ABERDEEN 2040

Creating an Antiracist University

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GEMS Group

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Opening Comments

- Thank you for the opportunity to meet to discuss antiracism

- Honesty is important

- This is our experience, our journeys will be different

- Delighted that we have an approved Antiracism Strategy

- Strategy was a culmination of 15 months of work

- Strategy represents a bold framework for taking forward the creation of an antiracist University

Inclusive is at the Core of our Strategic Plan Aberdeen 2040

"Open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others"

Inclusive

Interdisciplinary

Our commitments

International

Sustainable

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Antiracism

- Learning about Antiracism was critical

- Understanding the difference between equality, diversity, inclusion and antiracism and why the distinction is important

- A lot of reading, webinars, conferences and podcasts! Creating a culture of sharing resources. Immersive approach. Limited number of people initially, but quickly recognised the need to bring wide range of others on board. Not just the 'usual suspects' involved in this work.

Antiracism

University definition of Antiracism has three elements:

- Bold, deliberate and conscious action against racial hatred, bias, systemic racism and unfair treatment

- Supporting, encouraging and empowering staff and students to recognise racism, actively reject and challenge it

- Fostering a sense of belonging for all staff and students

Race Definitions Task and Finish Group

- Embedding antiracism into our 'normal business'

Change through key enablers

Areas which provide a robust foundation for the development of an antiracist University

- Aberdeen 2040 Inclusive commitments provide strategic commitment

Senior management engagement/buy-in and leadership in this area

- Key areas of the University supporting staff and students such as HR and Student Advice and Support heavily invested in the work – showing leadership

- Commitment to transparency – sharing challenges as well as success. Willingness to acknowledge racism in the University

- Recognition that we needed a sounding board – worked with Advance HE

- Communication with staff and students on a regular basis

- Strong, effective governance structures are now in place on race matters

- Good links across the sector so learning can be shared

- Engagement with local partners is critical to adopting a regional approach to tackling racism and hate crimes

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Acted on recommendations from sectoral reports- talked about these widely in the University

"It is my firm belief that UK universities perpetuate institutional racism. This is uncomfortable to acknowledge but all university leaders should do so as a first step towards meaningful change. Too often Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and staff have been failed. While they may have heard positive words, they have seen little action."

Professor David Richardson, Chair of the UUK Advisory Group which produced the report *Tackling Racial Harassment in Higher Education* Nov 2020
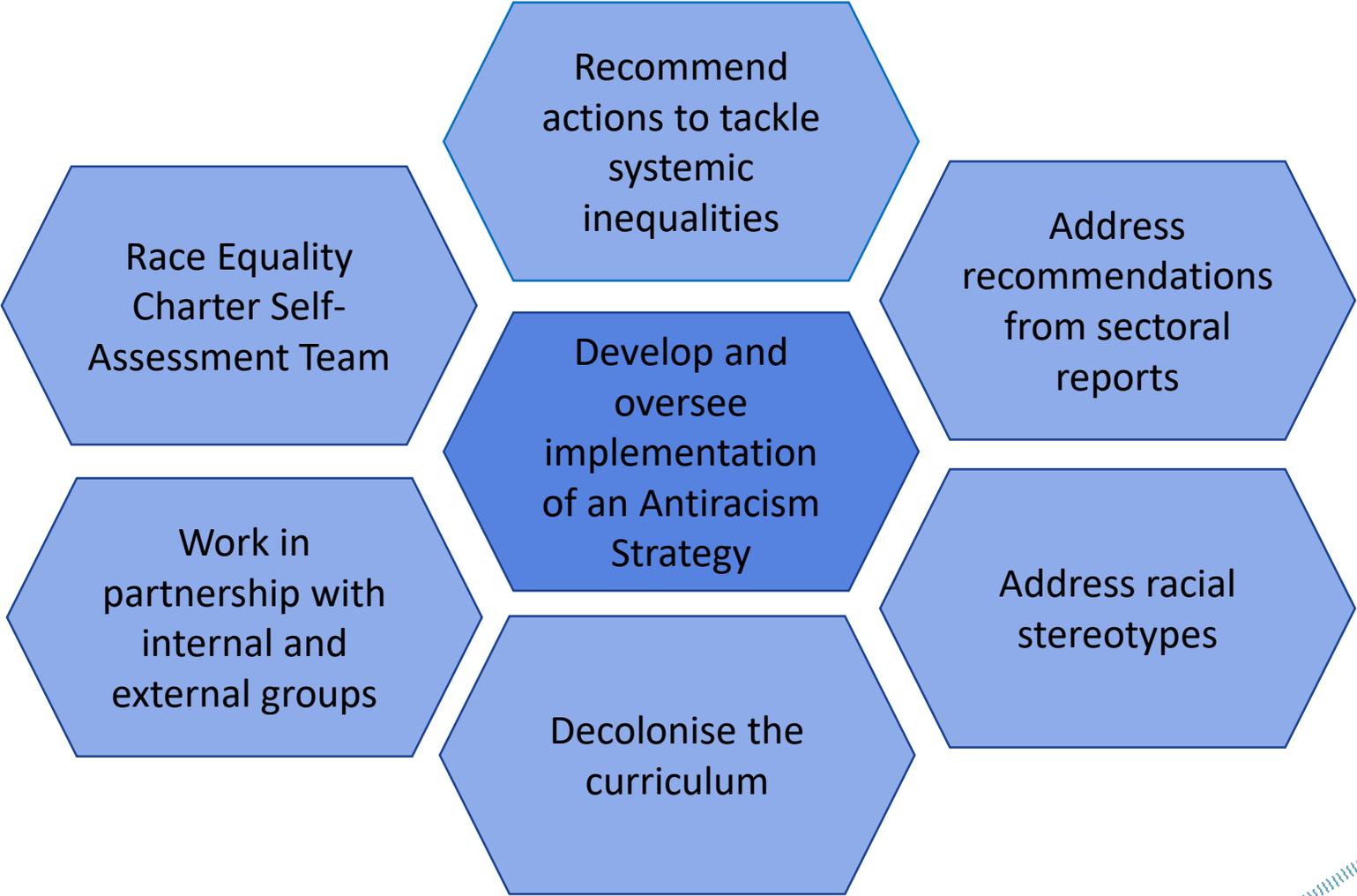
"Racial harassment is a common experience for a wide range of students and staff at universities across England, Scotland and Wales"

