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Researcher Academy

EDI in PGR Recruitment Guide

Welcome
to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Postgraduate Researcher Recruitment Guide

The Researcher Academy is the network for researchers, and staff who support them, at the University of Nottingham. We strategically advocate and advise on researcher issues and contribute to shaping the university's policies on researcher culture, environment, and provision.

Developed by the Researcher Academy based on consultations, surveys and interviews with PGRs, academics and support staff involved in the PGR recruitment process, this guide is designed to highlight areas for consideration, share best practice and support the recruitment of increasingly diverse postgraduate researchers to the University of Nottingham.

Designed for use by academics and support staff involved in the PGR recruitment process, the guide provides practical examples of ways in which equality, diversity and inclusion can be built in to our PGR recruitment processes. You can explore the guide by clicking on the different sections listed to the right and within the navigation bar.

Planning recruitment

Candidate selection

Case studies

Planning recruitment

Embedding EDI in recruitment processes

There are a range of practical factors to consider when designing EDI into a recruitment and selection process – it is likely that you will need to balance a range of stakeholders' needs (funders, industry partners, supervisors, administrative colleagues) in order to agree the best approach.

Throughout this section you will find practical guidance on things to take into account when putting in place an application process:

As you develop your process, you should build in an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that you have actively considered potential barriers for specific groups in your process design. Your EDI Coordinator will be able to support you with this.

Application forms

Although many applicants for postgraduate research at the University of Nottingham will complete the MyNottingham application, there are many cases where an additional or alternative application form is required (for example to apply for funding, or to apply for a multi-institutional doctoral training partnership).

When designing an application form it is important to consider the following points:

- Consider the key information or evidence you need to make a decision, and ensure that the questions you ask give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate this.

- Provide clear, easy to follow instructions and explain why you are asking these questions. Only ask for and collect the information that you need.

- If you use an online form, provide an offline copy of the form for candidates to use to draft their answers.

- Complex, confusing and specialised language can create a barrier to entry.
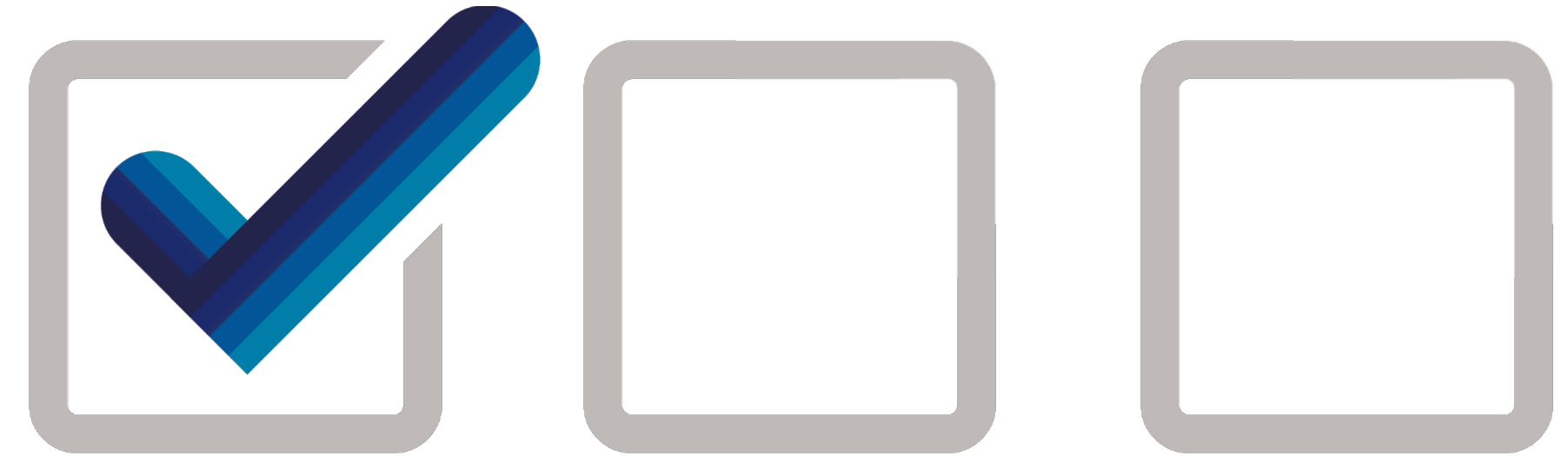
Application form questions

A challenge of recruiting a diverse cohort is in asking questions that allow you to effectively assess motivation and potential for doctoral study alongside evidence of relevant skills and previous academic record.

It can be useful to consider whether a case for support, or a more targeted set of questions may be more useful to assess candidates at application stage. Where there is a high volume of applications, a set of specific questions can allow for more effective review of applicants, facilitating fairer direct comparisons by using a scoring rubric.

Some examples of questions which have been used at Nottingham to assess motivation and potential for PhD study include:

- What are the main challenges for you personally in undertaking a PhD? How will you overcome these challenges?

- What are the things that excite you about undertaking a PhD?

- Describe three personal attributes you possess which you feel will make you a successful PhD student.

Application timelines

Timing

The timing of a recruitment process is an important part of planning, particularly where there is likely to be a competitive process for a studentship. In some cases, timings may be restricted by external factors (late approval of funding, for example), while in others it is potentially more flexible.

