

Inclusive Advocacy: evidence and justification for pilot programme in 2018-20

Inclusive Advocacy is a new sponsorship programme designed to ensure high-performing, under-represented groups reach their full potential at UCL.

Emerging from the recognition of persistent barriers to career progression for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff, the two-year programme aims to connect senior leaders ('Advocates') to high-performing Grade 7 and 8 staff ('Protégés'). The senior leader's role is to proactively ensure that the protégé receives robust support and access to useful networks, hopefully resulting in career advancement

Why does the Inclusive Advocates programme have a focus on BME staff progression?

Substantive statistical analysis of all key areas of University activity has demonstrated significant differentials between white staff and BME staff. For example, there is a higher turnover rate of BME staff; white staff are promoted at a proportionally higher rate, and faster, than BME staff, and BME staff are less satisfied with career support^[1]. Furthermore, various studies have found that BME staff often feel isolated, marginalised, undermined and lacking support in the higher education sector^[2]. The sense of BME staff feeling as if they are 'outsiders' is repeated throughout much of the literature on this topic^[3].

Whilst at a formal level, UCL has clear institutional policies for the equitable treatment of all staff, as in any large, complex organisation, there remain opaque, and sometimes invisible, practices and instances of informal decision-making that can undermine formal procedures. These are compounded by unconscious biases that foreground psychological processes, which means that most people are invariably inclined to have more of an affinity to others who are like themselves^[4]. The cumulative effect of this, as evidenced by statistics from UCL's 'Race equality charter mark application form'^[5], is durable inequalities^[6] in career progression outcomes according to demographic categories. Additionally, staff from under-represented groups generally have less power in an organisation than the socially dominant group – in both actual and 'soft' power - and this can limit their advancement, yet the organisation may tend to blame their lack of progress on them, or society at large, rather than its own systems and processes.^[7]

The Inclusive Advocacy programme is driven by evidence-based research which indicates that the daily experiences of working relationships and managerial support and encouragement are

significant matters for career advancement[8]. For example, the personal discretion of managers or PI's in delegating high status or risky projects can influence who is considered more prepared for promotion.

[1] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/sites/human-resources/files/recm_a...

[2] <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/experience-of-bme-staff-in-he-final-re...>

[3] <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf>

[4] Kandola, B. (2013) *The value of difference : eliminating bias in organisations*

[5] Op. cit. 1

[6] Exploitation and opportunity hoarding are intrinsically interlinked to the production and reproduction of 'durable inequality' (cf. Tilly, C., 1998. *Durable inequality*. Univ of California Press, pp. 10)

[7] Op. cit. 4

[8] Mullins, L.J., 2007. *Management and organisational behaviour*. Pearson education. Pp. 410-442

Is sponsoring specific groups of staff unfair – or even wanted?

Most senior staff may be able to name someone who has been influential in advancing their career: someone who has 'taken them under their wing' and gone the 'extra mile' to support them. This means many senior staff have *de facto* been beneficiaries of sponsorship and may instinctively understand what is meant by the term 'sponsoring'. There is a strongly-held perception of 'meritocracy' at UCL, but to have a functioning meritocracy, there has to be equality of opportunity. That being said, equality of opportunity does not always and everywhere lead to an equality of outcomes. This initiative aims to address that. UCL has compelling statistical and qualitative evidence which shows that structural barriers are still more prominent for staff with certain protected characteristics[1]. Over time, as staff from historically marginalised or disadvantaged groups' progress more equitably through the organisation, specific programmes should not be required.

An important aspect of the Inclusive Advocacy programme is that it also offers the opportunity for reciprocal learning, by raising awareness of the experience and perceptions of under-represented groups amongst senior managers. It will bring together a community of senior

leaders who wish to advance inclusion, with highly-talented junior staff who can bring a diversity of perspectives and knowledge.

[1] Op. cit. 1

What is the difference between sponsorship and mentoring?

“A mentor is an experienced person willing to build your confidence and provide a sounding board; whereas a sponsor is a senior person who believes in your potential and is willing to take a bet on you, in so doing advocates for your next promotion” [\[1\]](#)

The main distinction between mentoring and sponsorship is that whilst a mentor may help an employee envision and plan their next position, an Advocate will leverage their social and career capital with the protégé, to ensure expanding developmental opportunities for them.

The role of UCL’s Inclusive Advocates is to open doors, introduce opportunities for exposure, demonstrate to a higher-level audience what the Protégée can bring to the institution, connect the Protégée to career opportunities and advocate for their abilities. The Advocate must be willing to learn from the employee, to be welcoming of diverse perspectives and to be receptive of the fact that ‘success’ comes in many guises.

[1] Hewlett, A, S. (2013) *Forget a mentor, find a sponsor*

How the scheme works

Inclusive Advocates must be Grade 9 or 10 staff who are well-placed to advance a more junior colleague’s career. They must be able to commit to sponsoring a protégé for two years and, at a minimum, meeting with the protégé one-to-one, every two months.

Advocates will be invited to an initial training session, accompanied by a toolkit which can be studied at the Advocates own pace. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Team will support the process of identifying and matching suitable Advocates and Protégés. Advocates and Protégés can also identify their own match if they wish. The matching process is driven by the Protégés’ requirements. As such, Advocates have a longer wait time to be matched than Protégés. If you’re not matched immediately, you will be placed into our library of interested Advocates until a suitable match can be made

The training provided will explore how to navigate sensitive issues, such as how the sponsorship relationship will be explained to others in the department. The Protégés, once selected, will then also be asked to attend a briefing session. Both sessions will make sure that each party understands what is expected of them and how they can build a successful sponsorship relationship. The Protégés manager will also be informed of the arrangement and asked to support it and any subsequent opportunities that emerge for the Protégé.

Inclusive Advocates is largely a one-to-one relationship. The EDI Team, however, will check in on a six-monthly basis to ensure the sponsorship relationship is working well. A formal evaluation of the pilot will be undertaken Autumn 2020, which will form the foundation for the proposal to make this programme a permanent UCL offering. The pilot will continue to run until Spring 2021.