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Panel Discussion

Joan Simon, Marcia Wilson, Jenny Douglas, Ola Fadoju, Patrice Belton:

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JOAN SIMONS: So, I have got one very long question. Just giving you the heads-up, Marcia. You're in the firing line first.

MARCIA WILSON: OK.

JOAN SIMONS: OK. So, for our-- sorry, I should have said to everybody-- I asked for questions, and I was submitted questions. And then, the working group who organized today agreed on the questions. So, this is where they've all come from. So sorry, Marcia.

For people who are racialized minorities, not part of our code, our University race mission is going to be a marathon, not a sprint. And it is psychologically exhausting to deal with issues about race in the OU, which is sometimes in addition to the demands of a regular workload. What advice would you offer to those doing this work in an organization that admittedly does not have safe space or safe space reporting at the moment?

MARCIA WILSON: Yeah. That's a challenge. It's been a theme that we've heard throughout the day, isn't it? Just the additional emotional labour of having to deal with issues of race and racism in the institution.

And I've said it and I've heard Jenny say it-- it falls on the shoulders of those individuals who are the most marginalized, which is not OK. So safe space reporting-- that's something that we've just started at the University. So, we have a tool called Support and Report. We're starting to get that up and running.

But I think the problem with Support and Report is that you have to have structures in place whereby, first of all, people feel confident that they can actually report any issues that come to light and have the confidence that it will be dealt with appropriately. And that is not always in place. So you can have tools like Report and Support but, you know, they may not work if you

don't have the appropriate structures in place to support that, whereby people know that the issues are going to be dealt with. So that's the first thing that I want to say.

I also think that a moment ago, I said that this work falls on those who are the most marginalized, and that has to stop. You know? As Black and brown people, we come into higher education-- I think back to when I first started.

It was a long time ago when I first started lecturing, but I just wanted to teach students, and I wanted to write research papers. But my career has gone from lecturer in Sports Psychology, now to Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. And that was simply because I could not tolerate the things that I saw and experienced in higher education.

I was quite content doing my lecturing and working with my students. But I think if you can't tolerate these things and you really want to generate change, and if opportunities present themselves for you to make that change, oftentimes we have to grab those opportunities. And so, there is this additional emotional labour that Black and brown academic staff and also professional services staff find that rests on their shoulders alongside the contract that they get given when they start work. So, it's almost like this additional workload that you are expected to do.

I think one of the things that becomes really important is self-care. I'm sure that's come up time and time again, but you have to engage in self-care. And you hear me talk about Audre Lorde-- Audre Lorde, last week, Thursday-- for me, this is about self-care. You have to engage in that. She says it's absolutely crucial, and it's not self-indulgent, because we were not meant to survive in this system, because it was not built for us.

So, you have to engage in that level of self-care if you are in higher education. So that's the advice I would give, but I would also say that going back to what I said a moment ago, those structures, those sound structures, need to be in place that support marginalized staff. So, if you do engage in reporting racist incidents, if you do decide that you're going to report microaggressions, you have to have confidence that it's going to be dealt with appropriately.

So, I'll just leave it-- I'll leave it there.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Marcia. That's very powerful, coming from you. And it's fabulous to know that you already know about the experience of the Report and Support mechanism, so maybe we can learn more from you when you do join us in December.

That's really helpful. And it's great to know that recognition about this additional workload, this emotional workload, that are often left on the shoulders of-- and somebody in the chat said, Thank you for saying brown and not BAME of our Black and brown colleagues. So yeah, really powerful stuff, and that's been a very, very helpful answer.

OK. So, I'm moving on to my next question, and Jenny, this is for you. What is the biggest challenge for the OU in developing an inclusive curriculum?

JENNY DOUGLAS: Thank you, Joan. Our biggest challenge and also our biggest resource are all of our many academics, both lecturers, senior lecturers, professors, and also associate lecturers. Because in order to deliver an inclusive curriculum, we need to have a lot of work at the level of writing new modules, updating existing modules, changing modules. And that is all going to require a lot of work by a whole range of people across the University and across all our different faculties.

