

Race and Equality

The Silent Majority

Anthony Gunther and Joan Simons:

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you very much, Anthony, for your perspectives today. Is there anything you would like to add?

ANTHONY GUNTER: Yes. Thanks, Joan. I would really like to talk about the conference that we had a couple of weeks back at The Open University, Reflecting on Race, where we had our vice chancellor, deputy vice chancellor, yourself. We had our new EDI team, Professor Marcia Wilson. We had a number of other staff, Black staff.

And one of the interesting things is I think The Open University has up to, I don't know, 10,000 members of staff or something like that. We have a large number of staff in the room, with probably up to 100. And I don't know how much were on stadium. But I don't think more than 150 people were at Reflecting on Race seminar conference. There was lots of goodwill in the room.

But I believe that a majority of The Open University who are the ones who can help us make the change, who we need to be having the conversation with. And we also need to change their minds. And one of the presentations was by one of our Black associate lecturers.

And he spoke really eloquently and wonderfully about the work he's done with yourself, trying to get the opinions and views of a PME associate lecturer staff on open forum common room. And what happened was, I mean, the abuse and the vitriol that came out from white associate lecturer colleague, saying, why do we need this. It's reverse racism.

And it was just the level of hostility that was-- and it was a positive initiative, you know. It was something that was positive. And let's be clear. There was lots of goodwill from white associate lecturer colleagues. But it's the silent majority who can really hinder and stymie change. And at least, they were vocal so, at least, we could see their views. And we can, maybe, challenge them.

But my concern is our colleagues who share the same views but are quieter and therefore, can disrupt change by just not acting, by just not engaging. And that's our professional support colleagues sent to academic-- he's one of our associate lecturers.

So, The Open University is a very complex organization. But we all need to move together to make this happen. And you know, yourself and the vice chancellor, deputy vice chancellor, with all the goodwill in the world, if staff at ground level in all these areas are not on board or are not putting themselves forward, so we know what their critiques are, or why they're not happy about it, then we're going to find ourselves going around in circles and not making the changes that I think are really necessary.

JOAN SIMONS: Thank you, Anthony. That's very well said.