University of Amsterdam
Institute of Physics

# Executive Summary

# From Intention to Impact

## An analysis of the Equity and Inclusion survey at the UvA Institute of Physics (IoP)

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# Introduction

This document summarises the analysis of the IoP survey on equity and inclusion. The survey outcomes disclose experiences and perspectives of IoP employees on aspects of equity, inclusion, diversity and belonging, and their encounters with racism, sexism and other mechanisms of exclusion in the institute and the broader physics community. Respondents were also invited to share ideas and perspectives for improvement and prevention. The survey was developed and executed by the IoP manager Joost van Mameren and PhD/PD council members Evita Verheijden and Jaco de Swart. The institute management and the PhD/PD council have extensively consulted with the UvA Chief Diversity Officer team, the Faculty Diversity Officer at the Faculty of Science, and the newly installed IoP Diversity & Inclusion Council while designing this survey. ECHO, Expertisecentrum Diversiteitsbeleid analysed the by the IoP collected, edited and anonymised survey data.

The survey consists of quantitative and qualitative elements, analysed using Qualtrics software. Out of the institute's 250 employees, 105 (42%) persons filled in the survey, of whom 28 persons partially completed the survey. For this executive summary, a selection of the responses is used to illustrate how practices take shape within the context of the IoP. A more extensive selection of quotes is purposefully integrated in the full report to explain the noted developments but most of all to acknowledge and appraise the experiences of employees of the IoP.

# Key Findings

Overall, respondents attribute a high level of importance to diversity in the institute and report positive experiences of belonging. Despite the shared importance of diversity, respondents find room for improvement within the IoP. The survey showed that the majority of respondents are aged 21–49 and identify as (cis) male, heterosexual, white and Dutch. Respondents show they are most comfortable discussing issues surrounding discrimination and harassment with colleagues. A relatively large number also mention talking about these issues with supervisors, IoP management and the IoP secretary.

While most respondents are comfortable discussing harassment, some also noted that it is not always easy:

> *"Harassment is usually not obvious. When the moment comes that one him/herself finally acknowledges it, it is still a big step to discuss it with a supervisor who then also has to recognize this, probably of a known colleague, which in the first place usually sounds incredible."*

## Racism

24 of 83 respondents have experienced or witnessed racism in the IoP and broader physics community. These took the form of, for instance, institutional racism, racial discrimination or misuse of power. One participant recalled:

> *"At the IoP level, it was having my skin color compared to a suntan or being told that I could use the "color card" in discussions about equity and inclusion for grant proposals by senior staff. Outside of IoP, it was marginalization and the wrong attribution of scientific contributions and credit in large collaborations."*

In the cases where respondents reported incidents of racism, it did not lead to noticeable action. Respondents also noted the changing nature of racism and the need for white employees to educate themselves on the topic:

> *"The meaning of the word "racism" and the set of phenomena that it entails has broadened substantially over the last ten years. As a white person, talking about the topic requires the willingness to learn and extend the horizon. This is good in many ways, but not necessarily comfortable."*

Respondents who experienced racism first-hand indicate that these events have had (long-lasting) effects on their well-being and performance. As one participant noted:

> *"As I work in a mainly white department, I am constantly fearful of talking about racism and being accused of "tokenism" and "victimhood" and using the "color card." I am also one of the few people of color in IoP […]. I have also had negative experiences with NL senior physicists telling me that they are color blind and minimising all aspects of racism."*

Similarly, one participant noted:

> *"It is something I have lived with all my life and normalised, but in the recent five years […] I have had to start educating myself and confronting the trauma of racism. With the rise of populism, it is something that I am aware of and reminds me of my childhood where I was used to receiving racist abuse (i.e. taking a train, bus, I am always prepared to absorb racism). The BLM movement also took quite an emotional personal toll […]."*

Finally, another participant note:

> *"Racism [negatively impacts my] sense of belonging which affects my concentration. Recruitment or visits of highly qualified researchers can be hampered by racism. Indeed, they can be victims of racism during their visit (when they come from a foreign country) or they can have a distorted view of their qualifications (when they are nationals of a Western country, and because of racism have been led to believing that they were inferior)."*

## Sexism

37 (11 females) of 102 respondents experienced sexism in the workplace. 51 (15 females) of 80 respondents experienced and witnessed sexism in the broader physics community. Sexism experienced by employees took various forms, including the following:

> *"At conferences, I have experienced women not taken seriously by members of the international scientific community, leading to comments, questions, and treatment that male presenters would not receive."*

In a similar vein, another participant noted the nuanced ways in which sexism takes place:

