

BiolmagingUK and the Physics of Life Network Audit

2025 Report and Recommendations

Commissioned by BiolmagingUK and the Physics of Life Network (BiolmagingUK & PoLNET) 2025

Index

Introduction.....	3
Overview.....	5
Data Summary.....	5
Demographic data.....	5
Membership Context.....	9
Social Mobility.....	11
Experiences with BiolmagingUK & PoLNET: Members Opinions.....	13
Culture and Community.....	14
Leadership.....	16
Verbatim Comments.....	18
High Level Recommendations.....	21
Conclusion.....	25



Introduction

About Us

The Equal Group was established to give organisations the tools and support needed to reap the advantages of embracing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Our passion comes from a deep-seated belief that diversity and inclusion cannot only benefit an individual but organisations, sectors and society as a whole. Changing attitudes in the workplace can be a catalyst to how we interact with our colleagues in and outside the office or other environments.

We recognise that embedding EDI is not always easy and our aim is to simplify this as much as possible. We find that many organisations are keen to get involved in initiatives without a clear and analytical assessment of the impact these initiatives have on their stakeholder communities. Often organisations miss opportunities to enhance their EDI outcomes due to a lack of clear vision and intentional focus.

Our approach ensures that organisations leverage qualitative and quantitative data to achieve intersectional, measurable and sustainable EDI progress.

Context

To ensure underrepresented groups can fully participate in the BiolmagingUK & PoLNET activities, the networks have identified three key challenges that they are keen to address. With a membership of over 1,750 individuals, it is crucial to take a collaborative approach which maximises impact and effectively utilises resources across the networks.

One of the primary challenges is gender disparity in conference presentations. Fewer women apply for oral presentation opportunities compared to men, leading to an overrepresentation of men at senior levels in bioimaging and biophysics. BiolmagingUK & PoLNET members have shared that women often feel less confident when delivering presentations and experience higher levels of anxiety. To bridge this gap, BiolmagingUK & PoLNET will provide dedicated support, including presentation skills training and personalised coaching from a professional scientific communicator, to empower women and enhance their confidence.

Another pressing issue is socioeconomic barriers for undergraduates, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds. These students often struggle to secure summer studentships compared to their peers from higher socioeconomic groups. To mitigate these obstacles, BiolmagingUK & PoLNET plan to streamline access to opportunities by curating a list of available projects and supervisors, removing the burden of finding a suitable placement. Additionally, BiolmagingUK & PoLNET will offer



financial support to cover living costs for four weeks, making these summer placements more accessible. Through these measures, they aim to encourage talented undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue careers in bioimaging and biophysics, fostering long-term positive impact.

Finally, scientists with caregiving responsibilities, such as parents and carers often face difficulties in attending and participating in professional meetings, which can hinder their career progression and networking opportunities. To support these individuals, BiolmagingUK & PoLNET has introduced a carers' bursary scheme, providing financial assistance to those presenting talks or posters. This initiative enables them to engage fully in meetings without the burden of caregiving responsibilities preventing their participation.

To ensure that BiolmagingUK & PoLNET interventions effectively address equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) concerns within the networks, a comprehensive survey of its members is required. Gathering EDI data will enable BiolmagingUK & PoLNET to monitor trends, assess impact, and prioritise future support.

Communicating the importance of this data collection to its members will be key to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that continues to evolve in response to membership needs.

This audit will help BiolmagingUK & PoLNET make significant and measurable progress in their EDI commitments and ambitions by implementing a data-driven approach. The audit provides insights into the current environment, supported by quantitative and qualitative results, which are presented in an easy to understand manner.

Our Approach

Our methodology began with collaborative scoping meetings with the BiolmagingUK & PoLNET teams to define audit objectives and align with the networks' strategic EDI goals. We intentionally crafted survey questions through an iterative feedback process with BiolmagingUK & PoLNET stakeholders, ensuring clarity and relevance to capture meaningful insights. Communications narratives and FAQs were co-developed to encourage member participation and address potential concerns. The survey launched in March 2025 with targeted follow-ups and progress updates to maximise engagement, supplemented by ongoing communications support throughout the data collection phase. Quantitative and qualitative responses were analysed to produce this baseline report. We intend for these findings to inform BiolmagingUK & PoLNET's tailored EDI strategy, providing a data-driven foundation for targeted interventions and future progress tracking.



Overview

This section presents a high-level summary of the data gathered from a cross section of the Bioluminescence & Polymers membership; through the survey conducted by The Equal Group.

Responses represent the views of members predominantly based in the United Kingdom (83.6%), with a smaller proportion of responses having been received from members based Internationally (16.5%).

The survey was sent to 1811 members, with 554 members opening the email containing the survey. The survey launched on 6 March 2025 and closed on 14 May 2025.

Response Rates

This report reflects responses from 158 individuals across the Bioluminescence & Polymers network. This translates to a response rate of 28.5%. While a relatively modest response rate, Bioluminescence & Polymers note that engagement with the network's posts typically average around 100 individuals, meaning this survey has exceeded usual engagement levels.

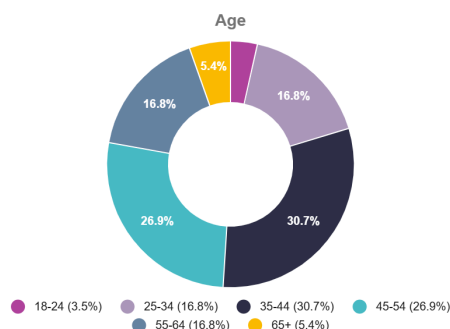
Although the sample represents a proportion of the overall membership, the insights gathered provide valuable perspectives on prevailing attitudes and trends. The findings offer meaningful contributions, serving as a foundation for future data collection and EDI initiatives.

