible mechanism to do this:

“There is so much more to be done to get effective and real equality. I think it is fantastic that it is being done and in the last five years things are really starting to step up and people aren’t anymore talking about waves of feminism... which I always used to hate that the idea that feminism came in waves... where does it go in between? The wave... it seems now it’s here to stay... it suggests that society is changing but I think the pressure needs to be kept up. Bodies like the AHRC are important to keep that pressure up.”

The challenge with EDI work is that it can be hard to frame so that it does not simply get reduced to the legally protected groups, but considers broader diversity and inclusion issues. Even between protected groups, however, there can be perceptions of hierarchy and an absence of clarity about how to treat lived complexities, for example intersectionality and the need to explore multi-layered intersectionalities, which is only beginning to be appreciated and actually researched.

“The tricky thing about EDI is what gets counted as a protected characteristic.”

Summary

Interest in EDI has increased, and it is slowly embedding across the research community partly due to heightened awareness of the low representation of minoritised groups and the need to reflect an increasingly complex society in research. Whilst piloting innovation through schemes like the EDIEF, the need for the AHRC to mainstream good and best practices and EDI inclusion is a real opportunity that needs conscious consideration so that these benefits can be realised systemically across the research council’s work and research areas, and lead to better outcomes.

Funding EDI-focused primary research

The EDIEF has enabled the AHRC to attract a broader and more diverse researcher profile than for other calls (See **Statistics on applications**, page 11 and **Statistics on funded projects**, page 15). This broader research profile redresses the demographic and representation gaps, enabling the AHRC to start delivering its strategic EDI objective to be more inclusive. More importantly, the EDIEF has allowed new areas to flourish and brought EDI issues into focus. The EDIEF has opened the research community, bringing in individuals with atypical profiles into the research funded community via its reach and capacity building. Because of this, it creates the opportunity for longer term engagement with communities that would otherwise not see the AHRC, or more generally arts and humanities research, as a destination for themselves. The opportunity is not yet fully optimised (because the funding scheme does not offer higher funding ceilings, PI time or long funding durations). Further, the type of funding being offered is only directed at existing research exploitation and impact and does not currently allow for primary research activity to be funded through this mechanism. This focus on impact alone reinforces, at some level, marginalisation because it is only permitting individuals with existing research track records (likely established academics) into the competition. EDI areas of research are disproportionately handled and explored by those having experience of marginalisation themselves. Establishing a primary research funding opportunity in EDI may be the way to further stimulate more work in these areas and engage protected groups and communities that the AHRC wants to engage.

To ensure that the risk of hesitancy and marginalisation are not exacerbated by EDI-specific funding, the calls need to be attractive, including adequate support for PIs and resourcing, ensuring that the calls can attract those with non-traditional career paths into research and ensuring that the AHRC redraws the boundaries of previous researched areas into new and more diverse topics and approaches. This report has picked up on a number of indicators which suggest optimisation of the EDIEF provision would ensure the work to broaden the profile and diversity of the applicant base continues in the right direction. If the measures identified are adopted, the AHRC may be able to optimise engagement and, if sustained over time, cultivate a more inclusive researcher community.

Next steps

This report has aimed to capture the learning and good practice established by the pilot of the EDIEF so that the innovation developed can be considered by the AHRC before launching subsequent rounds of the EDIEF. Secondly, but of perhaps greater strategic importance and impact, where good practice has been identified the AHRC is invited to consider which of these innovations can be mainstreamed into other AHRC funding schemes and work. For this to be done effectively, the AHRC is invited to consider how to engage with stakeholders on the pilot, sharing the findings of the EDIEF pilot and then formalising the next steps of what measures will be taken forward into future work as part of the EDI action plan and mainstream operational plans. The engagement with stakeholders will need to be undertaken in a holistic and ongoing basis drawing on principles of cultural humility, the willingness to learn from each other in order to co-design a more inclusive and representative research environment and community.

« This report has picked up on a number of indicators which suggest optimisation of the EDIEF provision would ensure the work to broaden the profile and diversity of the applicant base continues in the right direction »

Acronyms, references & endnotes



Acronyms

AD

Audio Description

AHRC

Arts and Humanities
Research Council

BLM

Black Lives Matter

BSL

British Sign Language

CPD

Continuing Professional
Development

EDI

Equality, Diversity,
and Inclusion

EDIEF

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
Engagement Fellowship

Eoi

Expression of interest

FTC

Fixed-term contract

FT

Full-time

FTE

Full-time equivalent

HERAG

Higher Education
Race Action Group

HESA

Higher Education
Statistics Agency

HoD

Head of Department

HR

Human Resources

Je-S

Joint electronic system

JoR

Justification of Resources

KEA

Knowledge Exchange Associate

LGBTQIA+

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender, Queer,
Intersex and Asexual

MOOC

Massive Open Online Course

RA

Research Assistant

RDE

Research, Development
and Engagement

PI

Principal Investigator

PRAG

Practice Research
Advisory Group

PT

Part-time

QTIPOC

Queer, Trans or Intersex,
Person of Colour

SET

Science Engineering
and Technology

UCU

University and College Union

UKRI

UK Research and Innovation

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Endnotes

1 The then Head of Cultural Value and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion left their post at the AHRC in October 2021. The Diversity and Inclusion role held by this employee was later subsumed under the Associate Director of Programmes duties and shared amongst AHRC colleagues.

