



Medical  
Research  
Council

# Advancing race equity in the Medical Research Council

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- EDI Engagement and Change Manager,  
Medical Research Council
- 17 November 2023

# UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

UKRI works with the government to invest over £7 billion a year in research and innovation by partnering with academia and industry.



**UK Research  
and Innovation**

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UKRI



- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is central to UKRI's vision to create a research and innovation system that is "for everyone, by everyone"
- [EDI Strategy and Action Plan](#) published on 23 March 2023
  - Sets out objectives and cornerstones for change
- [Workforce EDI plan](#) published on 17 January 2023



# Medical Research Council (MRC)

- Mission to improve human health through world-class medical research
- EDI is a key priority in the MRC
- ‘Diversity’ established as MRC Value in 2021, Strategic Delivery Plan
- Committed to embedding in all that we do
- Developing an MRC approach within the wider UKRI strategic framework to advance EDI as an employer, funder and leader

# Grant funding assessment process

Stage 1 - Assessment by experts

Stage 2 – Assessment by Board/Panel

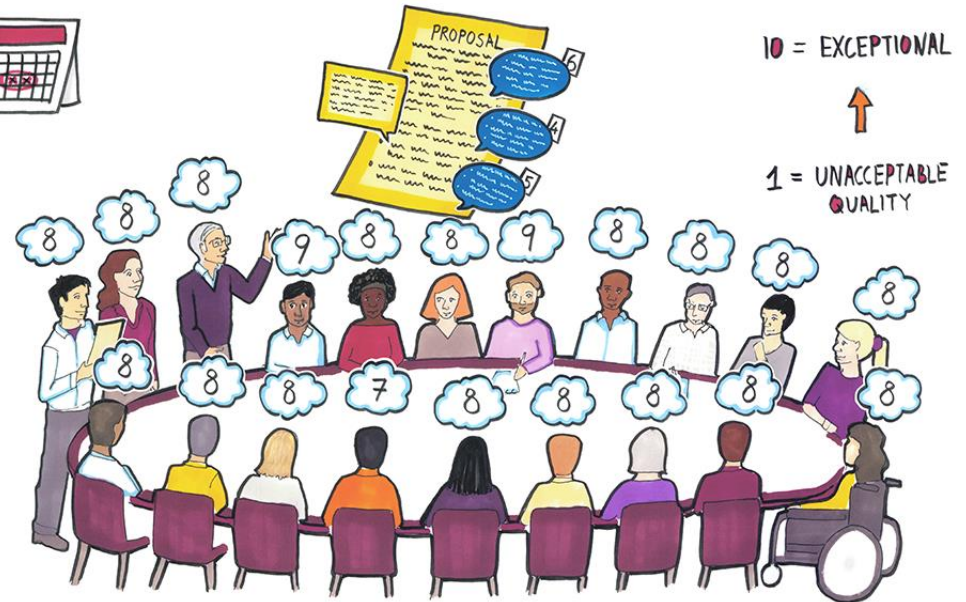
*Triage or shortlisting*



1 = POOR QUALITY



6 = EXCEPTIONAL



# How our process differs

## MRC:

- Uses paid Expert Reviewer Selectors to choose first stage reviewers (scientific experts) for most schemes
- Has assessment panels and not moderation panels, which means the board/panel members make decisions based on their own opinions too not just moderating the reviewer comments
- Have standing boards with their own annual budgets, not just panels
- Doesn't have a peer review college, recruits annually

# Promoting understanding

- On our website - peer review pages, reviewer and applicant guidance
- Blogs
  - [How we're supporting research integrity through peer review](#)
  - [Help us make peer review more diverse and inclusive](#)
  - [Peer review – critical to our success](#)
  - [Grant application checklist: eight checks to do before you submit blog](#)
  - [12 top tips for writing a grant application](#)
- Webinars and videos ([fellowships](#) and [responsive mode research boards](#))
- [Animation](#) of peer review process



Further questions, contact:  
[peer.review@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:peer.review@mrc.ukri.org)

# Embedding EDI

## ▪ **Boards and Panels**

- Diversifying membership in governing bodies paper
- Targeted advertising, positive action statements
- Short-listing guidance updated, accounts for targets
- Narrative CV questions
- Gender / ethnicity targets, annual monitoring
- Broadening Board Observer Scheme / New Board and Panel Associates Scheme