Applicants reported in our consultation that timelines for applying for PhDs can seem very tight, particularly when looking to move straight into a PhD from previous study. Tight timelines may be a particular disadvantage for candidates with a Specific Learning Difference (SpLDs) and neurodiverse candidates.

Open recruitment for PhDs

When advising candidates who wish to make an application for a PhD, but not necessarily to a specific programme, it is important to be aware of any date by which they need to apply in order to be considered for funding opportunities.

Recruiting to an individual studentship

Individual studentships are sometimes advertised with flexible or rolling recruitment, which may include a deadline but suggest that a place may be filled by a suitable candidate prior to this deadline. This potentially disadvantages students who may need more time to prepare an application, and may force candidates to rush an application or feel undue stress and pressure.

Recruiting to a cohort

When designing a recruitment process for a cohort based programme such as a DTP or a CDT, it is not unusual for deadlines to be set very early in the academic year due to a desire to secure 'the best' candidates ahead of other institutions. It may be worth considering:

- What evidence base is there for earlier deadlines securing higher quality candidates, and on what criteria are earlier applicants judged to be 'the best'?

- Is there an opportunity to design in a second, later round of recruitment to the programme? This could give candidates who make a later decision about their career direction (perhaps due to confidence, or lack of access to research experience compared to those who feel ready to apply earlier) the chance to be considered.

Initial data gathered about candidate diversity when running a second, later round of recruitment for the Nottingham BBSRC DTP, suggests that for this programme, candidates are more likely to come from more diverse backgrounds, including those from less 'traditional' educational pathways in a later application round. A more diverse set of socio-economic background characteristics was also reported by round two applicants to this programme.

Marketing and communications

Communication

Accessible guidance and information

It is very important to provide clear, accurate information in an accessible format to allow candidates to understand the PhD opportunity and the process to apply.

You should consider the following:

- Ensure the information and guidance pages are fully accessible, for example for screen reader software.

- Provide relevant and sufficient application information such as; stages in the application process, timelines, eligibility criteria and fees and funding information on university website and application pages.

- Avoid the use of technical language and jargon - words like 'cohort', and 'stipend' are in common use within the institution, but can be inaccessible to many potential applicants.

Pre-application communication

- Always provide clear contact details of the person dealing with questions and queries.

- Ensure responses to applicant queries are prompt.

- Ensure your communications with the applicant are respectful, considerate and unbiased.

- The communication from the university to prospective applicants should be clear, courteous and encouraging.

- Contacting academics who may be a potential supervisor can be a challenging task for some candidates, proving a barrier in the application process. Be open to applications received without previous contact.

- It can be helpful to provide information on how to identify and contact appropriate potential supervisors - for example using the Research Link tool.

Marketing and communications

Inclusive marketing is an important way to ensure that candidates feel that PhD opportunities at the University of Nottingham could be for them, regardless of background. Over half of postgraduate researchers consulted for this guide believed that inclusive marketing would encourage them to apply for a PhD.

Marketing

How can I make my marketing inclusive?

- Feature diverse role models in your advertising - showing that a diverse cohort already exists at Nottingham helps send a message that everyone is welcome to apply.

- Consider the language you use - refer to the work the STEMM-Change project has done on Transforming the Language of Exclusion and Bias in Recruitment.

- Aim to advertise your opportunity as widely as possible.

- Be sure to highlight the diverse student bases, student support services and inclusive culture at the University of Nottingham.

- Highlight flexible working options during the PhD application process to attract more candidates from diverse backgrounds (for example females, people with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities and international applicants).

Where should I advertise my PhD opportunities?

- Look beyond FindaPhD.com and jobs.ac.uk to find places relevant to your area of research that could reach a broader range of applicants - an example is Black British Professionals in Science (BBSTEM).

- Social media is a useful marketing tool - often current students have strong online networks which can reach a range of potential applicants.

- Consider ways to promote your opportunity to candidates studying at institutions which may have a more diverse undergraduate population - you may be able to use your professional networks to do this.

Applicant support

It is possible to put in place support mechanisms which provide the opportunity for all applicants to gain access to the same 'insider knowledge'. At an institutional level, the Researcher Academy works with External Relations to host PGR open days – details of opportunities for prospective postgraduate researchers to visit (virtually or in person) are advertised here.

Supporting PhD applicants

Ensuring that your marketing and communications are clear and inclusive is an important first step in equipping potential applicants to apply, but some applicants will have access to additional support, whether through networks they have established at undergraduate level or from their families.

Applicant training

Our consultation demonstrated that both staff and postgraduate researchers believe that offering applicant training opportunities is an effective strategy to support applications from under-represented groups.

Postgraduate researchers felt that there was a lack of information available on how to write a research proposal, and that the complex landscape of PGR funding opportunities was a barrier to writing the most effective application for each individual opportunity.

Options to consider in this space include:

- Offering programme or School-specific online 'open days', which include opportunities for Q&A from prospective applicants. Online formats allow the widest reach, including international candidates, and allow people who may not be able to attend in person access to the same information as other applicants.

- Offering application writing workshops (a recorded example from the Midlands4Cities AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership can be found here).

