

Editorial

Diversity in polar science: promoting inclusion through our daily words and actions

The polar regions are often seen as remote and, with no permanent human population in Antarctica, disconnected from the issues facing society. But those working in the polar regions often find themselves in small, close-knit communities thousands of miles from home, where everyone's safety and well-being are dependent on trust and teamwork and where any form of exclusion would feel magnified. In order to remain relevant in the twenty-first century, polar research needs to become representative of the wider society it serves and to be prepared to tackle existing inequalities. Whilst this issue is certainly not unique to polar science (e.g. 3.3% of the UK population come from Black ethnic groups yet only 1.8% of UK STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) academic staff and 0.5% of university science professors are Black), our community has a longstanding perception and history of being dominated by White men, dating back to the 'heroic age of Antarctic exploration'.

The desire for meaningful change led the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Polar Regions Department, to fund the [Diversity in UK Polar Science Initiative \(DiPSI; https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/diversity-in-uk-polar-science-initiative\)](https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/diversity-in-uk-polar-science-initiative). DiPSI exists to celebrate existing diversity and enhance further polar science opportunities for historically excluded and underrepresented groups such as women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities or those from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds. The initiative is supported by individuals and organizations across the UK polar community. The enduring underrepresentation of historically excluded groups and their lived experiences highlighted the need for targeted actions to improve the inclusivity of the workplace and to proactively move away from the stereotypical image of polar research.

Organizations and communities need to move beyond words of support to invest in actions that create a more inclusive workplace. DiPSI has concentrated its efforts on delivering outputs that open up polar research to previously excluded groups through hands-on personal experience in peer groups, targeted mentoring, inspirational speakers, online resources, paid internships and community engagement (see <https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/diversity-in-uk-polar-science-initiative/diversity-in-uk-polar-science-resources>). Feedback from these actions has shown that exposing groups of students and early-career researchers (ECRs) from minority backgrounds to the human face of polar science and the exciting opportunities it can provide can help to break down the stereotype of a sector dominated by 'heroic' White men. Moreover, we recognize the need to create a fully representative community that is explicitly welcoming to talent from diverse backgrounds. This will take the continued commitment and expansion of this work in order to engage the current scientists, engineers and the support staff of the future.

Far too often the burden of trying to fix systemic problems is placed upon the shoulders of already negatively impacted minority employees. When asked, 90% of White men said they believed that equality, diversity and inclusion efforts in the workplace were 'important', but, despite these good intentions, only 24% said they were actively engaged with them, with the most common reason being that they were 'too busy' to get involved (see <https://qz.com/work/1889860/why-white-men-dont-get-involved-in-diversity-and-inclusion>). Existing staff from minority backgrounds are often understandably wary of initiatives such as DiPSI, asking themselves whether they are just another tokenistic box-ticking exercise that would only deplete their energy reserves and ultimately leave them disappointed if they got involved with them.

An important aspect of the solution entails attracting and retaining diverse talent at an early career stage by dispelling the stereotypes associated with polar research. Within the community, the role of education on awareness and positive behaviours should not be underestimated. However, attracting talent from underrepresented groups requires us to reach out beyond our usual sphere of influence. Polar Horizons (<https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/diversity-in-uk-polar-science-initiative/uk-polar-horizons-2021>) is a programme designed to inspire STEM ECRs from a diverse range of backgrounds to take up a career in polar research. This is achieved by immersing the ECRs in an intensive and varied overview of polar research, whilst also pairing them with established polar researchers from their field of study to enable more detailed discussions to take place and career advice to be given. The scheme is different from most internships because it brings the ECRs in as a cohort who undertake many of the activities as a group, enabling them to build a peer-support network in addition to the

network they develop with their host researcher and institute. Providing a visible 'critical mass' of talent from underrepresented groups across the cohorts has enhanced the feeling of belonging and confidence for these groups.

Many of the cultural changes that DiPSI is trying to achieve will take years to filter through into tangible and quantifiable results, whilst others represent simply a matter of consciously looking at everyday behaviours, traditions and procedures from a minority point of view. One important lesson that we learned through this journey is that real change requires investment, commitment, humility and leadership with a desire to make a difference and lead by example: goodwill alone is not enough. These challenges are not confined to polar research in the UK, and those of us lucky enough to have privilege and positions of influence need to use our voices to ensure that global polar research is a welcoming and inclusive home to everyone whilst integrating inclusive thinking into the everyday fabric of our processes and organizations.

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