Co-creating the SRHE EDI network: From participant input to action-planning

Introduction

In June 2025, we created the SRHE EDI Network as a space *of and for* our diverse audiences—one that centres equity, representation and social justice across all our work. Drawing on our varied backgrounds as researchers and practitioners within and beyond academia, we, as co-convenors, aim to model the inclusive and collaborative culture we hope to foster. The network seeks not only to acknowledge structural inequities within current practices, but also to co-create meaningful actions and advocate for change across the Society and the wider higher education (HE) sector.

This summary shares how we have begun turning that commitment into practice. Reflecting on our launch event and conference sessions designed around interactivity and collaborative brainstorming using Padlet, in what follows, we showcase:

- the key emerging themes from our audience's input and
- how we aim to take this forward when action-planning for the network's future activities.

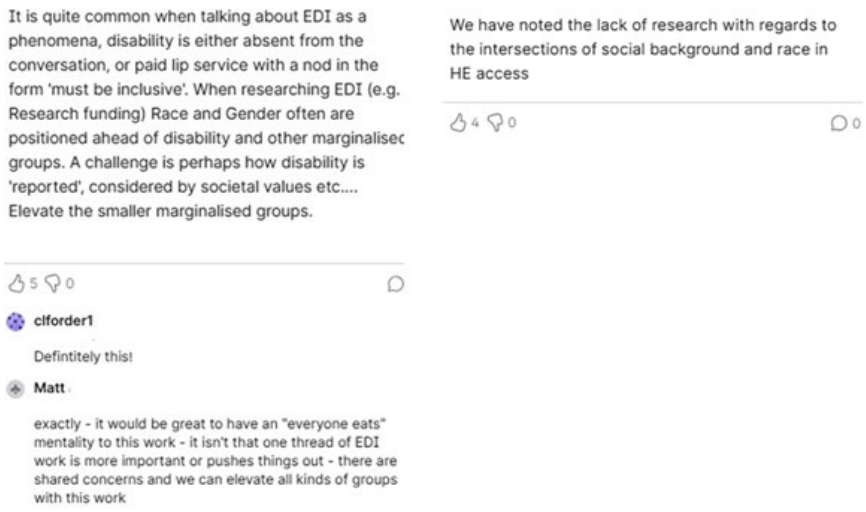
Findings

a. **Key topics of interest for network content**

   1. **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality appeared as a key priority. Participants wanted to see work that recognise how different forms of disadvantage overlap and interact, rather than treating identity categories in isolation. They stressed focusing on struggles that were shared across marginalised groups, and to avoid the trap of ranking or priming forms of inequality. Many noted that there were considerable gaps within existing research and practice, calling for deeper attention to how identity, background, and structural position shape experiences in HE. The ask is not for statements or commitments about diversity, but for undertaking analysis that reveals how power operates across multiple axes simultaneously. Overall, there was a clear call to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward more meaningful and grounded work on equity —work that starts from lived experience and builds toward collective action.

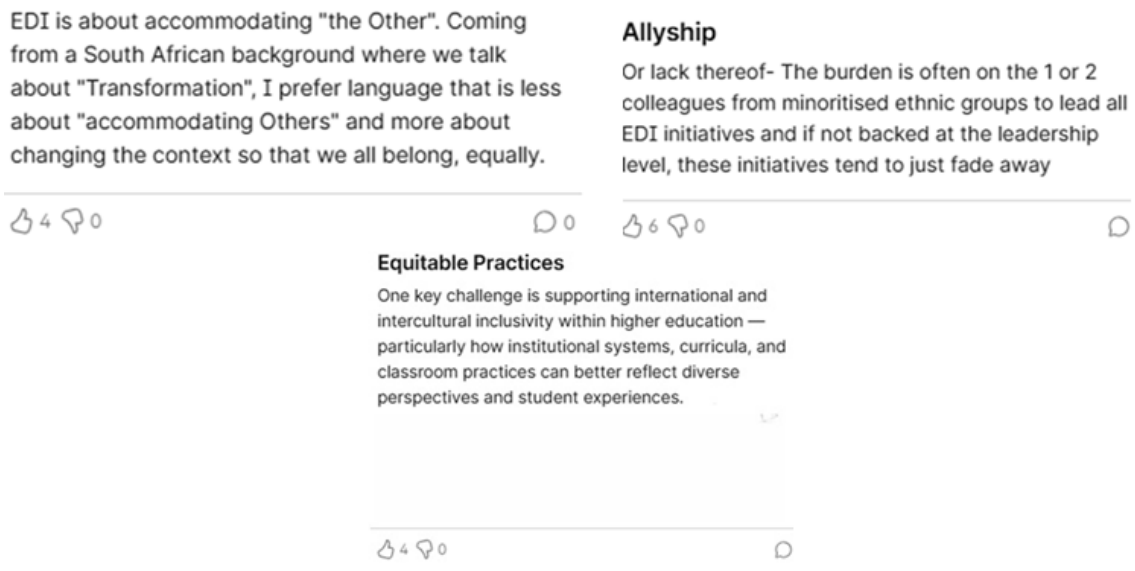
Figure 1 Indicative Padlet entries coded under 'Intersectionality'