Data Summary

Demographic data

Demographic data has been broken down to provide insight on those who participated in the survey.

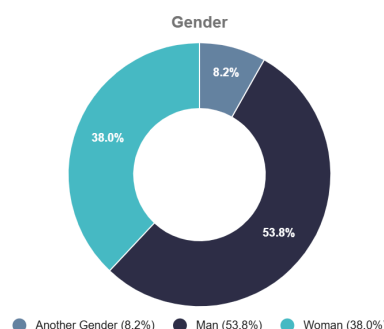
Age	2025
18 - 24	3.5%
25 - 34	16.8%
35 - 44	30.7%
45 - 54	26.9%
55 - 64	16.8%
65+	5.4%



The age profile of those surveyed show most respondents to be ages 35-44 (30.7%), followed by 45-54 (26.9%).

Those aged 25-34 and 55-64 account for 16.8% each and those aged 18-24 and over 65s represent 8.9% combined; nearly a third of the figure recorded for ages 35-44.

Gender	2025
Another gender ¹	8.2%
Man	53.8%
Woman	38.0%



The data for gender records that men account for just over half (53.8%) of individuals surveyed, while women represent 38% and individuals who identify as 'another gender' 8.2%.

The data about men, supports records on gender representation in UK academia, which records that men make up 50.9% of those in academia; in contrast, records on women vary slightly. HESA records that women in academia in the UK account for 48.7%, whereas those surveyed only account for 38%, a difference of 10.7%.² Women are therefore marginally underrepresented at the network.

Data however, on men and women closely aligns with the general workforce population in the UK which shows that males make up 52% of employed individuals and females 48%.³

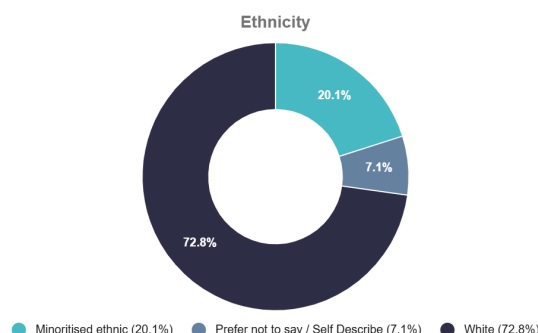
¹ We have merged some gender options and labelled these as 'another gender', to preserve anonymity.

² Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2023/24). *Working in HE – Staff characteristics*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/working-in-he/characteristics> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

³ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023). *Diversity in the labour market, England and Wales – Census 2021*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/diversityinthelabourmarketenglandandwales/census2021#males-were-more-likely-to-be-in-employment-than-females> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025)

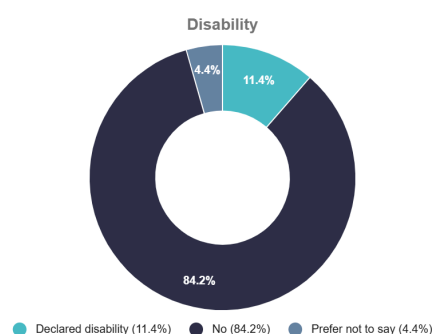
HESA records that those recorded as 'other' or 'not known' in terms of gender, collectively account for 0.4%, in this survey, individuals who fall into this category account for 8.2%.

Ethnicity	2025
Minoritised ethnic ⁴	20.1%
Prefer not to say / Self Describe	7.1%
White (incl. White Other)	72.8%



BiolmagingUK & PoLNET ethnicity data aligns with UK workforce data which records that those identifying as "White (incl: White Other)" represented the highest percentages (74.4%)⁵. BiolmagingUK & PoLNET data also aligns with national figures for "White (incl: White Other)" at 79.6%, as well as HESA data, which records 68.1% of academic staff being White.⁶

Disability or long-term health condition	2025
Declared disability	11.4%
No disability declared	84.2%
Prefer not to say	4.4%



Individuals who identify as having a disability or long-term health condition appear to be notably underrepresented within the BiolmagingUK & PoLNET membership

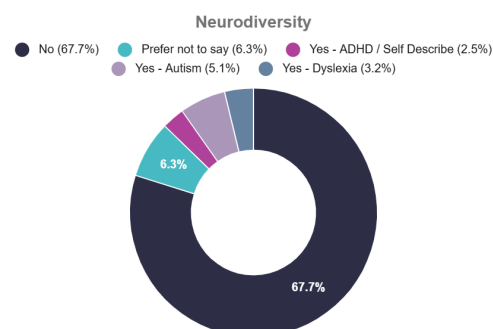
⁴ This includes those that identified as Indian; Any other Asian background; African; Any other Mixed of Multiple ethnic background. We have grouped these identities, due to the underrepresentation of these groups in the data, it is helpful for analytical purposes to group them together.