2 <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/uk.research.and.innovation.ukri./viz/EDIfundingdata2021/Awardrate>

3 It should be noted that the award rate differences for the AHRC between White and other ethnic groups are relatively smaller when compared to other URKI funding bodies. For more information see <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-funding-detailed-ethnicity-data>

4 This award was initially given to Dr Blackburn while she held a post at Keele University between 2019–2021. The award was transferred to The Open University part way through the funded period on 1st June 2021 when she took up a new post at this institution.

5 For example, Equality +, Higher Education Staff statistical report 2021, Advance HE (2021) reports that 22.8% of UK-BAME full-time staff hold fixed-term contracts (compared to 17.6% for white staff). For part-time staff the figures are 48.7% and 42.9% respectively. For non-UK national staff, the full-time figures are 44.6% BAME, 31.2% White and for part staff 69.6% BAME and 55.3% White (Table 3.6, page 140). 39.3% of all disabled academic staff in HE are on teaching-only contracts (compared to 32.3% of non-disabled academic staff) (Table 2.12, page 104). For female academics, only 39.4% are on teaching and research contracts, compared to 47.8% of males (Table 4.11, page 216).

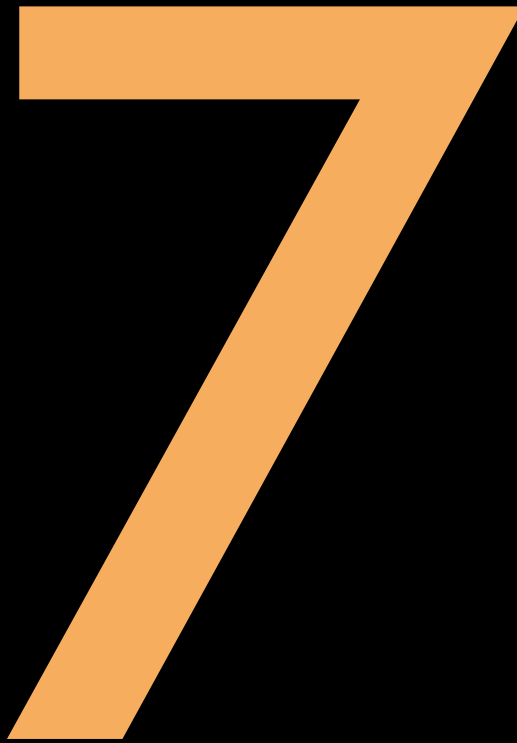
6 See Bhopal, K., and Henderson, H., *Advancing Equality in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study of the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters* (2019); Caffrey L, Wyatt D, Fudge N, et al, *Gender equity programmes in academic medicine: a realist evaluation approach to Athena SWAN processes*, *BMJ Open* 2016; Gregory-Smith, I., *Positive Action Towards Gender Equality: Evidence from the Athena SWAN Charter in UK Medical Schools*; *British Journal of Industrial Relations* doi: 10.1111/bjir.12252 00:00 July 2017 0007-1080 page 1–21; Ovseiko, Chapple, Edmunds and Ziebland, *Advancing gender equality through the Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science: an exploratory study of women's and men's perceptions* *Health Research Policy and Systems* (2017) 15:12.

Endnotes

7 The term practice-research is used here as an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of methods such as artistic research, action research, embodied research, practice-based and practice-led to name a few. For a more comprehensive list of methods belonging to the field of practice-research, see Bulley, J., Sahin, Ö., *What is Practice Research?* 2020, page 19–26.

8 The representation gap between SET and non-SET areas, highlight the need for longer-term engagement and action. See Equality +, Higher Education Staff Statistical Report, Advance HE (2021).

Appendices



Appendix 1

AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot call
(web publication)

Funding Opportunity Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Engagement Fellowships Pilot: Oct 2020

Opportunity status: Closed

Funders: Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

Funding type: Fellowship

Publication date: 21 May 2020

Opening date: 21 May 2020

Closing date: 17 September 2020 16:00 UK time

Last updated: 9 April 2021

The AHRC are pleased to launch a new pilot call for Fellowships aimed at arts and humanities researchers whose work is both of outstanding quality and has a significant Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) dimension.

The funding available is intended to enable researchers to engage a variety of relevant stakeholders with their research, to embed their work into policy and practice, and to work with relevant communities to realise the full potential benefits of their research. The Fellowships will therefore be inherently impact-focussed and cannot be used to conduct substantial new research. For the purpose of this pilot call the focus is on the UK context, whilst recognising the potential crosscultural value of internationally collaborative and connected research.

