

## **Black History Month 2022**

*100 Black Women Professors NOW*

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**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thank you so much for joining us today for this afternoon's Black History Month event. I hope everyone is doing well. A little bit of a wild time in UK politics this afternoon. But thankfully, we've got something a little bit more organized and something that I'm really, really happy to be introducing.

So today's session is all about the 100 Black Women Professors NOW program. This is a pioneering program to address underrepresentation and increase the number of Black women in the academic pipeline. So it's of particular interest to many of us, I am sure. So really delighted to be joined today by Professor Marcia Wilson who is our dean for equality, diversity, and inclusion and four colleagues who have taken part in the programme Azumah Dennis, Paulette Johnson, Lystra Hagley-Dickinson, and Miriam Amanze.

So I'm going to give them the opportunity to introduce themselves in a second. But before we start, just a little bit of housekeeping. This session is being recorded so that we can pop it on OpenLearn later. But your microphones and cameras are not enabled, so you don't need to worry about that if you're in the audience.

We do really welcome questions once we get into the Q&A section. So if you do have any questions, please can I ask you to put them in the chat, and then I will read them out to the panel when we get the chance to do that later today. So yeah. Let's get going then. Thank you very much for joining us. And Marcia, over to you.

**MARCIA WILSON:** That's great. Thank you so much, Yosra. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being with us to hear more about this amazing career progression program

called 100 Black Women Professors NOW. It was the brainchild of Alice Chilver, who is the CEO of the Women's Higher Education Network a couple of years ago.

And as Yosra said, the program is in place to address one of the urgent, important, and pressing problems in higher education. So I'll explain why this program is needed. In 2018, there were just 25 Black women professors in the UK compared to 12,500 white men professors.

The report's staying power by the University and College Union captured the lived experiences of 20 of the Black women professors, and highlighted key changes that were imperative to address this shocking reality. The changes included increasing cultural competence of institutions and proactively engaging with heads of departments to influence career trajectories.

Fast forward to today, we have less than 50 Black women professors out of just under 23,000 in the UK. I was invited to be part of the steering group that designed the program and following months of careful design and sector-wide engagement. In April 2021, the 100 Black Women Professors NOW program launched with six pilot institutions, and they were the Open University, Leeds, Manchester, De Montfort, Loughborough, and the University of East London.

So this 12-month program was designed specifically to challenge and unblock structural and cultural barriers to career advancement for Black women academics. One of the unique aspects of this program is that it's not about fixing the women. It aims to directly and immediately change the status quo by working directly with the vice chancellors, senior leaders, and the director of People Services, along with the women academics own heads of department.

The program raises awareness of racial justice, white privilege, and anti-racism through the universities having to address how their institution recruits, develops, and promotes Black women academics.

Through workshops, coaching intervention, and sector-wide peer-to-peer accountability, it increases cultural and career development, competence of HR directors or People Services and heads of departments and enables the university to zone in on the few key things that will really unblock institution-wide change.

In parallel to the commitment and delivery of systemic change, the cohort of Black women academics receive mentoring, sponsorship, career coaching, and form part of a tight knit, national peer group for support, championing, and strength. And I can say the impact of the 100 Black Women Professors NOW program has been immense because it's raised the issue

of racial and gender inequalities within the institution, and it's highlighted the problematic lack of diversity on all levels and the urgent need to address this situation.

Over the past year, there has been a significant focus on diversifying the staff and student body. With regards to staffing at the OU, we have reviewed and revised our recruitment and selection policies so that the entire process is conducted through an anti-racist as well as an equality, diversity, and inclusion lens.

We've incorporated positive action at every stage of the recruitment and selection process. Now, through their engagement with the program, the executive and senior leaders have gained awareness about the barriers that Black women academics experience in their career progression in higher education.

Senior leaders have engaged in educational workshops and have pledged to work towards creating an anti-racist and anti-discriminatory institution. Some have engaged in reciprocal mentoring and sponsorship of the participants on the program. And there is greater awareness about what an anti-racist institution should be, not only for staff, but the impact that it will have for students as well.

So I'm going to stop there, and I'm going to hand back over to Yosra and some of the participants for the next segment of this session. Thank you.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thanks very much, Marcia. Yeah. So we're now just going to do a little bit of Q&A. I'm going to start with some questions, and then we really do welcome any questions that any of you watching online might have. So please do take the time to put them in the chat, and I'll get to those shortly.

