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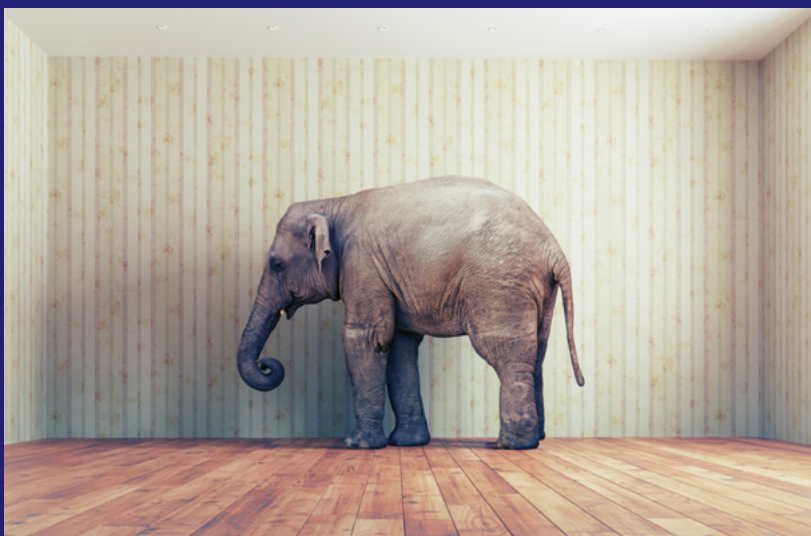
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The white elephant in the room: ideas for reducing racial inequalities in higher education

Edited by Hugo Dale-Rivas



Higher Education Policy Institute

HEPI Report 120

Foreword

Baroness Amos, Director at the School of Oriental and African Studies, (SOAS) University of London

'If you are a woman you are going to struggle. If you are a black woman you are going to struggle even more.' These were the words of Adesewa Esther Adebisi, Education Officer and BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) ambassador at the University of Huddersfield speaking at a recent joint SOAS / Universities UK conference on the black, Asian and minority ethnic student attainment gap.

Adesewa recounted an experience at her university where, after completing a degree in Biochemistry and expressing an interest in moving into the field of cancer research, she was warned that she would have to work twice as hard to match her white counterparts. Her immediate thought was: 'Do I have to put myself in a situation where I would have to struggle just solely based on my skin colour?'

Last year, I attended four evidence sessions in England and one in Scotland, as part of the process of gathering data to inform the joint National Union of Students and Universities UK report *Closing the Gap*.¹ The report focused on what needs to be done to close and ultimately eliminate the BAME attainment gap in universities.

We heard from students, university staff and others with an interest in these issues. We learned a lot. From the students who were constantly having to explain the realities of their day-to-day experiences, white staff who were fearful of talking about

race and racism because they did not want to say the wrong thing and BAME staff who often have to mentor and support BAME students but do not receive any support or recognition for the additional time required for this work.

The frustration was palpable but there was also commitment to change, to creating more inclusive and more diverse cultures in universities.

Universities are as much about delivering equality as they are about excellent scholarship and knowledge transfer. They are places where opportunity and aspiration come together.

However, the example that Adesewa gave shows that we are not operating on a level playing field. That we still have a long way to go.

What needs to happen to create the change needed? The report highlights four key areas:

1. the need for strong leadership;
2. creating a culture in which it is possible to have open and honest conversations about race and racism;
3. developing racially diverse and inclusive environments;
4. getting the evidence and understanding what it means and understanding what works.

Strong leadership is critical. My own experience as the Director of SOAS has shown me how hard it is to bring about the required change in culture. Resistance takes many forms

and communication is key. Although we have a very diverse student and staff body at SOAS, we are grappling with the same challenges as many other universities.

There are no easy routes to success. As university leaders we have a responsibility to make change happen and it needs to start now.

I hope this collection of essays – from contributors such as Professor Kalwant Bhopal, and Amatey Doku with whom I co-chaired the University UK / National Union of Students review —will be an important further contribution to help us all to deliver the real and practical change which we so sorely need in our sector.

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Introduction

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, Professor of Education and Social Justice at the University of Birmingham, begins our collection assessing how institutional racism has persisted, in contrast to improvements in gender equality in higher education. She contrasts the low uptake of the Race Equality Charter, with 56 member institutions at the time of writing, compared to 164 members of the gender equality focused, Athena SWAN Charter.² Applications for Athena SWAN awards grew 400 per cent after the British Medical Research Council funding was made conditional on holding a Silver Athena SWAN award. Bhopal argues that the Race Equality Charter, if given significant investment and attention, is a promising route for tackling institutional racism.

Professor Shân Waring, Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) at London South Bank University, writes about overcoming the first and surprisingly difficult challenge – how to talk about race within an institution. She takes us through the obstacles: those who do not engage because of a ‘fear of appearing racist, of being called racist, and perhaps of finding out when it comes down to it, they are racist’; finding acceptable common terminology; and conversation being dominated by white colleagues and undermined by micro-aggressions.

Amatey Doku, recent Vice President for Higher Education at the National Union of Students, discusses how well-meaning attempts to tackle racial inequalities can end up putting an additional burden on BME staff and students. He calls for greater

recognition and remuneration of this informal work, including mentoring and engaging with university governance.

Professor Margot Finn, President of the Royal Historical Society, argues that academic faculties also need to tackle racial inequality. Action is needed both in terms of their curriculum and supporting BME students and staff to progress, including little understood options such as offering BME only studentships.

Sanchia Alasia, Equality and Diversity Manager at Brunel University, brings a practitioner's perspective to these challenges, including underlining the need for a senior management diversity champion and for equality networks to have sufficient budget, remit and time allocated to work effectively.

Srabrani Sen, chief executive and founder of Full Colour, provides a perspective on the difference between mere words and creating meaningful change in institutions. Drawing on her experience of the charitable sector, she highlights the various traps that lead to well-meant initiatives not delivering hoped for improvements in racial equality in an institution.

