Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research:

A WELS working document for researchers and research teams

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Introduction

The academy won't change overnight. Nor does change occur through purely demographic shifts. It will only change when standard structures of knowledge and power are confronted.

Reyes, 2022, p. 1

Introduction

This WELS Faculty Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Research working document is intended to open a conversation amongst WELS researchers (postgraduate, emerging and established) and their research teams. It contributes towards accomplishing the OU's mission of being open to people, places, methods and ideas by cultivating a research culture that values inclusion, innovation and responsiveness.

Under the broad heading of Research Activities, the statement includes five sub-sections. The first sub-section considers the equitable building of a research team. It is followed by four other sections which outline the EDI implications of research activity: from asking equitable research questions to inclusive dissemination. The statement has been drafted to sit within the OU EDI plan and the OU Learn and Live Research Strategy.

This EDI in research working document represents an institutional commitment to:

- Ensure fair and appropriate in-research decision-making processes

- Foster a diverse and inclusive culture in all research activities

- Value and promote all institutional research activity equitably

- Build a network that encourages progress in higher education and works to make academia and research more accessible to the broader community

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Grounded in a series of ethical principles, this WELS Faculty EDI in working document draws attention to the benefits of research activity for all persons and contexts linked to and impacted by research. It highlights the wider responsibilities of individual researchers and research teams to society at large. Sympathies, assumptions, and predispositions are hard to avoid aspects of our research. They can be only countered through critical reflexive action.

The crafting of this statement does not emerge from a singular epistemic position, it reflects a diversity of views. As such, it does not offer a series of tightly bound prescriptions. It aims, instead, to cultivate the ethical imagination of those for whom the enactment and embodiment of EDI in research matters.   This WELS statement interfaces with the OU EDI Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange Plan sharing its commitment to providing a research environment that is supportive, inclusive and equitable. We aim for a research environment that is facilitative of good practice and based on principles of research integrity, enabling communities of researchers to undertake their best work.

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Institutional Support

To enliven and enact this EDI commitment the OU will:

Build awareness, recognise excellence and celebrate success Equity, diversity and inclusion in research is a continuous process of cultural transformation that requires leadership in communication, awareness-building (creating inspiring conversations) and recognizing excellence.

Strengthen professional development (skills, training and tools) Developing skills and expertise are a key building block for creating a diverse and inclusive research environment. Provide institutional support and infrastructure Guidelines, conditions and incentives to integrate EDI are required to ensure sustained results.

Measure needs, evaluate performance and document lessons learned Clear, realistic and measurable goals, targets and indicators will allow us to monitor progress, to take lessons from actions conducted, and to identify the adjustments required for a sustainable change in the culture of EDI in research we aim to create.

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This working document is a manifesto:

… a statement of principle, a mission statement, a declaration of the intent of an individual or organization or group. A manifesto: to make manifest … to make manifest, to render perceptible, a new order of ideas. A manifesto is thus about making manifest what exists. In the labour of making manifest, we make a manifesto.

Ahmed (2017)

Institutional Support

This manifesto calls for a full recognition that:

- The research community has the greatest potential to thrive when members are diverse and research protocols, systems and practices are inclusive.

- Institutional equity is accomplished when actions are taken to dismantle systemic barriers. To accomplish this, the obstacles faced by identifiable groups must be acknowledged, understood and countered.

- Research excellence, innovation and creativity are heightened across all disciplines and careers when EDI principles are integral to research participation, the research itself, research training and learning environments.

- Research should have a transformational impact on all communities. No groups should be privileged by research activities.

- Research with, by or of relevance for marginalised people is best when it aligns with policies and practices identified through ongoing engagements with those peoples. We accept Charlton's rallying cry: "Nothing about us without us"

- Strengthen the pipeline into academic careers for minoritised students. Inform and influence policies that affect minorisitised students' experience at a strategic level

EDI in Research Stages

The research process has been divided into subsections. Within each subsection there are a series of questions which have been posed for researchers to draw upon when developing, writing about or disseminating the outcomes of their research.

Building a Research Team

Formulating Research Questions

Citation

Methodology & Data Collection

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Dissemination

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Questions for consideration

The emancipatory research paradigm must be seen not in terms of one single project or projects but as a process.

