SPRITE+ EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY AND PLAN

Contents

Strategy

Introduction – Our Mission and Vision

Digital technologies and services are shaping our lives. Work, education, finance, health, politics and society are all affected. They also raise concomitant and complex challenges relating to the security of and trust in systems and data. TIPS (Trust, Identity, Privacy and Security) issues thus lie at the heart of our adoption of new technologies and are critical to our economic prosperity and the well-being of our citizens. Identifying and addressing such issues requires a coherent, coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach with strong stakeholder relationships at the centre.

SPRITE+ is a vehicle for communication, engagement and collaboration for people involved in research, practice and policy relevant to TIPS in digital contexts. Since launching in 2019, we have established ourselves as the go-to point of contact to engage with the broadest UK network of interdisciplinary, cross-sector digital TIPS experts.

The second phase of SPRITE+ will continue to build our membership, whilst expanding the breadth and depth of our innovation, and deepen our impact through proactive engagement.

Attention and actions to support and advance EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) are integral to achieving our mission and objectives.

Our Community

All our activities and resources are designed to support academics in developing their networks, building relationships with researchers from other disciplines, sharing their expertise, and understanding more about and developing connections with TIPS stakeholders, across all sectors. These relationships underpin TIPS knowledge exchange between disciplines and across sectors, and impactful research.

With this in mind it is important that we grow and sustain an inclusive research culture, which values the contributions of all, and builds relationships based on respect and fair treatment. Everyone should feel welcome within the community and supported to achieve their potential. They should also feel able (and know how) to raise any concerns about fair and inclusive treatment.

Our Objectives

In our second phase (September 2023 – August 2027) the main objectives of SPRITE+ are to:

- Expand our TIPS network, harnessing the expertise and collaborative potential of the national and international communities.
- Identify and prioritise future TIPS research challenges.
- Explore and develop the priority research areas to enhance our collective understanding of future global TIPS challenges.
- Stimulate innovative research through sandpits, industry led calls, and horizon scanning.
- Deepen engagement with TIPS research end users across sectors to accelerate knowledge exchange.
- Understand, inform and influence policy making and practice at regional, national and international level.

Our commitment to EDI is woven through all our activities, enriching the work of our community and its outcomes.

Commitment

- We will continue our commitment to embedding EDI throughout our programmes and activities.
- We will assist our community in promoting EDI, e.g. through shared learning.
- We will use our role as an engagement hub to advance EDI within TIPS fields.
- We are continuing our access fund for use by our members to reduce barriers to participation.

- We will continue to design our application processes to be inclusive and fair, take care with the language and framing of our calls to action, and take steps at events to support diverse needs.

Context and Evidence

SPRITE+ is funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). We align with EPSRC and UKRI policies and principles for EDI, working to "ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is considered and supported at all stages" of the Network Plus[i]. We also align with the EDI policies and principles of our host institutions.

Given the wide-ranging social impacts of digital technologies, work on digital TIPS needs to engage broad and diverse perspectives, and promote greater inclusion of underrepresented groups.

The communities we serve and engage with have recognised challenges in EDI including:

- EDI issues throughout academic careers, including inequitable access to educational and career opportunities and a lack of diversity, particularly at more senior levels[ii], with underrepresentation of women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities[iii,iv]. Also relevant to SPRITE+ in its funding activities – funding award rates and amounts have been found to be lower for women and ethnic minorities[v].
- Socio-economically disadvantaged groups experience persistent challenges in access to higher education and academic careers[vi,vii] and EDI challenges in general are compounded by intersectionality. There is a clear need for greater support and role modelling for underrepresented groups.
- Low levels of diversity within technology industries[viii,ix], and particularly within digital technology industries[x], again with decreasing diversity at more senior levels. In cybersecurity, there is greater ethnic diversity, but problems with inclusion and discrimination[xi].
- There are also persistent barriers to equitable societal access to digital technologies and their benefits, and in the ability to understand and shape their development and use[xii].
- In terms of policy engagement, while the civil service is more diverse than the tech industry and academia[xiii], embedded assumptions about who has expertise mean that academic-policy engagement tends to be skewed towards more senior researchers (where, as noted above, there is less diversity to draw on), and towards those based in London and the South-East[xiv].

