MPLS Action Plan – short version

The three-year (2023-2026) MPLS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Action Plan is an in-depth SMART action plan that includes the work of the MPLS ED&I team, other divisional teams, the University’s Equality and Diversity Unit, the MPLS EDI Steering Group and MPLS departments. We have focused on actions that can be achievable at the divisional level. The full action plan is a live document that will continually be updated with new or adjusted actions as needed, and RAG-rated (red, amber, green coding of progress against current actions) annually.

Our [previous action plan](https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-mpls/mpls-ed-i-action-plan) had a strong focus on mental health and disability, with an ongoing focus on gender equity through Athena Swan work. Race equality also had a focus through the Race Equality Task Force. While we will maintain our commitment to these areas, we have shifted our focus to supporting LGBTQ+ staff and students for the next year. Further priority actions are in response to the 2023 Staff Experience Survey (SES), which showed that bullying and harassment, career development, wellbeing and workload, and transparent communication are key issues.

Specifically, our four priority actions for the academic year 2023-2024 are:

**Action 1.1** **Consultation with representatives of stakeholder groups before designing relevant actions** Focus groups with LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent staff and students on what challenges they face and what we can do in support.

**Action 2.1** **MPLS Resolution Service.** Training mediators and launching service (In response to SES results around bullying and harassment).

**Action 5.1 Roll-out inclusive recruitment guidance.** Inclusive recruitment processes used for APTFs in all MPLS departments, plus pilot of inclusive recruitment for researchers in some departments.

**Action 2.3 Addressing unreasonable workloads**. Exploring options around pooling tutorials between colleges to reduce APTF workloads and acting on the recommendations of the Academic Progression and Workload committee. (In response to SES results relating to excessive workloads).

**Action 3.2 Mental Health First Aiders.** Continued support and training for MHFA, supplemented by collaboration with Oxfordshire Mind on delivering workshops for staff around mental health.

In addition, there is a growing internal and external focus on improving research culture, including the People, Culture and Environment statement in REF 2029. We are recognising this through the following action, among others in the action plan objective ‘Improving behaviour and inclusive culture to support and retain staff’: **Action 2.4 EDI training across MPLS**. Developing a coordinated training plan across MPLS, in collaboration with the Research Culture Facilitator and Researcher Development & Training team, with an initial focus on bespoke sessions for large research groups.

Here we present a short version of the action plan. The key objectives are:

1. Enhance effective communications, **consultation and engagement**, with reporting on ED&I activities
2. Improving **behaviour** and **inclusive culture** to support and retain staff
3. Enable and support **ED&I networks and advisory roles**
4. Attract, admit and support **students** from **underrepresented backgrounds**
5. Implement **inclusive recruitment** practices to increase **diversity of staff**, and embed ED&I in staff onboarding processes
6. **Community engagement** and advocacy.

### Short-version of MPLS EDI Action Plan

1. Enhance effective communications, consultation and engagement, with reporting on ED&I activities

Actions under this objective were driven by the 2023 SES, which revealed only a third (35%) of staff believe action would be taken as a result of the Staff Experience Survey, with those from minoritised groups having even less belief in action e.g. those with a disability (20%), those who are non-binary or other gender (18%), those from a lower socio-economic background (28%), those who are Black (20%) or mixed race (30%) and those with mental ill-health (27%).

### *Actions*

1. **Consultation with representatives of stakeholder groups before designing relevant actions.** Consultation with representatives of stakeholder groups (initial focus on LGBTQ+ and Neurodivergent staff and students) on what challenges they face and what we can do in support before including recommendations in action plan. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, with support from EDI Fellows.*
2. **Inclusive communications and events guidance documents**, plus sharing best practise between departments. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, with support from MPLS Comms Team.*
3. **MPLS communications and staff engagement strategy to promote a much wider understanding of the division’s financial ambitions.** Integrating ED&I considerations into existing MPLS action plan item.*Action led by MPLS Staff Engagement and Change Comms Manager, with support from MPLS Finance Team and MPLS EDI Team.*
4. **Visibility of response to SES and other feedback** to address poor belief in action in survey. Regular comms to share actions achieved. *Action led by MPLS Staff Engagement and Change Comms Manager, with support from MPLS EDI Team.*
5. **Sharing best practice via Town Halls** with EDISG members or departments leading some sessions. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by EDISG*.
6. **Expansion of MPLS EDI Sharing Hub and website** including data support pages and ‘you said, we did’ reporting on actions. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by EDISG, DAMPS, HR Leads*.
7. **EDI Newsletter and Mental Health Matters Newsletters** sent on regular schedule. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by MPLS Comms Team.*
8. Improving behaviour and inclusive culture to support and retain staff