2. Focus on equity and inclusion

Participants were vocal that the network content needs to focus on equity and inclusion, rather than just equality and representation. They emphasised that they would like to find out about approaches that move beyond simply "accommodating" difference, calling instead for structural and cultural change that enables genuine belonging. Several highlighted ongoing challenges around allyship, noting that EDI work is too often disproportionately carried by a few colleagues from minoritise backgrounds, with initiatives fading when not meaningfully supported by leadership. Others stressed the importance of improving support for international staff and students by embedding intercultural inclusivity into institutional systems, curricula and classroom practices. Together, these insights foreground participants' desire for sustained, systemic, and collectively-owned EDI action.

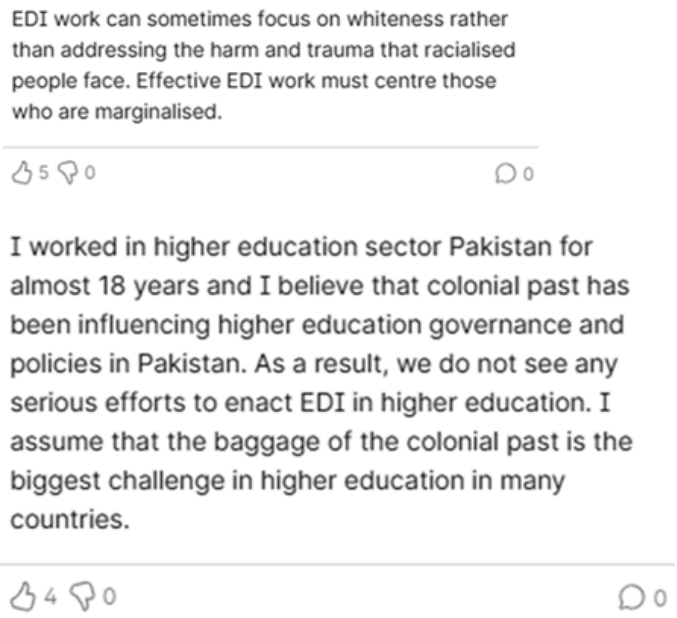
Figure 2 Indicative Padlet entries coded under 'Focus on equity and inclusion'



3. Transformative and transformational practices)

There was a clear appetite for change, change that is deep enough to rewire what counts as “normal” in HE, and durable enough to survive beyond a funding cycle, a leadership new appointee, or a moment of institutional attention. On one hand, there is a call for work that changes the conversation, this is the transformative dimension, which evolves around how exclusion is reproduced through seemingly neutral norms, like whose scholarship is treated as foundational, whose questions are considered “niche,” whose language is policed, whose experiences are over-scrutinised, and whose attainment is explained away. It is about epistemic power: what is centred, what is peripheral, what is silenced. It is about research. It is also about pedagogy: how everyday teaching, assessment, and feedback practices often designed in good faith can still encode disadvantage. If EDI does not reach the level of the curriculum, assessment design, and academic judgment, it remains decorative.
On the other hand, there is a call for work that changes the conditions, the transformational dimension, which is related to addressing the bureaucratic aspects that decide whether words turn into practice, like policies, incentives, workload models, staff recruitment and promotion criteria, procurement, governance, and the informal rules that determine who gets heard and who gets labelled “difficult”. The sector cannot keep asking individuals to be courageous while maintaining structures that punish risk, overload minoritised staff, and reward compliance over candour. EDI cannot be sustained on goodwill. It requires explicit resourcing and structural permission.

