

Best Practice Guide for Inclusive Events

Introduction

The School of Advanced Study and the IES are committed to enhancing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity amongst all our staff and students. As part of this commitment, one of our key priorities in 2020/21 is to promote greater inclusivity at the conferences and events we organise. We want to ensure that our events showcase the diversity of researchers working in our field as well as allowing people of all backgrounds and career stages to participate and feel included.

Why diversity and inclusion are important

Many events lack diversity, amongst both speakers and participants, and this is a problem for several reasons. Diversity improves performance, and drives innovation, by bringing in a variety of skillsets and experiences. Diverse teams are more innovative and produce better outputs.

It is important that early career researchers and professionals see diverse examples of professional speakers and leaders in their field; people who have succeeded regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability, and/or religion. Diversity is much more than just gender, race, and ethnicity. It includes people of different ages, religions, physical and learning abilities, education levels, and other characteristics of personal identity. In the UK, the Public Sector Equality Duty (part of the Equality Act 2010) requires universities, like other public sector bodies, to consider equality and diversity in their day-to-day work, including the planning of events.

Although diversity is usually defined in terms of certain protected characteristics, individual identities are not separate within ourselves, so it is important to think of people and participants as having intersectional identities that need to be managed appropriately.

It is important that we think of diversity not only in the variety of participants involved in events, whether as speakers, organisers or audience members, but also in terms of the ability of all attendees to participate meaningfully in the event and benefit from it.

Delivering an inclusive event

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I. PRE-EVENT LOGISTICS

Food, timing, venue, and ticket prices are elements that can be overlooked when thinking about the diversity of an event, but which can easily be addressed and make a considerable difference to improving inclusivity.

The IES and event organisers must:

- Ensure that all rooms (including for coffee breaks, networking sessions and meals) are easily accessible by all attendees.
- When an event takes place over different floors, ensure that the lifts, ramps, or other means that allow participants with mobility issues to access different parts of the venue are available.
- Do our best to guarantee that the venue has parking available, not just for those with mobility limitations, but also those who have other conditions that mean that being able to drive to and from the venue will be preferable.
- Ensure that large rooms are chosen to allow participants in wheelchairs to access and move around and access the stage if they are also speakers.
- Ensure there is an appropriate sound system with microphones, hearing loops etc.
- Make sure that signage (to lifts, rooms, toilets etc) is clear, visible, and appropriate.
- Ensure some chairs are available for any sessions where attendees are expected to stand for long periods (networking, poster sessions etc).
- Ensure that there are accessible toilets for attendees with physical disabilities.
- Ensure that the venue is equipped with small additional rooms that can be used as quiet spaces (for people to take a break from networking, or to eat alone without feeling awkward), for prayers, breastfeeding etc.
- Choose venues and accommodation where people feel safe and comfortable. This is especially relevant if the conference ends late.
- Where possible, provide facilities for livestreaming and/or video recording, so that people who cannot attend on the day (e.g. people with caring responsibilities) can still participate, or access the recording after the event.
- Where possible, ensure that speakers are able to deliver their paper via conference call or conference video services (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom).
- Ensure reliable Wi-Fi is available, to help delegates keep in touch with family at home.
- When an event runs over several days, offer a day-delegate rate for participants who cannot attend the whole event because of caring responsibilities.

- Where possible ensure there is diversity within the conference organisation team. In addition, as far as possible, each of the conference organisers should be given an appropriate share of duties, responsibilities, and visibility.
- Where slides are provided, ask speakers to ensure that they are written in a font and colour that are easier to read for those with dyslexia or other reading/learning difficulties.
- Make sure the on-site signage is clear and can be accessed and read by all participants.
- Brief photographers or filmmakers to document events to ensure they capture diversity.

The IES asks that event organisers plan their event with the above commitments in mind and work constructively with the IES to meet these commitments.

Choosing a date and time

The IES and event organisers should:

- Choose a date that does not overlap with key religious or national holidays, especially for the audience that is being targeted.
- Choose a time that will allow people with caring responsibilities, or those relying on support workers or carers, to attend. For instance, opt for a later start, and an earlier finish.
- Announce the date and time early so attendees can plan accordingly. This is particularly important for attendees with caring responsibilities or with disabilities who may need to find a helper/carer, or to organise childcare.

The School and the IES recognises that entertainments and networking sessions are key elements of many events, and provide opportunities for sharing ideas, making connections, and building partnerships or collaboration. However, they often take place at the end of the day, thus excluding participants with caring responsibilities (often women), or those with certain disabilities who may find conferences tiring. Event organisers should consider adding in such events throughout the conference to enable participation from all groups.

Food, drink, and entertainment

The IES and event organisers must:

- Collect information early about dietary needs and preferences (e.g. during the registration).
- Create a list of restaurants close to the venue that provide vegetarian/vegan/kosher/gluten-free food, or other options in the event that no catering is being offered on site.
- Ensure that dishes/ingredients, and/or allergens, are clearly labelled.

Attendees observing Ramadan will fast from sunrise to sunset. During this period, no food or drink will be consumed during daytime. If breakfast and dinners are provided at the event, if possible, make arrangements for these attendees to eat at a later or earlier time, or discount the ticket price to allow them to make their own eating arrangements.

