

British Society for Immunology Diversity & Inclusion Framework

Introduction

The British Society for Immunology is an inclusive and ambitious community. We act as a focal hub for the immunology community, supporting and empowering immunologists to drive forward scientific discovery and application together and ensuring society is aware of the significant positive impact that immunology research has on human and animal health.

Providing a safe and open platform for all those working in immunology is at the core of our mission. Through enacting the diversity and inclusion goals set out in our current strategic plan, we believe we can bring our immunology community together and change the world for the better.

The immense passion and dedication we see in all of our members has played a critical role in advancing our understanding of the immune system and delivering real benefits to global health. However, for immunology to unleash its full potential and maintain the incredible transformation we've seen in recent years, we must move forward in our journey to becoming a truly diverse and inclusive community.

For many years, we have worked hard to open the doors of immunology and show that it can be a fulfilling career path for everyone. Our starting point has always been listening to our community.

We know that we must continue to make progress in EDI, and it is through this two-way conversation with our members that we have developed our first diversity and inclusion framework. With it, we are renewing our commitment to building a fairer, more inclusive immunology community in which opportunities are within reach to the broadest range of people.

In our new framework, you will find highlights from our established work which will serve as pillars for the future. Building on those, we have begun working on focal areas presented here and on ways to further

integrate EDI within the Society. Our diversity and inclusion framework begins our long-term plan of action in this area which, together with the support from our community, will enable a fair and equal working environment and better health for all through immunology.

Professor Arne Akbar,
BSI President

Dr Doug Brown,
BSI Chief Executive

A diverse and inclusive immunology environment can change the world for the better.

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is vital to the future of immunology and of the BSI.

Immunology has the potential to deliver huge health benefits for society, but it can only change the world for the better with deliberate action towards a fairer, more inclusive field.

Our diversity and inclusion framework aims to showcase our renewed commitment to ramping up our EDI efforts to foster a culture within immunology that ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all.

To us, 'diversity' means appreciating, respecting and embracing all the unique characteristics that make people who they are, and 'inclusion' is about creating an environment in which people feel welcomed and valued. All those working in immunology, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity and any of the other infinite factors that distinguish individuals from one another, belong in our BSI community.

To realise our vision of better health for all through immunology we need to build a fairer, more inclusive immunology community, with and for our members.

Framework principles

- Better health for all through immunology
- We provide a safe and inclusive platform for all those working in immunology
- We work hard to ensure opportunities are within reach to all
- We are passionate about raising diverse voices in immunology
- We believe in two-way conversations with our community
- We know that EDI is everyone's responsibility
- We want to show that immunology can be a fulfilling career path for everyone
- We want to achieve a fair and equal working environment, accessible to all
- We believe in transparency around EDI data and progress
- We collaborate with partners to accelerate progress

- We support our members to overcome the challenges they face in their working lives
- We empower the next generation of immunologists
- We support our members in turning their EDI ideas into reality
- We celebrate the achievements of BSI members from all backgrounds

The Society's journey so far...

Building a fairer, more inclusive immunology community has been an important focus for us for many years. We work with and for our members to proactively integrate equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work, both internally and externally.

Our aim is to foster a culture within the field of immunology that ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all.

We strive for EDI in many ways, some of which we have highlighted in this document. However, we know we must do more.

By aligning our current activities with our EDI goals and collaborating with our members to develop an effective plan of action, we commit to ramping up our EDI efforts. Here, we showcase some of the existing projects we will build on with this framework and celebrate the achievements and progress made to date.

Representation matters

The BSI is here to represent **all** those who work in immunology, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity and any of the other infinite factors that distinguish individuals from one another.

Our committees are vital in leading our work. They make numerous decisions about how the Society is run, what activities we focus on and what support we provide to members. We always strive for diversity within our committees to make sure that everyone's views are represented. We encourage nominations from across the spectrum of our membership and ensure voting is accessible so that representatives are elected fairly.

