

## We are all of the same starstuff

Written by Alan Duffy, Associate Professor and Research Fellow, Swinburne University of Technology

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The SAGE Symposium in Brisbane this year brought together hundreds of interested parties across STEM to share and learn best practice in gender and diversity equity. [Science in Australia Gender Equity \(SAGE\)](#)

The recent [Science in Australia Gender Equity](#) (SAGE) Symposium in [Brisbane](#) brought together experts from around the country to address the gender and cultural barriers that we see in the STEMM sector. The symposium focused on implementing practical solutions to help deliver greater diversity and inclusivity within our sector.

I was honoured to be invited to speak at this event on why diversity in science is good for science and good for *you*, regardless of who you are. And I'd like to share these thoughts here.

### Why diversity matters

I was humbled to be addressing the Symposium, especially as I haven't earned the right to be there speaking about diversity. As a [cisgender](#) straight white male, every struggle I have ever had has been easier simply because of that fact.

It is a privilege and I recognise the unfairness of it. This inherent unfairness is part of my motivation to improve equity in science. But it is not the only motivation, *I* am also benefiting by greater diversity and inclusivity too. And as any good communication textbook will tell you – to drive change, appeal to self-interest.

Simply put, diversity and inclusivity makes for a better working environment for everyone, myself included! I am championing diversity because I know exactly what happens in science meetings when there's only people like *me* in a room - and stop me if this sounds familiar: Discussions are more heated, positions are defended at all costs, chests get beaten.

***The environment is less pleasant for all. And importantly for science, it's also less productive.***

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Diversity of experience, brings diversity of thought and the best science comes from the competition between, *and synthesis of*, diverse new ideas. Diversity, equity and inclusivity are the very foundations of science.

To accept an environment in which ideas cannot be heard because the people bringing those new ideas have been marginalised, driven out or even discouraged from being there at all is the very *antithesis* of science.

As highlighted by the Harvard Business Review's [Why Diverse Teams are Smarter](#) facts are considered more carefully, relevant questions are asked more consistently and potentially damaging assumptions are challenged more frequently in a diverse team.

***To be a champion of science then you must also be a champion of diversity in science.***

It's not just about having diversity of ideas in the laboratory. A diversity of background that reflects our community enables a research team to better understand, work alongside and aid the very community it serves.

Most of us work in institutions that teach as well as research, and there too diversity is invaluable. Where businesses have customers, universities have students. And diversity in the lecture theatre will better resonate with those students.

This wide-ranging value of diversity is as true in academia as it is in the business world, it's just easier to put a dollar value to it in a corporation. Which is exactly what consulting firm McKinsey & Company did in [Why Diversity Matters](#) , finding companies in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity posted financial returns 35% greater than the industry median.

With data collected under [SAGE](#) it may be possible to assign a comparative dollar value to diversity in teaching with increased student enrolment and retention. Money talks. As that good communication textbook will tell you - know your audience, and for some audiences money *really* talks.

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**Disclosure**

*Alan Duffy works for Swinburne University of Technology and is a member of the Science & Technology Executive.*

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