Equality and Human Rights Commission – *Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities Challenged* Oct 2019
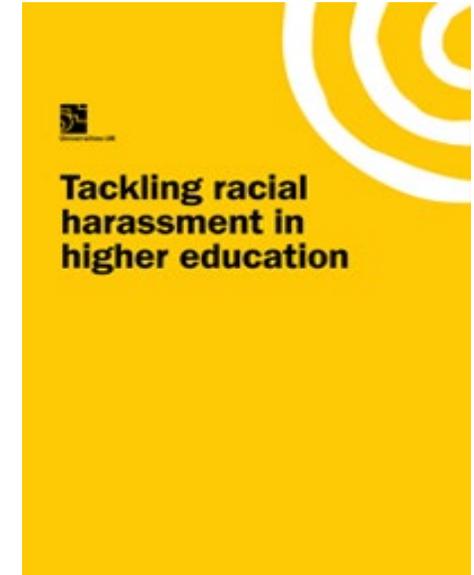
Established the Race Equality Strategy Group

Established to provide a robust governance structure and accountability with the following remit:

Recommend actions to tackle systemic inequalities

Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team

Develop and oversee implementation of an Antiracism Strategy

Address recommendations from sectoral reports

Work in partnership with internal and external groups

Decolonise the curriculum

Address racial stereotypes

Signed the Advance HE Declaration on Race

RACISM EXISTS ON OUR CAMPUSES AND IN OUR SOCIETY. CALL IT WHAT IT IS AND REJECT IT IN ALL ITS FORMS. WE STAND UNITED AGAINST RACISM.

#callitracism

CALL IT RACISM | CHALLENGE RACIST BEHAVIOUR | CHANGE RACIST STRUCTURES

Signed up to the Race Equality Charter

- **Guiding but not driving our work on antiracism**

- Signed up to Guiding Principles

- Covers all staff – recruitment and selection, progression, turnover, staff race profile by grade

- Student progression and awards

- Diversity in the curriculum

- Intersectionality

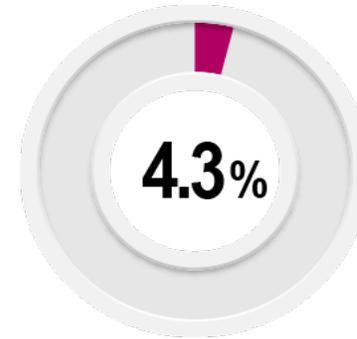- Robust data gathering and analysis leading to action planning

Race Equality Charter | Advance HE (advance-he.ac.uk)

Looked at our data
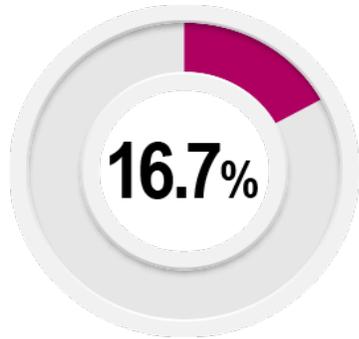
16.7% 16.7% of **academic** staff are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (Scottish HEIs – 12.8%, UK HEIs 16.2%)

4.3% 4.3% of **non-academic** staff are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (Scottish HEIs 4%, UK HEIs 11.5%)

