

Black History Month 2022

Race Equality at the OU

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SAS AMOAH: Thank you very much, everyone. So good morning, everyone, and welcome to this Black History Month event titled Race Equality Charter at the Open University. And so this talk will discuss the Open University's membership and journey on the Race Equality Charter. So Advance HE's Race Equality Charter is a self-assessment framework designed to improve the representation, progression, success, and experience of racially minoritized staff and students within higher education.

The OU will use the framework to identify barriers for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students and develop an action plan to address them. This event will introduce the Race Equality Charter and highlight the opportunities and challenges for the OU's engagement with the charter.

So my name is Sas, and I'm delighted to introduce our speakers today. And we have Temi Owoka, the Race Equality Charter's project lead. We have Kay Bashir, senior EDI analyst. And Molly O'Neill, the EDI project officer for the Race Equality Charter.

So this event today will run for about an hour until about 1:00 PM and is being recorded. But none of the questions from the Q&A will be included on OpenLine if it gets published. And the presentation itself will last for about 30 to 45 minutes. And after that, there'll be an opportunity to ask questions in the last 15 to 20 minutes.

However, please feel free to pop any questions that spring to mind during the presentation in the chat, and we will get around to those later. So thank you very much. Enjoy today's session. And I'm going to turn it over to the speakers.

TEMI OWOKA: Thank you so much for that fantastic introduction, Sas. So as Sas has said, I am Temi Owoka, and I'm the Race Equality Charter project leader of the OU. And today, we'll

be discussing the use of Advanced HE's Race Equality Charter to progress race equity at the OU.

I thought I would start by looking at the OU's years commitment to race equality. Race equity is actually built into the OU Live and Learn Strategy and its mission to be open to people, places, methods, and ideas. And the vision for the strategy is to leave a life-changing learning that enriches society. The values are to be inclusive, innovative, and responsive.

And that strategy is underpinned by five pillars, which is greater reach. Meaning that we are offering unrivalled choice, quality, and flexibility to learning to more people from our society. Success for our students, which means we are supporting our students to achieve their goals. The outcomes that are equitable. And open up new opportunities for them.

Societal impact. So developing initiative, be it research, enterprise, and skills that shape the future in a positive way. Equity, which for us at the OU is looking at greater diversity at all levels of the institution and inclusion in all aspects of work and study. And finally, social and environmental sustainability. So making sure that we embed in sustainability in our activities, so as not to compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The EDI Plan flushes out equity, one of the goals of the Live and Learn Strategy. It frames the implementation of this goal of equity and how we can achieve diversity and inclusion at the OU in all areas and at all levels. The purpose of the EDI Plan is to provide guidance and strategic direction on how to work towards embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion within our structures.

Our EDF Plan sits alongside our Equality Scheme. So the EDI Plan itself is currently being finalized, and we publish shortly. The Equality Scheme has been published, and we can put a link in the chat. And that sets out how are we as an organization committed to developing an inclusive university community.

Through these objectives, we aim to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimization to promote and advance equality of opportunity and to promote and foster good relations between people. The Equality Scheme contains the following key performance indicators for race equity.

So we aim to improve the representation, awarding, and post-graduation outcomes for our racial minoritized students. And to also improve diversity in senior roles and in staff recruitment and achieve pay equity for racially minoritized staff. So together, the EDI Plan and the Equality Scheme set out the equality, diversity, and inclusion direction for the OU. And

we'll be using Advance HE's Race Equality Charter as a method to progress race equity here at the OU.

MOLLY O'NEIL: Hi, everyone. So I'm Molly O'Neil, and I am the Race Equality Charter project officer. And so for those who may be unfamiliar with the Race Equality Charter and what that is, as Temi has mentioned, this is a framework that was drawn up by Advance HE in 2015. So through this framework, institutions such as ourselves can work to identify and self-reflect on the institutional and cultural barriers which stand in the way of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff and students.

So currently, there are 96 higher education institutions that are members of the framework, including the OU. And being a member does not mean you have yet achieved a charter award. But if you'd like more information on the institutions who have actually achieved their awards already, you'll be able to find this on Advance HE's website. And I can pop a link to that in the chat as well.

TEMI OWOKA: Thank you, Molly. So the Race Equality Charter has got five guiding principles that we as a university are committed to and are going to use as a lens on how we approach our work on race equality. So the first is that racial inequality is a significant issue within education. And racial inequalities are not necessarily overt, isolated incidents. Racism is an everyday facet of UK society. And racial inequalities manifest themselves in everyday situations, processes, and behaviours. So this principle is based on iEducation sector data on the representation, progression, and success of racially minoritized staff and students.