⁵ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) *Diversity in the labour market, England and Wales: Census 2021*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/diversityinthelabourmarketenglandandwales/census2021#those-who-identified-their-ethnic-group-as-white-other-white-had-the-highest-employment-percentage-across-all-ethnic-groups> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

⁶ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2023/24). *Working in HE – Staff characteristics*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/working-in-he/characteristics> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

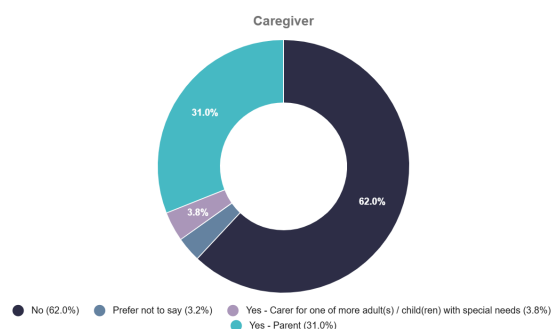
compared to the national position. The data shows that these individuals make up 11.4%, this is half the figure reported nationally for the working population report having a disability (24%),⁷ but approximately double the amount recorded by HESA (6.9%)⁸.

Neurodiversity	2025
No	67.7%
Prefer not to say	6.3%
Yes – ADHD / Self Describe	2.5%
Yes – Autism	5.1%
Yes – Dyslexia	3.2%



Approximately two thirds (67.7%) of those surveyed have declared having no neurodiverse condition, with 10.8% declaring a neurodiverse condition. Of those who have declared a condition, autism appears to be the most prevalent condition (5.1%).

Caregiver	2025
No / Prefer not to say / Self-Describe ⁹	62.0%
Prefer not to say (3.2%)	3.2%
Yes – Carer for one or more adult(s) / child(ren) with needs (3.8%) ¹⁰	3.8%
Yes – Parent (31.0%)	31.0%



62% of respondents do not have parental or caregiving responsibilities.

Just over a third of individuals surveyed identified themselves as parent(s) or carer(s) of one or more adult(s), or child(ren) with special needs (34.8%).

⁷House of Commons Library (2024). *Universal Credit: statistics*. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7540/#:~:text=There%20were%209.58%20million%20people,598%2C000%20from%20the%20year%20before> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

⁸ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2023/24). *Working in HE – Staff characteristics*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/working-in-he/characteristics> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

⁹ Merged to protect anonymity.

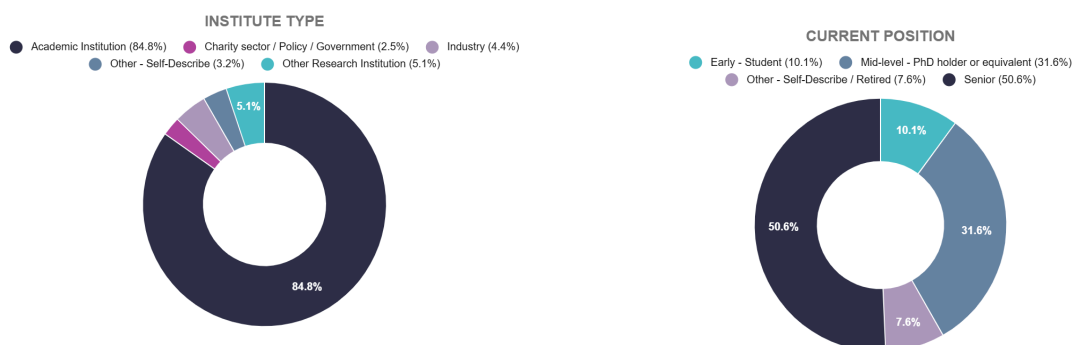
¹⁰ Merged to protect anonymity.

Membership Context



The majority of respondents declared being subscribed to the BiolumagingUK mailing list (40.5%), the PoLNet mailing list (38.6%) or both (13.9%). Therefore, the split between subscriptions to the respective networks is fairly equal and the survey has predominantly been completed by members of either or both networks (93.0%). 4.4% of those surveyed were unaware of the mailing list or unsure that it existed; a relatively small percentage of individuals have not subscribed to the mailing list as they prefer other forms of communication or report receiving too many emails (2.5%).

Nearly a third of those surveyed have been part of the networks for 1–2 years or 4+ years (27.2% and 27.9% respectively). In addition, 16.5% of those surveyed are new to the networks, having joined over the past 12 months and 19% have been in membership for 2–3 years. A minority of those surveyed (9.5%) are unsure how long they have been part of either or both networks.



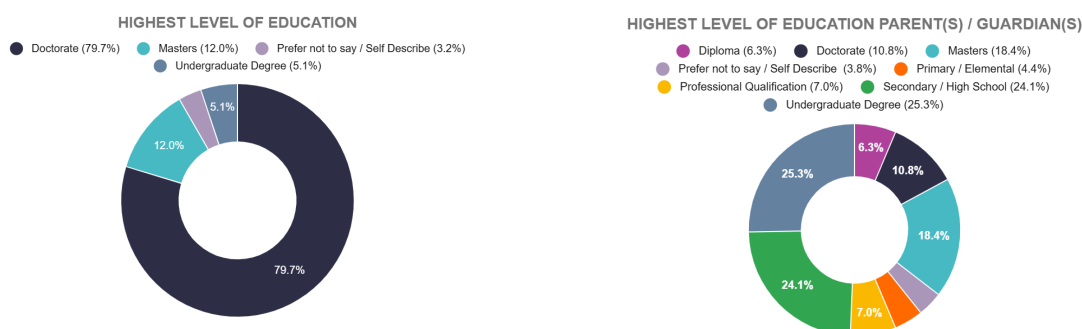
Most of those surveyed work within academia (84.8%), compared to the next most prevalent institution type, which is other research institutions and has significantly lower representation (5.1%).

Over half of those surveyed (50.6%) described their positions within the organisations they work at as senior, followed by mid-level professionals (31.6%). In comparison, only

a few (10.1%) are at an early stage of their career and even less are retired or preferred to self describe their working arrangements (7.6%).

