

Materials EDIA Race Focus Group

Tuesday 2nd March 2021

Statistics

University data shows that ethnic minority staff are underrepresented in senior roles. Representation has been improving over the last few years, albeit slowly.

There has been a decline in the representation of ethnic minority PS Staff at Grade 9 since 2016.

ACTION: Investigate what caused the drop in Grade 9 ethnic minority staff in 2016

Ethnic Minority Academic Staff Experiences

The support offered to some staff throughout probation has been inadequate. In particular, there has been insufficient support for T&S staff.

ACTION: Review the probation system, particularly for employees on a T&S contract. Probation should be a time to develop skills, arrange training and learn via mentorship. The metrics by which T&S staff are assessed should be refined, and there should not be a requirement to publish research papers.

Some staff have been asked to supervise research projects despite not being allocated any lab space.

ACTION: All staff who are asked to supervise research projects should be allocated lab space. If this is not possible, then either the project supervision should be allocated to other staff, or the requirements of the project should change (for example, by allowing the project to be a literature review). If the latter suggestion is implemented, then taking a literature review project should not disadvantage the student.

Staff have been allocated teaching with very little notice in subject areas they had no prior knowledge of. Negative comments the students made on feedback forms were then unfairly used as evidence of poor performance in relation to probation objectives. Comments made on the feedback forms can have a negative impact on staff mental health.

ACTION: Require that if academics are given a course to teach that is not their speciality they are given a significant amount of time to prepare and to learn the subject – this should be factored into their workload model. When this is the case, comments/scores from feedback forms should not be used as evidence of poor performance in the first year of teaching the subject.

ACTION: Review whether the free text boxes in feedback forms are necessary given the potential impact on staff mental health.

Work is often allocated in the department without any negotiation in contrast to other departments.

ACTION: Include staff in the discussion around what work will be given to them to ensure that it is reasonable and fits with their skill set.

Ethnic minority staff have been given much higher teaching workloads than their colleagues, with little explanation being offered as to why this is the case.

ACTION: Make the workload model a transparent system so academics can see how their workload compares. This will iron out discrepancies and highlight any people who are overloaded with work.

Ethnic minority staff have been made to feel unwelcome in the department via a series of microaggressions, including not being acknowledged by their colleagues, having students and staff question whether they should be in the building and being asked to produce ID, which does not often happen to White staff. This highlights a gap in our EDIA training. These microaggressions should not be taking place. More work needs to be done with EDIA training, going way beyond short, online courses, which often feel like a tick-box exercise.

ACTION: Introduce training to educate staff and students about microaggressions, power and inequality. One option would be to hold an EDI session in an away day led by external experts

One member of staff was subjected to completely inappropriate comments in an interview, being told that they “would have a better chance of getting a job as a cleaner”. Despite a track record of excellent performance in a temporary academic role, and years of previous experience, another candidate was appointed to the permanent position on the basis of a ten minute presentation at the interview. This appears to indicate a racial bias in our recruitment process. Notably, there was no ethnic minority representation on the interview panel.

ACTION: Staff that make inappropriate comments at interviews should be reported via the University’s Report & Support system. The onus should not be on the target of the comments to report such comments – other staff members on the panel should do so. The action that is taken as a result of such reporting should be communicated to the victim of the inappropriate comments/behaviour.

ACTION: There should be ethnic minority representation on all interview panels. In the past, there has been a reluctance to require underrepresented groups to take part in a large number of interview panels as this would impact on their workload disproportionately. To avoid this, work on interview panels should be built into workload models and staff should have their workloads reduced in other areas to balance out the additional work in this area.

The current NAP uses a one-size-fits-all approach – it does not take into account any experience that an academic may have had before. One academic had 12 years of experience of teaching and a PGCE but was still required to complete it in its entirety. The University supposedly celebrates diversity but treats all of its academics as a single homogeneous group.

ACTION: Review how prior experience can be incorporated into the NAP to reduce the requirements on staff to be “trained” in areas they are already expert in.

When the Black Lives Matter movement came to prominence in the international news following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, one academic wanted the department to put out a statement of support to Black students. The email sent was never replied to and it was felt that the Department Leadership didn’t feel empowered to release a statement without approval from higher up the University hierarchy. The Senior Management team have created an atmosphere where decisions have to be deferred up the management structure, which leads to inaction on issues which need to be addressed urgently.

ACTION: The management structure should be reviewed to enable departments to take rapid action in response to emergent events that impact the wellbeing of our students

It was noted that the Athena SWAN Charter was a successful catalyst for action at department level, and that a similar mechanism could also drive improvements in relation to Race. The University holds a Bronze Race Equality Charter mark, but this is at University level rather than department level.

ACTION: Investigate whether it is possible to apply for Race Equality Charter Marks at Department level