Actions under this objective were driven by an increase in staff saying they have witnessed or experienced bullying and harassment (B&H). 11% of MPLS staff have experienced B&H (4% increase since 2021) and 18% of staff have witnessed B&H (7% increase since 2021)), alongside a marked drop in faith in the B&H procedures, with only a third (34%) of those who experience or witness B&H making a report. Over half of cases of B&H were in the form of patronising language, hostility and excessive criticism. In relation to workload and wellbeing, just under half of staff reporting having the right balance between work and home life, and just under half can meet requirements of their job without working excessive hours (13% for academics).

### *Actions*

1. **MPLS Resolution Service.** Staff from across division trained to hold conflict resolution conversations, service opened to all MPLS staff and students. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, MPLS HR Team, supported by HR and EDI Leads in depts, Harassment Advisors.*
2. **Report and Support Tool** promotion of pilot scheme in division, plus monitoring of data to inform future bullying and harassment actions in MPLS. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by MPLS HR Leads, EDU.*
3. **Addressing unreasonable workloads.** Acting on recommendations from Academic Progression and Workload committee. Exploring options such as pooling tutorials across colleges and removing single-failure points in research and supervision. *Action led by MPLS Associate Head for People. Complements aims of Statistics Department.*
4. **EDI training.** Delivering bespoke EDI workshops in departments, targeting local needs, developing ‘train the trainer’ packages, coordinated training plan across MPLS with Research Culture Facilitator and Researcher Development and Training team. *Action led by Research Culture Facilitator, Researcher Development and Training team, MPLS EDI Team, supported by HR Leads and academic EDI Leads in depts.*
5. **Inclusive language** and inclusive comms guidelines shared with all departments, as well as reminders in divisional office newsletters. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by Departmental and divisional comms teams.*
6. **Name changes** and deadname support, with clear signposting from MPLS EDI website to university advice pages. Reminder to departments on importance of changing all records, exploring how to synchronise this with college records. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team.*
7. **Workplace Adjustment Plans (WAPs)** refined in collaboration with EDU and guidance shared with departmental HR teams to roll out across division. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, with support from DAS, SWSS, Staff Disability Advisor, Dept HR Teams.*
8. **Use of media** (e.g. Picture a Scientist and Re:Tension films, PERIODically podcast) to increase awareness and engagement. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, with support from MPLS Comms Team.*
9. **Research Culture: a) Equity in Research Funding,** supporting the actions of the project. *Action led by MPLS Research Support Team, with support from MPLS EDI Team*; **b) Inclusive Leadership** training for senior academic line managers (expansion of two pilot schemes). *Action led by MPLS Researcher Development and Training Team, with support from MPLS EDI Team.*
10. **Safety workstream on inclusivity in fieldwork** reviewing good practice, assessing uptake, developing divisional policy and a lunchtime discussion series on equitable fieldwork. *Action led by MPLS Safety Team, in collaboration with Safety Office. Complements aims of Biology Department.*
11. **Support for MPLS technicians** by engaging with Technician’s Commitment activities (POD), supporting MPLS Technician Champions and increasing visibility of technicians in MPLS. *Action led by MPLS Research Support Team, in collaboration with from Safety Office.*
12. **Embedding mental health and wellbeing work** by creating a Mental Health Action Plan and Town Hall events. *Action led by Materials Dept.*
13. **Monitoring of EDI training across MPLS** (linked to action 2.4) and incorporating findings into future training programmes. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, with support from MPLS Researcher Development and Training Team.*
14. Enable and support ED&I networks and advisory roles