- Signposting to proofreading services to check over wording, spelling and grammar.

The Webinar functionality in Microsoft Teams is a useful tool in setting up online applicant information sessions.

Positive action

In the university context, it is important to recognise that representation of different groups will differ dependent on discipline and level of study, and that therefore any positive action taken should be based on local need.

What is positive action?

Positive action is the steps that can be taken by the university to encourage increased representation of groups who have suffered from historic disadvantage, or low participation in education and training.

It aims to:

- alleviate disadvantage experienced by people who share a protected characteristic; or
- reduce underrepresentation in relation to particular activities; or
- meet particular needs

It is important to ensure that positive action is proportionate to achieving the stated aim, and any positive action should be taken based on data. (Information shared from Advance HE)

Positive action vs positive discrimination

Positive discrimination is unlawful in the UK, but positive action is not. Positive discrimination would include making a decision based on a protected characteristic alone (for example, based on gender or ethnicity) rather than based on merit. Examples of positive action are described on the right.

Intersectionality

It is important to consider intersectionality when planning positive action. While you may have a good gender balance in your area, and perhaps good representation of disabled PGRs, it may be the case that you have significant under-representation of disabled female PGRs, for example.

Examples of positive action

Some examples of positive action which can be taken to support PhD applicants include:

- Targeted applicant mentoring programmes (see example case study)
- Guaranteed interview schemes (see example case study)
- Ringfencing scholarships (see example case study)
- EDI-focussed summer placement opportunities

Positive action and the deficit model

A criticism which is sometimes levelled at positive action is that it assumes a *lack* of something in a candidate, when in fact it is the systems and attitudes that exist that need to be addressed. This is important to bear in mind when designing EDI interventions - as much as offering support to navigate processes can be a productive way forward, it is just as important to honestly assess processes and remove systemic barriers wherever possible.

Positive action and unfair burdens

Positive action such as mentoring programmes can inadvertently put an unfair burden on individuals from under-represented backgrounds who contribute to their success. When asking students from under-represented backgrounds to support these initiatives with their time and energy, it is important to recognise the value of their contribution and reimburse them fairly for their time. It is also important to explore the extent to which allies from other groups may be able to contribute to the success of initiatives and take on the burden of the work.

Candidate selection

Fair selection of candidates

Once applicants have applied for a PhD programme or position, it is important to ensure that they are considered fairly. There are a range of interventions which can be introduced at the candidate selection stage in order to ensure that the process is fair and equitable for all candidates.

Throughout this section you will find practical guidance on things to take into account or consider during the selection of candidates.

Processes for selection of candidates should also be considered in your Equality Impact Assessment of your recruitment process.

CVs

CVs can be a useful tool in assessing a candidate's suitability for a PhD, allowing them to showcase their skills and accomplishments and providing additional context to inform decision making. However, they may also reveal aspects of a candidate's identity which may introduce bias into decision making. They may also mean that additional information is provided about one candidate compared to another due to individual approach, and are usually an unverified source of information.

There are different approaches to avoid some of the problems associated with CVs:

- **CV free recruitment**
  Programmes such as the Wellcome Trust DTP do not use CVs in their selection process, choosing instead to ensure that all information required for decision making is covered in the application questions.

- **Template CVs**
  It is possible to use a template CV, which ensures that all applicants provide the same information in the same format.

References

It is worth considering whether references could be used as a post-offer requirement, as they would in an employment context.

The role of the reference

Decisions about the role of references in postgraduate researcher recruitment can be particularly challenging. While some prospective researchers from under-represented backgrounds may not have access to the same sponsors and advocates as other applicants, it is recognised that references can also build the strength of an application by providing context and background, and potentially highlighting extenuating circumstances or challenges faced by a candidate.

It is important to recognise that it is rare to see negative references, and that often negativity is read 'between the lines' rather than overtly stated. Decisions should not be made based on a meaning which is assumed based on what is not said. Equally, it is unfair to place greater weight on the contents of a reference because of the status of the indvidual who has written it.

Reference forms

There are practical steps that can be taken to remove bias and unhelpful metrics from reference forms.

- Avoid requesting that referees rank their student against the rest of their year group, or against every student ever supervised. This information is ultimately meaningless without more detailed context - they could be the top 50% of a very strong year group, or in the top ten of the fifteen students a referee has ever taught.

