Committees and Working Groups

1. Summary

Committees and working groups are both involved with overseeing and driving diversity work, and often the two can overlap. Whereas committees have a more formal and permanent structure, working groups are established to catalyse action or address a particular issue and are generally more transient. Having a committee or working group ensures that those managing equality and diversity initiatives are both informed and engaged with diversity matters, and that there are official structures with whom responsibility lies.

From the member bodies, most committees and working groups seem to focus broadly across diversity streams, with smaller groups developed as necessary for individual characteristics. The committees hold the remit for a greater range of work owing to their more established nature whereas the working groups tend to be more specifically focussed on a particular characteristic or action. They generally answer to a committee, although it is not necessarily a specialised equality and diversity one.

2. Examples

2.1 Member Bodies

British Psychological Society

    i.   Diversity & Inclusion at Work Group

The group aims to bridge the gap between psychological research and diversity work by increasing accessibility of information and increasing communication of findings. The particular focus of this group is BME workers in the UK, hoping to understand their experiences and how these can be used to influence positive action work. Their social media sites (linkedin[1], wordpress[2] & twitter) appear to be the main routes of communication, and indicate activities such as developing an informative video on unconscious bias.
http://www.bps.org.uk/networks-and-communities/member-microsite/division-occupational-psychology/diversity-inclusion

    ii.   Ethics Committee

The committee is responsible for the society's code of ethics and conduct, as well as monitoring equality and diversity issues that might affect how members conduct their work
http://www.bps.org.uk/networks-communities/boards-and-committees/ethics-committee/ethics-committee

Institute of Marine Engineering, Science & Technology, Roundtable on Skills Gap
IMarEST, in conjunction with engineering recruiters MatchTech, formed a working group to address the skills gap in the maritime industries. They are looking at the deficit of women in the industry as part of this work,

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[1] http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Diversity-Inclusion-Work-Group-Division-3737802
[2] http://diversityandinclusionatwork.wordpress.com/

having already conducted a survey of around 500 maritime recruiters to find that 84% had less than a 1:10 ratio of female to male workers. The group produced a white paper providing recommendations on how to address this gap, and other skills gaps. http://www.imarest.org/policy-news/newsroom-press/item/605-maritime-and-offshore-oil-and-gas-skills-gap-highlighted

Royal Astronomical Society, Committee on Diversity in Astronomy and Geophysics (CDAG)
The committee report to the council on diversity work and is responsible for ensuring that diversity issues are considered within all societal activities. It also monitors membership and the workforce to identify underrepresentation and the presence of equal opportunities.
http://www.ras.org.uk/about-the-ras/committees/249-ras-committees-terms-of-reference

Royal Society of Chemistry, Inclusion and Diversity Committee
The group committee aims to promote inclusivity and equality of opportunity to all members, and the chemical society more widely. http://www.rsc.org/AboutUs/Governance/BoardsandCommittees/MQB/IDC/Index.asp

Society of General Microbiology, Equality and Diversity Working Group
The group aims to address barriers to entry or progression in microbiology, and to increase the visibility and support it offers those with underrepresented characteristics. The working group is to recommend actions to the Council, which will then be measured by the Professional Development Committee. The council will then be responsible for ensuring the desired outcomes are achieved.
http://www.sgm.ac.uk/en/utilities/about-sgm/council-governance.cfm

2.2 Collaborations
Athena Forum
A legacy of the Athena Project, the forum sought to provide expert advice on increasing the representation of women in STEM and the progressing their careers in HEIs. The forum comprised representatives from several Science Council members (IOP, LMS, RSC and SoB) and other learned organisations (RS, RAEng, InterAcademy Panel and AMS). They produced several reports on the issues faced by women in STEM.
www.athenaforum.org.uk

STEM Disability Committee
The STEM disability committee is a collaboration of professional bodies (including IOP, RSC, SoB) aiming to produce projects positively affecting disabled individuals in STEM. Recent projects have included developing physics and engineering BSL signs for d/Deaf students, providing support for assessors of the DSA, and issuing guidance for dyslexic students studying maths. They also put on networking events for those working in academia looking to improve provisions for disabled students.
http://www.stemdisability.org.uk/about/

STEM Disability Transition Group
Larger than the other groups, and spanning across member bodies and other STEM organisations, this group aims to ease the transition of disabled students from education to work in STEM industries. They seek to do this by reviewing and sharing existing good practice, and by advising on and supporting upcoming projects. The Institute of Physics and Physiological Society have representation within this group, alongside other professional bodies, charities, disability practitioners and academics/ teachers.
https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studyhere/educationaladvisorsandschools/stem/stem-dtg.aspx

Women in Mathematics Group

Primarily the remit of the London Mathematical Society, the committee also includes representatives from the IMA, ORS and RSS from among Science Council member bodies. The committee meets twice annually and oversees the annual Women in Mathematics Days and Childcare Grants Scheme, as well as organising lectures and networking events for female mathematicians.

http://www.lms.ac.uk/about/committees/women-mathematics-committee

2.3 Non-Member Bodies

Royal Society, Equality and Diversity Advisory Network

The network advises board and council on diversity matters. They are also responsible for monitoring the composition of those participating in societal activities, and addressing any underrepresentation issues.

http://royalsociety.org/about-us/governance/committees/equality-diversity/

Royal Society of Edinburgh, Tapping all our Talents

The RSE established a working group to produce a report on the state of women in STEM subjects in Scotland and to recommend a strategy to address this leaky pipeline. The group co-ordinated surveys and consultations, interviews and discussion groups with the STEM sector, and undertook a review of the available literature. The Tapping all our Talents report was widely disseminated and demonstrates the high-impact working groups can have.

http://www.royalsoced.org.uk/1027_Report.html

3. External resources

No best practice external resources were found for establishing working groups, although some of the organisations above provide information about how their group was created and why.

4. Opportunities for Collaboration

There is potential to form cross-organisational committees or working groups to address similar issues or action comparable schemes. The broader composition of the group would bring in new ideas and practices perhaps not usually considered within the individual organisations. This approach carries a risk that conclusions are not specific enough to each member body, or that they do not take into account where each organisation is in terms of diversity work. However, such problems should be fairly straightforward to overcome in order to produce outcomes suitable for each component member.

Single organisation committees and working groups can also collaborate with other member bodies for best practice advice, either on running the diversity group or on the schemes they are implementing. This ensures that the outcomes of the group are exclusive to the organisation, but that the external advice has given them an opportunity to evaluate the scheme and integrate recommended ideas in a sector-specific manner.

Those undertaking collaborative efforts and working groups could undertake action learning sets to help them work in a productive manner. Please see the Action Learning Sets Overview for more information on this approach.

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