



DIVERSITY
IN UK POLAR SCIENCE

Diversity in UK Polar Science Initiative Race Impact Survey Report

February 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the key findings and data summary from the first Race Impact survey undertaken by the Diversity in UK Polar Science Initiative (DiPSI) in October 2020, with the guidance and support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and British Antarctic Survey (BAS).

Survey results confirm a problem for people from minority backgrounds in entering polar research through recruitment and academic career development pipelines and the need and requirement to develop more inclusive policies in current polar institutions to support minorities. While the experiences of people from minority backgrounds are not specific to polar research, efforts are needed from within the polar community to address current underrepresentation and change the traditions that prevent ethnic minorities from fully contributing their talent to the UK polar research community.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the respondents' demographics and free text comments and to analyse this data to help demonstrate and understand the current issues and collate future actions that can help improve racial diversity in polar research. This diversity is imperative for innovation and for community acceptance of crucial polar science.

Key survey findings at a glance:

1. 32% of respondents (55/174) have witnessed discrimination based on race or micro-aggressive¹ behaviour towards individuals of a minority background while working within the UK polar research community.
2. 57% of BAME respondents (4/7) have experienced racism in their workplace in polar research.
3. 67% of respondents (37/55) who witnessed incidents that involved racism, did not report it.
4. 78% of respondents (136/174) are aware of issues regarding racism and exclusion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff or students inside the workforce culture of the UK polar research community.
5. A lack of reporting of racist behaviours adds to the lack of recognition of these behaviours.

(*Definition of microaggression: a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)¹

¹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "microaggression," accessed January 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression>.

Introduction

The Diversity in UK Polar Science Initiative (DiPSI) – established in September 2019 – aims to promote and enhance polar research opportunities in the UK for all currently under-represented groups, including women, BAME, LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities. DiPSI has highlighted the lack of diversity for minority ethnic groups in UK polar research in comparison to the wider UK population. Survey responses were collected to attempt to better understand why the UK polar research community has less than 3% representation of BAME or Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) colleagues when UK STEM levels at university are 16%²; see Appendix B.

The UK polar research community covers many university departments and key institutions such as British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI). Many researchers and operations staff have proudly worked in this community and consider it a vibrant and great place to work and achieve scientific research. The ambition of this survey was to highlight the incidences that many are not aware of and bring the matter into the forefront of diversity conversations. Polar research is made up of many inclusive people and the initiative is working towards highlighting barriers so that more diversity can be brought into the workplace and for all to benefit from inclusion, innovation, and acceptance in the workplace, and from science enriched by diverse insights.

We asked participants in the UK Polar research and operations community, to complete a survey about their experience of equality in the workplace, particularly regarding race. This survey, devised by the DiPSI committee, with input from European Polar Board (EPB), SPRI and BAS staff, generated 174 responses with over 1000 free text comments. The data and respondents' comments have informed recommendations from the initiative regarding guidance for UK polar research personnel to acknowledge systemic racism and to put in place changes to improve diversity and inclusion in polar research and operations.

This survey was voluntary and may only represent 20% of those involved in polar research across the UK's Higher Education Institutions. As a result, our understanding of systemic bias against minority ethnicities is only partial. Further investigations are required to understand the determinants of systemic and individual bias regarding race, diversity, and inclusion.

About the survey

- Opened for three weeks in October 2020
- Opened to all respondents currently or previously working in UK polar research
- Online response using Microsoft Forms
- Publicised by directed committee email list for UKAAP/UKNCAR (UK Arctic and Antarctic Partnership / UK National Committee for Antarctic Research), email to all BAS staff, and social media
- The survey was kept anonymised to protect the respondents

² <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2020>

- The survey comprised two permissions questions, 26 content questions, 16 multiple choice/short answer and 12 free text answer options including feedback
- 174 respondents completed the survey with a general completion time range of 10 – 15 minutes
- An ethics review was completed prior to publication of the survey

Aims of the survey

- Gather key insights into racism experienced and recognised inside the UK polar community
- Understand how UK polar research staff viewed issues for racial minorities in polar research in the UK
- Identify any problems experienced by staff in reporting of issues
- Give respondents an opportunity to share positive action and ideas for improvement regarding unbiased recruitment, improved diversity-aware culture, and retention of BAME staff