- It is also important to note that complex reference forms place an additional workload burden on referees.
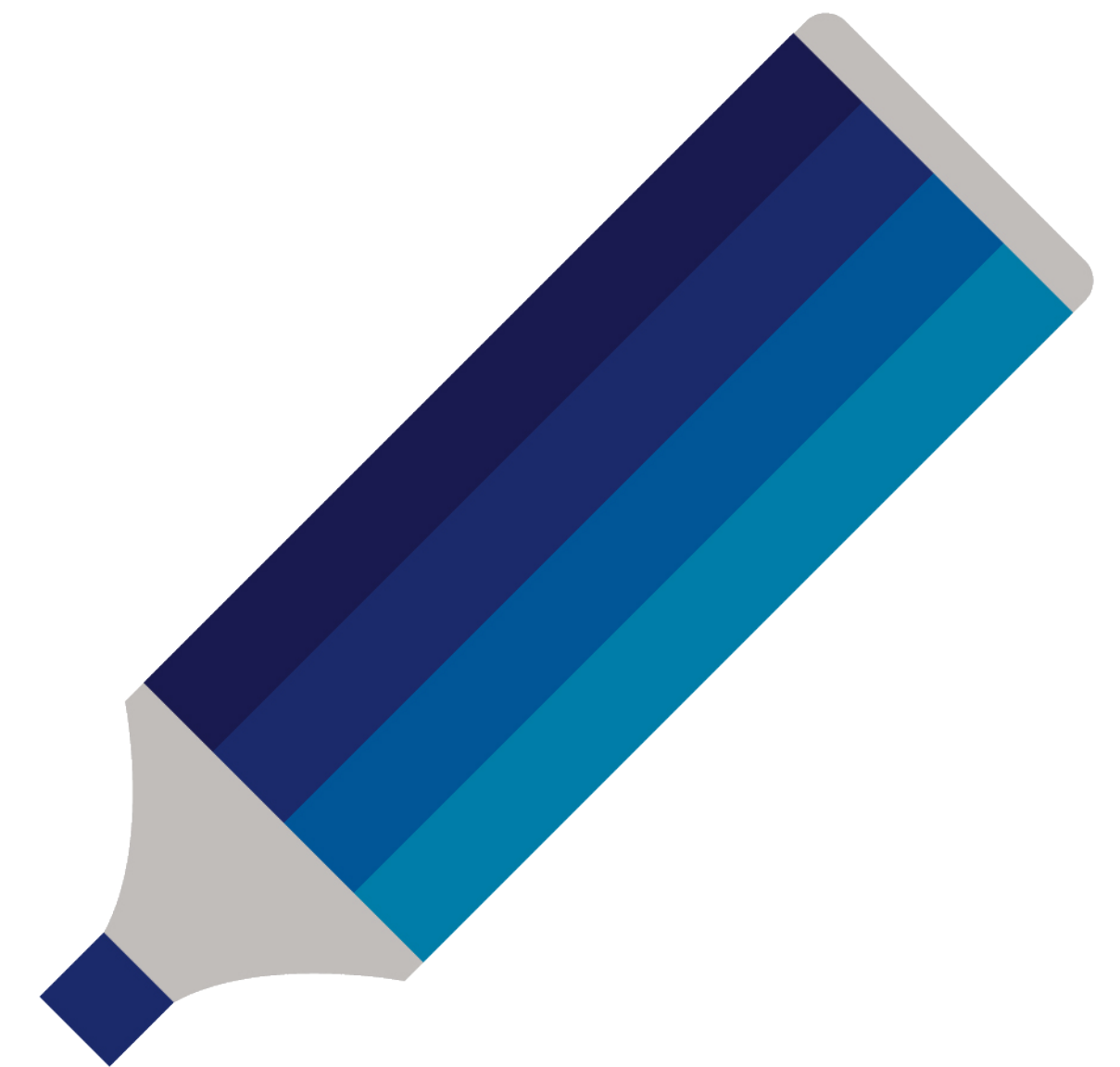
Interviews and assessments

Interviews

Interviews can be a good way to get to know an applicant; their research interests, knowledge, skills and abilities. In many cases, an interview can build the foundation of a future supervisor and supervisee working relationship.

However, interviews can be a mixed experience for applicants, who do not always know what to expect and how to prepare for an interview. They can also be a very stressful experience, which can affect performance and prevent a full assessment of an individual's potential.

You should consider the following when planning interviews:

- Candidates should be interviewed by a panel, rather than one-to-one.

- Strive to ensure a relevant, but also diverse interview panel. You should aim to achieve a balance of gender and career stage, and aim to include colleagues from diverse ethnicities too wherever possible, and without unfairly overburdening individual colleagues.

- Ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for applicants as needed.

- Online interviews may offer a more standard interview experience for all candidates, particularly when interviewing internationally.

You should consider the following when conducting interviews:

- Aim to create a relaxed atmosphere and reassure the candidate that they can take their time to answer questions.

- All candidates for the same position should be asked questions designed to gather the same information from each candidate which allow for fair comparison of their performance.

- Ask questions that dig into a candidate's transferable skills, motivation and behaviours as well as their academic abilities.

- Follow up questions allow interviewers to delve into important areas more deeply and give candidates the best chance to succeed.

Assessments

Where particularly large volumes of applications are being considered, it can be useful to consider whether additional assessments could help in decision making and to support differentiating between large numbers of well-qualified candidates.

Assessment can be used in different ways:

- Assessment of practical skills – if specific practical skills are a requirement of a particular project or programme it may be appropriate to assess this, or potential to develop these skills, as part of the application process.

- Assessment of intellectual skills – tests measuring verbal and non verbal reasoning, critical thinking and problem solving may help to differentiate between candidates.

- Assessment of professional style – the University's HR team are able to offer professional styles assessments which can provide additional information which may help to direct areas for questioning at interview.

It is important to consider, if looking at introducing assessments to a recruitment process, whether there is any potential bias in using that approach. If using an external supplier, they should be able to provide data on outcomes for different groups, and you should consider this as part of your Equality Impact Assessment.

