The Statistical Society of Australia Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Survey Report 2022

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Summary

The Statistical Society of Australia's (SSA) Equity Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Comittee conducted a survey on EDI issues as they related to the SSA, seeking responses from both members and non-members to open and closed questions. Sixty-four responses were received over a one-and-a-half month period. Eighty-seven percent of respondents were current members and 56% did not consider themselves as coming from an under-represented background. The majority of respondents, regardless of background, considered the SSA to be an inclusive and welcoming organisation, however for those from an under-represented background only half always felt welcome at SSA-run events. Responses to the open-ended questions generated discussion among the EDI Committee and broader Executive Committee, which has resulted in the work being done to address how the SSA recruits members to join its councils, what topics the SSA should make public statements on, and making information on the organisational structure of the SSA more easily accessible to new members.

Introduction

The Statistical Society of Australia is committed to making the Society, and the discipline of statistics more broadly, welcoming, inclusive, and equitable. The SSA formed an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) Committee (https://statsoc.org.au/Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusivity-Committee) in 2021 to help achieve this goal, however the Committee may not be aware of all issues of equity, diversity, or inclusion. For this reason the SSA's EDI Committee decided to conduct a survey of statistics practitioners in Australia, including its membership base, to understand what EDI issues these individuals may be facing, how these issues relate to the SSA, and comments on issues that may not have been considered by the EDI Committee.

As well as being interested in the views of the SSA membership base, the EDI Committee was also interested in perceptions of the SSA outside of our membership. If EDI issues are a cause for not taking up membership we would not be able to discover these issues by just surveying our members alone, and many non-members attend events that the Society and its Branches and Sections host, so the perspective of non-members is very relevant.

Methods

The survey received ethics approval from Monash University (MUHERC approval number 30741), and was open from November 25 2021 and closed on January 7 2022. A link to the survey was included in the weekly SSA member newsletter (Stats Matters & Events), on the SSA discussion board, and was also advertised via the SSA social media accounts. Before completing the survey participants were provided a brief overview of the survey's purpose and how their data would be handled, then asked to consent to participating.

Once the survey closed, the results were analysed independently by the current SSA President and chair of the EDI Committee, Jessica Kasza, and EDI Committee member Ben Harrap, to provide two perspectives on the data. The two analyses were then combined to create this report. Answers to closed-form questions were summarised as counts and percentages, and responses to open-ended questions were categorised into themes.

Analysis was performed using R version 4.0.5 (R Core Team 2021), RStudio (RStudio Team 2020), RMarkdown (Allaire et al. 2021), knitr (Xie 2015), and tidyverse (Wickham et al. 2019).

Survey questions

The EDI survey was drafted and tested by the SSA's EDI Committee, with the final selection of questions consisting of six closed questions, two specific open questions, and a general comments question. In order to maximise the likelihood of completion and to minimise the burden on respondents the survey was kept short with few open-ended questions.

The closed-answer questions asked whether respondents lived in Australia, were SSA members, and other questions about their perceptions of the SSA with respect to equity, diversity and inclusivity. We also asked open questions covering whether respondents considered EDI issues when becoming/remaining a member of the SSA, and how they would change the SSA to make it more welcoming. The full list of questions is available along with their justification for inclusion are available in Appendices A and B.

Results

Sixty-four responses were received. One response was from a non-member located outside of Australia. This response was excluded from any further analysis of the data, leaving 63 responses. Fifty-five (87%) respondents indicated they were current members of the SSA, with 5 non-members and 3 non-responses. Thirty-five respondents (56%) indicated they did not consider themselves as coming from an under-represented background, with 18 (27%) indicating they were and 11 (18%) being unsure.

For perceptions of the SSA in relation to EDI issues, 48 (75%) respondents considered the SSA to be an inclusive organisation, while 2 (3%) did not and 13 (20%) were unsure. When broken down by background, 80% of respondents who indicated they were not from an under-represented background thought the SSA was an inclusive organisation compared to 67% for those from under-represented background (see Figure 1).

