Universities Challenged?

Embedding Diversity, Empowering Institutions

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Contents

Introduction

There is certainly good news when it comes to the issue of diversity within academia. The higher education (HE) workforce is more representative of the lower socio-economic groups than many other professions and progress has been made in recruiting and promoting more women. But there is still some way to go in creating a gender balance in the top teams of leading universities and academics from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are significantly underrepresented across the HE workforce. An examination of some of the prevailing practices in recruitment – not just in HE but across the board – makes this lack of diversity less surprising. For example, there does seem to be a fixation in recruitment – particularly in the public sector – on size. The number of people a candidate has managed and the size of the budget they were responsible for often take precedence over all their other achievements and abilities.

I was involved in a recruitment process whereby a white man in his 50s was selected primarily because he had managed a team in excess of 600 people and a concomitantly sizeable budget. Now let me emphasise I have no objections whatsoever to white men over the age of 50. My father is one of them! But the position in question required management of a team of 50 and many of the other candidates had plenty of experience managing this size of organisation or slightly smaller. What an effective way of entrenching the status quo! Rewarding candidates for past experience (which is not essential to the new post) and then conferring more advantage on them in the next recruitment round. Similarly, this approach effectively bars people who may have all the skills and qualifications required and even fulfil the management experience criterion, yet they will always be trumped by candidates who can claim to have managed larger teams. Ironically, this job advert placed considerable emphasis on the postholder promoting diversity in the workforce. Yet I think the selection panel in this case would argue they are 'blindly' recruiting on merit; they did not understand the underlying unfairness and myopia in their reasoning.

Another barrier to fairer recruitment is an emphasis on previous experience within the sector in question. HE is particularly culpable in this regard but I recognise it is prevalent elsewhere. We all need to be more sophisticated in understanding the skills and knowledge that a range of experience confers. Working in a sector completely different from HE can equip people perfectly well and recruitment panels should learn to identify transferable skills. Certainly, the candidate must demonstrate an understanding of the culture of HE and the differences as well as similarities between their sector and academia. But lack of experience in an HE institution shouldn't be a deal-breaker. Many recruitment drives indicate that sector experience is desirable rather than essential criterion. But in reality, it often means candidates are significantly disadvantaged without it. More employers should offer 'on-boarding' or induction periods tailored for the candidate focusing on areas where they are less experienced. In this case it would focus on ensuring the employee is tutored in the culture and peculiarities of the HE sector.

Another incident I encountered recently – outside of the HE sector – indicates that there is still an advantage to those with friends 'in the know' in terms of a gap between what the recruitment guidance requests and what the employer actually desires. A friend of mine carefully crafted a supporting statement demonstrating – as very clearly and specifically requested – how their skills, attributes and experience fitted the stated essential criteria. Candidates were instructed not to exceed two pages so there was little space to do this effectively. They subsequently sought feedback from the employer about why they had not been shortlisted. She was informed that the panel actually wanted almost half of those two pages to be dedicated to a more personal description of the candidate and their motivation for applying. Now how on earth is the candidate supposed to know this when not only is it not requested, but the instructions specifically steer the candidate in another direction, i.e. demonstrating how they fulfil the essential criteria?

The examples I have cited are, admittedly, anecdotal. The contributions in this publication draw extensively on both academic evidence and in some cases personal experience. They offer insightful analysis of the problem of the lack of diversity in academia and innovative solutions to the problem. Our contributors are all extremely well qualified to comment.

Prof Gill Valentine is an outstanding ambassador for equality in academia both in terms of promoting practices which aim to increase diversity in universities but also in furthering our understanding of the complexities of the issue through her research. For example, she has won the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographies Memorial Award for contributions to Geography and gender, as well as the Murchison Award for her work on the geography of difference, equality and diversity.

Prof Nora Ann Colton is able to provide an invaluable international as well as a personal perspective on diversity issues particularly on racial grounds. She taught Economics in the US for 16 years, before moving into the UK university system serving as deputy at UEL and currently Director of Education at Moorfields/UCL. But she also saw at first hand how differently her Korean sister was treated from herself and provides a very moving account of how she tried to protect her sister from hostility and racial discrimination.