This context highlights the value that SPRITE+ can bring through support for EDI across our activities and emphasises that effectively doing so will be essential to achieving our objectives and for broad societal benefit from work on TIPS and digital technologies.

Because of our convening power and leadership potential in this area, we have the opportunity and responsibility to positively shape the TIPS research and knowledge engagement environment.

Guiding Principles

As the central function of SPRITE+ is to bring people together, to do so effectively we need to ensure everyone feels valued and respected and is equally able to contribute to our community.

SPRITE+ operates according to four interrelated principles. Diversity is one of those principles, EDI practices also support implementation of the other principles – creating an environment in which members are comfortable to challenge traditional perspectives and have equitable opportunities to connect and collaborate.

1. ***Interconnection:*** **Making magic in the joins***. Digital TIPS challenges and opportunities are best addressed with an interdisciplinary 'quadruple helix' model of academic-government-industry-citizen engagement.*
2. ***Diversity:*** **Great innovation from diverse voices***. Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is woven through all activities and we will take practical steps to encourage and facilitate participation.*
3. ***Challenge:*** **Encouraging challenges to traditional perspectives***. We embrace 'traditional' cybersecurity perspectives, but we actively seek to broaden and challenge our understandings of digital TIPS for the benefit of society.*
4. ***Collaboration:*** **Support; Communicate; Network.** *We work closely with cognate organisations and networks with an ethos of collaboration, and seeking opportunities for leverage and support, not duplication.*

These closely connect and align with key UKRI principles which hold EDI to be "a critical aspect of a healthy research culture" where work is enriched by "a diversity of ideas, opinions, knowledge and people" and when everyone has "the opportunity to participate and benefit"[xv].

SPRITE+ membership is free and open to everyone, our opportunities are widely advertised, travel support (such as bursaries) is made available to event participants, and we maintain a generous access fund to support participation.

Our approach includes flexibility and responsiveness to evaluative processes.

Strategic Objectives / Priorities

- *Gain better understanding of the composition of our community, through the collection and analysis of EDI data in our community and organisation, and proactively respond to identified areas of under-representation.*

- *Identify and address barriers to participation by under-represented groups.*

- *Provide clarity about what we expect from ourselves, our community and our partners.*

- *Encourage all members to share responsibility for sustaining an environment in which everyone feels respected and valued.*

- *Nurture and sustain an inclusive organisational culture, supporting all members of our team in achieving their potential.*

- *Ensure challenges can be identified and concerns raised in a timely manner, so that we can respond, review, and continue to improve.*

Plan

SPRITE+ can contribute to advancing EDI:

- In our interactions with our community and wider society.
- Among our community.
- Within our organisation.

In our EDI plan we set out what we seek to achieve in each of these areas, actions we intend to use to achieve them, and indicators against which we can evaluate our progress. We also have some cross-cutting goals. (There is overlap and interaction between these three areas which we also pay attention to, so that our actions align across them.)

We recognise that our actions on EDI are part of a developing process. As our network activities change, expand and extend, there will be ongoing work to ensure EDI considerations remain embedded throughout, and that our positive direction is sustained.

This will be a living plan, regularly reviewed and updated, enabling new goals, actions and activities to be added, and good practice to be iterated. For example, our selection of indicators will evolve as we collate and analyse data and identify areas where e.g. under-representation might be a concern. Indicators will be used for regular evaluation of delivery of the plan. Processes for review will include input from our Advisory Board (to which we will report regularly on progress) and discussions with our wider membership. The plan and progress reports will be publicly available on our website.

This will also facilitate responsiveness of our EDI activities to the community, itself involving inclusive practice, the engagement of diverse perspectives, and being accessible to those it affects.

SPRITE+ interactions with our community

GOAL 1: We will continue to ensure that EDI is woven through all SPRITE+ activities, taking practical steps to encourage and facilitate participation, and providing active leadership on EDI within the SPRITE+ community.

ACTION: Implement good practices in application, review and selection processes for events, activities, funding, and other opportunities. Includes practices to promote inclusion of under-represented groups, to support equality of opportunity, and manage bias.
INDICATORS: Qualitative description of how good practices have been implemented; quantitative indicators may also be used as measures once baseline data is established.

