UK Metamaterials Network Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

1. Vision and Aim

The UK Metamaterials Network is dedicated to a robust approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI), and EDI principles will be embedded in everything that we do.

Our aim is to help the metamaterials research community develop an inclusive and welcoming culture that ensures equal opportunities for all and in which everyone can thrive regardless of their individual characteristics. Our Executive Board (EB) are committed to the principles and actions outlined in this document.

The Network defines equality as including creating equal opportunity for all (equity) and eliminating barriers like discrimination and bias.[1] Diversity recognises and celebrates differences, including individual, social, cultural, and political differences. Inclusion represents the meaningful action that connects the concepts of equality (including equity) and diversity.

The structure of this policy is based around the six themes in the UKRI EPSRC EDI Expectations. This is an iterative document which will be reviewed and adapted to ensure that we continue to strive for EDI and seek to improve our actions and activities as the Network. The policy will be reviewed on a yearly cycle by the EB in consultation with the Advisory Board (AB) EDI Champion and the wider AB. After each review edits will be agreed by the EB at the next monthly EB meeting.

2. SMART EDI Objectives

The NETWORK has set out three key Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) objectives for the EDI initiatives of the Network. These are not an exhaustive list but are emblematic of the Network's commitment to strengthening EDI in the metamaterials community. They will be reported on to the AB on a biannual basis and progress towards their successful completion will be reviewed on a quarterly basis. The objectives will be reviewed and may be replaced with new, relevant objectives as part of the annual review cycle. The initial three key EDI objectives of the Network are:

1. **to increase diversity of the active membership of the Network** (the Network defines 'active member' as a member attending events and directly engaging with the Network). The Network will establish the benchmark through circulation of the Network's anonymous EDI Questionnaire (Appendix 3). Once this benchmark has been set, the Network aims to reach at least halfway to the STEM statistical average within 3 years.[2] Suitable increments towards this average will be determined by the EB.
2. **to identify a list of advertising routes and networks to promote the Network.** The Network EB will set annual targets for generating links and contacts to disseminate information in each region of the UK, to support diversity and engagement across the UK and to strengthen our

[1] The Royal Society, 'Understanding Unconscious Bias' (November 2015) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE

[2] House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 'Diversity and inclusion in STEM', *Fifth Report of Session 2022–23* (March 2023) https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmsctech/95/report.html

communication networks as an organisation.[3] The initial target is to create a minimum of two contacts in each region of the UK by January 2025. This will enable the Network to communicate effectively with a varied array of demographics and target groups.

3. **to ensure that EDI is incorporated into the Network's portfolio of activities.** This will be achieved by training workshops and discussions within upcoming conferences and events, including sessions to support ECR and mid-career researchers. The EB will review the upcoming series of events forecast for the next twelve months and identify opportunities to provide EDI training within these events or as standalone events. The outputs of these event will be recorded for the Career Advancement Group.

3. Target Audience

The key target groups for this EDI action plan are:

- Event organisers (the leadership team of the Network)
- Event attendees (members and associated non-members the Network)
- Partner organisations, stakeholders and funders

Through embedding EDI across all our activities and working in close collaboration with our community and key partners to achieve the goals outlined in our EDI action plan we will create a diverse and truly inclusive metamaterials community.

4. Governance of EDI in the Network

The EDI governance of the Network is the responsibility of the Executive Board (EB) who will oversee the EDI work of the Network. This will be reviewed and assessed by the AB and the nominated EDI Champion for the Network (the designated individual on the AB responsible for actively promoting a diverse, supportive, and inclusive culture in the Network), following biannual reports to the AB by the EB.

The AB will provide oversight for the implementation of the EDI policy throughout the duration of the Network, through the biannual reports and will review the Network's EDI principles and practice with respect to recruitment, training provision, funding allocation, data collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination.

5. Embedding EDI in the Network

To achieve this, we will:

Goal 1: embed EDI in how we operate.

- continually improving our processes to champion EDI and include individuals identified through the EDI Benchmarking Survey (SMART Objective 1) who are underserved and marginalised in metamaterials and the underlying disciplines (e.g. physics, engineering, etc), and those whose career progression requirements are difficult because of EDI factors;

Goal 2: proactively supporting inclusion.

- recognising the different needs of members (established through event sign up forms and event and general feedback) and offering and supporting practical suggestions of alternate ways to engage with the Network;
- A proactive strategy of engagement to drive the inclusion of underrepresented groups;

[3] The regions as defined in Country and regional analysis: guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) are: England (Greater London, South East, South West, West Midlands, North West, North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, East of England); Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

- providing resources in various formats to enable engagement with the Network;
- proactively encourage participation from all Network members and provide a range of opportunities and routes to contribute;
- design all communication and engagement activities with accessibility in mind.

