

Diversity in Committee Review Sept 2020

1 Background

On 2nd July 2020, SMC developed some principles for diversity, inclusivity and intersectionality to increasing diversity of committees including the SMC itself. These have been highlighted as important in recognition that some groups, especially diverse staff, are not represented we will encourage and support diversity. Three mechanisms were proposed.

1. Improve diversity in recruitment to senior roles.
2. Invite diverse and other underrepresented staff to attend as an observer and to deputise for senior colleagues so they can participate in and learn about committee work. This will need to be done equitably and without positive discrimination
3. Include diversity and intersectionality as a standing agenda item for SMC meetings to keep progress under review.

2 Methods

2.1 Inclusion criteria

Eight committees were identified for inclusion by SMC

1. Senior Management Committee - Richard Hobbs
2. Return to Work and Space Committee – Rafael Perera
3. Finance, Resources and General Purposes Committee - Richard Hobbs
4. Information governance – John Powell
5. Undergraduate Teaching Committee – Julian Hancock
6. Graduate Studies Committee – Paul Aveyard
7. Research committee – Richard McManus
8. Athena Swan SAT – Sue Ziebland

2.2 Recruitment

Participants chairs invited to attend either a group session or an individual session. For those unable to do this, email or attendance at the committee of interest was proposed.

2.3 Method

A semi-structured interview undertaken by a researcher (Rebekah Burrow) and academic (Julia Hippisley-Cox) with notes taken by Rebekah Burrow or a personal assistant (Claire Meadows). Participants were given opportunity to comment on the notes made and invited to send further comments/thoughts by email.

2.3.1 Questions

1. Could you briefly tell me about the committee you chair?
2. Committee members – who and what do they represent?
3. What is the process for appointing members to the committee?
4. What is the process for appointing the chair to the committee?
5. What do we mean by diverse and how might we measure it?
6. Do you feel that the committee is appropriately diverse at the moment?
7. How are items raised on the agenda (by non-members)?
8. What do you feel could be done at SMC level to promote diversity?
9. How would you measure success in diversity promotion?
10. Any other suggestions or comments you would like to make?

2.4 Key findings and suggestions for consideration

To collate basic information about the committee, including what committees exist, searching the departmental website, emails to various staff and interviews with chairs were required. More complex information (for example, how would a non-member raise an agenda item) could only be found by interviews with chairs.

Interviewees were easily able to describe the purpose, remit and membership of their committees (available in separate document).

Almost all committee members had a clear definition of whom or what they represented. Generally chairs and members held their positions either as:

- a defined role of their position
- the lead for a research theme, group or team
- an elected representative
- because someone had selected and invited them

Generally, processes for appointing members and chairs were either not defined or not clear. Some chairs expressed that the many members and chairs held their positions are a result of correct logic – they were the “best” people to hold those positions.

Interviewees were generally unsure how they should define diversity. Some acknowledged that who they were and the experiences they had, limited the scope of their knowledge, others wondered if they should be the ones defining diversity. Interviewees tended to describe diversity as a number of protected characteristics; some characteristics were mentioned a number of times, others fewer or not at all. Gender and ethnicity were discussed most often. A number of interviewees pointed out that in their view, the age of committee chairs and members would inevitably, or correctly, not be representative of the department. Types of diversity other than demographics were considered by some interviewees, including diversity of thought, research, and research populations. Interviewees were unsure how to measure diversity, some suggested a questionnaire, and most agreed that it needed to be measured at a departmental level.

Interviewees were generally not confident in judging whether their committees were currently diverse, some citing a lack of information about their committee members’ characteristics, other than what the interviewees assumed (which they didn’t seem to like doing). The few interviewees who did make a judgement about the diversity of their committees judged them to be definitely or probably lacking in diversity.

Interviewees described different methods for different committees, or for the same committee, for raising items on committee agendas, for example by email to the chair, or by contacting the representative for their group, or by being contacted proactively by their representative.

Interviewees had some suggestions for what the SMC could do to improve diversity in the interviewee’s committee, included in the table below.

Interviewees generally felt it would not be possible to measure success (in promoting diversity) without knowing how the department stood now. They didn’t disagree that we should attempt to measure success. The two methods suggested were: surveys to measure demographic diversity (to be carried out in the future and compared to results if a survey were done now) and asking members of the department how they felt in terms of representation in the various domains represented by each committee.

The following suggestions were made by interviewees via email or videoconference interview, or interviewers after considering the interview responses, or selected from the PHC document “Guiding principles for diversity, inclusivity and intersectionality”.

