

VIEWPOINT ARTICLE 

Inclusive Initiatives in Health Professions Education: A Journal-Led Peer Reviewer Development Initiative

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Received: 15 November 2025 | **Revised:** 10 February 2026 | **Accepted:** 14 February 2026

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in health professions education (HPE) and capacity-building is not new. In this context, capacity-building refers to strengthening individual, institutional and systemic capabilities for equitable educational practice, while EDI in HPE addresses structural inequities, representation and inclusive learning environments. Building initiatives that develop skills in HPE is challenging, particularly when aiming to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The *New Voices* programme addresses this by intentionally recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds and providing support structures that enable equitable participation regardless of experience, location or personal circumstances. In this Viewpoint, we aim to share our experiences of one such capacity-building initiative, the *New Voices* award. Drawing on our perspective and experiences, we aim to share how such initiatives can be replicated and sustained for long-term impact.

1 | The Clinical Teacher 'New Voices' Programme

Peer review is fundamental to ensuring the quality of scientific publications, yet there has been a notable decline in reviewers accepting journal invitations in recent years [1, 2]. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the Clinical Teacher–ASME Travelling Fellowship in 2020, leading to the launch of the 'New Voices' in HPE award in 2021. This initiative replaced the fellowship and aimed to equip early-career HPE professionals with skills in peer review and academic writing, supporting their development as emerging scholars. Selection for the 2023–2024 cohort was competitive, based on demonstrated interest in HPE, anticipated career impact and potential contribution to the wider HPE community. Successful candidates participated in a year-long programme that included monthly mentoring

sessions, alongside complementary educational activities such as tutorials on HPE research methods, journal discussions and structured peer review. The programme was designed with equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles at its core, resulting in a diverse cohort which was essential to mitigate subconscious bias in peer review (Figure 1). Such bias can occur in the evaluation of research topics, methods or author credibility, and may manifest as differences in expectations, feedback or assessment standards.

2 | The Importance of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Peer Review

According to the Editors' Association of Canada [3], equity involves addressing 'identity-based advantages and barriers' as well as 'working to correct and address this imbalance'. Diversity refers to 'increasing the presence of people of various identities' and inclusion is 'creating an environment where all those with distinctive identities are welcomed and valued'.

Integrating EDI into academic processes such as peer review is essential for ensuring that diverse perspectives are included, ultimately leading to research outcomes that better reflect fairness and inclusivity across groups [4]. The 'New Voices' initiative was designed to promote inclusivity, representativeness, impartiality and a sense of belonging in peer review groups in HPE settings, although formal measures of these outcomes are not yet available. Evidence from the broader academic literature demonstrates higher rejection rates for manuscripts authored by scholars from underrepresented groups, including those based in low-to-middle-income countries and racialised communities [5–8]. However, direct

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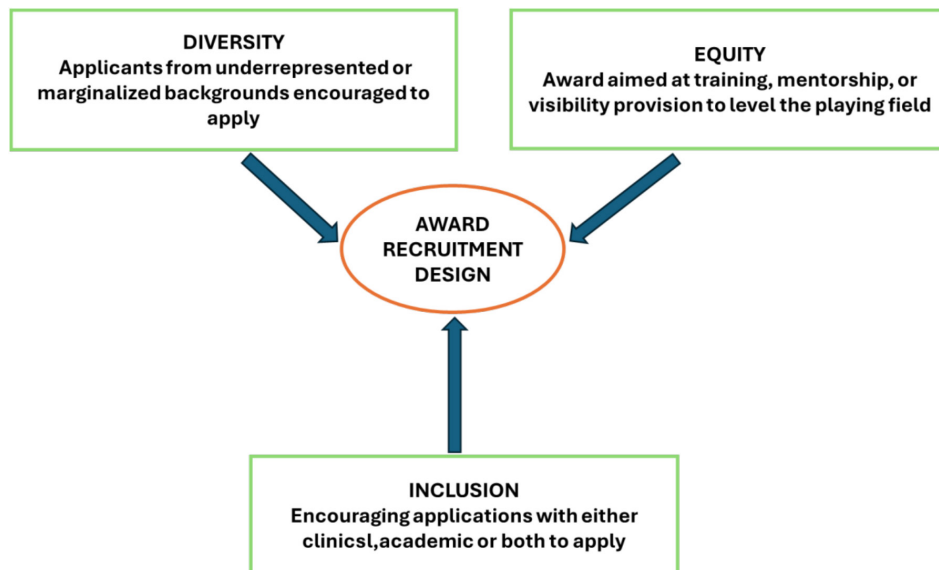


FIGURE 1 | EDI and New Voices recruitment design.

empirical examination of differential rejection rates within HPE journals remains limited, representing a clear gap in the literature. This lack of evidence contributes to restricted career progression and fewer pathways to leadership for many individuals from underrepresented groups, reflecting a wider pattern of underrepresentation in positions of influence within academia [7–9]. Highlighting these gaps underscores the rationale for initiatives like New Voices and the need for further research to promote equity in HPE publishing and peer review.