Baroness Valerie Amos has had an outstanding career and has impeccable credentials with regard to diversity issues. After working in Equal Opportunities, Training and Management Services in local government in London, Amos became Chief Executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission. A real pioneer, she was the first black woman to sit in the Cabinet of the United Kingdom and in 2015, the first black woman to lead a university in the United Kingdom when she was appointed Director of SOAS, University of London.

Few people can rival Shelia Gupta in terms of her experience in HR and recruitment within the HE sector; she has worked in no less than seven very different HE institutes over 28 years and was Chair of Universities HR - the professional HR body for the HE sector.

Prof Michael Arthur has held the most senior positions within HE including Dean of Medicine, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds, Chair of the Russell Group and, currently, President of UCL. In all of those positions he has forged an impressive track record promoting women to senior leadership posts.

Like Baroness Amos, her former political colleague, the Rt. Hon. Baroness Blackstone has gained an astonishing breadth and depth of experience across a diverse range of institutions throughout her illustrious career. Not only has she been the head of two London HE colleges, but she was also Minister of State for Higher and Further Education. She has also held a range of prestigious non-executive positions – Chairs the British Library, Bar Standards Board, and Great Ormond Street Hospital. Her insights on how we create a more diverse HE sector are certainly worth paying close attention to.

Wild Search is so grateful that these hugely experienced people have taken the time to share their expertise with us because we are scrutinising our own practices and refining our skills and knowledge about diverse recruitment. We are determined to help employers ensure they are fishing in as broad and diverse a pool as possible when it comes to looking for talent – that is by far the most effective way of finding the very best candidates and building the strongest teams.

Dr Wendy Piatt
London, November 2018

Diagnosing the problem and embracing solutions

By Professor Gill Valentine

Most UK universities pride themselves on being globally engaged and locally connected institutions. They promote both HE and a wider university experience as opportunities to encounter 'difference' and develop new ways of seeing the world. Yet despite their reputation as progressive and cosmopolitan spaces many of the UK's top universities demonstrate a striking lack of diversity amongst their staff and senior management teams. Of Britain's 19,000 professors only one in four are female, and fewer than 100 are black, with only around 3% of senior university leadership teams identifying as BAME.

Tackling this issue has never been more important if universities are to maintain their role as crucibles of innovation and ideas because the evidence from other sectors is that employing individuals with very different backgrounds, outlooks and skills promotes diversity of thinking and produces a more creative, effective and productive workforce. A more diverse HE sector would not only bring a range of benefits to the UK through the enhanced contribution of universities to the economy and society, but a more inclusive HE culture might also help to attract, inspire and support more students irrespective of their backgrounds to achieve their full potential.

The Equality Act, 2010 introduced a legal framework to protect individuals from unfair treatment and promote a fair and more equal society. The public sector equality duty explicitly sets out a requirement to advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups. Most universities are committed to supporting equality and diversity but the challenge is how to achieve this in practice.

The first steps are to diagnose the institutionally specific nature of the problem by analysing workforce data for recruitment, retention, pay/reward, promotion and job evaluations and by listening to the experiences of minority groups to recognise the barriers faced. Workforce patterns necessarily vary between universities given their different geographies, histories, disciplinary mixes and so on. Commonly there are also differences in experience between minority groups, as well as evidence of intersectional patterns of disadvantage. Understanding the complexity of an institution's position allows a clear narrative to be developed to explain why a diversity strategy is necessary and for actions to be targeted effectively.

Institutions can actively develop their own internal pipelines of talent by nurturing people with a diversity of backgrounds and experiences at every stage of the academic journey from student to postgraduate, from postgraduate to early career academic, and from early career academic to professor and future university leader. To attract more diverse external applicants requires effort to reach out to different populations by connecting with local communities and circulating opportunities via different social and academic networks. Underrepresented groups often suffer from 'imposter syndrome' so reviewing the language used in job adverts and selection criteria to remove language that can imply only superheroes should apply can generate a more diverse applicant pool.