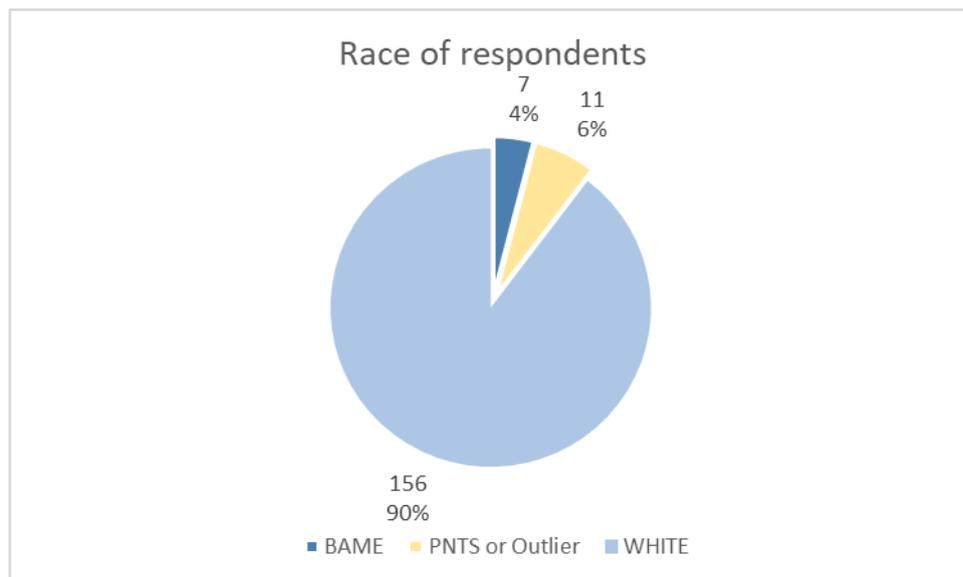
Outcomes of the survey

- Report summarising outcomes of the survey (i.e. this document)
- One-page summary document to be published and shared within the UK polar community
- Share and collate best practice responses with NERC and UKRI to consider the next stage of development of the DiPSI programme.
- Share the outcomes of the survey with survey participants and polar community committees (EG. Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), UK Polar Network (UKPN), UKAAP, UKNCAR, BAS and SPRI management) to encourage further action regarding outreach and bias in applications
- Academic publication of outcomes and recommendations

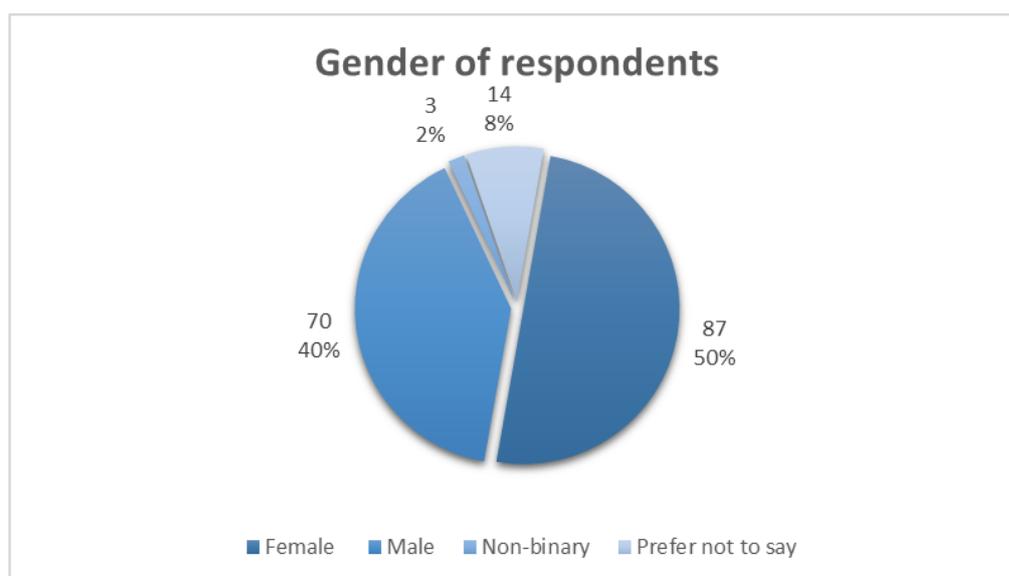
Demographic statistics from survey respondents

The survey had 174 respondents in 17 days. The survey received two outlier responses regarding race and experiences.