Policy Recommendations

- 1) All Higher Education Institutions should participate in the Race Equality Charter** (56 are members at the time of writing). Funding bodies should consider creating financial incentives behind them doing so. This proved effective when applications for the gender equality focused Athena SWAN Charter went up 400 per cent after the British Medical Research Council made funding conditional on holding a Silver Athena Swan Award. (Kalwant Bhopal)
- 2) Do groundwork to facilitate conversations about race within institutions.** Do not underestimate the obstacles faced in doing this and the need for ground rules. (Shân Waring)
- 3) Make sure that work done by BME staff and students to tackle racial inequalities is recognised and rewarded.** Being an informal mentor to BME students, or giving up time to help with racial equality initiatives, should not become another form of disadvantage. (Amatey Doku)
- 4) Academic faculties should look to their curricula and to other ways of addressing inequalities in their subject, such as Studentships for BME candidates.** (Margo Finn)
- 5) Diversity practitioners within institutions need senior management diversity champions to rely upon.** For instance, inclusion networks should be sure they have the resources and the remit to make changes. (Sanchia Alasia)
- 6) Avoid well-meaning but vague actions which are unlikely to effect change. For instance, implicit bias training should**

be used in a targeted way to map how biases are playing out in an organisation and to tackle specific issues.
(Srabrani Sen)

1. Race matters: Addressing competing inequalities in higher education

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, Professor of Education and Social Justice, University of Birmingham

The year 2019 marks 20 years since the publication of the Macpherson report (1999). The Macpherson report was published as a result of an inquiry on the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. Macpherson defined institutional racism as follows:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.³

Current scholarship on race in UK higher education consistently highlights the pervasiveness of institutional racism, which persists despite the presence of equality and diversity policies and the 2010 Equalities Act.⁴ Institutional racism works in overt and covert ways. In its covert form, racism is felt in black and minority ethnic (BME) staff exclusion from decision-making practices and cultural insensitivity, and in the performance and reproduction of the university as an elite white space at all levels of the institution.

The result and effects of institutional racism can be seen in the significant under-representation of BME staff in UK higher

education institutions, and particularly at senior levels in both academic and professional and support services. In terms of career progression in academic or professional and support services in higher education institutions, research has found racist practices in recruitment, promotions and pay.⁵ In addition to these measurable inequalities, the daily experience of racial marginalisation and exclusion remains deeply ingrained in the cultures of higher education institutions, and is a significant and normalised aspect of institutional life for many BME employees.⁶

The insidiousness of racist practices across the higher education sector has proved difficult to challenge through equality and diversity policies. However, the Race Equality Charter has been found to offer the potential to address racism, not least by providing a framework through which difficult conversations can take place, and specific actions planned.⁷ Current research suggests that although the Race Equality Charter has been found to offer a potentially powerful framework for beginning to address institutional racism in higher education institutions, there is evidence that considerably more investment and incentive is needed in order for the Charter Mark to be as effective as is necessary.

Following successful pilots in previous years, the Race Equality Charter was launched in 2016 by the Equality Challenge Unit (now part of Advance HE). The Charter Mark process requires participating higher education institutions to form a self-assessment team whose main function is to complete a self-assessment report on their current position in relation to race equality and compile a four-year action plan to address outstanding concerns. As a result of this process, the higher

education institution is awarded either a Bronze or Silver level Race Equality Charter award, which signals their commitment to work on race equality. Currently, 56 higher education institutions are members of the Race Equality Charter, and therefore working towards submitting an application for an award, and 10 higher education institutions hold a Bronze award. The Race Equality Charter focuses on inequalities experienced by students and in the university curriculum, as well as focusing on inequalities for staff.

The Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005, but became particularly prominent in universities after an announcement in 2011 by the Chief Medical Officer of the British Medical Research Council that applicants for medical research funding would not be considered unless their medical school or faculty held at least a Silver Athena SWAN award. Subsequently, the number of applications for the award increased by 400 per cent from 7.7 per cent to 29.7 per cent (Ovesiko *et al* 2017).⁸

At present, there are significant differences between the Race Equality Charter and the Athena SWAN Charter. Because the Athena SWAN Charter has existed for some 11 years longer than the Race Equality Charter, and because it is tied to medical research funding, the Athena SWAN Charter is often both chronologically and hierarchically the top priority for higher education institutions in equality, diversity and inclusion work.

There is evidence to suggest that gender has taken precedence in policy making in higher education, with white middle-class women being the main beneficiaries of the Athena SWAN Charter.⁹ Recent findings from a project funded by the British Academy confirm this.¹⁰ Aiming to understand more about

the impacts of the Charter Marks, and to identify examples of good practice, the project was the first of its kind to compare the Athena SWAN Charter and the Race Equality Charter. Key findings suggest that in some higher education institutions, the possibility of beginning work on the Race Equality Charter was further undermined by a perception that, while gender is a universal inequality, there are geographical areas of the UK where racial inequality is less of a concern. Gender was seen as a universal issue by respondents, in contrast to race which was seen as only a concern where racial diversity already exists. There is a risk here that white-only academic spaces are perpetuated by the myth that this is the natural or given state of a particular academic space, and should only be more diverse, paradoxically, if it already is diverse. Despite the contradictions of the race-geography argument, it was common across the findings, and therefore clearly represents a convincing justification within equalities work for a shift away from addressing white privilege through the perception that race, in contrast to gender, is a niche or context-specific inequality.

It was also clear that both the Athena SWAN Charter and Race Equality Charter offer an important framework for equalities work in UK universities. Respondents saw the Charter Marks as having enabled difficult conversations to take place, providing justification for the importance of undertaking work to address gender and racial inequalities in their institutions. In particular, the connection between the Athena SWAN award and medical research funding was seen as having made gender equality a priority. The result of this was that good practice for gender equality had become a standard item on meeting agendas

and appointment panels, and data systems had improved so that metrics on gender in recruitment, promotion and retention were accessible and up to date. Department and school-level Athena SWAN awards were also identified as prompting localised as well as institution-wide changes to practice. Without the weight of a connection to research council funding or an established process of moving from institution-wide to department-level awards, the Race Equality Charter was nevertheless seen as a vital tool for negotiating the discomfort around discussing issues of race in the workplace, with the gathering of triangulated data providing an evidence base from which to work.

However, a common perception of the Race Equality Charter was as an additional, often impossible, equalities workload, largely due to experiences of working on the Athena SWAN Charter. As a consequence of this perception, higher education institutions responded by considering economising strategies such as combining roles focusing on race and gender, or arguing that the Race Equality Charter was less necessary in a particular institutional context. Given the potential, noted above, for the Charter Marks to enable difficult and necessary conversations on separate issues of gender and race equalities in higher education, and given the particular discomfort of discussions of race and racism, I would see these economising strategies as a backwards step. Rather than approaching the Race Equality Charter with a logic of economising and efficiency, I argue that the Race Equality Charter requires significant investment of resources and time at institution-wide and localised levels, as has been shown to be effective in relation to the Athena SWAN Charter.

