

# Mapping inequity across the STEM workforce and Protected Characteristics

As part of the inquiry into equity in the STEM workforce, on 3 February 2021, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Diversity and Inclusion in STEM held the first of four evidential roundtables. Titled *Mapping inequity across the STEM workforce and Protected Characteristics* this closed roundtable convened experts in equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) from across STEM sectors to discuss underrepresented communities within STEM.

The roundtable sought to collect expert insight on how to combat inequity within the STEM workforce and facilitate sharing of knowledge of lived experience of inequity within STEM. The views expressed and potential recommendations discussed have been recorded as contributing evidence to the inquiry and will help shape the final report, due for publication in Summer 2021.

The discussion centred around gathering further evidence on inequity across Protected Characteristics and specifically how communities are impacted across different:

- STEM disciplines or sector/subsectors
- Types of organisation (e.g. private, public, non-profit)
- Type of STEM activity (e.g. academic research, education, engagement, commercial, funding)
- Job levels and/or qualification

The following points were highlighted, many of which could be applied more widely than the STEM workforce:

## Data

There is a need for granularity within our use of data to map the STEM workforce. Putting all minority groups under the umbrella of 'BAME' generalises and obscures individual experiences. Furthermore, the proposal to enshrine ethnicity pay gap reporting in law needs to be accelerated.

Grouping all LGBTQ+ people under one banner also similarly obscures specific issues experienced by different LGBTQ+ communities. There is little data on LGBTQ+ in STEM, and what there is needs to be more intersectional. [A report by the Institute of Physics, Royal Astronomical Society and the Royal Society of Chemistry](#) found that many LGBTQ+ employees do not feel comfortable working in the physical science industry.

Many organisations lack demographic data on their workforce, so a flexible approach needs to be taken. And, whilst data is important, knowledge of lived experience is vital to the discussion and will help us to better combat inequity in the workforce.

## Progression and disability

There are significant issues for disabled workers around disclosing disability because of the potential negative impact this may have on a career. Disabled people are less likely to be promoted and look for promotion. Once reaching the top of a pay grade there are usually significant obstacles that prevent further progression.

In academia there is still a lot of stigma around disclosing disability, which could be because working over contracted hours is seen as the norm. Many disabled workers need support or reasonable adjustments to complete contracted hours. The stigma and lack of disclosure makes things more difficult for those who need reasonable adjustments and are visibly disabled. The ways in which performance is measured needs to change, quality as well as quantity of output must be considered.

Employers need to be [Disability Confident](#), guaranteeing interviews for disabled candidates and preventing discrimination during hiring and promotion discussions. Disability awareness training should be compulsory within the workplace.

## Leadership

Leadership and senior management need to own the EDI agenda within organisations and be held accountable with performance indicators. Commitment to EDI needs to be a competency by which all employees are appraised. Transparency is needed at all levels; from pay reporting to decision making processes - diverse influences are essential.

Reverse mentoring is an effective tool in leadership change and accountability.

## Type of change

Small evidence-based change and multi-pronged, intersectional approaches will help enact positive progress. Bite-sized goals, rather than complete overnight culture change, make it easier to incrementally see the rewards. When implementing change, organisations need to engage those with lived experience of diversity, within their workforce.

For larger bodies, change needs to be both organisational and local. Regional and national initiatives are useful for agenda setting and building frameworks, but real change comes from a localised approach with local leadership owning the work.

Greater support for local grassroots initiatives is also needed, rather than an emphasis on large events. These groups are often underfunded and underappreciated but understand the needs of the communities better than most.

## Diversity Networks

Diversity initiatives and staff networks should be paid labour, this extra work should not rest on the shoulders of those who experience discrimination. Individuals should not have to see an impact on their performance in their actual job roles, because of having to facilitate these extra activities.

There are some positive things coming out of peer-led diversity networks, with organisations dedicating budgets to this work. However, these conversations need to be expanded beyond 'the church of believers' with a wider acceptance of fundamental systemic inequalities, in the workplace and in society.

## Representation and education

From disability to sexual orientation and Black and minority ethnic communities there are a lack of diverse role models within the STEM workforce. There is a need for greater visibility of STEM role models from these groups and further representation in senior positions. There are a variety of recent reports that highlight underrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic, and female board executives ([DiversityQ](#) , [STEM Women](#) ).

Many underrepresented groups within the workforce are also actively fighting against negative stereotyping. An example of which is the preconceived notion that Black people are intellectually inferior. This type of attitude translates across school years and seeps into the workforce especially in the STEM sector. More research needs to be done on the effect of teacher bias (for example lower predicted grades) especially on [young Black boys](#) and men in the UK.

Positive, early interactions with STEM are vital and the 'dumbing down' of science needs to be addressed by the education sector.

The roundtable was chaired by Baroness Verma and attended by the following participants:

- **Dr Alfredo Carpineti**  
Chair of Pride in STEM
- **Dr Nira Chamberlain**  
President of the Institute of Mathematics and Its Applications
- **Mike Clancy**  
General Secretary of Prospect Union
- **Dr Anton Emmanuel**  
Interim Senior Clinical Lead for the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)
- **Dr Ollie Folayan**  
Co-founder of the Association for Black and Minority Ethnic Engineers UK
- **Lopa Patel MBE**  
Digital Entrepreneur
- **Sarah Simcoe**  
Founder of EMBED Inclusion
- **Deborah Westfield**  
UK Recruitment Diversity Lead at GSK
- **Dr Becca Wilson**  
UKRI Innovation Fellow with HDRUK, University of Liverpool

This roundtable was the first of four closed roundtable sessions, the closed format was chosen to allow participants to share their experiences more freely. The roundtables follow a [public launch event](#) at which a panel of speakers addressed key issues arising from the [Data Analysis Brief](#). The evidence gathered in these sessions supplements the open [Call for Evidence](#), which closed January 29 2021 and resulted in over [80 submissions](#) from across the STEM sectors.