- Both have been increasing slightly over recent years

- 6.3% of Professors are Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (Scottish HEIs 7.4%, UK HEIs 10.1%)

- White job applicants are more likely to be shortlisted and, to a lesser extent, offered employment

- 13.3% of UK domiciled students are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background (Scottish HEIs 9.5%, UK HEIs 24.8%)

- 8% attainment gap between UK domiciled White students and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students (13% across UK HEIs)

Listening to our staff and students

What we did:

Video discussion release, focus groups, online consultation form, discussions at School and Directorate level, established Race Equality Network, launched the Race Equality Charter survey for staff and students

- Be prepared for difficult conversations and equip others with the skills to handle these

- Learning about racism in your organisation is challenging

- Non-defensive approach is critical

- Stakeholders are interested in action, not words

- Racialised groups should not have to teach the organisation about racism

- The next steps, what you do with the information, will shape perceptions of how the organisation is tackling racism

- Low numbers of formal complaints of racism were not, in our case, indicative of issues

- Be open about findings – many colleagues were genuinely surprised about the responses

Examples of responses to listening activities

Unfortunately, I don't know what can be done. I was made to feel like I didn't belong, and it was horrible" UG student

"It is an endless struggle then to prove myself in an academic environment as a black man". Unknown

"....it is not nice to be asked in a meeting where are you from, or say I will never be able to pronounce your name, or do they eat monkeys in your country?......more often than not as a way to tell you don't belong here." Staff

"I would much rather remain anonymous because I fear raising my head above the parapet will make me more vulnerable." Staff

Themes emerged

- Clearer reporting structures required, followed up with appropriate support

- Microaggressions can be a daily occurrence, knowledge and understanding of this should be increased

- Lack of racial diversity, particularly at senior levels to be addressed

- Change in this area must be a collective effort and not rely on marginalised groups

Examples of actions taken
while developing our Strategy – taking action concurrently was important to us

- Almost 400 staff engaged in race literacy training and follow-up sessions on antiracism action planning. Further sessions March – April 2022.

- Senior Management Team and University Management Group received tailored sessions on leading an antiracist university and Court engaging in race training

- Race Equality Champions appointed in Schools and Directorates

- [Race web pages](#) with information, guidance and resources launched

- [Decolonising the Curriculum](#) work

- Race Equality Network established – 80 members

- Network with NHS Grampian established further to letter from Black Medical Students Society

- Online Reporting Tool launched

- Race and EDI considerations as fundamental aspect of revised Recruitment and Selection Policy and Processes

Race Network

Antiracism Strategy

Voices of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff and Students are at the Heart of the Strategy
Provides a bold framework for our next steps
Final approval came 15 months after commencing drafting

Priority Areas developed through evidence:

- Leadership, accountability and governance

- Embedding antiracism across the University

- Attracting, appointing and nurturing talent

- Closing the attainment gap

- Decolonising the curriculum

- Research

- Reporting racism and support structures

Development of the Strategy

- Strategic approach – where are we now and where do we want to get to?

- What is the evidence base?

- Rationale for the Strategy was clear and communicated to staff and students

- Sought support internally (academic areas, Professional Services) and externally

- We took our time – more important to get it right than to rush

- Fully open to feedback

- Key people acting as a driving force

- Kept the meaning of antiracism at the core, permeated the language used

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Implementation Plan

- **Race Action Plan** – foundation of the implementation of the Strategy. Operationalise the strategic framework and stipulate metrics by which the Strategy can be measured and timeframes. Reflect the consultation undertaken in advance of the development of the Strategy, as well as the issues identified through the Race Equality Charter staff and student surveys.

- **Communication and consultation activities** - the University's race listening activities actively contributed to the development and approach of the Antiracism Strategy. These will be ongoing, both through formal and informal routes. It will be critical for the University to regularly 'check-in' with racialised groups - focus groups, engagement with our networks (both internal and external) and surveys.

Implementation Plan cont.

- **Race Equality Strategy Group** – responsible for monitoring the progress of the Strategy, working closely with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Senior Management Team.

- **Collaboration** – a 'whole-University' approach. Taking steps to ensure that all staff and students are aware of the Strategy, their responsibilities and the actions they can take individually to support an antiracist environment.

- **Flexibility** - the Strategy and Implementation Plan are 'living documents'. They will be modified and updated to align with progress, national and local conversations on race-related matters and current approaches related to terminology.

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Next Steps

- Further race literacy learning opportunities to all our staff and postgraduate research students

- Implementation of the Antiracism Strategy and development of the associated action plan– all Schools and Directorates will have a role

- Opening dialogue with local community and external local organisations to identify common goals, shared opportunities and understanding the context of race in NE Scotland

- Continuing to share progress, initiatives and impact with our staff and students

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