

30 March 2023

To the Chair of the Race Equality Charter Assessment Team

I am delighted to endorse the University of Sussex's application to the Race Equality Charter.

Sussex has a long and proud tradition of progressive inclusion and innovation – including through the lives and work of several generations of Black and other racially minoritized students who have gone on to undertake pioneering interventions across many domains of social, cultural and political life in the UK and beyond. Sussex is radically global in orientation and has a commitment to social justice and societal transformation that is deeply rooted in our institutional history. The University played an important role in the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa, educating many activists who became political leaders in the new South Africa, and we have been an important site of critical post-colonial thinking and research. This application sets out key aspects of our current work and through honest reflection seeks to build on this heritage.

This history and current commitments notwithstanding, both the University's executive leadership team and our Council recognise the structural issues that continue to perpetuate under-representation and disadvantage, and we are determined to address the full range of ways in which discrimination and marginalisation impact upon members of racially minoritized groups. I joined Sussex last summer and have a personal and professional mission to understand and address inequality, to support and celebrate diversity, and to promote inclusion in universities. Both before my arrival and since, Sussex has been taking steps to address the multitude of factors that allow racism in all of its forms to continue. We have recognised the strategic nature of the work that we need to do, and that more than operational delivery is required. We have many strengths but know that we must do more, better and differently, to build real inclusion across all areas of our community and work. And so the Action Plan in this application seeks to particularise our evidence-based approach.

Through the work of the REC SAT, I and the University's leadership team recognise the following key issues for minority ethnic staff and students at Sussex:

1. Lack of belief that there is recognition, acknowledgement or accountability of the problem, and of trust in the leadership to tackle the problem.
2. Lack of engagement in race equity work from staff and students – supporting the perception of low trust and potential disillusionment in addressing the issues. This is shown by low response rates to surveys and participation in focus groups, turnover in the REC SAT, also low completion rates of personal characteristic data, and a lack of engagement with local interest groups beyond the campus.

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3. Some examples of good work to tackle inequity, but without an overarching and sustainable race equity plan with embedded goals, clear ownership, monitoring and review to ensure coherence and integration.
4. Low representation and distribution of racially minoritised staff and uneven distribution across pay grades, with especially low numbers in the top two pay grades and also across professional services roles/divisions.
5. Increasing proportions of racially minoritised students, and some progress in closing awarding gaps, though these remain for all groups of racially minoritised students. The work we have done on supporting and equipping academics in race equity work has not been sufficiently systematic or far reaching and this impacts on the student experience.
6. Racially minoritised staff and students report a lack of sense of belonging and incidents of racism and discrimination, with a view that this impacts the retention of these staff.

The work of the university's leadership – including Council and Senate – to advance race equality at the University includes: consideration of the ethnicity pay gap and the action plan in place to address it; an annual EDI report; an annual dignity and respect assurance report considered; building EDI accountability into appraisal discussions and objective setting; completion of anti-racism training for the leadership team in place in 2022 and roll out of this for new members.

In addition, the University Executive Group announced an Anti-Racist Pledge in 2021, with a set of commitments and actions which are reflected in the application and Action Plan. A new Academic Promotions project has begun which seeks to advance our EDI agenda. A comprehensive programme to address decolonising teaching is underway as part of a broader Curriculum Reimagined programme.

The University leadership team includes consideration of race equity and the impacts of decisions in committee discussions and has strengthened governance processes, including better equality impact assessments which are built into policy change and decision-making processes.

The University has increased resources for race equity work in several respects. The EDI team has been expanded and a PVC for Culture, Equality, and Inclusion was appointed in 2021. We have a clear, expanded strategy - Inclusive Sussex - and strong commitment from senior leadership to address the challenges identified. The provision of dedicated funding for a five-year programme - Black @ Sussex (circa £270k total) - is a tangible demonstration of our commitment. We have a work allocation allowance for the BAME staff network chair, and School level work allocations for Race Equity/EDI Champions. Looking ahead we have made commitments to resource systems improvements which will provide a firm basis for future work, and a current externally-led review of EDI governance, oversight and of its organisational design will help deliver on our plans.

In sum, we have sought to honestly name the challenges that the University of Sussex faces, alongside setting out our ambition for change. I commend this application to you.

Yours sincerely



Professor Sasha Roseneil
Vice-Chancellor and President
University of Sussex