An environmental investigation into the Slade School of Art at UCL - Report

University College London

18 October 2022

nous

Contents

Content Warning: This report contains references to sexual violence, discriminatory behaviours and discusses themes of racism including structural racism, overt racism and microaggressions.

1 Executive Summary

For 150 years, the Slade School of Fine Art ('Slade' or 'the School') has been a world-leader in fine art education and interdisciplinary art research. Issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion ('EDI') have long been important to Slade's history and identity as an organisation. As outlined in the Slade Statement on Institutional Racism, the School is committed to addressing systemic racism within the Slade through actions to instigate fundamental and long-term changes to Slade's staffing and curricula.[1]

Context of the Environmental Review

University College London ('UCL') commissioned this Environmental Review following concerns that were raised within Slade by students and staff about the culture and functioning of the School. These concerns included allegations of racial discrimination and other inappropriate behaviours. Commissioned by the Vice-Provost (Faculties), the aims of this independent environmental investigation were as follows:[2]

- To review the workplace culture within the School, including behaviours.

- To review allegations regarding discrimination within the School, including but not limited to allegations of systemic and institutional racism.

- To review recruitment and employment practices, especially as they impact on EDI.

- To review the dynamics and functioning of leadership, including line management practices.

Overall finding: unprofessional workplace behaviours and racial disparities characterise the Slade's high-stress culture

The review team heard a wide range of examples from students and staff of unprofessional workplace behaviours and communication practices, a lack of clear vision and leadership, and feelings of low trust among both students and staff towards the leadership team. Concerns were also described in relation to the inconsistent application of recruitment policies and limited awareness of the complaints processes. Staff and students repeatedly described Slade as a highly stressful workplace.

The review itself was conducted in a climate where repeated concerns about its approach and intended outcomes from both formal and informal groups of staff and students were raised throughout. This contributed to delays in completing this work along with challenges with staff engagement. The review finds many instances of poor workplace behaviours at the Slade, and these experiences occur in a wider context of racial disparities in student and staff experience. There are clear challenges at the level of policy through to practice which are required to be resolved to advance racial equity at the Slade.

Recommendation: urgently clarify leadership responsibilities and vision, foster positive working norms, and increase diversity at the School

Overwhelmingly, the review team found that Slade's staff and students were committed to the School and to creating a positive learning and working environment for all. The Slade community are passionate about producing groundbreaking art and supporting each other as artists. The immersive pedagogical approach of fine-art education can be the foundation upon which positive and inclusive behaviours can emerge.

However, there is an urgent need to increase the representation of people of colour at the School. These measures should be underpinned by defining and agreeing respectful behaviours in the workplace and for the leadership team to establish a clear vision and strategy for the School. Slade's processes and policies, particularly in relation to advancing anti-racism and fostering a positive workplace environment for students and staff, would benefit from closer alignment to the wider UCL framework and ways of working.

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[1] Slade Statement on Institutional Racism: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/news/2020/07/slade-statement-on-institutional-racism
[2] UCL (2022). Correspondence from Dean, Arts and Humanities to Slade students and staff. 23 March.

2 Introduction

This section contains contextual information related to equity, diversity, and inclusion at UCL and anti-racism initiatives within Slade. It provides an overview of the approach taken to the investigation and the development of this report.

2.1 Equity, diversity, and inclusion at UCL and Slade

Concepts of care and respect[3] are a cornerstone UCL value, both in the undertaking of education and research, and in the way students and staff interact with each other. UCL's 20-year strategy[4] seeks to deliver a truly exceptional student experience and emphasises valuing staff, removing barriers to recruitment, development, and promotion of a diverse workforce.

Significant racial disparities persist for students and staff in higher education. For students of colour, there are gaps in participation and the awarding of grades[5], and for staff of colour, there are challenges in relation to recruitment and promotion. The underemployment and underpromotion of staff of colour is a pressing issue for the higher education sector as well as workplaces more generally. The employment rate for staff from ethnic minority backgrounds is 62.8 per cent compared with an employment rate for White workers[6], which is 75.6 per cent (a gap of over 12 percentage points).

Racial disparities in higher education go hand in hand with experiences of racial harassment; an Equality and Human Rights Commission inquiry[7] found that a quarter of students from minority ethnic backgrounds reported that they had experienced racial harassment in higher education.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities across the arts and cultural sector[8]. Within music, performing and visual arts, workers from ethnic minority backgrounds experienced larger reductions in hours during the pandemic than their White workers. Similar disparities are found within arts-based higher education institutions in relation to staff representation.

2.2 Project background

There have been growing concerns about racism and race-related disparities within the Slade

In recent years, staff, and student concerns about experiences of racism within the Slade have intensified, even extending into the public domain. In December 2021, several Slade students staged a public demonstration and published a list of actions required of the School. Simultaneously, a group of staff have come together to form the Systemic Racism Crisis Group (SRCG) to progress actions in support of race equity for students and staff.

Issues raised by students and staff have been wide ranging and focus on:

- Increasing the representation of staff of colour

- Diversifying the curriculum and involvement of visiting artists and speakers

- Introducing mandatory unconscious bias training

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[3] UCL Strategic Plan 2022 – 27: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/strategic-plan-2022-27
[4] UCL 2034. Valuing our staff: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/2034/review/enablers-objectives/valuing-staff
[5] Universities UK. BAME student attainment in UK universities: Closing the Gap. 2019
[6] Race in the workplace: The McGregor-Smith review: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-in-the-workplace-the-mcgregor-smith-review
[7] Equality and Human Rights Commission, Tackling racial harassment: universities challenged. 2019
[8] Centre for Cultural Value (2022). Culture in Crisis

- Investigating individual allegations and complaints where some members of the Slade were dissatisfied in the institution's handling of these matters

These groups requested an independent inquiry which focuses on the culture and practices of the School in relation to racism and other matters. In part, the environmental investigation was in response to this request.

Slade has set out commitments to tackle institutional racism and foster a positive culture

Published in July 2020, Slade's leadership has established 14 actions[9] to 'instigate fundamental and long-term changes to our staff and curricula.' The commitments include increasing visibility of the EDI policy for staff recruitment, restructuring the School and its curriculum to diversity staff appointments, supporting student-led initiatives including seminars and conferences to address issues of racial inequality, publishing an annual report on Slade's widening participation and EDI initiatives, among other priorities.

In 2020, Slade staff also participated in a three-part diversity training programme[10] which focused on understanding inequalities, democratising curriculum, and developing an anti-racist framework for the School. The Slade's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee and the SRCG have been consistently engaged in anti-racism work.