And if we use the Inclusive Curriculum tool to actually help us to identify areas that need to be changed, we also need to train people in using the Inclusive Curriculum tool. And in addition to that, we need to train and support our associate lecturers. We've heard today about how they need to be better equipped to deal with discussing issues of race and racism and colonization.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Jenny. That's a really helpful and comprehensive answer. And I think maybe today, it will galvanize support and enthusiasm for the work you are leading on. Thank you. OK.

Next, I'm going to come to you, Ola. And the question is, what change would you like to see at the OU as an AL?

OLA FADOJU: Um, wow. OK. So many changes I would like to see. Like I mentioned earlier, I've been at the OU since 2010. I remember my first module presentation briefing session. There were two Black and brown ALs amongst about 40 ALs. That hasn't yet improved. So I would like the OU to really constructively go out and recruit Black and brown professionals who can tutor.

They're there. We're there. We're all over the place.

You go to other universities, they're there. There are teachers. Like I said, I have mentored, taught loads of Black and brown young kids who are now young adults.

But they're not coming to the OU. Why? Why is that? What is stopping a Black and brown professional wanting to be an associate lecturer at the OU?

What is it? What stops that barrier? Is there a line across the road somewhere where they know that-- I don't want to go into that place, I don't think it's safe-- I don't know?

But I think the OU needs to really positively go out there and recruit them, because we can't have a curriculum based on a very high majority of one ethnic group. It just can't be seen. The argument about the inclusive curriculum comes into place. And across the board, as we've seen on the statistics, that curriculum will only be based on the people writing them. And at the minute, the majority of the people writing the curriculum are white.

Therefore, there is a problem. And even the ALs like myself who are Black and brown-- and I will say this, because I think this is very clear. The sports and fitness team, the OU academic team, actually are being really, really good. I have been involved in the curriculum critical review of at least two modules.

Now, that is what we-- to me, that's professional progression. But is that because they believed I knew what I was doing? What's the process for it? I know there isn't a process across the OU that actually allows ALs to be allowed to be recruited into the curriculum area of writing. It's not a norm.

So, across the faculties there are different standards. So again, that's another thing. So once a Black and brown AL comes into the OU, what's the progression route for them to move from one point to the other?

How do they become a senior lecturer if they wanted to? How could they become a professor if they wanted to? What's the route?

And as far as I'm aware, there is no route open, and if it is, it's not transparent enough. So now, would I go and speak to my former-- the guys I used to coach or I used to teach and say, you know what, come to the OU and come and work with me, or come and work with us there? I don't think I would do that.

And that's because as everybody's been saying, at the minute, we don't feel safe. We just don't feel safe. I will go back to that issue about the review.

I'm saying this now because it is evident that I was involved in the review of the AL common room. But everybody else who was involved in it specifically emailed the person who wrote

the review that we do not want our names attached to the review, because we don't feel we will be supported once that review comes out.

So, it's that balance. Does the OU really want to be diverse? Does it want to have diversity? Does it want to have inclusion? Or is it just-- we want to-- it's a ticked box?

Do they really want to do that? And I don't know. As it stands now-- I know Tim was very powerful in what he said, but then I've heard a lot of white people saying things like that but actually not backing it up. So, we'll have to see. We'll have to see.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Ola. That's quite powerful. That's really helpful. And it sounds like we need to really work on our reputation as a university that is attracting and attractive to Black and brown ALs so that we can actually provide what our students need.

And I'm quite sad to hear that even though I haven't been part of the review out of the AL common room for discussions, that nobody wanted to put their name to it because of the lack of feeling safe. That indicates the University has a lot of work to do in that area.

Thank you, Ola. And you're getting a lot of encouragement, and—

OLA FADOJU: Thank you.

