



Hydrogen Integration for  
Accelerated Energy Transitions



Engineering and  
Physical Sciences  
Research Council

# HI-ACT Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan Version 2

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**HI-ACT**  
**Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) plan.**  
**Version 2. May 2026**

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## **1. HI-ACT approach to EDI**

This EDI strategy is developed in alignment with UKRI's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2020–2025)<sup>1</sup>, which outlines national expectations for fostering inclusive, diverse, and equitable research environments. We share UKRI's vision of a research and innovation system by everyone, for everyone, and will adopt its principles across governance, monitoring, recruitment, partnerships, and culture change initiatives

### **1.1. Aim and vision**

In HI-ACT, we aim to foster an inclusive culture that values diversity and maintains a working and social environment in which the rights and dignity of our staff, researchers, PhDs, partners, and stakeholders are respected.

We acknowledge that aspects of traditional research practice, such as peer review processes, established funding panels, and academic hierarchies, often favour 'in-groups' and can marginalise diverse voices. These must be openly examined and constructively challenged to build a genuinely inclusive community.

We recognise the need and the challenges to support early-career and mid-career researchers and to improve the balance of protected characteristics across the entire hydrogen community.

In doing so, we recognise that traditional career pathways and evaluation metrics often reinforce systemic inequalities and may hinder progression for those from underrepresented backgrounds. Challenging established norms where they reinforce inequity is essential to achieving meaningful change

In addition to having Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at the centre of our activities, we will pay significant attention to Equity too. In contrast to Equality, which provides the same support to everyone, regardless of individual needs, Equity provides differential support according to individual needs, and so by engaging directly with underrepresented groups, we develop EDI policies that are targeted and enable them to thrive.

The evidence for the consortium and hydrogen community's needs will be collected throughout the lifetime of the project to inform the evolution of the EDI plan. In understanding the community needs, we will use a variety of instruments such as workshops, field experts and professional facilitators in addition to the standard online surveys. We will systematically collect evidence through annual surveys, structured workshops, and targeted focus groups, ensuring representation across career stages and protected characteristics to receive feedback from people we work with within and outside HI-ACT. The intention is to better understand and then reflect on the community needs at all levels.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

Our EDI strategy sits within the context of the UKRI's mission and core values. Our pathway to EDI is to:

- 1) Identify the needs of the consortium and the hydrogen community,
- 2) Develop a dynamic action plan informed by consultation, evidence, and lived experience. Given the recognised lack of EDI-specific data in the sector, we will prioritise listening and structured data-gathering efforts at the outset, including baseline assessments of representation, career stage, and perceived inclusion.
- 3) Develop monitoring and governance systems that will continuously update our EDI plan throughout the lifetime of the Hub.

To eliminate discrimination and bias, we will take specific steps such as establishing anonymised review processes for internal funding and recruitment; embedding inclusive language and representation across our communication and branding; and implementing anti-bias training for decision-makers, including those on funding and advisory panels. We will also support mentoring and sponsorship schemes targeting underrepresented groups at early and mid-career stages to address progression barriers.

We are also committed to recognising and addressing the complexities of intersectionality and non-visible characteristics, including neurodiversity and hidden disabilities. Many individuals experience overlapping barriers related to multiple characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic background), and our approach to EDI will reflect this by ensuring that our policies and activities are inclusive of those whose identities and experiences do not fall into a single category. In particular, we acknowledge that neurodiversity is underreported within academia, despite research indicating that more than 20% of academic staff may be neurodivergent. We view this as a strength and will strive to ensure our environments and communications are inclusive of diverse cognitive styles and needs.

We recognise the importance of intersectionality, how overlapping social identities such as gender, race, disability, neurodiversity, and socio-economic background interact to shape individual experiences. This understanding will underpin all data collection, policy development, and support services in the Hub. We will apply an intersectional lens to both qualitative and quantitative analysis to ensure that interventions meaningfully address nuanced experiences of exclusion and inclusion.