Goal 3: recognise and reflect on the diversity of the UK Metamaterials Network membership.

- creating a separate form to monitor diversity amongst event attendees;
- distributing the form with all events;
- examining results on a 6-month cycle and reviewing areas where timing of events, location or set up aligns with further feedback to identify problems proactively.

Goal 4: working in partnership with the Network's community to achieve and influence change.

- spotlighting role models through the Network's external outreach media (YouTube, social media, newsletters);
- the Network will act as an introductory space between metamaterials researchers at all career stages. The Career Advancement Group will explore options to facilitate mentorship within the community.[4] At present a mentorship scheme is out of the scope of the Network, until such a time as the Career Advancement Group can undertake a thorough exploration of the best possible method to undertake this;
- linking with on-going physics & engineering diversity programmes.

The Network embraces the process of continual improvement and learning from experience. Throughout the project lifecycle, and in line with our annual review process, we will reflect on what we could improve. We will capture this through feedback forms and a continual open appeal to feedback on EDI from the community to ensure that process improvements, ideas and suggestions are acted upon. This will be achieved through an open Google form and requests for feedback after events to ensure a continuous engagement with the community and by seeking advice from the EDI AB champion.

A culture of openness and trust will be embedded to ensure that there is no blame for things that do not go well first time around, but rather one of reflection and learning from mistakes. The Network will publicise the ways in which it has improved and corrected its practice through a brief annual report. We encourage all network members to contribute to the process of continual improvement by including opportunities for feedback on our website and follow up evaluation in relation to our activities.

Creating an inclusive, accessible and safe environment

Inclusive Environment

All network members are actively encouraged to contribute and are valued regardless of seniority, experience or personal circumstances. We will do this by proactively encouraging participation e.g. inviting contributions from every member, providing a range of opportunities and routes to contribute by organising activities (meetings and events) in different formats.

[4] Having noted the importance of the early careers groups and ED&I in other networks, we will establish a Career Advancement Group within the UKMMN+. It will focus on developing future leaders, as well as those negotiating mid-career obstacles, from under-represented groups, and returning from career breaks, and will identify members for mentoring towards Fellowship proposals.

We expect all members of the Network to behave in a professional manner when engaging with the Network and its members. The Network will not tolerate bullying or harassment by, or of, members of our group in any form. If Network members see or hear something that is exclusionary or inappropriate, they should feel comfortable in challenging it or reporting it (to event organisers, to the info@metamaterials.network inbox or anonymously through the feedback form available on the website https://metamaterials.network/contact/). We will encourage Network members to take training in their own institutions to become active allies.

6. Support career progression and training for Network Members

The Network commits to champion the work of network members, particularly ECRs. We will partner with existing support networks for underrepresented researchers (or help in building those networks) and provide dedicated development opportunities.

Collecting and reporting on sensitive data

In collecting, analysing, and reporting on data, particularly on sensitive diversity data, we will comply with the ethical codes, policies, and best practice in the sector. Sensitive data will be collected, stored, and managed within existing university protocols for managing data within the confines of the GDPR/Data Protection Act. Sensitive data will be treated with the strictest confidence, no information that has the potential to reveal an individual's identity will feature in outputs from the Network (unless otherwise pre-agreed with participants, for example through consent for photographs at events). When collecting, analysing, and reporting on diversity data we will adopt an intersectional and inclusive approach.

Transparency, accountability, and improvement

We will be transparent about the data we collect and annually report on diversity data highlighting both key issues and actions we undertake to address them. The EB will report back on the actions outlined above to enable review of the Network's activities at the 6-monthly AB meetings. Mechanisms such as anonymous reporting and feedback through the form on the website will be used so that any Network members can suggest changes or highlight areas for improvement. The EB will take remedial action where necessary.

Continued Professional Development for Network Staff

The Network will support the continued professional development, career progression and wellbeing of investigators and staff paid through directly allocated costs. Training, mentorship and wellbeing are key priorities for our Network investigators and Network centre staff to ensure they are effective ambassadors for the community.

We have allocated a budget for travel to events and conferences to the benefit of the Network which the investigators can access, to promote networking and professional development, and encourage the Network centre staff to also attend appropriate events to develop their own networks and careers. We will commit to regular 1:1 focussed sessions on an annual basis, with ad hoc discussions where appropriate, led by a member of the Executive Board, to explore how the Network and associated activities can support the career development of the investigators and centre staff. These sessions will be logged and monitored by the central team. We are committed to creating a supportive and respectful work environment amongst the team and wider Network, for those with leadership roles in the Network and central team this will include agreeing to guidelines on best practice for managing workload associated with the Network, and the effective and timely dissemination of information. We are also meticulous about fully acknowledging the personal contributions of each team member in news items and press releases.