Even if it is couched as a simple accident of timing and chronology, the effects of the introduction of the Race Equality Charter after the firm establishment of the Athena SWAN Charter are that the Race Equality Charter is a *secondary* equalities priority. While institutions can claim to be working on structural inequality by focusing time, resources and attention on gender equality, there is little or no imperative to shift the focus to uncomfortable conversations about race and racism in higher education. When race is introduced, so too is a weariness with the equalities agenda, an economising logic for diversity work, and justifications for inequalities more universal or more deserving than those of race. Given the stark and persistent racial inequalities in UK higher education, it is crucial that these inequalities are not allowed to be conflated with or replaced by more familiar discussions around gender equality. Through such a conflation, higher education institutions could appear to be conducting work on redressing inequality, while ensuring that the very issues that exclude people of colour from higher education are further excluded from discussions within it.

2. Talking about Race in Higher Education

Professor Shân Wareing, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education),
London South Bank University

Introduction

To put this section in the context of my background, I am a white employee of a UK university. In 2018, I led the University's Race Equality Charter mark preparations, and I lead the development and delivery of our education strategy, which has a reduction of the gap in award outcomes between BME and white students as a primary goal. I am also a sociolinguist, with a PhD in gender and communication, who taught courses in language, society and power, exploring how the words we use, and the way we use them, encode, reproduce, and challenge assumptions, culture and values.

We have a way to go to create an equal society. Our Race Equality Charter (REC) data left us in no doubt that our students face barriers to success connected to race and ethnicity at every stage of their higher education journey, from admission, to their likelihood of completing their award, their academic results and their chances of graduate-level employment afterwards. Staff were less likely to have permanent contracts, less likely to be in senior roles and less likely to have complaints and grievances upheld if they were BME. We know we have a journey to undertake, and we must undertake it, because higher education is a gateway to social mobility. Degrees are necessary to entering the professions, and graduate careers are routes to financial security, social, economic and political influence. Higher education institutions needs to analyse their

role in the student attainment gap and reduce it, and analyse the reasons for the lack of BME senior academics and managers, and change them, to succeed in our missions as organisations, to be the universities we want to be.

Being able to talk about race within London South Bank was an essential starting point for our journey. To make the changes required, we needed to understand what was going on and why so far change had happened too slowly, or not at all. To achieve this, we needed to hear the perceptions of BME individuals and groups, as well as review the quantitative data. Because it was going to take all of us, we needed to work together, which was only going to be achieved through honest conversations.

More than that, the way we talk, or do not talk about race, are themselves part of the practices which create and embed inequality. Avoiding talking about ethnicity, when people have different outcomes that correlate with ethnicity prevents us analysing and challenging the causes of inequality. Talk can also be how inequality is accomplished, if there are systematic differences in how and when people talk based on ethnicity. Who talks first, and who talks longest can reflect assumptions about relative power and also be an act of power, if members of some demographic groups regularly dominate conversations and decisions.

What words can we use?

Talking about race is hard, for a lot of reasons. For a start, the language we can use is always problematic, as Jeffrey Boakye explains in *Black, Listed*. 'Politically correct' words can be controversial, even before a politically incorrect word is

uttered. Words in common use define race crudely, abstracting and simplifying skin colour, from the perspective of white-as-normal, and black-as-other. 'Minority' in black and minority ethnic (BME), or black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) is numerically wrong; it captures, and linguistically preserves, differential privilege. Anyway, who wants to be referred to by an acronym? To complicate the situation, geography has a role. Different countries and cultures use different terms; thus 'people of colour' is fine in the USA, but not in the UK by and large. 'BME' on the other hand isn't a term much used outside the UK, so there was a bit of establishing who came from where and what was considered acceptable accordingly. Time and generational transitions were also a factor. Language many of us learnt as children is not any longer acceptable, but if we had not been talking regularly about race in an enquiring way, we lacked confidence that our lexicon was up to date. In a room of people talking about race, there will be people confused about which words are okay and which are not. And there will be people in the room who will not join in the conversation, for fear of appearing racist, of being called racist, and perhaps of finding out when it comes down to it, they are racist. All of which will impede any kind of open discussion.

But in the face of these challenges we do still have to talk about race, because these conversations are the first steps to ceasing to perpetuate institutionally racist structures and systems. So when we wanted to start an institutional conversation, we needed to agree ground rules from the outset. These included that it would be okay to explain if someone used a word that made you angry or offended you, why it did and to suggest what words they could use instead. Another ground rule

was to agree to be patient with one another and be tolerant or appreciative of our collective hesitant steps. If we could have these conversations with many voices participating, and with attentive respectful listening, it would be the start of constructing a lexicon we can all understand, use and feel comfortable hearing.

Apart from considering the very first basic steps of what words to use, there were numerous other challenges to constructive communication.

Who gets to talk

Who speaks, and who listens, was a challenge I definitely should have foreseen. There is a very significant body of research in language and gender that looks at time spent talking. It shows both men and women expect and enable men to speak more, and that women who do speak more than their socially-allocated amount are considered over-dominant or abrasive. As Chair at the first meeting of our Race Equality Charter Steering Group, I failed to anticipate that the white participants might speak first, might speak more frequently and at greater length than the black participants. Talk time demonstrates dominance, and also obviously influences what gets talked about, and what gets decided. Clearly it was unacceptable to have Race Equality Charter meetings dominated by the white participants, after that I structured meetings so that black colleagues led discussions and reported back on discussions.

Small group discussions and micro-aggressions

As part of the Race Equality Charter meetings, we used small

group discussions, and during these, I became aware of patterns of micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are behaviours which can be hard to challenge and easy to wave away but are systematic variations in ways that have a cumulative effect. They can include less eye contact, uninterested or hostile body language and less frequent use of people's names. They stack up to indications that someone is less valued, less worthy of attention and less respected than someone else whose contributions were affirmed through positive body language, name use and so on. The long-term effect of micro-aggressions is usually to sap someone's feeling of belonging and their confidence. Micro-aggressions are often a result of unconscious bias – attitudes we have which we may be unaware of and which can arise in response to a challenging or unfamiliar situation. They may be very fleeting but they affect how conversations take place, who shares information and how open people are, all of which influence how decisions are arrived at. We can minimise the impact of unconscious bias expressed through micro-aggressions by becoming more aware of their many forms. One way to find this out if you do not have personal experience is to find someone who does and is willing to talk about it.

