Diversity and Inclusion Plan

The Agile Initiative
March 2024

Table of contents

About the Agile Initiative

The Agile Initiative, based at the Oxford Martin School and funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) from 2022-2027, is developing an innovative way of delivering excellent, policy-relevant interdisciplinary research. The research produced by Agile will enable better use of evidence to significantly improve the way decisions in the field of environmental science are made.

Agile's high-level strategic aims are organised around three interwoven goals:

- **Goal One:** delivering solution-oriented science through a new model of interdisciplinary research. Groups of researchers from across the University work with stakeholders and partners (including government at all levels, industry partners, NGOs and local communities) to address a time-critical research question identified by decision-makers in rapid "Sprint" projects.

- **Goal Two:** creating a critical mass of interdisciplinary researchers capable of working within this model. Agile will offer training, career development, community-building and collective learning on the Sprint model.

- **Goal Three:** establishing a lasting culture shift in how impactful, interdisciplinary research is funded and delivered at the University of Oxford and more widely. By collating evidence and learning, Agile will use its findings to influence institutional policies and practices.

Our values

We, the Agile programme team and Management Group, are guided by the following values. These are living values that are open for ongoing reflection, discussion, and refining throughout Agile's lifespan:

Experimentation: Agile aims to push the boundaries for the way impactful research is conducted at Oxford University. We explore new ways of doing fast paced, interdisciplinary work, learn from successes and failures, and adapt accordingly. We are always striving to improve.

Ambition: Agile is tackling major societal challenges and this means confronting and disrupting existing systems and norms. We cannot solve everything and recognise our limitations. However, we do not shy away from difficult issues.

Collaboration: Agile brings together researchers, leaders, and stakeholders from the worlds of policy and practice. Working across disciplines and sectors, researchers and decision-makers co-create policy-relevant research programmes. We value the knowledge and experiences of all our collaborators and learn from each other.

Transparency: Agile's plans, processes, decision making, and progress are shared openly and clearly. We do this to improve fair and equitable participation in research, co-creation, and policy-oriented solutions that address societal challenges. We also welcome feedback. Receiving different perspectives about what does and doesn't work promotes continuous improvement within Agile.

Pragmatism: Meeting the needs of decision makers on issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss requires realistic, evidence-based solutions. We acknowledge the complexity of real-world decision making and aim to produce useful, practicable research. It's important that we also offer practical support to researchers. Agile activities are tailored to align with researchers' level of readiness and career development objectives.

Diversity and inclusion in the Agile Initiative

This document outlines values, commitments, and actions to enhance diversity and inclusion over the remaining years of the Agile Initiative. This Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Plan was developed in consultation with Aduke Onafowokan from Inclusivitii. The D&I Plan is aligned with the Equality Act 2010, NERC's diversity and inclusion living action plan 2022-2025, and the University of Oxford's Equality Policy.

What is driving our approach?

UK Research and Innovation data highlights a need for more diversity within the UK environmental sciences. For example, the NERC diversity and inclusion living action plan notes that, from 2019 to 2020, only 8% of NERC grants for principal investigators were awarded to individuals from marginalised ethnic backgrounds. We are aware that the lack of diversity in the environmental sciences has rightly led to a call for more inclusive and equitable research and academic practices.

The Agile Initiative is committed to embedding diversity and inclusion throughout all of our activities. This involves intentional, ongoing efforts to create a solid and enduring culture that challenges prejudice, ensures fairness, and welcomes difference in all its forms – from varied ethnicities, genders, and abilities to diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds. We are focused on ensuring that researchers from historically underrepresented or marginalised groups are respected, supported and valued in our work. By fostering a culture that celebrates diversity, we aspire to enhance research practices, broaden access to research funding, and share learning from Agile. We also aim for Agile's research to be accessible and useful to a broad range of communities and stakeholders.

It is worth acknowledging that our D&I Plan is framed by the University's current levels of maturity and readiness. Agile also operates within the bounds of its remit as an externally funded research programme governed by funder terms and conditions. Agile will pursue diversity and inclusion activities that fit within these parameters and the scope of our capacity and resourcing for the remainder of the programme period.

We know that diverse research teams bring questions, ideas, and creativity informed by lived experience. By building diversity and inclusion principles into the core of our work, we aim to enhance the richness and depth of Agile's research and, ultimately, contribute to a more equitable global community. In the face of the universal challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, and

biodiversity loss, including diverse voices, experiences, and insights is vital to creating sustainable, effective, and inclusive solutions.