At the BSI, we strive for diversity in our committees to ensure voices from across our membership are represented and have a say in our priorities and activities.

We aim for our committees to represent a diverse range of backgrounds and have individuals from different career grades, immunology sectors and locations in the UK.

We have worked hard to achieve the current level of diversity in our committees, but we know we need to do more. Diversity is about more than just gender. We know that it is only by including people with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives that we can facilitate effective decision-making and problem-solving to drive innovation. This is essential to the work of the BSI and our committees.

We will widen representation beyond gender in our committees, events and other activities.

All applications for opportunities within the BSI, including vacancies for staff roles, committees and other volunteering positions, are treated fairly and on the basis of relevant merits and abilities. We will do our utmost to ensure we attract candidates from a wide demographic spectrum by reviewing and further focusing our recruitment efforts on equity, diversity and inclusion.

Opportunities within reach to all

Our events programme seeks to unite our membership in their passion for immunology. Through a variety of meetings, both virtual and in-person, we facilitate exchanging ideas, establishing collaborations and finding inspiration.

We are proud to offer an opportunity for immunologists to come together at our flagship event, the BSI Congress. During the pandemic, we pivoted to offer a fully virtual conference in 2020 and a hybrid Congress in 2021 to enable the immunology community to continue to connect and have meaningful interactions.

Ensuring that the BSI Congress is accessible to all is extremely important to us.

By making this event accessible to as wide an audience as possible, we ensure everyone can make the most of the opportunities available. For example, making vital connections, presenting and getting feedback from peers can lead to new projects, papers and collaborations, all advancing the careers of our delegates.

A particular highlight of our Congress is the 'Bright Sparks in Immunology' initiative. We offer PhD students and postdocs the chance to showcase and discuss their research ideas in a friendly atmosphere,

as well as providing them with the experience of presenting their work to a large audience. This is incredibly important to our mission to support the next generation of immunologists.

In 2019, we rolled out new initiatives to further increase the accessibility of BSI Congress.

We established a carers' grant to enable those with carer needs to attend. The scheme helps cover the cost of care arrangements during the meeting, for example, to look after children or older members of the family. We were proud to award ten grants in this pilot scheme which we continue to offer at future Congresses and have subsequently expanded to our Regional & Affinity Group conferences. At Congress, we have also trialled providing significantly subsidised crèche facilities to care for children in addition to other provisions already in place, such as breastfeeding facilities, prayer rooms and a quiet space.

We will continue to keep diversity and inclusion at the forefront when planning our events and activities to ensure they are accessible to diverse audiences.

Raising visibility

We are passionate about raising diverse voices in immunology. The BSI recognises, supports and champions different communities by providing a platform for their ideas, experiences and achievements. By giving underrepresented groups a loud voice, we can learn and better appreciate the unique issues faced by others.

#BlackInImmuno

In November 2020, we supported Black In Immuno Week, a week-long celebration organised by a collective of Black immunologists and allies to showcase, amplify, support and connect Black immunologists. The Society makes regular donations to aid the planning and promotion of the week and future activities such as the development of 'Black In Immuno Hub', the first database of worldwide Black researchers in immunology.

We also contributed by raising the voice of Black immunologists from the BSI community by sharing their work and experiences through short profiles on our social media channels.

#WomenInImmunology

For many years we have supported the International Women's Day initiative. To mark this day in March 2021, we developed a social media campaign to recognise and celebrate women's contributions in the field of immunology with a spotlight of some of the editors of our official journals.

Building on the communications from previous years, we created animated graphics highlighting why they chose a career in science, why gender equity in science is important to them and their advice for women and girls looking to have a career in science.

We will continue to show that immunology can represent a fulfilling career path for everyone, while recognising the contributions and challenges of underrepresented communities.

In addition to specific campaigns, we are committed to embedding diversity and inclusion in all of our communications. We use inclusive language based on best practice from specialist organisations, choose imagery that accurately represents our diverse communities and share our activities through a range of channels to promote and attract diversity while inspiring current and future generations.

