

# Working towards diversity in the immunology research community



**Many immunologists strongly support the drive for inclusion and diversity in the workplace, but factors beyond their control are making this an ever more difficult goal.**

**A** diverse pool of researchers in immunology is vital as it fosters a rich array of viewpoints, perspectives, experiences and ideas that drive discovery and innovation.

When individuals from varied backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, ages, physical abilities and disabilities and cultures contribute to scientific research, they bring different insights and approaches to problem-solving. This diversity enhances the quality of research and ensures that scientific advancements are relevant and beneficial to a broad range of people. By embracing diversity, we create an environment that encourages collaboration, creativity and a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing immunology, hopefully leading to more robust and impactful scientific breakthroughs. Studies even suggest that a team with a mix of perspectives is associated with increased productivity<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the obvious benefits of a diverse workforce, people from minority ethnic groups have been underrepresented in science. For example, according to the Pew Research Centre, Black workers in the USA make up 11% of the adult workforce but only 6% are employed in life sciences. Similarly, Latinx workers represent 17% of the adult workforce and just 8% of those are employed in life sciences. This looks unlikely to change in the near future, with Black and Latinx students each gaining only 6% of the total research doctorates awarded in science, technology engineering and math (STEM) fields<sup>2</sup>.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement had a substantial impact across society. Its influence prompted discussions within the scientific community about addressing racial disparities in education, research opportunities, and professional advancement. Not only did this expose disparities in education and career opportunities within immunology and

other scientific disciplines, but it also encouraged advocates within STEM to push for systemic changes to address institutional barriers. In addition, organizations such as [Black In Immuno](#) have encouraged community engagement and amplify the scientific contribution of Black immunologists. Some universities have reexamined their curriculum to ensure that they are inclusive and representative of diverse perspectives while acknowledging the contributions of Black scientists and addressing historical biases in scientific narratives.

The push for diversity and inclusion has recently encountered some obstacles. In 2023, the US Supreme Court made the decision to terminate race-conscious admissions in universities (*Students for Fair Admissions vs President and Fellows of Harvard University*, 2023; *Students for Fair Admissions vs University of North Carolina*, 2023). These policies, commonly referred to as affirmative action, were implemented to address the effect of racism on non-white individuals in the USA. Affirmative action acknowledged that without proactive measures to enhance diversity in workplaces and student populations, historical segregation would persist informally owing to existing gaps in educational and professional accomplishments. This ruling strips universities of a vital tool in their efforts to foster more diverse and equitable educational environments. In California, where race-based admissions programs have been banned since 1998 in public universities, the University of California system has spent over US\$500 million implementing alternative outreach programs and is still unable to achieve diversity and equity goals.

The presence of international students and staff increases the diversity of laboratories, but drives to limit migration in many countries are making it increasingly difficult for individuals to relocate to another country. For example, changes in the UK government's latest immigration policy aim to increase the annual earnings threshold for skilled overseas workers coming into the country to beyond that of the starting salary for most UK postdoctoral university and lectureship positions. Given that according to the Royal

Society, more than 60% of postdoctoral researchers in the UK come from overseas, this [change in policy](#) could potentially have a large effect on the UK's scientific output. In addition, recent elections in The Netherlands have prompted concerns that the new government will place restrictions on international students, although no new policies have yet been implemented<sup>3</sup>.

These are just some examples of how structural policies may impede the positive drive for increasing diversity in immunology, and STEM in general. At Springer Nature, we have recently launched an internal Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategy to advocate for the communities we serve, with the aim to foster equitable outcomes in learning and advancing scholarship, from young learners to PhD level and beyond. This drive involves clearly communicating our DEI aspirations, collecting and using reliable data, and positively profiling and promoting the work of authors, researchers and academics from underrepresented groups. To further enhance diversity across gender, ethnicity, geographical locations and career stages, we are actively engaging and supporting external networks. Springer Nature aims to diversify their publishing supply and delve into research to comprehend structural barriers to equality, with a dedication to addressing and overcoming these challenges.

Ultimately, it will be up to the entire community to ensure that the positive steps taken over the past few years were not made in vain. We must all recommit to enhancing diversity and inclusion within immunology and proactively promote diversity while adhering to obstacles imposed by individual governments. As stated by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who wrote a dissenting opinion on the US Supreme Court's ruling to terminate race-conscious admissions in universities, "The pursuit of racial diversity will go on."

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## References

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3. de Vrieze, J. *Science* **382**, 1097–1098 (2023).