> *"My experiences with sexism are all mild things - on the whole, the IoP has always provided an inclusive and welcoming environment. In most incidences, someone just made either an uncomfortable joke or some off-hand comments along the lines of 1) Women aren't expected to continue their academic career to a high level because at some point, surely, we'll want to settle down and start a family. 2) Many women who have recently been promoted to a higher position have benefited from positive discrimination, e.g., by institutes trying to become more diverse by hiring more women. Here the implication is that these women are commonly not as deserving of their new position as some of their (male) rivals. 3) Women generically work less hard and with less dedication. 4) Women are typically worse at things like maths and numerical computations. 5) Women are less emotionally stable, and more susceptible to burnouts and breakdowns. 6) Women have less authority, and when giving presentations you should be aware (as a woman) that the audience will often be less inclined to take you seriously from the get-go."*

In almost all cases, respondents who reported these incidents feel that it did not result in noticeable action. Most respondents who experienced and witnessed these incidents did not report them. Amongst others, this was because they did not know where to report these incidents, feared the consequences of reporting them, or did not consider the incident serious enough. As one participant noted:

> *"I find that in general, one has to try very hard to convince people that it even exists. I have tried speaking to colleagues who, for instance, blame the wage gap on the fact that females do not hold high-paying jobs. This is untrue, but they cannot be convinced. It is extremely tiring to argue each point one person at a time. There needs to be collective action and education."*

## Other mechanisms of exclusion

Respondents experienced discrimination based on other factors, such as their phase of life, professional socialisation, religion or sexual orientation. Age/phase of life was the most often experienced act of discrimination but almost always combined with another dimension of diversity: professional socialisation, social class and/or sexual orientation. A participant reported:

> *"Often, they don't know anything about my ethnicity but make assumptions about it. I was also told by a colleague that I should apologize on behalf of the Muslim population [because of] ISIS. I am an atheist [...]"*

Reporting on discrimination based on sexuality, one participant noted:

> *"Public homophobic comments and statements being stated as acceptable when awarding scientific prizes by senior physicists."*

One of the respondents expressed resistance to the implementation of measures that enhance diversity and inclusion in the IoP. For some respondents, an intersectional (Crenshaw, 2018) approach provides the necessary framework to help understand their personal experiences. One participant noted:

> *"I have absolutely experienced gender diversity being prioritized and negatively impacting me as a woman of colour. The lack of understanding of intersectionality is quite immense in physics, and what has taken me aback, is the lack of awareness on this issue with white women colleagues and peers."*

# Conclusions

The survey outcomes confirm the necessity for the Institute of Physics to intentionally focus and act on aspects of *equity, inclusion, diversity* and *experiences* of *discrimination*. The survey also showed an appreciation of respondents for raising awareness and providing an opportunity to share and reflect on these issues. Experiences of discrimination are always a reason to act but not the only reason to develop equity, inclusion and diversity strategies. Although worldwide social movements like #MeToo, #ShutDownSTEM #BlackLivesMatter and #AsianLivesMatter served as accelerators for change, "strong evidence is emerging that equity is correlated with better academic performance measures" (Feder, 2021). The survey is an intentional act and policy statement communicating the level of commitment of the IoP management. With the survey, IoP's equity and inclusion aims are more than a value proposition because it also addresses issues that are often experienced as uncomfortable. The IoP can make informed decisions and develop tailor-made actions that are relevant and therefore more applicable to the context of the IoP since context matters. The survey can be seen as a "means of doing", a unit of measurement to document diversity (Ahmed, 2012).

*Diversity*

The part of the survey on individual characteristics provides a 'snapshot' of the representation of respondents based on different identity dimensions, positions and departments within the IoP. It can serve as a baseline metric for diversity. The IoP is diverse on specific dimensions of diversity, like age group and ethnic background, given the share of international staff, but less diverse on gender and racial identity. Assessing the diversity balance based on the separate identities of diversity is not enough since diversity is a means to an end. These metrics are more relevant if combined with data on the type of positions within academia, (leading) roles in research committees/projects, number of funding grants, publications and citations. This will give a better sense of the level of (under)representation and the (in)equity in payment, academic position and power balance within the institute. Creating a level playing field within IoP requires a multi-dimensional approach in the short and longer term.

*Inclusion, Equity and Exclusion*

The part on individual experiences of equity, inclusion and diversity within the IoP focuses

on the sense of belonging, the importance of diversity and career choices, and experiences of racism, sexism and discrimination within and outside the IoP. The outcomes of individual experiences of feeling or being excluded or witnessing others being excluded give insight into the challenges respondents encountered and witnessed with racism, sexism and other mechanisms of exclusion. The qualitative reflections are open and offer revelations that cannot be ignored. Even though the number of these revelations is low and will probably not have statistical significance on an institutional level, it is still significant to the person sharing the information. The reflections show that facing racism, sexism or other mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination of any kind impacts a person's peace of mind and can eventually have other unwanted effects. This way, the open door to more diversity becomes a revolving door with a loss of human potential and human capital.

