

# Reporting on the Race Equality Task Force Consultation

## Introduction

The Race Equality Task Force (RETF) launched a University-wide consultation in Michaelmas Term 2021. A full report of the analysed feedback will be published on the Task Force site. This summary captures the key outcomes from the consultation that form a significant part of the Race Equality Strategy going forward.

The consultation document contained a set of recommendations and proposed measures that aim to: address racial inequalities among staff and barriers for students identifying as Black or Minority Ethnic (BME); ensure the Oxford educational experience draws on the contributions of diverse societies and cultures; reinforce the University's position as a centre for research that is informed by and informs latest research; and accelerate progress towards making Oxford an institution which is, racially diverse and welcoming to the widest range of people and perspectives.

Staff and students were asked for their input on the priority interventions and were asked to agree, disagree or prioritise 71 measures split across 8 themes. In total, 1,167 members of the University took part in the survey, 76% were staff members, approximately 15% were postgraduate students, and 8% undergraduate students. Respondents were not required to select a response to all 71 measures – the numbers who selected a response to a measure ranged between 575 and 714. The survey included 10 open questions, for which a considerable amount of very constructive feedback was received. The numbers of written responses on each theme were in the low hundreds.

Most of the responses were very positive and welcoming of the RETF initiative with a few responses (approximately 1%) questioning the premise of the consultation. In addition, a few of the individual proposed measures attracted somewhat larger numbers of negative comments. The consultation has provided a basis for prioritisation of the suggested measures, and allowed for new suggestions and identification of areas where in general there is not support for activity.

The consultation showed a strong weight of opinion behind measures to deal with harassment and to address staff diversity. Seventeen measures were rated as a priority by more than 50% of respondents (six in the area of Harassment, three in Staff Diversity, three in Student Diversity and Experience, two in Communications and Engagement, one in Culture and Community, one in Responsibility and Accountability and one on Funding). It is proposed that these measures should be prioritised for accelerated action in the Task Force's final report. A further twelve measures (spread quite evenly across the themes) came close to the 50% threshold and merit further consideration.

Attention will also need to be given to those measures not prioritised for accelerated action. In many cases it may be possible to identify routes through which to take them forward at a steadier pace through the University's normal processes. Divisions, departments and colleges will continue to promote race equality and inclusion according to their specific needs.

## Overview of Consultation Response

### Who responded?

The distribution of responses to the consultation is shown in Table 1 below. It is a little disappointing that there were not more student respondents but given all else that was happening in the University and more broadly, it was very good to receive such a high level feedback and from many respondents a deep engagement with the consultation.

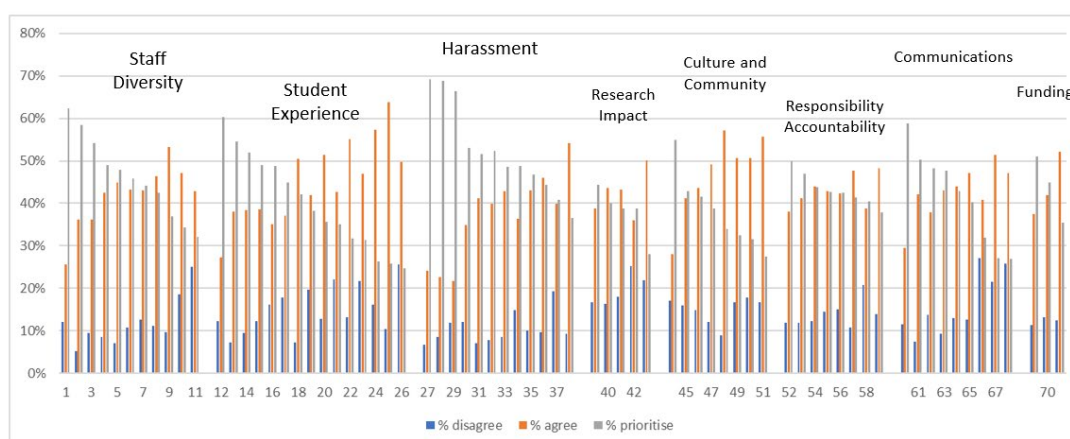
Division	Staff	Postgraduate Student	Undergraduate Student	Other	Total	% Total
Med. Sciences	212	23	7	1	243	21%
MPLS	140	45	32	2	219	19%
Humanities	120	50	31	2	203	17%
Social Sciences	111	40	6	3	160	14%
Cont. Ed.	18	5	2		25	2%
GLAM	57				57	5%
UAS	128				128	11%
College	63			2	65	6%
Other	43	9	13	2	67	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1167</b>	

