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Researchers awarded almost £600k to boost diversity in engineering and physical sciences

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council has awarded almost £600,000 to a consortium of universities and businesses in the north of England – including Northumbria University, Newcastle – to boost the reputation under-represented groups in engineering and physical sciences.

The engineering and physical sciences sectors contributes hundreds of billions of pounds to the UK economy each year, but people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, women, LGBT+ and people with disabilities

remain poorly represented. Female engineers and physical scientists are under-represented in all grades, especially in senior academic posts.

A group of northern universities and businesses have formed to run the *Inclusion Matters* project which aims to create a more inclusive culture in these sectors. It is hoped that this will lead to a more diverse talent pool and, ultimately, better science and engineering with which to address pressing global challenges.

Inclusion Matters has now been awarded £591,463 funding from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council project to tackle the issue in the north of England, as part of a [wider £5.5 million national initiative](#).

The *Inclusion Matters* project has six work strands designed to help address the problem of entrenched under-representation. These include reverse mentoring, where staff from under-represented groups mentor senior staff about the challenges they face and are coached on their career development in return; and establishing an online networking platform where participants can advise and support each other.

Northumbria University is using its extensive expertise as a business-focused university to lead the 'Collaborate with Industry' strand. Academics will work with the project's industrial partners to identify good practice on inclusion issues within their businesses and assess how this could be best disseminated in other organisations.

Northumbria is also working with Durham and Leeds Beckett universities on a strand aiming to improve how data is captured and analysed within universities to better understand the needs and perceptions of under-represented groups in higher education.

[Dr Roger Penlington](#), Associate Professor in Mechanical and Construction Engineering at Northumbria University, explained: "Anecdotal evidence suggests that female researchers leave academia because working in industry is perceived to be more family friendly. It is, therefore, vital that we understand what industry is doing well in this area, and determine whether this can be replicated in an academic setting. This will support the embedding and acceleration of cultural change that the engineering and physical sciences community needs."

The consortium is led by Durham University and includes the universities of Huddersfield, Hull, Lancaster, Leeds, Leeds Beckett, Newcastle, Northumbria and Teesside, with industrial partners Atom Bank, GTN Limited, IBM, Northumbrian Water, SAGE and Stanley Black and Decker is aiming to change this.

Professor Emma Flynn, Programme Director and Associate Provost at Durham University, added: “Engineering and physical sciences are vital industries. Yet for too long there have been sections of our society that aren’t represented sufficiently within these sectors. This scarcity has serious consequences: not only is it bad for equality; it limits our collective ability to tackle some of the most pressing and complicated issues facing our world today.

“We hope this project, and the activities within it, will make a bold step towards a more inclusive culture in these regional sectors, a more diverse pool of talent and creative minds, and, ultimately, better science and engineering that will benefit us all.”

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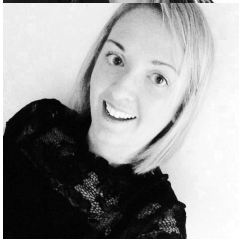


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