



Faculty of Sport  
and Exercise  
Medicine UK

# FSEM

## EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Focus Group Findings



A focus group report by the Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK (FSEM) following a comprehensive EDI in SEM membership survey

# Introduction

Building on the Faculty's [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\) report](#) published in March 2024, we remain dedicated to developing our understanding of the EDI experiences faced by our members within Sport and Exercise Medicine (SEM) and we are committed to fostering an inclusive environment for all. To further this goal, in 2024, we organised two focus group discussions to gain insights into how we can enhance support for our members and, specifically, to help mitigate the occurrence of negative EDI experiences in the future.

Participation in the focus group discussions was entirely voluntary, without financial remuneration, and participants were under no obligation to respond to any specific questions. Across the focus groups, participants represented a range of protected characteristics, including sexual orientation, ethnicity, and disability. To ensure confidentiality, all identifiable information has been removed from the reporting of results. The analysis of raw data was conducted by a small team of staff members, in collaboration with members of the Faculty's EDI Committee, who were involved in the EDI focus group study.

After the data was collected from the focus groups, thematic analysis was conducted to inform the development of an action plan to support our members within SEM. The key issues identified during this process were categorised into the following themes:

1. Support from management and colleagues
2. The importance of education and meaningful engagement
3. The impact of role models and the experience of 'not being the other'.

The Faculty would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this report, running the focus groups, analysing and then reporting the findings:

- **FSEM EDI Committee Lead:** *Dr Pria Krishnasamy*
- **FSEM EDI Committee Members:** *Dr Osman Ahmed (EDI Focus Group Lead), Dr Ron Bhattacharya, Dr Attar Singh*
- **FSEM Staff Team:** *Larissa Kennel, James Brownlee*



# 1 | Support from management and colleagues

- **Disability:** Additional support for individuals with dyslexia is often insufficient in workplace settings, particularly regarding standard clinical administration time slots and the provision of specialised equipment to assist neurodivergent individuals in their roles. Neurodivergent individuals may experience increased pressure and encounter micro-inequalities within systems that are primarily designed to accommodate neurotypical colleagues.
- **Sexual orientation:** Non-disclosure of sexuality to colleagues due to fear of this being seen as a negative characteristic, and worry that this could impact their professional standing, particularly given the competitive nature of working within SEM.
- **Gender:** Concerns were raised regarding slower career progression due to family choices and/or caregiving responsibilities, particularly for individuals with limited capacity to travel or work outside of regular hours. While those employed within the NHS reported greater flexibility, this was not the case in team sport environments, where flexibility around family commitments was more restricted. It was highlighted that many opportunities within SEM are scheduled on weekends, creating a significant barrier. It was noted that a number of leading SEM clinicians advised that “this is just the way the sporting world is”.
- **Race:** It was reported that there is a lack of institutional awareness regarding diverse identities and cultures. For instance, several events and conferences have been scheduled on religious holidays or conducted without consideration of dietary requirements.
- **Nationality:** There was general acknowledgement of the additional challenges faced by some focus group participants from overseas with training applications secondary to Home Office visa policies.

*\*The Faculty is open and supportive to overseas SEM colleagues, however is not responsible for Home Office rules and regulations.*



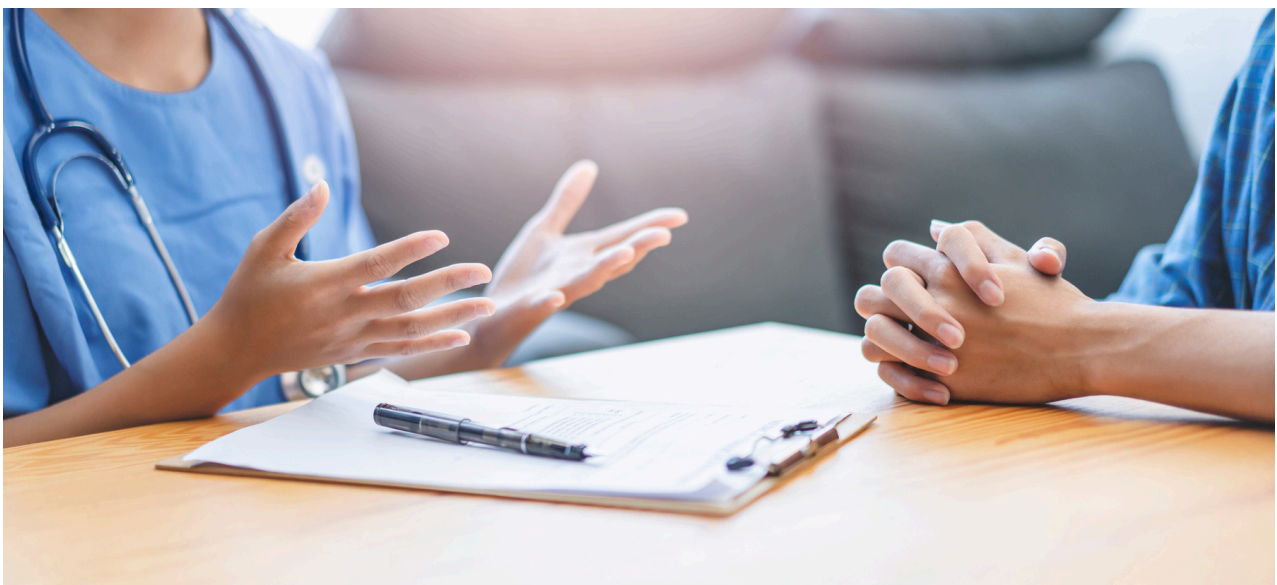
## 2 | Importance of education and meaningful engagement