We acknowledge that some barriers to improving representation, such as the limited presence of underrepresented groups within the broader hydrogen or engineering pipeline, may lie beyond the immediate influence of HI-ACT. However, we are committed to sharing our findings and experience with those who shape the talent pipeline, including universities, outreach programmes, and skills councils. Where possible, we will engage with those influencing early career decisions, particularly at undergraduate and pre-university levels, to raise awareness of opportunities in the hydrogen sector and support a more diverse future workforce.

The key objectives of our EDI plan are (1) to improve diversity in the membership of the Hub, participation in our events, and membership in our advisory board, (2) to create an

inclusive and welcoming research hub that individual's dignity is respected, (3) to eliminate discrimination and bias, and (4) to provide equal opportunity and support individuals to thrive.

## 1.2. Governance

### EDI Working Group

To ensure the embedding of equality, diversity, and inclusion across all strands of the HI-ACT, and properly monitor the progress and efficacy of our EDI plans, we have created a dedicated EDI working group comprised of Co-Is, researchers and staff from within HI-ACT. The team is led by Prof. Meysam Qadrdan, as the EDI champion. The EDI working group are responsible for developing and updating the EDI plan and its implementation. The members of the EDI working group will act as champions of EDI to help embed the EDI plan in any activity, such as policies, events, funding activities and at meetings. Throughout the lifetime of the consortium, the working group will organise regular meetings to discuss the implementation of the EDI plan and evaluate progress towards the EDI objectives. The members of the EDI working group will have representation in the senior management meetings to provide input on EDI aspects of the hub. The EDI Working Group will report quarterly to the Executive Board and recommend corrective actions where targets are not met.

The EDI Working Group will also play an active role in influencing the behaviours and expectations of projects supported through the Flexible Fund. By setting out EDI principles and minimum requirements in funding calls, reviewing applications through an EDI lens, and collecting post-award evidence of inclusive practices from funded projects, the Working Group will ensure that EDI is not only embedded within the core Hub activities but also cascaded into the wider community. This approach will provide a valuable source of additional impact metrics and shared best practices across the hydrogen innovation ecosystem.

Members of the EDI Working Group include, in alphabetical order:

Name	HI-ACT Role
Dr Adib Allahham	Co-Investigator
Mrs Sian Allister	Project Officer
Dr Yusuf Nadabo Chanchangi	PDRA
Prof Meysam Qadrdan	Co-I, EDI Champion (lead)
Dr Nabila Rufa'l	PDRA
Prof Sara Walker	HI-ACT PI

## EDI impact assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)<sup>2</sup> will be part of any new policy, event or funding activity and be factored in as early as the planning stage of such activities. In the assessment, for each protected characteristic, we will consider the potential for positive or negative impact and explain any evidence/data used. We will then describe the actions to address the negative impact. The EIA evaluation decision will then determine whether to proceed, stop, adapt or change, or justify the policy/process/action under evaluation. The EDI data collected as part of our monitoring and reporting plan will also be used to determine the appropriate action for the policy/process/action under evaluation.

### **1.3. Monitoring and Measuring Success**

To ensure the overall Hub strategy reaches the intended EDI outcomes, and to better enable actions to be based on solid evidence, we will create a portfolio of EDI measurements. For example, we may measure:

- i) diversity of the Hub – management, advisor, staff and researchers,
- ii) diversity at Hub events – speakers, poster presenters and audience,
- iii) qualitative feedback from the community regarding perceived improvements in equality, diversity and inclusion by the Hub.

We also recognise that some aspects of underrepresentation, such as non-visible disabilities and neurodiversity, are more difficult to capture through traditional data mechanisms.

Where direct data is unavailable, we will adopt qualitative and indirect methods (e.g. anonymised feedback, focus groups) and work with trusted facilitators to identify needs and barriers. We will develop inclusive metrics and ensure these areas are not overlooked in our evaluation of EDI progress

Where possible, we will disaggregate EDI data by protected characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, disability, and career stage. This will enhance transparency and enable targeted interventions. We will follow UKRI's guidance on responsible data collection and confidentiality and use these insights to update our EDI action plan annually<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to quantitative data collection, we will conduct annual anonymous EDI surveys and organise periodic focus groups involving Hub staff, researchers, students, and partners. These will help capture lived experiences and identify emerging barriers or areas for improvement. Findings will inform updates to the EDI strategy and action plan.