The survey shows collegiality among respondents by providing support to victims if they witnessed encounters of discrimination or confrontations with perpetrators. Most of the respondents discussed their experiences with colleagues. Conversations with colleagues give a sense of safety and serve as informal, safe spaces. In general, respondents feel comfortable discussing issues of harassment and discrimination with a supervisor or the institute management. But when asked which action respondents took in case of racism, sexism and discrimination, reporting or discussing with a supervisor or management is not an option chosen often. This is not because of a lack of trust but because of a perceived lack of vocabulary on inclusion and exclusion and 'spaces' to discuss these experiences combined with a lack of transparency on existing procedures and provisions. The fact that employees could share experiences of racism, sexism and other mechanisms of exclusion anonymously, knowing that the institute management is involved, is essential for being acknowledged—this way, the institute takes ownership of the situation. By doing so, the IoP prevents victims of racism, sexism and other mechanisms of exclusion from becoming the problem when reporting these experiences. "To point out what is blocked is to be experienced as the blockage point" (Ahmed 2012).

The survey shows that discrimination, in general, is also a reality within and outside of the IoP and within the physics community, especially for academic staff who do not represent the majority. The increased attention in the past years to the gender gap and sexism is noticeable in this survey. There is less hesitation to open up and share experiences, and there is a general commitment toward the importance of diversity and a willingness to tackle sexism. It is, however, less common to talk about experiences of racism. Talking about racism is often experienced as sensitive and less customary, let alone normalised. There is a need for vocabulary and knowledge and, therefore, a reluctance to discuss racism. Besides that, microaggressions with a racial or sexual connotation are not meant or seen as racism or sexism by the sender. Microaggressions can, however, happen daily and are then referred to as everyday racism, everyday sexism and everyday heterosexism (Sue 2010). Institutional racism and (hetero)sexism are systematic ways of framing and considering (respectively) people of

colour, women and persons who identify as LGBTQIA+ as inferior. Institutional racism and (hetero)sexism are embedded in historically maintained power structures and therefore need a systematic (long-term) approach to dismantle, which is beyond the scope of the IoP but can be addressed in the broader physics community. Tackling all forms of racism, sexism, other mechanisms of exclusion, and discrimination is a constant process of challenging the dominant norm.  Also, other discriminating factors were brought up in the survey, such as position and type of contract within the institute and the context of young families. This concerns how parents with young children must juggle work, parental responsibilities and 'normalised' expectations of, for instance, working hours. The rigorous and competitive academic culture within physics is not used to changing norms with respect to work-life balance. It can create pressure on staff and a divide among employees.

One respondent shared concerns and expressions of feeling excluded because of the strategic aims of the IoP management on equity, inclusion, and diversity. Resistance, invoked by fear of change, missing out on opportunities and a fear to give up space and make way for new scientists from underrepresented communities, are to be expected in these processes, especially with the intentional focus and determination of the leadership of the IoP. Voices of resistance are inherent in processes of change. However, the survey predominantly showed commitment and willingness among respondents with different positions to the importance of diversity. These colleagues are potential allies in the process of implementation.

# Recommendations

The recommendations are partly inspired by concrete ideas shared by respondents and partly based on the analysis of the survey outcomes. The recommendations of respondents elaborate on existing policies and practices but ask for a more intentional approach and concrete actions. Examples are the need for more diversity in hiring and more awareness-raising through training and workshops to make the IoP a more equitable and inclusive workplace and a more transparent and inclusive culture.
The recommendations based on the analysis focus on five main areas of intervention: (1) From intention to impact, (2) Diversity, (3) Inclusion, (4) Dealing with discomfort and (5) Maintaining impact. These areas are complementary to each other and are meant to have an impact on the individual and institutional level, specifically for the IoP context.

## 01 From intention to impact

A transformation from intention to impact needs to aim at *improving* equity, inclusion and diversity and *acknowledging, preventing and acting against racism*, sexism and other mechanisms of exclusion. Although both aims are interconnected and complementary,

each still needs specific action and policy. Reflections that were given by respondents also focus on both aims.

### From intention to impact *@the IoP*

This survey is an important catalyst and baseline for action by better understanding employees' individual perspectives and experiences on diversity, inclusion and exclusion. The next stage of the process is to 'translate' these individual reflections into an institutional strategy by transforming expressed needs and ambitions into policy and practice. For many organisations, the transition from good intentions to impact is a steep learning curve that asks for an intentional focus, consistency in vision and strategy, and valuing perspectives and ideas to co-create a sustainable path to inclusion.

## 02 Diversity *The future is intersectional, international, and intergenerational*

Increasing diversity means accepting diversity of thoughts, perspectives and responsibilities inhabited by a more equitable representation of underrepresented groups and identities (gender and cultural diversity) in combination with changing demographics due to international/global mobility, an ageing population and a growing share of younger employees. The diversity of individuals in organisations is not a collective of single identities but a collective of multiple and layered identities. The future of the IoP will be even more intersectional, which is part of more significant and global developments in STEM since universities worldwide aim to increase gender balance and other dimensions of diversity in academia (Feder, 2021).

