The ZERO Institute's approach to EDI

Version 27th May 2025 | **For all enquiries:** zero@eng.ox.ac.uk

Our commitment

As a multidisciplinary institute reaching across Departments and Divisions in the University of Oxford, with close relations with industry and entrepreneurship, the ZERO Institute is committed to upholding EDI principles and practices throughout our work, and to promoting them among our partners and stakeholders. We aim to create an inspiring, innovative, open and supportive environment, where everyone is valued, respected and able to be themselves, and where leadership is inclusive. Recognising that enacting EDI is a hard and multidimensional endeavour, we remain open to input and ideas in respect of continued improvement of our EDI approaches.

Working definitions[1]

This document illustrates the EDI principles, definitions and action areas in the ZERO Institute, and outlines steps towards implementation. Aligned with UK legislation[2] and the policies of the University of Oxford[3], the ZERO Institute and its members uphold EDI principles and practices and promote them among its partners and stakeholders. While the ZERO Institute is not an EDI initiative per se, it mainstreams EDI throughout its work.

Equality or Equity: Equality is about people enjoying equal opportunities, without unfair treatment or discrimination. Equity means that opportunities are shaped to fit with the needs of the individual.

Diversity: Diversity is about differences, visible and invisible. Valuing diversity means valuing the perspectives and experiences of people from different backgrounds.

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[1] This section is largely based on the University of Oxford's EDI strategic plan released in September 2024 (https://edu.web.ox.ac.uk/article/everyone-belongs-new-collegiate-university-edi-strategic-plan) and on CREDS programme's materials (Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions) - https://www.creds.ac.uk/the-edi-cube/.

[2] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1.

[3] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/equality-policy and https://edu.web.ox.ac.uk/article/everyone-belongs-new-collegiate-university-edi-strategic-plan.

Inclusion: Inclusion means that everyone can be themselves and contribute fully, in systems that are made to work for everyone and in which everybody is valued and respected.

EDI dimensions: The UK Equality Act 2010 protects the following characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. In addition to these, the University of Oxford brings attention to other dimensions, including but not limited to caring responsibilities, socioeconomic status and cognitive diversity.[4]

The EDI cube (pictured below): An equity/equality, diversity and inclusion lens is used across the ZERO Institute's people, processes and projects, through the Equality Act characteristics, recognising the multidimensional nature of EDI.
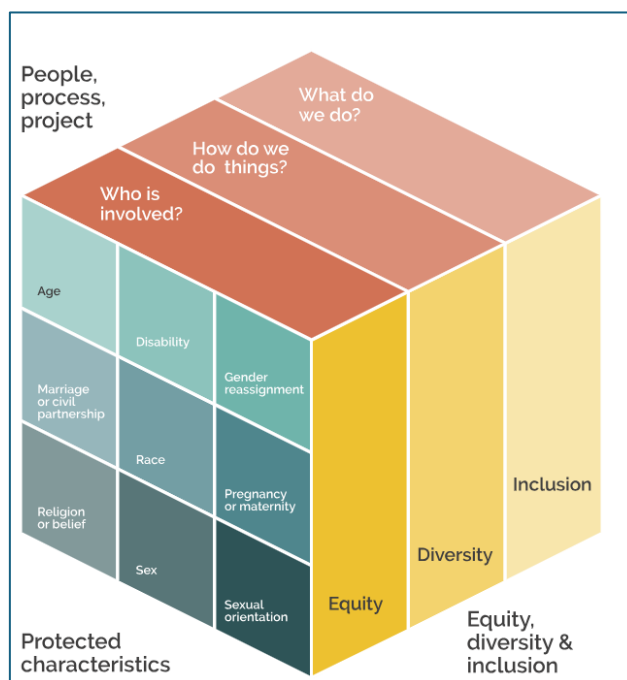

Figure 1. Image from the CREDS programme

EDI in the ZERO Institute

Key action areas for EDI

In line with our EDI commitment and using the EDI cube as a guide, below we identify action areas in which EDI can be actionable and impactful in the ZERO Institute. Some action areas concern the Institute's ways of working, whilst others relate to the

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[4] https://edu.web.ox.ac.uk/article/everyone-belongs-new-collegiate-university-edi-strategic-plan

activities that the Institute conducts or supports. Our ways of working and our programme of activities have obvious overlaps. These areas may evolve as the Institute grows and changes, and remain open to review and adaptation. Our guiding philosophy is to keep our EDI approach transparent and actionable.