JOAN SIMONS: OK. I'm going to move on to my next question, and this is for you, Patrice. What's the one thing the OU could, should change to make a difference to Black, Asian, and minority ethnic students' success?

PATRICE BELTON: OK. So, can you hear me OK, by the way?

JOAN SIMONS: Yep.

PATRICE BELTON: Brilliant. Thank you. So, I just wanted to put another message out there, I guess, when I'm answering this question or to answer this question. Assuming that as a HE provider, the OU are built to encourage others to learn and improve themselves, but for them to also be inquiring and-- let me change that. Let me try it again. It didn't come out right.

[LAUGHTER]

So, can you hear me? Sorry?

JOAN SIMONS: Yeah. Take your time.

PATRICE BELTON: OK. OK. As a HE provider, the OU are built to encourage and improve the lives or help others to improve their lives. And this also helps them to build inquiring and inquisitive minds.

But the trouble with that, a lot of the times, in doing so, they become very assumptive in their narrative, very assumptive in the way how they put things across to students. And what I feel it needs is a very robust qualitative and dynamic review of experiences of their student cohort.

It needs students to bring a wealth of the knowledge that they empower, a wealth of the knowledge that they have, to the University to help with the richness of the community, to help with the richness of what the University does provide.

It's a partnership. It's a lock-and-key moment, where we cannot function one without the other. The University needs to understand that without their students, they miss a part of themselves. Without the students, they omit a part of themselves.

So, in order for things to work towards an innovative, and sustainable learning environment, we need to involve students more. That means involving them an equitable way. It means meeting students at their needs. It means giving them a voice where normally their voices wouldn't be heard.

That's just as what we've done today in the focus group. It means being innovative. Because you know what? As a student for myself, I did such wonderful stuff, learning. I enjoyed it-- you know, learning my design and innovation things inside of the design and engineering department. All of the wonderful design study that I did, I really enjoyed it.

But I realized we talk a lot about innovation. We talk a lot about design. We talk about all of the wonderful things we can do to fix and harness and structure design thinking as well as decision-making.

But then, we don't seem to practice that. We tend to do a lot of talking and a lot of empowering in type-- in terms of words, sorry, but we don't seem to reflect or show that when we come to the action. And that's what students need to see. That's what staff need to see.

That's what we all need to see in order for us to be a robust and, like I said, dynamic and sustainable learning environment.

So in order for the University to really empower students, for them to really help students to get forward in life, it's not to assume that because they're the HE providers who already have the knowledge, who already have everything in place, and who is already educated, that they should be teaching. But they should have that inquiring mind as a University to say, you know what? We could learn from these people, too. We could learn, and it's a two-way street. We can learn from each other, and that way we can grow together.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Patrice. That's a call to action, I think, on behalf of students. So yes, a robust review of experiences, and the OU needs to hear the students' voice from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic background, and act on it. Lovely. Thank you, Patrice.

OK. Marcia, I'm going to come back to you next. And my next question is, what made the biggest difference at UEL that impacted on your ability to gain Race Equality Charter status?

MARCIA WILSON: I think the biggest difference was the fact that the University was ready to go through the process of applying for the Race Equality Charter mark. I hope it came out when I was talking earlier, but we had a phenomenal Race Equality self-assessment team.

We had 27 individuals from different grades and different areas across the University that worked as one unit, and we had the sole desire to make changes and to really work towards getting that Race Equality Charter mark, because we wanted to see change. And we also had support from our vice-chancellor from senior leaders. So, for me, that was what was significant.

We had really committed, knowledgeable, interesting people who-- yeah, we moved as one unit. It was great. You know, I've worked at UEL for 12 years, and I have to tell you that working with those individuals, for me, was probably one of the highlights in the 12 years. It was incredible.

And I think that, you know-- I said to you earlier, it took 2 and 1/2 years for us to take that journey and to get the charter mark. But for me, once you actually get the charter mark, the hard work begins. It's an award.

It says that you have looked at what the University looks like, you've analysed the data, you've come up with some actions, you want to work towards change within the University. OK? It's an award. It says that you've done A, B, C, and D.

