

# EPSRC CDT in Agri-Food Robotics: *AgriFoRwArdS* Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Update October 2024

## 1. Ambition

Gender under-representation is a primary concern across the computer science, engineering and technology sectors, with only 15% of undergraduates being female<sup>1</sup>. Empowering gender diversity is at the core of our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy, and essential to developing a fully inclusive research environment. Our underpinning objectives are to:

- Attract, recruit and retain the most talented applicants, irrespective of gender, race or background;
- Maintain diversity in the CDT above the sector norms (Table 1);
- Increase female representation within the CDT community, achieving a gender-equal student cohort within 5 years; and
- Upskill the next generation of agri-food robotics researchers around equality, diversity and inclusion.

Table 1: Diversity ambition within the CDT to develop an inclusive research environment

DIVERSITY GROUP	SECTOR BENCHMARKS <sup>1</sup>			CDT RESEARCH COMMUNITY						
	UG	PGR	Acad's	Supervisor Pool		PGR intake (aspiration)				
				Academia (current)	Industry (target)	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
<b>Gender (% F)</b>	15	25	17	31	31	30	40	50	50	50
<b>Ethnicity (% BAME)</b>	28	24	15	16	16	30	30	30	30	30
<b>Disability (%)</b>	10	6	4	Additional support will be provided at each Centre to ensure students with disabilities have equal opportunities within the CDT						
<b>Age</b>	Attracting students who have been employed in industry will provide additional experience to the cohort, and will be encouraged									

## 2. Institutional Framework

### 2.1 Commitment to equality and excellent working conditions

Our approach to EDI is underpinned by the institutional frameworks of the partner universities. All three partners have a fundamental commitment to progressing equality, diversity and inclusion as guiding principles in pursuit of excellence in teaching, learning and research. Commitment to gender and race equality, excellent working conditions and best practice is evidenced through engagement with both the ECU's Athena SWAN and Race Charter Marks, and Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index. All three partners have attained Athena SWAN Awards at the organisation level (Silver for Cambridge and UoL, and Bronze for UEA), and

<sup>1</sup> Computer science, engineering & technology. ECU (2017) Equality in higher education: staff statistical report.

are fully engaged with the relatively new Race Charter. All Departments involved in the CDT hold either a Bronze or Silver Athena SWAN Award, and all three partner universities have published EDI objectives, policies, strategies/action plans and have a range of EDI initiatives in place to support staff and students. All members of the institutions are expected to act in accordance with these:

- UoL (<http://Equality.lincoln.ac.uk>; <http://Eleanorglanvillecentre.lincoln.ac.uk>)
- Cambridge (<https://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/equality-diversity-cambridge>)
- UEA (<https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/corporate-social-responsibility/equality-diversity>)

## **2.2 Commitment to changing culture**

The Eleanor Glanville Institute (EGI) (<http://Eleanorglanvilleinstitute.lincoln.ac.uk>) is a centralised EDI centre at UoL, set up to drive cultural change across the institution, and embed an inclusive culture within the core business of the University. The EGI is responsible for effective EDI intervention, monitoring and reporting across the research environment, as part of the institution's Research Strategic Implementation Plan (2018–21). The Research Director of the EGI (Professor Abigail Powell) has a cross-cutting role within the CDT (Co-I, member of the Steering Board and the EDI Panel lead), and will effectively integrate EDI at all levels of CDT leadership and management, and facilitate proactive engagement with culture change within the research community.

The development of an inclusive research environment within the CDT has been enhanced by the institutional knowledge acquired from the previous CDT EDI lead's EPSRC ASPIRE programme<sup>2</sup> and broader EGI expertise on delivering EDI best practice and monitoring and evaluating meaningful culture change. The Agri-FoRwArdS CDT, and its EDI framework, will act as an exemplar CDT.

Indeed the AgriFoRwArdS CDT EDI framework has already helped shape the successful EPSRC DTP 2020-21 UoL, the ESRC SENSS DTP, and the UKRI SUSTAIN CDT. Further contributions will be made to a UKAEA Fusion Engineering DTP and BBSRC-NERC Doctoral Landscape Award.

## **3. Implementation**

A targeted approach will be adopted to increase diversity and ensure equality at all levels of the CDT.