While many organisations think they practice equitable recruiting, research has shown that 'affinity bias' is endemic. This has the consequence that recruitment panel members often unconsciously favour those in their own image so reproducing homogenous workforces and leadership teams. Ensuring diversity in appointment panel membership, requiring panel chairs to undertake unconscious bias training, and creating opportunities for all staff to develop knowledge, skills and awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion are critical steps to aligning reality with rhetoric.

Mentoring, buddying and advocacy programmes that pair individuals from minority backgrounds with senior colleagues to provide advice and support to navigate promotion pathways or workplace experiences - such as preparing first grant applications or taking and returning from parental leave - are increasingly common in the HE sector. Reverse mentoring is a newer take on the same principle. Here individuals from minority groups mentor members of leadership teams to broaden their understanding of diversity issues.

There are many examples across the sector of projects to support staff with particular protected characteristics including staff network groups, small financial awards to support women who have been on maternity leave to keep their research on track, and events to celebrate Black History Month, LGBTQ+ pride and International Women's Day. But creating an inclusive workplace is not about one-off initiatives. Activity needs to be embedded across an institution to ensure best practice is disseminated and sustained. Universities are only just starting to set targets to drive change and create accountability.

The responsibility for speaking up about diversity and championing change must be shared by privileged majorities. Carrying the burden of representation – such as writing Athena SWAN or Race Charter submissions and sitting on multiple recruitment panels– can have negative impacts on the workload, well-being and consequent career progression of staff with protected characteristics. Allies programmes, such as rainbow-lanyard campaigns to allow staff members to show support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ+) equality, are beginning to emerge in the sector. Women often complain that their ideas are ignored in meetings, but male colleagues can act as allies providing bystander amplification by noticing when this happens and highlighting and giving credit to a female speaker for her contribution.

Above all creating a diverse and inclusive workplace is not about 'fixing' minorities so that they can be accommodated into existing structures and ways of doing things. Rather it is about recognising that inequalities are maintained and reproduced through institutional systems and collective practices that are taken for granted as 'normal' or unremarkable. Equality and diversity therefore means recognising white, male and heterosexual privilege and accepting the need for institutional change. It is uncomfortable territory particularly at a time when there is a reactionary critique of diversity emerging in wider society. But universities need to listen to their own staff and to learn from academic research such as critical race theory because the prize is the chance to create a diverse and inclusive organisational culture where everyone feels valued and can reach their full potential.

A very personal experience of discrimination

By Professor Nora Ann Colton

When I was five years of age, my baby sister arrived from Korea. She was four at the time she was adopted into our family. Given that we were within a year in age, we became inseparable. We shared everything and seldom went anywhere alone. We were often referred to as the "salt and pepper" twins. However, even at a young age, I noticed that society did not treat us the same. I quickly realised it was better to be salt than pepper. At our rural school where students of Asian ancestry were a rarity, my sister received loads of unwanted comments and attention. People would often talk to me about my sister as though she was some foreigner on a visit to our home. This situation regarding someone I loved was very confusing. I found myself often feeling guilty due to the uneven treatment my sister and I received growing up. I also was constantly horizon-scanning situations to try and divert any insults or awkward moments that we might find ourselves in. My sister and I never spoke of these matters as children, and no one talked to us about them as well. It was only after reaching adulthood that both of us came to understand in our own way that many of our childhood experiences were informed by class, gender, and race. We shared the same class and gender, but race was defining in shaping who we would become and how we would be received in the world.

The notion of gender and race is complicated and, consequently, easily overlooked in the academy by those in leadership positions. It is much easier to focus on gender and assume that we capture the experiences of all women through gender equality regarding practices and policies. However, lumping all women together like this does women of BAME backgrounds a disservice. These women not only experience race and gender differently than white females but also within this grouping women have their own experiences and narrative. Consequently, I will use the term BAME, but recognise that within this grouping there are various experiences that are specific to the individual who is having the lived experience. We just need to look at the data collected by HESA to see that although women are making strides in the academy at some levels, BAME women are still waiting at the gate.