For me, it's the action plan and whether you actually follow through with those actions. So the hard work begins-- well, not even after you've got the award, because you have to wait a few

months to find out. But you should be working towards that change when you are actually engaged in that process.

Why wait until you get the award to actually make change? It is something that you should be doing as you work through the process. And we were doing that, and we had the support of senior leaders within the organization. And it's because the vice-chancellor said, you are going to do this, this is what we're going to do, this is important to students and staff, so this is the direction that we are going to go in.

And so now, I've kind of thrown a few things in there. So, the REC SAT was phenomenal. We had an incredible charters manager in Clare Matysova. She was well-organized and kept everyone on their toes.

And the accountability, you know-- it was very much-- if you say you're going to do something, you'd better do it. You'd better follow through with that action, because that's the way that we're going to get change.

But as I say, the leadership, you know, by way of the vice-chancellor saying this is important to our institution was also key. So, I hope that answers the question, Joan.

JOAN SIMONS: That's a fabulous answer. Thank you, Marcia. It gives us a lot of food for thought, because we have to reconvene our self-assessment team for our Race Equality Charter. That hasn't started yet. We're doing some preliminary work.

But it's really helpful to have the insight into the fact that you had a really large team, and they all pulled their weight, and embedded in there in your success was strong leadership. So they're really important points for us to take away. And of course, it's a really healthy reminder that getting the charter is the first step, that in actual fact, engaging with the action plan and making it happen is what has to follow through. OK, that's really helpful, Marcia, thank you. I think we all have learned from that.

OK, moving on again. Jenny, second question for you. How can we involve students in developing inclusive curricula at the Open University?

JENNY DOUGLAS: Right. When I spoke before about making sure that we change our academics, I think we also need to involve our BAME students in that process, in terms of developing inclusive curricula. Now, it's more difficult with Black and brown students, because they are studying, and we don't want to put extra burden on them. And also, we need to make sure that if they are critiquing modules, that they feel safe.

And so, we need to put all of those structures in place. And I think more widely, in order to develop, to deliver an inclusive curriculum, we need to change the whole structure of the Open University, in terms of people feeling-- Black and brown people feeling safe, feeling that they're being supported. Because you know-- and also to get that change with all of our white colleagues as well, recognizing the role that they have to play. And that means that we have to have, from the top of the university, from vice-chancellor and the vice chancellor executive, we need to have a commitment to this.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Jenny. That's really helpful. And I think you've touched on something that Patrice reflected on in her presentation, this idea of students needing to feel that their voice would be heard, and to engage.

Because I know when Patrice and I were setting up the focus groups, it was quite a challenge to get students to come forward. We thought we'd have many, many more, but it was through a huge amount of effort on Patrice's part that we actually managed to get 10. And it also reflects into what Ola said about not putting their names to a report.

So that is quite simple, isn't it, and almost an invisible challenge, in the sense that if students are feeling it's too much hard work, it's again going back to this issue of emotional labour. Why should they be involved if they're worried that there's going to be a backlash? And we have heard about the backlash that Ola experienced in the AL common room forum.

So there's something quite complex about that challenge that we need to step up to, to make students feel that their contribution is needed, that they will be protected by being in a safe space, that they will be valued, and they will not be critiqued. I think that's an incredibly powerful message. And thank you, Jenny, it's great to have your insight on that.

OK. I'm coming to you next, Ola. And your question is, having run the discussion thread in the AL common room forum, what do you think of your AL colleagues now?

OLA FADOJU: (LAUGHING) Oh, I don't think I'll be doing that again any time soon. I-- it is interesting, because I felt their-- I've worked in education for quite a long time, and I've never had those comments thrown at me at all. But then, I've never worked in a distance learning education organization.

So, I can honestly say that maybe the negative comments were made because people were keyboard warriors. They're behind a keyboard, and they could spout out anything they wanted because in their position, they felt safe doing that. Well, nobody knows.