Figure 3 Indicative Padlet entries coded under 'Transformative and transformational practices'

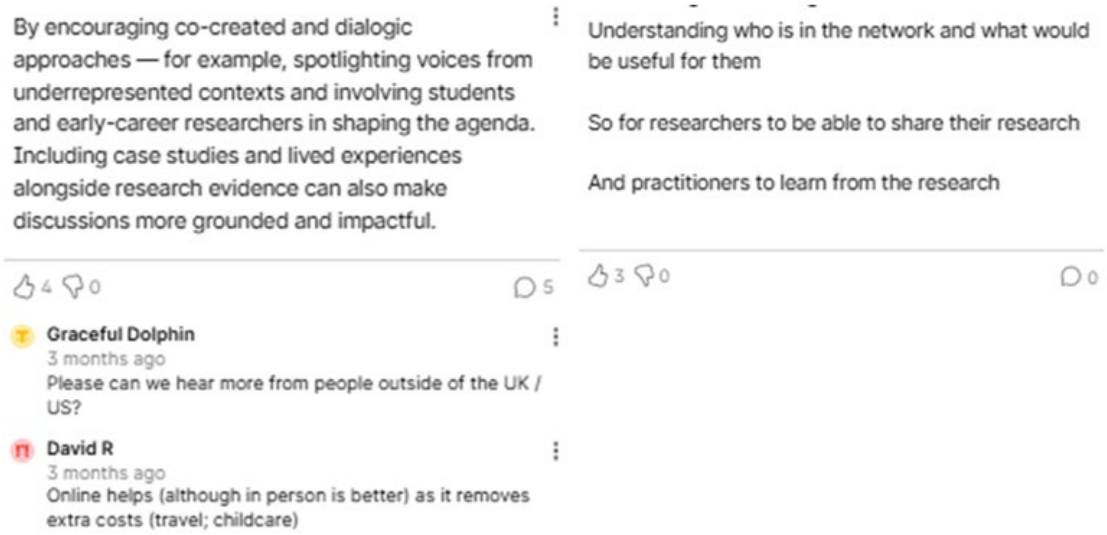


b. Ways to promote engagement and inclusivity

1. Encourage participation, co-creation and exchange

Participants envisaged the network as a space facilitating co-created knowledge and supporting mutual learning. They would like the network to encourage dialogical relationships and active participation rather than be based on unidirectional information flaws. Many stressed the need to highlight marginalised voices, such as those of students or in early-career stages. Furthermore, participants saw co-creation as a way to link research with real-life experience — they suggested bringing together case studies, practical insights, and shared evidence. Finally, they highlighted virtual events as more accessible, with online engagement helping address barriers related to travel, cost, and time.

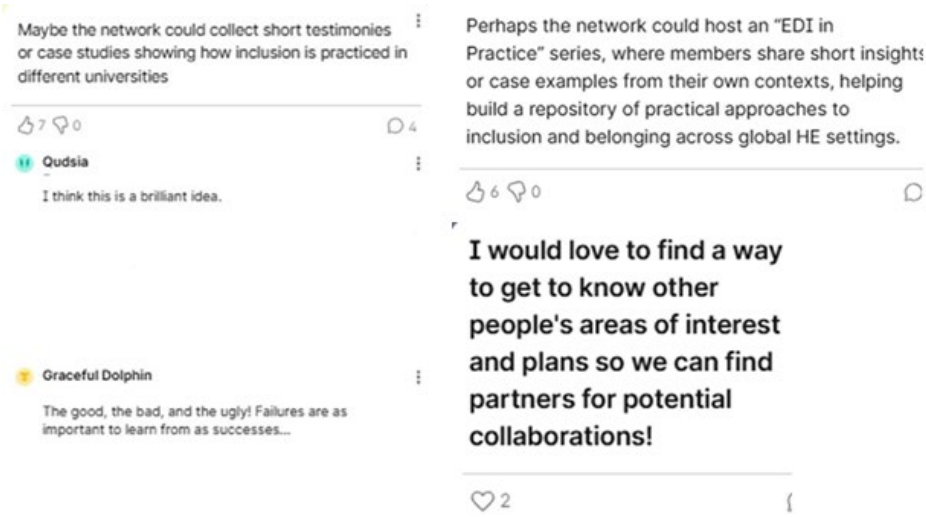
Figure 4 Indicative Padlet entries coded under 'Encourage participation, co-creation and exchange'