One of our Race Equality Charter Steering Group members had been the only black person in her university cohort. I asked whether she would sit down with me, and we talked about her experiences growing up, being at home, walking down the street and entering a lecture theatre. As a white person leading the Race Equality Charter process, I was conscious I would also have unconscious bias and that in all likelihood I was displaying micro-aggressions. One of the things that this conversation

helped me with was understanding my colleague's priorities, what concerned her most, and what I needed to work hardest on to avoid or overcome.

Hearing people's stories

At the outset of our Race Equality Charter preparations, Steering Group members were invited to share their reasons for being part of the Group, and in response, staff and student members of the group shared experiences of inequality and their personal drivers for their desire for change. We heard about people's grandparents' and parents' experiences, of casually racist comments at school and university (for example, 'you are very ambitious for a black woman'), which had fired anger and ambition. We heard about people wanting things to be different for their children and grandchildren from how things had been for them. It was very moving and humbling, a privilege to be given these insights. Afterwards, we felt like a team, honouring what was shared and with mutual trust and commitment to joint goals.

Conclusion

Language and communication are key to effective collaboration, to analysis of how people's opportunities within organisations are affected by their race and ethnicity, and to developing effective solutions. Language is also a site where inequality happens and is normalised; our communication practices are part of what we must understand and change to create more equal universities. Talking about race and ethnicity brings inherent challenges but accepting and rising to those challenges is part of our institutional process of change.

3. Putting the burden of closing attainment gaps off BME staff and students

Amatey Doku, former Vice-President for Higher Education at the National Union of Students

Over the last few years, the topic of institutional racism in higher education has been put back on the agenda. From racist incidents and hate crimes on campuses, to an increased awareness of the black and minority ethnic (BME) attainment gap data, the higher education sector has had to confront some very difficult questions about the role that universities play in the reproduction of structural inequalities. It is not the first time that these issues have been raised, but universities are now under more pressure than ever before to explain the 13.6 per cent BAME attainment Gap.¹¹

The Office for Students (OfS) backed up by the Government's Race Disparity Audit announced that, for the first time, universities will be set targets to reduce the BME Attainment Gap.¹² The National Union of Students and Universities UK have recently published a report sharing some of the best practice in the sector for tackling these disparities, work that will be taken on by Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education, a new Evidence and Impact Exchange.¹³ All this amounts to greater pressure for universities to review, assess and redesign their institutional processes, procedures and strategies to rectify these disparities.

However, while the ethnic diversity of students varies across the sector, with some institutions having a majority of their students from BME backgrounds, the staff profiles rarely match

that diversity. According to HESA, only 16 per cent of academic staff are BME, which drops to 10 per cent for professors, figures which are even more stark for women, or for specific groups within the broad category of 'BME'. The result is that the profile for those charged and accountable for implementing strategies to reduce these disparities rarely have the lived experienced of those students affected.

In light of this, some universities will continue regardless, conscious or unconscious of the problem, and seek to design strategies which they think will improve outcomes. Others will look to students and staff from those backgrounds and seek to take guidance from them about what should be done and how. On the face of it, the latter approach appears to be the right thing to do; how could a university plan and implement change in tackling the attainment gaps without having those affected at the heart of the change?

However, there are significant limitations to an approach which places the burden on tackling the attainment gap solely on BME staff and students.

For BME staff, who have successfully beaten the odds and navigated their way to positions within higher education, they often find themselves hugely stretched. As a quick and simple fix to tackling these disparities, some universities try to increase the sites of representation of BME individuals throughout the existing governance structures. It is often those who have spoken up, asking for change within the institution, who find themselves called upon to take up these places first.

However, as anyone who has been involved in university

governance will attest, this can be a hugely time-consuming commitment, on top of much of the unrecognised labour they are doing already. BME academics also often find themselves making up for the lack of culturally competent support services in universities going above and beyond what is required to mentor, support and advocate for students. This is particularly stark in most Russell Group universities where the proportion of BME students sits well below the sector average. It is rare that this additional work is acknowledged or factored into work plans. This in turn, could have a detrimental impact on their own research output or career progression.

BME students can also find themselves facing similar challenges. Students have been at the cutting edge of protesting, campaigning and lobbying for action on attainment gaps but now that universities are facing external monitoring, many find themselves having to play a slightly different role. In some cases, students are called to sit on committees, attend meetings, help organise events and support the drafting of strategies. Students may often find themselves torn between wanting to seize opportunities to influence change, but doing so within dense structures, required to provide complex solutions, all on top of their degree and the pressures of studying. Higher education institutions often find themselves overly reliant on students' expertise to provide some of the answers to these issues.

There is also a power dynamic which affects both staff and students which may limit the extent to which problems can be identified and remedies sought. Universities will have to confront challenging questions about how higher education reproduces structural inequalities, which will inevitably

implicate the senior management teams. Without recognising the power dynamic of BME staff being on the university's payroll, it will be hugely challenging for some staff to feel comfortable being open about their experiences or to be critical of their employer. Given how few they are in number it may also be almost impossible for those experiences to be anonymised, even if collated externally.

BME students are subject to the same imbalance of power. While university is meant to be a departure from the ostensibly 'passive' teaching methods of secondary school education, towards more co-production and independent learning, where students take a more active role in their education, it is unclear whether BME students are supported to make that same transition. A lot of work on the BME attainment gap points to a lack of 'sense of belonging' at universities for BME students, and the effect that that may have on students' confidence to speak up about their educational experience should not be underestimated.

On most other issues where high-level strategic change is required, universities will often look externally for strategic advice and support. Consultants, sector bodies and contractors usually do the bulk of work in drawing up strategies, proposing solutions and in some cases support in their implementation. Universities will often pay sizeable amounts for that level of support but when it comes to equality and diversity, and more broadly, the BME student experience, which also requires high-level strategic transformation, there appears to be less investment. That is in part down to the lack of sector bodies / consultancies organisations that have specific offerings to institutions in this area. The expertise exists, but very few existing

Equality and Diversity consultancies or organisations have expertise in the student experience and very few organisations who specialise in student experience and engagement have expertise on the BME student experience. The organisations which appear to be leading the way in this area are in fact students' unions but the resource that students' unions have to conduct this level of research varies wildly across the sector.