Based on feedback throughout the project lifetime, the EDI plan and procedures will be reviewed annually and amended accordingly. We will also implement regular diversity audits across the Hub to assess our internal policies, practices, and workplace culture. These audits will be benchmarked against sector standards and used to ensure alignment with our

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/nerc-110221-Funding-Opp-PreparingForFutureCleanAir-EIA.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [Good research resource hub – UKRI](#)

EDI goals. Any amendments, along with rationale and evidence proposed by our EDI working group, will be discussed and approved by the Hub's PI. The most up-to-date version of our EDI plan will be made available publicly via the HI-ACT website.

We will monitor selected KPIs related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and will assess our performance against these yearly. We will publish an annual monitoring report to track our progress towards meeting our objectives and the actions outlined in our EDI Plan. We will use this to further develop and refine our action plans.

To contextualise our progress, we will benchmark our EDI metrics against sector-wide standards, including Advance HE's Athena SWAN Charter, the Race Equality Charter, and UKRI's diversity data. This approach will help us set realistic, inclusive, and evidence-based goals, aligned with national expectations and institutional benchmarks.

#### **1.4. Reporting**

To maximise transparency in our approach, we will publish annual reports on our website summarising the EDI metrics we measure. This will include EDI-related metrics for a range of categories such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disabilities, caring responsibilities, career stage/promotions/advancement, job satisfaction and engagement. Where appropriate, these metrics will be gathered at our events.

We will create a dedicated web area and live document for EDI within the HI-ACT website to share the principles, processes, action plans, and our activities. This website will promote openness and transparency and will help us receive advice and suggestions to improve our activities. Additionally, it will provide evidence for EDI good practice in the consortium.

## 2. Flexible and remote working

Flexible working is defined as working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work, usually to the mutual benefit of both the individual and organisation. This can cover a wide range of working arrangements, including part-time working, job-sharing, flexitime, compressed and annualised hours, term-time-only working, working from home and mobile working.

Academia has a 'long hours' culture and surveys<sup>4</sup> indicate staff are working more than two unpaid days per week. This expectation can damage the career progression of those choosing or unable to work long hours, such as those with caring responsibilities or long-term health conditions. Flexible and remote working can promote inclusion, but they may be draining in other ways (e.g. lack of social interaction, long online meetings, or an expectation to always be online).

The measures outlined below form initial guidelines for flexible working on HI-ACT but should be subject to regular review and consultation with affected parties throughout the life of the project.

1. **Flexible working:** traditional 09:00 – 17:00 working pattern can be challenging for workers with caring responsibilities and long-term health conditions. All HI-ACT institutions have their own conditions of employment and we will honour them, for example by accommodating part/flexitime working and career breaks.  
We recommend, where possible, line managers consider requests for more flexible work patterns. This extends to investigators and support staff as well as PDRAs.
2. **Recruitment:** Wherever possible, all HI-ACT posts should be advertised as open to flexible work patterns. Institutional HR departments can offer guidance on how best to achieve this.
3. **Remote meetings and Events:** As a multi-institution consortium many meetings will be conducted online or hybrid as standard. To make such meetings as inclusive as possible the following guidelines should be observed:
  - Schedule meetings/events at inclusive times, i.e. during core hours of 10:00-15:00, being mindful of external circumstances like school holidays and religious festivals.
  - Be mindful of meeting/event length and include regular breaks to combat Zoom Fatigue<sup>5</sup>.
  - Where possible meeting participants should turn their cameras on while speaking/presenting so attendees can see their face, as well as use captions if

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/media/12905/UCU-workload-survey-2021-data-report/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>

possible, as this is inclusive for participants with disabilities or who are neurodivergent.

- Permit attendees to blur their backgrounds or use virtual ones (provided images are appropriate for a work context) if it makes them more comfortable.

While remote meetings are likely to be appropriate in many instances, these may not work for everybody. HI-ACT line managers should discuss meeting formats with staff at regular intervals and be willing to move to in-person or hybrid formats should these be more conducive to wellbeing and inclusion.

