

## Tackling racism

### Comments and suggestions from department members in response to HoD email (10 June 2020)

16 submissions were received from department members via the online suggestions box. Some submissions included more than one suggestion, so individual suggestions have been categorised separately in this paper.

*The words are unedited and show the views of those who commented.*

#### 1) BAME representation at senior level

- a) Recent events have brought to the forefront issues of race at Oxford. I think we need to address the lack of BAME representation - particularly BAME women - at senior levels within the department, and particularly black people. I don't know how we move forward on this but I feel it's important we do so and that an open dialogue would be a positive first step. Can more be done to support our students of colour?
- b) Why are there so few BME members of staff at senior management committee level and what is being done to allow BME staff to progress to senior positions?
- c) Since Athena Swan, the department has successfully addressed the representation of women in the department at a senior level. It is now time to consider representation of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

#### 2) Research design

- a) **Addressing health inequalities:** Ensure that researchers consider health inequalities as part of research proposals and how these will be addressed. For example, in recruitment, accessibility and benefits of the intervention, PPI, dissemination, implementation etc. Could the intervention actually increase inequalities? This maybe through the inclusion of equity audits or health inequality impact assessments. Applied research projects need to include actions to address inequalities. Better recording of ethnicity and other demographic data is required in order to assess and respond to health inequalities - we should be advocating for this in research but also routine data collection, i.e. GP data.
- b) **Study sampling:** Lead the way by conducting health research that is equitable and produces findings that are generalisable. Study samples should not be comprised of ~97% White and highly-educated participants (unless that is the demographic affected by that condition). Use prevalence data to identify study samples that actually resemble the affected population, with extra effort (and funds) if needed invested into methods to include people from different ethnicities and social classes. Use Black PPI contributors. Do outreach and community-based recruitment.
- c) **Study sampling:** Funding available / set aside for research projects for engaging BAME participants in research and targeted dissemination activities. Specific funded PPI roles for increasing and promoting intersectional awareness in research projects. Mandatory representation of POC in all research teams (co-applicants/ advisory panels). Training to improve these strategies.

#### 3) Staff and student recruitment

*Following feedback, comment 3a was edited because of views that it might be upsetting for others. This was a mistake, for which we apologise, and the comment has now been reinstated so that these suggestions can be viewed by all and inform discussions across the department about the levels of racism that exist and how it can be tackled.*

- a) We should all be considered fairly and not singled out to do a job because we are black or white. We all face racism. White people face racism and prejudice from black, Asian and other minority groups. My children face it at school as white children in Oxford. We all need to think about how we behave. The best people for the job should get the job whatever their skin colour. It's the working class in any country who don't get the opportunities, it's not about colour and race. The only racism I have come across in our department is that against the English.
- b) The department must be resolute in ensuring equitable representation within its staff, students, internal and public facing programmes. This can be achieved simply by; Having a strategy to identify, recruit and retain faculty, students and staff who have been historically underrepresented in higher education. The department must not only recruit these students and staff, but also provide them with mentoring and professional development resources to thrive.

#### **4) BAME Allies**

- a) Given the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movements and the increase in awareness of discrimination within our society, I think it's an important time for the university to consider how to best support its BAME staff. The department and university have taken great steps to showing support for the LGBTQ+ community recently and these steps could be used as a guide for tackling racism in the workplace as well. Perhaps, we could have BAME allies with a similar role to the LGBTQ+ allies, so BAME staff have support if they face discrimination or microaggressions while at work.
- b) Appoint anti-racism 'allies' in the department, similar to the LGBTQ+ allies who can support people of colour if need be.

#### **5) Rhodes statue**

- a) From a personal point of view, I would be keen that all statues that commemorate individuals who were racist and/or involved in slavery to be relocated to museums so people can CHOOSE if they wish to be exposed to them, reducing unnecessary trauma.
- b) The department should take a public position that this must come down. As a (white British) person who previously has had some sympathy with the "not erasing history" argument, I can see now that this just simply doesn't wash. Statues are for celebration. As Sir Kier Starmer said, it should be in a museum - where history can be examined in the broadest sense. It's continued presence on display is a powerful symbol that Oxford just doesn't "get it". It causes distress to many.
- c) Rhodes statue must fall. Level of feelings and emotions on this are high. It is not acceptable for the senior whips of the University to argue a case for history, yes we need to understand our history but we do not need to have the arrogance of Rhodes gazing down at us when we pass Oriel College in order to 'get it'. To do so is insulting to all, not just people of colour. Its time for Rhodes to fall.

## 6) Our approach to tackling racial bias

- a) At Oxford and in this department, those often leading diversity and access initiatives are the few Black/PoC faculty members and the Black/PoC students. This dynamic functions in a way that while Black/PoC people at Oxford are busy with (unrewarded!) diversity work, most white students can focus their energies on individual pursuits of greatness with little thought of the importance of diversity outside of a brief unconscious bias workshop.
- b) I suggest doing as much as possible as advised by BAME members of the department.
- c) The department must do better in improving their understanding of race and ethnicity - especially around student recruitment and the student experience. A focus might be around mental health and well-being of BAME students.

## 7) Additional suggestions

- a) Make the racial bias online training mandatory, rather than optional. And monitor and publish department staff recruitment statistics (at all levels) by ethnicity.
- b) As a white person who wants to do all I can to avoid prejudice and racism I would just like to know how I can best do this?
- c) Some consideration should be given to how BME staff will return to work during the pandemic, given that BME groups are a high-risk group.
- d) I would highly recommend that staff not assume how a name is pronounced or spelt or even further, not assume one's country of origin. I have experienced this situation countless times. After correcting the mistake for the other party, I receive an apology with the excuse that the other party thought that I was from this country therefore my name is thusly spelt. Although the other party apologises, this looks like an excuse to justify discrimination from my perspective. After 5+ years as an employee, I would have thought progression would be made in this matter. Yet, I am still occasionally addressed by this incorrect and frankly, offensive spelling of my name to this day by various staff members.

The correct way about this is to ask. It doesn't hurt anyone to ask for clarification and it certainly looks like one actually cares about another human being.