Diversity in Committee Review Sept 2020

Background

The Senior Management Committee (SMC) has been discussing principles for diversity, inclusivity and intersectionality, including the need to increase diversity on our committees (including the SMC itself). We have highlighted that some groups, especially ethnically minoritised staff, are not represented and we are committed to improving the diversity of our Department and our work.

Methods

We reviewed the composition and structures of eight committees identified for inclusion by SMC, looking at intranet sources and using semi-structured interviews with the Chairs of each Committee.

Key Findings

Not all basic or more complex information about our committees is readily available via the PHC intranet. Interviewees were easily able to describe the purpose, remit and membership of their committees. Most committee members have a clear definition of whom or what they represented, but processes for appointing members and chairs are either not defined or not clear. Different committees have different, sometimes unclear processes, for example, for the ways that members of the department can raise items on meeting agendas.

Interviewees were unsure how they should define diversity and discussions focused on protected characteristics. Interviewees were unsure how to measure diversity; most agreed that it needed to be measured at a departmental level, at intervals that would allow us to measure success in improving diversity. Interviewees were not confident in judging whether their committees were currently diverse; the few interviewees who did make a judgement judged them to be definitely or probably lacking in diversity.

The following recommendations have been discussed by the Athena SWAN committee, at SMC and via online consultation with members of SMC. These recommendations should be considered alongside our action plan "Guiding principles for diversity, inclusivity and intersectionality".

Committees should consider these recommendations AND a process by which the recommendations may be agreed (i.e. consensus or majority) AND prioritised / implemented.

	Recommendations
1	Throughout the following, ensure that 'diversity work' does not fall only to people who are disadvantaged already by lack of diversity/equality.
2	Ensure that all committee members undertake training in and regularly refresh their skills in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion
3	Consider fixed terms for members and chairs.
4	Recruitment of committee members/chairs should include specific efforts to address diversity – this might include inviting people from underrepresented groups to join, permitting observers at meetings to encourage people to volunteer.
5	Where possible, committee memberships and chair-ships should be sought by asking for volunteers from relevant constituents. (In the case of the chair this may be the committee itself). If more than one person volunteers, priority may be given to people from underrepresented groups and/or those who have not served previously on the committee.
6	Consider appointing deputy chairs by seeking volunteers from relevant constituents/ or existing committee members
7	Review student representation on relevant committees and consider how this can best reflect their views e.g. one rep per course, or per year group, or per qualification type.
8	Include diversity and intersectionality as a standing agenda item for committee meetings
9	Explore ways to measure and report on diversity within the department and use this information to compare committee membership with the profile of the department and address under-representation.
10	Update information about core departmental committees on intranet to include membership, dates of appointment for members and chairs, and terms of reference
11	Disseminate this report to staff via the departmental intranet and newsletter
12	Add "Departmental Committees" to Departmental Open Meeting agendas regularly to receive feedback/updates

Additional comments/items discussed
Continue to work to improve diversity in recruitment to senior roles (as this will in turn improve senior representation on committees)
Encourage chairs and members to join other committees when fixed terms end to spread knowledge and learning
Consider engaging an outside organisation/individual who could independently review the department and offer formative advice
Consider requirement for PI/CIs to confirm that they have considered diversity and representativeness of research populations when applying for funding
Review support to deliver committee roles