4. **In-person meetings and events:** While remote meetings are likely to be appropriate in many instances, from time to time, it may be appropriate or necessary to host in-person meetings and events. Where this is the case, every effort should be made to ensure events are hybrid, enabling remote presentation and participation. Every effort should also be made to consider access constraints arising from disability, outside caring responsibilities and participation in religious festivals in respect to event scheduling and venue selection.

If staff require additional care arrangements to attend HI-ACT meetings or events, we will (within what is permissible under the constraints of our grant) seek to reimburse any expenses that go beyond typical working days. This will be done in line with EPSRC's guidelines for supporting carers<sup>6</sup>.

5. **Mindfulness of others' circumstances:** All HI-ACT staff should be mindful of others' circumstances. Colleagues should not be expected to respond outside of their own regular working hours, which may not always correspond to regular Monday-Friday, 09:00 – 17:00.

**Key performance indicators:** HI-ACT will keep track of progress on inclusive working conditions through the following indicators:

- **New roles:** Percentage of new posts advertised as flexible
- **Meetings and events:** Percentage of the whole project meetings or events organised as remote/hybrid/in-person only
- **Members' satisfaction:** HI-ACT members' satisfaction with flexible working arrangements

We will all assess the success of our flexible working practices using KPIs, such as:

- The percentage of staff using flexible or remote arrangements (e.g., part-time, hybrid models).
- Qualitative feedback from staff, particularly those from underrepresented groups, on inclusivity and effectiveness.

These indicators will be fed into our broader monitoring and evaluation process outlined in Section 1.3.”

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-support/>

We will monitor the uptake and effectiveness of inclusive practices such as flexible working, remote collaboration, and accommodations for neurodivergent individuals. We will gather feedback from underrepresented groups to assess how well these measures support their participation and wellbeing.

### 3. Dignity at Work

At HI-ACT, we are committed to fostering a workplace environment characterised by mutual respect, where everyone feels valued and is treated with dignity and fairness regardless of their background, identity, or abilities. We are focused on eradicating anti-social behaviour including bullying and harassment, while ensuring a respectful workplace for all team members. We therefore have zero tolerance for bullying, harassment, discrimination or behaviour that may be construed as disrespectful within our research group. This will be facilitated through the following principles:

- **Exemplary Leadership:** WP leaders will demonstrate a strong commitment to maintain a respectful workplace by setting an example through their behaviour and actions. Leaders will actively emphasise the importance of respectful communication within HI-ACT, by encouraging listening, empathy, and understanding among team members to create a supportive research environment.
- **Regular Training and Awareness Seminars:** HI-ACT will periodically conduct training sessions and seminars on the importance of respectful communication, positive interactions, conflict resolution, and active bystander interventions to enable team members prevent and address incidents of bullying and harassment. Resources will be provided to raise awareness about the impact of bullying and harassment in the workplace and how they can be prevented. These resources will sometimes be embedded within other events, to better ensure messaging is received across a wide audience.
- **Strong Reporting and Response Mechanisms:** HI-ACT will provide confidential reporting mechanisms, where individuals are able to report anti-social behaviour without fear of reprisal. Thorough and timely investigation processes will be put in place for all reported incidents.
- **Prompt Support and Intervention:** HI-ACT will ensure the wellbeing of team members that have experienced any form of bullying or harassment by providing the necessary support services in the form of guidance and counselling.
- **Accountability:** Team members within HI-ACT that are found guilty of bullying, harassment, or anti-social behaviour will be kept accountable, within the constraints of the project team.
- **Celebrating Success:** HI-ACT will provide an anonymised nomination system on a rolling basis, where individuals are able to nominate colleagues for their contribution made to the overall aims and values of the HI-ACT hub. Nominees will be celebrated every 6-months at appropriate whole-team meetings.

By taking a stand against bullying, harassment and disrespectful behaviour within HI-ACT, and celebrating action in line with our values, we will create a positive, vibrant and respectful research environment where every member feels empowered to put in their very best to achieve the hub's objectives.