For the 59 individuals who had attended SSA-run workshops or other events, 47 (80%) felt welcome at the events they attended, while 10 (17%) sometimes felt welcome and 2 (3%) did not feel welcome. When breaking this down by background, 91% of individuals who were not from an under-represented background felt welcome at events while only 47% of those from under-represented backgrounds felt welcome, with another 47% indicating they sometimes felt welcome (see Figure 2).

Finally, 17 (27%) of respondents had considered issues of equity, diversity, or inclusion, when deciding whether to become or remain a member. The percent of individuals who considered EDI issues in their membership decision was similar for both those from under-represented backgrounds (22%) and not (26%).

Qualitative data

The open questions were reviewed for common themes. Redacted versions of responses to the three open-ended questions, where any potentially identifying information has been removed, are available in Appendices C, D, and E. Each of the open-ended questions will be reviewed here.

"If you said yes to the previous question, what were the issues that you considered?" There were 16 responses to this question, where the previous question asked if they had considered EDI issues in their decision about membership. We categorised the comments into three broad themes: the position

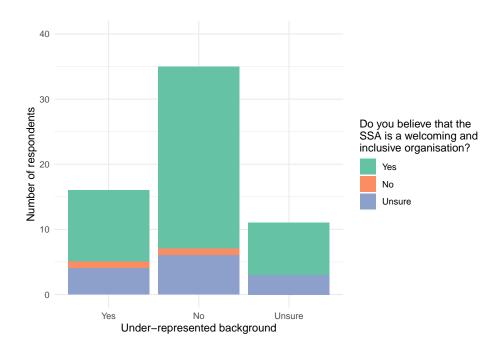


Figure 1: Responses to 'Do you believe that the SSA is a welcoming and inclusive organisation?', by under-represented background

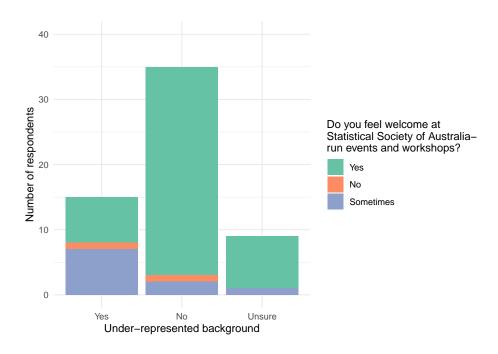


Figure 2: Responses to 'Do you feel welcome at Statistical Society of Australia-run events and workshops?', by under-represented background

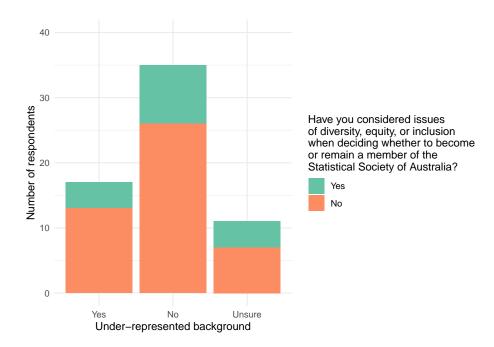


Figure 3: Responses to 'Have you considered issues of diversity, equity, or inclusion when deciding whether to become or remain a member of the Statistical Society of Australia?', by under-represented background

of the SSA on specific EDI-related issues (6 comments); the perception of the SSA and related societies with respect to EDI issues (6 comments), and a desire to increase the diversity of the SSA through their membership (2 comments).

The 6 comments regarding specific issues within the SSA mentioned a range of issues: gender diversity was mentioned in 4 (25%) comments, with queer-friendliness, nationality, English as a second language, and career stage mentioned in one comment each. Interestingly, two comments specifically mentioned joining the SSA to be visible and show diversity in the statistics profession.