Each university will have to take an evidence-based approach to tackling the BME Attainment Gap. Demographics, courses, type and size of institution, and the specific ethnic groups under the 'BME' banner, must inform any interventions. But how those interventions are reached and how they are implemented are as important for institutions to avoid simply reproducing these inequalities elsewhere.

There are a number of things that universities could consider when setting out to tackle these disparities.

For BME staff, universities should recognise and be open about the power imbalance that exists for them and ensure that no complaints, sharing of experiences or suggestions for change compromise their employment and progression through the institution. Any extra work that they are doing informally either to support the university in the implementation of plans, or in supporting students who feel unable to get support elsewhere, should be factored into their workplans and they should be remunerated accordingly.

For BME students, universities should work with students' unions to ensure that there is support for students who engage with the universities' efforts to tackle the issues. If a

plan requires significant amount of students' time, effort and expertise, measures must be taken to ensure that students are not disadvantaged from engaging and where possible remunerated accordingly.

Finally, the higher education sector should invest in sector-wide bespoke high-level strategic support for institutions to support closing attainment gaps, increasing progression for BME students into further study and diversifying their staff profile. This sector-owned support could also relieve the pressure on BME students and staff who are often expected to find the solutions while also still struggling to navigate those very same issues and barriers.

Finally, more research is required to see where the burden and labour is falling within institutions and across the sector. The targets, the strategies, the public pledges and the sector buy-in are very encouraging. The next step is to ensure that all these strategies are implemented in a way which genuinely tackles the inequalities without reproducing more elsewhere.

4. Decolonising History? Reflections on the Royal Historical Society's 2018 Report

Professor Margot Finn, President, Royal Historical Society

In October 2018, the Royal Historical Society published its first systematic assessment of *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*.¹⁴ Subtitled *A Report and Resource for Change*, this study combined statistical analysis of how History as a discipline is configured in UK education (from school to university level) with qualitative interpretations of how History is experienced by students and academic staff, predominantly within the higher education sector. The report, published during the Royal Historical Society's 150th anniversary year, was intended to make academic historians in the UK both take stock of and responsibility for History's place in higher education's equalities landscape. It makes for grim reading. However, at departmental level within universities, it is now also proving a catalyst for discussion and (we hope) change.

As the data surveyed at the beginning of the report reminds us, UK-domiciled students in HESA's 'Historical and Philosophical Studies' (H&PS) category are significantly more likely to be racialised as white than candidates in most other subjects: 89.0 per cent of H&PS students are white, compared to 77.3 per cent in all subjects and 65.9 per cent in, for example, Law. Whilst there is little difference between H&PS undergraduate attainment of 2:1 degrees (BME 64.2 per cent and white 62.6 per cent), First Class degrees (which can play key roles in postgraduate funding decisions) in H&PS are awarded disproportionately to white (22.8 per cent) compared to BME students (14.2 per cent). Unsurprisingly in this context, the underrepresentation

of BME History students persists at subsequent levels of study. Just 8.6 per cent of H&PS UK postgraduate research students are from BME backgrounds, compared to 16.8 per cent of all UK postgraduate research students. Staff in UK History departments are likewise overwhelmingly and disproportionately white. In the UK as a whole, 85.0 per cent of university academic staff are white; in History 93.7 per cent of academics are white, with only 0.5 per cent black.

Using the Jisc online survey platform, the Royal Historical Society surveyed UK-based university historians (MA and PhD students as well as postdoctoral research and teaching fellows and academic staff) in May 2018. The 737 respondents provided hundreds of pages of qualitative commentary to amplify their answers to the survey questions. Twice as many BME respondents (32.6 per cent) as white colleagues (15.8 per cent) reported witnessing/experiencing discrimination or abuse, with staff in respondents' own departments (36.7 per cent) most often reported as the source of abuse, and students (20.5 per cent) the next largest group. Coupled with these data were reports that BME histories and BME historians are routinely marginalised in UK History departments. 'The worst is being the only BME member of staff in a department', one respondent wrote. 'Whenever I tried to discuss it with my colleagues (all of whom were non-BME), I was told unequivocally that I was imagining it.'

The report runs to 121 pages, including targeted recommendations for different groups of historians (heads of department, postgraduate tutors, conference organisers and editors, for example) and an extensive bibliography of further reading. There is no space here to do justice to the findings (much less to the many previous expert studies that informed

our research), and no set of bullet points can adequately outline an effective programme of change. Here instead I have suggested four basic actions drawn from the report and from the workshops organised around it since autumn 2018 that merit reflection from staff, students and policy-makers committed to change.

1. Acknowledge and own the problem: History is among the ‘whitest’ university disciplines in the UK. We can blame society or schools for this ineluctable fact, or point out that universities as a whole are disproportionately white institutions and that other disciplines are also unrepresentative in terms of race and ethnicity. But those are excuses, and we need solutions. We need openly to accept that we have a serious problem, that it is our problem and that we have means in our hands to address it. The entrenched habits of silence and denial so eloquently anatomised in Reni Edo-Lodge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race* need to be laid to rest.¹⁵

No BME historian with whom I have discussed the Royal Historical Society report or its underlying data has been surprised by our findings; in contrast, most white historians who have read it have been both surprised and shocked. Many BME students report being ‘spotlighted’ in seminar discussions, being expected to speak as ‘native informants’ about ‘their’ histories. Many BME staff report the pervasive expectation that they are responsible for bearing the burden of higher education’s failure to make equality happen. That has to stop. Acknowledging that both overtly and ‘casually’ racist behaviours animate the experience of History teaching and learning in schools and universities is the first step toward actively calling it out.

2. Do not dodge difficult conversations about the curriculum: The taught curriculum is a problem in History. Both BME and white pupils in schools find the A-Level curriculum a disincentive for further study with its salient silences - on the British empire for example - and its overweening emphases – on black histories as histories of slavery. Lacking the obvious career trajectories of Law or Medicine, moreover, we do ourselves no favours in BME undergraduate recruitment by failing to explain the ways in which historical analysis opens up doors to both cultural understanding and paid employment.