ACTION: Sustain, enhance and increase uptake of our support for early career researchers, supporting and encouraging their contributions to the network, and addressing barriers to their participation in digital TIPS and academic careers more broadly.
INDICATORS: Activities run, take up of these; and qualitative feedback and identification of barriers to participation and how we might have impact in addressing these.

ACTION: Ensure early career researchers continue to be represented on our Advisory Board, and their needs taken into account in other decision-making processes.
INDICATOR: Participation in Advisory Board, including qualitative feedback on experience and ideas for improvement.

ACTION: Accessibility audits of our website and other communication materials.
INDICATORS: Audit results and response plans communicated to SPRITE+ Management Team.

ACTION: Equality Impact Assessments for events and funding opportunities.
INDICATORS: These will be documented, noted in our annual report, and shared with the SPRITE+ Management Team as events and funding programmes are planned.

ACTION: Review, development and updating of SPRITE+ inclusive events and communications policy and guidance, and code of conduct for events and activities.
INDICATORS: Revised versions published online, and members alerted to this through our newsletter.

ACTION: Development and/or adoption of tools for assessing and adjusting policies, programmes, and activities, such as access audits, and equality impact assessments.
INDICATORS: Useful tools identified, adapted or developed for this purpose, and their use outlined in our annual report.

ACTION: Continuation of our access fund to support inclusion – offering financial support towards travel, caring costs and other measures to reduce barriers to participation.
INDICATORS: Quantitative and qualitative data on use, and where possible evaluative feedback from users on its impact.

GOAL 2: Ensure EDI is carefully embedded within our 'Global Voices' programme, creating meaningful, inclusive opportunities for deeper engagement of the international community in SPRITE+.

ACTION: Drawing from relevant guidance (e.g. British Council EDI strategy[xvi] and guidance[xvii]) identify key additional areas of consideration for supporting EDI within this context. Identify and implement associated actions.

INDICATORS: EDI sections included within programme planning documents. Set of supportive actions identified.

GOAL 3: Our EDI approach and actions to be understood by our community with opportunities to engage with this work.

ACTION: Actively encourage our community to develop ideas in support of EDI, share good practice and learn from each other.
ACTION: Create a space on SPRITEHub for EDI resource sharing. Consider process for submissions and, for example, any moderation requirement.

INDICATORS: Dedicated web page(s) developed and made live on SPRITEHub, and space provided within our newsletter for the sharing of ideas and practices by the community; process for submissions documented and communicated to members; use of those opportunities by the community.

ACTION: Publish our EDI Strategy and Plan, and any associated policies and guidance on SPRITEHub, and alert our members to this through our newsletter.

INDICATORS: Materials added to our website, and communication sent to our membership.

ACTION: Ensure our EDI strategy and plan, and relevant policies and tools, are communicated to project partners and collaborating organisations, encouraging them to align with our principles and practice.

INDICATORS: Dissemination of these materials during project partner engagement activities, and to collaborating organisations.

Among the SPRITE+ community

To sustain a positive and inclusive community environment SPRITE+ members need to actively engage with and support our EDI practices, reflecting our principles in their interactions with each other. All members share responsibility for treating each other with fairness and respect, valuing diverse perspectives and contributions, and creating a welcoming environment within our events and activities.

GOAL 4: Set out EDI expectations for our community, and clearly communicate them.

ACTION: Continue to require Members to apply the SPRITE+ Code of Conduct in their interactions on SPRITEHub and at any SPRITE+ events and activities, including those that are Member-organised.
INDICATORS: SPRITE+ Code of Conduct easily accessed on SPRITEHub, communicated to Members when they join SPRITE+, and communicated to Members organising any SPRITE+ activity, alongside relevant guidance documents and offer of assistance from SPRITE+ team on making activities accessible and inclusive.

ACTION: Promote consideration of diversity within research design, and accessibility and inclusivity in research outputs.
INDICATORS: Section included within project proposals and application forms and project report and evaluation templates on EDI considerations and approach.

GOAL 5: Deepen collective understanding of our community and wider digital TIPS EDI environment, e.g. areas of concern, barriers, opportunities.

ACTION: Provide space for sharing of EDI resources and learning among the SPRITE+ community.
INDICATORS: Sharing of resources / conversations / other community activities around EDI.