Furthermore, the lived experiences of BAME females versus white females are very different. The white privilege I experienced as a child afforded me the opportunity to have fewer barriers in life than my sister. Mamta Motwani Accapadi (2007) has written about this dual oppressor/oppressed identity and how it often becomes a source of tension when white women are challenged to consider their white privilege by BAME women. Richard Dyer (2005) describes white women as often being seen as helpless while Asian women are seen as devoid of emotion or feeling. Furthermore, white female voices are heard while the Asian female often struggles to be heard and understood.

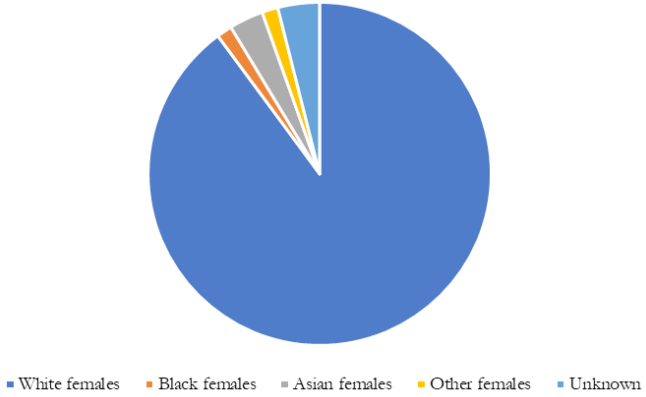

Chart showing ethnicity of academic and non-academic female staff in HE 2015/16 (HESA, 2015)

As a manager, I witnessed a situation where a white male colleague became completely conflicted with two women – one white and the other Asian. He felt very protective of the white female and complained that she was not being treated fairly while openly criticizing and harassing the Asian colleague. When his actions were pointed out to him, he struggled to see that he was doing anything wrong as he had convinced himself that he was "honest" in his assessment of these two individuals. He had not even considered the impact he was having on these women.

We, in the academy, must acknowledge that as much as we like to think of ourselves and our institutions as places that are open and inclusive, we have historically been places of privilege for the elite whites, and many of our rituals and rules are based on this period of our institutional formation. Academics/Faculty should not hide behind intellectual discourse to deny other academics a place at the faculty table. In her book, *Inside the Ivory Tower,* Deborah Gabriel (2017) points out that we must make sure our procedures and policies are not producing disparate outcomes for people of BAME backgrounds. We must also ensure that our BAME female colleagues can be their authentic selves without being cast into stereotypes that do not allow them to progress or forced to wear white masks to get ahead in the academy.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to travel with a black female colleague to Africa as part of alumni engagement. The first time I had met her, I remember thinking that she would eventually end up in a senior leadership role; however, she was struggling with colleagues who did not like the way she was leading her programme. She seemed to be folding under pressure and no longer resembled the person I had initially met. However, when we arrived in her home country, I saw a very different person emerge. It was as though she had received a boost of confidence. I also realised that she came from a very prominent family.

I was baffled as to why this woman would continue to try and move forward in the UK academy when she had so many opportunities in her home country. She told me that she did not want to succeed on the back of her family and wanted to make it in the UK on her terms. However, the irony of her situation is that the terms she is now confronted with in the UK are not hers, but decades of white elites defining the rules of the game.

If we are serious about gender equality, we must also factor in race. We must acknowledge and own the fact that white females are making most of the strides in gender equality. These females are often leveraging their whiteness while still experiencing oppression as females. This oppression can often be in many forms, but it is not the same as the oppression that BAME females suffer. We must make sure that when we use statistics to illustrate our advances on addressing gender equality that we also have a statistic that recognises race and gender, not just gender.

Lastly, we must learn how to talk about race and gender more openly both with our colleagues and students. Robin DiAngelo (2018) has written that white people are particularly bad at discussing racism. None of us genuinely like to admit or confront either our racial privilege or racism. Most of us as liberal academics like to believe that we have conquered fairness. DiAngelo has coined an expression about whites' inability to confront questions of race as "white fragility." She argues that part of the issue is that society is set up to shelter us from racial discomfort; however, the academy is not. We must ensure that the academy is a place where we recognise and talk about our racial identities with a goal of forging social justice.