Unconscious bias and anonymisation

Unconscious bias

During candidate selection it is possible for unconscious biases to slip in and influence decision making. Unconscious bias training is a widely used and easily accessible intervention which is used to help people acknowledge and increase awareness of the biases they may hold.

The university offers unconscious bias training for academic staff. It is recommended that anyone involved in recruitment of postgraduate researchers should take this training, but it is not a substitute for more in depth consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion measures and should be seen as an absolute minimum standard. Awareness is a good starting point – meaningful action is more important.
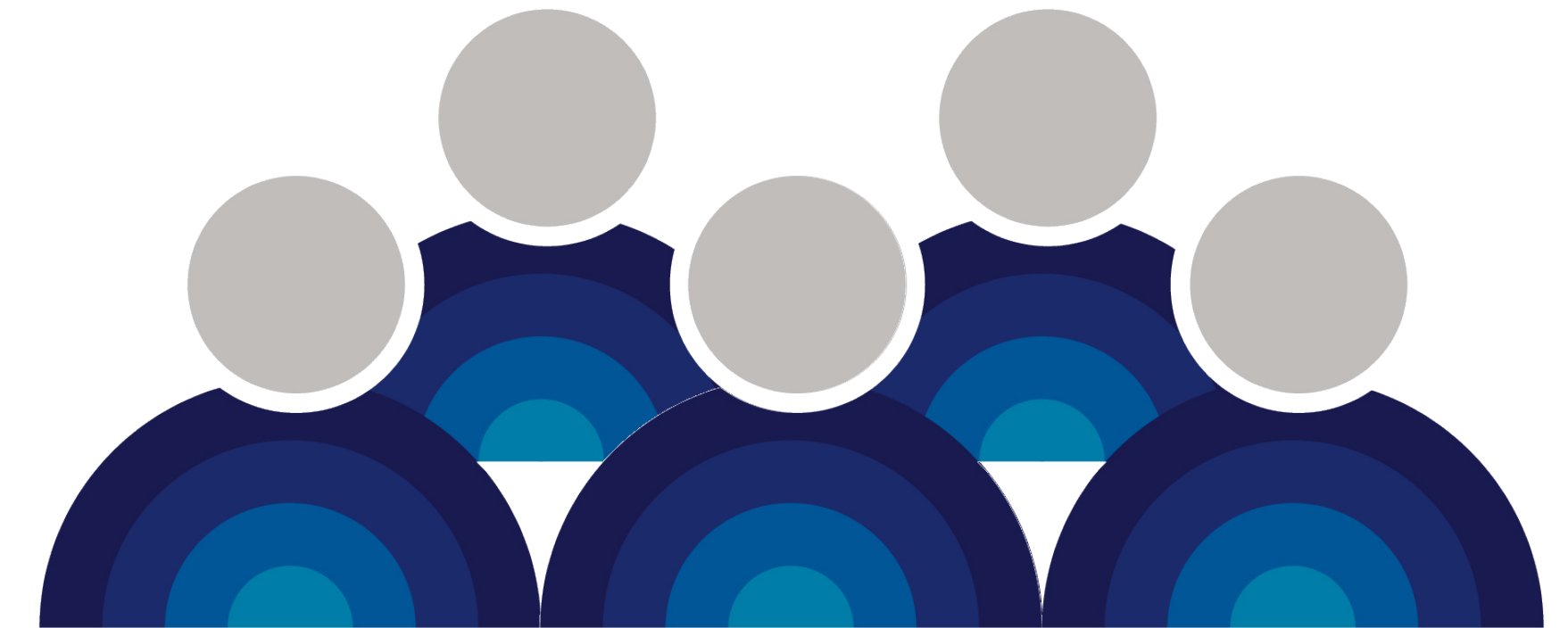
Anonymisation

One practical way to tackle bias in the selection of candidates is through the use of anonymisation in the recruitment process, particularly at the shortlisting stage. The following information should be considered for anonymisation:

- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Nationality
- Previous institution of study

The main challenge associated with anonymisation is that it may require significant manual administrative effort to redact applications. There is often some resistance to anonymisation of previous institution of study - it is sometimes used as a proxy measure for quality of previous training, but this has the potential to disadvantage applicants based on their background due to the increased likelihood of some underrepresented groups attending certain institutions. Instead, it is worth considering whether the questions asked in the application process allow the candidate to provide information this might be used as a proxy for.

Ongoing support

Beyond recruitment

Ensuring that we recruit fairly to our PhD opportunities is incredibly important, but we must also consider the support that our postgraduate researchers will receive during the course of their studies.

Useful information to help support our diverse postgraduate researcher community can be found below:

Supervising Students from Diverse Backgrounds

Report and Support

Centre for English Language Education (CELE)

Support and Wellbeing Service

Mental Health Advisory Service

Counselling Service

Disability Support Service

HealthyU

University of Nottingham Health Service

Case studies

There are a range of examples of existing good practice in equality, diversity and inclusion related to PGR recruitment at the University of Nottingham. The case studies shared here capture some of this practice, illustrating approaches to embedding EDI at different stages of the recruitment process, and the impacts that different interventions have had.