Whether in schools or universities curriculum change is a minefield: it is time-intensive and inevitably involves both stepping on toes and prodding scared cows. In the context of race equality, the curriculum comes loaded with a host of additional impediments. Schools already stretched past their limits financially and caught in the crosshairs of the league tables are understandably reluctant to embrace radical reform. Academics, keen to ensure that ‘their’ sub-fields flourish, can be reluctant to welcome new approaches (such as global histories) that challenge established boundaries when appointments of new staff are being agreed. The press (like some History practitioners) eagerly dismiss efforts to question disciplinary foundation myths as ‘political correctness gone mad’. But if we want to shape a properly diverse and inclusive student and staff cohort in History, we have to come to grips with what we teach, and how it is taught.

A repeated refrain in feedback to our survey was that historians have to get better at teaching ‘difficult’ histories. ‘It’s an ingrained problem within British society that has to be

challenged from school', commented one research student from a Black Caribbean background. 'White Britons need to be able to discuss uncomfortable histories without becoming defensive'.

3. Know the law: Both of the Royal Historical Society's reports on gender and our 2018 report on race identify high levels of ignorance about the legislative frameworks designed to protect equal opportunities in the UK. Over a third (34.1 per cent) of respondents to the race report were unaware of the 2010 Equality Act and its provisions. Among BME staff (46.4 per cent) and early career / temporary staff (46.2 per cent) these figures were even higher. The inability of many academic staff to distinguish between positive action - as it is enabled by the 2010 Equality Act - and positive discrimination - as disallowed by equalities legislation - not only stymies our ability to think through what excellence really looks like in History, it also prevents us taking steps to promote equality in recruiting BME students and staff. Ignorance of the legal distinctions that obtain between recruitment of employees, on the one hand, and of students, on the other, exacerbates this problem.

4. Do not mistake exclusivity for excellence: The scope for positive action in student recruitment is also wider than most academic staff think. 'There is a complacency in the upper reaches of the profession about the idea of recruitment on the basis of narrow and unexamined ideas of "merit" and "excellence", which has negative effects in terms not only of BME recruitment and representation, but also of gender and class', one respondent to our survey observed. Coupled with a lack of knowledge about the forms that positive action can take in student recruitment, this complacency encourages

academics to mistake exclusivity for excellence. In workshops organised around the race report, Royal Historical Society speakers underline that universities can — and, indeed, some now do — advertise postgraduate fellowships restricted to BME applicants. ‘Why didn’t they tell me we could do that?’ was one experienced postgraduate admissions tutor’s frustrated response to learning that this could be done. Good will is essential if we are to build an inclusive historical discipline. But it will not happen if we do not come to grips with the structural levers that positive action puts into our hands.

Surveying 50 years of UK legislation to combat employment discrimination against ethnic minorities, the sociologist Anthony Heath concluded that ‘the contours of racial discrimination have been remarkably persistent over time.’¹⁶ Many of the structural and socio-economic obstacles that thwart equal opportunities in employment feed into the severe problems of exclusivity and under representation that face UK university History today. We obviously need to take these deep structures into account. But we also need to find specific points that allow us to address our grim complex history of racial exclusions as a discipline-based problem, at the granular levels at which we work, teach and recruit — at the levels that we own.

No one in the working group that produced *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History* is so naïve or so ignorant as to think that the report is a silver bullet or a panacea. But we do argue that we will get closer to equality, diversity and inclusion — and thus to excellent historical practice — if we combine a better understanding of the national legislative and policy landscape with hard-headed commitment to ‘dig where we stand’.

5. Practitioner Reflections: making diversity work a success in your institution

Sanchia Alasia, Equality and Diversity Manager, Brunel University

The position of diversity professionals within an organisation is one of the first challenges of managing diversity successfully. Where the role of a diversity manager is aligned alongside the corporate structures of an organisation, the employees are more likely to recognise diversity as an important feature of the organisation's mission and values.

Diversity practitioners can be placed within various directorates within an organisation, each placement will have its benefits. Working within a Human Resource department gives the diversity officer a clear focus on workforce issues and influences policy matters to do with recruitment, maternity and flexible working to name a few. However, if based within the senior management section of the organisation, vital links can be developed by building equality into the strategic aims and objectives of an organisation. Some organisations choose to put resources into establishing an equality directorate that has a pivotal position across all sections of an organisation and where practitioners can have success in mainstreaming diversity. Wherever the diversity officer is placed, it is vital that there are linkages made throughout the organisation.

In order for the diversity manager to be successful, the senior management teams or the people at the top of the organisation must support the diversity agenda. When the people who are at the top of an organisation are on board, the difference is clearly

noticeable especially when they are prepared to go beyond the minimum level of legal compliance. Top-level support is crucial for example when as a diversity manager, you wish to pilot positive action programmes for under-represented groups of staff. Their support is also essential for embedding diversity throughout the organisation. Their commitment filters down to their senior management teams, through to middle managers and junior staff. Where those at the top of the organisation also accept that others at their level should be diverse and support programmes to achieve this, it demonstrates to the employees their commitment to the equality agenda. Where those at the top of the organisation are not on board or do not see the need to engage with the equality agenda, then this presents great challenges to the diversity manager, because only a limited amount of success can be achieved.

Usually any policy or programme being developed to take forward the diversity agenda in an organisation requires senior management agreement. Improving diversity within an organisation that has management resistance is challenging and can be de-motivating. If diversity practitioners have a strong sense of character and an interest in social justice issues, this can provide the momentum to continue in their roles. Similarly, the diversity practitioners' role is challenged if staff at the lower levels of the organisation are not engaged with the equality and diversity agenda. Staff within the organisation have a role in highlighting the inequality and discrimination that occurs, so that action plans and programmes can then be built around the actual needs of the organisation, rather than the perceived effects of discrimination.

Designing and delivering diversity training provides the next challenge. It is difficult to design a diversity course that will meet all the needs of those who will receive the training. Some will need general awareness, whereas others - especially managers - will need more in-depth information about equality law and how to manage diverse groups of staff. However, frequently it is not practical to come up with a multitude of courses, so practitioners are often faced with designing, delivering or commissioning a course with a one-size-fits-all approach. Leading organisations will provide these courses for their staff as a matter of course and make them mandatory.

Equality and diversity staff networks consisting of employees from diverse groups can have some success in advancing the diversity agenda. These groups are quite frequent within the public sector and in higher education. Usually a separate group is organized for each protected equality group. There are usually networks for women, black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, disability, religion and belief, age and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered staff.