Three (19%) comments mentioned whether the Society is welcoming and inclusive was important in their decision to become or remain a member, with two of these comments explicitly stating if the SSA was not a welcoming or inclusive place they would not be members. Overall, most comments expressed a need for consideration of equity, diversity and inclusivity within the SSA, however one individual expressed disapproval with the SSA's consideration of EDI matters altogether, and one individual expressed disapproval of a specific statement made by the SSA (the SSA's 2020 statement on the Black Lives Matter movement).

"How would you change the Statistical Society of Australia to make it a more welcoming Society?" We received 23 responses to this question. Seven (30%) respondents did not think the SSA needed to change or had no suggestions, however the remaining respondents had a variety of ideas. Some specific suggestions included improving the on-boarding of new members, with one respondent suggesting the process be improved with a welcome letter and instructions on how people can get involved with the Society. Hiring a diversity consultant was also suggested, along with having a more active discussion board (referring to the ANZSTAT forum).

Diversity in different areas (such as gender, ethnicity, or career) was raised again, with three comments on the importance of representation through diversity in leadership positions. Other comments included having events which appeal to different groups, such as people from non-academic or pre-undergraduate degree backgrounds, or other related disciplines. Two people mentioned making events more welcoming for nonacademics, taking the time to welcome new members or attendees, and making introductions at the start of each event. The comments related to diversity and career stages all highlighted that statistical careers are diverse, and statisticians do not only work in the academic setting.

One commenter suggested that the focus on under-represented groups was somehow in contrast with a meritbased approach. Finally, one comment discussed making the Society welcoming to people of all political beliefs.

"Any other comments?" In response to "Any other comments?" there were 17 answers. Again the comments were quite varied. Three individuals expressed gratitude that we were undertaking the EDI survey and actions to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion more generally, while one individual thought the activity of the EDI Committee was a waste of time.

Comments about the diversity of the statistical community and the SSA were themselves quite diverse, ranging from discussing the need to celebrate diversity, the diverse nature of the statistical profession, and the encouragement of diversity at a particular (unnamed) branch. Four comments noted areas in which the SSA could improve with respect to being more equitable, diverse, or inclusive, with mental illnesses and invisible disabilities noted, better ways to collect data on gender, greater clarity on how SSA leaders are recruited, and a note that even those seemingly in the majority (white and male) may not feel welcome within the SSA.

Discussion

We are extremely grateful to everyone who responded to our EDI survey. Though a small number of people responded to this survey, these responses indicate that while the general perception is that the SSA is doing well with respect to equity, diversity and inclusion matters, with most respondents believing that the SSA is a welcoming society, there is room for improvement. While there was consistent approval in among the majority of respondents, two individuals did express disappointment with the stance that has been taken by SSA leadership in recent years with respect to the Black Lives Matter movement and the focus on EDI concerns. The diversity of members within the SSA was noted, with respect to career path and stage, and with respect to political alignment.

Many of the comments sparked further discussion and planning by the EDI Committee for areas that we can improve. In particular, these comments stood out and caused us to pause and reflect:

Clear overview of how leadership positions in the SSA (committees, executive, etc.) are determined and how we avoid a culture of tapping people on the shoulder for positions within the organisation. This does not ensure diversity

This comment was both interesting and challenging. Shoulder tapping people to join committees is certainly common practice as it is not always easy for Branches and Sections to find enough volunteers, however we do still have people putting their hand up to join. The comment raises a good point though, that while shoulder tapping may ensure the continuation of volunteer-led Branches and Sections, it does not ensure diversity. The EDI Committee in conjunction with the Vice President for Membership will be discussing ways in which the Society as a whole can do a better job of encouraging hand-raising for Council and leadership positions.

... Similarly, the SSA should not have taken a position on the BLM movement (SSA should have affirmed the non-controversial goal of anti-racism, instead)...