Table 1: Distribution of respondents

## Overall response to Measures

There were 10 open questions in the consultation document and these are reported on in the sections below. We had about 265 pages of responses to these open questions and these have been analysed using sentiment tools and also drawing out key suggestions. The results below are the response to the measures through the indications of disagree/agree/prioritise; respondents could pick one of the three options. For nearly all of the measures, the number of respondents selecting one of the three options was between 600 and 700.

The figure below illustrates, for each of the 71 measures of the consultation the percentage of disagree (blue), agree (orange) and prioritise (grey). The figure shows that some measures attracted a great deal of support as priority actions, while others were identified as things that should be considered but not necessarily priorities, and finally a number of measures received over 20% of responses that disagreed with the action. An Excel version of the data provided in the figure below is available on the [EDU website](#)



## Overarching Interventions

Respondents were asked to consider the 11 priority intervention areas and asked two questions

1. Have we covered the most important issues or is there any priority you think we have not included?
2. Do you have any comments you would like to make on these priorities?

The majority of respondents were positive and supportive about the suggested areas of intervention with over 350 simply responding along the lines of “yes, everything seems to be covered”. Many colleagues took the time to provide detailed feedback and suggestions and concerns, for which we are enormously grateful. The concerns expressed ranged from the fundamental basis of the consultation to specifics within the language or focus of the priority actions.

Staff, postgraduate, and undergraduate students did not raise considerably distinct types of issues (i.e. participants expressed similar concerns regardless of their membership status). For the two open questions of the ‘Priority Interventions’ section, staff members account for roughly 77% of the answers, while postgraduate, and undergraduate students account for the 15% and 8% respectively.

For the two open questions in the ‘Priority Interventions’ section we received over 100 pages worth of feedback, with a rough total of 80,000 words. In an effort to summarise and consistently capture the comments provided by the community, the answers were individually read, and then coded in clusters. Quantitatively, opinions were classified between those that were ‘Welcoming and Positive’, those that offered ‘Welcoming with Constructive Suggestions’, those opinions which were ‘Negative or Critical’, and ‘Other’ type of opinions which normally were anecdotal or related to the survey instrument. Table 2 summarises this information. The qualitative results of this exercise are summarily presented below.

Welcome & Positive	57.8%
Welcome & Constructive Criticism	37.6%
Negative & Critical	3.7%
Other (don’t know)	0.9%

*Table 2: Breakdown of written input*

The order in which the topics and items are presented below does not neatly correspond to the frequency or intensity with which they are mentioned.

### **Welcoming and Positive**

The vast majority of participants welcomed the RETF initiative. While most of the positive written feedback was relatively short, some participants took time to write and show their interest in and appreciation for the RETF initiative. These type of positive comments are briefly exemplified below.

*They [the priorities] cover every aspect I would want them to. I am especially keen on 1, 4 and 8*

*I agree with the priorities, and would rank them all pretty equal. I'd value investing in people at all stages above all.*

Throughout the written feedback respondents expressed the need for the University to take strong and effective actions to launch the RETF measures so as to bolster the credibility of the initiative. Some of the suggestions, criticisms and concerns are outlined below.

#### **a) What is success?**

A significant criticism of the interventions was that while they might all be seen as appropriate, and good actions to take, they were not sufficiently well articulated to be able to measure their success.

As put succinctly by one staff member: “[a]ll interventions need to be based on evidence where possible”.

