

Black History Month 2020

Ola Fodaju

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OLA FADOJU: Good afternoon, everyone. Can you hear me?

SPEAKER: Yes

OLA FADOJU: OK. All right. So that's the first bit sorted. Once you can get mute to work properly, then you're on the go.

OK. So as John has said, I spent not the whole summer but part of the summer in the AL Common Room. So, this is a lot about myself. That's me in the corner there, I think on the opposite side of the shard, and that's about a year ago. That's my full name, Oladapo Fadoju. I prefer to be called Ola because if you call me Oladapo, that means I'm in big trouble. Only my grandma and my mom called me my full name. 51 years of age. I am getting old. I've been told that by my sons. But now my wife is saying it. So, I am definitely getting old.

An associate lecturer on sports and fitness modules since 2010. And I'm also an EDI champion in WELS. Just a fun fact, actually. I was born five days after the Open University was established. So, I am as old as the Open University. Another fact is actually, Baroness Jennie Lee, who was one of the main people behind the OU, actually I worked in her building. So, I was working with IET at the time for about three to four years. So, I do have a very close affinity to the OU in that sense.

So, I'm going to move on to the next slide and talk more about what happened while I was in the Associate Learners common room. So that's the slide. It's just about data. This has been produced by the OU, and as you can see there, it has actually been broken down specifically by the ethnicity. I've just put a few arrows across so you can just see that's the FASS, the FBL, STEMA, WELS, and the previous year students.

Yeah, I do apologize for the poor screenshot. But that's where we are in terms of the-- so you can see the numbers, how limited they are, quite limited in numbers in terms of how we are increasing the diversity of the population in terms of staff, especially ALs at the OU. So main

key points that were discussed in the OU Common Room. So, signposting of areas of BAME activities and networks across the OU. There were discussions of best practices from other institutions that could be adopted at the OU.

Honest reflections from non-BAME ALs, the experiences of BAME ALs, how we as ALs can help reduce the ethnicity attainment gap. But actually, when you listen to Jenny Douglas this afternoon, she's now saying actually it's the awarding gap on the modules that we lecture on. And what can we do, as an AL community, to reassure that BAME ALs, that the OU is actually open? And that was a point that Tim also mentioned our Vice Chancellor a few minutes ago. And that equity isn't a check box measure.

So, there were negative views from the ALs on the points below that were disconcerting. And quite frankly, at some stage, I was thinking, am I in a script or am I in the Mind your language or Love thy neighbour TV show back from the '70s? If you're as old as I am, and you remember that, you know what I'm talking about how negative some of the comments were, the stereotypical views of some of my-- when I say, my peers, my ALs, my colleagues.

But however, the majority of the posts from the ALs does indicate that we are moving in the right direction. So those key points that you can see, those two points is below. There were posts from ALs that just didn't sit well. There was a lack of understanding. There was ignorance, which you wouldn't expect from an academic community. I didn't expect it. That could be my naivete. But I did not expect to read some of the posts that came through the online forum.

And consequently, one official complaint was put in by an AL, and that triggered the review of the Associate Lecturers' Common Room. So, there has been a review that has been ongoing which has finished and hopefully will soon be published. So that's a positive point as well that came out from me being involved in the AL Common Room and actually using Let's talk about race as a thread.

So based on SAS, one of the points that he mentioned earlier, Joan and I-- because Joan Simmons really helped in supporting me in actually going through this process of producing the slides, and also talking about how we would have this discussion, and also supporting me, actually, through the time when the comments were coming through the of the AL Common Room.

So, we looked at what we don't know, OK? What we don't know. And that's the not so good. We don't know how many ALs these unacceptable views. We don't know how to change those views. We don't know what the impacts that those unacceptable views have on our

students. How does it influence tutorials, the forums, even assessments? We do not fully know the impact of what those views are on our AL colleagues as well.

And there were numerous examples of offensive posts without the author appreciating that they were offensive. And below there was a long, unpleasant thread that focused on objecting to the suggestion that there was a need to acknowledge that race is an important issue, and the need to increase the number of students and staff from a BAME background, specifically stating that race is irrelevant. Persistently negative and unacceptable views which were counter to the OU mission were expressed mainly by one AL.

