

## Exploring linkages between sustainability, Equality, Diversity and inclusion (EDI) and accounting

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### Project Description:

Sustainability is a broad concept that covers issues such as environmental, social and governance, amongst others. EDI, by its nature, deals with the social issues of equality, diversity and inclusion within society including education, organisations and professions throughout. To be truly sustainable, an organisation must consider Environmental, Social as well as Governance (ESG) issues in addition to financial considerations. This doctorate project seeks to provide a better understanding of the interplay between sustainability efforts and Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives and the role of accounting (and the accounting profession) in this context. The research may relate to a range of different contexts, for instance, exploring the inequalities in accounting firms and/or the profession or the linkages between EDI and sustainability challenges, through the lens of accounting and accountability, employing either a qualitative or quantitative approach

Although the concept of ethical and sustainable organisational behaviour surfaced many decades ago, it wasn't until the late 1980s and early 1990s that sustainability emerged as an increasingly popular area of research within accounting spheres (Gray et al., 1993; Gray and Bebbington, 2000; Bebbington and Larrinaga, 2014). We are currently witnessing a fast-growing interest in ESG, which has been further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, to cater for the needs of the market, there has been a surge of new sustainability related roles in organisations as well as a growing number of policies promoting sustainability. Furthermore, consumers and investors increasingly look at ESG rankings to guide their purchase, investment and employment decisions. In a similar fashion, EDI, which has been discussed for many years, recent events have highlighted that much more work is required in this space to improve EDI throughout society. This includes improving access, inclusion and progression to those from diverse backgrounds within education, within organisations and within professions, improving access and progression

It is hoped that this study will investigate the linkages between EDI and sustainability and how accounting acts as an enabler (as well as a barrier) to promoting more diverse and inclusive organisations and contribute to a transition towards more sustainable organisations. To this end, the research may also shed light on the behaviour of organisations, the increasing demand for accountability and the growth in socially responsible behaviour of organisations where stakeholders seek to promote social justice.

This project may also present a new understanding of the differently motivated forms of sustainable behaviour and explore the drivers and attributes of EDI in relation to this. In doing so, the research may shed light on whether EDI initiatives have ramifications for sustainable behaviour. Another potential avenue of investigation could be an examination of whether accounting for EDI considerations or inclusion of EDI into organisational policies and performance measures fosters a sustainable behaviour. The applicant is encouraged to read the Special Issue on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Accounting published in Critical Perspectives on Accounting:

Kyriakidou, O., Kyriacou, O., Özbilgin, M. and Dedoulis, E., 2016. Equality, diversity and inclusion in accounting. *Critical perspectives on accounting*, 35, pp.1-12.

The research project is envisaged to be flexible according to the interests and background of the PhD candidate. However, the research proposal should relate directly to this theme and linked broadly to accounting.

#### **Expectation:**

The doctorate is expected to develop more specific research questions within this area and gradually develop three working papers over the period of three years that are potentially publishable in internationally recognised academic journals.

It is hoped that the prospective candidate will demonstrate an interest in developing both a theoretical/conceptual and empirical contribution within this field.

#### **Applicant Specification:**

The candidate must express a keen interest in sustainability and EDI related research. Prior knowledge and experience in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies is required. An understanding and knowledge of UN SDGs would be an advantage; however, it is not compulsory.

#### **About the Supervisors:**

**Anwar Halarí's** research interests are in the area of accounting and finance. His recent project is in the area of accountability and sustainability where he is investigating the role of accountants in the move towards sustainability. His recent work was published in the International Review of Financial Analysis that investigated organizational non-compliance with principles-based governance provisions and corporate risk-taking. Anwar also wrote a piece on Sharia-compliant leases arguing that UK auto lenders are missing a valuable business opportunity and that Islamic financial products are not fundamentally different from their conventional counterparts. Other areas of research Anwar is currently working on include corporate governance, accountability and socially responsible investing.

**Shraddha Verma's** research interests are in the area of accounting and finance covering a range of areas including the professionalisation of accounting, accounting history and accounting and risk. Her work includes historical analyses of the development of accounting

professions in different contexts including issues of race in accounting professions and risk assessment and reporting within public bailouts of private companies. This work has been published in journals such as the British Accounting Review, Critical Perspectives in Accounting and Business History. More recently, Shraddha has been developing work in relation to EDI in different contexts including education and accounting professions.

### **Indicative reading:**

Ashley, L., and Empson, L. (2017). Understanding social exclusion in elite professional service firms: field level dynamics and the “professional project”. *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(2), 211-229

Ashley, L., Duberley, J., Sommerlad, H., & Scholarios, D. (2015). A qualitative evaluation of non-educational barriers to the elite professions. London: Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

Bebbington, J. and Larrinaga, C., 2014. Accounting and sustainable development: An exploration. *Accounting, organizations and society*, 39(6), pp.395-413.

Deegan, C., 2013. The accountant will have a central role in saving the planet... really? A reflection on ‘green accounting and green eyeshades twenty years later’. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 24(6), pp.448-458.

Egan, M. and Tweedie, D., 2018. A “green” accountant is difficult to find: Can accountants contribute to sustainability management initiatives? *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 31(6), pp.1749-1773.

FRC, 2021, Board Diversity and Effectiveness ibn FTSE 350 companies,

Goldberg et al, 2019, Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in the accounting workplace, CPA journal

Gray, R. and Bebbington, J., 2000. Environmental accounting, managerialism and sustainability: Is the planet safe in the hands of business and accounting? *Advances in Environmental Accounting & Management*, 1, pp.1-44.

Gray, R., 1992. Accounting and environmentalism: an exploration of the challenge of gently accounting for accountability, transparency and sustainability. *Accounting, organizations and society*, 17(5), pp.399-425.

Gray, R., 2010. Is accounting for sustainability actually accounting for sustainability... and how would we know? An exploration of narratives of organisations and the planet. *Accounting, organizations and society*, 35(1), pp.47-62.

Gray, R., Kouhy, R. and Lavers, S., 1995. Corporate social and environmental reporting. A review of the literature and a longitudinal study of UK disclosure, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 8(2), 47–77.

Gray, R., Owen, D. and Adams, C. 1996, Accounting & Accountability. Changes and Challenges in Corporate Social and Environmental Reporting, Prentice Hall International, New York, NY.

Gray, R.H., Bebbington, K.J. and Walters, D., 1993. Accounting for the Environment: The Greening of Accountancy Part ii (Paul Chapman).

ICAEW insights, Strengthening the accountancy profession through diversity

ICAEW, 2017, Edgely et al, Diversity and the accounting profession

Kyriakidou et al, 2016, Editorial: Equality, diversity and inclusion in accounting, Critical perspectives in accounting

Macmillan, L. Social Mobility and the Professions, Available online:  
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmpo/migrated/documents/socialmobility.pdf>

Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012, Editorial: Researching Gender, Inclusion and Diversity in Contemporary Professions and Professional Organizations, Gender, work and Organisation

Ozbilgin et al Four approaches to accounting for diversity in global organisations, Critical perspectives on accounting