Together towards a common goal

The BSI is not alone in the fight for equity within the scientific community. By working together with our members and other organisations we aim to accelerate progress in this area.

We collaborate with others in the sector to achieve a fair and equal working environment, accessible to all.

We support external initiatives such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM's inquiry on 'Equity in the STEM workforce'. As an official sponsor of the group, we consulted with our membership's Forum on the challenges faced by underrepresented

communities in joining and staying in the UK's STEM workforce. Our response set out key recommendations to promote the inclusion and progression of these communities in our sector, including better data collection and COVID-19 recovery, which helped shape the report published in July 2021.

We are also signatories of the Royal Society of Chemistry's joint commitment for action on inclusion and diversity in publishing, which brings together 42 publishing organisations in a collaborative effort to drive positive culture change within scholarly publishing.

In addition, we are part of the Royal Society of Biology's EDI working group where we meet regularly with other societies to discuss best practice for fostering increased diversity and ways of working together as a life science community to ensure an inclusive working environment.

We are members of the Royal College of Physicians' 'Inequalities in Health Alliance', a coalition of organisations who campaign for a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities.

We know that many of our members actively work towards diversity and inclusion, and we strive to support their efforts.

To further encourage and support our members' endeavours, in April 2021 we launched a scheme to fund activities and events that promote diversity and inclusion across immunology and the wider biomedical sciences. We were proud to award seven ambitious and inspiring activities with our first round of the BSI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion activity grant scheme.

Next steps to fulfil our mission

Immunology needs more diversity and inclusion to continue to thrive. Embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in all our activities is one of the cornerstones of our new five-year strategic plan to drive scientific discovery and to make a positive impact on health.

With this framework, we are renewing our commitment to building a fairer, more inclusive immunology community. Our starting point has, and will continue to be, an open and honest two-way dialogue with our members about the issues they face in their lives as immunologists. Through this continuous communication, we have begun setting a long-term plan of action for diversity and inclusion at the BSI.

EDI covers a vast range of interconnected areas that are vital to the future of immunology. Here, we highlight some of our future focal areas that will build on our current activities and the well-established lines of communication with our membership.

Taking positive action

In the move towards a fairer and more inclusive immunology community, meaningful change requires action.

We commit to tackling inequity and fostering a culture within immunology that ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all through deliberate action.

In the next few pages, we outline some of the ways in which we will step up to this challenge.

Connecting & uplifting our community

The BSI represents a strong and vibrant community of immunologists from different socio-economic backgrounds, demographics, career grades, sectors and geographical locations. There is a huge amount of diversity in our membership that we want to further recognise, support and celebrate.

A crucial part of our mission is to enhance collaboration within immunology and establish fruitful connections among our members. Our aim is to provide a safe and inclusive platform for all immunologists to

engage with others and share alternate viewpoints and experiences, all of which contributes to personal and professional growth.

Mentoring plays an important role in supporting career development.

Our popular mentoring scheme has received exceptional feedback from both mentors and mentees. It is based on a two-way relationship between early career immunologists and more senior members working in different institutions. This is an important differentiating factor from other mentoring programmes as it facilitates openness and transparency when sharing different working practices, in turn building a more positive research culture.

With our mentoring programme, we aim to equip the next generation of immunologists with a toolkit to navigate and advance through the career pipeline.

Successful mentoring meets the unique needs of individual mentees. To pave the way towards greater retention of underrepresented groups through the career pipeline, we will establish a bespoke mentoring initiative to support immunology MSc students from diverse backgrounds.

Increasing networking opportunities is also an important avenue for creating an inclusive and uplifting platform for immunologists.

Working with our committees and Regional & Affinity Groups, we will identify opportunities, develop networks and host events to enable underrepresented groups to interact and form connections.

Through these initiatives, we hope to empower and elevate diverse communities and play our part in removing obstacles in career progression.