Race: 7 of 174 respondents' self-identified as BAME (4%), 9 of the 174 (5%) preferred not to say (PNTS) and 156 of 174 respondents (90%) identified as White.

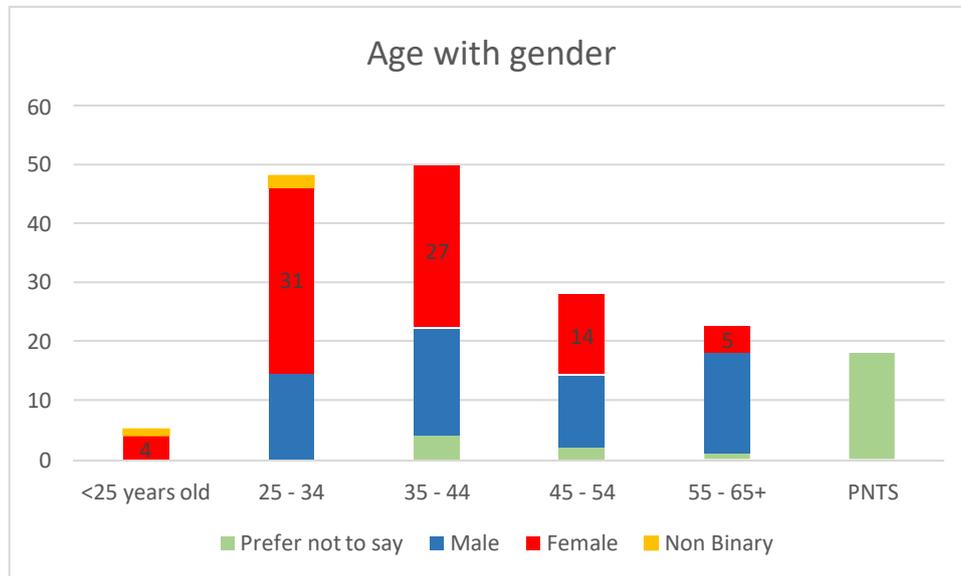


Gender: The gender contribution to the survey respondents was balanced with 50% of those who chose to identify choosing female. Of the 174 respondents, 87 respondents self-identified as female, 70 respondents self-identified as male, 3 respondents self-identified as non-binary, and 14 preferred not to say (PNTS).





Age: The survey covered a broad spread of ages and there were respondents in all age ranges. Slightly more than one third of the respondents, 32% (56/174) were under 35 years old.



Intersectionality: There are several indicators of intersectionality in the data. The intersectionality of age and gender is displayed by the decrease in % of women as age increases, reflecting the decrease in women’s retention in polar research. There are no responses from BAME women over the age group of 54.

Key areas of review

The following four sections break the survey responses into key areas of review: individual impact, systemic barriers, issues regarding reporting and the opportunities for research with change.

Section 1: Experience regarding race in UK polar research

Section 2: Awareness & discussion of barriers

Section 3: Suggestions of positive action

Section 4: Reporting culture and issues

SECTION 1: EXPERIENCE REGARDING RACE IN UK POLAR RESEARCH

Over half, 4/7, (57%) of the BAME respondents have experienced racism whilst working in the UK polar research community. Nearly three quarters, 5/7, (71%) of BAME respondents had experienced or are aware of policies, traditions or processes that make it harder for members of minorities to stay working in polar research. These BAME respondents gave us responses regarding experiences of racism in their workplaces in polar research. In the free text, the respondents shared personal experiences and examples of witnessed discrimination based on race or minority background while working within the Polar research community, summarised below:

Personal Experience of Racism
Direct racist comments
Inflammatory material printed and given to individual
Physical aggression due to race
Gaslighting
Racial stereotyping

"I'm not sure I could in good conscience encourage a younger/newer colleague to enter polar research without being honest about what I have experienced and what barriers they might face compared to other sectors..."

"There is no data point to tell you how it feels to think that your peers might be avoiding working with you, just based on how you look."