This caused considerable reflection on the delineation between organisations and the individuals they are comprised of, and the role of politics in statements made by the SSA. Organisations cannot have beliefs, but the individuals comprising that organisation have their own political (and other) beliefs, which will directly or indirectly guide what they do in their roles. Discussion of this issue is ongoing, with the Executive Committee of the SSA, in conjunction with the EDI Committee, intending to consider the range of issues on which the SSA should provide public commentary more deeply. The SSA Executive Committee is currently developing a set of guidelines for making public statements - noting that the SSA will continue to maintain its anti-discrimination stance.

Improve the 'onboarding' of new members, e.g. welcome letter, guide for getting involved, important contact persons.

This comment, in addition to the comment on shoulder-tapping for leadership positions, has led us to review the on-boarding process of new members and how we better inform new, and existing, members on how they can get involved with the running of the SSA. At the time of writing this report the SSA trialled a new "Member Welcome Event" on the 31st of March 2022. This event provided attendees with an overview of the structure of the SSA, and a panel discussion. The event went well and we intend to run these events more regularly in the future to provide our new members with an opportunity to connect with the Society.

Outcomes

Given the responses and discussion by the EDI Committee, there will be several outcomes arising from the survey:

- In collaboration with the VP for Membership, enact strategies for better welcoming new members
- Provision of clearer requirements for SSA leadership and participation in committees and Branch Councils
- Ensure consideration of industry and government career pathways alongside academic career pathways in Society activities, including at SSA conferences, and in the award of scholarships and prizes
- Ensure that the SSA adheres to best practice in collection of data on gender
- Reminding event organisers of our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Event Recommendations

A project that is already under way is the further development of our membership database, which will hopefully enable us to track how diversity in our membership base over time.

Finally, the SSA will endeavour to conduct another EDI survey in the future, and hopefully at regular intervals, as people's experiences of the SSA will change over time. Additionally, the way the SSA has operated events has been drastically different for the past two years due to COVID restrictions, so should branches have more in-person or mixed-mode events, the experience of individuals at our events may change.

Limitations

Ideally we would have had a larger number of responses, however given the low response rate to previous surveys we have conducted of our members the response rate to this survey was not surprising. Overall the goal was not to gather a large representative sample of all Australian statisticians (although this would have been nice), but to understand EDI issues as they relate to the SSA and come up with areas that the SSA's EDI Committee can work on.

We also did not manage to obtain many responses from non-members. We will reflect on what else we can do next time we run an EDI survey in order to reach more non-members and encourage them to respond. The strategy of publishing the survey in our weekly newsletter, on the SSA forum, and advertising at events and on social media may have been more effective if we spent time specifically requesting feedback from non-members.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Survey questions

Closed questions

- Do you live in Australia? (Yes/No)
- Do you believe that the Statistical Society of Australia is a welcoming and inclusive organisation? (Yes/No/Unsure)
- Do you feel welcome at Statistical Society of Australia-run events and workshops? (Yes/No/Sometimes/I haven't attended any SSA-run events or workshops)
- \bullet Do you consider yourself as coming from an under-represented background in statistics? (Yes/No/Unsure)
- Are you a member of the Statistical Society of Australia? (Yes/No)
- Have you considered issues of diversity, equity, or inclusion when deciding whether to become or remain a member of the Statistical Society of Australia? (Yes/No)

Open questions

- If you said yes to the previous question, what were the issues?
- How would you change the Statistical Society of Australia to make it a more welcoming place?
- Any other comments?

Appendix B - Survey question justification

Do you live in Australia? Since anyone was capable of completing the survey we wanted to restrict our analysis to those residing in Australia as the majority of our members and the statistical community we aim to serve reside in Australia.

Do you believe that the Statistical Society of Australia is a welcoming and inclusive organisation? Before getting into qualitative data we wanted a simple closed-question to give an overview of perceptions the SSA's level of inclusiveness.

