



Research to inform policy from the University of York, School of Arts and Creative Technology

EMBEDDING EDI INTO RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Insights from XR Stories and SIGN

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Summary

- The Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN) and XR Stories were funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to stimulate the development of the screen industries in Yorkshire and the Humber.
- From 2020–2023, SIGN developed and commissioned work on:
 - skills and training provision; business development support
 - equality, diversity and inclusion interventions
 - It also developed a programme of research to better understand the sector
- XR Stories ran from 2018–2023 and focused on boosting R&D capacity through:
 - funding schemes for SMEs
 - academic research
 - internships and placements
- Exclusionary practices, discrimination and exploitation are common and long-standing problems in the screen industries. Both projects aimed to embed diversity and inclusion in all activities to address them.
- As the projects ended, we commissioned AdvanceHE to evaluate what we did and how we did it and develop recommendations for similar projects.

Recommendations for Policy

1. Build in EDI considerations and clarify definitions from the start of a project.
2. Proactively make project staff more diverse across all levels of seniority, job roles and contract types.
3. Co-create strategic policies and actions – include the voices of all internal staff as well as external experts.

AdvanceHE's Recommendations

1) Build in EDI considerations and clarify definitions from the start of a project.

- Include EDI considerations in funding applications, whether the funder requires it or not.
- Define concepts and working practices at the outset.

This will ensure that staff are on the same page and can be effective EDI advocates, who practise what they preach both within the project team and while implementing project activities.

2) Proactively make project staff more diverse across all levels of seniority, job roles and contract types.

- Promote recruitment opportunities through diverse communication channels and for long enough, to reach a diverse audience.
- Reconsider institutional recruitment and appointment policies if they result in non-diverse workforces. Consider approaches such as targeted campaigns and/or positive action, to increase representation from minoritised backgrounds (e.g. in relation to ethnicity/race and socioeconomic background in White, middle-class cities such as York).
- Make sure that people from minoritised backgrounds hold a variety of roles across all levels of seniority, job roles and contract types.

3) Co-create strategic policies and actions – include the voices of all internal staff as well as external experts.

So, the development of strategic policies and actions should be a collective responsibility and not just delegated to individuals. Also, external voices can offer additional expertise: they should be brought in from the start of a project so that actions, processes and procedures can be sense-checked and constructively criticised by a more diverse audience. A possible step-by-step approach:

- Engage the project team in a vision exercise, where all members are brought together to clarify:
- where the team is – what is the current situation?
- where it needs to go – what are the final aims of the project?
- how this can happen – what actions, processes and procedures (internal and external) are needed to meet the final aims?
- Collectively develop an EDI policy that covers internal working culture and project outputs.
- Produce a specific action plan and measurable targets, with mechanisms to monitor progress and make any adjustments.
- Create an EDI advisory board. This should include project team members and also external people with lived or learned experience, who can act as 'critical friends', sense-checking actions and progress and suggesting improvements.

4) Raise awareness of EDI as vital for a successful working culture, and engage all team members in planning EDI actions.

When participants were asked how effectively EDI was embedded in the internal working cultures of SIGN and XR Stories, they often struggled to identify how well this was done. But can a project be considered successful in embedding EDI and bringing about change if it doesn't first of all reflect these practices internally? We recognise that projects that aim to tackle inequities through systemic change need to first practise what they preach.

With this in mind, the positive elements identified in SIGN and XR Stories should be retained. These include:

- flexible working arrangements – working patterns and/or contracts adjusted to individual needs
- practices to build community in project teams that work remotely/on a hybrid basis
- good rapport between line managers and staff members, characterised by trust and mutual respect
- encouragement for staff to engage with career development opportunities
- recognition and reward for staff's work, for example through institutional and external award nominations
- staff members with a real commitment to EDI

Meanwhile, the following improvements are needed:

- Alleviate workload pressures – for example:
 - stick to protocols for allocation of work across team members
 - set up regular meetings with staff to check the feasibility of their allocated workload
- Foster equitable working environments, characterised by mutual respect:
 - between academics and professional/support services staff
 - across all levels of seniority
- Encourage staff to engage with professional development opportunities outside the institutional context by allocating funding for this.

Further reading

For a summary of our achievements, see our end-of-project report, [Empowering the Screen Industries of Yorkshire and the Humber Final Report 2023](#)

Further information

To find out more about the University of York's work on digital creativity, check out XR Stories, SIGN and the School of Arts and Creative Technologies:
xrstories.co.uk
screen-network.org.uk
york.ac.uk/arts-creative-technologies

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