Chapter Title: Introduction

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Introduction

Attention to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is growing across all research fields and disciplines. This book is largely focused on UK health and biomedical research, also drawing on international and interdisciplinary evidence to bring together examples of key concepts, current thinking and emerging approaches.

Key to the research ecosystem is the body of researchers, who all bring their own commitment, dedication, experiences, circumstances, views and interests. These backgrounds can inform the paths that they take and the focus of their research, including with particular groups, populations, contexts and health conditions. Indeed, researchers interviewed as part of the work to develop this book became EDI advocates and engaged with EDI topics for a variety of reasons, including their own experiences and backgrounds. Such personal motivation has considerable benefits to EDI within the research community and to the design of research itself. Researchers are often advocates for inclusion, want to make a difference in the world and act as key role models for future generations, for instance through their teaching and mentorship. The research ecosystem also depends on the work of researchers through their formulation of research ideas, conduct of peer review, and communication of research to their peers and to members of the public.

The book focuses on researchers and research careers, but we acknowledge that attention to research design,

analysis, pedagogic content, science communication and public engagement provides distinct, yet complementary, foci. Although EDI within research is often framed with attention to staff and student bodies, EDI considerations apply equally to stocks of knowledge, ideas and philosophies. These include dominant paradigms in curricula and calls for decolonisation of knowledge, application of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, neurodivergence, and intersectional analyses in research studies (see, for instance, Bentley et al, 2017; Schiebinger et al, 2020; Botha, 2021; Wong et al, 2021; Yerbury and Yerbury, 2021). There are several questions to address in research itself: How do we devise research questions and collect data? What tools and ideas do we apply that may perpetuate inequalities? Why are some questions more important than others? How do we decide which communities our research serves? EDI also matters when thinking about how best to communicate research so that findings are available to all. This is an international concern. For instance, writing about responsible science communication in Africa, Elizabeth Rasekoala underscores its key role in countering misinformation and the need to 'make way for new diverse and accessible narratives that speak to a wider knowledge base and resonate with the lived experiences of all in society' (Rasekoala, 2022, p. 5). Design, conduct and communication of research are important fields of inquiry—questions that deserve separate and undivided attention—and we recognise that we are unable to attend to these topics in this short book.

This book suggests that there is a need for institutional change and that this journey can be supported through carefully designed interventions. These are needed to equalise and democratise access, opportunities and outcomes for all researchers regardless of background, identity or circumstances. To understand the effectiveness of interventions for change, we draw on qualitative and quantitative material from existing literature. The material that we have brought

together in this book is a curated product of our work to collate and synthesise material garnered through literature searches, our knowledge of outputs and studies by various EDI stakeholders and equality networks. This means that we draw on academic and grey literature that includes both quantitative and qualitative material. The literature is complemented by qualitative material from narrative interviews conducted in 2022, and we provide detailed information about the study interviews in the appendix. The interviews provide information about experiences, including those relating to interventions designed to address EDI. Sometimes simply asking people how something was for them provides information about how a well-intentioned approach makes a positive difference or about any unintended consequences, which in EDI might include entrenchment of inequalities.

It is important to acknowledge the pace at which evidence is moving in the field of EDI. Recent developments reflected in the book include reviews commissioned by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which sought to collate national and international evidence about what works to address EDI challenges (Guyan and Douglas Oloyede, 2019; Moody and Aldercotte, 2019). More recent reports continue to build knowledge about the scale and shape of equality matters in health and biomedical sciences workforces. For instance, in 2022, the UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) within UKRI published a report conducted by the University of York into inequality in early careers in the Life Sciences. That report provides a blueprint for empirical investigations in further fields and disciplines (Dias Lopes and Wakeling, 2022). No doubt in the period between completion of our book in January 2023 and its publication, more useful evidence will have been produced that will help to underpin approaches to successful interventions in EDI. Therefore, we encourage the reader to continually consult the latest available evidence.

Notes on timing, content and language

This book is based on work to bring together existing and recent knowledge and experience of EDI in health and biomedical research careers. Over two years, the authors sought to understand and explore literature and the current situation in research careers, complemented by interviews with individuals active in EDI. Therefore, the project necessarily reflects a particular time and set of perspectives and does not include every possibility. The work started during the 2021 pandemic and ended in January 2023 as the UK and Europe were exiting acute pandemic situations but were impacted by a new geopolitical crisis in Europe, which we acknowledge as one of many ongoing crises globally.

The nature of EDI work and its diverse foci, themes, identities and contexts, and the limits of a short-format publication, mean that some literature has been included in the book, and some has inevitably been left out. As secondary research findings have been included in the book, there might be some inevitable omissions, although we have tried to be as accurate as possible in our representation of the work of others. Our aim was to provide a piece of work that is of value, freely available and useful to readers and we hope that the book does so.

Finally, we explore some terminology and definitions in Chapter 1. Language changes over time, has deep meaning and impact. We are mindful that language can replicate and reinforce inequalities. In this book we follow Bristol University Press's style guide and capitalise 'White' and 'Black' where used, but respect the discussions about capitalisation of these terms, including relative capitalisation and the need to recognise long-standing discrimination.