Social Mobility

To support the understanding of the demographics across BiolmagingUK & PoLNET, the EDI survey incorporates measures of socio economic background.



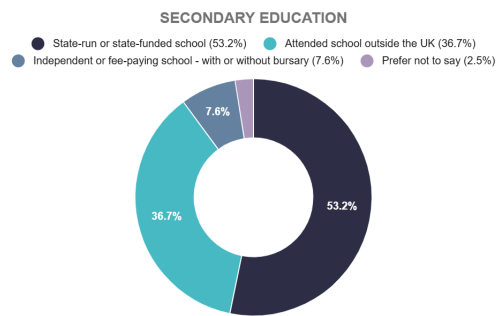
The data show a high representation of individuals educated to doctorate level (79.7%), in comparison to their parents and guardians, where only 10.8% had a doctorate as their highest level of education. A smaller proportion of respondents have completed a master's degree (12.0%), while only 5.1% hold an undergraduate degree; a minimal percentage (3.2%) chose not to disclose their education level or have provided a self description.

Figures for the respondents also exceeded national figures for academia, which record that 51.5% of academic staff are educated to doctorate level.¹¹

The data suggested the surveyed group is highly educated, in contrast to the educational backgrounds of their parent(s) or guardian(s) which shows a more varied position. Parent(s) and guardian(s) of the respondents predominantly hold an undergraduate degree (25.3%), followed by those with a secondary or high school education as the highest form of education (24.1%). A notable portion of parent(s) or guardian(s) hold a master's degree (18.4%), 6.4% more than for the respondents themselves.

Parent(s) and guardian(s) also hold professional qualifications (7.0%), diplomas (6.3%), primary or elementary education (4.4%) as their highest level of education, evidencing a high level of diversity in the case of parental educational attainment.

¹¹ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2023/24). *Working in HE – Staff characteristics*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/working-in-he/characteristics> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

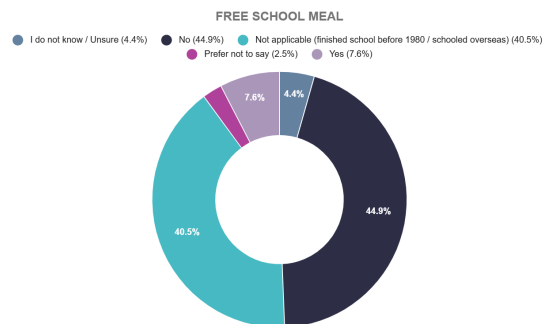


The data indicates the majority of members surveyed attended a UK state-run or state-funded school (53.2%); or were educated outside of the UK (36.7%). Only 7.6% attended independent/fee-paying schools. This figure is slightly above the national average of 5.9%.¹²

A small minority of respondents have chosen not to disclose their educational background (2.5%).

To gain further understanding of the diversity journey of members, the EDI survey incorporates the same measure of socioeconomic background as recommended by the Social Mobility Commission.

Eligibility for free school meals is one of a range of indicators that can be used to measure socioeconomic background (and social mobility, where combined with other questions).

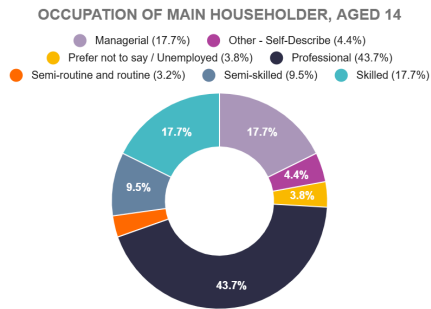


A small proportion of respondents indicated that they were not eligible for free school meals (44.9%), with a similar proportion stating they were not eligible for free school meals because they finished school before 1980 or school overseas (40.5%) Individuals eligible for free school meals are significantly lower, 3 times less than the general UK population, where 23.8% of children are eligible for free school meals¹³.

The relatively low eligibility for free school meals suggests a low representation of individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

¹²Tutorful (2023). *Private School Statistics UK – Independent Schools*. Available at: <https://tutorful.co.uk/blog/private-school-statistics-uk-independent-schools> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).

¹³Department for Education (2023). *School pupils and their characteristics: 2022–23*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2022-23> (Last Accessed: 16 June 2025).



Respondents were asked to indicate the occupation of their main household earner when they were aged 14. The Social Mobility Commission recommends this as the primary question to ask when assessing socioeconomic background.

At age 14, over 60% of respondents indicated the occupation of their main household earner fell into the categories of professional (43.7%) or managerial (17.7%). This includes roles such as Manager, Supervisor and Executive (Managerial) or Doctor, Lawyer, Engineer and Teacher (Professional). On the converse, semi-routine (e.g. factory worker, sales assistant, driver) or skilled labour accounts for smaller shares (3.2% and 17.7% respectively).

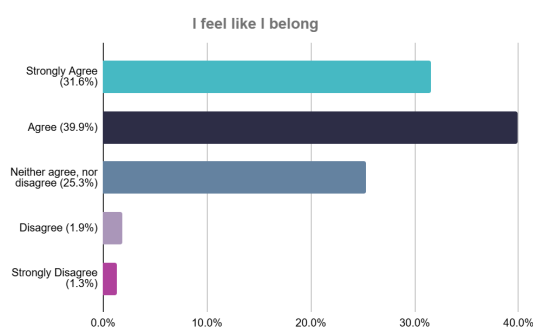
This suggests that many members surveyed originate from middle or upper middle class households, however, the presence of skilled (e.g. electrician, plumber, technician, craftsman) and semi-routine backgrounds (20.9% combined) suggests some diversity in socioeconomic origins.