It extends the definition of racism as not just on acts of oppression committed by individuals. It rather encourages us to see that society and institutions themselves manifest racism, which is evidenced by the unequal opportunity and outcomes for racially minoritized communities within them. For example, the overrepresentation of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff or lower grades within institutions. Or in the awarding gap, they exist for Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic students. Although overt racist incidents, their reporting and actions to eliminate them will be addressed as part of our work under REC, a key part of our work will be reviewing policies and practices that lead to unequal outcomes.

The second principle of the Race Equality Charter is that UK iEducation cannot fulfill its full potential until it benefits from the talent of the whole population and until individuals from all ethnic backgrounds can benefit equally from the opportunity it affords.

So this principle is based on the proven benefit of diversity and on the need for social justice. Diversity and inclusion enriches us all. So allowing the current status where racially

minoritized staff and students' talents are undeveloped and really recognized cannot go on as it reduces our productivity and pulls apart the very fabric of our society.

Our goal as a university is to equip the next generation of diverse leaders, both staff and students, and to have a positive impact on our society. So we must take steps to close this gap. The third principle is that in developing solutions to racial inequalities, it is important that they are aimed at achieving long term institutional culture change. Avoiding a deficit approach where solutions are aimed at changing the individual.

In regard to addressing equality issues, which sometimes put the onus on the individual to change to become included. There's lots of mentoring and coaching programs. And whilst recognizing that this can have benefits, especially when co-created racial minorities themselves. For example, the 100 Black Women Professor Program. This principle is a recognition that...

And processes and policies to become inclusive. So for us, the Women Program, a fantastic program, is accompanied by the review of the academic promotions process and criteria to become inclusive. The fourth principle is that Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff and students are not a homogeneous group.

So people from different Ethnic backgrounds have different experiences of and outcome from, and we deny education. And then that complexity needs to be considered in analysing data and development action. So this is really important and Bears out from our data here at the OU, where, for instance, the rate of continuity or the awarding gap for our Black students is larger compared to our Asian students. Therefore, all our analysis of data will disaggregate the BAME category to really understand the barriers to race equality.

So the final principle of the Race Equality Charter is that all individuals have multiple identity, and the intersection of those different identities should be considered wherever possible. So limitations of data aside, the final principle is based on intersectionality, which was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which looked at the double oppression Black women faced in the legal system in the US. Firstly, by virtue of being Black. And second, by virtue of being women.

We also see this in academia with Black women having the lowest representation of all minority groups. And on Verma's talk last Tuesday on anti-racist university, I highlighted the importance of intersectionality when seeking to address inequality. And it brings to mind Kimberlé Crenshaw's quote that if we are intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable of us are going to fall through the cracks. Therefore, we'll take an intersectional lens analysis of both our quantitative data and lived experience to better understand the barriers, so that we can devise actions to remove them.

MOLLY O'NEIL: So I had mentioned previously, and I've popped it into the chat box there, the awards information that's available through Advance HE. But how do we actually get to the point of an award in the OU? And so member institutions such as us need to develop initiatives and solutions for action. And from these, we can then decide to apply for either a Bronze or Silver Race Equality Charter award.

So which awards institutions are able to apply for will depend on the level of progress they've made in terms of race equality? So the Bronze award, which the OU will be starting with, recognizes the following from institutions. So a candid understanding of how race equality is perceived within their institution and a thorough acknowledgment of issues that exist for Minority Ethnic staff and students.

An institution's identification of context-specific priorities for race equality work with a clear understanding of their aims and what success looks like. And we should also have evidence of a comprehensive evidence-based action plan which underpins the institutions race equality priorities and aims. And finally, there should be institution-wide senior and middle management commitment to advancing race equality. And this must be demonstrated through their involvement with the Race Equality Charter work, their ownership of actions, and the allocation of adequate resources. So there are currently 29 institutions who have successfully met the criteria for a Bronze award. And there are not yet any institutions with a Silver Race Equality Charter award.

TEMI OWOKA: Thank you, Molly. So the REC process is based on developing a self-assessment team, understanding the lived experience of racially minoritized staff and students, in-depth analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and co-creating an action plan to address the finding of this analysis.

Advance HE requires that staff and students complete surveys as part of the submissions process. So we know that the OU exists in a different format to other universities. And we're able to reframe the other questions to be relevant to our online ways of working and learning. The SAT will also use information obtained through focus groups and other interactions with the university population to understand and progress research quality.