My daughter, who started university in the UK this past year, phoned me up distressed one evening to ask me if she was white (her father is from the Middle East). She told me she was giving a presentation in her sociology course on white privilege when a white female interrupted her to say to her it was not hers to discuss as she was not white. Allan G. Johnson (2005) has stated, "When it comes to privilege, it doesn't matter who we really are. What matters is who other people think we are". My sister and I grew up never verbalising or fully understanding how our different ethnic backgrounds shaped how others interacted with us. I hope that through championing race and gender equality within HE both at a faculty and student level, there can evolve a narrative that not only recognises social identities but begins to address our notions of which behaviours are privileged. Without recognising how race directly impacts the way we can move through this world particularly when coupled with gender, we cannot hope to challenge the marginalisation of racialised females within academia.

Addressing the woeful progress on BAME representation in HE

By Baroness Valerie Amos

UK HE has been under significant scrutiny in the last few months – with debates ranging from Vice Chancellor salaries to concerns about value for money for students and the quality of the student experience.

One issue which has not received sufficient attention is the poor record of appointing and developing senior BAME academics, professional services staff and leaders in our HE institutions. The figures are woeful and not enough progress is being made. The total number of black professors fails to reach 1%. In relation to professional support staff and senior managers, BAME staff remain in the lower paid roles and are more likely to be on fixed-term contracts than staff who are white. When I was appointed Director of SOAS in 2015, I was astounded to discover that I was the first British person of African-Caribbean descent to head a UK university. Today I remain one of very few British BAME Vice Chancellors.

This should be a clear warning to all of us that we have been much too complacent in tackling inequality in the sector. While action plans and strategies have been produced by many, the impact these efforts have had on a practical level remains patchy. This is evidenced in the lack of black and minority ethnic leaders in our university system. Our attitude needs to change. To put it simply: we should not be rewarding intent – we need to reward action and change.

The context in which we are operating as HE institutions is challenging. The UK's decision to leave the EU has placed significant pressure on UK universities to remain attractive to both international staff and students. The Home Office reported a spike in hate crime recorded during the EU referendum – partly stirred by the way in which much of the debate on Britain's relationship with the EU was conducted. The #LondonIsOpen campaign launched by the Mayor of London has attempted to dispel that perception of the UK, particularly of London, but we need to do more than that.

The Government's Race Disparity Audit, introduced last year and championed by the Prime Minister, is useful in helping to understand some of the barriers that BAME groups face. It tells us what many of us have known for years. But I hope that, with the backing of a Prime Ministerial initiative, the discrepancies in the data will be viewed seriously and action taken. For example, in Britain, black households are one of the groups most likely to be in persistent poverty; black Caribbean students are three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than white students; and one in ten black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or people with mixed background were unemployed compared to one in 25 of white British people.

It is always hard to start conversations around these issues because people jump from the institutional to the personal and immediately think they have been accused of racism. Of course, the picture is more complex than that and seemingly equal behaviour can result in discriminatory practices and effects because we are NOT all the same. Culture, race, class does make a difference.

So, what can the HE sector do to begin to tackle some of these issues? Firstly, to achieve greater diversity in the recruitment of staff in HE, one major challenge lies in how we select our leaders and our use of the term 'merit'. This is a particularly pernicious term as it means different things to different people, yet it is too often used to justify the status quo or resist a change in culture. When you see a lack of diversity in leadership within an organisation, yet are told that appointments are "based on merit" - I ask - what does this say to me as a black person? It says that you are not good enough.

We also have to look at aspiration and the level people are being told they can aspire to. In the UK we celebrate the fact that we have some of the best universities in the world. But this summer, the Minister for HE, Sam Gyimah, described Oxford and Cambridge's failure to take in more students who are black or from disadvantaged backgrounds as "staggering", saying that it was rare for him to be a black student at Oxford 20 years ago – and it still continues to be rare. This is despite there being a 51% increase in the number of BAME students entering HE in the last 12 years and it's not just about Oxbridge.