Recognising & supporting efforts

Our members carry out significant work to increase diversity and create a fairer and more inclusive environment for immunology. These efforts don't go unnoticed by the Society – the BSI tremendously values the time and energy they spend to move the needle in this area.

Firstly, we want to further support our members in turning their ideas to create a positive impact in our community into reality. With this in mind,

we recently established our **EDI activity grant scheme** to help fund activities and events that promote diversity and inclusion across the immunology community and the wider biomedical sciences. We will continue to run and expand this scheme in the coming years.

Secondly, we are eager to recognise and highlight exceptional immunologists actively promoting a more diverse, fair and inclusive immunology community. As part of the new BSI award schemes celebrating the contributions of diverse members to different areas, we will reveal a new prize for BSI members for their EDI work, encouraging our community to continue removing barriers and driving this meaningful change in this area forward.

Inspiring EDI activities from BSI members

After the first round of grant applications, **we were immensely proud to fund a range of ambitious and inspiring activities** that aim to accelerate culture change, promote visibility of EDI and solve challenges faced by the immunology community and the wider world. We provided funding for a range of initiatives including a project to decolonise and diversify some immunology units on a university curriculum, a dedicated support network for improving psychological safety, and an Honoraria for Black speakers and other underrepresented ethnic groups to recognise their work outside of research. Find out more about the [projects funded in the pilot EDI activity grant scheme here](#).

The ‘Decolonising and diversifying the immunology curriculum’ project

In the summer of 2021, supported by a BSI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion activity grant, Dr Bronwen Burton and Dr Caroline McKinnon ran their first [decolonising and diversifying project](#) on the biomedical curricula at the University of Bristol. They employed undergraduate students to review material from Year 1 and Year 2 units with significant immunology content with the aim to identify opportunities to diversity the content and highlight areas of good practice. The detailed reports produced led to thoughtful reflection and discussions with the university staff resulting in constructive changes to the curriculum.

They have now secured external funding to expand this project to review further units. The BSI is proud to support this important project that will

address structural inequalities in immunology and lead to long-term positive change for the next generation.

We look forward to funding more initiatives to accelerate culture change within immunology through our [EDI activity grant scheme](#) in the future.

Maximising inclusivity & accessibility

We will consolidate the accessibility measures already in place for our events and BSI Congress so that different voices and experiences can be shared and heard louder than before. Every immunologist, no matter who they are or where they come from, belongs in our community and as part of it, should be able to take advantage of the many benefits of our activities without difficulty.

We will continue to keep diversity and inclusion front-of-mind when considering the location, timing and facilities for BSI activities. We will work hard to ensure that event facilities are accessible for people with disabilities. We will also review the possibility of future hybrid online options for BSI events.

We will scale up our offering in our wider events programme to aspire for the maximum level of inclusion.

This will be in addition to initiatives already in place, such as the carers' grant for BSI Congress delegates and our grants to support travel costs to scientific conferences.

We are also expanding our financial support to those attending BSI Regional and Affinity Group conferences. We are proud to be making a significant investment to provide travel grants to attend these events and cover the cost of care arrangements during those meetings through **new grant schemes for our membership**.

It is only by removing barriers that prevent or hinder attendance of diverse groups that we can ensure our meetings drive collaboration and innovation to their full potential.

Building a platform to learn and grow together

We commit to collaborating closely with our members and wider community to raise the bar for EDI in immunology based on open and honest two-way conversations. Our aim is to engage with people from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to support innovation and research through a diversity of ideas. Including more diverse voices in every aspect of the organisation will enable us to better understand and represent the community's needs and increase excellence in immunology.

In particular within the BSI...

It is vital that EDI is embedded into every aspect of the BSI's work and that the responsibility to build a fairer, more inclusive immunology community is shared by all members and staff of the Society.