Nearly a third of people of all ethnicities working in polar research who completed the survey 55/174 (32%), have witnessed discrimination based on race or micro-aggressive behaviour, while working within the UK polar research community. Of these respondents 28/55 (51%) were female, 19/55 (35%) were male, 1 was non binary and 7 preferred not to say. There was no significant bias for witnessing/not witnessing across any age groups. There was a broad list of recognised actions against minority ethnic colleagues, from micro aggressive behaviours to racist jokes, direct racial comments and physical acts. Some respondents had experienced multiple incidents or had witnessed multiple incidents against the same colleague over time. Responses are summarised below:

What form did this witnessed discrimination based on race take?
Ignorant stereotypes
Racist comments
Excluded due to race
Racist jokes
Physical racist aggression
Direct racist comments
Harassment
Structural barrier

The reports of racially motivated harassment and bullying in the workplace from the experiences captured by this survey throw light on behaviours that are counter to the Equality Act and to the values and desired work practices of the institutions involved in polar research in the United Kingdom.

SECTION 2: AWARENESS OF BARRIERS

Two questions were asked regarding the impact of race on recruitment and retention: “Have you experienced or are you aware of policies, traditions or processes that make it harder for members of minorities to stay working in polar research?” and “What are the barriers, or the perception of barriers, to BAME or BIPOC individuals entering polar research?”

Both sets of answers were very similar in the recognition of lack of role models and existing BAME staff as a key issue, as well as the specific negative reputation polar science has, due to its colonial White male exploration history of the early 20th century and continued use and pride in these images and reputation. The awakening of the knowledge of decolonisation of science and exploration hits at polar exploration stereotypes particularly hard and is important to consider seriously. Two key differences between retention and recruitment are the awareness of the impact the lack of outreach to the non-traditional pool of BAME scientists in the UK has on recruitment, and the systemic bias that BAME students suffer in PhD applications to NERC and UKRI.

Forty-three respondents recognised that the current absence of BAME staff is a deterrent to new BAME STEM graduates seeking a career in polar research. Additionally, there is negative connotation for an academic career as being less stable and less conscionable for a first-generation university student who does not have financial support available from a family base.

There was also a strong commentary on the recruitment bias of employing ‘like’ personnel, to the exclusion of BAME talent. The continuance of ‘word of mouth’ recruitment and dependence on a comparatively static ‘Antarctic talent pool’ from within a pool of White staff obviously translates to mostly White applicants and White recruits. Unconscious bias was consistently referenced as an issue for the retention and recruitment of BAME staff. Responses to both questions asked in this section are summarised in the tables below:



Have you experienced or are you aware of policies, traditions or processes that make it harder for members of minorities to stay working in polar research?

Poor existing racial diversity

Poor reputation specifically for Polar research

Lack of role models

Active racial bias in recruitment

Research as a career issue

Bias selection in outreach

Some 136/174 (78%) of total respondents indicated that there are policies, traditions or processes that limit BAME involvement in UK polar research. More than half of those respondents who identify as white male 36/69 (52%) know that there are policies/traditions/processes that limit BAME involvement in UK polar research.

What are the barriers, or the perception of barriers, to BAME or BIPOC individuals entering polar research?

Lack of BAME polar role models

Polar research has negative connotations

Lack of targeted polar outreach – BAME School and university students

Unconscious bias in recruitment

Negative PhD application bias

Lack of BAME applicants

Negative research culture for STEM

Structural barriers

Racism

Additional intersectional barriers for BAME women

Response had racist comment

Lack of targeted BAME support / funding

There were intersectional elements of many of the comments regarding micro-aggressions towards women in the polar research community that is amplified for BAME women. This survey provides comprehensive details that could be used for staff training to identify what racist and exclusionary behaviours look like and now how to pick it up in the workplace.

“...ignoring comments at the lunch table that were derogatory towards different races”

“Making up a name for a crew member because their real name was difficult to pronounce for most others.”

“...reported negative behaviour is ridiculed and brushed aside by [...] management but treated seriously for white staff.”

SECTION 3: SUGGESTIONS FOR POSITIVE ACTION

Respondents were asked to share examples of activities that improve diversity and inclusion in the UK polar research community or have the potential to do so. Some 65/174 (37%) respondents had positive suggestions for action the polar community could take within the UK to encourage, support, and promote diversity issues.