Collecting participant information

The IES and event organisers must:

- Include a free space on the registration form where attendees are actively encouraged to declare specific needs they might have (i.e. learning or physical disabilities, dietary or caring needs).
- Specify that all guests are welcome and (where appropriate) that they will be supported and catered for.
- Offer an inclusive range of title options on booking and registration forms. For example, including a gender neutral 'Mx' title option on their registration forms.
- Where delegates receive name badges, by default issue name badges without titles and affiliation. This policy will only be changed where event organisers can provide sufficient reasoning for why titles and/or affiliations should be included on name badges.

Ticket price

Income is an important area of diversity that is often overlooked.

The IES and event organisers should:

- Consider creating an event scholarship with a reduced or free ticket or offering discount tickets for those with no or reduced income (e.g. students and those on state benefits).
- Arrange for free access to the conference for helpers, assistants, or rapporteurs
- Unbundle the ticket price, so people can opt out of certain aspects of the conference they would prefer not to pay for or attend (e.g. dinners, side events, entertainments etc.).
- Offer helpers or carers a complimentary ticket to enable people with certain disabilities to attend events.

II. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND SPEAKER SELECTION

Women and people from minority groups are less likely to be chosen as speakers in high-level roles (keynote speakers, discussants, opening panels etc).

Over the past five years or so, we have seen the emergence of a movement calling out all-male panels and as a result an increasing number of conferences are committing to more diversity on panels and among speakers.

Many conferences are organised with the principal aim of demonstrating excellence to a large audience and showcasing cutting-edge work by leading professionals and academics.

The format of choice for this purpose is often the keynote lecture or panel discussion in a large lecture theatre, which is built on the celebration of individual excellence, and may limit participation from under-represented groups.

Recognising that events serve other important purposes – fostering collaborations, building skills, raising profiles and supporting career development for a wider group – may justify the adoption of other types of formats that are more conducive to sharing knowledge, generating new ideas and building partnerships, such as small interactive sessions, world cafés or networking sessions, dedicated workshops.

Some events provide multiple keynote speakers to give voice to different groups.

Making diversity a key target for all sessions

The IES and event organisers must:

- Commit to ensuring gender and ethnic or racial diversity on all panels.
- Keep track of whether that diversity is spread among all speaking roles: keynotes, session chairs, panellists, parallel session speakers, and poster presentations.
- Invite early career researchers (ECRs) and young professionals to speak at events.
- Encourage ‘inclusive’ participation by ensuring that all speakers have an equal opportunity to contribute and participate in the conversation, to network, and gain exposure.

Panel discussions and plenaries

Event organisers and panel chairs must consider:

- The chair should be selected carefully and should be briefed to ensure they give panel members an equal opportunity to speak. The chair should be able to stop panellists if they monopolise the discussion or if they speak for longer than asked to, and to create a space for speakers who are less vocal to share their research, views, or opinions. The chair should also have a good grasp of the background, field, research, and expertise of different presenters and ask relevant and appropriate questions.
- If there is only one woman on a panel, chairs and organisers will ensure that they are not consistently last to speak. This will also apply to BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) panellists, those who have a disability or who are early career.
- Where panellists or speakers will not be presenting in their native language, the chair should rephrase audience questions that use complex or convoluted language.
- The chair should take a few questions at a time, ensuring there are questions from a diversity of people (participants from different genders, BAME individuals, younger audience members etc.).
- The chair should attempt to take questions from women, BAME individuals, early career professionals, or members of a minority group first.
- Make it clear that no question is too simple or silly, all ideas are welcomed, and that the conference is non-judgemental.

- Event organisers and chairs should take care to ensure that titles, names, and pronouns are respected. Where chairs are unsure of how to pronounce an individual's name, they should ensure they check this with the individual before introducing them.

We encourage the person who opens the event to make a statement about the event's efforts towards equality, diversity, and inclusivity, and mention what attendees themselves can do to support these efforts.

The IES should:

- Provide a means to raise questions (anonymously or not), for example via Twitter.
- Consider making transcripts of papers available on the day, to enable fuller participation for people with processing issues who may struggle to follow the spoken word.
- Where necessary the IES will offer less experienced speakers mentoring or free training or guidelines on how to present their research or work and handle Q&A sessions most effectively.

III. COMMUNICATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The IES will:

- Communicate our efforts to improve inclusivity and diversity at our events, by clearly stating why diversity matters, and making all key information accessible on the event website and via emails prior to the conference.
- If required create a clear equality and diversity statement specifically for the event.
- Remind speakers of our commitment to diversity and inclusivity sending them a copy of our expectations in this regard if desired.

After the conference

Following the event, we will collect feedback from participants on the inclusivity of the event and share the findings with event organisers. This will also help with the planning of our future events.

Preventing and dealing with discrimination and harassment

Attendance and participation at events depend on delegates feeling safe (from both physical and verbal assault); and safety is closely tied with gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and characteristics of people's identity. Thus, creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment at events should be a key priority for organisers. To this end, we encourage everyone involved in planning and delivering an event to make clear what is, and what is not, appropriate behaviour, and how to report incidents (anonymously) should they arise.

The IES will remind attendees that these guidelines also apply to social media.

We will ensure that there is a clear process for reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment. We will provide more than one way for attendees to report any incident, for instance through an online form, via email, or in person.

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These guidelines are based on guidance issued by REACH, University of Oxford, Developing Inclusive Conferences, May 2019. We will continue to review, update, and improve these guidelines.