This objective brings together actions and ongoing commitments to ED&I networks and advisory roles within the division. Our departments have many support roles, often with a few individuals often taking on multiple roles (harassment advisors, Mental Health First Aiders, disability advisors, resolvers/mediators, network convenors). We found support for people in these roles can be standardised and improved. Furthermore, the Disability Focus Groups (HT 2023) found a strong call for disability advisors/ allies, who could provide essential support in departments for staff, as well as students.

### *Actions*

1. **Implement Disability Allies role in a pilot scheme,** with training from University’s Staff Disability Advisor. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by DAS, SWSS, EDU Staff Disability Advisor.*
2. **Mental Health First Aiders.** Continued support and training for MHFA, monitoring and evaluation of scheme. Supplemented by collaboration with Oxfordshire Mind. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by* *EDU/ Wellbeing Programme Team.*
3. **Support for BIPOC STEM network,** particularly succession planning and funding applications to ensure continuation long-term. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team.*
4. **Grow Working Parents Network and associated sub-channels**, including Solo Parents and Student Parents networks. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team.*
5. **Support for gender equity societies and programmes**, supporting events such as the annual GenSTEM event as well as collaborations with Research Services Enspire/ IDEA team on innovation and diversity. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team and MPLS Enterprise Team. Complements aims of Materials Department.*

## Attract, admit and support students from underrepresented backgrounds

Actions under this objective derive from work in the the Race Equality Charter Award and institutional Athena Swan Award, which revealed ethnicity and gender gaps at each stage of the student admission process and awarding gaps in good degrees persist in MPLS. There are growing numbers of students with disabilities and LGBTQ+ students in MPLS, and increasing numbers of students who will experience multiple layers of disadvantage. With attention focussed on themes including AI, machine learning and climate change, there is a need to address already existing diversity biases in these research topics.

### *Actions*

1. **Improve alignment of UG recruitment with reality of recruitment to colleges** with course-level review of under-recruitment for students from under-represented backgrounds. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by MPLS EDI Team.*
2. **Investigate reasons for PGR under-recruitment at a programme and departmental level** by undertaking a department by department investigation of recruitment strategy and local issues. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by Dept DGS, MPLS EDI Team.*
3. **Working with departments on graduate recruitment strategy** including offer targets and marketing of course to improve diversity of applicant pool. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by DGSs, Graduate Administrators, MPLS EDI Team.*
4. **Continue to prioritise fundraising for PGR scholarships** including EDI considerations, utilising Positive Action Cases as appropriate. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, MPLS Development Team supported by MPLS EDI Team.*
5. **Diversifying the curriculum in taught courses.** Regular talks and Town Halls to share good practise, consider ways to capture new appointees as they prepare lecture series, consider ways to increase diversity during curriculum reviews in departments, Diversifying STEM Curriculum project and Women in STEM course content for Biology. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, MPLS EDI Team supported by MPLS EDISG*.
6. **Investigating the PGT ethnicity awarding gap in MPLS** (largest of any division at 15%) and what measures have already been trialled in departments. Collaborative working group between departments with large awarding gaps. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by MPLS EDI Team. Complements aims of Statistics Department.*
7. **Building inclusion into new PGT courses as they are developed,** including Responsible Research and Innovation recommendations. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by MPLS EDI Team.*
8. **EDI in new CDT course applications address** EDI requirements of new funding applications, and financial requests specifically for EDI in those bids. Also actions similar to Action 7 above.*Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by MPLS EDI Team.*
9. **EDI Inductions for all students** including mapping gaps in current provision and considering division-wide approach. *Action led by MPLS Departments, supported by MPLS EDI Team.*
10. **Addressing disparities in allocation/recruitment for UG 4th year projects** Collecting best practise and making recommendations on transparent, equitable process to ensure opportunities available to all students, including under-represented and vulnerable students. *Action led by MPLS Education Team, supported by MPLS EDI Team. Complements aims of Chemistry Department*

## Implement inclusive recruitment practices to increase diversity of staff, and embed ED&I in staff onboarding processes

Actions under this objective aim to address underrepresentation across all job roles in MPLS. Female and BME staff are still under-represented in research and academic roles in MPLS (less than 20% of titular or statutory professors and less than a third of researchers are female; 10% of PSS, less than 10% of academics and only 25% of researchers are BME).