Several answers directly related to efforts that would impact the key barriers that were identified in the survey, i.e. targeting outreach to BAME students and celebrating existing BAME role models. There were also examples of cohort programs, like the Polar Horizons program, that introduces underrepresented students or employees into the workplace in a cohort structure to give them ongoing support and has a higher chance of success and survival in the workplace. Additional methods of increasing the numbers of BAME staff included:

- Ring-fenced roles
- Protected entry schemes
- Internships & scholarships for BAME science and operations roles
- Targeted recruitment of BAME researchers
- Targeted Master's programme development for minorities
- Diversity quotas in grant proposals and expedition numbers.

In addition, there were strong recommendations for increased efforts from senior leadership to personally and visibly drive diversity change and develop improved policies and support with unconscious bias and general EDI training. Responses are summarised below:

If you have experiences of positive action, do you have any suggestions for activities the Polar community could take within the UK to encourage, support, and promote diversity issues
Polar Outreach to BAME students at schools and universities
Celebrate existing BAME role models
Develop anonymous reporting systems
Senior Leadership to visibly drive diversity change
Ring-fenced roles / protected entry schemes
Unconscious bias training
Internships for BAME scientists and operations
Promote BAME researchers
Repair structural bias in PhD applications
Polar Horizons-like cohort projects
Celebrate diversity
Continue promoting the issues and talking of diversity
Equality and Diversity Training
Improved policy to instigate change
Scholarships for BAME scientists and operations staff
Strong anti-bullying / anti-racism policy and actions
Intentional diverse networking

Mentoring programs
Minority targeted Master's programme support
Polar Impact support /social media
Change makers reading group
Decolonisation of polar science
Diversity quota for expeditions
EDI roles in all Polar committees
Engage international polar researchers of BIPOC background
Meaningful equality standards in grant applications
Priority conference sessions
Review Racism policy
Structural change for research environment
Yearly diversity reporting to be made public

SECTION 4: REPORTING CULTURE AND ISSUES

The survey reflects on the experiences and witnessing of incidents and issues due to racism, yet the reporting of incidents is very low in relation to incidence. Even though 55% of people (96 /174) know how or where to report an incident, 28 respondents (16 female, 9 male, 6 PNTS, 1 non-binary) did not report after witnessing or experiencing an incident. There was no statistical grouping regarding age.

Some 55 /174 (32%) respondents have witnessed discrimination based on race or micro-aggressive behaviour towards individuals of a minority background while working within the polar research community.

Two-thirds of respondents (115/174; 66%) have not witnessed discrimination based on race or micro-aggressive behaviour towards individuals of a minority background while working within the polar research community. These respondents were equally balanced across gender and age. There were also many comments regarding not having any BAME colleagues in their work teams to be able to witness any incidents. 4/174 (2%) stated they were unsure if they have witnessed discrimination instead of saying they had seen none.

Of the 55 respondents who had experienced or witnessed racism, less than a third reported it (17/55), i.e. 67% of people (37/55 - 19 female, 11 male, 6 PNTS, 1 non-binary) chose not to report a racial incident inside their workplace.

The respondents acknowledged four key reasons they did not report the incident:

- They did not trust the system
- They thought it would not do any good
- The incident involved senior staff or there was a fear of reprisal by senior staff
- The reporting process was too complicated.



“The main reason for not reporting the incident, because it would be laughed at.”

Some 18/174 (10%) of respondents had left polar research – 7/18 (39% - 14 female, 3 male, 1 PNTS) of those had experienced or witnessed racism in their workplace when they worked in polar research. Age was spread evenly across the groups.

This survey therefore supports the claim that the real incidence of racism in UK polar research is higher than official figures suggest, given a finding of non-reporting of racist issues, incidents and experiences.

Survey findings

DiPSI undertook the survey to gather key insights into racism experienced and/or recognised inside the UK polar community and this was achieved by the survey responses.

There is awareness in the polar community of systemic and cultural issues that are fundamental barriers to a more open and inclusive culture. The survey amplifies the existing statistical evidence (i.e. <3% BAME personnel in the polar community, compared to 16% in UK society) with qualitative evidence shared through the free text responses, and that some traditions and practices maintain or hide other malpractices such as bullying and harassment. The lack of anonymous reporting tools continues to maintain this imbalance in the status quo and is a noticeable lack of support for minorities and shows a lack of real intention for change.

