

Race and Equality

Time For Change

Anthony Gunther and Joan Simons:

JOAN SIMONS: Hello, I'm Joan Simons. I'm associate dean for Teaching Excellence in the faculty of Well-being, Education, and Language Studies, and I'm also the academic lead for EDI.

ANTHONY GUNTER: Hi. I'm Anthony Gunter. I am senior lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies and program leader for Childhood and Youth Studies in the faculty of Well-being, Education, and Languages in the School of Education, Childhood, and Youth Studies.

JOAN SIMONS: Anthony, thanks very much for agreeing to talk to me today about experiences you've had both working within The Open University and outside it. Would you like to explain some of the experiences you would like to talk about today?

ANTHONY GUNTER: Yes, most certainly. I started off as an associate lecturer at The Open University. Just did my PhD some two decades ago, and I've recently come back to The Open University as a central academic in March. So, I think it's quite an interesting span of years to see how things have progressed or not in that time for me.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Anthony. And can tell me about your cultural background?

ANTHONY GUNTER: Yes, I mean, as far as The Open University is concerned, I'm a BAME member of staff, but I'm of British African Caribbean heritage. A Black African Caribbean heritage.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Anthony. And the term BAME has become problematic. Can you explain to me your perspective on this?

ANTHONY GUNTER: BAME, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, it's problematic because it conceals more than it reveals. And if we're looking at education or higher education, BAME includes those from Southeast Asia, from China, or the Indian subcontinent. And we know

that those from China, as an example, are over-represented in terms of higher education attainment and their numbers in the Academy. Whereas those of Black African Caribbean heritage are underrepresented. So, you've got two groups in there who have exceptionally wildly different experiences.

JOAN SIMONS: Thanks, Anthony. So, with your wealth of experience of having been an AL previously, at the OU, and now coming back in your more recent role as a central academic, what in your perspective should the staff at The OU be doing differently?

ANTHONY GUNTER: I think, first and foremost, I think staff at The OU need to understand that there was a problem. I was an associate lecturer 20 years ago, and I was the only Black associate lecturer at the time, but I managed to get a full-time job. And I left The Open University, but I never considered The Open University to be an institution where I could have a career. And it wasn't a conscious effort, but looking back on it, I can see that I didn't feel that institution would be welcoming to someone like myself and that I'd be able to forge a career here.

JOAN SIMONS: OK, and now that you've come back, what difference do you see?

ANTHONY GUNTER: Now I've come back, I've almost felt a bit more depressed actually, because 20 years ago it was a different time, and you'd have thought in 20 years that more progress would have been made. But it seems, in many respects, progress hasn't really been made. And so, I was really excited to come back here. I was also a bit apprehensive because I knew that I'd be leaving an institution that—

There was always problems in the higher education sector, but there were many BAME students, there was quite a lot of BAME staff in my university. And so, to come to The Open University, it was almost like I was thrown back into a time warp almost. So that was quite difficult to get my head around.

JOAN SIMONS: Right, I can understand that. And so, because you came from the University of East London, what practices have you come across outside of The Open University that could be brought here to advance things?

ANTHONY GUNTER: I think one of the things at the University of London was that-- there's a long way to go. There's always a long way to go, but the great thing I found was colleagues. And some of the colleagues who I found were really at the heart of moving the agenda forward. Weren't necessarily Black or Asian colleagues, but they were my white colleagues who were really coming up with some great ideas. And everywhere you looked there were colleagues who were really stuck in and part of the solution. And it was a lovely collegiate

atmosphere. Everybody felt like they were on the same page driving for change and connecting between all the equality agendas.

JOAN SIMONS: And that's interesting, because I think for a long time, issues of race and ethnicity seemed to have been left to colleagues from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic group. And what you're saying is that all of the rest of the University need to move forward together.