However, many other ALs objected to and challenged. The moderator intervened and some posts were deleted. But again, when the moderators intervened, they only intervened after I had intervened. And that caused another issue as well. So, the moderators and I had to have a discussion outside the forum about how I felt that they were not moderating the forum effectively, which led to another discussion with one of the-- I think it's one of the senior managers of the Associate Lecturers department, Tasmin Wisher.

And I had to have a discussion with her about how I felt the moderators needed to be trained more effectively to deal with issues regarding race when they come up. And I don't not think that they were. The stereotype view that has been dismissed countless times was expressed and supported in the forum, that the disparities between white and BAME ethnicities can be attributed, for example, to poverty, diet, and genetics.

I'm going to use a word that I used when I actually did respond that it was mind-boggling to see those views being attributed to academic people who I worked with. And when ALs were questioned, they stood by their posts and objected to the questioning, saying that they were not being confrontational in relation to the need for safe spaces.

And actually, at one stage, the BAME ALs who were on the forum actually had to remove themselves because they said, I do not feel safe. And this one response from an AL was, well, what makes him think he's not safe? Why does it have to be a safe space? What do you mean by safe space?

But again, this is not to suggest that they weren't countering that. Sometimes some ALs were countering some of these posts as well. So, what do we know? So, what we know, which is the good, which is the good part.

So ALs gave examples of previously working in diverse teams where everybody worked in harmony. There were posts from ALs who accounted for the unacceptable posts, were reasoned and respectful in their words, and supportive of the need for discussion. The need

for protective characteristics to be respected was stated. The legal approach to deal with discrimination.

There was a post about the discussion on the removal of statues. An AL expressed satisfaction of the Statue of Edward Colston, which was the slave owner in Bristol, being thrown into the water. One post called on white colleagues to challenge racism when they came across it. There were helpful resources being shared, such as the APP, and as well as authors who had written on their experiences of racism.

It was pointed out; it was signposted that there is a BAME network at the OU. There was a call to acknowledge why safe spaces are needed and supporting colleagues to have them. There was a view that the university was working to right the wrongs of the past and trying to address the imbalances of BAME college representation.

And there is one quote there which I'm going to speak about later on a bit more, which was there was a quote-- and this is the only quote we've actually pulled out because we didn't want to use quotes, more to keep it to kind of summary and paraphrasing-- which is, "We haven't done well enough, and we need to do better." We need to do better.

At the start of the thread, again, there was a lot of engagement, and there were several ALs who appreciated it and saying this is really good that this thread had been started. So that was a very good point to see.

So, the challenges. What do we need to know? There's a very telling post suggested that ALs can't do anything about our awarding gap, as we do not know the ethnicity of our students, suggesting that the issues with our students are not our curriculum or lack of representation. And again, this has been covered in depth and breadth by Jennie Douglas and Marcia earlier on today.

One person acknowledged that there was a BAME awarding gap but felt it couldn't be tackled at university level. So which level would it be tackled at? We need to know how ALs have successfully addressed the support needs of students from a BAME background, and then promote those examples of good practice.

The statistics on the number of BAME students and staff, as well as national figures, were cited incorrectly. So, there's a need for greater clarity and knowledge and resources so that colleagues have the support they need to correct this information. There was an acceptance that ALs are role models, and students learn from them in relation to how they communicate, as well as the topic being discussed. This reinforces the need for ALs to be trained in the issues of racial equity and effective strategies needed to address the BAME awarding gap.

And again, Marcia and Jenny have touched on role models, and Tim actually mentioned it as well.

Acknowledgment that students from BAME backgrounds may come into the OU with negative experiences from previous white educators. There was a view that it's easy for a person to ignore the importance of race if all your teachers have been white. Essentially, largely a proportion of our students are white, which means there are views and experiences missing from other ethnicities. So, we need to look at that.

Some posts demonstrated a lack of understanding of anonymous recruitment. Again, that's something that Tim also called up earlier. There was a very big lack of understanding of why you should have anonymous recruitment. There was a lack of understanding.