Applicant mentoring and guaranteed interview scheme in the BBSRC DTP

Background

The Nottingham BBSRC Doctoral Training Partnership (BBSRC DTP) is a PhD programme which recruits students to work on projects across the Faculties of Science, Medicine and Health Sciences and Engineering at the University of Nottingham, working in partnership with Nottingham Trent University and industrial partners. The programme has been running since 2012 and was most recently re-funded from 2020 for five further intakes. Prior to 2021, the DTP recruited only from the UK and EU, but now recruits internationally for up to 30% of places.

As part of the re-bidding process in 2019, the DTP team reviewed recruitment data from the previous seven years and identified significant under-recruitment of candidates from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, with 0-6% of those recruited to the programme coming from these backgrounds in each year of recruitment.

This was initially benchmarked against University of Nottingham ethnicity data for home students in relevant research areas, and a target of increasing representation of BAME students was set from 2020.

The DTP introduced changes to its recruitment processes in two parts to address the under-representation of BAME recruits to the programme.

Initial actions

The first action taken by the DTP was to make some broad changes to its approaches to recruitment to improve inclusivity. This included:

- Review of marketing materials to showcase the diverse role models and include current students' own words about their experiences on the programme.

- Review of the language in the marketing materials and website to remove jargon such as 'cohort-based' and replace it with more accessible terminology.

- Advertising in more diverse areas, including BBSTEM.

- Review of the application form and move from a Case for Support to specific questions which aimed to improve the ability to assess motivation and potential.

- Amendments to scoring rubric to reflect the changes to the form and give more weight to measures of motivation and potential.

- Anonymisation of name, age and gender from applications.

- Changes to the interview process to include a transferable skills interview alongside the academic interview.

Outcomes in year one

Following the changes made in year one, the DTP recruited 11.4% of its students from BAME backgrounds. However, it was noted that while this was a notable improvement on previous years, it did not improve on representation of Black and mixed-Black heritage researchers on the programme and more targeted interventions were designed to address this and rolled out in year two.

11.4%

of DTP students were recruited from BAME backgrounds

Amplify and guaranteed interview scheme

Having identified that while the programme's overall BAME recruitment had improved in 2020, Black and Black mixed candidates continued to be underrepresented, the DTP team considered the points at which there appeared to be barriers in the process. It was noted that very few applicants from these backgrounds applied to the programme, and when they did they were less likely to progress through the selection process.

The DTP worked with its students at an anti-racism forum led by Black students to co-create the Amplify programme and guaranteed interview scheme for Black and Black mixed DTP candidates.

Amplify

The Amplify programme is an applicant mentoring programme offered to Black and Black mixed prospective DTP candidates. Mentors are current postgraduate researchers on the DTP programme, and include a mentors from a range of backgrounds - this approach was agreed by the student co-creators as the best way to maximise the opportunity and ensure that an unfair burden wasn't placed on underrepresented student groups. Mentors are paid at R&T Level 4a and receive training and support from the DTP team, with line management from the DTP's Welfare and EDI Officers.

Amplify mentees are offered an initial introductory session as a cohort, then work 1-2-1 with a mentor for an initial meeting, an application writing support session, an interview preparation session and a post-interview reflection session, as well as a visit to Nottingham to see their mentor's lab.

Guaranteed interview scheme

An opt-in guaranteed interview scheme was offered to Black and Black mixed DTP applicants for the first time when recruiting for 2021. Candidates who identified as Black or Black mixed, had home fees status and had or expected to have a 2.1 in a relevant subject were able to opt in to the scheme.

Outcomes

The BBSRC DTP recruited five candidates in the first round of Amplify in 2021; more than twice as many Black candidates than applied to the full PhD program in 2020. Of those five candidates, four were shortlisted for interview through usual sifting and one was given a guaranteed interview. Three of the five candidates were offered places on the DTP, and two went on to accept those offers.

Ten DTP candidates opted into the guaranteed interview scheme in 2021. Of those five were shortlisted for an interview through usual sifting and five were shortlisted through the guaranteed interview scheme. Of the five who were shortlisted through the scheme, two received offers. This is quite significant because those two candidates would not have been shortlisted otherwise, despite the other inclusivity measures implemented in the programme.

These initiatives have increased the proportion of UK-domiciled BAME students in the 2021 DTP cohort to 23.7%, and the proportion of UK-domiciled Black students to 15.8%.

Next steps

The BBSRC DTP plans to continue to use these interventions to develop the diversity of its cohort, and is actively looking at intersectional data to further target diversity work for the programme.

The Management Committee has agreed increased recruitment targets to replace the 10% BAME target set at bid stage, aiming to recruit at least 20% of its UK-domiciled candidates from BAME backgrounds and 10% from Black and Black-mixed backgrounds in future years.

23.7%

of DTP students were recruited from BAME backgrounds

Ringfencing scholarships and equality statements

Background

The School of Politics and International Relations identified that its undergraduate cohort was significantly more diverse than its postgraduate cohort, confirming this with student data, which was used to spark a conversation on the topic.

The team considered a range of potential interventions, including targeted fee waivers. However, recognising that there are existing avenues to apply for fee loans and bursaries at the postgraduate level, it was felt that scholarships which could be used to support living costs would be a better approach.