MOLLY O'NEIL: So as Temi mentioned, the self-assessment team. And so I'm going to give you an idea of what this group does in terms of the Race Equality Charter. So the self-assessment team are responsible for undertaking a full evaluation of race equality across the institution and then developing appropriate actions in response to what they find. So how is the self-assessment team expected to lead us through the charter process? They will do this by reviewing a range of quantitative and qualitative data and using this to identify racial

inequalities and the representation, progression, and success of Minority Ethnic staff and students.

They'll review the impact of institutional policies and practices. And they will respond to the results of these reviews by establishing institutional priority areas on appropriate success criteria. As well as this the self-assessment team will develop an evidence-based comprehensive action plan, like I mentioned earlier. And this action plan should underpin the agreed priorities and advance race equality in the OU for the subsequent five years.

So after the five-year period has passed, institutions are then expected to renew their award by repeating the self-assessment process. This award is called the Bronze Renewal. And so far, there are two institutions who have received this award. The University of Hertfordshire and Abertay University. So the self-assessment team will then be supported in its efforts by working groups. And Temi is going to discuss the working groups later on in the presentation.

TEMI OWOKA: Thank you. So the Race Equality Charter actually gives us a fantastic opportunity to draw across all the race equality activities that are currently happening across the university, helping us to develop a holistic approach that avoids duplication of effort. But more importantly, it allows us to understand and facilitate cross-learning on what works to have positive impacts on racial equality across the OU. So if you're working on a project or initiative to progress racial equality in your faculty or department, we would love to hear from you. Please contact us, and we'll be able to facilitate this cross-learning that I mentioned. In support of the self-assessment team that we've covered, we'll be developing working groups to help progress race equality across the strands of the OU. The working group will seek to identify and address barriers that exist in your areas of focus. And at the moment, we are proposing five working groups.

One, which is based on culture change, which will seek to raise awareness of race inequality to staff and students of the OU. The group will also work to improve reporting for race-related bullying and harassment, as well as improve sense of belonging for racially minoritized staff and students at the OU.

The other working groups are based on staff and student populations. And they will assess the impact of the OU's processes and policies on race equality and help develop actions to address them. If you're interested in working with us by joining one of the working groups or you would like to nominate somebody to be a member of a working group, please do contact us by email. We'll put our email in the chat as part of the presentation as well.

MOLLY O'NEIL: So we've mentioned throughout the self-assessment of the institution, and that needs to be evidence-based and using both quantitative and qualitative data. So what

that might look like in terms of student data is access and admissions representation at undergraduate, postgraduate, and postgraduate research levels. And course progression, the curriculum, teaching and assessment methods, awards and awarding gaps, and postgraduate employment.

In relation to our staff, the self-assessment will look at data that includes representation across grades, contract types, and in decision making committees. Grievances and disciplinaries. Equal pay. Recruitment and selection processes. And staff development, including access to leadership training and also the support that is given to early career researchers. Promotion and progression data. And finally staff, retention. So I'm going to pass over to Kay Bashir. And she's going to give us a high level overview of some current OU data.

KAY BASHIR: Thank you, Molly. Hi, everyone. I'm Kay Bashir. And I am senior data analyst in the EDI department. So I lead on the data side of things, and I'll be supporting Temi, Molly with the data requirements and the application. So I've got very high level stats today. Obviously, as Molly and Temi mentioned earlier, we will be disaggregating this data lot further and considering intersectionality, considering non-UK, UK members of staff and students, as well as looking at the specific Ethnicity groups from a more granular level.

So with the student data, I've got three areas of sort of high level stats, and that's representation. So what does our student body currently look like? Around about one in 10 of our registered students identify as Black or Minority Ethnic. However, this differs depending on the level of the student group that you're looking at. So it's 11% at undergraduate level, 13% at postgraduate taught, and one in five research students. When we look at retention. So retention basically refers to the difference between the number of students at the beginning of a course and looking at the same data of the number of students looking at the difference between the number of students a quarter away into their studies.

And currently, even though White students also drop out, Minority Ethnic students are more likely to drop out. And there's a 6.3% gap in these retention rates. When we look a little bit deeper into the stats, Black students are disproportionately more likely to drop out more than all other Ethnic groups at undergraduate level. So we lose about one in 10 Black students before they get a quarter into their studies. So we'll be investigating and trying to discover why and what we can do to increase the retention.