**Key performance indicators:** HI-ACT will keep track of progress on dignity at work through assessing the satisfaction of the staff, researchers and students involved in HI-ACT.

- **Training and Awareness:** Number and diversity of participants in training and awareness sessions.
- **Reporting:** Number and severity of incidents.
- **Celebrating success:** Number and diversity of nominated colleagues who are nominated for their role modelling of core EDI values of kindness, respect and dignity.
- **Satisfaction:** Member satisfaction in relation to kindness, dignity and respect.

#### 4. Career Development

One of the main objectives of the EDI plan within HI-ACT is to create an inclusive and supportive environment that fosters the professional growth and development of all employees, irrespective of their background, gender, ethnicity, or other diverse factors.

Many activities will be held within HI-ACT to support the career development of HI-ACT's employees:

- **Needs assessment of the employees:** HI-ACT will organise focus group discussions to understand the specific career development needs of diverse employee groups. In collaboration with the ECR working group within HI-ACT, we will also conduct surveys and assessments to identify the skills needs and career aspirations of employees.
- **Training:** HI-ACT will allocate resources for training, mentorship programs, and skill development initiatives. In addition, HI-ACT will collaborate with other energy consortia such as EDRC, UKERC and HyRES to develop training programs and workshops catering to diverse skill sets. Training programs will focus on leadership skills, technical expertise, and soft skills, ensuring that employees from all backgrounds have equal access and encouragement to participate.
- **Mentorship and Guidance:** The leaders of tasks and WPs will act as mentors and guides, especially for employees from underrepresented groups. One-to-one mentorship relationships with employees seeking guidance will be established; insights and advice on career growth opportunities will be also provided.

The main features of HI-ACT's career development plan are:

- **Inclusivity:** The plan is inclusive, catering to employees of all backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.
- **Customisation:** The plan provides tailored career development paths based on individual skills, interests, and career aspirations.
- **Equal Opportunities:** The plan ensures that everyone has an equal chance to access training, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities.
- **Transparency:** The plan maintains transparency in the processes related to appointments, skill development programs, and mentorship initiatives.
- **Regular Evaluation:** The plan includes continuous evaluation of its effectiveness through feedback, surveys, and data analysis, making necessary adjustments for improvement.
- **Leadership Involvement:** The plan includes active participation and support from project leaders and management to demonstrate HI-ACT's commitment to career development for all.

**Key performance indicators:** To evaluate the career development plan, the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be monitored regularly through the lifetime of HI-ACT:

- **Training and skill enhancement:** improved number and diversity of participants in training and development programs.
- **Mentorship and coaching programs:** Establish mentorship programs and aim for an improved number of mentor-mentee matches on annual basis.
- **Growth and career development:** We will monitor the career progression of our employees, in particular ECR and professional staff from diverse background.
- **Feedback and inclusivity surveys:** Improved staff satisfaction related to career development supports provided by HI-ACT.
- **Success stories and recognition:** Share 2-3 success stories annually, highlighting employees from diverse backgrounds who have excelled in their careers within HI-ACT. Celebrate and showcase success stories of employees from diverse backgrounds to inspire others and reinforce the HI-ACT's commitment to EDI in career development.

Collected data, employee feedback, and engagement surveys will be regularly analysed to assess the progress towards these KPIs. Based on the continuous evaluation of these KPIs, the career development programs and initiatives can be adjusted.

#### 4.1 Supporting Underrepresented Groups

We will introduce tailored initiatives to support researchers from underrepresented backgrounds, including:

- Structured mentorship programmes for early-career researchers.
- Partnerships with organisations such as WISE, Black in STEM, Women in Hydrogen, and others promoting inclusion in STEM fields.

These efforts align with UKRI's emphasis on building diverse research communities and addressing structural inequalities within the sector

## 5. Recruitment

During the HI-ACT formation, EDI principles have been embedded in our Hub community engagement and consortium development. A range of both online and in-person engagement events were organised to ensure maximum outreach – online events were particularly more convenient for those with caring responsibilities who couldn't travel. Considering EDI, we designed a procedure for shortlisting and selection of Co-Is to reduce bias. As a result, the Hub includes Co-Is with a diversity of backgrounds, ages, gender, race, and career stage. The academic institutions involved in HI-ACT are members of EDI charter mark schemes, such as Athena SWAN, Stonewall, Business Disability Forum, and Race Equality Charter.

