

Race and Equality

Staffing Change

Eric Addae Kyeremeh and Joan Simons:

JOAN: My next question is, looking back over your 10 years, what changes have you seen to staffing at the OU?

ERIC ADDAE: Oh, that's an interesting one. At the OU, it's kind of broad. Can I scale it down to the faculty or the school?

JOAN: Sure, absolutely.

ERIC ADDAE: Yeah, yeah. So, I mean, when I joined in 2011, I quite remember sitting at faculty- so it was then the Faculty of Education and Language Studies, FELS, as it was known as, and HWSC was a different faculty. And I remember sitting at one faculty meeting looking around and it looked like I was the only black academic at the time.

I've never really checked the data to see whether that was the real case, but I remember looking around on our floors, I mean, we're used to all building. I walked the floors; I don't recall seeing another black person. At meetings I hardly saw any black person.

But looking back now, I mean, 10 years down the line there are seven blacks now including myself that we've had. Yeah, six. And black colleagues have joined, and interestingly, three female, three males.

JOAN: Well, that's good.

ERIC ADDAE: It's not by design. Exactly. It's never by design, it's just happened. So yeah. So, I've seen these changes take place within the 10-year period. And it's one of the things that I keep saying to colleagues that, I mean, when it comes to diversity, when it comes-- I mean, personally I've never had an issue with inclusion because I felt included.

But when it comes to diversity, yes, I think it's obvious. I go to many meetings and it's likely I'll be the only black person. But it does take time, it will take time in terms of diversifying a workforce. It's not something that can be done in two or three years. It will take time.

The key thing is having strategies in place and getting people to understand that diversity really, really works and it's something to celebrate.

JOAN: I agree, yeah. Are we on the right road?

ERIC ADDAE: Yes.

JOAN: So, looking back, Eric, to when you started with us and you were the only black academic, what difference does that make to you?

ERIC ADDAE: That's one of the challenges I've always had. It hardly had any impact on me in terms of my work because I joined a very, very supportive team. I mean, a very tightly knit team. They had been around the OU for a very long time.

They've been working together-- so this is the master's in education team, particularly the Leadership and Management strand. And they've been working together for a very, very long time. I mean, one of them had been around since the '70s. I only knew when she retired, and we were packing her books and I saw a book that she wrote in the '70s.

So, they've been a very, very closely tight team. But then the welcome I got was tremendous because I think they had come to a point where they were beginning to retire and were also looking for an opportunity to maybe diversify their team, but also to get fairly new people to bring in new ideas and new thinking into the team. So, I felt so welcomed. I think that for some reason insulated me from anything else, if that's kind of a good way to put it.

I mean, I always give an example of Professor Bennett coming to my first-- so when I went to my first BELMAS-- BELMAS is the British Educational Leadership Management and Administration Society. So, most academics that research and teach in educational leadership and management will be members of that association and we will attend our conference.

And I remember the faculty-- and as you know, usually to get support to attend these conferences you must be presenting a paper or something like that. But I remember the faculty paying for me to attend although I wasn't presenting the paper. It was kind of my first conference.

Yeah. And Nigel, actually who had was retiring I think, but made the effort to come to that conference that year because he wasn't going to go. But he made the effort to come just because of me, so he could introduce me to the networks. Because interestingly, a lot of the BELMAS senior colleagues in there are ex-OU.

So, Nigel made-- yeah, exactly. So, Nigel made the effort to introduce me to some of his networks, and I've always appreciated that, and I got very got on very well with him before he retired. And I'm always forever grateful because that introduced me to a network of people who have remained very close friends and allies, and it's great.

So, I think because of the makeup of the team and the way I was welcomed, I always felt a member of the team, a member of the faculty, and from there I've tried to progress as the years have gone by.

JOAN: Great. Thank you, Eric. That's really good news.