Many arts and humanities researchers working on the culture, history, literature, languages, though (and so on) of specific areas, regions and countries would consider the process and practice of engagement with stakeholder communities as a vital component of their research. It is precisely this group of researchers that these Fellowships are aimed at, as success will depend on the ability to engage different groups with their research, work effectively within established networks and create valuable new partnerships. The Fellowship should also aim to strengthen the disciplines, communities and institutions it is embedded within, so there will be an expectation that award holders will build in development opportunities for junior colleagues, practitioners or partners who have potential to enhance the EDI aspects of their work.

In line with the pilot nature of this call, we would be interested to receive feedback from researchers who believe they may meet the criteria for the award of a Fellowship but have been unable to apply due to eligibility requirements, or other barriers.

Applications will not be limited in scope by the nine protected characteristics recognised under the Equality Act 2010: EDI issues significantly affect groups not covered by the act (for example only, the sick; those with lower socio-economic status; other people victimised or discriminated against not on the basis of protected characteristics). Applicants will be expected to evidence and justify how any non-protected characteristic groups are affected by the issue their research project focusses on, and how any interventions would have a positive impact within that group. It is recognised that not all research into EDI must be framed by challenges or barriers, so researchers working on positive or celebratory cultures and histories are also encouraged.

This fellowship is limited to researchers working within arts and humanities disciplines. Research into history, languages, culture, heritage and creativity, or any other field in the arts and humanities, may all provide vital and distinctive insights into a range of contemporary EDI challenges, but analysis indicates that although these projects are thematically linked they can also be widely dispersed and lack effective mechanisms for sustained coordination with the communities they are working with. It is hoped that projects and researchers that fall into this category would benefit from the engagement opportunities that the fellowship would offer.

Funding will be provided for researchers who have a strong track record of integrating their research within communities, engaging stakeholders with their research and/or communicating with the public. Therefore, in order to be eligible for this scheme, proposals need to outline how they plan to engage stakeholders such as:

- Policymakers across the UK, including Westminster and Whitehall; Devolved Governments; Mayors and Local Government; and any relevant informal or community-based policy structures.
- The general public; people living in recognised or informal communities, and organisations or groups affiliated with, or a part of, such communities
- Institutions, including businesses (including but not limited to the creative industries); employers and service providers; cultural institutions (GLAM and heritage organisations etc.) and the media.
- New disciplinary networks that have been identified as having particular potential for collaboration in the topic area.

Applicants do not need to engage with all these groups but should ensure that all stakeholders relevant to their EDI topic/s have been considered and that plans for engagement activities, tailored to the needs of the different stakeholders, are set out clearly in the application.

Applicants should note that as this fellowship is impact and engagement-focused, funding for substantial new research is not permissible. The funding is therefore limited to events, seminars, workshops, policy engagement, communication and knowledge exchange. Synthesis of existing research may be in scope where the value and relevance to the proposed programme of engagement can be clearly demonstrated. The programme of engagement should be built around existing outputs that the applicant feels would have further impact potential through a period of sustained support. Applicants who view collaborative work as part of their research process are encouraged, where it can be demonstrated that further engagement with relevant individuals and communities is central to their exploration of the topic. This fellowship cannot be used for theoretical research on particular EDI topics, groups or communities. New research projects emerging from the fellowship should be directed to other (for example, responsive mode) funding schemes.

Proposals for funding should make clear not just which audiences they plan to engage and how they plan to do so, but how this interaction will benefit the communities they work with, their research and their discipline more widely. The planned programme of engagement must evidence how it will advance discussions around their EDI topic, contribute to the generation of new policy initiatives or ways of doing things and otherwise enrich and strengthen the project partners and communities involved.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have robust existing relationships in place with the networks, platforms or partners necessary to deliver their programme of engagement. The fellowship will not provide substantial amounts of funding or time for the development of new partnerships, so it is important that the fellows clearly evidence the networks and relationships that they already have in place. For example, if an event series was dependent on the participation of an organisation such as the BBC, the UN, or specific community organisations, they would need to evidence the commitment of this partner to participate at the point of application.

The applicant's host institution should use the fellowship as an opportunity to consolidate and solidify an ethical commitment to any community or interest groups they are partnering with as part of a wider organisational engagement strategy. The host institution will be required to set out how this commitment will stimulate additional and sustainable partnership activity and should be prepared to indicate how they will support ongoing relationships beyond the life of the fellowship.

In order to help develop further capacity in their discipline, there is an expectation for applicants to include explicit commitments to mentoring or partnership working with researchers earlier on in their careers in order to facilitate sharing of expertise and access to relevant networks. It is hoped that this will allow researchers, practitioners and community members to hone and develop their engagement skills and cultural competency, as well as helping them to develop relationships with groups and individuals relevant to their research.