Diversity and inclusion will be considered from start to end of every activity. To further incorporate EDI into our way of working, **we will establish diversity leads in every BSI committee and provide appropriate training for Society representatives and staff.** We can only enact a positive shift in organisational culture if everyone understands their duty in supporting diversity and inclusion at the BSI.

A crucial aspect for successful diversity policies and practices within the organisation is proactive communication, with and for our members. **We will ensure that there are functional systems in place to seek and understand the opinions and perspectives of our members.** This will include running EDI focus groups with membership to inform our activities and maintaining a focus on EDI issues at our Forum, the Society's 'think tank' representing all sections of our membership.

Through the BSI's wide-reaching communication channels, **we will amplify diverse and underrepresented voices in the immunology community,** showcasing and celebrating their work while providing a platform to highlight their lived experiences and the barriers they face. Our efforts to spread their stories and encourage our members to share them with their networks will turn a spotlight on these vital topics, enabling authentic discourse and meaningful change within our community.

And in collaboration with valued partners...

We will accelerate progress and enhance our EDI efforts by working in partnership with committed organisations and initiatives that share our values and objectives. Our current partners are instrumental in the delivery of our mission, and they span different areas of our work.

Looking at our policy work, we are a sponsor of the important work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Diversity & Inclusion in STEM. In publishing, we cement our commitment for action on inclusion and diversity through the Royal Society of Chemistry's collaboration of over 40 publishing organisations. We are also proud strategic partners of the Royal Society for Biology, participating in their EDI working group as well as joining up on public engagement and careers.

Partnership work is an essential catalyst of EDI. Strong collaborations bring everyone a step closer to their purpose by combining resources, broadening reach and learning from one another. Together we can achieve a fair and equal working environment, accessible to all.

Over the coming years, **we will identify new partners with similar goals and foster new strategic relationships to achieve our objectives**. Importantly, we will continue to support initiatives such as International Women's Day and Black In Immuno Week, and proactively get involved in other endeavours that instigate positive change in immunology.

Tracking our progress openly

Setting an ambitious long-term plan for diversity and inclusion at the BSI is only the first step. For this framework to be a positive force for change within immunology, we also commit to monitoring, reviewing and regularly revisiting the effectiveness of our activities and policies.

Using an evidence-based approach to maximise the impact we make for immunology, **we will begin by capturing relevant diversity data from our membership and key activities**. This will help us identify where we are successful, where there are gaps in our work, address inequalities and facilitate specific adjustments in areas most in need.

An indispensable pillar of a productive diversity and inclusion framework is transparency around EDI data and progress.

We will continue to be open and honest about our progress on diversity – reviewing our impact and reporting on data on an annual basis. We will also make sure that EDI is a prominent feature within our upcoming immunology careers review, so we can better understand how these factors affect the challenges and enablers of a career in immunology.

In addition to ongoing consultations with our membership, **we will also seek feedback from external experts**, ensuring that independent, knowledgeable assessment is fed into our commitment to enact positive change in immunology.

By measuring how well we are tracing the course set and gauging the distance from where we started, we will avoid being complacent and make sure we are focusing our efforts on any areas of work that might fall short.

Delivering our promise to you

Our diversity and inclusion framework has been developed in consultation with the BSI Board of Trustees and thanks to the helpful discussions with our membership's Forum. Our committees will work with BSI staff to deliver this framework and apply the principles of EDI in every aspect of the organisation.

We will report on our progress on a regular basis and continue to listen to the emerging challenges and opportunities of our diverse membership.

We hope that this framework strengthens everyone's commitment to EDI and encourages our wonderful members to continue their inspiring efforts towards a fairer, more inclusive world of immunology.

Thank you to all members and partners for their ongoing support, engagement and enthusiasm for our Society and its activities.

Our open-door policy

We believe in an open and honest dialogue with our members about the issues they face in their lives as immunologists. If you have questions, comments or feedback on this framework or diversity and inclusion matters, we would love to hear from you. Please contact us inclusion@immunology.org.

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