Recruitment

The Network is committed to creating a diverse environment and is proud to be an equal opportunity employer. Network provides equal employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, sex, gender, transgender, sexual orientation, disability, age and religion or faith. We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers. We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances.

In instances where staff are recruited through the Small Grants or Pump Prime Funds (as laid out in **Network's Governance and Funding Policy**) the Network requires that grant holders should commit to uphold the Network's EDI policy. We encourage grant holders to offer a range of flexible options that lets applicants tailor the support they need to fit their research goals, career and personal circumstances.

7. Flexible Funding

The EB will ensure that the flexible fund for pump priming, the small grants funds, and the discretionary fund are allocated in a fair, responsible, and transparent manner. The Network welcomes applications and ideas from researchers of all career stages, particularly early career researchers (ECRs), mid-career researchers and those where EDI factors limit progression and will provide support and mentoring to help them to deliver the projects, to allow equality of opportunity. The funding calls will be scheduled in advance as per the project management plan, applicants will be made aware of the calls well in advance to allow adequate time (minimum 4 weeks prior to the call opening) to prepare and in alignment with a set timeline with applications on the 1st Monday of October and March.

Application forms will be kept short to minimise the impact on workloads. Deadlines will be set to avoid bank holidays or school holidays, to avoid disadvantaging those with caring responsibilities. Flexibility will be built in to allow short extensions for those who are unable to meet the deadline due to other circumstances (e.g. religious holidays and medical appointments affecting researchers with disabilities).

The Small Grants and Discretionary Fund applications will be open on a rolling basis, for monthly review by the EB (for further details see the Network Funding Governance Policy. The EB's decisions will be communicated to successful applicants.

To minimise bias in peer review, the review of the final applications for the Pump Prime Funds will be undertaken by an independent Assessment Panel (which will include an ECR representative). Panel meetings will be based on standard EPSRC processes, and the process will be reported on to the AB.

The full assessment criteria are described in the **Network's Governance and Funding Policy**. We will collect demographic information for each research team member, for both applications and awards. This will allow us to compare success rates across differing demographics, backgrounds, and identities.

8. Measuring Success

The EB will monitor and update this plan on an ongoing basis. In addition, the EB will measure the success of this EDI plan by examining engagement in the following areas:

- Membership
- Attendance at events
- Allocation of funds
- Feedback from the Career Advancement Group

- Data Collection
- Feedback from Stakeholders

9. Review Cycle

This document will be reviewed by the Executive Board with the advice of the External Advisory Board on an annual basis. The last date of review was **23rd May 2024.**

10. Feedback and Suggestions

As part of our continual improvement processes, we would welcome feedback and suggestions about this plan. Please contact us, either anonymously through the online form on our website or by email at info@metamaterials.network

Appendix 1: Event and Activity Planning

The Network has committed to organising a range of activities. The Network will:

- engage with, and learn from, underrepresented and marginalised groups as identified through the benchmarking EDI survey, feedback forms and diversity monitoring (this information will be anonymous), to increase the reach of the Network's activities;
- create a safe environment for discussion and reflection, through the application of **Appendix 2: the Code of Conduct** to which all event organisers and leads will be required to commit to prior to the event;
- actively work to remove barriers to accessibility and widen access to initiatives and events. If an event is run in-person it will be located in an easily accessible location for day long events; events will be organised throughout the country across each calendar year; and where possible events will be held within 10am to 4 pm to minimise barriers to attendance for those with caring responsibilities;
- report on events and provide updates on events through the website;
- arrange, where appropriate, for talks to be recorded for dissemination and virtual discussion boards to be provided as an alternative means of gathering views and feedback.
- ensure that events which require attendance in-person, are held in venues that, in addition to standard facilities, are provided with accessible and inclusive facilities (such as level access). Where activities require in person attendance those not able to attend because of EDI factors will not be left out, as alternatives will be arranged where reasonably possible;
- Monitor demographics of event attendance to identify marginalised groups.

Appendix 2: Meetings Code of Conduct

The Network is committed to providing a harassment- and discrimination-free experience for everyone at our events, an experience that embraces the richness of diversity where participants may exchange ideas, learn, network, and socialize in the company of colleagues in an environment of mutual respect.