What does this say to young aspiring BAME students who cannot see themselves in some of the UK's most prestigious universities, let alone as tomorrow's leaders? Is it right that we let a generation of talented young students think that it is all down to 'merit' and unfortunately they are not good enough? That they are somehow the problem. The issue here is whether our education system is enabling young people from all backgrounds to thrive. In my view, it is not - and we need to change that. Fast.

Creating an inclusive environment in HE requires a structured and integrated approach. At SOAS we are constantly looking at these issues driven by concerns from students, staff, our trustees and the senior team because we know we cannot be complacent. Despite robust policies, women and BAME staff are disproportionally less likely to progress through the ranks within the School.

We found that while staff valued SOAS as a good place to work, there was a lack of clear pathways and transparency in career development. Some staff described parts of the institution as being far too 'old school'. We learned that in order for us to help support career progression for all we had to do more to tackle issues such as support for part-time academic staff, ensuring that career support systems are fit for purpose through, for example, a regular audit of relevant staff benefits, training opportunities, flexible working arrangements and work-life balance.

Changing the culture extends to everything we do, including rethinking how we teach our students and our approach to pedagogy. It is not just about who teaches, but what is taught and how it is taught. I am proud of the way students and staff have engaged in the debate around decolonising the curriculum. We are listening to questions being raised such as 'Why is my curriculum white?' where students and staff are seeking a greater inclusion and diversity of non-European writers and scholars on our syllabuses. We are listening to questions raised from across the organisation.

Achieving greater diversity among staff in HE requires a change in culture in the UK – at a societal, sector wide, institutional and personal level. As leaders we must play our part by helping to create an environment which recognises and rewards talent – wherever it is found.

Do we need to be disruptive to be diverse?

By Sheila Gupta

I have enjoyed a career in the HE sector spanning 28 years working in seven very different universities from small specialised institutions like the Institute of Education, now part of UCL, to research-intensive universities including Edinburgh and Sussex. I feel deeply committed to the work that we do as universities, in terms of education, research, innovation and our wider contribution to the economy, society, industry, commerce, culture and the arts. For me, it is through this exceptional range of activity and public engagement that we are able to offer unique and invaluable opportunities to our students, our staff and society as a whole. Put simply, I believe that we are a source for good. But could we be better? What would it take to further improve our performance?

The business case for diversity is now well established and continues to be both compelling and globally significant. Research conducted by McKinsey in their 2015 report, *Why diversity matters*, which was updated in their recent 2018 case study, *Delivering through diversity,* provides detailed analysis that demonstrates how more diverse companies and organisations achieve better performance. The message is unambiguous: diverse leadership teams exhibit greater success in decision-making; attract and retain a more talented workforce; and achieve improved satisfaction amongst their staff and customers. Diversity in this context is understood more widely than just being about gender, race and ethnicity, but also applies to age, sexual orientation and qualities including possessing a global mind-set and displaying cultural fluency (McKinsey & Company, 2015). All of which are highly relevant to universities. Whilst I accept that the concept of the student as 'customer', remains contested by many in HE, it is incumbent on universities to ensure that our students enjoy a positive and fulfilling experience, if not as customers, then as members of a vibrant academic community.

For me, there is an important link between the discourse on diversity and the role of universities in modern society. My own view is that generally universities aspire to advance the frontiers of learning and knowledge through excellent research, education and innovation. In so doing, we have a responsibility to prepare our students to be highly effective members of society, equipped with skills, including social skills and not just proficiency in their chosen field, that enable them to contribute fully to building a better world by addressing aspirational goals such as those espoused in the United Nations Grand Challenges. These ambitions to enhance economic growth, improve social cohesion and deliver health and environmental benefits can be better achieved by helping to create a more inclusive society. But the 21st century world is highly complex and we require diversity across all levels of our workforce if we are to be able to genuinely fulfil this aspiration to understand the complexity of these challenges and then explore how to

respond to them. As institutions, if we are not inclusive and diverse ourselves, how can we begin to understand and respond to the complex needs of society? Universities need to embrace the diversity inclusion agenda with greater strategic intent if we are to realise our goals. I believe that the need to increase diversity in our universities needs to be addressed from Board level down through all levels of staff and, importantly, across our student body.