*“The measures outlined are a fantastic start - and thank you so much for having formulated these thoughtful proposals! I'd encourage the taskforce to be even more specific to ensure that the much needed targets are indeed all specified and measurable, and so that those responsible for implementing them can be held accountable (establishing committees and working groups can be a necessary part thereof, but it cannot be a sufficient answer, for example).”*

*“How will [the RETF/University] evaluate the effectiveness of each of the interventions proposed? above, in order to remove ineffective or actively harmful interventions and ensure that resources are most appropriately focused on the interventions that are most likely to make a difference to students' lives? Who will be responsible for this measurement and evaluation? How will implementers be held responsible for ensuring targets are met? How will measurement be safeguarded against external interference that may have a vested interest in the success or failure of a particular intervention?”* And further *“There is otherwise a risk that the establishment of a post, committee and communications will be taken as evidence of progress while substantive action is delayed.”*

#### **b) Priority focus**

Beyond performance assessment and coordination issues, respondents shared their opinions regarding the types of goals pursued by the initiative. There were significant calls to include measures oriented towards strengthening retention and career development (as distinct from recruitment). Similarly, respondents called for measures to be targeted towards all members of the university, suggesting that at present, initiatives put a heavy emphasis on students and academic staff, leaving administrative staff on the sides. In relation to the issue of retention, one of the responses stated that *“[r]etention should be just as high as recruitment because too often Black and Brown people are recruited into hostile work places for them because no effort has been made to diversify the culture [...]”* and a further example *“I'm assuming development and progression are implicit in the mention of recruiting and retention? I think there is a pre-existing issue with career development opportunities, in general, that would be helpful to tackle in this context to help with the retention of an increasingly diverse workforce”* In relation to the issue of expanding the scope of the measures vis-à-vis community members, as briefly exemplified here, some participants expressed that *“[the University] also need[s] diversity in professional posts too, not just academic roles”*.

#### **c) Intersectionality**

Alongside calls for a research-oriented approach diagnosis, a careful planning and performance assessment, perhaps one of the strongest feedback points received was the need to make of intersectionality an axis or fundamental pillar of the set of RETF initiatives. One staff member commented that: *“[...] intersectionality is key here as you can not [sic] look at the question of racial equality in isolation”, with an undergraduate student also suggesting that “...there needs to be a much greater focus on intersectionality - race equality at Oxford often focuses too much on those from privileged backgrounds”*. Similarly, as part of their joint response members of a College collectively expressed that they *“[...] would also like to see, across the recommendations, a recognition of the intersectionality of for example race, class and gender”*.

In this regard, as the above quotes exemplify, University members recognised the need to think intersectionally to design and implement measures which that allow the University to meet its EDI goals more efficiently and effectively. It is important to highlight that race, gender, religion, and class were the most common dimensions highlighted by respondents.

#### **d) Financial Resources**

Closely linked with intersectionality, one of the overarching concerns linked with the RETF initiative pertains to its monetary/financial component. More specifically, there were two prevalent types of money-related concerns: Those oriented towards the financial backing of the initiatives, and those

linked towards increasing the funding available to students as well as the salary of staff members of the University. In reference to the former, there was a general sense of agreement that “..in order for these priorities and a step change to become reality, substantial funding would be required. Funds should therefore be earmarked from the start, as part of this exercise, for those priorities that have gathered agreement”.

#### e) Tensions

The written comments reveal that there are tensions even within those who support and welcome the RETF initiative. Below, the most salient points of contention are highlighted.

**Top-down vs Bottom-Up:** While some participants believe that change and measures should be directed at and come from changing the top authority structures/figures of the University, other respondents argued in favour of measures that put students and academic staff at the centre.

**Autonomy vs Centrality:** The feedback revealed that a majority of respondents would like a stronger central leadership, which puts out specific guidelines and standards to be followed by the rest of the collegiate University. However, there were also voices which underscored the importance of resisting centralising efforts, defending the autonomy of department and colleges, as well as safeguarding academic freedom.

**Compulsory vs Voluntary:** Another layer of tension concerns whether involvement in EDI related activities should be mandatory or remain voluntary. This was particularly salient for issues pertaining to training, but also when it came to exploring the salience of race across different disciplines, revising curricula under an EDI framework, and setting certain EDI values or ethos as criteria for admissions or recruitment.

**Further issues:** Additional tensions exist on whether, for example, specific numerical targets should be set, on how to define, identify, and tackle harassment and microaggressions, and whether the focus should be on decolonising the curricula or making it less Eurocentric.

#### Rejection of the Premise and Actions

Using different rationales (ideological, empiric, etc...), some participants rejected the premise of the RETF initiative. While these were a small minority of voices they made strong arguments against the fundamental premise of the consultation. This rejection was expressed —with varying degrees of intensity and complexity— by both staff and students and by respondents with a variety of backgrounds (differences in sex, gender, ethnicity, etc.).