Two important factors increase these groups' chances of success.

1. Support from the organisation in terms of resources for the group. If the organisation can aid in establishing staff network groups, suggesting terms of reference and setting up regular meetings, then this can give such groups the solid foundation that they need to last. The groups should not only have a remit to organise events such as Black History Month, but be given a strategic role within their organisations, such

as getting involved in setting the equality and diversity strategies and policies.

2. Momentum from staff themselves to get engaged within the networks. There should be commitment from staff to give up time, for example in their lunch hour to attend meetings, put forward their views and assist in carrying out actions that support the groups aims. If staff within the organisation do not feel the need for a network group to support them within the workplace place, the sustainability of the group is limited.

A high-level diversity champion that supports staff network groups and diversity within organisations can be extremely useful. In supporting network groups, they can have a role in speaking at network meetings, which in turn can attract further membership to the groups and give them credibility. KPMG's Islamic society has helped to address the needs of their growing Muslim staff and client base and have introduced the use of Islamic business models to gain new business worth in excess of £500k in fees. *Imperial as one*, which is a race equality group within Imperial College, has the support of the College's Rector and Management Board who actively undertake the role of equality champions.

The role of a diversity champion can be important, in spearheading the diversity agenda and making the diversity practitioner role easier to fulfil. In the public sector, where the appointment of diversity champions is a common feature, their role has two main functions. The first is to be a role model and signal positive images of diversity to employees within the organisation. The second is to give reassurance to

the relevant diverse groups within the workforce, that there is someone senior within the organisation that is willing to speak up on issues that affect them. Diversity champions can also have success in gleaning from the various protected equality groups, what their particular concerns are that they may not have necessarily have found out otherwise. They can set examples by attending equality training *in lieu* of their busy schedules and briefing their senior management teams on the importance of engaging with the diversity agenda.

There is a moral argument for treating people equitably within the workplace, however practitioners over the last decade have more frequently outlined the benefits for their organisation to gain further buy in. Practitioners may use the business case for diversity as a leverage to overcome the difficulties of mainstreaming equality within organisations. The practitioner's role here is to encourage people to engage. This can be done by outlining how establishing diversity networks within their companies and placing diversity at the heart of the business can contribute to an increase in profits and expansion of the customer base.

The success of any diversity manager's role can be enhanced by networking externally. Being a member of several different network groups comprising of diversity professionals within higher education and the public, private and voluntary sectors, can help diversity practitioners overcome some of the challenges of tackling new and complex areas of diversity. These networks can prove invaluable in sharing knowledge and the provision of advice and guidance about setting up diversity initiatives or tackling complex issues. These networks can provide support in quite a lonely field and reassurance

that some of the issues the practitioner is expected to provide guidance on have been faced by others elsewhere.

The diversity practitioner needs to be able to keep up to date with legislation and articulate its meaning and implications to those at all levels within organisations. This is a pivotal role especially as the legislation is constantly being updated and interpreted by the tribunals. On the job learning is the method by which many diversity practitioners gain this legal knowledge. There is no one course or legal seminar that can teach a practitioner about all aspects of equality law, as well as the nuances and difficulties that come with trying to apply this in any specific workplace setting. Being from an under-represented group can help, however the practitioner best attains this knowledge through journals, magazines, legal updates and networking with other practitioners.

Diversity practitioners deal with issues of competing rights and responsibilities, particularly in the areas of sexual orientation and religion and belief. When two protected groups want opposing outcomes, this requires skill and tact to resolve. The higher education sector has usually promoted freedom of speech, thought and expression. Equality law does limit this, if this will cause others to be deeply offended. Universities can find it difficult to grapple with this concept, which goes against the principles they set out to achieve. The diversity practitioner should have the skill to carefully balance their roles and responsibilities, particularly when it comes to providing advice and guidance. Often when advising people on issues that arise with individuals or groups that are protected by the legislation, one needs to have tact and

sensitivity as well as persuasion and diplomatic skills to find an amicable solution.

Equality legislation has provided diversity practitioners with a powerful tool to convince those within organisations that it is within their best interests to fulfil its various requirements. Although most organisations have a diversity strap-line or equality policy, equality strategies and objectives help promote equality between different groups of people, which has helped to move the diversity agenda forward. These strategies usually have accompanying action plans, which prompt the organisation to put in place programmes and initiatives that can begin to effectively tackle institutional discrimination.

6. Achieving change: lessons for higher education from the Non-Profit sector

Srabani Sen OBE, Chief Executive and Founder of Full Colour
www.fullclr.com

There is a well-worn joke: 'How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? One – but the light bulb's really gotta want to change!' Groans aside, as with all jokes the humour relies on the recognisable truth underpinning it.

In thinking about racial diversity, particularly in organisational leadership, it is starkly apparent how most leaders are white. HESA data show that of all managers, directors and senior officials in higher education, 93 per cent in academic roles and 90 per cent in non-academic roles are white.¹⁷ It is the same in the sector I know best: the charity sector. At three per cent, the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations calls the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) CEOs 'shamefully small', pointing out this has not changed in years.¹⁸

Conference platforms resound with passionate people demanding 'something must be done'. Well-meaning leaders say they agree. This has been the case for the 30 years or so since I started work. So why have things not changed?

Pauline Kayes in an article for the US based Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) cites several factors for why change on diversity in higher education is so slow, including the 'short-term fixes' that organisations over-rely on.¹⁹

NPC, a charity consultancy, issued a report *Walking the Talk on*

Diversity which describes key obstacles to change on diversity and inclusion:

- 'discomfort talking about diversity, in particular race;
- attracting and retaining diverse talent;
- a scarcity of diverse role models;
- unconscious bias;
- fears of diverse views increasing complexity in decision-making;
- uncertainty about how to achieve the change; and
- the reality of competing priorities'²⁰

It's a good list, but I would argue there is something deeper going on.

To be clear, I firmly believe that most people generally want to do the right thing. But a nagging question remains: does the light bulb really want to change?

What is diversity and inclusion?

One of the challenges is that people aren't precise or clear about what 'diversity' and 'inclusion' mean, often using the terms interchangeably, even though they mean different things. Here are the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development definitions:

- **Diversity** is about recognising difference, but not actively leveraging it to drive organisational success. *It's acknowledging the benefit of having a range of*

perspectives in decision-making and the workforce being representative of the organisation's customers.