For detailed information see the below links:

- [Call guidance document \(PDF, 261KB\)](#)
- [FAQ document \(PDF, 224KB\)](#)

Timetable

Activity / Date

Call launched: 21 May 2020

Je-S forms available: 15 June 2020

Deadline for submissions: 17 September 2020

Panel meeting: date w/c 2 November 2020

Funding decisions to be issued: w/c 7 December 2020

Start date of awards: Between 1 January 2021–1 February 2021

How to make an application

Applications should be submitted through the Je-S system by 17 September 2020, 16.00 and will need to go through the appropriate institution submission process. You should submit your proposal using the Research Councils' Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) System. The Je-S submission form for this call opens on the 15 June 2020 and closes at 16.00 hours on 17 September 2020. You will not be able to submit your application form into Je-S any earlier than the 8 June or any later than 16.00 hours on 17 September 2020.

Further Information

The AHRC wants to ensure that this Fellowship does not inadvertently enforce any issues of inequality and access to funding, so the Fellow will need to be prepared to reflect and feed back on the necessary support and documentation required throughout the application process. The Fellow should also be active in monitoring the progress of their Fellowship and the impact it is having on their topic, discipline and stakeholders, and report back periodically to the AHRC with suggestions and observations.

Contacts

For queries about this call such as eligible activities and costs or remit of the call, please email: enquiries@ahrc.ukri.org or tel: 01793 416060 (Monday to Friday 8:30–16:30)

For queries on using Je-S such as creating and submitting the application form or Je-S account creation, please email: jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org or tel: 01793 444164 (Monday to Friday 8:30–17:00)

Appendix 2

AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot call guidance document

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Engagement Fellowships Pilot

I. Contents

- I. Contents
- II. Introduction
- III. Context
- IV. Aims of the Call
 - A. Scope
 - B. Additional Requirements
- V. Eligibility
- VI. Guidance on Costs and Project Timescales
- VII. Application Process and Format
- VIII. Assessment Process and Criteria
- IX. Scheme Requirements and Post Award Reporting
- X. Contact Information

II. Introduction

The AHRC are pleased to launch a new pilot call for Fellowships aimed at arts and humanities researchers whose work is both of outstanding quality and has a significant Equality, Diversity and Inclusion dimension.

The funding available is intended to enable researchers to engage a variety of relevant stakeholders with their research, to embed their work into policy and practice, and to work with relevant communities to realise the full potential benefits of their research. The Fellowships will therefore be inherently impact-focussed and cannot be used to conduct substantial new research. For the purpose of this pilot call the focus is on the UK context, whilst recognising the potential cross-cultural value of internationally collaborative and connected research.

Many arts and humanities researchers working on the culture, history, literature, languages, thought (and so on) of specific areas, regions and countries would consider the process and practice of engagement with stakeholder communities as a vital component of their research. It is precisely this group of researchers that these Fellowships are aimed at, as success will depend on the ability to engage different groups with their research, work effectively within established networks and create valuable new partnerships. The Fellowship should also aim to strengthen the disciplines, communities and institutions it is embedded within, so there will be an expectation that award holders will build in development opportunities for junior colleagues, practitioners or partners who have potential to enhance the ED&I aspects of their work.

In line with the pilot nature of this call, we would be interested to receive feedback from researchers who believe they may meet the criteria for the award of a Fellowship but have been unable to apply due to eligibility requirements, or other barriers.

III. Context

The current AHRC Delivery Plan includes Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) as a strategic priority. It is also clear that a great deal of the discovery research that the AHRC funds is fully engaged with debates around ED&I and has the potential to change the ways the public, policymakers and other researchers are engaging with and discussing these issues. However, this area of AHRC's work is in the early stages of development in terms of opportunities and dedicated support for researchers to translate their work into new forms and generate change in ED&I-relevant policy and practice.

This Fellowship is intended to enable researchers to take high-quality research outputs outside of the academy; to strengthen, scale up and highlight their work; to provide new opportunities for the communities and networks they are part of; and to ensure that their knowledge and outputs are fully accessible to all.

In addition, it is hoped that the Fellowships will enable the AHRC to better understand where its funding will add the greatest value in terms of ED&I, and to highlight areas where the structures and systems of the current research funding landscape are providing barriers to ED&I.

The AHRC is part of UK Research and Innovation, whose vision is to ensure that ED&I is integral to a thriving research and innovation sector. Award holders will benefit from the support and expertise of the central UKRI ED&I team and the opportunity to reach colleagues across the disciplinary spectrum, and will be invited to reflect on AHRC and UKRI funding policy in the area of ED&I.

This opportunity is a pilot, and it is hoped that it will inform the development of future funding opportunities or calls within AHRC and UKRI. Award holders will therefore be expected to keep careful records of their experience of the documentation and support required to make their application, of their activities during the Fellowship and of the change opportunities it enables, to which AHRC and UKRI can refer in thinking about the diversification of its applicant pool and participating communities.