Experiences with BiolmagingUK & PoLNET: Members Opinions

Respondents were asked a range of Inclusion focused questions centred around, Culture and Community; as well as Leadership. This section details overall responses to all questions asked and provides a breakdown of responses from staff. Some responses shared have helped shape our final observations and recommendations, detailed later in the report.

Culture and Community

I feel like I belong within the BioimagingUK & UK Physics of Life Networks:



The data suggests a strong sense of belonging within the networks, with 71.5% of those surveyed strongly agreeing (31.6%) and agreeing (39.9%) that they belong within BioimagingUK & PoL Networks.

It is worth noting, however, that 25.3% of respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Therefore, this should be monitored over time, to ensure people continue to feel a sense of belonging.

Verbatim comments suggest individuals feel they belong to the networks, which they find welcoming: "Bioimaging UK meetings – always feel productive as well as welcoming and community building" and "I think both are very inclusive and try to engage with a broad community." These responses highlight a strong sense of belonging, with those surveyed describing events as welcoming, supportive, and community-oriented. This sense of belonging is probably felt more amongst those highly engaged with the networks.

Early career researchers (ECRs) note feeling included, with opportunities to actively contribute to the network: "I would say the network did pretty well. As an early career researcher, I felt I was given opportunities to voice my opinions and I was represented suitably in the network." Such structured opportunities foster a sense of belonging and shows how such approaches can be extended to other minoritised or underrepresented groups to ensure all feel equally included.

Engagement with meetings and events, enhance feelings of belonging: "Hybrid meetings enable more people to participate." Funding opportunities also widen participation for some respondents: "I have seen carer grants and travel grants advertised which is great." This means that individuals who may have been excluded due to lack of funds, can participate in the same way as others. The networks should also explore what other barriers exist to engagement and introduce measures to address this.

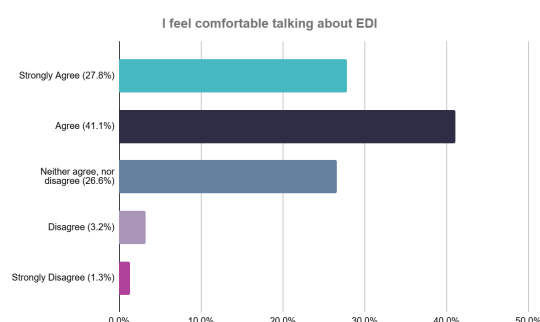
There were instances in the verbatim comments about bullying from seniors or inappropriate comments and behaviors based on protected characteristics or perception of these.

Comments also show that some respondents, although aware of the networks, do not actively participate in the work they do. This gives the networks an opportunity to find meaningful ways to engage such members to ensure individuals do not have a detached perspective on belonging. This may also lead to less neither agree nor disagree responses and a great sense of belonging from all, especially underrepresented groups.

I feel comfortable talking about equality, diversity and inclusion within the BioimagingUK & UK Physics of Life Networks:

Responses to this question show the majority of respondents agree (41.1%) or strongly agree (27.8%) that they feel comfortable sharing their personal thoughts or feelings with peers.

There is a significant number of individuals who neither agree or disagree with the statement (29.6%). It is apparent that a strong sense of belonging and community is felt amongst some members of the network.



Verbatim comments from the survey suggest individuals positively engage with EDI initiatives. For example, one respondent comments that: "the funding and mentoring schemes dedicated to under-represented groups are good initiatives" and another states that: "Asking for pronouns – I think it's good we normalise it so if someone wants to be referred to as 'them', it is more acceptable." Another respondent recalls that: "I think there is often a number of opportunities to engage (polls, questions in person, smaller discussion groups etc.), which can really help a wider audience to engage." These quotes generally demonstrate support for EDI efforts. In respondents explicitly praising initiatives like this, as well as carers grants, hybrid meetings and diverse representations, indicates the culture across the networks is such where people feel comfortable talking about EDI matters.

Despite the positive score for this question, the verbatim comments suggest some discomfort or neutrality when talking about EDI across the network. This may be down to individual lack of engagement with the network, many comment on not being fully engaged with network events and activities, for example: "My interactions with BioimagingUK have been limited, so I have no specific area to point out" or "I'm aware of the UK PoL network from email communications, so in that respect the network does well in maintaining a profile." Some surveyed, also state that things should be left as they are in the networks: "The networks are fine as they are, I cannot see any difficulties", "They seem to have it well designed and I do not see any issues with regards to EDI" or "What they are doing now has been fine, what problem do you want to solve?"

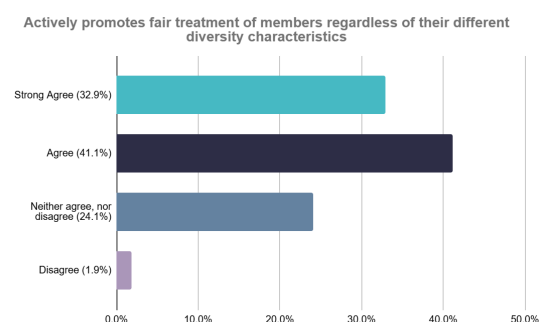
These responses reflect that some members are happy with maintaining the status quo, but could also imply a resistance to a deeper critique of EDI issues. These comments could also suggest a blind spot, for example someone notes: "I feel well supported at PoL network events. However, I am white, cis-male and middle aged, so there may be things I don't notice." Comments like this highlight the need for continued efforts to ensure underrepresented voices are heard, as privilege can obscure barriers others face.