ACTION: Provide opportunities for community engagement and feedback on SPRITE+ EDI strategy, plans, and policies.
INDICATORS: Opportunities provided.

ACTION: Explore the potential value of, capacity for, and routes to developing a small group of EF and Member EDI champions to support EDI conversations and initiatives within the community, providing a focal point for activities and ideas, and a key contact point with leadership of the organisation.
INDICATORS: Options outlined in future iteration of the EDI plan.

ACTION: When requesting input for newsletters, include as possible items materials / resources to highlight in relation to EDI.
INDICATORS: EDI resources regularly submitted for inclusion in the SPRITE+ newsletter.

Within our organisation

The organisation is made up of the operational and research staff, Management Team, and Advisory Board of SPRITE+.

GOAL 6: Sustain an inclusive organisational culture in which all members feel valued, respected and that they are fairly treated, with equitable opportunities to achieve their potential.

ACTION: For staff employed at the University of Manchester – ensure awareness of institutional policies, processes and support in addressing bullying, harassment and other inappropriate behaviour.

INDICATORS: Documented as part of staff induction / development processes.

ACTIONS: For staff (e.g. research fellows) employed or hosted at other organisations, encourage them to find about corresponding policies and processes. Ensure they also have a clear central point of contact with whom to raise concerns and request support – e.g. within the Management Team.

INDICATORS: Such staff assigned point(s) of contact for this purpose.

ACTION: Encourage take up of institutional EDI training and development activities, and awareness of institutional policies, processes, strategy and plans as well as SPRITE+ ones.
ACTION: Ensure staff have awareness of and regularly utilise institutional professional development activities, including routine discussion of career goals and aspirations with their line manager.

INDICATORS: Discussed and documented within staff induction / development processes.

ACTION: Facilitate flexibility and hybrid working arrangements for staff.

INDICATORS: Application of institutional policies discussed and documented within staff induction / development processes.

ACTION: Ensure that the Advisory Board is broadly representative of our community and stakeholders.

INDICATORS: Board membership broadly representative.

ACTION: Advisory Board chair to actively encourage all members to contribute and to listen to others within meetings.
ACTION: Advisory Board chair and PI to develop additional initiatives that encourage all members to contribute outside of the full meeting setting.

INDICATORS: Evaluative feedback from Advisory Board members.

Cross-cutting goals

GOAL 7: Improved understanding of the composition of our community as a grounding for actions to support EDI.

Background – Enabling a more proactive approach to EDI

SPRITE+ does not yet routinely request EDI data for our organisation or community. While we do not have baseline diversity data for our community, SPRITE+ proactively responds to evidence about diversity in the communities on which we draw, for example through attention to representation at events and in review panels, and tailored support programmes for early career researchers.

Starting to routinely collect and analyse diversity data for our membership, for event participants, for applicants to our funding programmes, and for our organisation, will help identify areas for improvement, areas of effective practice, and inform open conversations with the community about how we can collectively advance and demonstrate leadership in EDI practices.

There are sensitivities around the collection of such data, and we will be very clear that the provision of such data is optional, about the purposes for which it will be used, and about its handling and storage. The benefits in terms of being better able to evaluate our EDI practices and take informed action to improve them, justify making this request of our members.

ACTION: Monitoring EDI data over time and across our activities.
INDICATORS: Updated EDI data collected, analysed and reported.

ACTION: Learning about what works and adjusting and developing our plan and actions accordingly.
INDICATORS: Routine review and updating of our EDI plan, related notes on areas of learning e.g. approaches that had little impact.

GOAL 8: An open and transparent approach to EDI and our learning and adaptation.

ACTION: Open communication and conversations with the SPRITE+ community, being clear about the reasons for our actions and about what we are achieving.
INDICATORS: EDI materials routinely published on SPRITEHub, and highlighted in our newsletter. Outline of community input into development of SPRITE+ EDI activities.

ACTION: Regularly report to our Advisory Board on implementation of our EDI strategy and plan, including challenges and weaknesses.
INDICATORS: Reports provided to the Advisory Board; minutes of Advisory Board meetings.

Responsibilities

The SPRITE+ Management Team has overall responsibility for oversight of delivery of our EDI plan and will report regularly to the SPRITE+ Advisory Board, and to EPSRC, on its development and delivery. The document 'SPRITE+ EDI Plan Chart of Actions, Indicators, Timelines and Responsibilities' provides more detail on responsibilities related to each action.

