The University of Sheffield's submission for evidence to the Sheffield Race Equality Commission in tackling race inequalities

Sent on behalf of the University of Sheffield

Summary

- Introduction to the University of Sheffield
- Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan
- Key areas of progress

Race Equality is an important issue and at the University of Sheffield, we are progressing our Strategy and Action Plan in a constructive way that holds onto what is great and improves the areas that need to be improved. We are bold in our ambition and will challenge ourselves to hold difficult but crucial conversations. We believe that we can and that we must remove barriers, challenge notions and improve our teaching and learning environments so that we can continue to be an international university that allows talented people, especially those from Sheffield to succeed.

The University

The University of Sheffield was formed to deliver higher education to benefit the children of the working class of the city and the surrounding region. We want to keep this legacy of civic duty alive and so it is vital that we remove barriers that prospective students and staff may face in order to promote equality of opportunity so that members of our community can reach their full potential.

We have over 8000 staff members and almost 40,000 students that make the University not only a physical presence in the city, but also an important economic, intellectual, and cultural hub in the region.

We are submitting evidence of our work to combat racial inequalities because we have already begun our work in this area and want to do our part in helping the Sheffield Race Equality Commission to progress this important agenda in other parts of our city.

Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan

In March 2019, via a culmination of partnership work between staff, students and other stakeholders, the University of Sheffield published our **Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan (RESAP)** that set out its commitment to tackling racial inequalities at the Institution. The strategy had 5 overarching aims split into 38 action points with responsible stakeholders and timelines.

As a live document, our RESAP was always intended to be updated at regular intervals and in April 2021 we launched our second iteration. [Click here to view the second iteration of our **Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan.**](#) We have updated the articulation of the action plan to make the actions themselves more Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely - SMART.

Governance Structures

One of the first steps taken after we published our original RESAP was to establish the governance structure required to progress this area of work in the form of a **Race Equality Steering Group.** This group has membership from key areas around the University and the Students' Union. This is important, not only to ensure that relevant areas of the University are working in collaboration to progress our race equality work, but to also ensure that diversity of thought is welcomed to create constructive debates that lead to correct actions being taken.

From this overarching steering group, a number of subgroups were formed to work on specific areas, including a race equality comms group and a subgroup to work on decolonisation in the curriculum. Each has a specific remit to progress its own area and feed back to the main steering group.

[Professor Susan Fitzmaurice](), a member of the University's Executive Board, chairs the Race Equality Steering group and sponsors this work at the highest levels within the University. We also have membership from the following areas: the Students' Union, Human Resources, BAME Staff Network, BME Student Society, academic faculties, Chaplaincy Centre and Student Support Services.

Education - Decolonising the Curriculum

Decolonisation of the curriculum has been used by many people and organisations to mean different things and a common misconception is that it is about removing *dead white men* from the curricula. This is not what we are doing at the University of Sheffield. To clarify this point, our subgroup on decolonisation has written the following definition of Decolonisation.

Decolonising the curriculum is an ongoing process which critically assesses and contextualises the arguments and assumptions of Western thought within all disciplines. It is not simply the integration of minority ethnic academics, scientists and scholars into syllabi, but it does prompt us to actively consider the incorporation into curricula of historically marginalised or suppressed knowledge.

Central to this work is the recognition that knowledge systems are marked by existing power relations which are themselves rooted within a history of colonialism. A Eurocentric epistemology presents white, global North intellectual traditions as superior and universal and places the West to be the origin and originator of knowledge and development. This continues to reinforce white dominance and privilege, whilst at the same time reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices about non-white people and culture, the basis of which underpin the attitudes and behaviours of contemporary racism.

Decolonisation does not deliver a set of prescriptions but is instead a set of suggestions and ideas for colleagues and students to think through, both individually and collectively. Each faculty within The University of Sheffield will take forward this work in the way that maximises its impact on their subject areas. The practice of decolonisation will have profound implications with regards to the presentation and content of the curricula, methods of teaching and research, outreach practices and institutional structures.
As a University, we recognise that the knowledge directly and indirectly produced within our institution goes beyond the academic sphere. At the centre of this work is our aim for staff and students to engage within an inclusive learning environment, which is representative of all cultural backgrounds, but also equips them with the knowledge and skills to dismantle structural inequalities and institutional racism.

Tackling Racism

The University takes incidents of racism very seriously and to help our community be able to report incidents more easily we introduced Report + Support in November 2019. This system can be used for other types of incidents such as sexual harassment and can be accessed by staff, students, and external visitors regardless of whether the incident occurred on University premises or elsewhere.

Reports can be made by leaving personal details or they can be made anonymously. The University has been gathering feedback and regularly promoting and improving the information listed on Report + Support and improving the procedures that get triggered behind the scenes once a report comes in. This system feeds into the work that our Security Services have been doing with other organisations such as South Yorkshire Police, in the city around hate crimes.

Staff Recruitment

In order to allow the best talent to be recruited to the University, we are taking steps to improve our recruitment procedures. The University is using an external diversity dashboard to promote our vacancies to a wider audience. HR have updated their guidance on how Positive Action can be lawfully used to improve equality of opportunity.

Staff Development

In November 2020, the University launched a mandatory online ED&I development course for staff and PGRs. The objective of this mandatory module is to allow all of our staff members to have the same baseline understanding of ED&I. It was created based on our legal obligations as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The module covers different protected characteristics and how different forms of discrimination may present itself within a higher education environment. The training is being disseminated to all staff using faculty and professional services communications routes.

For senior staff and staff that we determined to be in critical positions, we invited Advance HE onto campus to facilitate workshops on these complex issues. Topics covered included the historical context of racism and racial inequalities, different forms of racism including antisemitism and different approaches to race equality.

We are working with internal expertise to create a series of videos on Implicit Bias. Previously, we held an online event where two of our academics engaged each other to discuss what constructive implicit bias materials would consist of.

Student Anti-Racism Programme

A three phase anti-racism programme as part of first year student inductions has been running since the 2019/20 academic year. The University community has people from over 150 different countries and this three phase programme allows students to come together and have the opportunity to engage with these complex topics in a constructive way.

BAME Staff Network

The University has a BAME Staff Network that acts as one of our key stakeholders in this area of work. Members of this staff network are invited to contribute to relevant committees and subgroups. The University supports the staff networks with time allocations for Chairs.

Intersection of Religion and Ethnicity

The University of Sheffield formally adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism at the end of 2020. The Chaplaincy Centre is heading a listening project with staff and students to understand more about the issues that may exist in the intersection between religion and ethnicity. A strategy on religion, belief and no belief is currently being finalised to offer some recommendations that different parts of the University may adopt.

Addressing the Awarding Gap

In order to investigate and remove barriers that may contribute to the ethnicity awarding gap based on entry grades, we are currently aligning our data systems so that student grades can be tracked more easily. This will allow us to see where a gap begins to form so that interventions can be used. This isn't about lowering the bar as we want the value of our degrees to be maintained at a high standard. This is about understanding what factors are causing these gaps so that we can remove the barriers in order to allow students to reach their full potential.