## ▪ **Peer review**

- Bias Awareness Scheme
- Diversity in research design policy

## ▪ **Call development**

- Equality Impact Assessments
- Removal of potential barriers (timebound criteria)

## ▪ **Funding and award rates**

- MRC EDI Dashboard – monitoring

## ▪ **Positive action**

- Black in Biomedical Research project



# Board and panel recruitment data

	White	Ethnic Minority	Not disclosed
Applications from 2020	321 (73%)	57 (13%)	59 (14%)
Applications from 2021	253 (83%)	48 (16%)	4 (2%)
Applications from 2022	236 (70%)	95 (28%)	8 (2%)
Applications from 2023*	58%	40%	2%

Following updated diversity questions and more targeted advertising



Following target introduction



Success rates		
Year	White	Minority Ethnic
2020	15%	12%
2021	12%	19%
2022	16%	16%
2023*	14%	16%

# MRC Data (2015/16-2019/20)

- Fellow applications and award rates by ethnic group

<b>Ethnicity Category</b>	<b>Award rate</b>	<b>No. of apps</b>	<b>No. of awards</b>	<b>Prop. of apps</b>	<b>Prop. of awards</b>	<b>Employed population</b>	<b>Academic staff</b>
Asian	21%	320	65	18%	18%	7%	9%
Black	--	30	--	2%	--	3%	2%
Mixed	26%	85	20	5%	6%	1%	2%
Not Disclosed	17%	60	10	3%	3%	--	--
Unknown	--	--	0	--	0%	--	--
White	22%	1260	275	72%	73%		--

# MRC Data (2015/16-2019/20)

- PI applications and award rates by ethnic group

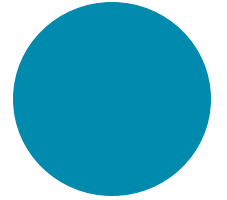
Ethnicity Category	Award rate	No. of apps	No. of awards	Prop. of apps	Prop. of awards	Employed population	Academic staff
Asian	18%	935	175	12%	10%	7%	9%
Black	11%	195	20	2%	1%	3%	2%
Mixed	19%	190	35	2%	2%	1%	2%
Not Disclosed	19%	490	95	6%	6%	--	--
Unknown	--	10	--	0%	--	--	--
White	23%	5940	1340	77%	80%		--

# Current/past MRC activities

- Event run for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic PhD students which influenced studentship practice.
- Partnership with head hunting firm Egon Zehnder to grow talent in Africa.
- Invitations to prominent Black scientists to present in MRC seminar series.
- Professor Tumani Corrah delivered a talk on 5 November 2020 entitled 'Unconscious bias and racism – my journey to date'
- Internships offered through Summer Diversity Internship Programme and 10,000 Black Interns.
- Financial support for BBSTEM Bridge mentoring scheme.

# 'Black in Biomedical Research' project

- £3.7 million over 3 years
- Approved by Executive Board, Strategy Board and Council
- To help address the sustained underrepresentation of researchers from Black heritage backgrounds across MRC and UKRI funding portfolios, within the MRC staff population, and more broadly across the Biomedical Sciences



# Progress

- Black in Biomedical Research Advisory Group formed, first meeting March 2023
- Race Equality Lead recruited, based at the Laboratory of Molecular Biology
- Pilot conference and summer lab internships for Black students funded for 2023
- Funding provided to Sanger Excellence Fellowships (6 over 3 cohorts)
- Work in partnership with the Laboratory of Molecular Biology to develop fellowship scheme for Black researchers

## Launch of "Changing the Story for Black Biomedical Scientists" conference

🕒 Wednesday 26 April 2023, 12 noon - 6pm

📍 West London Campus [View map](#)



# Actions

- Provide further funding to support Black fellows.
- Provide additional opportunities to Black researchers to observe MRC boards/panels and gain reviewer experience.
- Continue inviting participants from the 10k Black Interns programme.
- Provide funding for outreach organisations focused on pre-university students.
- Support grassroots networking groups.
- Launch UK version of 'Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritised Scientists'
- Explore JLA PSP initiative focused on health inequalities impacting Black heritage communities.



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# Thank you



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