Leadership

BiolmagingUK & UK Physics of Life Network actively promotes fair treatment of all members regardless of their different diversity characteristics:

The majority (74%) of respondents believe that Biolmaging & PoLNET actively promotes fair treatment of all members, with 24.1% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 1.9% disagreeing.

Although sentiments are largely positive, it is important to understand why so many individuals neither agree nor disagree with this statement and to ensure consistent practices across the networks.



Respondents note that the networks: "Recently started offering financial support to attend for those with caring commitments." This highlights the networks' proactive efforts to remove financial and structural barriers; ensuring fair access for members with caregiving responsibilities, this initiative appears to be supported and celebrated by individuals across the network.

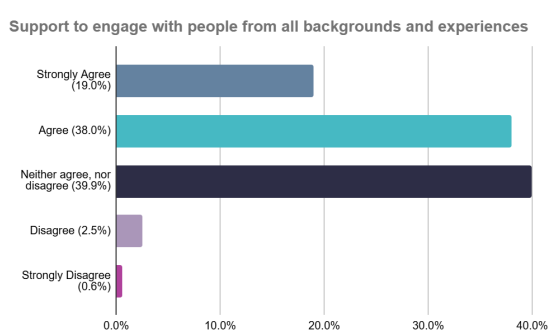
Many comment on the lack of diversity of conference speakers and the need to strive "for an inclusive speakers list and representation from around the UK." Showing the desire for speaker selections where speakers are from diverse demographic and regional representation. This would help the networks demonstrate a commitment to equitable visibility and opportunity for all.

A further way to increase fair treatment for all is through accessibility and hybrid engagement: "Hybrid meetings enable more people to participate." However, some report that there are not enough such meetings. By offering hybrid and recorded events, the networks ensure fair participation for those who cannot attend in person due to location, disability, or other constraints.

Normalising the use of pronouns and inclusive language, foster an environment where members' identities are respected, promoting fairness in interpersonal interactions. For example, respondents comment that: "Asking for pronouns – I think it's good we normalise it so if someone wants to be referred to as 'them', it is more acceptable" and another states: "They do not define scientists by their gender or ethnic origin in meetings and communications."

Members with minimal interaction felt unable to assess or comment on the impact of fairness, indicating a need for broader outreach to ensure all voices are heard: "I cannot judge how much these actions support/consider aspects of inclusion and diversity" and "But because neither have tangible data on how good that reach is, it's difficult to know how to do better." These quotes reveal a desire for measurable outcomes to confirm that fair treatment is effectively implemented across all groups.

BiolmagingUK & UK Physics of Life Network provides me with the support (including training, safe spaces, mentoring etc.) I need to engage with people from all backgrounds and experiences:

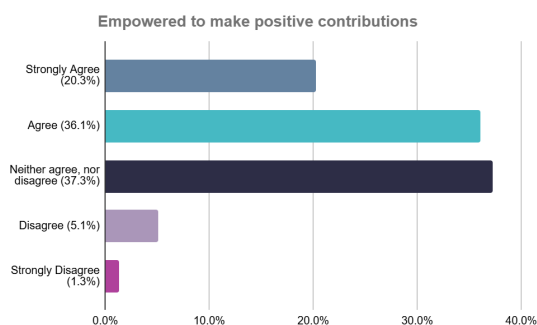


Nearly half of those surveyed (47.0%) agreed that Biolmaging & PoLNET provides them with the support needed to engage with people from all backgrounds and experiences. This suggests individuals would be comfortable speaking with colleagues about equality, diversity and inclusion matters.

As seen with previous questions, there is a considerable proportion of neither agree nor disagree responses (39.9%); suggesting that although individuals are generally willing to discuss EDI and engage in training some are uncomfortable to do so.

Verbatim comments suggest the networks provide meaningful support, however, the networks have an opportunity to engage in proactive outreach and evaluation to ensure all members benefit from initiatives equitably. One comments how the networks: "work very hard to include everyone and give equal opportunities to all" and another comment states: "My experience with PoUNET tells me that they work extremely hard to make this Comments record that the networks offer mentoring, funding, safe spaces, and interactive training to facilitate cross-background engagement, however, the lack of engagement from some members call into question whether this support has been felt by all.

I feel empowered to make positive contributions to the Bioluminescence & UK Physics of Life Network:



Another positive response with 56.4 % of respondents feeling empowered to make a positive contribution to the network. Negative sentiments are negligible (6.4%). That said, 37.3% neither agree nor disagree, it is important for Bioluminescence & PoLNET to explore this further to ensure the network gets the best from members and vice versa.

In the verbatim comments, ECRs mention having platforms to share ideas, suggesting the networks actively empower emerging scientists to contribute meaningfully.

Some commented that the networks "promote those from a range of gender and ethnic identities to present their work", however there were views that diverse voices are still not being heard, specifically in leadership and presentations. The networks should increase this to ensure a sense of empowerment and belonging among underrepresented groups.

Of the leadership, one respondent notes: "The team are genuine and lovely people and very resourceful scientists and administrators. Top job." This suggests some view leadership as approachable, however, in the absence of many comments about leadership it is difficult to make definitive comments. This is something for the networks to monitor over time.

As highlighted above, the networks successfully empower active participants, however, broader inclusivity requires intentional strategies to uplift all voices.