But first, I think what might be really useful is if our participants wouldn't mind just introducing themselves, telling us a little bit about what you do at the OU, and then we'll get going. So if we start I'm just looking at my screen, and Lyrstra, you're top left. So if we go to Lystra, then Azumah, then Miriam, then Paulette for those introductions, please.

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** Oh, cheers. Thank you for that. I was expecting my colleague in alphabetical order, Azumah, to go first. But as much as I called, I will get us started. Firstly, to say thank you for the opportunity for us to outline and discuss our participation in the 100 Black Women Professors NOW program and to use this opportunity to say to the people that are involved in supporting this program, Black History Month here at the OU.

A big, warm congratulations on all the programs and projects and activities that has taken place in the month so far and towards the end of the month. In terms of introduction, I recently read that when introducing yourself, you use the formula this is what I do, this is how I do it, and this is the impact I have.

So again, this is another thing that has come out out of the project. So with that in mind, I shall practice that this afternoon. So I would say I produce and manage and deliver on criminology modules in the social policy and criminology department here at the OU. I do this through leadership, project management, research and scholarship.

And the impact I have is to provide a teaching and learning environment for staff and students that is inclusive, accessible, and to ensure successful application of learning and teaching. I'm what is referred to as a regional academic. So as a regional academic, I co-chair modules in the level 2 criminology program.

I'm also a cluster manager because as a staff tutor, which is a unique position to the OU, I'm also involved in what we refer to as cluster management, which involves the management of ALs and the delivery of the programs in two criminology courses. My research is in three strands prisons, what is referred to now what we used to refer to it as Black criminology, Black feminist criminology.

But where we're expanding that now to be BIPOC, which is Black, Indigenous, people of color. Some of these definitions we can argue as territorial until we get blue in the face. But we have a category that we use. But it all relates to my involvement in terms of criminal justice both here and in the Caribbean. And my research involves recruitment of Black and ethnic minority students, Black women in leadership.

And all of that is underpinned by the advocacy in EDI issues to improve access and participation of those groups that are marginalized. Thank you.

**AZUMAH DENNIS:** Wow. Thank you. OK. So from that brilliant introduction by Lystra and a formula which I think we shall all try to follow from now on. But I can't promise to follow at the moment because, of course, I'm trying to fit my life into it, and I don't know that it's going to go. But who I am is Azumah.

I'm primarily well, a central academic, the program lead for the professional doctorate in education in Wales and obviously a researcher alongside that. And I research in post-16 education. The how, I will leave to a side. I'll leave that to your imagination. Impact, well, not quite sure what I would say there.

What I would say is one thing I think is notable about how I see myself is I don't research around although, I write a lot about politics and about ethics and about equity and social justice and so on, I've always resisted occupying an academic space in which I talk specifically about race and about gender.

And I do that because I want to reserve the right for Black women to talk as if we are gods and to talk as if we have a neutral perspective on the entire world. And so that tends to be the stance I take in my research. I write as a Black woman, but I don't necessarily write about being a Black woman. And I hand over to Miriam, wasn't it?

**MIRIAM AMANZE:** Yes, it is. Thank you very much, Azumah. Hi, everyone, and good afternoon. My name is Miriam Amanze, and I am a lecturer in law from the School of Law. And I joined the OU in 2020 right in the middle of the pandemic. So it was great to have that pandemic experience. But now coming out of it, interacting more with colleagues and come into Milton Keynes which is so big, the campus.

I just always get lost every time that I come. So my role really is to develop materials. And currently in our school, we are in production for our new LLB program. So I spend quite a lot of my time developing the module as part of this program. And I'm currently a chair on one of the modules in production.

I have also chaired modules and presentation both, so I have both undergraduate and postgraduate experience of teaching. In terms of research, my research is primarily on public procurement law, so government contracts. And specifically, I try to look at how government contracts can be used to achieve different goals, both policy goals like economic, human-rights related, and also looking at climate change from the lens of public procurement.

So I'm quite relatively new to academia and to the OU, as you know already, because I consider myself as an early career researcher. So it was quite interesting for me to join the program right back at the end of my PhD, which I completed in 2020. But I am so glad that I joined at this stage of my career. And I'll be telling you more about that later on. So that's me. Thank you. And Paulette, over to you.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Thank you, Miriam. Thank you, everyone. I don't know that I can follow your formula, Lystra, but I won't say I'm going to try even. I'll just start with who I am. My name's Paulette Johnson. I joined the OU as a staff tutor about seven years ago. I am a social worker, and I like to identify as a social worker even though I'm not working in social work now.

