Royal Society Annual Diversity Conference 2018

Roundtable discussions - feedback summary

The roundtable session of the 2018 diversity conference gave delegates an opportunity to discuss the barriers and enablers to diverse leadership, share best practice and suggest ways the Royal Society could support diverse leadership in future. Delegates were given 30 minutes to discuss four questions provided by the Royal Society. Delegates separated into 13 facilitated groups and recorded their observations on paper; these notes were collected by the Royal Society at the end of the session and are summarised here.

The majority of the notes recorded covered questions 1-3, with comparatively fewer notes for question 4. On the whole, discussion tended to focus on the perceived causes of a lack of diversity.

**Question 1: What has worked well to support progression in your organisation?**

A wide variety of examples were recorded.

Key points included:

- Role models, mentoring and coaching.
- Flexibility within a role.
- Supportive networks.
- Clear progression pathways.
- Support from senior leadership to encourage underrepresented groups to apply for senior roles.

Leadership training, training for role models, mentoring and coaching were highlighted as successful tools by several participants.

Delegates observed that supportive networks enable people to discuss shared experience, both good and bad. Small networks are preferable as they enable people to make more meaningful connections with one another.

Clear progression pathways, in particular, schemes or support programmes that allow for flexible working and are tailored to suit individuals, work best. Such pathways were considered to aid staff retention. Conversely, complex and opaque progression schemes lead to frustration and become barriers to development.

**Questions 2: What may be preventing progression of diverse groups in your organisation?**

Common themes included:

- Lack of accountability
- Barriers to recruitment
- A lack of training for management
- Cultural change

Delegates also observed that:

- It is often unclear who is accountable for diversity and inclusion in organisations. This can result in a lack of impetus to implement change. In addition, sometimes great policies are put in place but are not always implemented.

- There are issues around the recruitment process, including: using the same sources/recruitment agents, failing to actively seek out diverse talent, and job descriptions - particularly complex functional language - can put off underrepresented groups from applying for roles.

- Talent pools for senior roles may not be diverse.
- Criteria for progression can hinder those with additional responsibilities - for example, parent/carer commitments.

- Lack of leadership training, in particular for middle management, both in terms of attaining these positions and in the skills or confidence to achieve diversity.

**Question 3: Based on what you have heard at the conference so far, what else might be barriers or enablers to diverse leadership?**

Delegates identified the following barriers:

- Not enough training for new managers.
- Culture: resistance to change and lack of motivation to strive for diversity coupled with an ‘old boy’ culture.
- People who speak out/ask for change risk being labelled as troublemakers.
- Gender bias, using H-index (the metric used to measure the impact, based on the number of citations received, of a scientist’s publications) as a measure of success.
- Fixed term contracts.
- Intersectionality is not taken into account.

Delegates identified the following enablers

- Trailblazing leaders.
- Diverse backgrounds for grants committee members.
- Recognition of diversity work in awards.
- Enforcing targets, official guidelines and laws.
- Encouraging and supporting the majority to in turn support the minority.

**Question 4: Is there anything you think the Royal Society could or should do to support diverse leadership?**

Delegates’ comments included:

- Make work on diversity and inclusion a requirement for grants and awards applicants.
- Provide upskilling workshops for potential leaders.
- Award or recognise groups who have supported scientists, as well as individuals.
- Consider wider issues around diversity including socio-economic status and neuro-diversity.
- Fellows’ mentoring programme and reverse mentoring.
- Review Fellows election criteria to ensure there is no bias.

**Next steps**

The Royal Society would like to thank all delegates for sharing their views and ideas during the roundtable session. The Society will use the suggestions provided during the roundtable to inform its future strategy, and hopes that this summary will inspire other organisations to do the same.