

The Department of Cellular and Physiological Sciences

Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool (ISAT) Report

Executive Summary

May 2022

REDI EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Board of Governors approved UBC's Inclusion Action Plan (IAP) in December 2019. As part of efforts to implement the IAP, UBC's Equity and Inclusion Office developed the Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool (ISAT), and encouraged its use across UBC Departments to "assess how their practices, processes and policies are equitable and inclusive"¹. In January 2021, the Respect, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Committee of the Department of Cellular and Physiological Sciences (CPS) distributed the ISAT to CPS department members. While the REDI Committee made small changes to the ISAT using the guidelines articulated in the ISAT Guide², the ISAT was distributed to CPS Department members largely in its original form. Out of the 140 members of the CPS Department who started the survey, only 48% (67/140) completed enough of the survey to allow meaningful analysis of their responses. This survey report is therefore based on responses from 25 faculty, 15 staff, 6 postdoctoral fellows, 12 graduate students and 9 undergraduate students (n=67). The following four themes emerged from the ISAT survey.

Theme 1 – Limitations of the ISAT survey tool

Summary. One theme that emerged from survey responses was that the ISAT, as it was distributed to CPS department members, has important limitations. The most significant limitations were that department members lacked a common understanding of the tool's scoring system for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) interventions, and lacked clarity about which issues the questions aimed to address (Q1,4,6,8,11,16,27,30). This may reflect a lack of understanding of EDI practices in general, and/or confusion about the survey's EDI scoring system (*e.g.* transforming, progressing, etc.). Additional limitations included survey length (based on verbal feedback from faculty), and that many sections were not relevant to all department members (Q13-18 for undergraduates and postdocs). Together, these limitations likely contributed to discrepancies between individuals in their perception of department EDI practices, and to the high number of department members who failed to complete the survey.

Action Items. (1) Provide education and training for members of the CPS department on EDI principles and practices. This will promote a common understanding of EDI terminology, its relevance to the department, and EDI best practices. (2) Modify the ISAT tool so that it is shorter and more relevant to each department group. This will increase survey completion and provide more meaningful answers on matters related to specific groups (*e.g.* undergraduate students). (3) Develop an easier and more accessible scoring tool in place of "Preparing", "Developing", "Progressing" and "Transforming".

Theme 2 – Widely divergent understanding of EDI practices and principles

Summary. Another key theme that emerged from survey responses was that department members do not agree on how much progress the department has made in developing EDI policies, processes and procedures (Q1-6). Survey comments suggest that the lack of agreement on these matters could lead to disengagement of department members from participation in departmental activities that

promote diversity and inclusion (Q1). Lack of general agreement on perceived progress toward transforming EDI practices and policies may also slow down progress towards creating more equitable spaces and events in the department (Q2,3), as members pull in different directions due to their widely different views of the need for change.

Action Items. (1) Provide accessible and regular EDI education and training to all department members. Where possible, tailor training opportunities to career stage so that power dynamics do not interfere with an individual's comfort level in sharing EDI-related experiences. This will help foster a common understanding of EDI practices, and the need to continue evolving department practices to promote excellence in EDI. (2) Create and support open forums within the Department for discussion of EDI matters. The aim of these forums will be to foster common understanding of the Department's EDI values, policies, and progress.

Theme 3 – Lack of representation and diversity among department faculty and leadership

Summary. A third theme that emerged from multiple responses and across different department affiliations (*e.g.* faculty, students, staff) was the lack of diversity among department faculty and senior leadership (Q1,3,4,7-9,11,16-18). According to the comments, this lack of diversity may represent a barrier to providing adequate mentorship for students and postdocs (Q16) and faculty (Q11). Comments also suggest a relatively homogeneous faculty cohort may impair future efforts to enhance diversity at the faculty level due to a lack of diversity on search committees (Q8), and act as a barrier to engagement and participation with department communications (Q1) and events (Q3). Strong support was expressed for increasing the diversity of faculty and senior leadership in the department, and a role for REDI in bringing about necessary changes, however, concerns were raised regarding the department's commitment and ability to increase diversity at these levels.

Action Items. (1) Departmental discussion around how to increase diversity in faculty and senior leadership in the department to improve mentorship opportunities, diversify the pool of individuals on search (and other) committees, and promote engagement with department communications and events. (2) Develop and implement an action plan based on this discussion. (3) Solicit feedback and collect data to monitor changes in diversity of faculty and department senior leadership.

Theme 4 – Department EDI Perception and Practices

Summary. Department members expressed support for efforts to integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion into all activities (*e.g.* teaching, recruitment). There was also support for the REDI committee in leading and implementing these efforts. Many comments suggest that developing clear policies, processes, and resources will enhance the ability of individuals, committees, and department groups to make the necessary changes to their practices (*e.g.* Q1-3,5,6,16). Department members suggest these documents should be widely circulated, and the process of developing these documents should be transparent.

Action Items. (1) Develop policies, procedures, regulations, and resources to support department members as they integrate the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion into all their activities. (2) A discussion around the contributions of the REDI committee, and all department members, in evolving department practices with respect to EDI. (3) Draft a plan for department members to

provide feedback on policies, procedures and regulations so that they may be adjusted in line with best practices.

Concluding Remarks

Distributing the ISAT tool to our department members reveals support for integrating the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion into all department activities. Four themes were identified as starting points for the department to create a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning and working environment; specific action items outline key tasks in evolving department practices. Completing these action items will depend on a significant and sustained investment of resources and personnel to support policy development and implementation, and to collect feedback for self-reflection. Importantly, as highlighted in multiple comments (Q4,9,17), collecting and/or accessing the demographic information of department members will play an essential role in monitoring the success of new measures aimed at transforming equity, diversity, and inclusion in the department.

Executive Summary References

1. UBC Equity & Inclusion Office. *About the ISAT*, p. 3; *The ISAT Guide: A guide to using the Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool*. Version 2.0. February 2020.
2. UBC Equity & Inclusion Office. *For ISAT Leads or Champions*, pp. 4-9; *The ISAT Guide: A guide to using the Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool*. Version 2.0. February 2020.