NOTE: As mentioned in version 1 of this report, the SMC may wish to consider these recommendations AND a process by which the recommendations may be agreed (i.e. consensus or majority) AND prioritised or implemented. SMC may wish to add to these recommendations or request more information is made available.

Table of recommendations

Suggestions and recommendations were received after the first version of this report was presented to the SMC. Often these were part of SMC member’s responses to the recommendations. Some of the suggestions and recommendations were about the existing recommendations – these have been added to the third column of table 1. Others were suggestions for new recommendations- these have been added to a new table. Comments were left clarifying responses – these are below.

Responses

Some questions had more than one part, or were complex, so single answers may have captured an overall view rather than a full response. Some answers “more information needed” may indicate that a member did not have a particular view on that item.

Implementation

Discussion will be required to decide processes for implementing any recommendations.

Recommendations

	Recommendation/suggestion	rationale	Agree / disagree / more information needed	Prioritisation (higher number = more votes to be a priority)
1	Throughout the following, ensure that the main work does not fall to those who are disadvantaged already by lack of diversity/equality.	We do not want our work to exacerbate inequalities.	17 agree 0 disagree 4 more information needed But asking 'those most disadvantaged now' to do the work may produce more change as those unaffected now may not perceive issues as important.	2
2	Publish this report on the departmental intranet and disseminate it to members via email.	We want the department to know about this work and to help us to improve it.	19 agree 0 disagree 2 more information needed Disseminate via weekly newsletter with link to intranet.	1
3	Measure diversity within the department. Compare committee diversity to department diversity. Consult the Equality and Diversity Panel to define what diversity we want	Interviewees agreed that measuring diversity was necessary to a) identify if there is a problem and b) measure any change. Interviewee's definitions of diversity differed and interviewees did not identify a specific tool to measure diversity. Central HR hold	17 agree 0 disagree 4 more information needed Should we consider balance of clinical/non-clinical?	2

	to measure, and select a tool and a method to use and a mechanism for the results to be presented.	this information but it is not available on a departmental level. Let's ask the experts to help us collect this information now, and then as people join, or regularly for everyone.	Measurements need to be relevant. Committees are very small numbers within a relatively small department so measuring diversity may not add value and is difficult to baseline. It might be better to have a policy statement that sets out why diversity is important (to ensure as rich a variety of experiences and perspectives as possible and ensure that committees do not become an echo chamber for a narrow, self-affirming, set of view points)	
4	All committees in PHC should be listed on one PHC departmental webpage. The list should contain links to a webpage for each committee. These individual committee webpages should each contain a statement of purpose, a list of members, what group the member represents, minutes and agendas (redacted where necessary), information about how members are elected to a committee, how chairs are appointed, and information about how to raise items on the agenda. Chairs of each	These are all information that were difficult to find (difficulty varied by committee and type of information; information was often were elicited only by interview). Members of the department cannot have equal access to join or attend committees, or raise items on their meeting agendas, if they do not have equal access to knowing how.	17 agree 1 disagree 3 more information needed The Committees are set out here https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/intranet/better-workplace-groups-committees-open-meetings [with some of the information listed in this recommendation] Terms of Reference should be updated included This work could be onerous and discourage new members [although new members not likely to be chairs so not responsible for this work?]	5

	committee should be responsible for ensuring the committee pages are kept up to date (they could delegate this task). Responsibility for upkeep of the master list page and oversight of other webpages should be assigned to someone's role.			
5	Add "Departmental Committees" to departmental Open Meeting agendas at least annually	We want the department to maintain awareness of departmental committees, we want committees to be useful and used.	14 agree 2 disagree 5 more information needed Adding committees to the DOM could be very dry, and announcing significant decisions annually would be wrong - a continuous and current communication with the department is preferable - so it depends on what you envisage by including committees in the DOM	1
6	The number of student representatives on committees should be altered – perhaps to have one rep per course, or per year group, or per qualification type?	Most committees have two or fewer student representatives who are expected to represent the diversity of the student population. With very small numbers it is not a reasonable expectation.	7 agree 1 disagree 13 more information needed Student reps are not relevant to all of our committees.	