Any concerns about EDI, for example reporting breaches of the SPRITE+ Code of Conduct, can be raised by email to admin@spritehub.org, and will be reviewed and responded to by the Management Team.

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[i] UKRI, April 2023, 'RGC 3.4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' in *fEC Grants Standard Terms and Conditions of Grants*, UKRI-04042023-UKRI_fEC-Grant-Terms-And-Conditions-April-2023.pdf. Accessed 12.09.23.
[ii] Prince, L.R. and Francis, S.E., July 2023, 'Barriers to equality, diversity and inclusion in research and academia stubbornly persist. So, what are we doing about it?' *Disease Models and Mechanisms*, Vol.16(7). https://doi.org/10.1242/dmm.050048.
[iii] Advance HE, 'Staff Inequalities', https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/governance/governance-and-edi/edi-challenges-higher-education/staff-inequalities. Accessed 12.09.23.
[iv] There is limited data available about EDI issues in academia related to sexual orientation and gender identity, but research indicates particular problems of exclusion and discrimination are experienced by LGBTQ+ academics. See, for example: Reggiani, M., Gagnon, J.D., & Lunn, R.J., 13 January 2023, 'LGBT+ academics' and PhD students' experiences of visibility in STEM: more than raising the rainbow flag', *Higher Education*, DOI:10.1007/s10734-023-00993-2. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-023-00993-2. Accessed 12.09.23.
[v] UKRI, 2020, 'Diversity Results for UKRI Funding Data: 2014-15 to 2018-19', https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-020920-DiversityResultsForUKRIFundingData2014-19.pdf. Accessed 12.09.23.
[vi] Forsyth, A. & Furlong, A., November 2000, *Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Access to Higher Education*, Policy Press / The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/jr092-disadvantage-higher-education.pdf. Accessed 12.09.23.
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[viii] TechTalentCharter, 2023*, Diversity in Tech Report: 2022*, https://report.techtalentcharter.co.uk/diversity-in-tech. Accessed 12.09.23.
[ix] TechNation, 2019, *Diversity and Inclusion in UK Tech*, https://technation.io/diversity-and-inclusion-in-uk-tech/#executive-summary. Accessed 12.09.23.
[x] DCMS, 12 March 2020, *Cyber security skills in the UK labour market 2020*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-security-skills-in-the-uk-labour-market-2020/cyber-security-skills-in-the-uk-labour-market-2020. Accessed 12.09.23.
[xi] NCSC*, Decrypting Diversity 2021 Report*, https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/files/KPMG-and-the-NCSC-Decrypting-Diversity-2021-report.pdf. Accessed 12.09.23.
[xii] DCMS / DSIT, September 2023 Update, '2. Digital skills and inclusion: giving everyone access to the digital skills they need', in *UK Digital Strategy (2017)*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-digital-strategy/2-digital-skills-and-inclusion-giving-everyone-access-to-the-digital-skills-they-need. Accessed 12.09.23.

[xiii] Cabinet Office / Civil Service, 10 May 2022, *Civil Service Diversity Dashboard*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-diversity-inclusion-dashboard/civil-service-diversity-and-inclusion-dashboard. Accessed 12.09.23.

[xiv] Morris, S. et al, December 2021, *Surfacing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion within Academic-Policy Engagement*, Universities Policy Engagement Network, Discussion Document, https://www.upen.ac.uk/what_we_offer/reports/Surfacing%20Equity%2C%20Diversity%2C%20and%20Inclusion%20within%20Academic%E2%80%91Policy%20Engagement.pdf. Accessed 12.09.23.

[xv] UKRI, 15 May 2023, *Guidance for equality, diversity and inclusion*, https://www.ukri.org/manage-your-award/good-research-resource-hub/guidance-for-equality-diversity-and-inclusion/. Accessed 13.09.23.

[xvi] British Council Diversity Unit, June 2021, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/edi-strategy-2021-screen_reader_compliant_0.pdf. Accessed 13.09.23.

[xvii] Various tools and resources available through https://www.britishcouncil.org/about-us/our-values/equality-diversity-inclusion.