Moving forward, HI-ACT is committed to maintaining and improving the diversity of the people involved in the centre. This will be achieved through embedding EDI principles in the whole cycle of recruiting staff, researchers and students, i.e. job description, job advertisement, shortlisting, interview and selection. We recognise that the participating institutions have their own rules and regulations for recruitment, therefore as a consortium, we cannot enforce EDI in recruitment at our participating institutions. However, we aim to share the best practice and encourage our investigators to follow them as far as they are compliant with the local rules.

The followings are the recommendations to the partner institutions:

- Job description: Include an EDI statement to encourage applications from under-represented groups; refer to the HI-ACT's EDI plan relevant to flexible working and supports available for career development.
- Job advertisement: Advertise job opportunities as widely as possible to reach diverse groups.
- Shortlisting, interview and selection: Ensure that all staff involved with recruitment and selection have undertaken EDI and unconscious bias trainings; ensure that appointment panels are diverse (e.g. in gender and ethnicity).

**Key performance indicators:** The KPIs related to the recruitment that we will monitor as part of our EDI Annual survey is the diversity of HI-ACT members, and how it is improved over time.

## 6. Flexible Fund

We wish to embed issues of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion in the flexible fund process. In order to achieve this, we will ensure the following steps are taken.

- The EDI Champion shall be part of the working group which develops flexible fund processes.
- Flex fund opportunities for the wider community shall be widely promoted through our mailing list, and through connected projects such as HyRES, UKERC, EDRC, IDRIC and other UKRI energy investments.
- The timing of flexible fund calls shall be considerate of part time working, and of periods of religious and school holidays.
- Any peer review of applications shall be done using a diverse panel with respect to gender, ethnicity and career stage.

**Key performance indicators:** HI-ACT will keep track of progress on inclusive flexible fund practices through the following indicators:

- **Diversity of applicants:** Percentage of applications with lead and team members from protected characteristic groups
- **Diversity of funded researchers:** Percentage of funded projects with lead and team members from protected characteristic groups
- **Diversity of evaluation panels:** Percentage of peer review panel from protected characteristic groups

To promote fairness and minimise bias in awarding flexible fund support, we will explore a blinded review process where appropriate. Reviewers will assess applications using standardised criteria and anonymised submissions, where feasible

## 7. Communications and Events

In communicating with our members and external stakeholders and in organising events we will pay special attention to EDI to maximise accessibility and inclusivity.

Incorporating EDI principles in our communications will ensure that stereotypes and discrimination will be avoided. We will consider accessibility and inclusive language<sup>7</sup> in all communication and materials such as our website, newsletters and emails. In our communication we will consider various cultural norms, accommodate linguistic differences and avoid language that may marginalise certain groups. The stock images and video that we will use to communicate our outputs will be appropriate, inclusive, and represent the diversity of the UK population. Overall, embedding EDI in communication is essential for building understanding, trust, and a sense of belonging among diverse individuals and communities.

To benefit from wider participation of diverse speakers and audiences in our events, we will ensure accessible venues, convenient timing, diverse speaker panels, inclusive marketing, and accommodating access need as much as possible. We will consider attendees' diverse needs, including dietary restrictions and accessibility requirements. A good quality remote attendance option for those who cannot attend in person will be considered when planning our events. We will seek feedback after our events to continually enhance inclusivity. Embracing these considerations creates events that resonate with a broad audience and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive community.

### Key performance indicators:

- **Satisfaction of events participants and stakeholders:** We will collect feedback from participants in our events, and stakeholders/ researchers we interact with.
- **Diversity of participants:** EDI statistics of event speakers and audience.

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<sup>7</sup> CREDS' Inclusive language guide: <https://www.creds.ac.uk/inclusive-language-guide/>