



Description

Diversity and inclusion are fundamental to scientific advancement. In line with this vision, the Wellcome Trust has made diversity and inclusion (D&I) one of its [six priority areas](#). As one of the world's largest biomedical research charities, the [Wellcome Trust](#) hopes to change the existing male-dominated research culture.

The initiative was described as “hugely significant” by the deputy pro vice-chancellor for equality and diversity at the University of Leicester. It is expected that other research funders will follow the suit.

However, this is not the first instance where a research funder included diversity terms to its grants. In 2011, Department of Health & Research made silver-award of the Athena SWAN Charter one of the eligibility criteria for funding. Athena SWAN, which encourages gender equality in the sciences, had [soaring applications](#) after the funding requirements changed. Similarly, Research Councils UK encouraged an inclusive framework. The Wellcome Trust will closely examine options and broader impact of its decision on research funding for effective implementation.

Plan of Action

The aim of the initiative is to prevent the number of people dropping out of research careers because of various barriers. Scientific progress thrives on diverse ideas and thus faces a huge setback in the current funding environment. The Wellcome Trust's plan of action consists of three key strategies:

- Making UK science more inclusive
- Engaging a wider range of people
- Leading by example

Accordingly, the Trust defines ‘diversity’ as an assortment of personalities, ways of thinking, and the [categories protected by UK law](#). Inclusion intends to make adjustments for disabled applicants and accommodate special needs. This will introduce methods to quantify and replicate good practices in diversity and inclusion, from an objective standpoint. This includes the launch of a network called [EDIS](#)

(Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science and Health Research). With the Francis Crick Institute and GlaxoSmithKline, the network aims to inspire and encourage an inclusive scientific community.

The strategy will build upon the work of the Wellcome Collection and its [accessibility to diverse audiences](#). The trust will also collaborate with BBC Children in Need and the Brilliant Club to inspire the next-generation. The focus is to spark scientific curiosity early on in young people to develop them as future scientists. Leading by example, Wellcome Trust hopes to raise awareness of inherent bias. Initially, it is important to change non-inclusive recruitment process and the limited investment in people.

Statistically, 44% of senior lecturers in bioscience are women, but only 16% of them make it to professors. Furthermore, students opting for STEM after the age of 16 represent the same ethnic/social group as they did 20 years ago.

The Next Step

A strong [steering team](#) focused on Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) is required to create an inclusive research culture. The next step is to form a team to reinforce recommendations of the Diversity in Grant Awarding and Recruitment report. The established steering group of D&I experts will give strategic advice to shape Wellcome's projected work. Specifically, the group includes 12 external members.

Accordingly, the steering group will meet thrice a year, to focus primarily on implementing the listed D&I plans. The group will specifically help shape annual priorities to meet the projected agenda, discuss complexities, and highlight current opportunities.

On the Same Note

In the spirit of inclusion, the Trust cofounded EDIS and also [published a review](#) detailing benefits of diversity in biomedical research. This also includes the pilot training process to promote awareness of unconscious bias for Wellcome employees. The steering group had its first meeting on 2 November, to elect a Chair and develop the plan of action. The D&I group will share feedback on the plan of action in the next few months. The group hopes to start early on its proposed course of action and persevere through to implement core changes. To recap, the reader can access the following sites recommended for further information,

- [RAND's literature review](#) commissioned by Wellcome and The Royal Society,
- Wellcome-commissioned [research summary](#) by the Bridge group, and
- [Review of Diversity and Inclusion](#) by the University of Sheffield.

Do you also think this move for diversity and inclusion will change the funding landscape and how? Share your thoughts in the comments section below.

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