Even if they challenge me, they can't really see me, per se, whereas if you're in a physical staff common room-- and I'm going to say this. If you see me in the flesh, you'll have to be pretty adamant or a bit crazy in the head to actually look at me straight in the eye and give out the comments that some of them were making. So that bit is there.

However, I'm going to say-- and this is not naive. It's not utopia. The overall content is that people do want change. And it did come from the white ALs, the comments of those changes. It did come from them. So, there is that element of change.

And that could be because, yes, they have seen the positivity behind it, and it's not tolerance. It's acceptance. We are here. We are here, and we're not going anywhere, so we need to work together.

We need to be in the same place for the betterment of our lives. It's as simple as that. And in that case, I have to take that on board and say, yes, if I was asked to go back in again today, I would. I would. I was joking that I wouldn't. I would and be able to take the experiences of what I had and move them further, maybe be more challenging.

I have support from the BAME networks and people who went in them, but maybe I'll even be more challenging. And Marcia was talking about a few things earlier, and Anita and I had a discussion, and that has prompted me to do even a bit more. So for example, like I said, I've nominated myself to be an AL rep, because if we are not seen, then we're invisible, and therefore the people who think they can get away with these things will continue to do that.

But the more visible we are, the more influential we are in the places of policy. Then, they will either go away and sit behind somewhere or get on board on the train and join it. So that's that balance.

So, I have no ill will to them, and like I've said, I've worked in the sports and fitness team with a range of lovely people, staff, academic team, and I've never had that experience with them. I've never had that. So, I know it was just a few idiots in the room who felt that they could do this, so overall my experience was positive. I know it sounds like-- it was positive, because the overwhelming fact is that people were not agreeing with all the other nasty comments that were coming through.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Ola. You're getting a lot of support in the chat, saying, yay, go Ola.

[LAUGHTER]

Thank you for that. I think it's very admirable that, having gone through the experience you went through over the summer, you're prepared to go back and challenge. But I think it is really life-affirming to hear that you did feel supported by your white colleagues, and they were the absolute majority, and that's really an important message to hear today.

And it's interesting-- somebody said in the chat here, maybe this relative anonymity-- although the person's name is there in front of their posts, but they're not eyeballing you out. They're not sitting across from you in the room saying offensive things, and chances are, they wouldn't dream of it face-to-face. So, there's something quite insidious and nasty about the fact that there's that relative anonymity by sitting behind a forum post.

Thank you, Ola. That's encouraging that you'd be brave enough to do it again, but you did get support. Thank you.

OK, Patrice. My second question for you-- how did you feel as a Black student undertaking the focus groups with fellow students?

PATRICE BELTON: For me-- can you hear? Let me just make sure it's not on mute.

JOAN SIMONS: Yeah.

PATRICE BELTON: Okay, good, because I tend to put it on mute sometimes. But for me, it was a solemnizing experience, to be honest. Because the students inside of the same group-- well, they had already joined, so I had started developing sort of a relationship, a bond with them, so that made it a little bit easier.

But I had to convince them nonetheless, because they've been bruised. They've been set apart so much and recognized as other so much that they felt even reluctant to go represent themselves. They felt even reluctant to speak out, just even in a small group like that, with their own voice. And knowing that there was some level of-- I can't say that word-- anonymity. Thank you. It came after.

But yeah, so with that, it was really solemnizing for me, because I had to try to be there, empower them, and make them feel like, you know what? Your voice is going to matter here. But equally knowing I'm one of them, and I'm also going through the same struggle, it was tough. It was really, really tough as a moment, you know.

And secondly, just to add, as you've mentioned, around June time, the Black Lives Matter movement-- having students-- well, I set up the group with the association in May, and it was

really slow to build, because students weren't even trusting the idea of having one. Because we tried it in the past as a diversity-- a wider group, and a lot of students didn't come in. They kind of like stayed away, you know, because-- yeah, whatever reason. Just didn't work out how it should have done.