Barnes (2001)

Building a Research Team

This section considers the institutional arrangements that sit behind EDI in research. It is concerned with the systems and structures that frame research activity including who, how and under what terms or conditions research teams are employed.

Key questions for researchers:

- Does your institution have an EDI mentorship scheme to support you in the building of a diverse team of co-applicants, collaborators, research personnel, critical friends or partner organizations?

- Who is the PI? How is it possible to use this position to support others in developing a research profile?

- How can the research process encourage informal and formal leadership opportunities in the day-to-day operation of the research project, above and beyond PI and work stream leads?

- If you engage with the perspectives of research subjects, are they positioned as meaningful participants in all aspects of the research process (ie. Part of the research team) or deployed as peripheral consultants?

- What abilities, competencies, experiences and/or EDI considerations do you think about when identifying team leadership?

Additional considerations for Building a Research Team

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Community collaboration as the cornerstone of EDI in research.

(Texas Centre for Equity Promotion, nd)

Formulating Research Questions

This section explores the formulation of research questions, considering who is involved and how. The who is involved and how includes consideration of the literature that informs research questions.

Key questions for researchers:

- Are your questions relevant to diverse communities or marginalised groups?

- Do your questions consider the legacy and impact of colonial histories and behaviours?

- How do you identify and step away from a predefined view of marginalised groups with or about whom you are researching?

- Is your research consistent with the priorities of the participants?

- How are you ensuring your research processes will be responsive to a full range of access preferences?

Additional considerations for <u>Formulating Research Questions</u>

Citation is [...] memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow.

Ahmed, 2017 pp. 15-16

Formulating Research Questions – citational politics

This section is part of formulating research question and explores the politics of citation, considering what literature informs research questions.

Key questions for researchers:

- How do you ensure your literature comes from beyond the dominant canon to include representation of marginalised groups?

- Have you read the work of marginalised groups?

Additional considerations for Formulating Research Questions – citational politics

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Equity-based design thinking advocates that those at the margins should hold the most power in the design process. Ceding power doesn't necessarily exclude anyone who isn't directly impacted by the problem but calls for aid to radically rethink 'expert' roles, recognise the 'process as product', ceding power where necessary, and listening.

Oddy (2021)

Methodology and data collection

This includes reflections on methodological approaches, data collection instruments, data analysis.

Key questions for researchers:

- How will you ensure that your research participants reflect diverse categories?

- Do EDI considerations impact relations between those conducting the research and those participating in it in ways that affect data collection? How will this be identified and mitigated?

- Does your proposal consider the different forms of support required (e.g., financial, logistical, cultural, linguistic) to ensure that the individuals or communities involved in the research are able to meaningfully participate in it?

- Would another methodological approach be more inclusive and accessible to your participants?

- How might you guard against cultural predispositions in your research design? Who is likely to challenge the values, norms and roles in your research? How will you engage with those challenges?

- *Additional considerations for Methodology and data collection*

There are always vacancies: there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known.

Greene, 2000 p15

Data Analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is not a technical process. In this section we invite you to consider the EDI implications of which and how stories are heard through data interpretation.

Key questions for considerations:

- How will you ensure an equitable interpretation of your data?

- Are the interpretations of marginalised groups included in your research?

- How will you identify and understand predispositions in data or your records?

- Have you accurately measured the true variable of interest? Use scales to measure sex, sexism, gender identity, gender roles, and/or gender expression, depending on the study question.

- How can you share digital ownership of your data?

Additional considerations for Data Analysis and interpretation

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All stories have structural underpinnings and material consequences. All stories are political.

Rohrer 2016

Dissemination

In this final section we invite consideration of how the outcomes of your research might be shared. We value publication in peer reviewed journals, but given these are mostly behind paywalls, other more creative or collaborative approaches are necessary.

Key questions for considerations:

- How are you representing your results for a diverse audience?

- Have you checked which journals are included in the OUs open access scheme to avoid your work being accessible only from behind a paywall?

- How are you being responsive to diverse access preferences of potential audiences?

- When designing what and how to disseminate, who do you see as the most likely or most desirable audiences of your research

- How do you recognise audiences as made of individuals, especially when individuals are members of an identifiable group or community?