IV. Aims of the Call

A. Scope

Applications will not be limited in scope by the nine protected characteristics recognised under the Equality Act 2010: ED&I issues significantly affect groups not covered by the act (for example only, the sick; those with lower socio-economic status; other people victimised or discriminated against not on the basis of protected characteristics). Applicants will be expected to evidence and justify how any non-protected characteristic groups are affected by the issue their research project focusses on, and how any interventions would have a positive impact within that group. It is recognised that not all research into ED&I must be framed by challenges or barriers, so researchers working on positive or celebratory cultures and histories are also encouraged.

This fellowship is limited to researchers working within arts and humanities disciplines. Research into history, languages, culture, heritage and creativity, or any other field in the arts and humanities, may all provide vital and distinctive insights into a range of contemporary ED&I challenges, but analysis indicates that although these projects are thematically linked they can also be widely dispersed and lack effective mechanisms for sustained coordination with the communities they are working with. It is hoped that projects and researchers that fall into this category would benefit from the engagement opportunities that the fellowship would offer.

Funding will be provided for researchers who have a strong track record of integrating their research within communities, engaging stakeholders with their research and/or communicating with the public. Therefore, in order to be eligible for this scheme, proposals need to outline how they plan to engage stakeholders such as:

- a. Policymakers across the UK, including Westminster and Whitehall; Devolved Governments; Mayors and Local Government; and any relevant informal or community-based policy structures.
- b. The general public; people living in recognised or informal communities, and organisations or groups affiliated with, or a part of, such communities
- c. Institutions, including businesses (including but not limited to the creative industries); employers and service providers; cultural institutions (GLAM and heritage organisations etc.) and the media.
- d. New disciplinary networks that have been identified as having particular potential for collaboration in the topic area.

Applicants do not need to engage with all these groups but should ensure that all stakeholders relevant to their ED&I topic/s have been considered and that plans for engagement activities, tailored to the needs of the different stakeholders, are set out clearly in the application.

Applicants should note that as this fellowship is impact and engagement-focused, funding for substantial new research is not permissible. The funding is therefore limited to events, seminars, workshops, policy engagement, communication and knowledge exchange. Synthesis of existing research may be in scope where the value and relevance to the proposed programme of engagement can be clearly demonstrated. The programme of engagement should be built around existing outputs that the applicant feels would have further impact potential through a period of sustained support. Applicants who view collaborative work as part of their research process are encouraged, where it can be demonstrated that further engagement with relevant individuals and communities is central to their exploration of the topic. This fellowship cannot be used for theoretical research on particular ED&I topics, groups or communities. New research projects emerging from the fellowship should be directed to other (e.g. responsive mode) funding schemes.

Proposals for funding should make clear not just which audiences they plan to engage and how they plan to do so, but how this interaction will benefit the communities they work with, their research and their discipline more widely. The planned programme of engagement must evidence how it will advance discussions around their ED&I topic, contribute to the generation of new policy initiatives or ways of doing things and otherwise enrich and strengthen the project partners and communities involved.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have robust existing relationships in place with the networks, platforms or partners necessary to deliver their programme of engagement. The fellowship will not provide substantial amounts of funding or time for the development of new partnerships, so it is important that the fellows clearly evidence the networks and relationships that they already have in place. For example, if an event series was dependent on the participation of an organisation such as the BBC, the UN, or specific community organisations, they would need to evidence the commitment of this partner to participate at the point of application.

The applicant's host institution should use the fellowship as an opportunity to consolidate and solidify an ethical commitment to any community or interest groups they are partnering with as part of a wider organisational engagement strategy. The host institution will be required to set out how this commitment will stimulate additional and sustainable partnership activity and should be prepared to indicate how they will support ongoing relationships beyond the life of the fellowship.

In order to help develop further capacity in their discipline, there is an expectation for applicants to include explicit commitments to mentoring or partnership working with researchers earlier on in their careers in order to facilitate sharing of expertise and access to relevant networks. It is hoped that this will allow researchers, practitioners and community members to hone and develop their engagement skills and cultural competency, as well as helping them to develop relationships with groups and individuals relevant to their research.

B. Additional Requirements

The AHRC wants to ensure that this Fellowship does not inadvertently enforce any issues of inequality and access to funding, so the Fellow will need to be prepared to reflect and feed back on the necessary support and documentation required throughout the application process. The Fellow should also be active in monitoring the progress of their Fellowship and the impact it is having on their topic, discipline and stakeholders, and report back periodically to the AHRC with suggestions and observations.

V. Eligibility

Unless otherwise stated, the eligibility criteria as published in section 3 of the AHRC Research Funding Guide apply.

Applicants do not need to have held previous AHRC funding to be eligible for a fellowship.

Where the proposal builds on research not originally funded by AHRC, there must be a clear explanation of how:

- the original research used arts and humanities research expertise and distinctive arts and humanities research concepts, ideas and/or approaches, and/or
- the new impact and engagement activities will include and draw significantly on arts and humanities research expertise and distinctive arts and humanities research concepts, ideas and/or approaches to impact and engagement, and/or
- the impact of the original research is being extended through engagement/partnership/co-production with new audiences of particular relevance to the AHRC, for example community arts/culture groups, or professionals or institutions in the heritage sector or creative industries.