And then, they came to this one, and students started feeling, OK, you know what, I should come, but very, very minimal. And they weren't sure what we meant as well by just putting the whole category of BAME at the forefront of it. So, I had to go out and rally a lot, but then the Black Lives Matter thing came, and students started running, and I was so grateful that there was a place for them to feel shelter.

There was a place for them to feel like, OK, we can come in, and we can talk about it, and we can relate with other people who have the same experience, and nobody's going to shut us down because we're upset right now. It's not that I just let them come in there and have negative slurs and say really racist-- because that, I would shut down as well. But if they spoke their truth, you know, it was a safe space. It was a space where they're allowed to speak what matters to them and also feel like it's important for them to do so.

And so, it started growing really, really rapidly, and then we had an advert from the uni about BAME bursaries come out, and [SIGH] that was-- other students, not myself only, but other students started putting it out. So a white student, my fellow reps, et cetera, started putting it out in spaces where it's a diverse group-- so students who are alumni, students who we don't really take account for anymore, also new students, old students, et cetera, all mixed together in a big amalgamation with staff and whoever else is inside of these groups.

So for one of the biggest ones, I think it's 30-something thousand people now, but it was 20-something at that time, and someone put it in there, and it started getting really negative, racially charged slurs saying that the University is racist for putting it out, and all sorts of different things. It got really toxic, and it's been like that. Whenever they put anything with the name BAME or highlight that they are there, it gets such negative-- yeah, as long as they go along with everybody else, as long as they go along with everybody else and be happy with whatever everybody else is doing, no problems. But as soon as they highlight themselves as here and present, they get a lot of negativity.

So, when Ola was saying he was having that, I felt that. I really did. And it's really hard as a person being BAME myself, as a representative who has to represent all students, knowing that I'm representing people who feel like-- or a lot of people who put me as an Other, who don't really give me that respect as a quality person inside of the student cohort.

And that makes-- well, I hope it's not that anyways, but that's what it's coming across as. And so, for me, it was really difficult-- just to get back to the question, it was really difficult as a student representing. But again, just like Ola said, there are a lot of people, especially from yourself, Darren, Michelle Pride, who's in—

JOAN SIMONS: FBL.

PATRICE BELTON: FBL-- I was going to get it wrong then. And other people as well as Verity, who's my lead inside of the Association-- all of those people coming behind me and backing me up and really empowering me and telling me it's OK and saying, here's where you go. Also, there's Anita, there's Suki, who mentioned something really positive about the common room earlier from Ola's thing, and a lot of others-- Parvati, Sas, everybody just really coming and supporting me and telling me, it's OK, and this is what you might do, and this is what-- because we don't have safe space reporting here, it really empowered me as a student to keep going when it was a hard uphill struggle.

And so that's what kept me, and that's what made me feel empowered even further. But it was a hard, hard test and a hard journey, and it remains so.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Patrice. That was said with real feeling. But I think your success in leading those focus groups-- number one, in recruiting so many students to them in the face of adversity, and in running the focus groups, you showed real empathy for the students, which you were uniquely placed to do, I think.

They looked up to you, you totally had them, they knew you understood the experience, and so they did feel safe, and they said things that we know they wouldn't have said in another situation if they didn't feel safe. So well done to you for doing that. The chat box has gone mad again. "Thank you, Patrice, you inspire me," and "you're an inspiration."

But also, there's been a comment in here about, the fact that we need allies. So, our Black and brown colleagues can't do this on their own. And it was a very poignant statement that Marcia made this morning. I love this idea of, go and find a white friend and bring them back, and I think that's just so simple but absolutely exactly what we need to do.

So, we have this group, Allies of BAME, but I don't think enough people know about this, and I think that we really do need that connection. Because it's like the quote this morning from Stuart Hall, we have to appreciate our differences. We have to work together, and together, we are stronger. We have to have Black and brown colleagues having white allies working together to move and make things different.