2. Facilitate collaboration and networking

Participants strongly emphasised the importance of creating opportunities for collaboration and networking as a means to strengthen engagement and inclusivity within the network. There was appetite for co-creating outputs, such as jointly-authored blog posts, shared editorial activities during sessions, and repositories of case studies and testimonies that reflect not only examples of effective practice, but also the "*bad and the ugly*" as valuable lessons learned. Alongside this, participants highlighted the need for purposeful networking mechanisms, including collaborations with other SRHE networks and activities, to help members connect across geographies, roles and career stages. Suggestions such as "speed-dating"-style introductions, curated contact repositories, and cross-network events were seen as vital in enabling like-minded colleagues to meet, exchange knowledge and build meaningful partnerships that might not otherwise emerge.

Figure 5 Indicative Padlet entries coded under 'Facilitate collaboration and networking'



3. Provide support

Structured support though mentoring and coaching was also highlighted by participants as an inclusive and engaging provision the network could offer. Participants suggested creating accessible schemes that connect members with mentors who can offer guidance on career progression, particularly for early-career researchers and scholars from under-represented groups. Sharing grant and job opportunities more proactively was also identified as a valuable way to enhance support. Participants emphasised designing initiatives that benefit both partied involved (eg. mentors and mentees), ensuring a sustainable, mutually rewarding model that strengthens the network and promotes equitable access to development opportunities.

Figure 6 Indicative Padlet entries coded under 'Provide support'

What now?

The SRHE EDI network has been established to bring EDI at the forefront. Since our launch, our promise as co-convenors was that we will co-create the network with our key audiences, using their input as guidance to understand what is most useful and relevant to them. This is our first attempt to deliver our commitment to doing so.
In terms of content, we have three areas to focus upon in terms of event planning for the coming year – intersectionality, equity and inclusion as well as transformative and transformational practices. Nonetheless, even for the remaining of this year, our events

are responsive to the transformational and practical aspects highlighted by participants, with invited speakers from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from practitioners and policy makers to academics from the Global South. Members want the network to act as a facilitator, supporting honest knowledge exchange, highlighting the importance of context, and revealing constraints as well as enablers of change when it comes to how we implement EDI in practice and that will remain our focus as we look into the future. Similarly, we will stay attuned to the need to further expand our reach for contributors, to give platform to minoritised groups, like students and early-career researchers or scholars from the Global South.
In terms of making sure that what we do and offer is engaging and inclusive, we will be working in collaboration with the Society's relevant structures, to identify what is feasible and when. Despite being a network that wants to be a positive change agent, we still need to work with existing processes and procedures of the Society to enable our ambitions. To do so, our aim is to convey our findings to the Society's leadership through the various governance mechanisms we can employ (eg. committee meetings we attend, annual network reports etc) to make sure that we secure the buy-in, resourcing and general institutional backing required to translate narrative change into sustained, measurable action.

To give a few indicative examples, we will be exploring options to:

- create and curate a mass mailing list for people interested in the EDI network and its activities;
- facilitate online networking sessions to enable connections and collaborations to be established;
- establish a designated online space that could operate as a database of good practice of EDI practice, encouraging submissions from our key audiences.

If EDI in HE has felt like a cycle of declarations without concrete actions, we share the impatience and, please, bear with us. As mentioned above, this is just the beginning to our long-term journey of closing the feedback loop with our key audiences and "walking the walk" towards change and impact.