

The Vice-Chancellor
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Daphne Cunningham
Oxford BME Staff Network

26 June 2020

Dear Dr Cunningham,

Thank you for your letter of 15th June which coincided with the publication of a University statement which addresses several of your points. I hope that you have seen that statement and that it makes clear that we as an institution reaffirm our unequivocal abhorrence of and opposition to racism against Black and Minority Ethnic people and discrimination in all its forms. While we have been working to address racism in our community we recognize that we all need to take further action.

In the week before that statement along with senior colleagues I published several other statements on this matter, as well as the communication from Dr Surender. I regret that those were not evident to you and that in some cases you were left unaware of them.

As I consider your requests they essentially are asking that we have a much stronger focus on creating an inclusive and racially equal community at the University. I agree. Having reflected on our aims and ambitions, and how far we have met them to date, I agree that we need to step up our response. I invite you to help us get this right. The University has, over the past few months, identified areas of race equality work which it will seek to accelerate over the next year and will embark on an institution-wide consultation process to develop a new three-year action plan in the run up to the renewal of its Race Equality Charter award in February 2022. I would invite you to participate fully to help review our progress and targets to date, and to help put in place effective and tangible measures where we are falling short

I am going to try to respond to each of your points in turn but I would suggest that several will need further consideration as we take forward the Race Equality Charter consultation.

The Reporting of Racist Harassment

The University does not tolerate any form of harassment and expects all members of the University community, its visitors and contractors to treat each other with respect, courtesy and consideration. The reporting of harassment, be it racial, sexual or other, can be personally difficult and is a sensitive issue that is treated as such within the University. For this reason, individuals are provided with support throughout the process via the confidential harassment advisor network, which offers the option of speaking to a BME advisor if preferred. We believe the approach meets the diverse needs of those who need support, but if there are ways in which this approach is letting down the BME community, then we need to understand that, and welcome your input. The University captures data on harassment through its biennial staff experience survey and recognizes that the levels of harassment experienced by our staff are higher than the levels formally reported. Our ongoing review of the University's approach to



preventing bullying and harassment seeks, among other things, to understand the barriers to reporting and to improve record keeping, which is currently both decentralized and fragmented, making it difficult to identify trends. We are exploring whether the introduction of an online reporting mechanism would be desirable.

In Hilary Term 2020 Council endorsed the university's commitment to fostering an inclusive culture. The University understands inclusion to mean 'institutional and individual efforts and actions to foster an environment and culture in which each member feels, and is, valued, listened to and respected, able to be themselves and empowered to participate fully in the life of the University'. This commitment fully encompasses the fact that BME members should be able to discuss issues of race and racism safely through forums including the Staff Network, the annual BHM lecture and other similar events. We are open to exploring with you additional mechanisms that may facilitate this.

Mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training

We intend to review the University's approach to equality and diversity training, including consideration of any elements that should be mandatory, and ensuring that we have the IT systems in place to monitor its uptake. At the last Personnel Committee meeting it was agreed that recruitment training should be made mandatory for anyone involved in recruitment of staff, extending this from chairs of panels. Consideration of E&D is already embedded in all of POD's management training programmes and will be a strong focus of the line-managers' toolkit which is under development. Personnel Committee will be considering whether this should be part of the induction for all members of staff.

BME Representation in all meetings and committees where questions of race are discussed. We fully agree that there is insufficient representation of BME staff in University committees and addressing this is a key priority in the current REC Action Plan. Work is underway to ensure that all main committees including the Personnel Committee have BME members. This includes reviewing committee constitutions as well as raising awareness among HoDs and managers and encouraging them to promote this actively, as well as working with OxRSS to ensure that the diversity of researcher representatives is monitored. This work will be accelerated and implemented as quickly as is possible with the renewal of memberships.

Acknowledgement and Action

The brutal killing of George Floyd in the United States and subsequent events have caused concern and distress across the University but have been particularly painful for our BME staff and students. Our priority at all times is the well-being and welfare of all University members. Letters written by me, by Heads of Houses, and the University Advocate for E&D have acknowledged this situation and provided information about some of the support and resources the University offers. I am grateful to the BME staff network for all the work it does to also provide support for BME staff across the university.

The public attention on the issue of racism has focused attention on what our university is doing to tackle racism within our own structures. While we reaffirm our unequivocal abhorrence of and opposition to racism against Black and Minority ethnic people and discrimination in all its forms, at the same time, we acknowledge that the University itself is imperfect in the way it addresses these issues. We know that we still have work to do in creating a truly diverse and



inclusive community where everyone feels respected and secure. We are not complacent and we are determined in our efforts to achieve this.

Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As we plan our return to working on site we are putting a great deal of effort into ensuring a safe environment for ALL staff and students. Many staff are adversely impacted by Covid in ways that the general population of the University community are not. Guidance aims to ensure that managers are sensitive to the potential concerns of vulnerable groups, including BME staff. The University, in collaboration with the NHS, is planning to provide extra resources so that members of the University can have easy access to a Covid-19 test if they think they have symptoms. There will be two testing sites in the city and one on the Old Road Campus, with an online booking system. Preparations of spaces to allow social distancing and the installation of appropriate PPE is being installed wherever it is required. Detailed guidance for line managers and staff in general is being developed to support their return to work and to allow consideration at an individual level.

Commitment to hiring BME Staff at all levels.

The University's Race Equality Charter action plan outlines our plans to increase the proportion of BME staff at all. If we had more BME staff we would readily be able to address the issue outlined above about representation on University committees. A number of different initiatives are underway, including stronger engagement with our local city community, improving processes for academic recruitment, and removing bias from recruitment processes – (strengthened measures on this were brought forward to Personnel Committee earlier this month). Personnel Committee agreed to a number of actions on recruitment but we do recognize that we need to do more to shift the balance. We are looking to other organizations that are doing better, to see what we can learn from them and to understand how we can adapt and achieve more.

Curricular Reform across the University

The topic of 'decolonising' or 'diversifying' the curriculum is a Race Equality Action and various strands of work are already underway in consultation with students in recent focus groups. Education Committee are looking at how to accelerate this action.

The MPLS Division has been awarded a grant from the Diversity Fund to take forward a project to develop teaching resources to support the diversification of STEM curricula, an area that is frequently overlooked. Many departments in Social Sciences have begun work on making their curriculum more inclusive and adding diverse voices to it. This includes steps such as integrating race and gender questions into topics; embedding teaching on colonialism and empire into courses; changing reading lists to ensure substantial representation of a diverse range of voices; ensuring better coverage of issues concerning the global South in syllabuses. Similar initiatives are underway across the collegiate University

Funding for BME-focused research activity

The University has a number of internal funding mechanisms including the Diversity Fund, the Van Houten Fund and the John Fell Fund. Since the Diversity Fund was reestablished on a permanent basis in 2017-18, a number of successful bids have had a strong focus on race equality, including three projects aimed towards improving curriculum diversity. All successful bids are listed at: edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/successful-bids



The GLAM institutions have a number of diversity activities and projects. I am aware that the new GLAM strategy which is under development has diversity as a thread throughout, in audiences, outreach, staff and interpretation of the collections. The PVC for GLAM has agreed, in response to your request, to set up a working group to consider how the exhibitions and collections of GLAM might be used more effectively in this regard. She will be inviting members of the BME network to join that working group.

TORCH also provides support and funding for race-related research through its Race and Resistance programme, a number of its networks and its Global South Visiting Fellowships and Professorships.

Restructure the Equality and Diversity Unit and recruit another Race Equality Policy Advisor at the EDU

There is no question that we will need to bolster the resources and the focus as we take forward the new Race Equality Charter plan. It is not clear that moving the EDU unit to report directly to the Registrar does achieve what we all wish to achieve. The role of Advocate was added to the senior team in 2015 to work alongside the then PVC Personnel and Equality (and PVC Ed) to bolster our efforts.. The University Statutes only allow me to have five PVCs with portfolio so I am not at liberty to add more. Dr Surender and the PVC People, Professor Trefethen, work closely on all staff matters and will do so increasingly. Furthermore, in addition to the resources within the EDU, there are now dedicated E&D posts which also support the work of race equality in all four academic divisions. The structure and positioning of the our race equality work across the University is something that we will consider as we take forward the consultation in the development of the REC plan.

Commitment to community engagement

The University has a vast amount of community engagement through the academic divisions, UAS, and particularly through GLAM. However, as is so often the case in Oxford, this often happens in an uncoordinated way meaning that, for example, connections made through our work to enhance public engagement with research are not capitalized on to target recruitment towards under-represented BME communities. This is a challenge that we seek to address going forward. The working group that is being set up by the PVC GLAM will consider ways in which this can be made more accessible to the University BME community. We are also preparing to strengthen our outreach to local recruitment fairs and other local BME community networks in our efforts to recruit more BME staff (in particular professional and support staff). Again I hope you will be involved in those discussions.

I believe that by working together we can increase the number of BAME staff at Oxford, we can enhance their career development and we can ensure that everyone who works here feels that they work in a University that delights in its diversity and in which every member of our community is equally valued. Thank you, again, for taking the time to write. My colleagues and I look forward to working with you as we prepare the strongest possible case for the next REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Louise Richardson'.

Professor Louise Richardson