Do you feel welcome at Statistical Society of Australia-run events and workshops? One of the main services that the SSA provides, through its national body, the branches, and sections, is the hosting of events, ranging from workshops to talks to social events. This is the main place where people interact on an individual level with the SSA and its representatives. By asking this question we aimed to find out if our events needed to be made more welcoming and inclusive.

Do you consider yourself as coming from an under-represented background in statistics? In order to encourage people to respond we decided to limit the amount of identifying information that we collected. Rather than asking questions about gender, ethnicity, and other personal characteristics, we asked this question as we were interested in whether perceptions varied depending on being a member of an under-represented background in the statistics profession.

Are you a member of the Statistical Society of Australia? As mentioned previously, EDI issues may be a reason for people not taking up membership, so this question was asked to compare responses between members and non-members.

Have you considered issues of diversity, equity, or inclusion when deciding whether to become or remain a member of the Statistical Society of Australia? We asked this question to gauge how many people considered EDI issues as part of their decision on becoming or remaining a member.

If you said yes to the previous question, what were the issues that you considered? By asking this question we hoped to discover issues that might be preventing people from becoming members, or were important in retaining them as members.

How would you change the Statistical Society of Australia to make it a more welcoming Society? We decided to include this question as while the members of the SSA's first EDI Committee have a variety of ideas on what we could be improving, it is possible that we missed something. By asking this question we were hoping to identify EDI areas that we could work on that had not already been identified. Also, if responses were consistent with our existing goals we would be more confident that we were working on the right areas.

Any other comments? This served as a catchall for any comments people had that may not have been elicited by the existing questions.

Appendix C - Redacted qualitatived responses and broad themes for the question "what type of EDI issues had been considered when joining the SSA or renewing membership".

Increase diversity of the SSA (2 comments)

- "I want to increase the diversity of the Society by becoming a member"
- "I considered that the statistics profession does have more men than women, and is largely comprised of academic statisticians and so I consider that as a [REDACTED] who works in a [REDACTED] area but use my statistics education and knowledge, that I have an obligation to be a member to counter that trend and provide an example of something different."

Perceptions about the SSA and related societies with respect to EDI issues generally (6 comments)

- "Essentially other groups in the area have a bit of a reputation so I'm always cautious."
- "Historically (like many other similar societies) the SSA did not have D/E/I issues clearly identified as a priority. The move in the recent years to prioritise this as a good move as I would expect any professional association to have considered and acted in this area in the current time."

- "Not so much explicitly, but only as I have been invovled for so long. There are other organisaitons I have stayed clear of since I do not consider them inclusive. And if I felt SSA was not I would either leave or try to change it."
- "reflecting on my experience about how inclusive of SSA is in its policy and in practice."
- "more implicitly then explicitly. But if SSA was not an inclusive organisaiotn I would cease to be a memeber"
- "I am very disappointed that SSAI has become obsessed with left wing political ideology that focuses too much on these ridiculous woke issues rather than on STATISTICS."

Position of SSA on specific EDI issues (6 comments)

- "queer-friendliness"
- "The SSA's statement in support of the divisive and far-Left BLM movement (in contrast to the completely non-controversial statements in support of anti-racism from the UK and US statistics societies) is making me question if I should renew my membership of the SSA. [REDACTED] I hope the SSA will never take a position on abortion, because it's largely irrelevant to the SSA and the SSA should not alienate devout Catholics. Similarly, the SSA should not have taken a position on the BLM movement (SSA should have affirmed the non-controversial goal of anti-racism, instead). The BLM movement is far-Left, relies on anecdotes (videos) instead of statistics, and advocates extremely harmful policies, such as de-funding the police. All of my concerns about SSA's statement on BLM were dismissed by the previous president. So why would I remain a member of a professional society that now appears to be taking highly divisive political positions?"
- "Whether there was gender balance (mostly not) and whether we cared about it (yes we do) and whether we're sufficiently welcoming (probably not)."
- "Gender and nationality, particularly those with English as a second language"
- "Gender Diversity."
- "My first response was"no", but upon reflection when choosing to remain a member, the fact there are opportunities for early career statisticians it's not just targeting old/ experienced statisticians was important. Also the fact that women are well represented makes you feel like it's not just a professional body for "old, predominantly white, men". So, these issues have perhaps not been for front of my mind but yes the SSA has tried to develop and highlight diversity so it makes you want be part of it. As opposed to some memberships were you think stop and think "do I actually want to support these people/ this organisation""