			now that we have a larger number of DPhils in the dept this might be the time to consider a departmental GJCC.	
7	Where committee memberships are NOT held due to the position a person has and members represent a research group, or theme, or function, when their term ends a replacement should be sought by asking for volunteers from the whole group of constituents (I.e. those who the committee represents). If more than one person volunteers, priority should be given to whomever is not already on a committee, and whoever might be expected to have been disadvantaged by current inequalities and lack of diversity in the department.	The current system of selecting one's own replacement, or inviting volunteers from a selected group might allow the like-me bias to win.	<p>12 agree 2 disagree 7 more information needed</p> <p>Suitability for the role should be considered more important than ensuring regular turnover.</p> <p>One barrier [to diversity] may be a narrow range of expertise. If very few could/should have a particular role is it more difficult to have diverse committee?</p> <p>For some committees the composition is the relevant course directors and managers – membership cannot be allocated on basis of diversity, or basis of 'not already on a committee'.</p> <p>Elections [one method that could be considered for choosing committee members for some positions] can be burdensome, but may also put weight of responsibility on minorities or those under represented, whilst not including them means those making the decisions are not cognisant of relevant issues and entitlements.</p>	1

			Elections don't always work well – have failed before in other departments.	
8	Where chair-ships are NOT held due to the position a person has, when replacements are sought they should be sought by asking for volunteers from the whole committee perhaps with an application process and interview. If more than one person volunteers, priority should be given to whoever is not already a chair of a committee, and whoever might be expected to have been disadvantaged by current inequalities and lack of diversity in the department.	The current system of selecting one's own replacement, or inviting volunteers from a selected group might allow the like-me bias to win.	12 agree 3 disagree 6 more information needed	2
9	Recruitment of new members and chairs should include specific effort to appeal to diverse groups	Some groups might be less inclined to consider themselves qualified to volunteer, although equally qualified as others who do feel qualified to volunteer. It may be harder work for some groups to be committee members or chairs and so they should know early that they are welcome and that problems that disproportionately affect them will be tackled as a priority.	20 agree 0 disagree 1 more information needed	1
10	Improve diversity in recruitment to senior roles.	Many committee memberships and chair-ships are held due to the position a person	19 agree 0 disagree	5

		has. One way to diversity these is to diversify the people holding those positions.	2 more information needed	
11	If possible, deputy chairs should be appointed for each committee. They should be sought by asking for volunteers from the whole group (as in 6) or committee (as in 7).	Interviewees thought deputy chairs could add diversity of scope and opinion and demographics.	15 agree 3 disagree 3 more information needed Could co-chairs be targeted at early stage researchers and minority groups?	3
12	Fixed terms should be introduced for members and chairs.	12 and 13 go together. Reasonable efforts should be made to find a replacement. If a position can't be filled when a fixed term ends, the incumbent can be asked to renew for another term. More change in membership should increase diversity within the committee, and opportunities for members of the department.	17 agree 2 disagree 3 more information needed	1
13	When chairs and members reach the end of their fixed terms on one committee, they should be encouraged to volunteer to join another committee.	Two people swapping committees would generally be preferable (in terms of diversity of opportunity) to each remaining on their own committee for another term. More change in membership should increase diversity within the committee, and opportunities for members of the department (as well as enrich the views represented by committee and provide more career development opportunities for members).	6 agree 7 disagree 8 more information needed	

14	Observers should be permitted at committee meetings either for a particular meeting or on a regular basis. If observers are not permitted this should be stated on the committee webpage. diverse and other underrepresented staff should be proactively invited to observe meetings as observers. Deputy chairs could also be observers (or members) of SMC	It's easier to know how things work (and how you can be a part of it) if you can see them working.	10 agree 1 disagree 10 more information needed	3
15	Include diversity and intersectionality as a standing agenda item for SMC meetings to keep progress under review (e.g. termly or yearly). Include diversity and intersectionality on other committee meeting agendas to ensure it is considered in relation to other business.		20 agree 1 disagree 0 more information needed It already is.	2
16	Move agenda items to do with diversity to the start of meeting agendas	One committee has found that altering the order of agenda items has altered the importance they are given.	11 agree 8 disagree 2 more information needed	3
17	Consider engaging an outside organisation/individual who could independently review the department and offer formative advice.	External perspective could help identify systematic blind spots and bring in experience from other settings.	12 agree 3 disagree 6 more information needed	1

			Equality and Diversity Unit may be helpful. We would need all SMC to be engaged.	
--	--	--	---	--

New recommendations/suggestions from the SMC

	Recommendation/suggestion	rationale
18	Add requirement for PI/CIs to confirm to PHC that they have considered diversity and representativeness of research populations when applying for funding.	Hopefully having to confirm will remind them to consider if they haven't already.
19	Up skilling of everyone on committees in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.	
20	Support to deliver committee roles	