So yes, I'm a social worker, and was a social worker and was a social work staff tutor. I, this year, took on a new role within the Open University. So my new role is academic lead for access, participation, and success. So that work focuses on our student-facing equality, diversity, and inclusion work.

And so with that, the impact that I hope to achieve in that space is improving student experience and student outcomes. So that's a clear focus for me. In terms of my research profile, I as well like Miriam consider myself well, I am an early career researcher. I was in fact with Azumah a couple of weekends ago at the residential weekend because I started my journey as a professional researcher.

And I will be reflecting on going back to my social work, actually, and looking at how we teach anti-racist practice to our social work students in a distance learning environment. And I'm interested in how we do that most effectively and possibly innovatively as well. So that's my research background, and that's me. So nice to be here.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thank you very much. Really nice to have you here. Amazing introductions. I'm absolutely taking that formula on, as I think Molly's said in the chat. So let's get started with some general questions. And then, please, if you do have questions, pop them in the chat, and I'll also add those on.

So the first question that I have to ask the four of you is, since you've participated in the 100 Black Women Professors NOW program, what has been the biggest change for you individually as a result? Who'd like to start?

**AZUMAH DENNIS:** OK. I see a vacuum, and my nature is to fill it. So I go straight ahead. I would say that, for me in very personal terms, the biggest impact is I now feel a greater sense of discontent, if you like, but not discontent that I tend to sit and stew with, but more of a discontent in terms of, no, I'm not going to wait for something. I'm not going to, for example, apply for my professorship in a few years time when I'm no longer a teenager, she laughs.

But I'm going to do it now. And actually, my feelings of, ooh, I'm not sure if I'm ready, ooh, ooh, ooh, I think are just feelings and ways in which we allow ourselves to not appreciate the value of what we bring. And I think it's made me feel, no, I think I have as much as my colleagues, as my counterparts, and I am going to be going through that process often now. And that feels like quite an important change. I can't keep coming back to the words of a rap song where he basically says and I can't remember who it is or what it is, but "nobody opened any doors for me. I just had to kick them down." And that's the kind of in a slightly more polite and feminine way. But that's really how I feel about things at the moment.

**MIRIAM AMANZE:** I'll jump in I'm right after you, Azumah. For me, the program really was an eye opener because this was my first full-time position in academia. So I had no expectations per se, and it was really, really so important to hear the experiences of those that have gone ahead of me in academia.

And I learned so much really from that. And I really want to share with you three key things that has changed for me as a result of the program. One is the way that I think, my mindset. I have become more strategic in roles and tasks that I take on. Prior to the program as an ECR and new to the OU, I wanted to be the biggest team player that there is in OU.

And so I would take up any work. I'm always happy to chip in. And being collegiate is great. And really, it is a part of me. But I did realize through the program that the raw tasks that I take on that are not strategically to my advantage to help me develop in my career. And I really have to wisen up to think strategically. OK, what role do I need to take on to help me get from A to B, and what can I do on limits just for the purpose of continuing to be a team player?

So the program helped me with my mindset and the way that I really think and approach my job. The second thing is that the role helped me to develop a timeline for my career progression. So even though I am brand new to academia, I have the desire to progress and potentially become a professor in years to come.

But having that desire and putting it into action is different things altogether. So the program helped me in developing a timeline, which I now have in my office. And sometimes I look at it and I wonder, oh, OK. I'm doing so well. Maybe I'm not. But it is keeping me focused on the achievements, both short-term and long-term achievements.

And just quickly, the last thing that I want to mention is stakeholder mapping. I didn't hear about this prior to the program, and my coach raised it. And I had to go back and really think of, OK, who are those that are currently in my life professionally that can help me get from A to B? And where are there gaps to enable me to find people and by people, I mean mentors and sponsors to help me get to where I want to be?

So for me, three big changes is that I am now more focused and driven. I now have a career timeline that's going to help me. And I now have an idea of who my key stakeholders are. And I'm very much open now to knock on their virtual doors or physical doors if maybe to call in on them when I need support.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thank you, Miriam. OK. Paulette. Yeah, sure.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** I'm going to come in. I've got messages asking me to attend another meeting, so I am going to come in, and it might be that I leave earlier than planned. So I do apologize for that. So in terms of what's changed for me, I suppose I left my career in social work to come into academia.

And of course, the kind of demographic of the people I even worked with is very different to what I'm used to. So actually being on this program has given me a wider network, and it feels more inclusive. I now know a wide network of Black women who do a similar role to me, which, for me, means quite a lot, actually.