Appendix D - Redacted qualitative responses and general themes for the question "How would you change the SSA to make it a more welcoming society?"

No change (7 comments)

- "It really is fine and better than society in general."
- "Main issues in the past have related to the tone of posts on ANZStat, and to a lesser degree the intimidating nature of some forums. But doesn't seem to be so much an issue recently, and having groups like Young Statisticians does help."
- "It's doing well as far as I can see, with the inevitable challenges associated with COVID."
- "I am not from an under-represented group in statistics so I don't really have any useful feedback about what should change."

- "I am happy with SSA's current policy and practice."
- "i think it is fine"
- "I don't think it's a question of structure just we should try harder as individuals."

New members or attracting members (3 comments)

- "Improve the 'onboarding' of new members, e.g. welcome letter, guide for getting involved, important contact persons."
- "Consider format of Branch social events to attract diverse membership, actually to attract membership of any description."
- "Annual welcoming event to welcome new members to the organisation?"

Leadership within the SSA (3 comments)

- "Clearer messaging about who can be involved in committees and event organisation in the SSA. How do people get leadership opportunities within these committees? If diversity is a priority, it has to be clear how that manifests in leadership and events."
- "Have a diverse representative in leadership positions."
- "Leadership should reflect the diversity of the organisation"

Consideration of the diversity of statistical careers and career stages (3 comments)

- "I think making an effort to draw in folks from other disciplines who are statistics practitioners might be a good way to increase diversity e.g., geologists, biology, the social sciences, econometrics etc."
- "It might be seen as a bit different to normal considerations of" diversity", but the SSA needs to be conscious of the diversity in its membership. In particular assumptions are sometimes made that members are academics or students and that "real" statisticians have or are on their way to a PhD. (For example, I was disappointed when some years ago the young statisticians part of the ASC became effectively an early career researchers session.) Having said that, the SSA is light years ahead of the Australian Mathematical Society!"
- "I think the society does work to be inclusive and welcoming. It can be hard as a non-academic to attend events where lots of people know each other professionally and they don't always take the time to introduce themselves to people they don't know or welcome them into discussions. But when I have just jumped into groups and joined in at dinners, everyone has been very nice. So it's not an issue of individuals, but making the structures and culture more welcoming to non-academics."

Political alignment (1 comment)

• "All of the benefits of diversity follow from diversity of opinion, so this aspect of diversity and inclusion should not be neglected. Like many middle-aged people, I used to be very left-wing, but I am now politically unaligned. I don't think SSA should be a society where only today's far-Left true believers feel welcome."

Underrepresented groups (3 comments)

- "TBH I think my 'unsure' answers above reflect more upon me [REDACTED] nervous around groups of older (male) professionals, but in general my experience dealing with the society has always been very friendly. Unsure how to help build up the confidence of females and minorities. I think the mentoring initiative must help massively."
- "I fell like there could be specific Women in Stats type discussions promoting career progression."
- "I would stop the focus on supposed victim groups (female/non-white skin/unusual sexuality etc...) which is ridiculous and appoint people and make decisions on MERIT only, that is the only fair way to do things. Preferentially favouring women is sexist. Preferentially favouring non-white people is racist. etc..."