Our definitions

Diversity: Diversity refers to including and collaborating with people from various backgrounds, disciplines, and stakeholder groups to address complex environmental and sustainability challenges. It encompasses not just diversity in terms of race, gender, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and socioeconomic backgrounds but also diversity of expertise, knowledge, and approaches.

Inclusion: Inclusion refers to the proactive and intentional effort to involve all relevant stakeholders in a respectful, equitable, and fair research process. It goes beyond representation, ensuring that individuals and groups have access to participate, contribute, and benefit from environmental science research and initiatives. It emphasises the importance of diverse perspectives and voices, particularly those traditionally marginalised or underrepresented in environmental decision-making and scholarship.

Equality: Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equality broadly implies equal access to opportunities for everyone to realise their potential; however, this can lead to neglecting the variability in access needs and the diverse impact of systemic and personal biases, structural inequalities, and power disparities.

Equity: Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to achieve an equal outcome. Much of this plan focuses on diversity and inclusion within Agile. We recognise the need to move towards an equity-driven approach as we evolve. This approach would include tailoring resources and opportunities to specific needs and positions to help researchers achieve equal outcomes.

Identified areas for improvement

To develop this plan, the Agile Management Group contracted a consultant to identify areas we need to improve. The key areas are described below:

Area identified	Potential risk	Actions for improvement
Absence of a comprehensive D&I Plan	The absence of a plan reduces the systematic approach towards implementing and tracking diversity and inclusion activities, subsequently impacting the representation and participation across different demographic groups in Agile.	Develop interim short-term action plan that addresses urgent and critical D&I gaps; engage an external D&I consultant to guide the creation of a comprehensive, long-term D&I plan; and identify dedicated resources to implement the D&I plan.
Lack of structured D&I oversight and governance	Disjointed and potentially ineffective D&I, with limited capability to create tangible change and ensure consistent application and adherence to D&I principles across Agile.	Review the role of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Lead on Agile Management Group to oversee D&I activities and concerns; identify a counterpart on Agile Executive Board; recruit an EDI Officer and, concurrently, work towards an approved D&I plan.
Ineffective diversity data collection and analysis practices	The absence of detailed, accurate, and representative data compromises the ability to identify, understand, and address underlying disparities and systemic issues within the research environment and to quantify and track diversity across Agile.	Use existing demographic data as a preliminary guide while developing a more robust data collection and analysis framework; strengthen links with related and interdependent departments to identify and track data collection improvements relevant to Agile.

Area identified	Potential risk	Actions for improvement
Limited D&I training	Without robust understanding and commitment at all levels, initiatives may face resistance or need for more alignment, potentially perpetuating unconscious biases and systemic barriers in research operations.	In addition to the training offered by the University, design and roll out targeted D&I training relating to the research, funding, and environmental sustainability context.
Lack of standardised Sprint/research selection criteria and processes	This inconsistency can unintentionally favour specific demographics or groups, reducing the diversity of perspectives and innovations in Agile research projects.	Implement transparency measures regarding criteria and processes. Review, redesign, and standardise selection processes, ensuring equitable principles underpin them.
Lack of positive action and reasonable adjustment initiatives	Failure to proactively create supportive and adaptive environments may inhibit access and participation from a diverse talent pool, limiting the scope and applicability of research outputs.	Identify and implement quick wins for accessibility and support, guided by feedback from previous participants and other stakeholders; develop a thorough, reasonable adjustment policy in parallel, ensuring future initiatives are more inclusive.
Perpetuation of poor research culture practices in Agile research projects	There is a risk that the Agile research approach (rapid, time-bound, policy-facing) may not lend itself naturally to diversity and inclusion and may perpetuate poor practices in research culture.	Identify evidence, and track through feedback any areas where the Agile approach limits D&I outcomes; readiness to pilot through Agile innovative approaches to D&I developed at university and departmental levels; continuously apply learning to future Sprints; contribute lessons learned to university recommendations.

Our commitments

To address these areas, Agile has identified four strategic commitments regarding governance and accountability, researcher and research diversity, inclusive culture, and inclusive communication, engagement, and impact. We aim to deliver change on these four commitments over the remaining period of the Agile Initiative (2024 to 2027).

Commitment one
Governance and accountability

We are committed to ensuring effective governance and accountability in promoting diversity and inclusion within Agile. This includes implementing our objectives and having systems to oversee, evaluate, and report on the Diversity and Inclusion plan (the Plan). The fulfilment of this commitment is dependent upon dedicated leadership, stakeholder engagement, and shared accountability.