More challenges. So, the moderators, as I mentioned earlier, they did try to intervene. They did post on the forum. However, I felt they need more support to deal with issues of race and non-acceptable in the forum. I really do feel that that, essentially, was a key thing for me, that they just didn't have the knowledge, the understanding of how to deal with the issues, and hence why some of the posters kept on going through without them being challenged by the moderators.

All colleagues need to be able to speak out freely with good intentions without worrying about being criticized. I think that is essential because it does bring that step towards race equality.

There has to be a safe space for BAME staff to be able to talk to each other without having to engage with discussions on racism. We shouldn't just have to talk about racism just because we're BAME staff. We should be able to talk about anything. It shouldn't just be about race.

There has to be more ALs employed from a BAME background. I'm going to state something. Again, I don't yet have a full confirmation of those stats. I have been, as I said, an AL in the sports and fitness team since 2010. I don't think we're more than five BAME ALs within the sports and fitness team, I don't think. I do know there's no BAME academic staff within the OU in that department. There used to be, but she left. And there was no reason why she left apart from she got another job.

But that's the issue. So, I was wondering, while I was having this discussion with Joan and the rest of the BAME network group in our groups, and also when I was within the AL forum, to say why is that? What's the disparity? I've lectured outside the OU and other universities as guest lecturers. There are a multitude of BAME sports and fitness students who have gone on to get masters. Some of them have gone to get PGCE teaching qualifications.

Why are they not coming to the OU to work? Is there a lack of knowledge or understanding of it? Is it myself? Could I have promoted the OU more? I used to mentor and coach a lot of young boys. All of them are now in their mid-30s. But I don't think I've ever once mentioned to them, why don't you apply to the OU?

Why is that? Is there something that I feel that they might not be accepted? Is that why I haven't said that? Is that my subconscious level working on me? I don't know. But that's an issue I think has to be addressed because we need that diversity.

And that's the last point. The staff of the OU should reflect our diverse society. And at the minute, that's not the case.

A greater need understanding our cultural differences. There has to be a need to recognize the needs of students and to put students first. Those are challenges that, in the posts that some ALs were making, it wasn't clear that some of the ALs were putting the needs of the students first. It wasn't clear that that's what they were doing. We do need to understand the ethnicity of our students.

Positive discrimination towards students from a BAME background was suggested when deciding where to run-- so for example, I think an AL said that they don't have any tutorials on a Friday because-- this was, I think, really linked to more to religion-- that that was stopping the Muslims in the tutorial groups from attending their tutorials. So, they shifted that from Friday into other weekdays. So, things like that will be shared across the forum as well.

There is that need to discuss race and ethnicity with students, and the potential for issues that impact on their studies, that need to be addressed. The views of the colleagues and students from the BAME background need to be heard and acted upon. It's not just enough to hear the plethora of just white people's voices. It needs to be more diverse.

The need for the Associate Lecturer Support and Professional Development team to focus on the APP and the importance of race and ethnicity at the OU. And this should include issues such as being valued, being included and representation, as well as having an inclusive curriculum.

OK. So, this is the breakdown of the ALs from-- that's statistics in terms of the faculty. So, you've got FASS, FBL, STEMA, and WELS. And as you can see, you can see the total of ALs in the middle, and then the percentage below. The FBL faculty has a very high percentage. But again, they have a very low number of ALs. So, you can just see that the disparity in terms of the number of BAME ALs across the board. You can just see the disparity there.

So final thoughts what started off as a thread to find out what the views were of the OU ALs in relation to the discussion about race descended into an unsafe space, which resulted in ALs from a BAME background removing themselves from the forum. But then I'll go back to the quote I said that I wanted to pull out. But there was that one quote. We haven't done well enough. We need to do better.

And that gave me hope. I'm not naive to say that everything is going to change today or tomorrow or the next year. But that did give me hope that we are moving in the right direction. People were countering and challenging posts when they could. But yes, I didn't expect this to happen. That was not how I felt-- or sorry, that's not how I saw the thread going through from start to finish. I did not perceive that the posts that were there is what I would have seen. That wasn't my perception at all. But again, I'll go to that quote. We haven't done well enough. We need to do better.

And on that note, thank you very much.