

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework

The TAS Hub aims to deliver world-leading best practices for the design, regulation and operation of ‘socially beneficial’ autonomous systems. We are passionate about establishing and curating a programme that conveys social benefit to citizens from **all** walks of life and reaches out to **all** communities. To deliver our ambition, we have established a set of [guiding principles](#) that underpin our ways of working and decision making; we focus on *openness, accessibility, equality of voice, and inclusivity*.

Core to our inclusive vision for the TAS Hub will be active integration of EDI principles in our research teams, in the research culture we promote, and in how we design research responsibly. We firmly believe that instilling EDI at the heart of what we do will enable us to draw more widely on the breadth of UK talent, enhance research quality, and broaden avenues for impact.

At its inception, the TAS programme brings together 17 of the UK’s universities and research centres, liaising with stakeholders in over 140 organisations, and is anticipated to grow significantly throughout its life. The scale of the TAS initiative therefore provides rich opportunities to explore how we can innovate and promote change to the culture in academic research environments, irrespective of institutional policies and perceived localised barriers.

Our **EDI Framework** and **Implementation Plan** aim to provide clear guidance and map out a series of practical steps that enables our leaders and teams to build EDI into all TAS activities, consistently and cohesively.

Promoting a happy, healthy research culture

A fundamental part of our vision lies in how we promote the importance of *flexible* and *adaptive* research environments, and – crucially – normalise attitudes and behaviours that support this. We want to embrace this opportunity to effect real, positive change for researchers from different backgrounds, with varying roles and responsibilities, and at all stages of their careers. We *must* impress upon our community the importance of equality-of-voice and respect as core values; we *must* listen to individuals who feel marginalised, regardless of intention, subtlety or nuance, and find solutions that enable them to express themselves freely and to feel valued.

The success of our plans for integrating EDI best practice, and indeed the success of the Hub as a whole, depends on our ability to build effective working relationships across multiple institutions. Limited opportunities to meet physically due to geographical separation presents a barrier to developing these relationships, and this has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. While there are benefits to online meetings, not least reduced environmental impact from travel, it is challenging to bring different groups of people together across the portfolio of TAS activities and to build rapport within these groups.

As we move to a post-pandemic world of hybrid, flexible working models and more widespread, long-term use of online meeting tools, we must carefully consider EDI impact, and respond by adapting our plans for encouraging inclusivity.

A common problem in all working environments is a tendency to assume that colleagues have the same availability and capability, with inadequate consideration given to personal circumstances, for

example caring responsibilities or disability. Expectations placed on an individual can be unrealistic, particularly where turn-around is short for completing pieces of work.

Throughout the pandemic, the potential for improving work-life balance as a result of increased home working has been embraced by many. However, there is also significant risk of a perceived increase in an individual's availability, and subsequent pressure to take on additional load or to produce work at a higher rate; frequently, this pressure is not direct nor intended, but stems from whether an individual feels able to keep pace with conversations and make timely contributions.

We will use the TAS platform to introduce measures that encourage positive change for individuals and teams. We will promote the values of respect and freedom of expression. We will recognise the importance of regulating work-life balance for health and well-being. We will provide tools and training to enable our community to learn and develop ways of working that embrace diversity. We will develop strategies to cultivate relationships and trust in teams, regardless of whether interactions are online, in-person, or follow a hybrid model.

PRIORITIES

We aim to:

- **Create** a culture where colleagues feel safe to share
- **Raise** awareness of behaviours that marginalise or discriminate
- **Actively** monitor TAS workload across our teams
- **Recognise**, acknowledge and appreciate contributions

We will:

- **Introduce** standards governing organisation of fully inclusive meetings and events
- **Implement** a system for colleagues to signal availability
- **Advocate** minimum acceptable notice periods for requesting work commitments
- **Ensure** requests for contributions are transparent in terms of workload
- **Consult** colleagues regularly through a survey to identify ongoing issues

Creating diverse research teams

We will identify measures that can influence diversity in research teams, both short-term, i.e., the lifespan of TAS funding, and longer-term. This will involve addressing two fundamental challenges:

1. Diversity in **future talent pipeline** in all specialisms linked to autonomous systems
2. Diversity across the pool of **active researchers** engaging with TAS

In both cases, it is important to recognise the limitations to our spheres of influence and set realistic goals, considering resourcing challenges we might create for project teams that cannot be resolved. Nevertheless, TAS provides the ideal platform to showcase opportunities in research and to engage with hard-to-reach demographics, minorities and communities. To do this effectively, we need to encourage colleagues to consider EDI from both perspectives (active researchers and the talent pipeline), when designing their research and engagement activities. Our task is to ensure this approach rapidly permeates across the wider programme.