OK. So, we have little over five minutes, and this is a chance for anybody who didn't get a chance earlier in the day to ask a question to either Marcia, Jenny, Ola, or Patrice. I'm literally going to go by the first hand that comes up in that order. So, you have five minutes.

SPEAKER 1: Could I ask one? Hello, this is Denise. Could I ask my question? The hand thing is not working.

JOAN SIMONS: Please do, Denise. You've got the floor.

SPEAKER 1: Oh, brilliant I'd just like to say a couple of things, in terms of Patrice and the Student Association. I can see why you would have serious problems recruiting BAMEs, because as an OU student since 2014, I hate the OU Student Association, and I make sure that I check to make sure that I don't attend any of their events. They're whiter than white, and they are mean. So, I'm glad to see somebody like you taking the chair, but I just hope they don't grind you into a pulp and change your personality and chew you up and spit you out.

Another comment I wanted to make was in terms of terminology, and I feel that it's very important that it be recognized that Black is not just a homogeneous group, but within that, you've got your descendants of slaves, you've got your Africans, and we've got different histories with different things that need to be addressed.

But my main-- my question to Ola and everybody is that regardless of all we do-- and it's just been fantastic seeing all these brown and Black faces at the OU after all this time, in an event. But my question would be, what I know is the white systems tend to do-- they love this representation of the population and their measure is when they have diversity. So to my mind, if in the Open University-- when they go to themselves on the back, it will be roughly when they've got about 3% of Black people-- I would say, one-point-odd percent Caribbean, so many African-- it's still going to be 90-odd-- well, not 90-odd-- 88% or whatever white. So, for me, I struggle to see how the word diverse works in that context, because they will still be able to pick me up and spit me out, because we're such a low number. That's been done.

JOAN SIMONS: Thanks, Denise. Panel, do you want to respond to Denise? Ola?

OLA FADOJU: Oh.

JOAN SIMONS: You were the first with your microphone on. Sorry—

OLA FADOJU: Oh. Oh, well, OK. (LAUGHING) Yeah. But good point by Denise, but I think-- well, Marcia will be with us in December, so I know she's not going to let the senior management off the hook. So no, it is not just about meeting a quota. That's fine if you want

to meet a quota, but I think in the chat, there's someone talking about this rich, diverse group, and that's what we need to have at the OU.

So yes, there is a set number that the OU would like to meet, but then we need to move on from that. So, it's just the same-- it's like the issue about Black History Month. When I first heard of Black History Month-- I'm not talking from a perspective that I have my Nigerian parents.

I've lived in Nigeria, and I've lived in England, so I didn't understand, why is there a Black History Month? I'm Black every day. You know? Why does it have to be a special month that I am Black?

But then, when I've lived here long enough, I could see why. Because a lot of people did not understand why there's Black History. They don't understand there's a history of Black people.

So therefore, I understand why it is a special month put down there. So we need to take this on point as Black and brown people within the OU that, once a particular quota either has been met or not met, we still have to continue to challenge the management, to continue to do what is necessary, not because it ticks a box, not because it looks nice, but because that is what you're supposed to do.

If you're a parent, you're supposed to look after your child. You don't need to be told that. You don't need to be. It's not a tick box. You have to look after your child. So, there is no reason why we shouldn't have a diverse set of staff at the OU. That is what should happen as a normality.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Ola. And then, the last word to Patrice.

PATRICE BELTON: Oh, thank you so much. Right. Just to add to what Ola said, and it's to Denise as well-- I appreciate-- and I must stress that-- I appreciate how you feel about the Association. And for me, when I came in, I had my own challenges with the Association.

But one thing I want us to do, as I assume you are a BAME person as well, is to be open-minded, not to say that you have to go back there. I'm not saying that. I'm saying, we've all got scars, and in order for us to move forward as a community to help this University to grow-- because that's our mandate here, is to help the whole University to grow. And the Association is a very valuable and important part of that.