The Terms of Reference of Slade's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee[11] states there is an 'urgent responsibility to be race-conscious, anti-racist and to challenge anti-Blackness' among other purposes. More recently, in March 2022, staff and students have formed a working group to develop an Anti-Racism Action Plan[12].

The Director's working vision statement of the School aims to 'focus on staff wellbeing and ensure support systems are in place to create a vibrant and fulfilling working environment,'[13] though the awareness of this document is limited.

UCL has now commissioned an Environmental Review to investigate the culture of Slade

In response to student and staff concerns, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities made a commitment in December 2021 to commission an independent environmental and culture review into Slade's culture and functioning. The Terms of Reference for the review have been previously detailed in the Executive Summary.

The review has three distinct areas of focus: a review of the workplace culture generally, allegations of systemic and institutional racism and wider discriminatory behaviours, and the role of the leadership team.

As set out in the scope of investigation, the review sought to understand the context of concerns raised; specific behaviours being alleged; the individuals exhibiting and impacted by these behaviours (where appropriate); other factors impacting the working environment; and to review other UCL internal information relevant to the areas of focus.

The Environmental Review has not sought to make findings concerning individuals; but there are provisions to make recommendations where further investigation/s should be progressed under an informal and/or formal process.

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[9] Slade Statement on Institutional Racism
[10] Shades of Noir (2020). Slade School of Fine Art – programme evaluation
[11] Slade School of Fine Art (Date unknown). Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. Terms of Reference
[12] Correspondence provided by the Slade School of Fine Art (March 2022).
[13] Kieran Reed (Date unknown). A vision for the Slade School of Fine Art

2.3 Method

The review employed a trauma-informed approach to consultations (n = 47; 4 = students; 41 = staff; 2 = alumni) together with a review of available data. The review focussed on current staff and students, and alumni were not in scope of the review. However, where alumni expressed interest in participation, these requests were accommodated.

Our trauma-informed approach was designed to support psychological safety for individuals

The review team involved interviewers experienced working on sensitive issues and in creating safe spaces for participants. The approach also involved a specialist counsellor who provided follow up support where required. Interviewers followed confidentiality protocol except for documenting allegations and referred participants to appropriate services where there were risks to self-harm or to others.

The anonymity of participants was taken extremely seriously throughout the engagement. Reviewers outlined the measures put in place to ensure anonymity through the initial participant communications as well as during the interview itself.

Reviewers escalated individual cases to the nominee of the commissioning manager where they considered there was a significant risk of harm to self or others. Some consultees wished to engage with review team members who were people of colour, and this request was respected.

The core team of Nous reviewers were supported by an Expert Advisor who is skilled in matters of racial equity in workplaces. The Expert Advisor guided the key lines of inquiry, conclusions, and recommendations. The team structure is set out in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1 | Nous Reviewers and Expert Advisor

Terminology used in the review

This report primarily uses the terminology of "people of colour", "students of colour" and "staff of colour." It refers to individuals racialised as non-white, and who define into communities which have historically and currently experience racism. Where the term "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" (BAME) is used this is specifically referencing data or UCL policy documentation, where that specific terminology has been used.

These terms have significant limitations; they increase the risk of homogenising the experience of individuals and communities who experience racism in different ways. People are more likely to define as a particular ethnic group or race, rather than into an overarching identity. This report should be read in the context of these considerations. Experiences of racism highlighted in this report should not be assumed as applicable to all non-white individuals.

Triangulation of data

Reviewers pursued a range of methods to explore the key issues in focus:

- Analysis of staff representation and student participation and attainment data
- Analysis of Report and Support data
- Review of documents
- Review of organisational structures

- Consultation with staff (and review of supporting documentation where this was provided)
- Consultation with students
- EDI strategy

Limitations of the review

There are several dependencies and methodological limitations to this review. These are described in detail below.

- **Unverified allegations.** The review does not seek to determine the accuracy and validity of allegations raised in the review, nor did reviewers attempt to mediate or resolve these matters. The perspectives conveyed here reflect the recollections of those that participated in the review.

- **Hesitancy to participate in the review.** In consultations of this nature, staff experience barriers such as uncertainty about whether contributors' input would be listened to or acted upon or displayed a lack of comfort in talking about potentially distressing personal or organisational issues. Additionally, several staff were concerned that participating in this review would negatively impact their employment at the Slade and that they did not have sufficient input in designing the terms of reference.

- **Limited engagement with students and people of colour.** The review primarily heard from White staff and students and relies on their indirect and anecdotal accounts. The review engaged with a small number of staff and students of colour, whose perspectives are conveyed in the findings. Overall, the review had higher levels of participation among staff than students.

- **Self-selection bias.** Staff who participated in the review are those most likely to have stronger views or have had negative experiences at the Slade. This biases the sample of perspectives reflected in the review, both in terms of participants and the content conveyed in interviewed. Regardless, the findings in this review are robust in that they reflect the lived experience of a range of students and staff at the Slade. Their challenges and experiences are real and deserve attention. These perspectives were triangulated with other sources of evidence including interview, document review and data.

- **Intersectionality and implications.** Issues of class, gender, disability, faith, and sexual orientation were recurring themes that were discussed in the review, and closely intersect with experiences of racism and racial harassment.

- **Limited historical data in relation to formal reporting and complaints.** There is limited historical data available related to complaints as Slade did not use the formal UCL wide Report and Support process until late 2021. Slade did not routinely collect complaints data prior to the introduction of Report and Support. A total of 11 complaints were received between February and May 2022 which reviewers considered as part of the data triangulation approach.

- **Wide ranging interpretations of culture.** Understandings of culture and environment varied considerably across staff and students that participated in the review. While most participants focused on individual attitudes and behaviours, a wide range of strategic and infrastructure-related issues were also discussed (e.g., use of 3D printers, accessibility of studio hours, changes to tuition fees). Reviewers have prioritised an analysis of the issues which were felt as most significant by consultees, triangulating their perspectives with data and documentation where possible.

3 Findings

The findings focus on how wider social issues manifest themselves within the Slade context, the broad cultural dynamics within the School, leadership behaviours and their effectiveness, racial disparities in relation to staff progression and student outcomes, the role of complaints processes, and a discussion of challenges in engaging participants in the Environment Review process. These findings are illustrative and not representative of the view of all staff and students in the School.

3.1 Slade context

Wider social movements, such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo are being played out in complex and often 'messy' ways in art institutions globally and considered to be far from reaching equilibrium[14]. Communities and individuals are seeking to democratise the art world and make it more representative of diverse backgrounds, while grappling with debates around 'cancel culture.' A growing number of UK-based art institutions, including the Royal Academy of Art and Arts Council England[15] have pledged ambitions to act towards race equity[16]. These wider global and national shifts, simultaneously reinforce and challenge the Slade's own actions towards racial equity specifically and inclusion more generally.