The Network does not tolerate harassment of event participants, attendees, exhibitors, speakers, volunteers, contractors, service providers, venue staff, or the Network staff. This code of conduct applies to all the Network meeting-related events, including those sponsored by other organizations but held in conjunction with the Network events, in public or private facilities.

Expected behaviour.

- Treat everyone with respect and consideration, valuing a diversity of views and opinions. Be mindful of your surroundings and of your fellow participants.
- Alert Network staff if you notice a dangerous situation, someone in distress, or someone being harassed.

Unacceptable behaviour

- Physical or verbal abuse of any kind
- Unwanted sexual advances, jokes, or comments
- Other examples of unacceptable behaviour include, but are not limited to, unwelcome slurs, jokes or verbal, graphic, or physical conduct relating to an individual's race, colour, religious creed, sex, national origin, ancestry, citizenship, age, gender or sexual orientation; verbal comments or electronic communication that reinforces social structures of domination (such as related to gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance/size, race, age, religion, nationality) or other offensive, non-inclusive remarks; and deliberate intimidation, stalking or following others, verbal abuse, aggressive verbal confrontations, and threats of violence and disruptive behaviour.
- Disruption of talks at oral or poster sessions, or at other events organized by the Network at the meeting venues or at other Network-contracted facilities including those sponsored by other organizations but held in conjunction with Network events, in public or private facilities.

Consequences

- Network staff or venue security guards may take any action deemed necessary and appropriate, including immediate removal from the meeting without warning or refund.
- The Network reserves the right to prohibit attendance at any future meeting.

Reporting unacceptable behaviour

- If you experience or witness inappropriate behaviour, please notify any Network staff, or contact us, either anonymously through the online form on our website or by email at info@metamaterials.network
- Anyone experiencing or witnessing behaviour that constitutes an immediate threat to someone's personal safety should dial emergency services (999 in the UK).

Appendix 3: EDI Questionnaire

UK Metamaterials NetworkPlus Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Survey 2024

The UK Metamaterials NetworkPlus is dedicated to supporting Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) throughout the metamaterials community. So that we can accurately benchmark and then measure the active involvement of all members of the NetworkPlus we have designed this form to collect EDI data.

Collecting EDI data is essential for fostering an inclusive environment and understanding the diversity of our membership. This data helps us identify areas for improvement, tailor our initiatives, and promote a more equitable society for everyone.

All responses are anonymous. The EDI data collected will not be shared with third parties. The data will be treated with confidentiality and used solely for internal purposes to improve diversity and inclusion within our organisation.

All data collected is treated confidentially, stored securely, and only accessible to authorised personnel. Personal information is anonymised or kept confidential to ensure individual privacy is protected.

All questions are optional.

Please only complete this form once per year (end date 31st December).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Survey

1. **Role**

- ◯ Academic (ECR)
- ◯ Academic (non-ECR)
- ◯ Representative from industry or non-academic research organisation
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Other

2. **How would you describe your ethnicity?**

- ◯ White (English, Irish, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh, any other White background)
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Latin American
- ◯ Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
- ◯ Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, any other Black background)
- ◯ Asian or Asian British (Chinese, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, any other Asian background)
- ◯ Other

3. **What best describes your gender identity? (Choose as many as are applicable)**

- [ ] Non-binary
- [ ] Prefer not to say
- [ ] Man
- [ ] Woman
- [ ] Other

4. **Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?**

- ○ No
- ○ Yes
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other

5. **What best describes your sexual orientation?**

- [ ] Asexual
- [ ] Pansexual
- [ ] Bisexual
- [ ] Heterosexual/straight
- [ ] Prefer not to say
- [ ] Gay / Lesbian
- [ ] Other

6. **What is your religion or belief system?**

- [ ] Sikh
- [ ] Jewish
- [ ] Buddhist
- [ ] Agnostic
- [ ] Hindu
- [ ] Muslim
- [ ] Humanist
- [ ] Christian
- [ ] Prefer not to say
- [ ] Atheist
- [ ] Other

7. **What is your age?**

- ◯ Under 18
- ◯ 19-30
- ◯ 31-45
- ◯ 46-60
- ◯ 60+
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Other

8. **Are you responsible for caring for a child, an adult relative/partner, or other person?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other

9. **Do you consider yourself to be disabled? and if so which of the following applies to you? (Please select all that apply)**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Yes - Physical Disability
- ☐ Yes - Learning Difficulty
- ☐ Yes - Mental Health
- ☐ Yes - Long Standing Illness
- ☐ Yes - Sensory (Partial or Total)
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

10. **Any further comments?**

If you feel that the survey was inadequate in anyway or if there were areas for improvement please also provide feedback here.