And I suppose when I came into academia and particularly at the OU and realized that, actually, the opportunities that I might have had in my other role might be quite different in an academic environment and one that is as big as the OU felt quite a bit disillusioned, actually. And so being on this program has given me a bit more optimism about the future at the OU and what it is that I can contribute in academia and actually what the possibilities are. Because I see women around me who look the same as me who are doing great things and are working towards great things as well. So I think I found the program so inspiring is really my takeaway from the program.

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** We couldn't have planned it better in terms of our discussion as to answer your question, Yosra. Because for me, I'm again, new to the OU. And I'm coming to the OU having worked in government in four different international organizations and four different countries in criminal justice as a prison governor, returned to higher education.

And it's in that span of that 35 years of work and having come to the OU as an associate professor having attempted applying for professorship in other institution. And it's the first time with women program that I was offered the opportunity, space, and support to consider something called career planning.

I have a similar trajectory of lots of other women who, because of you jump from job to job, from project to project, and it's a random, messy career kind of operation. And that has whereas worked for some others who are non-Black women, it does not work for a Black woman in the industry.

And I think this is one of the things that the program has allowed from somebody like me to really revitalize hope, having given up on it. And I suppose that is the opportunity that being here at the OU at this point in time has allowed to be and being allowed to be part of this program.



So for me who really there's no way you usually talk about your start, your early career as the first five and seven years of which you have had your PhD. And so therefore, I can't see myself as an early career practitioner or academic, but I can see myself as still having the opportunity to make good in terms of Black women being involved in higher education and leadership.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thanks, Lystra. Thanks as always. It's really inspiring to listen to you all and your reflections on the program. I'm just wondering what's next for you and what your future looks like from these reflections. Miriam's smiling. So, Miriam, I'm going to come to you first.

**MIRIAM AMANZE:** Thank you very much, Yosra. What does the future hold? I'm really going back to my timeline, I'm really grateful for the opportunity to sit down, develop the career plan and the timeline. And for me, really, I would like to take the next step in my career, which is really to become a senior lecturer.

But for that even, I want to stay driven to fill in the gaps that's currently in my CV that would effectively help me in preparing that application for a promotion to senior lecturer. So in the short term, the future is to get a promotion. In the long term, of course, is attain the professorship.

But until then, there are many steps did I want to take in order to get there. And because of the program, I am now more aware of these steps. I know how to do it, who to call on. And most importantly, really, I have a lot of confidence in myself that I can get there. Growing up, my dad always said to us that no one has two heads. We all have one head. And so if someone can achieve something with the one head, so can you with your one head. So I am so very much looking forward in the future to join a number of Black female professors. So watch the space, guys.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Azumah, Lystra, any of you want to come in next?

**AZUMAH DENNIS:** OK. Yep. I'll happily follow that. For me, my next step is definitely applying for professorship. I must admit I'm just a little bit embarrassed to be saying that so loudly in front of a room full of people, not least of all because if I don't accomplish it, I'll be walking around my tail between my legs and feeling, how dare you? How dare you have been so whatever it is?

So to talk about yourself in that way. Nonetheless, I'm doing it. I really like the idea of having a number so being the 50 this or the 60 this or the 70 this Black women professor would feel enormously proud of but not just for myself, but for my sister and for the people around me.

That is definitely my next step. I'm also going to be insisting on applying for a promotion when things come up. I normally sit back should I, shouldn't I? Whereas at the moment, I'm thinking, yeah, I damn well should. And I think perhaps I'm veering into another question, but I think one of the things that's happened in this program is that you suddenly become that much more visible.

There are always issues around hyper visibility of Black women versus in invisibility and it's a complicated issue. But I certainly feel like I've been seen more by senior managers partly because I've applied for promotions even if I didn't get it. But I was in the room, and that's made a difference.

And so I feel that there are other options which I will continue to pursue and not wait for people to invite me. So starting a research group, for example, which I've wanted to do for a long time. I am now doing it, and putting myself in particular research spaces within the school, which I've wanted to do, and perhaps held back. So those are the kinds of things which I'm doing now, which, previously, I would have been a little bit more hesitant.

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** Yeah. And just to endorse that in terms of my next steps as well. Well, rather than I say this without the hesitance because rather than giving up, I'm getting up in terms of revitalizing that opportunity one already challenging institutional practices because there's a four-year probation here at the OU to a four-year probationary period here at the OU.