Verbatim Comments

Below are some qualitative responses from Bioluminescence&PoLNET members:

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Efforts	
"Asking for pronouns – I think it's good we normalise it"	Shows the networks' proactive steps toward gender inclusivity and inclusive communication/language.
"They do not define scientists by their gender or ethnic origin in meetings"	
"Carer's grants seem very useful"	Highlights practical support for members with caregiving responsibilities and

"Recently started offering financial support to attend for those with caring commitments"	indicates evolving, responsive policies to meet members needs and reduce structural barriers.
"Hybrid meetings enable more people to participate"	Demonstrates commitment to accessibility and inclusion.
"Include diverse speakers in conference, etc." "Striving for an inclusive speakers list and representation from around the UK"	Evidences a direct call for representation in programmes and events, including geographical representation.
"I think the funding and mentoring schemes dedicated to under-represented groups are good initiatives"	Recognises and celebrates the impact of targeted support for underrepresented groups.
Sense of Belonging & Community	
"Bioimaging UK meetings – always feel productive as well as welcoming and community building" "I feel well supported at PoL network events" "My experience...tells me that they work extremely hard to make this space inclusive" "Physics of life events have been well publicised and provide good opportunities for networking"	Highlights a strong sense of community identity and belonging.
"Summer/Winter schools are amazing...feels like a longstanding tradition"	Shows how established programmes can foster belonging.
"The team are genuine and lovely people and very resourceful scientists"	Human-centered leadership builds trust and helps members engage.
"The work very hard to...give equal opportunities to all" "Provide equitable opportunities for professional growth"	Perception that the leadership are instrumental in promoting fairness in access and facilitating career development.
Empowerment & Contribution	

"As an early career researcher, I felt I was given opportunities to voice my opinions"	Direct evidence of empowerment for ECRs, giving them a voice and opportunities.
"The promote those from a range of identities to present their work"	Active platforming of diverse voices celebrated.
"Smaller discussion groups etc....can really help engagement"	Appreciation of how intimate formats can amplify voices and increase engagement.
Areas for Improvement	
"I cannot judge how much these actions support/consider aspects of inclusion" "But because neither have tangible data...it's difficult to know how to do better"	Calls for clearer impact assessments and measurable outcomes which are shared with members.
"I have not attended any events or activities" "My interactions...have been limited, so I have no specific area to point out"	Reveals engagement gaps and a need for broader participation from all members.
"What they are doing now has been fine, what problem do you want to solve?" "Opportunities...are open to all so I don't see any major inclusion issues"	Reveals potential complacency about EDI and oversight of systemic barriers some face.
"I am white, cis-male and middle aged, so there may be things I don't notice"	Acknowledges privilege and blindspots.

The verbatim comments reveal both strengths and opportunities, from strong community building and practical EDI measures to needs for better impact measurement and broader engagement. The quotes collectively paint a picture of a network making genuine efforts toward inclusion, with room to deepen and systematise these initiatives. The personal testimonies about belonging and empowerment are particularly encouraging, while the calls for data and broader participation point toward meaningful growth areas.

High Level Recommendations

Recommendation	Justification	Priority
Theme: Data-Driven Impact Assessments and Monitoring		
Biolmaging & PoLNET need to ensure they create an EDI impact dashboard with standardised metrics. Time needs to be spent ensuring this aligns with the networks' visions, strategies and aims. Outcomes and impact insight need to be transparent and shared with members, with a clear articulation of the need for the collection and monitoring of this data. The networks should commit to periodic pulse checks or annual EDI audits on inclusion metrics and publish progress along with initiatives to address any gaps. This ensures accountability and that EDI efforts are not seen as performative but well thought out and backed by data.	Qualitative responses reveal gaps in assessing the effectiveness of initiatives across Biolmaging &PoLNET, along with a lack of understanding of the need to prioritise EDI. The data suggested this is not widely understood by all members, nor is the EDI agenda fully embedded or accepted across the board. A metrics framework tracking, for example, participant demographics, grant outcomes, speaker diversity etc; would allow for evidence-based improvements and demonstrate accountability. This will also help members gain tangible insight into the need for a robust EDI programme and its resulting impact. From the verbatim comments some respondents do not see the value or need for EDI work, therefore a cultural shift is necessary to bring members along on the journey and a data driven approach will solidify the need for this.	HIGH
Theme: Proactive Community Engagement		
Biolmaging & PoLNET should engage members, to increase engagement and foster a greater sense of commitment	The qualitative section of the survey reveals a relatively high level of 'neither agree, nor disagree' responses, especially with regards to the question relating to the support Biolmaging &PoLNET provides to help members	MEDIUM

towards EDI progress. Encouraging those at the peripheries of the networks to fully engage with the networks' activities. The voices and lived experiences of all members (but specifically historically minoritised groups) should be a priority, so that barriers to engagement can be understood and addressed.	engage with each other regardless of background and, being empowered to make a positive contribution to the networks. Although the survey suggests a culture of belonging, the verbatim comments highlight that many still sit on the sidelines of the network, suggesting not all feel this sense of belonging. Biolmaging & PoLNET needs to expand outreach to less engaged members to ensure their needs are being met and they can fully participate in all the network has to offer. The success of intervention for ECRs and amplifying their voices should be afforded to other underrepresented or minoritised groups. The verbatim comments provide evidence that some women, minoritised ethnics, early career researchers, mature colleagues, international colleagues, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and those with disabilities or long-term health conditions may be facing barriers, so interventions needs to be considered to ensure that they are fully engaged in the networks and their voices are heard.	
Theme: Behaviours		
Biolmaging & PoLNET should consider creating or commissioning EDI training to clearly highlight its stance on bias and inclusion and also use this as an opportunity for Biolmaging & PoLNET to reaffirm its commitment to EDI and zero tolerance of prejudice and bullying.	Some members have reported instances of name calling, unwanted advances, microaggressions and "bullying". This is something that Biolmaging & PoLNET should take seriously, all members should be helped to understand the benefits of EDI to all. Bias, bullying and exclusionary behaviours should be called out and training created to help members navigate this area and work towards an inclusive, progressive membership where everyone is valued and accepted.	HIGH