Other specific suggestions (2 comments)

- "The SSA to me seems to be doing what it can to be inclusive but it is easy to overlook things. There are diversity and inclusion consultants out there and it might be worth getting their assessment of the SSA. The person brought on to do this should be paid as well."
- "The one thing I would like to see is an active discussion board. The old email based one created an atmosphere of community. Of course it had all the problems any community has, there were some people who behaved in appropriately but they were almost alway quickly, and overall politley, put in their place. I do feel that for some reason some of the 'conflict' that occured on the old board made some people think it was not an inclusive space. However any community will have conflict on occasions, and it was the very inclusivness of that community that lead to some of the conflict due to different opinions (and sometimes people obviously having a minor mental episode). We shouldn't be afraid of debate and conflict if it is usually done politely and a good result is the outcome. Indeed in some ways we should see it as a sign of our inclusivity since it shows people feel comfortable debating their different opinions.

But overall I dont think it needs much changing, it is def travelling in the right direction." [ALSO FITS IN NO CHANGE]

Comments about the SSA (1 comment)

• "I used to go to the conference each year. Everyone sticks to their groups. Everyone tries to outdo each other with fancy stuff, instead of helping, , I don't bother any more."

Appendix E - Redacted qualitative responses and general themes for the question "any other comments"

Opinions about the survey (4 comments)

- "I've found the SSA to be very welcoming and inclusive, but I'm glad to see that the committee is actively working to make sure they are and continue to be. There's always room for improvement, and if you don't ask you don't find out, so great that this survey is being done."
- "I haven't personally found it non-welcoming, but I welcome this initiative to address the issues."
- "Thank you for the opportunity of expressing our view/perception about out own organization."
- "What a ridiculous waste of time and resources this all is. Focus on statistics please!"

Diversity of statistical community and the SSA (7 comments)

- "We all have a lot in common, namely an interest in data analytics and we should celebrate this as often as we can."
- "The statistical community is very diverse and traditionally has many members from different cultural backgrounds."
- "Improving the Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity of the society will be crucial to retaining/growing the membership base."
- "There are diversity issues in the statistical profession, more so than in the SSA."
- "In general I find the SSA naturally very inclusive, with its openness to anyone" with an interest in statistics". In that sense it is much better than some other professional groups who impose significant thresholds to entry. A side effect of the lack of such a threshold is the acceptance of diversity."
- "EDI includes the freedom to equally allow (include) diverse opinions, including those not popular or mainstream"
- "There is probably a disproportionate number of late-career white men occupying council positions [REDACTED]. This may create an incorrect image of the society for some younger members or non-members. However I haven't seen any evidence of discrimination against anyone not of that description. All we can do is encourage other demographics (minorities?) to get involved. Certainly in my Branch that happens."

Areas for improvement (4 comments)

- "Considerations for mental illness and invisible disabilities."
- "This might not be directly related to this survey, but I was looking for an opportunity to give the feedback to SSA, so I apologize if this is not the right forum. A while ago I was completing an SSA questionnaire for a funding to attend a conference as an ECR. Under the gender section, which was worded how do you identify (we collect this information to maintain diversity)", the options were male and non-male and prefer not to say. I had never seen anything like that before and felt rather uncomfortable. To me, the choices implied as if gender was on a scale of maleness and perhaps a binary of either being a male or a non-male. I had a chat with a couple of my friends who work in the gender identity space to check if this was a suggested way to have a more inclusively worded question, but they didn't think so either. There is a suggested wording in this guide, which could be of use: https://genderrights.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/LGBTIQ-Inclusive-Data-Collection-a-Guide.pdf (page 16). Many thanks!"
- "I am [REDACTED]. I still feel ostracised."
- "Clear overview of how leadership positions in the SSA (committees, executive, etc.) are determined and how we avoid a culture of tapping people on the shoulder for positions within the organisation. This does not ensure diversity."

Opinions about the SSA (1 comment)

• "Vic branch seems super welcoming."

No other comments (1 comment)

• "No."