The Slade has experienced significant shifts to the character of its student population: a growing number of international students, rising incidences of mental health issues, and a larger proportion of students and staff identifying as neurodivergent. These trends have significant implications for Slade and to the delivery of its education and research mission, which are summarised in this section. A selection of participant quotes is provided in **Figure 2**.

3.1.1 A number of years on, there continues be widespread upset and confusion about a high-profile incident of racial harassment

Many stakeholders described their concerns in relation to the handling of a widely known staff – student incident. Staff and students expressed frustration at both how the incident was handled through institutional processes, the lack of support provided for the complainant, the absence of a formal review of the incident, and highlighted the longer-term negative consequences for the student and staff involved along with the entire School. Various staff and students provided their recollections of this incident and acknowledged that this was based on both direct observations and information they had heard from others. They acknowledged that second hand information was not a complete account of the events.

3.1.2 There are reports of tensions between academic freedom and a commitment to equity

Several consultees spoke favourably about Slade's commitment to freedom of expression; students are encouraged to produce innovative, risk-taking, and original pieces of work. However, others observed that this should not come at the expense of making staff and students feel unsafe or subject to discrimination.

Consultees also put forward the view that some Slade staff were actively encouraging students to engage in protest action and produce works on anti-racism, even where students may not have felt comfortable or compelled to do so. Staff that participated in the review shared accounts of where these dynamics have not been well managed, causing stress for students and staff consequently.

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[14] Nayeri, F (2022). Takedown: Art and Power in the Digital Age
[15] Arts Council England (2020). Black Lives Matter: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/black-lives-matter
[16] Royal Academy of Art (2022). Race Equity Statement. https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/page/race-equity

3.1.3 Consultees are concerned that several senior leaders engage in performative anti-racist behaviour

A renewed focus on anti-racism, both globally and within the Slade, has led to several staff dedicating significant time and effort to address these issues. Action has been primarily mobilised through the Systemic Racism Crisis Group (the effectiveness of which is discussed in section 3.2.7), but the review found other examples of staff engaging in anti-racist practices at local-area level actions. However, stakeholders perceive some staff engaging in these issues in a largely tokenistic manner.

Concerningly, these same staff are reported to engage in poor behaviour with other colleagues, particularly towards junior staff, and do not participate in actions which have significant benefit for staff and students. Further, stakeholders observe that staff who are driving change at a local level, particularly those of colour, are not recognised for contributions. Notwithstanding these concerns, stakeholders commend Slade's institutional commitment to addressing racism through actions such as the Statement on Institutional Racism, and initiatives over the past decade including Transnational Slade (an initiative to explore the global networks of influence of the school's alumni and staff)[17]. There is widespread recognition of the intent to bring about positive change.

Figure 2 | Selection of participant quotes in relation to Slade context

'The elephant in the room is that they are all white...and controlling the debate on racism. They do not speak on my behalf' – *Staff member*

'Staff view that any change (to Slade) is stopping academic freedom' – *Staff member*

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[17] Slade School of Fine Art (date unknown). Transnational Slade. Transnational Slade - The Slade School of Fine Art (ucl.ac.uk)

3.2 High-level cultural dynamics

This section summarises Slade's broad cultural dynamics which include a combination of longstanding issues and more recent challenges that have emerged in the past two years. This section primarily focuses on the behaviours and mindsets of staff and students within the Slade, and the interrelationships between staff-staff, staff-student, and student-student contexts. The connection and alignment between Slade and wider UCL in relation to policies and processes is also a focus of discussion. A selection of participant quotes is provided in **Figure 3**.

3.2.1 A high-stress culture has diminished the positive experience of staff and students

Slade's enduring culture is one where staff work closely with students to mould them as artists and art researchers, often in a very immersive and collegial manner. In recent years, the positive aspects of this culture have deteriorated due to perceived deficiencies in leadership and poor communication practices. These challenges have been exacerbated by the experiences of racism and racial harassment.

Reviewers heard confronting accounts of the School's present culture; rumour, paranoia and stress characterise the current working environment. The culture of Slade has been disrupted to such an extent that there is a high degree of suspicion regarding the motivations of the leadership team. Several students and staff were visibly emotionally distressed while participating in this review. Some staff and students were highly anxious about participating in the review for fear of repercussions to their employment and study, despite participation in the review being accommodated on an anonymous basis.

3.2.2 Slade's student focus is a strength, but contributes to blurred boundaries between students and staff

Staff and students affirmed the strength of Slade is in attracting talented current and aspiring artists from across the UK and internationally. Slade has maintained a distinct student-centered approach over a long time that sets it apart from other fine art schools, and stakeholders spoke highly of Slade's focus on 'journeying' with students to identify their personal strengths, and its non-modular approach. There is a strong emphasis at Slade on creating spaces for individual expression and freedom, particularly in critiques ('crits') of student work and in tutorials. It was clear that the continued ability to debate and contest ideas is core to Slade's enduring appeal.

However, while the student-focused ethos provides many benefits that need to be preserved, it has also contributed to the creation of challenging student-staff dynamics in some cases. This includes:

- **Breaches of staff confidentiality** – staff sharing personal information about other staff and decision making with students e.g. staff contractual matters.
- **Staff viewing themselves as advocates for students, and not recognising their role as part of the institution** – Staff aligning themselves with students to the extent that it creates unproductive divisions between staff and undermines School or institution-level decision making.
- **Perception of preferential treatment of White students** – with implications for assessment and disciplinary procedures.

3.2.3 Slade operates in a silo and its long-tenured staff contribute to resistance to change

Consultees indicated that Slade operates in a silo from the wider University with a general lack of engagement and buy-into UCL policies. While Slade's student focus was seen as a key strength, many stakeholders indicated that there was a culture of resistance to change, and that most staff had come from

privileged white backgrounds that were not in keeping with the demographics of modern UK society. In addition to perceptions that there was a culture of systemic racism, some consultees mentioned that there were issues with sexism, ableism, and ageism at Slade. Slade's unique culture – both its strengths and challenges – is maintained by its unusually high staff retention. Many staff have worked at the School for decades, and also attended Slade as students themselves. There are longstanding personal and professional relationships between staff, and these relationships are blurred as many engage with one another in the broader art world. For junior or newer staff entering into this culture, this can be an intimidating experience.