And already I'm challenging that in terms of seeking promotion and challenging that in terms of what happens next to be to get through that probationary period, and also in terms of, again now doing the career planning, which is what both my colleagues talked about, to the promotion of professor.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thanks.

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** And the good thing about that and about the program is not only, as Azumah said, for us, for me as an individual, but in terms of aspiring other women to now have a career development plan and to be strategic in their thinking about their careers rather than falling forward to being the best teamworker, doing all those jobs in academia that we end up as women doing because nobody else wants to do it.

And also doing roles that are necessary for the delivery of the teaching service but not necessarily those that would further our careers. So in terms of being strategic and having a career plan and the timeline, as Miriam is saying, is crucial for our development rather than just an ad hoc kind of way and waiting for it to happen. Because if we're waiting for it to happen, it will never happen.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Yeah. Thank you. Everything you're saying, it's really resonating with me. And I don't know if you know the confidence with which you're speaking is amazing. I don't know if you've had a chance to look in the chat, but there's loads of people leaving comments for you and just saying how inspiring you are, and you've got a real cheer squad behind you. For other individuals, other women in similar, what types of strategies would you suggest in order to enable their own career planning and acceleration? You've touched on this a little bit. But if you were speaking to someone like myself, what would you offer in terms of advice?

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** I think you would have heard this before. But in terms of advice, I want to suggest to you, as I said these are some of the things that I could have suggested to myself, my younger self. Think about it. Think about your career. What do you want out of it? And don't only think about it, but actually write it down, reflect on it, work on reflexive diaries and so on.

But put that down. Write it down because, I mean, we're all here in academia, research, higher education. Have that reflective self about you from now. If there's anything you get out of this conversation with us. Write down what where do I want to be in the next two or three years? Do I want to be doing this? Is this the passion that I have? Is it giving me the passion for my research? Is it giving me the passion for my own development? So having that career plan.

Other things that has come out of the program that I find really strategies that you can use is identifying a mentor or when I say that, identifying a mentor, it doesn't necessarily sometimes you have job mentors. But probably identifying somebody who you feel can support you, give them the aspirations that you have.

And it doesn't harm to call that person in a research conference or whatever and that person resonates with you and say, can I chat with you every couple of months or whatever, just to give you that sort of I found having a career coach a revolutionary thing. Where was that again and sometimes, that may not be as it is in the program as sort of part of a package. But you can develop these types of relationships amongst your colleagues or amongst also women like ourselves who you see is somebody that you might want to emulate or somebody you would like to be part of your network. Miriam talked about being part of your network.

Building that up I think is crucial. And also with regard then to identifying what are your strengths and weaknesses, but what are the gaps that will get you from where you are now to where you want to go? And addressing these gaps. So you become more strategic in the conversations you have with your heads of department. You become more strategic in the CDSAs or whatever is your career development plan, that it begins to have a focal point.

Because in some ways, as Black women, we are not only we are not only insisting with regard to these kinds of structures, but we also have to be clear from the structures that we have how we can work with those to advance our careers and the careers of other Black women.

**AZUMAH DENNIS:** OK. That's really brilliant advice I think. And I don't know that I could add much to it apart from perhaps saying from my experiences of the program. And I'm not one who's done all my homework in terms of writing everything down on paper, though I have a sense of direction in myself.

But I think it is about keeping focus. And I don't necessarily mean focused on that trophy or whatever, but by working out what is important in this context. And if you like, making a priority of your professional or career advancement. And things which are distracting to that, allow them to fall by the wayside.

And so some of that means learning how to say no, because you can get yourself invited and drawn in to do things which really are not really of much benefit to you. And you can only work out if it's of benefit to you if you've got a sense of where it is you want to be going and what it is you want to be doing in the long term, which isn't the same as saying don't help anyone. But it is the same as saying work out what your boundaries are and don't allow yourself to become too distracted. And I think also just in terms of the tribulations and the trivialities you can get yourself caught up with in work. I think you've got a clear sense of your focus and your goal and your target.

It allows you to push them aside. I also think there's something to be said for getting yourself in the right room, for introducing yourself to the right person. And I think that there are a good ways to do that, which might mean making an appointment to talk to somebody who wanted to talk to because they are in an interesting position within the university, and talking to them about an aspect of their work or your work that you can find as a legitimate basis for talking to them.

And somehow, it means that people know you and associate you with a particular stance, with a particular field of work which they might not know otherwise. Specific example I find I know what my academic expertise is. And suddenly, I find that there are colleagues who have much less of an expertise in that area are the ones who are picked up and everybody says, oh, such and such a person does this.