Outcomes. This refers to what students are being awarded with at the end of their module or their degree. And from an OU's perspective, we're going to be looking at this from a module and also a degree awarding perspective as well. And good degree or good module paths specifically relates to awards that are either first class classifications or 2-1 degrees.

And similar to the retention gap, there are awarding gaps as well. And specifically, there's a 15% good module awarding gap between White students and Minority Ethnic students as well. So Minority ethnic students are less likely to achieve a good module pass in their modules.

And again, when we look deeper, this gap is even higher when we factor in Black students and look at this in comparison to White students. The gap is at 28%, signaling that Black students are disproportionately less likely to be awarded with 1 or 2-1 in modules.

And similarly, this is the same when it comes to degree awarding. So degrees that are awarded with a first class or 2-1 degree classification, Black students with White students are still at 21% gap again. So we'll be looking at this and factoring in different levels by nation and also by nationality as well.

When we look at our staff data as well. Again, very high level stats. We will be looking into contract types working patterns as well. And in terms of our representation of what our staff population looks like, around about 1 in 10 of our members of staff have a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic background.

And what we can see when we look at different staff groups is the highest representation of our Black and Minority Ethnic colleagues are in the research of staff level. So over a quarter of the research staff body have disclosed as a Minority Ethnic staff. Whereas the associate lecturer staffing group has a lowest number of Minority Ethnic staff as well.

Representation at senior level. This is quite tied to the equity scheme targets as well. So 1 in 10 of our senior staff population, which refers to those who have SS grades or PB grades, so professor grades, are from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, again, when we dissect this data, we will be doing even further than breaking down to different sort of Black communities, different Asian communities as well.

But we can see already that only 1% of the senior population are Black. And when we separate the sort of senior levels and look at the professor grades, this accounts to less than 1% of the professor population who identify as Black. And in absolute figures, just for reference, this is around about just under five colleagues out of 246. And just touching on briefly on intersectionality, again, in that same group of senior staff, women who are also from racially minoritized backgrounds make up only 3% of the entire senior population.

Ethnicity pay gap. So last year was the first time the OU conducted an ethnicity pay gap and published it. And at the moment, we have a 21% pay gap between White colleagues and colleagues from racially minoritized backgrounds. There is a huge, uneven distribution across mainly the higher band of the pay quartile. So basically, minority ethnic staff are more likely to

fall into the lowest pay bands than they are in the highest pay brackets as well. So that's just a high level view of the staff and student data. And we'll be doing a lot more in depth and also factoring in qualitative work as well.

TEMI OWOKA: Thank you, Kay. So the OU also previously applied for a Bronze award in 2019 and were ultimately unsuccessful. And looking at the feedback, we note that the application had the following weaknesses. So one was lack of data on key processes, such as staff recruitment and promotions data.

And now, we're working with the MI team and other relevant staff across the OU to collect and report on the required data sets for representation, progression, and success. This is really important because the REC is evidence-based. We need to have data to be able to see what the outcomes are, to identify where the barriers are in order to develop actions to address them.

Another key weakness of the last submission was in regards to the lack of engagement to racially minoritized students. The Race Equality Charter is based on understanding lived experience. This is so as to help identify barriers, so that they can be removed. So we need to work hard on making sure that we're able to reach our racially minoritized students to fully understand the experience. So if you're working with students or aware of any student groups that we can consult as part of this work, please do get in touch with us.

The final key reason for the previous submission being unsuccessful relates to this point. And I think this is one of the issues that we're going to actually have to work really hard at understanding. So lack of understanding of how race equality plays out in a distant learning environment.

The REC itself, the framework was built with on-campus universities in mind, but it's actually a really adaptable framework. So it can help us understand risk quality in our context, as long as we dig deeper in our engagement with the self-assessment. So I'll give you an example. Section seven of the application is on student admissions. And it requires us to analyze data on student admissions over three years to determine whether ethnicity has an impact on the likelihood of students with the same predicted or actual grades being offered a place at the OU.

It also asks us to outline our racial barriers identified within the admission process. Although on the face of it, it looks like this is not applicable in our context as you don't need a qualification to come here, the data that Kay highlighted actually shows that in terms of representation by ethnicity, that there is a barrier to the current admission process.

The previous submission actually found that Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic students are less likely to inquire about studying at the OU compared to their White counterparts. So we need to understand why this is the case and develop actions to address it. The self-assessment team are well aware of the weaknesses, and we are putting in place actions to address them as ultimately, understanding and addressing the barriers that exist for racially minoritized staff and students at the OU will make the OU a better, safer, and more inclusive institution where everybody can thrive and succeed.