3.2.4 Inappropriate communications breed discontent and silences staff

While the value of freedom of expression at Slade was uncontested, many stakeholders emphasised that the key cultural issue at Slade was inappropriate communication. Stakeholders questioned whether Slade's communication styles were acceptable. Forms of inappropriate communication range from instances of shouting and speaking over colleagues during meetings, through to aggressively worded emails. Some staff are unclear about which communication behaviours are appropriate in a modern workplace and learning environment, and the impact of such behaviours on wider staff morale.

3.2.5 Allegations of bullying and related behaviours towards a range of staff and students

Numerous allegations of current and historical bullying were made throughout the review. While specific bullying incidents were generally not discussed in detail, a range of staff and some students were described as 'bullies.' Some stakeholders went further to say that Slade had a broader culture of bullying. It appeared that the definition of bullying was not clear and is in some cases politicised at Slade. Given these varied understanding, Nous reviewers have interpreted bullying as defined in UCL's Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy[18].

3.2.6 Staff and students are broadly unhappy with Slade's response to the Black Lives Matter movement and anti-racism more generally

Despite the appetite and goodwill for addressing systemic racism at Slade, many staff and students lack confidence in the approaches and initiatives underway. Currently, the Slade has an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and an Anti-Racist Action group, but the key mechanism that has driven the conversation about race at Slade is the Strategic Racism Crisis Group (SRCG), stood up in June 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd's death and heightened awareness about systemic racism.

Stakeholders' views on the SRCG were very mixed. The SRCG was initially viewed as a positive development, and many staff contributed their ideas through a report in January 2021. There is positive regard for the toolkits developed by the SRCG. However, discontent grew when reports made by the SRCG in January 2021 were not acted upon by Slade's leadership. The SRCG were reported to have received insufficient support from the School for engaging in this work out of paid hours. The formal governance mechanisms surrounding the SRCG lack clarity and there are mixed views on whether the group sufficiently reflects the lived experiences of students and staff of colour. Stakeholders indicated that the remit of the SRCG has lost its original intent, and become a platform for 'loud voices' to voice their discontent. The review found limited evidence of the SRCG contributing to substantive change.

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[18] Bullying defined as intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive behaviour, through means which have the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, or humiliating environment. Bullying usually involves a repeated course of conduct.

3.2.7 Stakeholders are dissatisfied with day-to-day management

Against this backdrop of longstanding cultural dynamics, most consultees emphasised that trust within Slade has significantly diminished during COVID, particularly since the return to in-person classes in the summer of 2021. The key source of this discontent is that staff felt that they had not been properly consulted on leadership and studio management decisions, with flow-on effects for staff and students. Reviewers heard several examples – including the poor organisation of exams in 2021 and lack of office spaces – where administrative challenges constrained the ability of staff to conduct their work. Staff highlighted that morale has also worsened due to workload. Many consultees indicated that workload since the pandemic was too not sustainable, and pointed to UCL's recruitment freeze as a reason.

3.2.8 Various student and staff groups describe a range of inequitable experiences

In addition to racial disparities, staff and students described inequities between other groups at the School, including between staff on lecturer (teaching) contracts and lecturer (research and teaching) contracts, the experience of international students as compared to UK-domiciled students, undergraduate students as compared to graduate students, part-time staff versus full-time staff, and staff that work on the Summer School versus those during term time. These groupings contribute to feelings of insider-outsider within the Slade and reinforces the cliques described elsewhere. These two-tier structures were perceived by many to disadvantage people of colour. Some differences are not always negative. In some instances, it was noted that there were positive working cultures within these sub-groupings. For example, the graduate staff at Slade are described as functioning more cohesively than the staff working in undergraduate programmes.

3.2.9 There is a perception of preferential treatment and bias in the selection and recruitment processes

The close relationships between many of the staff at the School is considered to play a part in favouring some students and staff over others. The review heard perception of undue influence being exerted in recruitment processes and certain staff being promoted because they had close relationships with members of the senior leadership team or with other senior staff at UCL.

Figure 3 | Selection of participant quotes in relation to high-level cultural dynamics

'People choose Slade because it's meant to be one of the few places where they keep the small group community feel alive.' – *Student*

'Most Slade staff also studied at the Slade...this has led to a culture of 'not rocking the boat' and over-adherence to a certain Slade way of doing things. There is a kind of smugness.' – *Staff member*

'Relationship between staff at the school is the biggest problem...lots of longstanding staff members doing things their own way for a long time. It's a boys' club, also two-faced' – *Staff member*

'The way of communication at the Slade is stressful...it has everyone on edge' – *Staff member*

'The SRCG group has become an echo chamber of people complaining about their jobs.' – *Staff member*

3.3 Fragmented leadership and accountability

Drawing on best practice leadership behaviour frameworks[19], this review assessed the effectiveness of leadership and accountability practices at the Slade with respect to advancing anti-racism; the effectiveness of appropriate governance and oversight mechanisms; the communication and effectiveness of the leadership team to driving positive change. A selection of participant quotes is provided in **Figure 4**.

3.3.1 Stakeholders are divided in their views on the effectiveness of the leadership team towards anti-racism and management of the Slade

Despite a recognition of the leadership's positive intentions and engagement on issues of racism, staff and students expressed polarising views on their performance. Several stakeholders felt strongly about the failure to mobilise and clearly communicate the actions required to drive progress on these issues.

The review found that several members of the leadership team were not in an enabling environment to discharge their duties effectively and there was an urgent need to improve styles of communication to lead and manage Slade's staff and students more effectively. In addition, stakeholders describe members of the leadership team as constrained by a lack of administrative and executive support.

3.3.2 Slade's leadership team is lacking clear roles and responsibilities, hampering the ability of the School to implement its strategy

Several Slade staff, including those in formal leadership positions, lack clarity on their roles and responsibilities. Many staff were unclear on which staff were included in the leadership team. They were unclear on their scope of influence within the leadership team and point to an ongoing culture of indecision.

The review finds that a significant underlying factor is the large number of staff (n = 13) who directly report into the Director, and are thus required to participate in leadership team processes. The leadership team spans a variety of work areas and is not organised around the strategic goals of the School. The current arrangement contributes to a heavy management load for the Director. Informed by literature on levels of work (distribution of roles across levels of an organisation)[20], Slade has a wide span of control which do not facilitate effective flow of information and slows decision making. The current leadership structure is not fit-for-purpose for the nature of work undertaken by Slade.

A review of job descriptions reinforced that the leadership team lacks the structure and vision to deliver on its strategy. Roles are not clearly demarcated, with overlaps in responsibilities and inconsistent use of language (such as first-person terminology, which indicates that staff have defined their own role specifications to a degree). The number of long-serving staff members in leadership positions could explain these differences, as the size and shape of a role appears to have evolved to fit the individual.