So, we have to remember that in terms of equity, in terms of helping to make the diverse robust division in which our students are part of the University, we have to take them along with us. And so I am a representative of the Association, and I'm going to back them up for the sake that I have been there for the past year and a bit, and I've seen their challenges, and I think they see their challenges, and they're trying to make change.

I'm not saying it's great, because nothing here at our University is fully great just yet. But we have to be mindful of what we feed ourselves. We have to be mindful of how we help ourselves move forward.

We could stay stagnant with the things that burnt us, and if that's what we're going to do, then we live inside of a mentality which is inside of a pit. We cannot do that to help ourselves progress. We have to be the people who make change.

We have to be the people who bring positivity. And in order to do so, it means we have to look at the people who were our enemies at one point and learn to understand them and learn to teach them how we can grow forward together. Thank you.

JOAN SIMONS: Well-said, Patrice.

[APPLAUSE]

And that's a fabulous way for us to end our day. Thank you so much. And thank you to the people who have done a double whammy today. So, you've not only come and presented to the whole group-- thank you for that-- but you've also turned up again and sat there waiting for these questions. And we've had fabulous answers from you, so thank you so much. You've really made our day.

SPEAKER 2: Is it OK just to say one quick thing? Can you hear me?

JOAN SIMONS: Yep.

SPEAKER 2: I've got three jobs. Hello, Marcia. You probably don't remember me from a long time ago. I am a-- I'm in the STEMs now. I think when you knew me, I was in psychology. I'm in STEMs now. I teach at a Russell Group University, Imperial, and I've been visiting at Open University.

And one thing I would say of my experience at Open University is that I, like all of you, am not only Black people, but we also have a profession as well, and we have a discipline. And I

used to be very internationally known on the circuit in China, and-- where else have I been? Loads of places-- talking about race.

But one thing that I found after a while was that I was always being asked to talk about race and diversity issues, which is what I started doing in psychology, and not my science issues. And so I don't want us to be ghettoized again, because we're seen as only being able to talk about those issues and not about other issues.

When-- I forgot the chap's name-- but earlier, you did a fantastic presentation. I think it was the one who said he's 51. Is that you?

JOAN SIMONS: Ola.

SPEAKER 2: Yeah. Ola. When he was showing the statistics, which I find very heart-breaking, especially in my own faculty in science, and to find out that probably that one person may be me. I don't know. But what is it that we need to do to get across-- I mean, I've had discussions before with Tim, because I did AL presentations at the conference, mostly looking at neurodiversity, because I'm a neuroscientist, looking at the brain and difference, and the brain and how we work with unconscious bias.

So that was my area, and I had the fortune to ask Tim a question. He seems not to have moved very much on from the answer that he gave me, and I am really happy to see students and poetry and all of that to be helping to kind of be getting the way forward. But you know, all the way through the day, it's been really brilliant to see people of colour talking about issues like-- at the beginning, talking about how many Black female professors we've got, et cetera, et cetera.

But I think we also have to recognize, as you said, Patricia or Patrice, that we have to get those others on board. I'll give you a very quick example. When I was training before I became a scientist—

JOAN SIMONS: Sorry, I'm sorry. I'm going to come in there now. We are running five minutes over, so please give your last example and thank you.

SPEAKER 2: OK, thank you.

JOAN SIMONS: No, you're going to give us your example, if you could just make it short.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, all I was going to say is that whenever I ask about why we don't have these issues on the curriculum, which is in psychology, at the time, I was asked, why don't I teach it,

as if it's only an issue for people of colour. And I think we need to make them realize that it's not only their issue, and that diversity is important. I just want to say thank you very much for putting this day on as well, and if you think there's any way that we can encourage people of non-Black and Asian backgrounds to be more forceful.

JOAN SIMONS: Angela, that's very well said, and I think we need to hear more from you and your passion and help us improve things, because that's what today has been about. I'm glad you enjoyed the day and Thank you very much.

SPEAKER 2: Thank you.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you.