Initial actions

Budgets were the first practical consideration. The team assessed the budget needed for the initiative - this was simpler to calculate for postgraduate taught students than for postgraduate research students, where funding had to be made available for three consecutive years.

The next step was to identify eligibily criteria for the initiative. The school reviewed approaches in other schools and selected income as the core factor in awarding postgraduate taught scholarships. For postgraduate researcher scholarships, the team wanted to improve overall diversity in the cohort, so inclusive statements which specifically mentioned females and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students were made to encourage individuals from a range of backgrounds to apply.

"**The School of Politics and International Relations values equality, diversity and inclusion. As a holder of an Athena Swan Award, we are committed to offering equal treatment and opportunities to our student body. We welcome applications from those who are under-represented in the sector and at the University of Nottingham including but, not exclusive, to women, disabled and neurodiverse people, LGBTQ+ people, and people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds."**

Equality statements

As part of the implementation of this intervention, the school has redesigned its application forms to include a personal statement in which applicants can highlight in a maximum of 500 words why they believe they should be considered for a scholarship. Applicants are encouraged to outline any difficulties or challenges they have faced or expect to face as they work towards their postgraduate studies. The application encouraged examples of ill health, disability and caring responsibilities.

Outcomes

The initial timing of this initiative has meant that so far scholarships have only been offered to existing offer holders. Communications were sent in July and even in a short space of time several applications have been received, which will be reviewed by a school committee.

Next steps

The team looks forward to continuing and expanding this initiative for 2022 recruitment. The intention is to use it as a tool to attract more applications from individuals from diverse backgrounds. The team will also learn from feedback on the initial process and hopes that this will be a tool to support a more diverse academic pipeline.

This approach is one which can be replicated in other schools and departments of the university.

Women in Chemistry event

Background

Three PhD students started the Women in Chemistry Event at the University of Nottingham in 2018. The team felt that there was not adequate representation of the females in the field and aimed to create an event to support and encourage women in chemistry. After three successful years, the fourth event will run in 21/22.
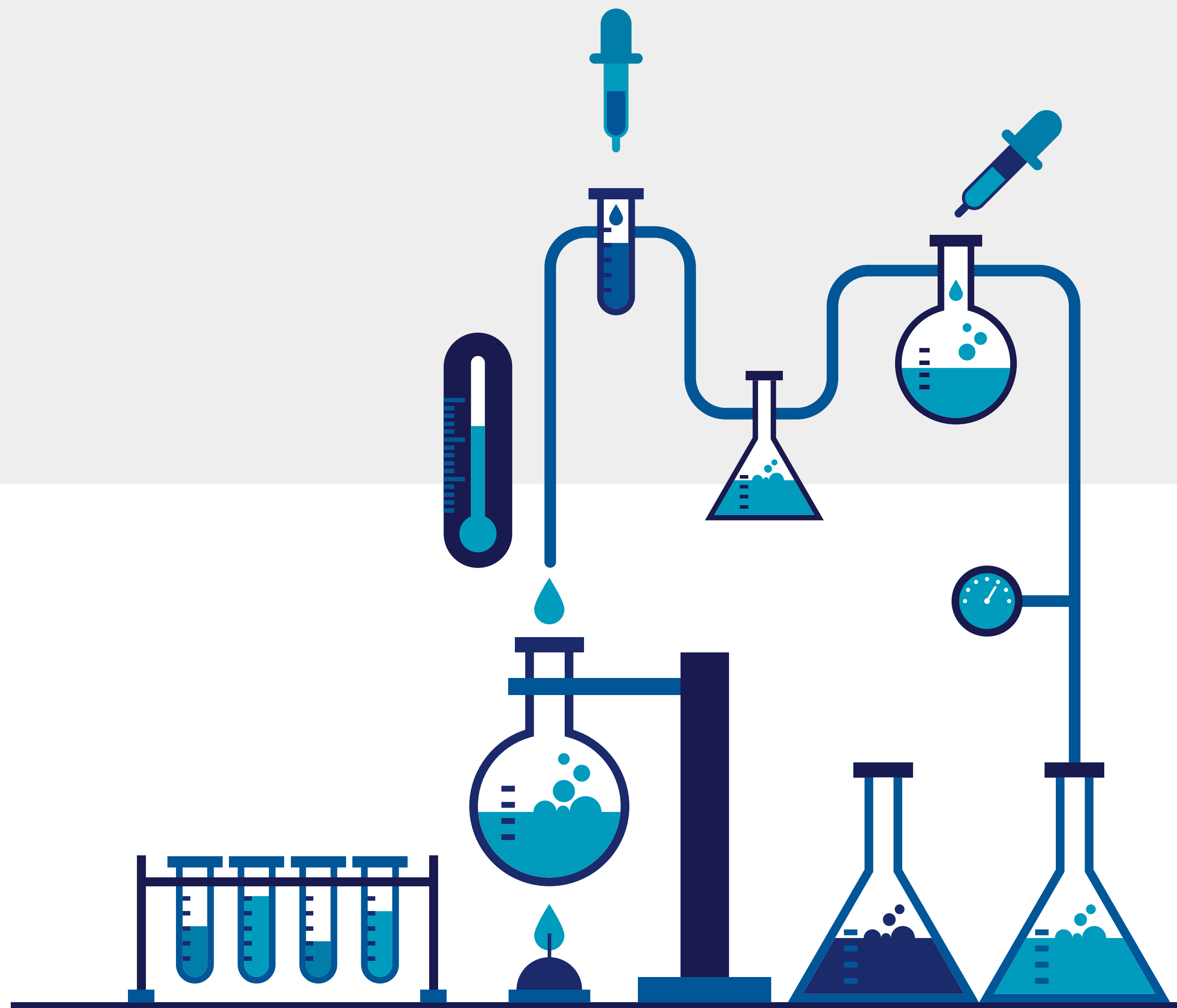
The team