3.3.3 Part-time appointments and significant years of service characterise Slade's operating model and limits staff renewal

As highlighted in **Figure 4**, significant numbers of staff are employed by Slade on a part-time basis. While this promotes flexibility for staff and attracts a wider range of professional artists, this model is not without its challenges.

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[19] Australian Human Rights Commission. Leading for change: a blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited, 2018

[20] Spans of Control. Lockheed Supervisory Index and five managerial archetypes, McKinsey & Company

Part-time staff have a limited day-to-day engagement with Slade and therefore, feel low accountability to processes and to enacting on agreed actions. Stakeholders described the way of working as informal and 'opt-in.' However, others are much more favourable towards the input and engagement of part-time staff, who are considered to hold a lot of institutional knowledge and access to professional networks.

Staff who have held long associations with Slade, in particular those in positions of leadership and who were once employed on a full-time basis, take up a part-time position as a way of remaining connected with the School and are reported to enjoy a level of influence on its culture. However, there is a sense that these long-standing part time staff 'look over the shoulder' of those currently in full-time positions and that their tenure can limit the renewal of staff positions.

Figure 4 | Distribution of academic staff employed at Slade, by FTE 2021-22[21]
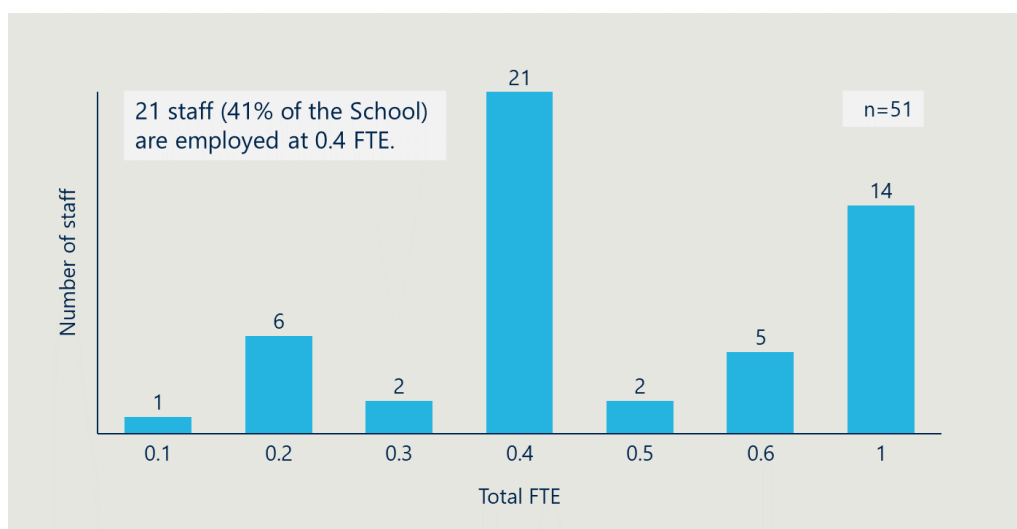
3.3.4 Slade's vision is not widely communicated or understood by staff and students

There is an overwhelming sense that students and staff are not clear on Slade's strategic purpose and for staff, there is a lack of confidence that they can deliver against this vision. In part, consultees identify that they have not been made aware of the wider direction of the School, and that this is not actively communicated by the leadership team. Some staff identified that there is a disconnect between Slade's strategic priorities and the wider ambitions of UCL, with limited opportunities to facilitate engagement, trust and understanding between the School and the wider university.

Figure 5 | Selection of participant quotes in relation to leadership and accountability

'Leadership team wildly large and dysfunctional. There is a bi-weekly meeting with 15 people where things simply don't get done. There is no single agenda' – *Staff member*

'There needs to be a vision at the School that reflects inclusivity and equity – but no one is talking about it' – *Staff member*

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[21] This excludes technical staff members and faculty administrative / operations staff

3.4 Racial disparities

This section explores staff and students' experiences of race and racism at Slade in greater depth. It triangulates quantitative student enrolment and staff representation data with interviews. The section discusses reports of racial harassment and microaggressions, and approaches to address inappropriate behaviours. A selection of participant quotes is provided in **Figure 10**.

3.4.1 The proportion of staff of colour has remained low compared to other London-based art schools and wider UCL average

Slade's own recruitment strategy[22] recognises that the School 'is not diverse and does not represent the diversity of London.' As shown in Figures 6 and 7, the proportion of staff of colour falls below several other London-based art schools and the UCL average. The staff population is significantly less diverse than the student population, and another London-based institution.[23] The data represented in Figures 6 and 7 reflects staff who are on a UCL employment and considers both permanent and fixed-term staff. It does not include temporary staff and contractors who are employed through an agency.

Overall, there is a recognition across the School that the staff body lacks racial diversity. Consultees highlighted limited awareness of Slade's recruitment strategy guidelines such as the UCL Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit 2020-21. There is also limited familiarity with the School's own internal recruitment practices to improve diversity: only a few staff were aware of the requirement for the School's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee to maintain a list of staff of colour for recruitment panels.

Figure 6 | Proportion of Slade, Royal College of Art and University of the Arts London staff with BAME ethnicity in 2020-2021[24][25]

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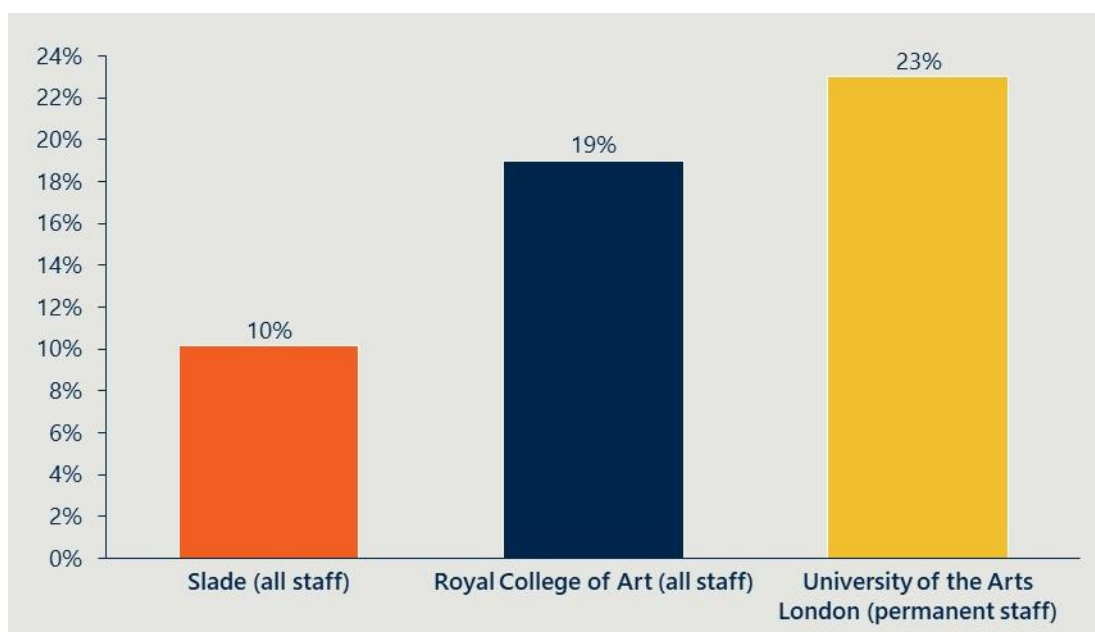
[22] Slade Recruitment Strategy (2021).

