Open letter to:

Rt. Hon. Michelle Donelan MP Minister of State for Universities; Universities UK; funders of higher education institutions; learned societies & higher education membership bodies

CC.: AdvanceHE, Office for Students

We are a group of Black, Asian and minority ethnic academics, students, professional support staff who work or have recently worked in UK higher education. The group includes highly respected and well-known scholars of science, law, politics, business and social justice.

We note that a number of UK higher education institutions have used the occasion of the brutal murder of George Floyd to publish statements indicating their commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement.

We are aware of and welcome efforts by the sector to address racial harassment and narrow the gap in degree outcomes between white students and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. However, while these and other racial inequalities remain, statements that Black lives matter can at best be regarded as tokenistic and superficial.

The sector has, to date, been overly optimistic in its assessment of the extent of the problem, it has been slow to act and, where action has been taken, it has failed to seriously engage with the systemic and structural nature of racism.

We believe the groundswell of protests in the US and the UK represent a crucial moment for us - as people directly affected by these issues - to call on the sector for help in eliminating racism. Specifically, we request that:

Culture & understanding

1. Committees, boards or advisory groups set up, whether locally or at a national level, to address racism and racial harassment must be led by and made up of those with first-hand experience of these issues or expertise in the area. Where this is not the case, white colleagues must have received coaching on antiracist practice and have the confidence of Black and minority ethnic groups to work in this capacity.

2. Any training and development programmes focused on pedagogy and leadership include, as central components, considerations of racial justice and that criteria about these be included in applications for promotion or appointment to managerial roles.

Training

1. While useful in some areas, we note the EHRC’s reservations that unconscious bias training is unlikely to be effective in addressing fundamental matters of racial inequality.

Moving forward, race equality training programmes engaged by HEIs must include as central components topics on institutional racism, white privilege and power and racial microaggressions.
**Hiring**

1. The nature of feedback to unsuccessful applicants should contain specific and useful information that can usefully shape their career development and their personal grading sheets made available without redaction.

1. Where universities make use of executive search firms, they should have demonstrable expertise in diversity and inclusion and, be purposeful about including suitably qualified Black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates in shortlists.

1. Universities should publish by ethnicity, data on candidates who have applied for, been shortlisted and successful in securing senior appointments on an annual basis.

1. That where racial disparities have been identified, universities make use of positive action measures, as permitted under the Equality Act 2010, in order to help reduce them.

**Promotion & progression**

8. Current systems of promotion and progression disadvantage Black and minority ethnic scholars. We call for the government to lead the sector in:

   a. agreeing and publishing specific criteria aimed at reducing opaqueness and increasing transparency and fairness in the process
   b. calling for all HEIs to have established an appeals’ process that operates independently of selection committees
   c. ensuring that universities make public the number of Black and minority staff achieving promotion and/or progressing each academic year and state actions to improve this

**Funding Bodies & Learned Societies**

1. Funding bodies should make public the number of applicants for awards and/or grants by ethnic group and, of these, the number who are successful and make public actions to address any disparities.

2. Funding bodies should introduce specific criteria for universities applying for grants to demonstrate how the institution is advancing racial justice.

3. Learned and membership societies should publish their membership by ethnic group and, where applicable, the make-up of prestigious positions such as Fellows and make public actions to address any disparities.

4. Learned societies and membership bodies should proactively and explicitly work towards advancing racial justice across their disciplines and make these actions publicly known.

5. Funding bodies, learned societies and membership bodies should also scrutinise the ethnic profile of their own work force and be explicit in how their employment practice advances racial justice.
Racial pay gap

11. We call on institutions to publish data pertaining to the racial pay gap by grade and show how this data intersects by gender.

Workload

12. Workload models ignore the additional burdens and responsibilities placed on Black, Asian and minority ethnic scholars. We invite conversation about this at sector level with the view that actions which emerge ensure a workload model which better captures and values the hidden labour of these scholars.

Scrutiny, rigour & implementation

13. Where it does not negatively impact on the experiences of particular individuals or cause breach of GDPR, we call for all public data to be disaggregated by ethnic group. It is limiting and not sufficient to group our experiences under the homogenising and alienating term ‘BAME’.

14. The sector should not be its own arbitrator of racial justice. We call on the government to make available ring-fenced funding for the EHRC to oversee the implementation of the afore-mentioned actions, to identify any further disparities in experiences and outcomes, and to work with relevant parties, including the Office for Students, to ensure their implementation.

Sincerely

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