Action 1.1: Improve, approve and share the Diversity and Inclusion Plan

- Collaborate within the University and with NERC and external experts to produce an improved and aligned D&I plan for the Agile Initiative.

- Ensure the Plan addresses recruitment, retention, advancement, research practice, impact and culture, with clear objectives and milestones.

- Use a variety of emails, newsletters, websites, and meetings to ensure the Plan is widely and transparently shared and understood, including with Agile print research teams.

Action 1.2: Strengthen diversity and inclusion oversight

- Clarify governance roles and responsibilities across the Agile Management Group and Executive Board concerning decision-making and monitoring of the Plan.

- Establish protocols and working practices for those responsible for D&I to ensure effective decision-making and efficient flow of communications.

Action 1.3: Share diversity and inclusion progress in alignment with reporting requirements

- Define key metrics for the plan and establish a reporting schedule per existing reporting processes and requirements.

- Add metrics, indicators, data capture, and analysis methods to the Agile Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, refining or replacing existing indicators as appropriate.

- Regularly share reports with relevant stakeholders and maintain a transparent dialogue about challenges, successes, and adaptations.

- Undertake an annual review and refresh of the plan, allowing it to evolve in response to findings and changing contexts.

Action 1.4: Contribute to institutional strategies and plans

- Identify the connected initiatives within the University relevant to Agile and establish working relationships with them.

- Share learning and evidence from Agile and ensure that institutional obstacles that affect achieving D&I goals are identified and shared with relevant stakeholders.

Commitment two
Researcher and research diversity

We are focused on developing a talented and diverse researcher community to ensure that varied perspectives are integrated in the areas of interest to Agile. Researchers will be supported with broadening their research focus to include interconnected issues and policy areas. Our activities will encompass various dimensions of diversity, including but not limited to disability, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Action 2.1: Agree on success measures and indicators

- Conduct D&I review of existing Agile Theory of Change.

- Integrate D&I into Agile's operational and strategic framework, ensuring that varied research questions can be tackled promptly and inclusively.

- Establish relevant, realistic and measurable indicators to monitor progress and assess success, such as demographic representation, research topic diversity, and participant satisfaction with D&I in Agile.

- Align with indicators used by the University and NERC, wherever possible.

- Ensure indicators are reflected in the Agile Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (cf. Action 1.3).

Action 2.2: Review Agile's data collection practices

- Identify and map data dependencies across the University.

- Obtain necessary approvals and permissions to collect equality, diversity and inclusion data.

- Implement strategies to access relevant diversity data for evaluating D&I in Agile and to accurately capture additional diversity data through applications, awards, and reviewer processes, ensuring compliance with General Data Protection Regulation and transparent communication regarding data usage.

Action 2.3: Fund Sprints that advance diversity and inclusion

- Include guidance and criteria for considerations about diversity and inclusion in calls for proposals and application review processes.

- Review lessons learned and use this to develop further the Agile offering

Action 2.4: Promote inclusive applications for research

- Review current practices for promoting calls for Sprint research and identify areas of improvement.

- Utilise the University's reach and partnerships to initiate events and activities that encourage applications and participation from marginalised or under-represented researchers throughout all Sprint cycles.

Action 2.5: Implement standardised equality impact assessment in research

- Create a template that identifies, monitors, and manages the equality impact through all Sprint research stages, ensuring inclusiveness and fairness in research impacts.

- Assess past and ongoing Sprints to identify areas where D&I considerations can be or could have been strengthened.

- Ensure the template is completed by all new Sprint teams and reviewed as necessary during the research.

Action 2.6: Review Sprint assessment criteria

- Review the criteria used to assess Sprint research proposals.

- Ensure the criteria are clear, transparent, standardised, and publicised.

Action 2.7: Foster diversity of proposal reviewers and assessment panels

- Review the diversity of assessment panels to date.

- Identify and implement actions to broaden the pool of reviewers to strengthen diversity, ensuring recompense/reward for participation by colleagues from marginalised or under-represented groups.

- Where appropriate, involve experts outside the University to ensure unbiased and representative assessment processes.

Action 2.8: Train reviewers and panellists

- Assess University D&I training already undertaken by reviewers.

- Assess any institutional plans for developing relevant training for research review panels.

- Identify gaps and training needs and, as appropriate, implement new training activities focusing on enhancing D&I awareness, reducing biases, and improving adherence to assessment criteria.

- Where feasible, collaborate within the University to develop and deliver training.

Action 2.9: Review the application process to ensure accessibility

- Review Sprint application guidance documents to ensure they are accessible and understandable to all applicants.

- Ensure application timeframes do not exclude applicants.

- Establish actions to address weaknesses identified in the application review process.