[23] University of the Arts London (2022). Choosing our target well: creative diversity at UAL. https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/press-office/stories/choosing-our-target-well-creative-diversity-at-ual

[24] Royal College of Art (2022). Equality and Diversity. https://www.rca.ac.uk/more/organisation/equality-diversity/
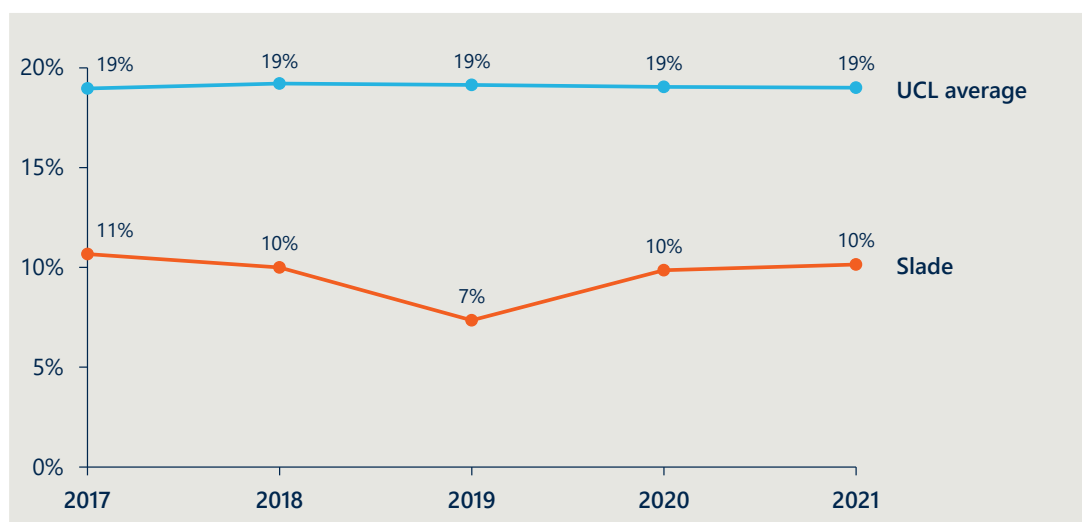
[25] University of the Arts London (2022). Choosing our target well: Creative diversity at UAL. https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/press-office/stories/choosing-our-target-well-creative-diversity-at-ual

Figure 7 | Proportion of Slade and UCL staff with BAME ethnicity from 2016-2021[26]

3.4.2 Slade is increasing efforts to recruit staff of colour in the wake of Black Lives Matter, but wide disparities remain

Slade has sought to improve the representation of staff of colour at Slade over the past decade, However, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a partial recruitment freeze, and several staff of colour were recruited on temporary contracts to fill positions in 2022. Stakeholders anecdotally highlighted that the large majority of BAME staff were employed on temporary contracts despite having served in roles of high responsibility. It was also reported that in 2019, there was a similar situation of BAME staff on temporary contracts.

Additionally, consultees expressed frustration about the delineation between two types of permanent teaching contracts; lecturer (research) and lecturer (teaching) and with the practical implication being that some lecturers are paid to undertake their research and others are not. This distinction was perceived to create and perpetuate a hierarchy amongst staff, including between people of colour and White staff.

3.4.3 Slade's recruitment panels are not sufficiently diverse and recruitment processes are not consistently applied

Despite UCL's commitment to ensuring diverse recruitment panels through the Fair Recruitment Specialist Scheme (and as part of its Race Equality Charter obligations)[27], Slade staff do not consistently uphold these practices. Consultees expressed concerns that personal relationships, lack of awareness about the Fair Recruitment Specialist scheme, and a desire to recruit quickly are some of the factors which inhibit Slade staff from convening diverse recruitment panels.

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[26] Staff ethnicity data provided by Slade

[27] University College London (2022). Fair Recruitment Specialist Scheme: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/equality-areas/race-equality/fair-recruitment-specialist-scheme

3.4.4 There are year-on-year improvements in the representation of students of colour at Slade

The growing proportion of students of colour within the Slade is promising. As shown in Figure 8, Slade's proportion of students of colour is higher than several other London-based art schools. Figure 9 indicates that Slade's overall share of BAME students[28] is growing steadily (39 per cent in 2021) but remains lower than the UCL average (58 per cent in 2021). However, it was noted that there were still only a few Black British students amongst Slade's over 300 students. The review finds many examples of positive practice, which have likely contributed to these improvements. These include: the delivery of the Summer School programme, the 10 Artists, 10 experiences initiatives to connect Slade alumni with students at school and college, the provision of short course to students from widening participation backgrounds, and the Saturday Club, delivered jointly with UCL East Art and UCL Outreach

Figure 8 | Proportion of Slade, Central Saint Martins and University of the Arts London students with BAME ethnicity in 2021[29]
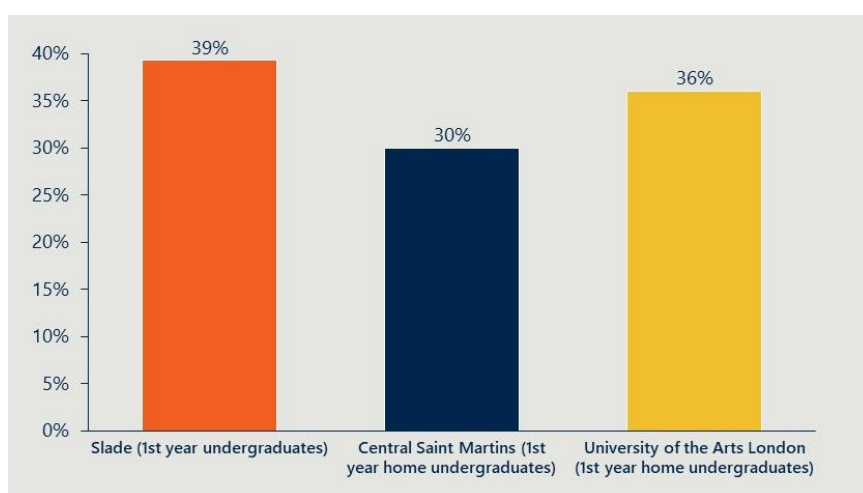
Figure 9 | Proportion of Slade and UCL students with self-identified BAME ethnicity from 2016-2021[30]

