Campaigning for Disabled Scientists & Engineers

Dr Hilary Leevers
Assistant Director, CaSE
hilary@sciencecampaign.org.uk

Barriers to Disabled Students in Science & Engineering
IOP & Royal Academy of Engineering
23rd October 2010
CaSE's work

1986 Save British Science founded
Advocate the economic and social importance of science & engineering to Government, Parliament & media
900 individual & 90 organisational members
Work across the sector on policies that allow science, technology, engineering & maths to flourish
• Research Base – structure & funding
• Innovation – industry & research charities
• Science & Engineering in Government & Parliament
• Education – primary & upwards

www.sciencecampaign.org.uk
CaSE's work on disabled Scientists & Engineers

Summary of findings & recommendations

1. The diversity of a more diverse science and engineering workforce is generally well-accepted. Many initiatives to improve this diversity are having impact, but it is depressingly slow in some areas and may have plateaued in others. More radical steps must be implemented as policy rather than simply as good practice. It is time to deliver diversity.

2. The Government must integrate its commitment to improving diversity in STEMM education and employment into all science and innovation policy, and never treat it as a soft option anymore.

3. Belonging to a group that is under-represented is a disadvantage in itself. This is partly because of the shortage of individuals at higher levels to act as role models, mentors and networks or to provide support networks. Perhaps equally important, these groups may be poorly represented on influential committees, governing bodies, interview panels, etc.

4. As well as taking a bottom-up approach to improving diversity, by increasing numbers at early stages, we argue for a top-down approach whereby diversity is implemented at the highest levels to pull others up.

5. All organisations in the scientific and engineering community should demonstrate a representative diversity for the full range of their activities. They must not just show their commitment to diversity, but actual access. The practice should be self-imposed within the community and not be driven by the need for Government organisations or for those seeking Government funds.

6. School outreach programmes should be attended by students representative of the schools where they are being delivered (before subject selection). Outreach programmes for older students should be targeted at under-represented groups.

7. Governance bodies should be representative of the groups from which they draw (within the usual limits of office).

8. Prizes, fellowships and funding should be awarded across different groups, and speakers at conferences should be representative of different groups, according to the groups from which they are drawn.

9. It is time to shift from good practice that encourages gentle change to achieving real and rapid results.

10. A national database should be developed for all under-represented groups to help provide site models, mentors, speakers, support networks, etc. The GenSET database managed by IMED may be a good starting point.

11. All teacher training should address diversity. Teachers should be trained not just to promote diversity but also in how to recognize and eliminate discriminatory attitudes and practices. Careers advice should emphasize the possibilities of a STEM career for all.

12. More flexible employment practices should be implemented, providing part-time work, accommodating career breaks, and improving work/life balance for all. The proposed Research Excellence Framework must not penalise part-time workers or those returning to work after a career break.

• CaSE opinion forum meeting on under-represented groups, October 2008
  – Women
  – Ethnic minority groups
  – Disabled scientist & engineers
  – Socio-economic status

• Delivering Diversity published May 2008
Key recommendations

For all under-represented groups

More radical steps must be implemented as policy rather than simply as good practice.

Integrate diversity into all science and innovation policy.

Counter the inherent disadvantage of being under-represented – role models, interview panels, etc. Diversity to be implemented at the higher levels to pull others up.

More flexible employment practices.
Key recommendations

For disabled scientists & engineers

The Government should provide funding for a centralised resource centre for disabled people studying and working in STEM.

The STEM community must widen its perceptions of how work can be performed and communicated, and be more flexible in assessment and promotion.

Lift the caps on financial support for disabled undergraduate and graduate students to bring it into line with support for employment.
Progress...

CaSE has brought up recommendations from the report, including those specifically to do with disabled scientists and engineers:

Meetings with MPs
Submissions and Meetings with Science and Society team (DIUS)
Meetings with Select Committees
UK Resource Centre for Women in SET
Meetings with the Royal Society
Progress for 2010

Working with MPs: Chi Onwurah, Valerie Vaz, Lynne Featherstone

Challenge
Funding for:

• A web resource to collate information for disabled scientists and engineers – across the sectors and stages

• Building & maintaining a network

Programme for research into what is needed and start to implement policy change

www.sciencecampaign.org.uk