Perhaps the most common ground for opposing the RETF initiative is the defence of merit as the most valuable criterion for (and driver of) academic excellence. Further, a small number of respondents were concerned about the devaluing of academic freedom and the adoption of an ideology that limited individuals’ freedom to express open views on what are difficult issues. *“The University should be upholding liberal values including freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, merit-based appointment processes and academic freedom. Evidence from the US in particular shows how DEI is detrimental to liberal values. Activism becomes more important than scholarship.”*

#### Focus for Accelerating Change

The details for each of the measures are provided in the full report. It is clear that many of the actions included in the consultation are already underway or are planned in different parts of the University. The results from the consultation are to help prioritise and identify where we must first put our focus to accelerate change. Therefore, the actions with the highest prioritisation levels from

the consultation will be included in the Race Equality Strategy and Race Equality Charter Plan to with funds to support their delivery.

#### Highest Prioritised Measures

The measures which were prioritised more than 50% of the time (in order of ranking of highest priority first) were:

<b>Section</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Dealing with Racial Harassment	Deliver a University-wide campaign for zero tolerance of racial harassment and bullying
Dealing with Racial Harassment	Develop a comprehensive training strategy
Dealing with Racial Harassment	Develop and implement a strategy to raise awareness and reduce the incidence of microaggressions or subtle forms of discrimination
Staff Diversity	Develop and implement a comprehensive inclusive recruitment strategy to underpin the University's BME staff target
Student Diversity	Increase funding for Black Academic Futures and other scholarships for under-represented students of colour on an annual basis.
Communication and Engagement	Develop a University-wide anti-racism campaign with the aim of increasing conversations about race equality
Staff Diversity	Encourage applicants of diverse ethnicities to apply for Visiting Fellowships, Professorships and lecturerships
Culture and Community	Introduce a programme of training and awareness activities that go beyond online training using the expertise of specialist trainers and to help shape effective anti-racist approaches.
Student Diversity	Engage proactively with a forthcoming project on access and participation for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in postgraduate research.
Staff Diversity	Provide a housing liaison officer to support and lend advice on behalf of staff experiencing housing problems, and potentially a trusted landlord database for renters as well.
Dealing with Racial Harassment	Implement an online reporting tool to enable a more open and transparent way of reporting concerns.
Dealing with Racial Harassment	Put in place a robust process for record-keeping and reporting to stakeholders held accountable for racial harassment.
Student Diversity	Building on progress already made, ensure students of colour can access a range of counsellors of colour.
Dealing with Racial Harassment	Develop an enhanced approach and toolkit to encourage and support early intervention and greater use of informal resolution
Funding	Agree funding sources to establish and maintain an appropriate level of diversity funding to support sustainable change.
Communication and Engagement	Support the systematic sharing of best practice across the collegiate University

Section	Measure
Responsibility and Accountability	Resource the central Equality and Diversity Unit provision appropriately to bring it in line with investment in other Russell Group universities.

There were a number of measures that were just under this cut off and where other input also supported the measures, they have been included in the strategy.

### Next Steps

The measures and activities are now being turned into a clear strategy which is supported by the Race Equality Charter plan with the aim to submit the plan in July 2022. The plan includes these prioritised measures together with a number of general Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives, each of which has a clear deliverable, a way in which it will be measured and a responsible owner.

The Race Equality Task Force put forward three enabling actions and that we have progressed:

- 1: Create an EDI Leadership role, reporting to Vice Chancellor and with appropriate support team: this [role is now advertised](#) and please circulate to colleagues you feel might be interested and suitable for the role.
- 2: Work with Conference of Colleges to bring forward proposals for shared governance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: discussions have between the Conference and University show a clear desire for joined up governance and this is being taken forward this term.
- 3: Develop and embed a positive approach to communications and engagement on race related issues: we now have a communications officer within internal communications who is focussed on developing this positive approach and creating a clear strategy and plan.

The Race Equality Strategy and REC Plan will be discussed with Divisional Boards this term.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the work of the data analyst, Javier Pérez Sandoval, who completed the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 1,167 responses. Given the nature of the subject, and the nuanced responses received, review of the free text questions was carried out manually by the analyst and the RETF Co-chairs and Programme Manager.