

Making diversity and inclusion matter at the National School of Healthcare Science



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Inspired by the national solidarity shown in the face of COVID-19, and 2020's many reminders of the persistence of systemic racism, the National School of Healthcare Science decided to lead by example.

It was amazing to see last year how we came together in solidarity as a country, to help ease the strain on the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic. We followed government guidelines and were mindful of those around us and their needs.

In the summer of 2020, we witnessed and experienced tragedies that stirred emotions for many of us, reminding us of another pandemic that has been affecting a lot of people for many years – systemic racism.

At the National School of Healthcare Science, we did not want the solidarity inspired by the pandemic to end there. We felt it was time to lead by example, by eliminating any potential for racism in the School, and actively promoting equality, diversion and inclusion.

Developing our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Staff at the School were not alone in wanting to tackle the problem of systemic racism being embedded in our processes and thinking. A number of trainees on our programmes got in touch to express their concerns and ideas. This confirmed for us that we needed to take further steps to bring about change.

Our first move was to create, very quickly, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Committee, which would meet regularly to

identify areas of improvement for the School and the services we provide. In practice, this means being accountable to the School's senior management team, in order to meet standards, promote inclusion and create an environment in which we are constantly educating ourselves and others.

Extraordinary meetings

In practice, this means, individuals in the School make suggestions and come up with ideas that are then addressed in ED&I committee meetings. If a matter is more urgent and cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting, we sometimes conduct extraordinary meetings.

Once matters have been discussed in a meeting, recommendations are made on how we can move forward and come up with a formal process. These are also presented at our senior management meetings (SMM) to be sure all teams are aware of these improvements.

We are also in close collaboration with the BAME Scientist Trainee Network, which reached out to us and maintains close contact to make sure that their voices are heard throughout this process of change.

Improving our recruitment processes

We are working to improve both our internal and national recruitment processes to the healthcare science training programmes we facilitate. Our



Events in 2020 led the National School of Healthcare Science to create its own equality and diversity training resources for internal use and external stakeholders.

recruitment team is currently in the early stages of working with the external academic research organisation the Work Psychology Group to review these processes.

This work aims to identify and eliminate any bias in the various stages from initial application right through to the placement of trainees on the programme. We intend to be as transparent as possible and will make the relevant data available on a dedicated Equality and Diversity Matters page (currently under construction) on the School website.

Internally, we have since late September 2020 introduced more diverse interview panels, with wider representation from people of different genders, ages and ethnicity, and include interview questions directly on equality, diversity and inclusion.

We hope that, in this way, people we recruit will understand the importance of the values of equality and diversity to the School from the moment of their interview. In turn, we hope they too will demonstrate and implement these values

A holistic approach to training

The School is also actively creating its own equality and diversity training resources for internal use and for our stakeholders, including trainees, apprentices, supervisors, training officers, assessors and recruiters. Through these, we hope to create an environment of continuous learning and self-reflection on how we promote these values, and to identify any areas of improvement.

Our future plans are to view equality, diversity and inclusion in a holistic way, embedding these core principles in all of our training programmes. We do not anticipate change happening overnight, and nor do we expect immediate results. We must remind ourselves that this is a marathon, and not a sprint.

However, now that the School has appointed key individuals to dedicate the time and effort to prioritising this holistic approach, we are confident that we will see progress happen sooner rather than later.

We hope that our initiative encourages other organisations, networks and individuals to invest the time and resources, to listen to their service users, to reduce injustice and bias, and find ways to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Forming a partnership with STEM

We have also recently formed a partnership with the charity In2Science. Founded in 2010, In2Science aims to provide young people from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds with opportunities to gain practical insight into the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) sector.

Each year, In2science offers nearly 500 students a chance to take part in life-changing summer placements, working alongside researchers and industry professionals to get hands-on STEM experience.

We are delighted that the School will be able to help more schoolchildren with an interest in science to gain professional experience, especially those who would like to work in healthcare and the NHS. This is an exciting venture and we look forward to helping young scientists of today walk through the doors of NHS departments of the future.

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