With the relevance of equity in mind and acknowledging varying levels of experience and expertise, the Clinical Teacher editorial team provided tailored voluntary support to help develop our skills and confidence in peer review. There was no formal time allocated to facilitators to enhance accessibility; mentoring was delivered to 16 awardees virtually by video conferencing, and support included the option to review our presentation materials before delivery and an ‘open-door’ policy for discussing peer review and authorship. Presentations were delivered by the awardees themselves, supported by the faculty team, and peer review was embedded in the programme through structured exercises that allowed awardees to give and receive feedback on scholarly work. The programme was designed to ensure that, regardless of prior experience, participants had access to support and guidance, including virtual mentoring sessions, optional review of presentation materials and an open-door policy for discussing peer review and authorship. These mechanisms were intended to help all participants feel welcomed, included and able to contribute during interactions. While formal evaluation of perceptions or levels of contribution has not yet been conducted, this approach was intended to foster a sense of belonging, equity and an inclusive learning environment where everyone can develop.

3 | How Could This Be Replicated?

Generally, fostering a positive learning environment through group interactions led by experienced colleagues and structured

mentorship can be applied more broadly across HPE settings. Journal clubs and peer review groups can support equity by providing a formalised structure that links early-career researchers, academics and educators with more experienced colleagues, creating groups of individuals who share knowledge, collaborate and learn from one another to improve professional practice. To enhance inclusion within the New Voices programme, less experienced participants could be identified through self-report and targeted support designed collaboratively, respecting autonomy, confidentiality and individual needs. Facilitators should have mentoring experience and an understanding of EDI principles. Additionally, creating a subgroup of early-career HPE researchers could encourage structured engagement with the editorial team. Linking participation to incentives, such as CPD recognition or career advancement support, may increase peer support and reduce barriers in larger, more experienced groups, fostering voluntary, equitable access to mentorship and developmental opportunities.

The call for applications for the *New Voices* award was intentionally framed to attract a diverse group of participants. Applicants were encouraged to self-identify if they belonged to underrepresented groups or were from regions where HPE career development support is limited, allowing the programme to broaden participation and promote inclusion. As a result, the 2023/24 cohort included participants from varied geographical regions and professional backgrounds, leading to enriching group discussions from diverse perspectives. In the course of our discussion, we all recognised that the listing of previous award recipients, including their location and job roles, showcasing their diversity encouraged us to apply. From its inception of 2021 up to date (2024), 43 awardees have passed through the New Voices programme from Australia, United Kingdom (mainly England, Scotland and Wales), Hong Kong, Pakistan and Singapore (Figure 2).

4 | How Could This Be Replicated?

Generally, academic institutions can promote diversity by intentionally showcasing representation in their programmes.

Year	Number Of Awardees	Countries Represented	Broad Regions Represented	Global North or South
2025	18	UK, South Africa, Malta, Ireland, Italy, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, UAE, Canada	UK, Europe, Middle East, Africa, North America	Both
2024	17	UK, Australia, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Canada, Turkey	UK, Europe, Asia, North America, Australia	Both
2023	17	UK, Pakistan, Ireland	UK, Europe, Asia	Both
2022	4	UK, India, Australia	UK, Europe, Asia, Australia	Both
2021	3	UK, Singapore	UK, Europe, Asia	Global North

FIGURE 2 | New Voices in health professions education awardees** annual numbers, locations and broad regions.

This may include diversity statements in application materials and highlighting past participants from diverse backgrounds, which encourages individuals from underrepresented groups to apply. Engaging with individuals or teams responsible for developing and supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives within National Health Systems or universities (EDI leads), as well as established gender-equality initiatives in academia, such as Athena Swan, is crucial for broadening outreach efforts.

Future promotion of inclusive initiatives, including New Voices, should consider non-traditional methods such as social media, international or local radio as these can reach broader and more diverse audiences.

The *New Voices* programme nurtured inclusion by using an online format, enabling participants from different time zones, childcare commitments or varied work shift patterns to participate fully. By sharing session materials asynchronously, participants facing connectivity issues, varied work schedules or childcare commitments still engaged at their own pace. This approach fostered inclusivity, enabling all awardees, us included, to contribute meaningfully to discussions and fully benefit from the learning experience.

5 | How Could This Be Replicated?

Generally, adopting flexible meeting times, online forums and asynchronous access can support inclusion in peer review groups. In the *New Voices* programme, meetings were scheduled to accommodate participants' varied schedules and time zones, and sessions were conducted via Zoom and recorded for later access. These approaches helped participants with

challenging clinical commitments or other responsibilities engage fully. Evidence from the wider literature suggests that additional technologies, such as auto-captioning and audio-text devices, can further support diverse needs. Continuing to offer flexible formats and, where feasible, creating smaller subgroups based on availability may enhance engagement and inclusivity in similar programmes.

6 | Programme Sustainability

Sustaining new initiatives can be challenging, but intentional strategies can enhance the long-term impact of the *New Voices* programme. Building partnerships with programme alumni, who can be trained as local champions, may support sustainability by establishing structured mentorship relationships for new participants. Collaboration with local and international organisations can integrate the programme into existing structures, widening the reach of participants. Finally, using social media, blogs or podcasts to showcase participants' experiences and programme outcomes may attract new participants and highlight the initiative's impact.

7 | Conclusion

For us, the *New Voices* programme highlighted how thoughtfully embedding EDI in peer-review groups nurtures inclusive learning environments and offers a model adaptable across HPE academic communities. While formal evaluation of the *New Voices* programme (short- and long-term outcomes) has not yet been conducted, implementation of systematic assessment in future cycles, enabling evaluation of impact on participant engagement, will inform ongoing programme development.

Author Contributions

Benedicta Quaye: conceptualization, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing. **Maddie Kannegiesser-Bailey:** conceptualization, writing – original draft. **Julia McLaughlin:** conceptualization, writing – original draft. **Aileen Barrett:** writing – review and editing.

Funding

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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