And I'm thinking, well, so do I. So why aren't I being picked up? And so it's how do you make sure that the relevant people know who you are and what you can do, and so you're not in an absurd position where somebody insists you attend a training course delivered by somebody who has less experience of that area than you do.

These are the sort of absurdities that I think we find ways of avoiding them. And that is by putting yourself in a room, here I am. This is what I know, this is what I can do, and finding a way of doing that.

**MIRIAM AMANZE:** And kind of just to Azumah's made a really good point, and I really want to expand on that as well. Because for me, that has helped me quite a lot in my short career. In addition to putting yourself in the room, find someone that would advocate for you when you're not in the room.

We call these people sponsors. So not just mentors. Yes, mentors are great. I've always had mentors from pretty much when I started my LLB degree right up to this point. But what I also realized quite early on in my studies and now really is that there's a lot of power in knowing the right people and speaking to the right people and like, this is not just in normal society, but I think it also applies in academia.

Because these promotions, there are panels that are going to sit there and deliberate on the promotions, the recruitment for jobs. There are panels. People are involved in our career developments. So when you have a sponsor and it's really important to identify your sponsor. But when you have a sponsor, those people can speak for you when you are not there. So for me, one of the things that I would highly recommend to every single Black woman is to do a stakeholder mapping. So when you've identified what your goals are, do a goal mapping of each of those goals.

So you want to be a senior lecturer? OK. Well, who's going to help you to do that for you? Well, here's a mentor. This is someone that already is a senior lecturer. OK, but here's a professor that I know can speak for me, who could be my sponsor. Or this is someone else in this group that can be my sponsor.

Honestly, you can have different stakeholders that would help you to achieve one particular goal. So doing that stakeholder mapping, it's really vital and really important. And another thing I recommend, which has been touched upon, is networking. There are now a few Black women network groups scattered around. Join one.

Hear from experiences of other people. Because even though we're all individuals and what we experience are quite unique, you'll be so surprised to learn that there are similarities in what we experience as Black women. The sometimes challenges that we have with the line managers, for example, like Azumah was saying we get bypassed for things that we're clearly ready and competent to do.

But if you hear someone else speaking on that and you can pick their brain a little bit, it might help you to put strategies in place to address a particular challenge that you're going through. So do a stakeholder mapping, and network with people of similar goals and objectives that you have.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thank you. That's great. Really, really great advice. I've been typing some notes as you've been speaking. And one more question from me, if I may. And then I know we do have a few questions in the chat to come to. So let's talk about the OU. What change would you like to see in your school or your faculty or team that you think would make a positive difference for Black academic women?

**MARCIA WILSON:** I'll start with this one because I think it's very often easy for us to feel the OU is OK. There are no issues at the OU. We're all at our hardcore committed to equity, social justice. It's on the agenda.

And I think that that is true. But nonetheless, I think that we shouldn't underestimate that there are the colleagues who are perhaps not as on board or not as committed or as even in tune with, aware of what those issues are as we would perhaps imagine.

So I know that I've been in a group of academics talking about inequalities in, or what's called the Black awarding gap, the awarding gap, the inequities in the awarding gap; and somebody making a comment, which suggested, OK, well, we just get poorer quality students in from those communities, and that's why they do less well.

And I find that as the only or one of the very few people of color in the room, I'm the one who publicly has to stand up and object to that statement. So I think, in short, perhaps what I'm saying, is I think that what would be good is to identify, declare yourself an ally or somebody who is prepared to speak out and to know the facts of the matter, to know that if there are 41 Black women professors out of 22,000, there is something quite profound that goes on within the sector, to know that when there are Black students who are coming to the OU, actually, they come with actually the same level of qualification and experience and background as their white counterparts.

And so when there is discrimination or differences that happen, it happens within the institution, not within the body of the person who came to the institution. So that's a really kind of like fuzzy, fuzzy sort of way of basically saying don't let's all assume that every one of our colleagues at the OU has the same level of knowledge and commitment to equity and social justice as we do. And that there are really clear arguments to be making and facts to be pointing out because there is still a need for that almost quite basic type of discussion in my view.

So yes, is that a change that I would like to see? Well, yes. In that meeting, I would have rather that the more senior managers there had picked up on that comment as indeed they did. And they had been the one to address it rather than me as the only Black girl in the room, or one of the few Black girls in the room.