Ways of working

ZERO governance teams: Within the limits of our remits, we ensure that teams are diverse, with no explicit or implicit barriers or biases preventing access and participation, and that all members can safely raise any EDI-related concerns.

Staff (academic, non-academic, temporary, casual): In recruitment, we ensure that there are no implicit or explicit biases and encourage diversity in the candidate pool.[5] We commit to making workplaces harassment-free[6] and inclusive, across cultures, customs, workstyles, meeting arrangements, diverse audiences, religious observance[7] and work-life balance.[8] We cater for the needs of staff with disabilities or health conditions, through accessible facilities. In career development, we work towards removing any barriers and biases, providing support to staff who may need it, and promoting use of university resources[9]. Line managers support capacity development of their staff, carry out PDRs/CDRs, and implement fair job descriptions and grading.[10] All staff, including line managers, are encouraged to take courses and to use existing guidance on EDI issues.[11]

Activities

EDI mainstreaming: We ensure that EDI informs planning, design and implementation of activities. This doesn't mean that all EDI dimensions are necessarily actioned, only those that are applicable and impactful. The EDI cube or other tools[12] can be used as reminders of EDI dimensions and commitments.

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[5] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/equality-policy
[6] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/harassment-advice
[7] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/inclusive-workplace
[8] https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/working-from-home
[9] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/for-all-new-staff
[10] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/resources-for-managers
[11] https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/training
[12] For instance, tools from the EDI action plan of *IGNITE Network+*: www.ignitenetplus.ac.uk/about/EDI-action-plan

Students: When designing, advertising and recruiting for student-focussed activities such as internships or DPhil funding, we will ensure that barriers or biases are removed, and will actively work to appeal to a diversity of candidates, to support and encourage diverse student cohorts. Following a similar approach as to staff (see section above), we will support a student environment that promotes welfare, with adequate support tailored to needs and circumstances.[13]

Internal and external events:[14] We aim to ensure that event venues, dates and times, food, drinks and entertainment cater for a broad set of needs. We aim for an inclusive and diverse programme and organisational structure. A varied event structure, with plenaries, smaller groups, Q&As and networking can encourage active participation of all. Through an event code of conduct, we will communicate EDI commitments to speakers and participants. We will promote channels to safely raise feedback. With some adaptations, similar principles apply to online events.[15]

Industry and startup engagement and partnership: When reaching out to stakeholders in industry and entrepreneurship, we will include a broad range of people and organisations with a diversity of talents and perspectives, reflecting the diversity of society and affirming a culture of inclusive engagement.[16] We actively work towards creating diverse networks and supporting and partnering with EDI-conscious individuals and organisations.

Research grants: We will appeal to a broad audience when designing and promoting research grant schemes, removing explicit or implicit barriers and unnecessary complexity. When awarding grants, we will promote access to a diverse range of individuals and projects, and maintain an awareness of structural inequalities and of individuals or groups who may require guidance in proposal preparation and grant application. We will provide grant holders with ongoing academic and managerial supervision and capacity development, tailored to needs.[17]

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[13] https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/student-welfare

[14] For in-person events, we take inspiration from SoGE's guidance on inclusive conferences: https://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/190522_Inclusive_Conference_Guide.pdf.

[15] https://communications.admin.ox.ac.uk/how-to-plan-and-run-an-accessible-online-event

[16] https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukris-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy/ukris-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-research-and-innovation-by-everyone-for-everyone/

[17] https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/equity-and-inclusivity-in-research-funding