The team has expanded from three to ten people working together to make the field more accepting and inclusive towards women, and more individuals continue to be recruited to the team. The team consists of a healthy mix of PhD students in chemistry, post docs and staff. The team has always encouraged including men and currently the team includes two.

This is because they feel it is important to show that men stand side by side with women and support them. It is important to have representation on the team to share diverse insights and create a more inclusive environment.

Conference format

The event is held on the International Women's Day in March. The event is sponsored by organisations and local chemical companies who attend the event and actively demonstrate their support, resulting in a mixture of academia and industry present at the event, celebrating achievements of women in the field.

The team calls six speakers in every conference to talk about different areas of chemistry. The guest speakers come from both academia and industry and speak about their experiences, the struggles they faced, their achievements and their field of chemistry. This creates awareness, as well as providing attendees an opportunity to learn more about the science.

Before the pandemic the conference used to be held in person. However, last year the team did the conference online because of Covid-19. The turnout was great. The online conference was very interactive and had the most diverse panel of guest speakers so far.

Two speakers came from ethnic minority backgrounds, and the panel included someone who had a career break to have a family and returned to the field and someone who did their chemistry PhD and now works as an editor for a chemistry magazine. The team aims to invite a diverse panel to show the different experiences of these successful professionals and to reinforce the idea there is not only one path to success in the field. For example, it is not necessary to stay in the lab and research, individuals can also pursue another career within the field.

Attendees and activities

Attendees

Around 200 people attend the conference each year, the majority of whom are female PhD students from Nottingham. The event is also advertised to other universities across the country and is free to attend.

The event is designed to celebrate females in the field, however male peers are equally encouraged to attend this event to develop an insight to the kind of issues females face in this field that they might not previously be aware of. The event is mainly advertised to young female researchers in chemistry, but professors, staff and leaders are encouraged to come too, so they can also understand the problems.

The team believes having large and diverse attendee base is important in spreading their message. For example, having professors and staff in the conference may give them a new perspective and influence interaction with and recruitment of new PhD students.

Activities

Each year, to keep the event interesting, the team does things a little differently. In 2021, a career coach with a chemistry background was invited to give advice to attendees at the conference and people really enjoyed that. It was a very interactive workshop.

Last year, breakout sessions were introduced to allow people to discuss topics from different categories (such as imposter syndrome and career in certain areas) in small groups. Attendees enjoyed the discussions and the opportunity to network. It was a very successful interactive tool so the team plans to do something similar at the in person conference this year as well.

The event also has a panel session where attendees are given a platform in an open and free environment to bring up issues and have a discussion on them.

A lot of attendees can then relate to that and put forward their input in the topic. This also tells people attending they are not the only one facing the issue and that there is a need to overcome these problems. Poster sessions are also part of the conference, this activity helps highlight the achievements and experiences of women.

Outcomes

Every year, the team collects feedback from attendees and the majority of people leave the conference feeling motivated and proud. Some of the common responses also include acknowledging that the attendees were not fully aware that certain things were an issue to the females in the field.

The team feels happy with the responses because their aim behind this event was to drive change in attitudes which can eventually lead to a change in numbers of female representation in the field. It is hard to bring about a change in numbers; there won't suddenly be more females pursuing PhDs or a career in chemistry.

However, if as reflected by the responses, people leave celebrating their achievements in the field, connecting with people who are on a similar journey and reflecting upon ways that can improve the environment for female chemists then the aim of the event has been achieved.

The event has received positive feedback consistently over the years. The event has been growing and demand has been increasing. There is a long waiting list to come to these conferences now. The event has also gained recognition at different levels. It has been mentioned in press articles and the team also received an award from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Nottingham 2020 for their contributions.

Next steps

The team aims to increase the diversity for coming conferences. In audience the team aims to include more young people from the industry, as per the feedback received from previous events. They are sending out invites targeting young chemists in industry.

The team is also working towards introducing a more diverse panel in the coming conferences by inviting someone from the LGBTQ+ community and someone with an international background. This will open the event up to two different communities and help expand the initiative. The team feels that the event should have as much diversity as possible so that it feels as inclusive as possible.

The team would also like to grow the conference in the future given the increasing demand. Currently, the event has about 200 attendees which is the maximum capacity for the current venue. Expanding the conference has the potential issue of funding and a need for bigger venue at this time - issues which the team will explore in the future.

Replication

Events like this can be replicated in other schools according to their diversity needs. If introducing a new event, it is possible to start smaller and build up the scale of an initiative.

For any further information please contact:
researcher-academy@ nottingham.ac.uk