**AZUMAH DENNIS:** For me, there are three changes that I would like the OU to implement if they can, or even consider at the very least. Within my faculty, I like there to be more Black female academics. It's really it's as simple as that because I'm currently the only one in the law school out of, I think, 42 colleagues. So I'm feeling rather lonely here. [LAUGHS] It would be great to have more recruitment of people from diverse group. And I know that this is one of the key things that Marcia mentioned earlier on. And I'm glad to see that there are plans in place, but I'd really like that to be actions, results, stemming from that. This year, the theme for the Black History month is it's time for change action, not words. So let us do that. Let us recruit more diversity into the OU.

The second thing is that I would like the OU to facilitate more mentorship and more sponsorship for Black women. We do the CDSAs annually. And in there, we state what our goals are, what we want to do.

Through that, I would like to line managers and the head of school to actively take steps in order to help us achieve them. So if we say, for example, we want more leadership positions, well, if a position comes up in the faculty that it's suited for us, maybe we can be encouraged a bit more to apply for them and be linked with people that can help us to achieve our goals. And I'm probably speaking specifically to early career researchers like myself, who are new to academia because sometimes we just don't know who the right people to go to is. So a bit of support there would help.

And the final thing that I would like the OU to do and this is not really coming from my experience, but from generally what I've heard from ladies that we're part of the program is that everyone have has different experience with the line manager. Some people feel the line managers are really supportive. Some feel that the line managers are working against them. And I think that the OU need to have some sort of training that specific on managing diverse group of people. Black female academics being part of that, I think they need to be aware of some of the barriers, both institutional and perhaps cultural barriers even, that are preventing us from progressing in our career.

And I think having such a training that is mandatory for all line managers would really set the standard. And in that training, specify what we can do when we feel that our line managers are not supporting us. So I think that would really give us the confidence that the institution is truly putting their words into action.

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** Oh, Paulette is back. I just wanted to add very quickly my answer to those two things. And just one of which has already been picked up, which is the idea of accountability of gatekeepers, particularly heads of departments, heads of divisions with regard to the career development of all its staff, in particular Black and minority staff, who, most of the times, have a difficult relationship with these gatekeepers because of the cultural nuances with regard to that.

And to add to that, it's also for us to be able to identify those allies that we can have if we do have the support and the recognition from our non-colored colleagues, if you like, who are involved in these types of panels and so on. And the third thing really, I think the promotion system at the OU also needs to be looked at again in terms of the criterias, the different positions that exist.

And that people can see a clear career development path in terms of the promotion, whether they are in the professional services; they're in central academia; or they are in regional academia; or even as associate lecturers. What are the pathways the structural pathways that exist so that you are in can then inform your career development because those systems are clearly articulated, given the strand in which you are involved in the institution?

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thank you, all. And Hi, Paulette, welcome back. We were just talking about changes that we want to see at the OU that can make a positive difference for Black women. I don't know if you want to quickly touch on that before I ask a question from the audience.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Yeah. I will. And apologies that I had to leave. In fact, my colleague who was asking me to leave quite urgently was wanting to present me with an award...

[LAUGHS]

**MARCIA WILSON:** Oh. Well-done.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** ..which was quite lovely.

**MARCIA WILSON:** Congratulations.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Thank you. And I suppose that ties into this in terms of just being acknowledged for the hard work that we all put in. But in some ways and I say this. And I hear others say it, that you feel that you have to work twice as hard sometimes as a Black person. And to not be acknowledged for that work that you do is quite that can cause you to just feel quite deflated in some ways, really.



And Lystra, you were alluding to kind of succession planning. And I think this is a big problem within the OU that succession planning doesn't seem to be a feature. And then when you put into the mix that actually you are disadvantaged because of the color of your skin, then actually it kind of becomes even worse a situation for you.

So I think that there needs to be more transparency around different roles in the organization and what is required of you within those roles and how to progress into those roles. And some leadership, some clear leadership around succession planning.

And also, just finally, just to say that actually the population of the institution needs to change really as well. We can't be in this position where we are feeling so isolated as Black women and being in such a minority within an institution.

The sector isn't the same as this. And it's unfortunate that the OU is in this situation. So let's hope that changes fairly quickly as well. So I'll stop there. And back to you.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** No, that's great. And huge congrats for that on your awards. So I'm just going to try and squeeze in a couple of questions from the chat. And one of those questions well, actually two of those questions, which I think are linked and are touching on some of what you've said.

So Sas is asking, if you want to become a professor, you often need the approval or recommendation of your head of department. Can this be an obstacle? And linked to that there's another question from Anna who's saying, do you think we need to do more to change the promotion criteria or the mindset of those people who are sitting on promotion panels so that the onus isn't just on people like the four of you to be the super heroes?