Theme: Investigate and Remove Barriers to Participation		
While carer grants have widened participation for caregivers and funding for ECRs. Biolmaging & PoLNET should seek to understand and address the barriers other members are facing.	Qualitative responses show there are many barriers to members engaging fully with the network. The main barriers appear to be geographical barriers, which disproportionately affect those not based in major cities, like London, Oxford or Cambridge. Colleagues have also perceived systematic biases (e.g. a preference for prestigious UK based institutions or doctoral holders), this marginalises international and non-traditional researchers.	LOW
Theme: Speaker Representation		
Biolmaging & PoLNET should diversify its speaker pool, so that the perception across the network is that speakers are not just "White and British" speakers. To ensure this is the case, the networks should implement a structured diversity framework with clear targets for underrepresented groups to ensure a balanced speaker/ trainer line-up.	Although some of the verbatim comments suggest that speakers are diverse, many state that speakers and trainers are not diverse. Speakers and trainers should reflect underrepresented groups, this will help remove bias and promote inclusion. Biolmaging & PoLNET should proactively engage with underrepresented communities, organisations, or networks, promoting formal mentorship programmes and interventions for underrepresented groups. A structured framework will address the call for "diverse speakers" and remove the risk of tokenism. Additionally, regional representation should be prioritised by reserving slots for institutions outside elite hubs like Oxford/Cambridge, aligning with member requests for "representation from around the UK." These steps ensure events reflect the network's full range of diversity rather than recycling the same visible figures.	MEDIUM
Theme: Accessibility at Events		
Biolmaging & PoLNET should mandate hybrid formats at events, considering closed	Individuals have expressed the need for hybrid meetings, the use of subtitles and availability of recordings after events.	MEDIUM



captions, and recordings for access after events.	Language used at events and in communications should be inclusive of diverse perspectives and cultures, embracing all identities. Members should be given the opportunity to engage fully with content and process the material(s) presented. This will lead to greater levels of inclusivity, but will also accommodate people's varying needs. EDI considerations should be central to all events and thought should also be given to how to engage international and disabled members, paying attention to language and communication barriers.	
--	--	--



Conclusion

The EDI survey provides a detailed and insightful overview of the current state of equality, diversity, and inclusion within BioImaging & PoLNET. The findings highlight both progress and areas requiring further attention to ensure that all members, particularly those from underrepresented groups, can fully participate and thrive.

The survey revealed insights about demographic representation. Women are underrepresented compared to national academic figures. Minoritised ethnic groups align with national workforce data but indicate room for improvement. Additionally, individuals with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions are underrepresented compared to national figures, suggesting potential barriers to access and/or inclusion. Socioeconomic data shows members predominantly come from middle or upper-middle-class households, with low representation from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The survey identified key challenges hindering inclusivity. Verbatim comments suggest gender disparity persist, with women facing barriers in engaging with conference opportunities (both speaking and attendance), leading to underrepresentation especially at senior levels. Socioeconomic barriers also exist, as students from lower-income backgrounds struggle to access opportunities like summer studentships. Scientists with caregiving responsibilities encounter difficulties attending professional events, though the carers' bursary scheme has been a positive step toward addressing this issue.

A strong sense of belonging exists among active members, however, there are a large number of neutral responses (neither agree nor disagree), indicating a need for wider engagement. There is also a need to increase inclusive dialogues, evidenced by the fact that although many members claimed they feel comfortable discussing EDI, a significant portion remain neutral, and some verbatim comments suggest discomfort or resistance to deeper EDI discussions.

Most respondents believe the networks promote fair treatment, with a significant proportion of neutral responses, highlighting inconsistencies in perceived treatment. Support for engaging with diverse backgrounds is acknowledged, however the high level of neither agree nor disagree responses indicate potential gaps in outreach and awareness. Early career researchers noted positive experiences with mentorship and platforms to share ideas, however, broader inclusivity requires intentional strategies to ensure all voices, especially from underrepresented groups are heard.

There is evidence to suggest that geographic and institutional variances have the potential to alienate or marginalise members outside of major cities or elite institutions. Financial constraints and lack of hybrid/accessible event formats further



limit engagement for some groups. Comments revealed a need for more diverse speaker representation, regional inclusivity, and proactive measures to address systemic barriers.

To address the findings, the networks should prioritise data-driven impact assessments by developing an EDI dashboard with standardised metrics. Proactive engagement is essential to reach less engaged members of the networks, particularly underrepresented groups. Behavioral training should be considered to address bias and exclusionary behaviors, while participation barriers can be reduced through diversified funding, hybrid event mandates, and improved accessibility for existing forums and event formats. Structured frameworks for speaker and leadership diversity, will ensure equitable representation.

The networks have made commendable strides in fostering inclusivity, as evidenced by the positive feedback on initiatives like carers' bursaries and hybrid events. However, the survey highlights the need for a continued systematic, data-driven approach to address persistent disparities. By implementing the recommendations, Bioluminescence & PoLNET can transform their EDI commitments into measurable outcomes, ensuring all members feel valued and empowered. Sustained effort, cultural shifts, and collective accountability will be key to creating an environment where diversity is celebrated, equity is practiced, and inclusion is the norm.