### Diversity *@the IoP*

Increasing the diversity in representation will need necessary adjustments in the current recruitment and hiring process. The impact of this process is dependent on the choices in hiring strategy: generic or specific policy and how the recruitment process will be executed. Which networks are targeted, affirmative action as a potential strategy, diversity of the hiring committee, involvement of the IoP, FNWI or UvA diversity office in the selection process etc. Diversity hiring is part of a holistic vision of change within the institute and the physics community. Increasing the diversity in hiring requires inclusive recruitment, selection and hiring process but cannot be seen separately from a strategy on retention, belonging and inclusion.

## 03 Inclusion *Making excellence inclusive*

Countering the dichotomy between meritocracy and excellence on the one hand and equity and diversity in academia on the other hand is part of the journey towards inclusion and belonging. "Inclusive excellence is a process that includes excellence in teaching and learning, student development, institutional functioning, community engagement and workforce development" (Salazar, Norton and Tuitt, 2010).

### **Inclusion** *Getting comfortable with the uncomfortable*

Enabling uncomfortable conversations is part of a (growth) process to getting comfortable with the uncomfortable (Baboeram and Karaaslan, 2020). Not having these conversations will support the reproduction of inequities (Ahmed 2012).

### **Inclusion** *From Colour blind to Colour brave*

A colour-brave approach supports the notion of being intentional and purposeful in enhancing inclusion in education (Hobson, 2014, Tupan-Wenno, van Marlen & Aumaj, 2020). It requires the acknowledgement of differences in ethnicity, (gender) identity and access to power to create a sense of belonging. Being colour-brave is an intentional way to value different perspectives and is relevant for organisations where diversity is increasing. A colour-brave approach often leads to specific measures, with intentional programmes offered to employees to reach an equitable starting position.

### **Inclusion** *@the IoP*

Developing a gender & colour-conscious approach from an intersectional perspective is essential to recognising power structures such as sexism and racism. These institutionalised, reproducing mechanisms cause inequality in opportunities and inequity in positions. Therefore, creating a climate to discuss experiences of inclusion and exclusion is part of the organisation's growth process. Building on what has already been done within the institute is equally important as identifying what can be done differently based on the survey.

*Next steps*

- *Language:* develop a shared vocabulary on equity, diversity, inclusion and mechanisms of exclusion within the context of the IoP through dialogue and professional development.
- *Ownership:* build a coalition of IoP initiators keen to invest in jump-starting a learning process and engaging with colleagues to develop and implement new ideas for the IoP context.
- *Training:* provide training opportunities for knowledge development, creating awareness and mastering skills to better interpret experiences and challenges of the institute to strategy, policy and practice.

## 04 **Dealing with discomfort and unsafety** *Safe, Brave and Accountable Spaces*

These spaces support creating a culture to discuss and combat experiences of racism, sexism and other systemic ways of discrimination (Ali, 2017). Safe spaces are means for members of minoritised identities to share and explore ideas without feeling

marginalised. Brave spaces are meant to discuss similar experiences with the purpose for employees to better understand one another and participate in challenging dialogues equally. Accountable spaces stress the importance of also structuring responsibility and accountability in addition to the brave space. The accountable space supports a deeper understanding of diverse lived experiences in real-time (Ahenkorah, 2020).

### Dealing with discomfort and unsafety *@IoP*

Participants with different perspectives and opinions join the conversation to share, express and uncover potential biases and opportunities that can be addressed and implemented. Brave and accountable spaces support conversations to get comfortable with the uncomfortable. Creating opportunities to discuss mechanisms of exclusion and experiences of harassment openly and safely are necessary means in addition to an already existing (infra)structure to prevent situations of unacceptable behaviour. There is a need for more transparent and accessible information about the support structure and clear policy toward perpetrators and victims in cases of harassment. The UvA policy and support related to social safety are separate from the diversity and inclusion policy. Ideally, this should be an integrated approach. An inclusive culture and working environment should be safe from harassment and misuse of power, whether sexually, racially or otherwise.

## 05 Maintaining impact *@IoP*

Transforming from intention to impact to ensure equity, inclusion and diversity are collaborative processes and a shared responsibility. The survey jumpstarted this process and captured the experiences and perspectives of the employees of the IoP. The survey highlights the determination of the IoP management not to shy away from experiences of exclusion within the institute. The recommendations in this chapter can be seen as building blocks: “something essential on which a larger entity is based.” The components will be of value separately but will be more meaningful and complementary if implemented holistically in responding to the needs of the IoP context.

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## Colophon

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