VI. Guidance on Costs and Project Timescales

1. The fellowship should run for between 9–12 months.
2. The maximum limit for applications is £100,000.
3. Fellowships must start no later than 1st February 2021.
4. As the fellowship is not built around the production of original new research, proposals will be paid at 100% of the Full Economic Costs of the proposed engagement activities.
5. All costs associated with the running of a series of engagement opportunities will be eligible and should be fully justified.
6. Costs should therefore be included under the 'Exceptions' cost heading.
7. As the full costs of the proposed activities will be covered, Estates and Indirect costs are ineligible under this call.
8. Costs associated with ensuring the accessibility of outputs and events are encouraged.

9. Costed staff time for the PI is ineligible. Staff costs should be limited to the involvement of junior colleagues where their professional development is seen as a key impact of the overall fellowship. Contracts of employment would be expected to be issued for the duration of the fellowship.
10. If any community or interest groups are involved, it is expected that they will be remunerated fairly and in a timescale that will not force any undue hardship. Any partnerships should be premised on leaving that organisation in a stronger position than before the collaboration.
11. Costs for specialist brokers, mediators, translators and of support workers/carers can be included where their participation can be shown to be essential to achieving the aims of the fellowship proposal.

VII. Application Process and Format

Applications should be submitted through the Je-S system by 4pm at the latest on 10th September 2020 and will need to go through the appropriate institution submission process. You should submit your proposal using the Research Councils' Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) System (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk>). The JeS submission form for this call opens on the 15th June 2020 and closes at 4pm on 10th September 2020. You will not be able to submit your application form in JeS any earlier than the 8th June or any later than 4pm on 10th September 2020.

Je-S submission

You should submit your proposal using the Research Councils' Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) System (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk>).

To prepare a proposal form in Je-S:

- log-in to your account and choose 'Documents' from the menu;
- then select 'New Document';
- 'AHRC' as the Council,
- 'Standard Proposal' as the Document Type;
- 'AHRC Fellowships' as the Scheme;
- 'AHRC EDI Fellowships Pilot 10 September 2020' as the Call/Type/Mode; and
- 'Create Document'.

Je-S will then create a proposal form, displaying the relevant section headings. Using the Blue Question Marks and the 'Help' link at the top of each section will provide guidance relevant to that section of the form.

All Investigators named on the Je-S application form, must have a Je-S account. Where a named investigator does not already have a Je-S account, one can be easily set up, but please note that the process can take a number of days. It is therefore strongly recommended that the process is started well before the application deadline. Je-S accounts can be created on the Je-S site [here](#). During account set-up an account type of 'An Applicant on a Standard/Outline Proposal' must be selected. If you require assistance with the process, please contact the Je-S Helpdesk at JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org or +44 (0)1793 44 4164.

Please note that selecting 'Submit document' on your proposal form in Je-S initially submits the proposal to your host organisation's administration, not to AHRC.

Please remember to allow sufficient time for collecting materials from all of the participants (e.g. CVs, project partner letters of support). Also, please consider your organisation's submission process, allowing time for internal deadlines before the Call closing date.

Please note that no staff costs should be included for the PI in the Je-S form. In the Investigator section, zero should be entered into the fields which ask for 'Salary Rate' and 'Total number of hours to be charged to the grant over the duration of the grant' for the PI.

To download a pdf format document of the Je-S application, please follow the instructions below.

Please note that a complete document including all attachments can only be generated once the application has been submitted to AHRC.

- Open the application (you may need to first tick the "Show documents submitted to Council" at the top of the screen)
- Select Document Actions at the top of the screen
- Select Print Document
- Select the option "Download the PDF version including attachments"

Attachments

The following are a list of attachments that are permitted for this Call. Documents should be completed in a font size no smaller than size 11, noting the permitted document lengths below.

Attachment	Requirement and page limits (sides of A4)
Case for Support	<p>Compulsory. (no more than 7 sides A4)</p> <p>You should structure your case for support using the following headings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Summary of the proposed fellowship 2. How it addresses the aims of the call 3. The proposed Fellow's relevant contribution to the generation of knowledge in the area 4. Proposed programme of engagement 5. How will this strengthen the discipline, partners and relevant communities 6. What will be the overall impact of the work
Curriculum Vitae	<p>Compulsory for the Fellow and any named researchers. Please tailor to the aims of the scheme and outline any selected outputs, publications or engagement activity relevant to the fellowship (no more than 2 sides A4 each)</p>
Justification of Resources	<p>Compulsory: Justify the resources required. (no more than 2 sides of A4)</p>
Project Partner Letter of Support	<p>Compulsory for each named project partner, including any specialist brokers or mediators. (no more than 2 sides A4 each)</p>
Head of Department ED&I Statement	<p>This should make clear the institutional commitment to ED&I, how it will be embedded in the fellowship and sustained beyond the life of the award (no more than 2 sides A4)</p>
Visual Evidence	<p>Optional: for non-textual evidence in support of the proposal. Should not include Gantt charts of workplans. (no more than 2 sides of A4)</p>

PLEASE NOTE: If you would like to discuss accessibility support with us when applying for this programme please contact us at equality@ukri.org.