- **Disability:** Neurodivergent individuals explained that they experienced situations where they were not believed by colleagues to be disabled as their disability is not visible.
- **Sexual orientation:** Participants reported experiencing negative comments such as, 'What are all these letters in LGBTQ+? More letters keep being added.' Such comments create a reluctance to openly mention their own sexual orientation in occasional casual conversation with colleagues.
- Participants mentioned that not all within SEM consistently adhere to the Faculty's Professional Code in their workplace in relation to EDI matters. It was suggested that more work to promote the Faculty's Professional Code should be done, including with organisations that employ SEM practitioners.
- Participants noted that EDI training in many organisations is conducted online and assessed through multiple-choice quizzes. They observed that many colleagues tend to quickly click through the slides to complete the quiz, often bypassing the content. As a result, these individuals may not fully engage with or absorb the material, leading to a lack of interest in, and knowledge of, EDI-related topics.
- Participants noted that few other colleges have proactively engaged with their members through an EDI survey or made efforts to understand issues within their specialty. In contrast, FSEM was commended for taking this initiative.
- Participants expressed confidence that the Faculty is heading in the right direction, noting that it is distinguishing itself from other colleges by actively evaluating the survey results and offering members the opportunity to participate in focus groups.



### 3 | The impact of role models and “not being the other”

- While we do not encourage colleagues with protected characteristics to feel pressured to disclose these, it was noted by participants that role models who share similar characteristics can be incredibly inspiring and provide valuable support to others.
- It was discussed that many colleagues have faced discrimination related to their protected characteristics. In many cases, individuals struggled to report these issues or raise concerns due to the fear of potential negative impacts on their job or future career prospects.
- Individuals who have relocated to the UK in search of opportunities within SEM have faced significant challenges in accessing these opportunities, often in contrast to their UK-born counterparts.
- Female clinicians noted that female athletes were more likely to openly discuss their health concerns with them.





## Proposed Actions

- Establish an EDI Policy within FSEM for discrimination based on protected characteristics. The policy will be actively promoted with all SEM employers, who will be encouraged to adopt the FSEM EDI Policy. The policy will provide:
  - Guidelines for an inclusive work environment in SEM
  - Signposting to EDI resources for individuals and organisations
  - Signposting to resources available from external organisations to support with whistleblowing in the workplace
- Promote and support alternative pathways by offering enhanced support for clinicians pursuing specialist registration in SEM through the portfolio route.
- Implement an annual audit of all appraisals to ensure that every SEM clinician appraised by the Faculty meets the mandatory training requirements, including EDI training. This will involve closely monitoring completion rates to ensure full compliance and accountability. Audit results will in future inform annual appraiser training.
- Promote the Faculty's newly revised Professional Code amongst FSEM members , employers of SEM clinicians and across the SEM specialty.
- Promoting role models from diverse EDI backgrounds currently working within SEM through regular podcasts and articles throughout the year, emphasising that SEM is an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome and valued.



The feedback highlights several key areas where improvements are necessary, including support for neurodivergent individuals, the importance of education and engagement in EDI matters, and the need for diverse role models. These insights have informed the development of actionable steps designed to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment within SEM. By promoting initiatives such as a FSEM EDI Policy, supporting alternative training pathways, and mandatory training, we aim to address the challenges identified and ensure that all members, regardless of background, can thrive in their professional roles. Through these efforts, the Faculty is committed to leading the way in creating a SEM community that is diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all.





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