A large number of the respondents, 136 of the 174 – over 78% – are aware that there are issues regarding racism and exclusion of BAME colleagues inside the workforce culture of UK polar research. These 78% of staff had either experienced or witnessed racism, or they know of barriers for the retention or recruitment of BAME staff.

Some 65 respondents of the 174 – over 37% – had positive suggestions for activities that offered opportunity for improvement and more inclusive culture. Key areas of effort required to change culture and BAME attraction and retention are in leadership, recruitment, training, and reporting.

There was positive feedback on general Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training and some form of unconscious bias training being effective. This is also important in developing a baseline of understanding for issues and the processes to resolve them as large numbers of respondents stated they would go to peers for support in reporting incidents.

Comments highlight that those who are in the minority and/or victimised are reluctant to go to official sources if there is an incident, as they fear recrimination and do not wish to exacerbate the feeling of being more isolated than the general population. Better reporting systems will create a numeric record of incidents as well as creating a pattern of incidence related to an individual to allow redress by the institution without highlighting the victims.

Conclusions

The UK polar research community produces scientific research of global importance. Imagine the potential for this body of researchers if the culture, values, and traditions were to change to become a fully inclusive, safe, inviting place for everyone to work. If behaviours that enable bullying and harassment are removed, if traditions and policies that benefit the White majority are unpicked and recruitment and research is allowed to proceed without bias, unhelpful culture will be replaced with innovation and inclusion.

The UK polar community and its leaders are encouraged to develop the skills and confidence to identify cultural issues and traditions that are not inclusive and instil new policies and traditions, to ensure that the workplace meets the needs and standards required to be fully inclusive. They should also have new policies supporting them through a transition phase of integration. They can begin this by understanding the issues that people from minority backgrounds encounter and put in place actions that develop and motivate the polar workforce through inclusive practice. There is a message from this survey that the leadership need to fully understand the Equality Act and their obligations as an employer. Key to this is becoming more effective in accessing a pool of diverse, talented people, and avoiding unconscious bias in recruitment and consideration and reward of non-Oxbridge degrees in the Doctoral Training Partnership (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs).

The Diversity in UK Polar Science Initiative (DiPSI) has been acting on internal community suggestions to address immediate issues such as application bias, lack of networking and like-employing-like recruiting. The projects that have been completed have created resources and projects that have aligned with many of the improvement suggestions from this survey. A table highlighting the activities and aligning them with suggestions is listed in Appendix A.

We do have a body of evidence now of testimonials by people who have experienced and witnessed discrimination, based on race, inside the UK polar research community. The evidence is clear: those who have not had personal experience can rely on the data gathered as evidence that discrimination does and is still happening.

The following recommendations, derived from the survey, could assist in the change required to address the significant issue of lack of diversity and evidence of racist systems and behaviours:

1. Ring fenced employment programmes for both science and non-science roles at all levels (including senior researchers and management).
2. A full review of bias within the UK postgraduate application process (including UKRI Doctoral Training Partnerships) e.g., exclusionary university rankings, rewards for volunteering and other systemic racial barriers.
3. A fully resourced and strategic polar focused outreach programme to target BAME students across the UK STEM Higher Education system to elevate awareness of the polar research community and show an EDI-aware workforce that would counteract historic views.

4. Targeted Masters training – Masters level interactions with established scientists for BAME students would improve networking and credibility of Master’s projects and increase the success rate for DTP/CDT applications.
5. Recruitment reporting on diversity applicant pool and successful appointments would highlight the behaviours that are preventing recruitment and retention.
6. Continuation of cohort programs, such as Polar Horizons would develop a pool of diverse talent that could flow into the polar research and operations community.
7. Yearly diversity reporting would keep the issue in focus and drive improvement.
8. Visible statements and support by the highest levels of leadership across the polar research community, with published diversity goals would contribute enormously to culture change.
9. Advanced Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training and some form of unconscious bias training are a necessary base level of education to change culture and continue improvement in diversity and inclusion understanding.
10. The continued development of resources to provide role models and community linkage will help gain momentum in student outreach and EDI education.