VIII. Assessment Process and Criteria

Assessment process:

This call will be handled differently from the standard AHRC grant peer review and moderation panel model. This is because of the developmental nature of the call, which will require the fellows and panel to reflect on the assessment process and make suggestions about how the scope and criteria of the call restrict, or enable, the delivery of its objectives.

Proposals will be assessed by a specially convened panel comprising expert members of the AHRC peer-review college and independent ED&I specialists.

Panel recommendations will be made to the AHRC Executive, who will agree final funding decisions, taking into account thematic balance across the portfolio of fellowships.

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- The quality and appropriateness of the engagement activities proposed
- The distinctive arts and humanities contribution of the fellowship
- Demonstrable impact on an evidenced ED&I challenge, or range of challenges
- The quality and importance of the proposed fellow's research and engagement work to date and its relevance to the proposed fellowship
- How successfully the applicant has articulated how they will use the fellowship to translate and transform existing research into valuable new forms
- The extent to which the fellowship will successfully develop capacity in the area of research, e.g. through the fellow's own career development, or the training and career/professional development of colleagues

- The significance and importance of the project, and of the contribution it will make, if successful, to enhancing or developing public and policy discourse on its chosen topic
- The contribution the fellowship will make to generating a wider base of knowledge accessible to the public and any affected communities or interest groups
- Evidence of the robustness of the proposed partnerships and the commitment of the fellow and partners to the aims and objectives of the fellowship and its shared benefits
- The commitment of the host institution to ethical and inclusive partnership working, the extent to which the fellowship will build capacity in the partner organisation/s and leave them strengthened
- Your plans for monitoring and evaluating your proposed activities, including how you'll measure success and share your learning.

Call timetable

Activity	Date
Call Launched	20th May 2020
Je-S Forms available from	15th June 2020
Deadline for submissions	10th September 2020
Panel meeting date	w/c 2nd November 2020
Funding decisions to be issued	w/c 7th December 2020
Start date of awards	Between 1st January 2021– 1st February 2021

IX. Scheme Requirements and Post Award Reporting

The scheme requirements and post award reporting as stated in the AHRC Research Funding Guide will apply.

Award holders will be required to submit outputs, outcomes and impacts that arise from AHRC's funding through the Researchfish system. Information can be added to Researchfish at any point once the award has started but award holders will also be required to 'submit' this information to AHRC at one 'Submission Period' each year. Award holders will receive an email with log-in details shortly after their award has started. More details on Researchfish are available on the UKRI website here: <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/research-outcomes>

In addition, successful fellows will be required to engage fully with the AHRC (and UKRI where applicable) to capture and evaluate learning from their award in line with the developmental aspect of the call scope. The process and timeline for this will be agreed in negotiation with the AHRC post-award.

Contact Information

For queries about this call such as eligible activities and costs or remit of the call please contact AHRC at enquiries@ahrc.ukri.org or telephone: 01793 416060 (available Monday to Friday 8:30–16:30)

For queries on using Je-S such as creating and submitting the application form or Je-S account creation, please contact the Je-S Helpdesk on 01793 444164 or jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org (available Monday to Friday 8:30–5:00)

Appendix 3

AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship pilot call
FAQ document

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Engagement Fellowships Pilot FAQ Document

Can we recruit a new member of staff to work on the project?

Yes, it would be fine to employ somebody for the project, but it would be necessary to factor in the capacity-building aspect of the call, taking into account how the employment of the individual would benefit their career, the institutional capacity or the discipline they are working within.

How many hours should the PI work (as they can't claim salary costs)?

We envisaged that the Fellow would have a management or oversight role, with the workload shared with 'junior colleagues' or community partners, whose time can be costed. It would be fine for the Fellow to commit more time than this if the Research Organisation can commit to buying out their time.

Can we include a Co-PI?

It is not possible to include two PIs on the Je-S application form itself, but it would be possible to pick a nominal PI and then to make it clear in the application that this would be an equal collaboration between two Fellows.

Are Project Partners mandatory?

No.

Do we need to include a Workplan?

No, but the main application should articulate what form the programme of engagement is going to take. Upload a blank document if Je-S requires.

Do we need to include a Publication List?

No, upload a blank document if Je-S requires. Please note that CVs may include selected outputs, publications or engagement activities that are relevant to the Fellowship.

The estates/indirect section of the Je-S form is mandatory— what should we do?

Input a value of 0. Estates and Indirect costs are ineligible for this call.

How should we include members of staff?

All members of staff, other than the PI, are to be included under the 'Exceptions' cost heading.