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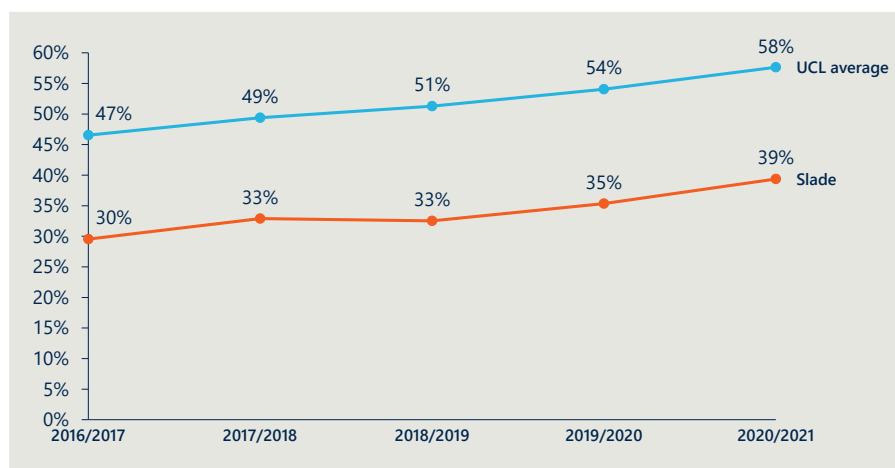
[28] We have used BAME terminology to reflect UCL's reporting on students representation

[29] University Arts London (2020/21): Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report
https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/325267/Student-Equality-Diversity-and-Inclusion-Report-2021.pdf

[30] Student ethnicity data provided by Slade

3.4.5 There are reports of racism against staff and students of colour, including both UK citizens and international students

Slade has grown in its awareness of race and racism in recent years, particularly in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. However, many stakeholders spoke of both an enduring culture of colonialist attitudes, and specific incidents of racism, though the review heard from limited people of colour. Notwithstanding these limitations, the review heard descriptions about a wide range of racist incidents, including inappropriate references to the works of art produced by students of colour, microaggressions relating to the ethnicities of staff and students, and biased treatment towards White students.

3.4.6 Staff and students of colour affirm that there are racial disparities at Slade and that they shoulder a heavy burden

While we received limited engagement from staff and students of colour, those that did participate confirmed that there are significant racial disparities at Slade. These individuals reported a range of both overt and subtle instances of racism and emphasised that the lack of racial diversity at Slade created a heavy responsibility on these individuals to represent people of colour.

3.4.7 Diversity training conducted in 2019 was controversial, but those that participated overwhelmingly found it valuable

Many stakeholders highlighted that diversity training conducted in 2019 had been highly controversial at Slade, with some staff reportedly objecting with the confrontational nature of the training and others refusing to take part in the training at all. However, those that did participate in the training noted that while it was provocative, it had an enduring impact on them and encouraged deep reflection.

Figure 10 | Selection of participant quotes in relation to racial disparities

'The distinction (between lecturer (research) and lecturer (teaching)) is immediately structurally unfair. There's a reinforced discrepancy.' – *Staff member*

'Recruitment is an area where things are more inclined to be inward looking and to continue to hire the same kind of person. – *Staff member*

'After the death of George Floyd, students wanted to do more about racism and conversations were led by white students, making black students feel both visible and invisible.' – *Staff member*

'Generally, international students are seen as lesser. In my experience people of colour from Britain are treated similarly to Caucasian students... For international students, there is a difficulty.' – *Staff member*

'I had many realisations in that course. Someone told me – you're in a position of power. I have tried really hard to change my behaviour, and in my opinion, white staff who did not do this course are miles behind in their thinking' – *Staff member*

'There is very little understanding among staff of the additional burden and stress that the few black and of colour Slade members are under.' – *Staff member*

3.5 Limited engagement in complaints processes

Stakeholder interviews and a review of complaints received through Report and Support (a total of 11 complaints were received between February and May 2022, with no available historical data) demonstrate there is mixed awareness among staff and students in the reporting and complaints processes when incidents of racial harassment and other forms of inappropriate behaviours arise.

Staff and students refer to a fear of repercussions to their study and employment if they were to make formal complaints. Some stakeholders report they have been discouraged to use formal reporting processes by other colleagues, as there is a belief that it would lead to no action. On a related point, as described in the limitation sections of this review, some staff were also discouraged from participating in the current environmental investigation, which contributed to the reluctance in engagement. Nevertheless, the review heard concerning accounts of negative and unresolved experiences from students, staff, and alumni, and where complaints processes could have provided a constructive pathway to resolution.

Figure 11 | Selection of participant quotes in relation to complaints processes

'One of the reasons use of Report and Support is low is that people are intimidated to use it, especially in naming someone because there is a fear that they will need to confront that person. We need utter clarity about what report and support involves, and to ensure that it doesn't lead to double bullying' – *Staff member*