The multidisciplinary nature of TAS does introduce challenges around understanding nuanced approaches between disciplines, e.g. use of language, role expectations. Moreover, while all

universities have EDI policies, access to practical advice and strategic approaches to managing EDI may be less readily available. With our **EDI Framework** and **Implementation Plan** – and the regular, ongoing re-evaluation and re-shaping we plan to undertake – we aim to support our community in implementing and sustaining actions that address inequalities, introduce diversity, and promote inclusivity, irrespective of discipline or organisation.

PRIORITIES

We aim to:

- **Advocate** team structures that give a voice to *all* members, including ECRs
- **Champion** and broadcast widely our commitment to promoting diversity
- **Listen** and act to challenge established, problematic ways of working
- **Leverage** the TAS platform to engage the next generation of researchers
- **Challenge** traditional team hierarchies – recognise contributions more fairly
- **Encourage** risk-taking to foster new relationships and explore new research ideas

We will:

- **Develop** a code of conduct and clear process for raising EDI concerns
- **Devise** a set of guidelines for online meetings to fully engage all participants
- **Monitor** *disengagement* – identify and *act* when colleagues withdraw from TAS
- **Share** best practice between organisations to transcend institutional policies
- **Invest** resource to transparently capture, analyse and understand data
- **Measure** diversity in teams to understand representation while respecting data privacy

Building EDI into research design

Inherent to our vision for the TAS Hub, is the concept of responsible research design, and a focus on answering research questions that benefit society and minimise the risk of inadvertent harms. As a research programme focussed on trust in autonomous systems, we will ask our community to situate anticipated AI research outcomes in application pipelines and to take the time to carefully contemplate potential for misuse. We will ask researchers to consider the potential for machine learning algorithms to build on flawed input data, producing biased outcomes.

EDI is at the heart of this ambition for responsible research, with many pitfalls to avoid such as biased design or problematic methodologies devised by research teams lacking socio-economic and socio-cultural diversity. Where diversity in design is not achievable – or not desirable relative to a research hypothesis – our reasoning should be transparent and clearly communicated.

The TAS Hub *must* challenge researchers to consider inclusivity in the real-world applications of their research and the channels they use to engage and communicate with a diverse cross-section of stakeholders and user groups. We need to support researchers to conduct wider stakeholder engagement and provide access to expertise when attempting to engage hard-to-reach demographics with little trust in researchers' incentives. We need to encourage teams to reflect on their diversity, create awareness of gaps in their teams, and devise mitigating strategies. We must also acknowledge situations outside of our control and the impact this may have on our research, such as achieving diverse representation in our extended teams, e.g. research projects involving key industry partners.

PRIORITIES

We aim to:

- **Empower** and recognise stakeholders as members of an extended research team
- **Promote** transparency and communicate reasoning behind research design choices
- **Challenge** researchers to consider research outcome bias and risk of misuse
- **Reward** participants fairly and equitably for their time
- **Maintain** relationships with stakeholders and recognise our gatekeeper role
- **Collaborate** with charities and organisations responsible for representing groups

We will:

- **Agree** baseline expectations for how participants are treated
- **Develop** guidance with case studies to illustrate inclusive research design
- **Anticipate** and systematically reflect using tailored Equality Impact Assessments
- **Expect** project teams to consider extended user groups during study design
- **Convey** research results to participants in an accessible format

Communicating our vision to the TAS programme

We will develop and deliver messaging that clearly articulates the EDI vision for TAS and secures buy-in from our community. We need to prompt colleagues to reflect and evaluate their ways of working, and to persuade them to embrace opportunities for positive change. Key to this will be how we convey potential benefits as being tangible and relevant to their projects and teams.

PRIORITIES

We aim to:

- **Generate** engaging material to connect with the TAS community and stakeholders
- **Identify** realistic targets and share these transparently with our community
- **Reflect** objectively and openly on EDI successes and failures

We will:

- **Develop** resources and case studies to aid learning
- **Circulate** best practice guidance tailored to specific activities in the programme
- **Maintain** accessible and inclusive web resources dedicated to EDI
- **Reinforce** our message by establishing a coherent series of EDI events
- **Appoint** TAS EDI ambassadors dedicated to broadcasting our message
- **Nominate** EDI contacts for each project – create an EDI dissemination network

Delivery

This **EDI Framework** draws together current EDI challenges and the commitments we make to finding solutions that work for the whole TAS community. It is intended only as a starting point and will be re-evaluated regularly by the **EDI Working Group** and adapted as needed to remain relevant.

The details of actions we will take, measures of success, and how we plan to monitor effectiveness are described in our **Implementation Plan**. This will also be owned by the **EDI Working Group**, who will review and update as required.