Making connections, overcoming barriers

An inaugural cross institutional forum for race equality in higher education

31st January 2012

Forum Report
Summary

“Making connections, overcoming barriers” was an inaugural cross institutional forum for race equality in higher education held on 31st January 2012 at King’s College, London.

The event was a unique partnership forum, initiated by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff within London’s leading universities. The central purpose of the forum was to promote a stronger vision of focused, collaborative working amongst BME staff networks.

This report summaries the main themes and ideas discussed at the forum. Most importantly, it includes recommendations that the staff networks from the four London Russell Group universities have endorsed.

It is clear from the forum that there is a strong shared belief that individual universities are failing to properly engage with the significant inequalities experienced by BME staff.

Moving forward, institutions can expect a more focused and concerted approach from their BME networks to enable progress towards meeting commonly stated institutional goals of fairness and equality. The relationships which have already been forged across institutions means the foundations for future partnership and collegiate working are already firmly in place.

The Chairs of BME staff networks from University College London (UCL), King’s College, Imperial College and the London School of Economics (LSE) organised the event, with input from Queen Mary University. The event attracted 106 delegates from the main participating universities and other stakeholders.

The format of the day included:

- Introductions from senior staff
- Keynote speeches
- Panel discussion and question and answer session
- Interactive audience electronic voting on key issues

This report summaries the main themes, ideas and recommendations that were expressed.

1 Introduction

1.1 Sir Lawrence Freedman, Vice Principal, King’s College London

Following opening remarks from Darren Robinson, Chair of the BME staff network at King’s College, Sir Lawrence Freedman expressed his support for the network and the purpose of the forum. He acknowledged the barriers BME staff still face in higher education and referred to recent research from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) which evidenced this. Sir Lawrence expressed his concern that the rise in tuition fees may present further challenges around equity and diversity.
1.2 Sir Stephen Wall, Chair of Council, UCL

Sir Stephen offered data from UCL which demonstrated that the university has made limited progress on race equality. He reported that BME staff were more likely to be in lower grades, both in an academic and support role, and that there is a worrying absence of ethnic diversity at decision-making levels. He stated his commitment towards readdressing this balance at Council level whilst acknowledging that to date the institution has exhibited more ‘ambition that achievement’. Sir Stephen referred to the new positive action provisions in the Equality Act and said there is now scope for ‘tie-break’ situations to be utilised at the university, specifically in recruitment and selection processes. In concluding, Sir Stephen remarked that competition between universities can be healthy and he believed the cross-institutional basis of the forum was very positive.

2. Keynote Speeches

2.1 Professor Nirmala Rao, Acting Director, SOAS

Professor Rao began by offering some observations on the challenges of addressing race equality in higher education. She had observed that universities very often have ‘opaque, informal systems’ for decision-making which can be fertile ground for vested interests to operate. Professor Rao talked about her own journey, from growing up in a very traditional part of South India where women were not usually encouraged to aspire to higher education, to a position of leadership at a university in the UK. She emphasized the critical importance mentoring had played in her career throughout the years. Professor Rao talked about multiple and complex identities, and how gender still posed a barrier to progression. She elaborated that for many people from minority backgrounds, there can be a fear of success as well as failure and that ‘rising stars can encounter much friction’.

The fact that not all ethnic groups do badly in education was emphasized and the Forum was encouraged to celebrate the positives as well as consider the negatives. Professor Rao believed that data collection and analysis on governance in higher education must be a priority along with the need to improve selection methods in higher education. The Cultural Leadership Programme at the University of Bradford was suggested as an example of good practice.

2.2 Professor Gus John

Professor John began his presentation by clarifying that he deemed the term ‘Global majority’ much more appropriate than ‘Minority ethnic’. He outlined the reasons why the four Russell Group Universities in London had a responsibility to reflect the multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-class and international demographics of the capital city. On the theme of ‘from the margins into the centre’, Professor John made the following points about networks:

- Global Majority people have first hand experience of the way society validates white people automatically, while requiring black people to prove themselves before they could be ‘accepted’ as capable or ‘belonging’
- Having strategic reach into the management of the institutions is critical and there must be formalised means by which Global Majority staff are acknowledged as key stakeholders.
Global Majority staff might be more inclined to participate willingly if they felt the institution was facilitating the networks as protagonists rather than as 'victims', or as centre stage people than as a marginalised target group.

Please see appendix 1 for Professor John's presentation.

2.3 Professor Amrita Ahluwalia, Professor of Vascular Pharmacology, Queen Mary, University of London

Professor Ahluwalia delivered a powerful presentation on the importance and benefits of B-Mentoring programmes. Professor Ahluwalia highlighted statistics which reveal a shortage of Global majority academics throughout the sector, and a growing increase in the attainment gap between White and Global majority students. Offering first-hand experience of the benefits of mentoring programmes, Professor Ahluwalia endorsed the importance of such schemes - which aim to promote understanding of formal and informal structures, enhance opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge, and enables continuing personal development and growth.