### *Actions*

1. **Roll out Inclusive Recruitment Guidance** and pilot Inclusive Recruitment processes for postdocs. *Action led by Associate Head for People, MPLS Academic HR Team. Complements aims of Chemistry, Engineering, Maths and Physics Departments.*
2. **Develop best-practice guidelines on ED&I in inductions** with materials prepared by EDI and Training Team, whilst also tracking CDO’s plans for collegiate university inductions. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, MPLS Training and Development Team, supported by Departmental HR Teams and Directors of UG/ PG study.*
3. **Monitoring the impact of the interview process on recruitment** focussing initially on gender data because of data availability. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, supported by MPLS Academic HR team. Complements the aims of the Statistics Department*.
4. **Inclusive recruitment practises for departmental and divisional leadership roles** (HoDs, Associate Heads) including interview process, followed by mandatory EDI aspect to induction to new role. *Action led by Head of Division, supported by Associate Head for People, Academic HR Team Leader.*
5. **EDI Inductions for all staff.** Mapping of departmental activity in this area already, followed by addressing any gaps with a division-wide approach as appropriate. *Action led by MPLS Departments (EDI Leads, HR Teams) with support from MPLS EDI Team.*
6. **Career pathways** for PSS (Engineering), academics (Maths) and all roles (Physics). *Action led by Engineering, Physics, Maths Departments*
7. **Blind recruitment of PDRAs.** *Action led by Chemistry Department.*

## Community engagement and advocacy.

Actions under this objective regarding community engagement are in response to the University's mission and strategic plan, the expectations of funders and the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which all emphasise the importance of research that serves the broader society. Furthermore, local engagement is one of the Vice Chancellor’s key priorities. Women are currently more likely to undertake PCER activities, and acting as representatives of under-served groups is a disproportionate burden for these and other groups. Staff in other under-represented groups, e.g., disabled or neurodivergent staff, may face challenges getting involved with PCER activities, whether online or in person, if not properly supported.

Other advocacy actions under this objective aim to use the divisional perspective to elevate concerns from departments to central university in collaboration with other divisions.

### *Actions*

1. **Public and Community Engagement in Research.** Ensuring all researchers have access to support for PCER, with EDI considerations of over-burdening under-represented groups. Also focussing on research culture, training, and research support, funding and impact. *Action led by MPLS PCER Team, supported by Research Services, REF Teams, Oxford Sparks, MPLS Training and Development Team, MPLS Comms Team, MPLS Finance Team and STORC.*
2. **Bullying and Harassment** Support and add voice to those of departments calling for greater consequences for those at fault, and clarity regarding accountability, working with other divisions to consider changes to B&H policy. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team and EDI Teams in other divisions, supported by MPLS HRBP Team.*
3. **How to proactively deal with resistance to EDI.** Collaboration with EDU, EDI CoP, other University teams and the wider sector on how to deal with resistance to EDI whilst still protecting academic freedom. *Action led by MPLS EDI Team, EDU and EDI CoP, supported by EDI teams in other divisions.*

Abbreviations:

CDO – Chief Diversity Officer

DAMPS – Regular meeting of MPLS HAFs (Heads of Admin and Finance)

DAS – Disability Advisory Service

DGS - Director of Graduate Studies

EDI – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

CoP – Community of Practice

EDISG – EDI Steering Group

EDU – Equality and Diversity Unit

MHFA – Mental Health First Aider

MPLS – Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (division)

PCER - Public and Community Engagement with Research

PSS – Professional Services Staff

SES – Staff Experience Survey

SWSS – Student Welfare and Support Services