Additional considerations for Dissemination

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Additional considerations

Research [...] is valid and meaningful knowledge if it is clearly linked to [marginalised] communities' wellbeing according to local cultural norms and values

Sam and Ktunaxa, 2011

Building a Research Team

Key questions for researchers, continued:

- How can your team engage broadly amongst itself and with external parties including marginalised groups to ensure it reflects a wider range of perspectives?

- What are the options for including non-academic partners (in research team) to contribute to the co-design of your research?

- How can the team represent a diverse mix of researchers in terms of research journeys and in relation to EDI?

- Who is the PI? How is it possible to use this position to support others in developing a research profile?

- Who are your work stream leads? How is it possible to use this position others in developing a research profile?

- Have you considered identifying an "EDI champion" within the team?

- For larger research networks and institutes, what EDI considerations are taken into account in the composition of governance bodies?

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Formulating Research Questions

Key questions for researchers, continued:

- Are your questions relevant to diverse communities or marginalised groups?

- Do your questions consider the legacy and impact of colonial histories and behaviours?

- How do you identify and step away from a predefined view of marginalised groups with or about whom you are researching?

- Is your research consistent with the priorities of the participants?

- How are you ensuring your research processes will be responsive to a full range of access preferences?

- How might your research team contribute towards improving national data collection processes and address data collection gaps in applicant demographics for funded PGR study – from application stage through to place confirmation?

- Do your questions enhance our understanding of marginalised students' experience of applying for and undertaking PGR study?

Formulating Research Questions – citational politics

Your research project emerges from and is grounded in a literature. With this in mind, continued:

- In what ways can the project provide space and time for the work of marginalised groups to be heard?

- How have you recognised that marginalised groups talk about everything; the relevance of their voices is not limited to experiences of marginalisation

- Does your literature review address relevant EDI considerations?

- What key words could be used in your literature review to gain deeper and broader knowledge of who might, or might not, be impacted by or contribute to the research?

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Methodology and data collection

Key questions for researcher, continued:

- What are the power relationships between you as the researcher and those participating in your study? How can you minimise the impact of such power? (Power could be held by the researcher or the participants)

- How could you get close to your participants' world to show sensitivity to the needs of others?

- Does your research understand and respect cultural preferences, taboos and confidentiality?

- Have you ensured that the language used to generate research data is accessible to diverse groups of people?

- How can you build and maintain constructive, trusting relationships with participants who are different to you?

- Does your research value and include marginalised groups? How could you demonstrate your respect for all participants?

- Have you ensured a fair selection of participants?

Methodology and data collection

Key questions for researcher, continued:

- What research methods can help you equalize the collection of your data?

- Are you confronting your own assumptions about the ways in which participants may want to engage?

- Are you unintentionally feeling hostile, suspicious, critical or unfriendly to some of your participants?

- Are there any other additional localised or general ethical considerations for data stewardship should you consider?

- Have you explained your study in a manner adequate to ensure fully informed consent?

- Is there a risk of reinforcing the damage of oppressive ideologies while undertaking this research?

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Data Analysis and interpretation

Key questions for consideration, continued:

- Can you allow marginalised groups involved in the research the opportunity to participate in the interpretation of the data and the review of research findings before the completion of the project?

- How will you ensure that your analysis is not generalised to the population as a whole, if your method and design were limited to certain groups?

- If marginalised groups were not included in your study, is this acknowledged as a limitation of the study?

- How have you discussed the implications the absence of marginalised groups in your analysis and interpretation?

- Have you considered QuantCrit as an approach to rectifying quantitative methods?

Dissemination

Key questions for consideration, continued:

- What strategies enable you to recognise ways of knowing and valuing other than your own?

- How have you recognised the impact of your positionality, on mechanisms and forms of dissemination and how dissemination is received?

- To what extent does your dissemination plan include collaboration and codesign?

- What approaches have enabled you to get to know potential audiences, including how they are likely to self-identify/wish to be referred.

- How diverse is your imagery, and to what extent dose it maximises the likelihood of wider identification and positive, diverse role models?

- How might you disrupt normative dissemination vehicles and their tendency to reinforce hegemonies which forestall epistemic justice.

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We welcome your feedback about EDI in Research. Please leave your comments here.

Thank you

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this, please email:
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