Please see appendix 2 for Professor Ahluwalia's presentation.

3 Panel Discussion

The panel consisted of the Chairs of the BME staff networks at the London Russell Group universities:

- Darren Robinson, Chair of the King's College BME staff network
- Cecil Thompson, Chair of the UCL Race Equality Group
- Betty Yue, Chair of Imperial as One (Imperial College)
- Lewina Coote, Chair of EMBRACE (LSE)

Each of the Chairs began by giving an overview of their respective networks. Prominent issues and key learning points covered by the Chairs were:

- Imperial as One (IAO) is the longest established group. It was supported by the Rector of Imperial from inception and has approximately 100 members from all parts of the College. IAO identified three strategic priorities from the outset with all their activities and events aligning with these aims;
- The other networks are more recent and are involved in similar activities to each other. All of the networks organize cultural events and networking opportunities. The strategic influence of the networks appears to vary.
- Whilst three of the networks are primarily open to BME staff, UCL’s is distinct as it was established as a consultation group open to any member of staff interested in race equality. Membership therefore includes white staff.
- EMBRACE, LSE's network, benefits from having ten committee members, including a fundraising and events specialist.
The Chairs also each spoke about the common challenges and opportunities their networks face:

Challenges:

- Resources – in the current financial climate equalities initiatives and networks are often considered a lower priority and can therefore become vulnerable to funding reductions. For networks which are relatively well-resourced, time is still a critical issue for Equalities and Diversity staff who are often stretched to deliver tangible outcomes for all equality areas. Members often have very little time to contribute to their networks, or are restricted by their managers in the amount of time that they can dedicate to it.
- The significant under-representation of BME academics and staff at decision-making levels. This can make it difficult for the networks to have as much influence and reach as necessary to improve policy and practice.
- Engagement with academic staff. This was more challenging for some networks than others. However it was felt some academic staff are reluctant to join a network for fear of being labelled a ‘trouble-maker’

Opportunities

- Newer networks have the opportunity to learn from more established ones and therefore Chairs can shape them at an earlier stage to emulate success.
- The networks all offer a wide range of activities, events and projects for members and potential members to engage and participate in. This will ensure they are appealing to a wider range of staff, including senior academics and management.
- The networks benefit from high-level and distinguished support from individuals in their institutions and are keen to capitalize on this as much as possible.

Electronic Voting Results

A series of questions were put to delegates by the Chair of the networks. Responses to the questions were obtained through use of electronic voting handsets. The results were anonymised.

1) How much of a problem do you think race discrimination still is in Higher Education?

- 74% 1. A severe problem
- 23% 2. A moderate problem
- 3% 3. A slight problem
- 3% 4. No problem

2) Have you personally experienced or witnessed race discrimination whilst working in Higher Education?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Not sure

- 64% 1
- 22% 2
- 13% 3
3) In your view, what is the main obstacle to tackling race inequality in HE?

- 18% 1. Too sensitive/uncomfortable to discuss
- 12% 2. Other equality areas take precedence
- 37% 3. The 'old boys network'
- 18% 4. There are too many complex factors
- 16% 5. It's seen as no longer relevant

4) Are you optimistic that there will be much progress made on race equality in HE in the next 5 years?

- 28% 1. Yes
- 40% 2. No
- 31% 3. Not sure

5) In your experience, do BME staff networks receive adequate resources, support and links to decision-making?

- 75% 1. Yes
- 17% 2. No
- 7% 3. Not sure

6) What is (or would be) your key motivation for joining a BME staff network/group?

- 59% 1. To meet like-minded colleagues
- 28% 2. Potential for career or personal development
- 6% 3. To influence institutional practices
- 4% 4. To have a safe space in which to share experiences
- 2% 5. All of the above

7) What is the most important area for HE institutions to be addressing?

- 40% 1. Very few BME staff at senior level
- 29% 2. Disparities in promotion/development
- 23% 3. Fair recruitment
- 15% 4. Organisational culture
- 5% 5. All of the above

8) Do you feel valued at your institution and that you have a voice to influence policy/practice?

- 32% 1. Yes absolutely
- 33% 2. Sometimes
- 18% 3. Rarely
- 10% 4. Never
- 3% 5. Don’t know
Several key themes emerged from the open discussion facilitated by Professor John.

Leadership

The theme of leadership was referred to in a number of questions. Sir Stephen Wall was asked about his commitment to addressing the issues raised by the forum. He explained that he joined others in thinking that the ‘old boys network’ was one of the key barriers to effective change. He went on to say that ‘trouble-making’ was very distinct from applying effective pressure, of which the latter must certainly be encouraged. Stephen gave examples of a few major policies that UCL had changed stance on in response to successful campaigning from students.