With thanks to the support and funding by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and British Antarctic Survey for hosting the Diversity in Polar Science Initiative.



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**British
Antarctic Survey**

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

APPENDIX A – DiPSI efforts and outcomes since October 2019, aligned to survey suggestions.

Subject Area	Actions, products & achievements	Status
Awareness	Diversity Calendar - to highlight Black History Month, Women in Science Day, International Day of disabilities, LGBTQ+ History month	Completed and available for download from the DiPSI website base
Awareness	Cooperation with International partners, European Polar Board for awareness raising	Publicising Polar Impact, Pride in Polar Research & Women in Polar Science and LGBT Stem Day
Awareness	Polar Pride Day	Established as an annual event in British Antarctic Territory and globally in partnership with Pride in Polar Research & LGBT Stem Day
Awareness	Pride in Polar Research pin badges	Over 4,000 badges distributed via the post and international conferences to promote Pride in Polar Research
Awareness	Interaction with SCAR	Steering committee involvement, SCAR conference participation and contribution
Awareness	Internal BAS media pieces in ICESHEET	8 articles referring to Polar Horizons, DiPSI or published talks
Best Practice/Systemic	Annual Diversity statistics for UK polar research	Completed full first diversity review for BAS and published results on the website
Best Practice/Systemic	EDI roles in Polar committees	Diverse Steering Committee for DiPSI, Polar Horizons 2020 alumni now one of the new EDI Officers for UK Polar Network
Best Practice/Systemic	Interaction with Antarctic Science Ltd, UKPN and UKNCAR regarding Diversity statements	Draft statements completed and support for committee change from DiPSI
Best Practice/Systemic	Develop targeted Masters programmes	No progress yet - further discussion and champions within BAS required
Best Practice/Systemic	Discuss strong anti-bullying / anti-racism policy and actions	No progress - further discussion and champions within NERC and UKRI required



Best Practice/Systemic	Meaningful equality standards in employment, grant, and studentship applications	No actions yet - further discussion and champions within NERC and UKRI required
Best Practice/Systemic	Positive action: Diversity quotas and statistics for jobs, studentships, expeditions, internships and opportunities	No actions yet - further discussion and champions within NERC and UKRI required
Best Practice/Systemic	Review EDI policies	No actions taken
Best Practice/Systemic	Scholarships for underrepresented groups	No progress - further discussion and champions within NERC and UKRI required
Best Practice/Systemic	Interaction with Antarctic Science Ltd, UKPN and UKNCAR regarding Diversity statements	Draft statements completed and support for committee change from DIPSI
International Engagement	Priority conference sessions	Participants in SCAR & IASC EDI sessions at international conference
International Engagement	Campaigning with International polar organisations to support Polar Pride Day 2020	Successful engagement with 40 countries participating in Polar Pride Day
Role Models	Senior leadership and diversity - disability	Ben Merrick FCDO talking to Polar Horizons
Role Models	Senior leadership and diversity - race	Karen Salt UKRI talking to Polar Horizons
Role Models	Senior leadership and diversity	Blogs on the DiPSI/BAS websites Beatrix Schlarb-Ridley, David Vaughan & Jane Rumble
Role Models	Highlight and share International polar researchers of minority backgrounds	Polar Horizons guest speaker Dr Melissa Burt.
Tools	Diversity 101 training	Bespoke training for the Polar community covering the language and etiquette surrounding EDI
Tools	Polar Funding information 2020	A list of funding opportunities relevant to underrepresented groups



Tools	Ethics review of Race Impact survey	Basic structure of key questions and process for creating an ethics survey
Tools	Race Impact Survey	Survey completed for 2020, structure and questions available for future repeats
Tools	Provide anonymous reporting tools	No progress yet - funding needs to be made available to allow introduction
UK Capacity Building	Citizen science – counting seals from space	10 UK undergraduate students took part in a volunteering project to count seals from space.
UK Capacity Building	Polar Horizons 2020	22 students from underrepresented groups (BAME, LGBT & Disabled) attended a launch day at BAS followed by monthly seminars and discussions
UK Capacity Building	Polar Horizons 2021	~62 students from underrepresented groups to attend 2021 virtual program

APPENDIX B - Comparison of racial diversity across polar research and relevant UK communities