NB: Please note that no staff costs should be included for the PI in the Je-S form. In the Investigator section, 'Total number of hours to be charged to the grant over the duration of the grant' should be entered as zero for the PI. The Je-S form requires a figure higher than zero in the 'Starting Salary' field, but the 'Total Cost' field should be entered as zero to provide an overall salary rate of zero in this section. All other salary fields for the PI should also be entered as zero.

How should we input T&S costings on the Je-S form?

All costs should be included under the 'Exceptions' cost heading as specified in the Call guidance document.

How does AHRC define 'researcher'?

Members of staff listed as researchers (or Research Assistants) must be of post-doctoral standing, meaning that they either possess a PhD or have the equivalent research experience. The responsibilities of the post should be commensurate with the level of experience and skills of the proposed researcher, and costs should be directly related to the actual time the researcher will spend working on the project.

Please note that these Fellowships are inherently impact-focussed and cannot be used to conduct substantial new research. Therefore, if members of staff are working to set up engagement activities etc it may be more appropriate to list them under the 'Other DI' costs section rather than in the 'Researcher' section of the Je-S form.

In the context of COVID-19, is there a risk that this scheme enforces 'ableist' activities and may discriminate against researchers that are unable to commit to 'standard' methods of engagement?

AHRC are aware of the impact of COVID-19 on 'high-risk' or shielding researchers, partners and stakeholders. The assessment panel will be briefed to be aware of this and be open to alternative and innovative modes of engagement to ensure that the Fellowship opportunity does not discriminate against those that are most at risk from the pandemic.

Appendix 4

AHRC Consolidated panel feedback for EDI Engagement Fellowship scheme—general observations

Consolidated Panel feedback for EDI Engagement Fellowships scheme

The AHRC and the Assessment Panel would like to take the opportunity to provide some general observations on the proposals received and provide some brief individual feedback for specific proposals.

General observations

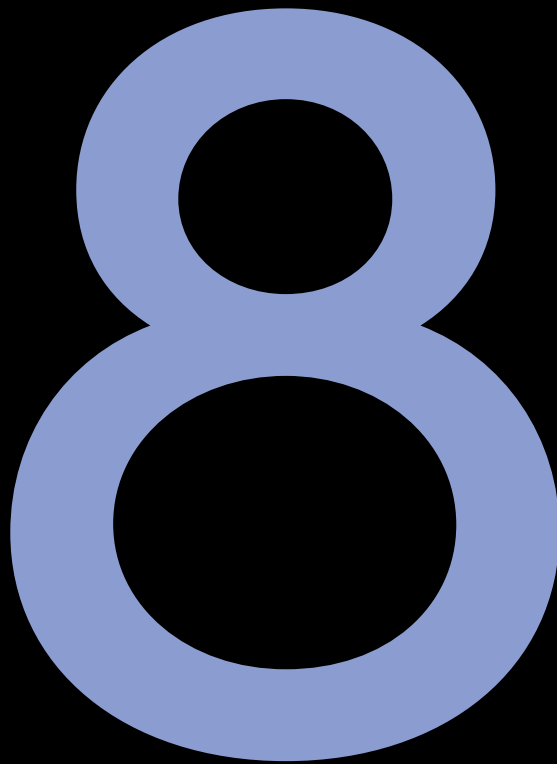
- Many proposals were constructed around good ideas and identified important challenges or opportunities but struggled to successfully articulate how their programme of engagement would address them and have any tangible impact.
- Very few bids included accessibility considerations and yet all the projects included public outreach. This is something that should be considered for all outward-facing engagement projects, but particularly for proposals responding to a call that was focussed on equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Many proposals were directing costs to large, well-funded organisations and institutions to conduct work that they should already be doing as part of their wider institutional commitments to EDI.
- In many cases, the letters of support were not specific enough around the commitment that the partner was prepared to make. This often undermined the whole project, particularly where the participation of that partner was integral to the successful delivery of the fellowship.
- Some proposals did not address the importance of intersectionality in relation to the EDI challenges they were attempting to address. Even if this was not what the fellowship was intended to focus on, failing to acknowledge relevant intersectionality indicated to the Panel that the fellow did not have a deep enough knowledge of the issue they were engaging with, not just on a theoretical level, but in terms of the people their project were intended to engage and benefit.

- Some proposals were based around one-off or isolated events, so the Panel were unsure what the long-term benefits to the marginalised communities they were engaging with would be.

Additional feedback considered to be for internal use only:

- AHRC needs to think carefully about what other activities it can do to try to influence the influencers (high-level people) who are the blockers for some of these changes to take place.
- The level of institutional support was highly variable across the proposals. The most successful proposals had realistic and sincere head of department statements, which gave the Panel more confidence that the fellowship would lead to greater sustainability

Author profiles





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« With this report and recommendations list in place, it is intended that the AHRC, and funding bodies more generally, can understand how best to support impact-focus EDI work in the future »

Dr Manuella Blackburn