One audience member queried the leadership role of the network chairs and other BME staff in senior positions. Professor John responded by saying it was vital that BME staff in these positions were supported to do well by having strong networks and by working together across institutions.

Role of Human Resources

David Michael introduced himself and explained that he was a member of the Metropolitan Police for 30 years. During that time, his concerns about racism went completely unheeded and the Met
continued to ignore them until the Macpherson Inquiry. He felt that a crucial difficulty in tackling
discrimination was that there is often no formal support available for individuals within intuitions to
help them overcome barriers and obstacles. A discussion followed on the role of BME staff networks
and how appropriate it is or is not for them to support individuals. Professor John talked about how
he believed that Human Resources is usually compelled to support managers. He offered a vision of an
advocacy model by which select BME staff can be trained to support colleagues.

It was noted by one delegate that there was an absence of institutions’ HR Directors and it is to be
hoped they will play a more active part in future collaborations.

Role of networks in challenging organisational culture

The Chairs of the networks were asked to what extent their networks were able to challenge the
organizational culture. The Chairs explained that they worked closely with Equalities and Diversity
staff who could take forward recommendations from the networks. The Head Of Equalities at King’s
College gave clear examples of initiatives that were taken forward in response to the barriers
identified by the networks.

Mentoring:

Most of the partner institutions have mentoring programmes to some degree. A key priority for the
forum was to roll out a BME mentoring project for academics and researchers by adding to the pool of
specialist mentors and reverse mentors. Once the initiative was piloted with academic staff it would
be rolled out to support staff. It was asked how this approach would address racism. One of the Chairs
clarified that he did not perceive the mentoring scheme as evidence that BME staff need ‘special help’,
but more of an aid to ensure equitable access to career development opportunities.

External drivers

It was asked what the driver for holding the forum had been. The Chairs of the networks asserted that
it had been initiated by them in response to the perceived apathy towards race equality issues in
higher education.

The role of HEFCE and the Equality Challenge Unit in holding institutions to account was also
discussed. There was consensus that it was a positive step in the right direction that HEFCE were now
embedding equalities issues into the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework, however these
sorts of interventions were long overdue.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were put forward by speakers and key participants in the forum. The
first three recommendations will be taken forward by the four BME staff networks together.
**Recommendations for the networks**

1) The networks should explore together the potential for an ‘advocacy model’ which will see members of the networks trained to support individual staff in the early intervention and resolution of relevant cases. If appropriate, the networks could develop and implement a shared model across their institutions.

2) The networks should work together to develop a small number of shared strategic priority areas with which to apply effective pressure on their institutions. The networks could establish shared criteria against which current practice or performance could be assessed against.

3) The networks should work towards developing, in the long term, a vibrant, focused, London-wide Forum involving other institutions.

**Recommendations for Institutions**

1) There should be a consistent approach for allowing network members reasonable time away from their main work duties to focus on network activities. For example, it could be agreed that support staff are entitled to a certain number of hours per year and academic staff will receive greater acknowledgement for this form of ‘enabling’ when applying for promotion.

2) Messages should come from very senior staff at the institutions that the networks are valued and essential, thus encouraging varied, representative and high-calibre membership.

3) BME staff networks should have strong, meaningful links into, or representation on, key decision-making committees within their institutions.

4) There should be a consistent, robust and clearly established procedure by which institutions consult BME staff networks on new policy development in critical areas.

5) Dedicated, clear financial support should be provided to networks at the beginning of the financial year.

6) Particular attention should be paid to the diversity of institutional governance bodies and efforts should be redoubled to ensure they are representative.

7) HEFCE’s renewed focus on equalities issues for the forthcoming REF need to be better communicated and promoted by senior staff. Institutions should positively engage with this as an important and useful external driver.

The forum organisers would particularly like to thank Professor Gus John for his very valued input, advice and participation in the forum.
From the Margins
to the Centre

The Strategic Role of GM Staff Networks
31 January 2012

Gus John
Honorary Fellow & Associate Professor
4 Prestigious Russell Group institutions somewhere near the top of the totem pole

Each an International University
Your 4 universities have the highest GM participation rates within the Russell group (between 30% and 50%), all in London:

- a capital city where approximately half the GM population in the UK lives
- a capital city that attracts the highest number of international students in the country
It is axiomatic that the International University is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-class institution and that it should reflect that reality in its ethos, human resource policies and arrangements, student support structures and general working practices.
‘It is the task of senior managers to seek to embed race equality values and anti-racist principles and practice across all the University’s functions and make them organic to the culture of the University and the way it operates as an organization’

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External Drivers:

- Principles of Natural Justice
- Employment Law
- Cannon of Equality & Human Rights Legislation
• Judgement as to how a reasonable employer might be expected to act, with or without having to comply with the law

• Extent to which the conduct of your institution is commensurate with its own policies and with what the law requires
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Internal Drivers:

• Moral Purpose

• Growing and Sustaining a Culture of Dignity, Equity and Respect
• Manifestly giving affirmation to the right of everyone to live with respect and dignity and to work and study in an environment in which that right is upheld
There are other staff networks within and outwith each of 4 HEIs and you have a right to belong to them and to exercise that right.
We bring what we are and we are what we bring to those networks
Some of us are radical and progressive, if not revolutionary

Some of us are conservative, if not reactionary
Hopefully, none of us makes a fetish out of backwardness
Some of us hold fast to the fundamental principle, as stated so succinctly by Paulo Friere: *There is one thing I am certain about: Nobody is superior to anybody*
Some of us are confident in our own skin, know who we are and where we came from, if not where we’re going
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So, what makes this forum different?

We are global majority people with an experience of North/South geo-politics and binary constructions of the world
Global majority people with a commitment to building an education culture that ceases to marginalise and devalue students and to reproduce educational disadvantage on account of ‘race’ and ‘class’
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- Protagonists for social change
- Protagonists in the struggle for racial equality and social justice
- ‘Protagonists of our fate’
Through the prism of our collective experience, see the need for:

- new paradigms for teaching and learning
- new paradigms for leadership and management in learning communities
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• new paradigms for curriculum design and delivery

• new paradigms for promoting global education and the understanding that knowledge knows no colour, nor is it validated only when it is eurocentric
Global majority people who have first hand experience of the way this society validates white people automatically, while requiring black people to prove themselves before they could be ‘accepted’ as capable or as ‘belonging’
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To the Centre?

How then does the institution use the capacity we have to interpret it to itself from inside our experience of it and all its institutional practices and arrangements, formal and unofficial?
If the Network is not just a forum for GM staff to share anecdotes, exchange ideas, have a moan now and then, or plan the revolution, what is its strategic reach into the management of the institution?
How is that formalised in acknowledgement of the fact that the GM staff group is a body of key stakeholders, even if many do not identify with the GM network?
Might the latter not to more inclined to participate willingly and actively if they felt that the institution was facilitating the network as protagonists rather than as ‘victims’, as centre stage people rather than as a marginalised target group?
What expectations do GM students and GM graduate employees have of network members in middle or senior management positions?

How does the institution react when GM staff feel the need to exercise their right to seek redress for discriminatory conduct externally?
We root our identity in our knowledge of our past, in the spiritual traditions of our ancestors, in the profile that their struggles, achievements and advances earn for succeeding generations, and in the sense we have of the quality of our own contribution to the present.
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Part of that contribution -

Ensuring that the International University shows evidence of paying attention issues such as:
the need for clearly articulated equality objectives underpinned by sound anti-discrimination principles (gender, disability, sexuality, race, etc.)
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• clear and verifiable evidence of monitoring and impact assessment

• commonly shared understandings
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• cultural competence for promoting equity and managing issues of class, culture, ‘race’, religion, inter-group conflicts
• cultural competence (as a core requirement for teaching, managerial and administrative staff)
• Shared commitment to treating people equally by **not** treating them all the same!...

• and for the sake of completeness

.....
Margins > Centre

• Race/Gender Equality Impact Assessment of ‘the old boys’ club
Professor Gus John
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B-Mentor
Cross-HE mentoring scheme

Professor Amrita Ahluwalia
Professor of Vascular Pharmacology
Queen Mary, University of London
BME Staff

- 14,000 Professors in the UK
- Only 50 – 0.4% are black (HESA 2009-10)
- 2.8% of population of England and Wales is Black African or Black Caribbean (ONS)
- 230 – 1.7% are Asian
- 5.9% of the population of England and Wales is Asian (ONS)
BME Students

- 18.1% of students in the UK are from black and ethnic minorities origins (HESA)

- In London this rise to 45.5% (HESA)

- 16.0% of White students achieved a 1st class degree in 2009/10
  8.4% of Asian students
  8.3% of Black students
  12.4% of Chinese students

- Since 2003/04, the attainment gap between White and BME (1st and 2:1) has gone from 17.2% to 18.6%
B-Mentor Scheme

- Aimed at Black and Ethnic Minorities (BME) academics and researchers from post-doc to lecturer level

- Mentors: academics and researchers of any ethnic background at senior level and above

- Scheme Aim:
  To help promote understanding of formal and informal structure, enhance opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge, enables continuing personal development and personal growth
Benefits of B-Mentor

- Partnership between 5 leading institutions
- Access to confidential adviser/critical friend
- Support
- Assistance in career direction
- Confidence building
- Develop a network
- Etc.