'It's hard to know who to complain to because they have relationships with each other that aren't visible. The reason why an experience like mine could be reproduced, they tend to hire students of the school, and it's not like they've seen another way' – *Former student*
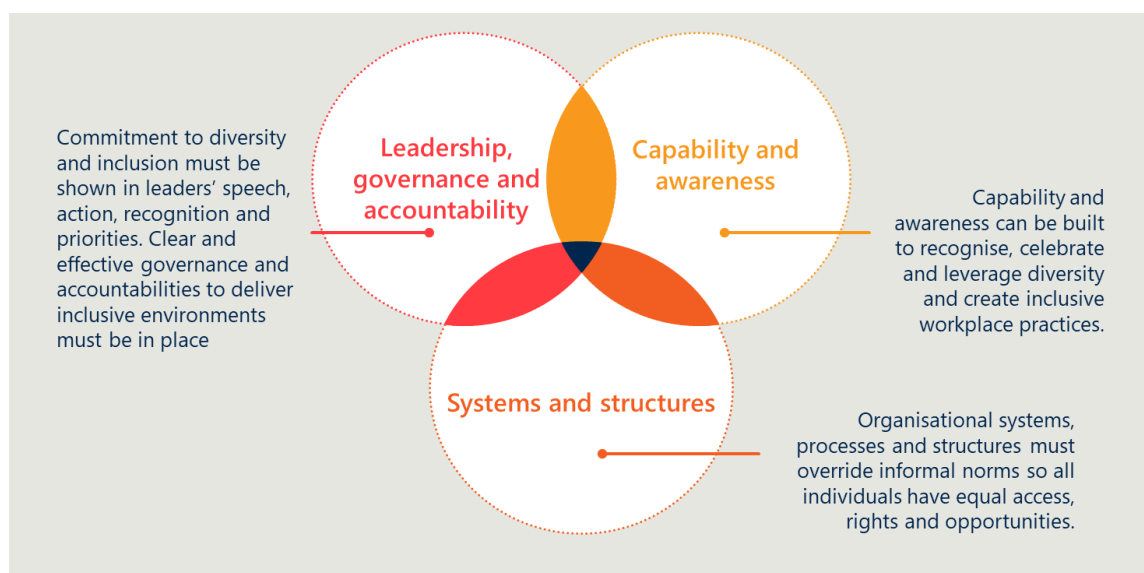
4 Recommendations

This section establishes a series of recommendations which aim to address the challenges identified in this review. The findings (section 3) revealed a range of issues and opportunities, which include:

- The need for urgent and ongoing training for the leadership team to enhance their capabilities
- Support to all staff to address inappropriate communication styles
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of the leadership team
- Address inequalities between staff contractual arrangements
- Increase the representation of students and staff of colour, including in leadership roles

In developing recommendations, we have drawn on Nous' conceptual framework for creating inclusive organisations, as set out in Figure 12.

Figure 12 | Levers to create a diverse and inclusive organisation

In turn, the review outlines three broad recommendation areas, which are discussed in detail below:

1. **Strengthen the leadership team's ability to establish a professional and inclusive culture**
2. **Build staff capability to create a safe and inclusive environment for all**
3. **Increase alignment between UCL and Slade systems and policies**

Implementing these recommendations will require effective coordination and oversight between various groups and individuals, both within the Slade and beyond. At the outset, it is imperative that UCL assign a **senior officer to take ownership of these recommendations,** providing regular reports of progress to key stakeholders at quarterly intervals and can function as a spokesperson to the Slade community at large.

This senior officer will need to work closely with Slade's leadership to ensure that recommendations are effectively translated into practical actions, and can support Slade with the appropriate resources, oversight, and autonomy to drive positive change. As detailed further below, successful implementation of these recommendations will require the sustained energy and focus of this senior for a period of ~12 month at a minimum.

4.1 Strengthen the leadership team's ability to establish a professional and inclusive culture

Slade and UCL should collaborate to strengthen the Slade leadership's ability to address cultural challenges and shift the culture toward greater professionalism and inclusiveness. This will require a more fully embedded relationship with HR and closer engagement with UCL senior officers, to ensure that desired ways of working are reinforced. While Slade has benefited from significant levels of autonomy, stronger alignment with UCL policies and frameworks can bring about positive change in the culture of the School. Table 1 provides recommendations in relation to issues identified in section 3.1.

Table 1 | Recommendations: 1. Strengthen the leadership team's ability to establish a more professional and inclusive culture

Recommendation	Priority	Timescale	Owner
1.1 Release communications that commit to change in response to the Environmental Investigation			
1.1A Disseminate an initial response to the Environmental Investigation that acknowledges the experiences of participants in the review and communicates next steps	High	Within two months of the report	UCL Vice Provost
1.1B Publish a summary of the independent review on the Slade website that conveys Slade's commitment to advancing racial equity and strengthening Slade's broader culture	High	Within two months of the report	Head of Department
1.1C Issue protocol setting out Slade's commitment to EDI and academic freedom	High	Within two months of the report	Head of Department; EDI Committee
1.2 Provide supports that enable the Slade leadership team to succeed			
1.2A Provide leadership training for leadership team over an intensive period	High	Within two months of the report	UCL HR
1.2B Clarify roles and responsibilities of leadership team	High	Within three months of the report	Slade leadership team
1.2C Enhance operational and administrative support to leadership team	Medium	Within six months of the report	UCL Human Resources
1.3 Develop a shared vision, strategy and roles and responsibilities			
1.3A Develop a shared vision, cultural values, and strategy	High	Within three months of the report	Slade leadership team

4.2 Build staff capability to create an inclusive environment

Slade and UCL should prioritise building all-staff capability to foster inclusive environments at Slade. The recommendations in Table 2 address issues raised in Sections 3.2 – 3.4.

Table 2 | Recommendations: 2. Build staff capability to create a safe and inclusive environment

Recommendation	Priority	Timescale	Owner
2.1 Prioritise anti-racist initiatives and building an inclusive culture at Slade			
2.1A Consolidate anti-racism bodies and appropriately prioritise this work	High	Within two months of the report	Head of Department
2.1B Introduce mandatory diversity training for all staff	Medium	Within six months of the report	Head of Department; UCL Human Resources
2.2 Improve equitable opportunities for staff and students			
2.2A Improve employment conditions for staff on teaching fellow contracts and staff on temporary contracts	High	Within 12 months of the report	UCL Human Resources
2.2B Review recruitment and promotions processes to improve equitable opportunities for staff of colour	High	Within 12 months of the report	Head of Department; UCL Human Resources
2.2C Identify opportunities to provide leadership opportunities for staff of colour and other diverse backgrounds	Medium	Within three months of the report	Head of Department
2.2D Consider opportunities to accelerate student diversity	Medium	Within six months of the report	Slade EDI Committee

4.3 Increase alignment between Slade and UCL policies

UCL and Slade should focus on increasing Slade's alignment with UCL systems and policies for a diverse workplace. Table 3 includes recommendations in response to issues raised in Section 3.5.

Table 3 | Recommendations: 3. Increase alignment between Slade and UCL systems and policies

Recommendations	Priority	Timescale	Owner
3.1 Clarify Report and Support process	High	Within two months of the report	UCL Human Resources
3.2 Assign responsibility to a senior officer drive implementation of the Environmental Investigation	High	Within six months of the report	UCL Senior Management
3.3 Publicly report on progress toward creating a safe and inclusive environment on a biannual process	Medium	Within six months of the report	Head of Department

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