• **Inclusion** is where difference is seen as a benefit, and where perspectives and differences are shared, leading to better decisions. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels valued, that their contribution matters and they are able to perform to their full potential, no matter their background, identity or circumstances. An inclusive workplace enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.

One of the basic prerequisites of achieving change is being able to describe it. If we do not have a shared understanding of what 'diversity' and 'inclusion' mean, how can we hope to change, even if we want to?

Do you know where you are?

Improving diversity and inclusion in an organisation is, in essence, a change management programme. Two basic principles for success are:

1. To have a clear picture of where you are starting from so you can plan a route map to your desired outcomes
2. To understand how the change management programme you are planning will enhance your organisation's success

Higher education institutions will have data about the racial diversity of their staff teams. So far so good. But how many have clear data about the factors preventing racially diverse candidates progressing up the hierarchy for their specific organisation? No two organisations are the same, and without

a clear understanding of barriers specific to your institution, change on diversity and inclusion is impossible to plan.

Also, a UK literature review from Advance HE showed a lack of data on the impact of poor staff diversity on outcomes for diverse students.²¹ While evidence does exist in the US, this is not always transferrable to a UK context. The poorer experience and outcomes of BAME students and those from under-represented backgrounds in higher education has been a concern for a while now.²² Is it not time we looked at the link between these issues more closely?

The higher education sector is not necessarily worse than others on diversity and inclusion. Very few large corporate or charities develop concerted action in planned ways to achieve systemic change. There seems to be an underlying assumption that if the intention is there on diversity and inclusion, change will somehow happen. A kind of 'build it and he will come' approach, which is not the basis of any effective change management programme.

'What is in it for me?'

In talking to a senior company executive who is an ardent advocate of gender equality, I asked why he was so passionate about the issue. 'Because I have daughters' was his simple but sincere reply. It mattered to him personally, at a visceral level. I know from my background as a campaigner that to achieve change in public policy or public attitudes, all the evidence in the world amounts to very little unless you can also win hearts and minds. One of the best ways of doing that is to make it personal.

Change happens because people take decisive, regular, significant action. But taking this kind of action can be exhausting. Change also takes time and unless people have something that keeps them going through all the ups and downs, they are likely to give up. The more personal that something can be, the more likely they are to keep moving forward.

The classic way organisations contrive to make things personal is through setting people targets, measuring their performance against these targets and rewarding success. This can provide a useful motivation for individuals and teams to get stuff done. But is it enough to change behaviour? Or are the drivers preventing change stronger?

Unconscious bias

In their Nobel Prize winning work on nudge theory, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein point out that knowing the right thing to do is not always enough.²³ Our biases affect our decision making, often in ways we are unaware of.

According to the Equality Challenge Unit, unconscious bias is

*a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences.*²⁴

These unconscious biases permeate every choice and decision we make, in and out of the workplace. In *Racism at Work* Binna

Kandola quotes Geoff Beattie's research which tracked the eye movement of recruiters and showed that those with higher implicit bias towards white people spent more time looking for negative information about black candidates when reviewing applications, something of which they were unaware.²⁵

In thinking about higher education in the US, Pauline Kayes talks about the need for 'white search committees ... to determine (their) levels of intercultural sensitivity'.²⁶ She refers to Bennett's Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and how these stages affect things like recruitment decisions on panels. The six stages are:

1. Denial of difference
2. Defence against difference
3. Minimisation of difference
4. Acceptance of difference
5. Adaptation to difference
6. Integration of difference

Each of these stages come with attitudes, beliefs and stories we tell ourselves which warp the way we think. Kalwant Bhopal in the *HEPI / Brightside Manifesto* calls for mandatory unconscious bias training for HE staff.²⁷ That is a good place to start. Large corporates have invested in raising awareness amongst their staff of unconscious bias. But as with any behaviour change, raising awareness is only the first step.

Achieving real change

Einstein is famously quoted as saying: 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.'

Whenever people ask what we can do to improve diversity and inclusion in our organisation, it does not take long for someone to answer: 'improve recruitment practices'. There is some kind of implicit assumption that if we can get people into a pipeline, they will find their way to the top of the hierarchy given enough time. The trouble is the 'recruitment answer' is exactly the same one I used to hear 30 years ago when I first started work. I do not see a lot of evidence that the assumption that diversity will sort itself out with the right approach to recruitment is correct.

To achieve genuine change the most powerful people in an organisation – in other words our leaders – need to provide, well, leadership on this issue. But what exactly can leaders do? I would suggest five things:

1) Learn how to lead inclusively: From the market research I did in establishing Full Colour, it became apparent that there is a cohort of leaders who want to do the right thing, but do not know how. Leading inclusively is made up of practical competencies that people can learn and apply – so if you are a leader, learn and apply them, and get feedback on how you are doing so you can continually improve. Share your personal journey towards becoming an inclusive leader – the failures as well as the successes — and share what you have learned with the people you lead so they can learn too.

2) Create and communicate a vision for diversity and inclusion: What does it look like, feel like, taste like in your

organisation. Describe it, enthuse about it, excite people about the possibilities, and do it often. Make it clear how it will help the organisation and individuals succeed.

3) Create a route map: Be clear about the milestones, and the resources you will deploy to ensure success. Make the journey fun and celebrate every success, however small.

4) Use unconscious bias training proactively: Do not just raise awareness, use unconscious bias training to map how these biases are playing out in your organisation so you can devise ways to overcome the obstacles they are creating.

5) Create the right context: Make the journey feel safe for everyone. Ask people what they need to engage in and succeed on the journey. Find ways to open up conversations so people who feel threatened by change can share their worries and people who are affected by the biases of others can share the impact this is having. Build the change journey into your business plans, talk about it at team meetings, report on it, keep the issues constantly alive and vibrant.

To achieve genuinely diverse leadership, we need to start with the leaders we have now and help them change. Not in a finger-wagging 'you need to do better' way, but by making it feel safe, energising and fun. Start with the leaders who crave change. Give them the practical skills to help them lead inclusively and drive inclusion through their organisations.

Leading inclusively is not as complicated or mysterious as some people seem to think. It is a skill like any other and can be learnt, though applying these skills does take courage.

The rewards these leaders and their organisations will gain will shine a bright, glimmering light on what is possible with truly diverse and inclusive organisations. This is at the heart of how we get the lightbulb to want to change, however many psychiatrists are involved.

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