Action 2.10: Provide tailored application support to researchers

- Review support currently available.

- Develop and implement support to assist researchers throughout the application process, as needed, focusing on providing additional and tailored support to marginalised and underrepresented groups.

Action 2.11: Ensure researcher onboarding and orientation is inclusive

- Review and augment the onboarding process to provide focused support, identify individual needs, and establish continuous communication channels.

Action 2.12: Provide mentoring and support for researchers

- Explore opportunities or plans that exist for mentorship for underrepresented or marginalised researchers across the University, considering if and how these could be accessed or adapted for Agile Sprints (cf. Action 1.4).
- Establish mentorship programmes and provide access to skills-building opportunities, ensuring researchers can leverage and build upon their involvement with Agile.

Commitment three
Inclusive culture

Beyond our focus on research and researcher diversity, we want to ensure that the culture within the Agile Initiative is inclusive as a research programme. We are working to deeply embed diversity and inclusion in the programme culture, policies, and day-to-day operations.

Action 3.1: Create and share Agile values

- Collaborate across the Agile programme team, researchers and stakeholders to co-create and agree on values that ensure a cohesive and inclusive cultural backbone to guide behaviours within the Agile Initiative.
- Ensure that Agile values are socialised across research Sprints and included within onboarding and orientation activities.

Action 3.2: Create Agile complaints procedure

- Explore relevant departmental-level policies
- Create and share Agile-specific complaints procedures.

Action 3.3: Conduct diversity and inclusion survey for staff and researchers

- Design and implement a comprehensive, non-compulsory survey in line with legislation and University policies to acquire data on staff and researcher demographics and D&I experiences specific to Agile.

- Identify any areas of development required and develop actions in response.

Action 3.4: Promote inclusive recruitment and people practices

- Liaise with department HR staff to promote fairness and equality in recruiting researchers to Agile Sprints.

- Review recruitment plans and job descriptions with Sprint leaders during project design.

- Where possible, ensure that key performance indicators for Sprint leaders and team members explicitly incorporate objectives related to fostering an inclusive environment and recognising and rewarding efforts to enhance D&I.

- Where applicable, signpost available mental health and well-being support to those potentially exposed to discrimination or marginalisation.

Commitment four
Inclusive communication, engagement, and impact

We are committed to ensuring that all communication and engagement activities, as well as outputs and publications, within Agile embody the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity. Promoting accessibility through our outputs and publications helps us to deliver on our commitments as laid out in this plan, including engaging with diverse stakeholders.

Action 4.1: Ensure Agile communications are inclusive

- Review existing communications strategy and practices and identify areas requiring improvement to strengthen inclusiveness.

- Develop communication materials that are accessible in various formats, where possible and appropriate (e.g., Braille, large print, and multiple languages).

- Offer inclusive communication training or writing guidelines for researchers and programme administrators with writing responsibilities.

- Develop metrics and indicators that accurately measure inclusion in communication, engagement, and impact, and reflect these in the Agile Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning framework (cf. Action 1.3).

- Implement an iterative process for refining and adapting communication strategies based on feedback and evaluation outcomes.

Action 4.2: Ensure stakeholder engagement activities are inclusive

- Review initial Agile stakeholder engagement activities to identify gaps or weaknesses relative to inclusion, including accessibility for marginalised or under-represented communities and groups.

- Identify resources available across the University to help with ensuring that Agile outreach and engagement activities are accessible and inclusive.

- Produce guidance and provide training for Sprint research teams and the Agile Programme Team on making outreach and engagement activities inclusive and enabling wide participation.

Action 4.3: Promote recognition and visibility

- Assess what platforms and opportunities are available for researchers involved in Sprints to showcase their work, achievements, and learnings, thereby elevating their visibility and career prospects.

- Take action in response to this review.

More information

This plan was produced in consultation with Aduke Onafowokan from Inclusivitti.

If you would like to get involved with Agile as an Oxford University researcher, please register your interest by joining our mailing list here. Visit the Agile website for updates on Sprint calls for proposals and research outputs.

If you are interested in further detail about how Agile is pursuing diversity and inclusion, or if you would like to access the Diversity and Inclusion plan in another format, please get in touch with Agile's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer:

Stephanie Perrin (she/her)
stephanie.perrin@oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk

For More Information

✉ agile@oxformartin.ox.ac.uk

🌐 www.agile-intitiative.ox.ac.uk

✖ @oxmartinschool

The Agile Initiative,
Oxford Martin School,
34 Broad Street, Oxford,
OX1 3BD, United Kingdom