### **3.1 Leadership and Management**

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<sup>2</sup> ASPIRE (Advanced Strategic Platform for Inclusive Research Environments, EP/S012001/1) was established to provide an evidenced-based mechanism to build enabling EDI strategies, identify and share best practice across the sector and provide impact markers to monitor and evaluate culture change.

- All decision-making and advisory boards / panels will be diverse and of mixed gender.
- All Advisory Boards will be led by male/female Co-chair teams.
- The EDI Panel serves as an authority to which possible equal-opportunity concerns of staff and students can be addressed.

### 3.2 Marketing, Recruitment and Selection

- Photographs used for promotional purposes (e.g. on the Agri-FoRwArdS website) will demonstrate diversity of the students: a significant proportion of individuals featured should be female, and BAME individuals represented.
- Gender-neutral recruitment processes will be adopted. Recruitment adverts will use gender-neutral language and emphasise the desirability of attracting both female and male researchers, with the aim of achieving a diverse and balanced applicant pool.
- The number of projects with industrial sponsorship will be increased to encourage applicants from more diverse backgrounds.
- Anonymised processes will be adopted for short-listing applicants for interview to mitigate unconscious bias, and ensure fairness and equality of opportunity. This process will be overseen by the Centre's EDI Panel.
- All interview panels will have gender diversity wherever possible.

### 3.3 Training, support and development

- Robust EDI training will be provided for staff and students. Staff training in EDI (including unconscious bias) is mandatory at all partner universities. Industry partners will provide evidence of similar training (training will be provided by the EGC, where necessary). EDI training for PGR students at UoL is mandatory and forms part of the induction process in Year 1. This will apply to all CDT students. The CDT will roll out an EDI training programme for all staff and students, developed in consultation with students and the EDI panel.
- Staff and students in the CDT have the opportunity to join mentoring programmes at all partner universities, including '*maternity mentoring*' and '*work-life balance*' support pathways (e.g. <http://eleanorglanvillecentre.lincoln.ac.uk/equality-unit/training-support-for-researchers/pipeline-mentoring-scheme/>).
- All partner universities are supportive of students with caring responsibilities, maternity leave, and provide part-time study routes at PhD level (e.g. [http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/files/maternity\\_paternity\\_policy.pdf](http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/files/maternity_paternity_policy.pdf)).
- All partner universities are supportive of staff with caring responsibilities, and as such enable flexible working and career break opportunities, along with returning-carers'

schemes (e.g. the Academic Returners' Research Fund <http://eleanorglanvillecentre.lincoln.ac.uk/equality-unit/support-initiatives/returners-research-fund/>).

- All core meetings and events will be held within core hours (10am–4pm) to allow staff and students with caring responsibilities to attend.
- All support available for under-represented groups will be explicit on the CDT website.

### **3.4 Developing and maintaining an Inclusive research environment**

- Gender and race diversity in the supervisor pool (academic and industry) will be maintained above sector norms, and where possible, female representation will remain above the WISE target (30%), allowing all supervisory teams to include at least one female, wherever possible.
- Members of the CDT will act as ambassadors for EDI by establishing an EDI Network for staff and students across the three centres. This will be student-led (facilitated by the EGC) and involve regular meetings with informal talks / discussions around topical EDI issues.
- Diversity will be evident in invited speakers, chairs and facilitators.

### **3.5 Monitoring and Evaluation**

- The EDI Panel is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of EDI progress within the CDT, and formal reporting to EPSRC and the external Advisory Board on an annual basis.
- In the first instance, metric-based progress indicators will be used for evaluation (as utilised in recognised standards such as Athena SWAN). For example, annual evaluation against our EDI goals for *applications received* and *cohort students* by gender, ethnicity, age, disability, fees status, previous institution, and previous industrial experience.
- New impact indicators to measure genuine and meaningful changes in EDI attitude and behaviour will be incorporated into annual monitoring procedures during the first 2 years. These are being developed within the EPSRC ASPIRE project.
- The Agri-FoRwArdS-CDT equality, diversity and inclusion strategy will be reviewed annually and updated as required, informed by applicant/cohort data trends and feedback received.