In the interest of time, if one of you wants to comment on that. And then I'll ask another question afterwards. Anybody?

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** To answer the question about the promotion, I think, one of the two that you raised. I think both needs to happen. I think both in terms of it's always good to revisit the promotions criteria because those things tend to be not as clear as they should be.

It's like jurisprudence. Every time I see one of these things, I think of what my early days in my the law degree prior to drafting legislation. They're heavily written documents that takes two months to translate into something. So it's always good to reflect on that as a document in terms of what is the promotion criteria, and that we're all clear as to what those are.

But I also think there is the need for that cultural kind of change, similar to what we talk about in recruitment and selection, or what is the mindset with regard to equality, diversity, and

inclusion? And whether or not it is still being seen as the thing to add on rather than the thing to be incorporated into the holistic whole of the system.

**PAULETTE JOHNSON:** Can I come in here as well? What I established through the program is actually that there are these opportunities for promotion where actually you have to demonstrate that there are things you need to demonstrate in order to apply for and be successful. And there's a problem when these opportunities are not available to you. That's where there's a barrier.

So I think, yes, that process needs to be reviewed. But actually, there needs to be and I think Marcy has mentioned mindset as well there needs to be some thoughts about the distribution of work that will support someone's case for promotion as well. And I think potentially there is possibly some bias in that as well.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Thank you. There's just I didn't know. Lystra, sorry, did you want to add something there? I wasn't sure.

**LYSTRA HAGLEY-DICKINSON:** Only to say I think with regard I saw somebody was talking. I think Anita about the imposter syndrome. And I wanted to respond to that in the sense because this is something that plagues women and plagues Black women in particular. It seems and we can talk about the historic and the socioeconomic thing that has created that. But it's one of the things that I think we want to be clear to stamp out amongst ourselves and to encourage each other that in terms of no other category seem to think that there is that imposter syndrome is really much embedded in women as gender and then Black and minority women in particular. And it's time that we socially delimit ourselves from that kind of constraints.

In some ways, I think it goes back too far for us. And it's something we need to think about it that we need to encourage each other to get to just eliminate that as far as possible. Because the reason that you're in the job in the first place says that you have worked twice as hard and three times as hard to impress somebody in that recruitment process or whatever. So wherever you are, you have potential, you have expertise. And it's time we learn to celebrate those.

**MARCIA WILSON:** Yeah. It's a tough one. I mean, I keep thinking of Nirmal Puwar. I've not heard her name said, so I just see it written. So I'm sure I'm not confident that I'm pronouncing it properly.

But she writes about space invaders and how certain bodies are not seen as being the norm when they occupy certain spaces. And that has an impact on how we feel when we go to certain places. And yeah, thank you.

I'm not sure who is that Parvati who's put in that? Yeah. Nirmal Puwar. Again, forgive my mispronunciation. And how do I think we counter it? I only wish I knew.

The only thing that I can certainly feel is that the existence of my Black sisters, or my sisters generally in these institutions, is perhaps one in the eye for the imposter syndrome. It's just one in the eye saying, imposter syndrome. I'm afraid you got it wrong because look at us and look at where we are. And look at how brilliant we are.

Yeah. And I just have the vision of somebody like Paulette who's just been given her reward, holding it up and saying, this one is for you, imposter syndrome. Take that.

**YOSRA OSMAN:** Love it. I love that. Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm really, really sorry. The time just seems to have disappeared. So we're going to have to end it there, but I think that's a really great way to end it.

I just want to thank you all so, so much for your contributions and this discussion. I think it's been brilliant. Marcia, I don't know if I could just quickly come to wrap this up.

**MARCIA WILSON:** Yeah. I'm going to be really quick. I just want to say that we have eight women on the program, and you just heard from for today. All of the eight women on the program are equally brilliant. And I tell you, I met you a year ago. And the change that I have seen and just hearing you speak today with such conviction and such intention around your career just it makes it all worthwhile.

Now, we have formed a network at the OU. And although your cohort is coming to an end within the next few months, we're going to have cohort 2 joining us starting January 2023. And once again, we're going to form a network.

Our cohort 1 will mentor cohort 2 so that we have strength in numbers so that we don't feel so isolated, and that we support each other. And I think that's so important going forward. But I just have to say, today's session was nourishing. And I feel so proud listening to each and every one of you. You nailed it. Spot on. And Paulette, congratulations. Well-done.