We also need to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our diverse student body in terms of the education and services that we offer. The attainment gap between BAME and white students is of deep concern. Equally important is the need to adopt a cohesive, inclusive and tailored approach to enhancing our student experience that encompasses the design and content of the curriculum; embraces the potential of digital technologies across our education, research and student services, allowing for more quality interactions between faculty and students, as well as delivering more specialised professional services.

Thus, the reasoning is simple, in order to address the considerable challenges presented by the complex world in which we live, and to do so at a local, national and global level, we need to have representation from across all these constituencies to identify sustainable and enduring solutions. Equally, we need to create institutional cultures that are truly inclusive in which every individual member feels welcomed, accepted and able to flourish, that is, to realise their potential fully, as they contribute to the overall success of the institution, and afterwards in their chosen career.

To date, progress to become diverse from the most senior levels of executive leadership down throughout our institutions, has been unacceptably slow. I believe that we need to be bold and introduce disruptive thinking in how we recruit and promote staff if we are to make any discernible impact on the profiles of our current leadership teams and our workforce more generally.

A good friend of mine who is active in the field of diversity, Simon Fanshawe, introduced me to new ideas that dispel conventional approaches by recruiting for difference. This bold new method is inspired by the work of Professor Iris Bohnet (2016), of the Harvard Kennedy School, renowned for her work on unconscious bias, and whose recent book, *What Works – Gender Equality by Design* advocates the need to completely redesign our processes for recruiting and promoting staff in order to remove bias. It is not just about training. Read in conjunction with the work of Caltech Professor Scott E Page (2007), whose book, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies,* which contends that the highest performing teams do not have to be made up of the highest performing individuals, certainly challenges conventional wisdom on how to improve diversity in the workplace. The message: recruit the best team, not a set of separate individuals who you then mould into a team. This approach has been shown to both improve diversity and the overall performance of the team.

By relating your overall goal of what you are trying to achieve to the skills and experience in your current team, you should then define the type of person or persons you are seeking to appoint who will bring the difference; who can introduce insights into the areas where the current team lacks expertise. For example, in relation to understanding the needs of different generations; LGBT+ staff; or different religious faiths; or displaying a global mind set. I am excited by the prospect of genuinely transforming how we attract, employ and promote our talent. I would use experts in the field of diversity in redesigning our approach to recruitment or promotion, in order to develop a new process that is robust and credible. But once established, I would expect such recruitment strategies to become business as usual across the university.

To conclude, there is now a growing and compelling body of research that demonstrates why we should make diversity a strategic priority if we wish to be high performing institutions that are not only successful in our academic endeavour, but which also offer a fantastic experience to our diverse community of students and staff as places to learn and work. And furthermore, to become significantly more diverse in our composition to better reflect the societies that we serve. To fulfil these aspirations, we need to enhance the diversity of our leadership teams and workforce by being more radical in how we recruit and promote our staff. This, in turn, will begin to influence the talent pipeline that will transform us into institutions equipped to better meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The importance of being honest and owning the problem

By Professor Michael Arthur

Universities should be bastions of excellence when it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion in their staff recruitment processes, but the evidence indicates that they are nowhere near as good as they need, or aspire, to be. Most universities are working hard to rectify this situation and we have seen much better performance in recent years, particularly with regard to gender balance, but even there, universities still have a long way to go.

Universities need to consider not only gender, but also race, sexual orientation and disability, and increasingly intersectional issues for individuals that have two or more of these characteristics because of the multiple disadvantages this brings. Whilst we have done well on shifting the dial on gender equality, we have done less well in other areas and we are not seeing much, if any, improvement at all with respect to racial inequality. Why has this occurred and what can we do about it?

First, I think we need to look back over the history of our institutions and acknowledge that there have been periods when we have contributed to promoting inequality quite blatantly. Even at UCL, which prides itself on being the first English university to admit women as students on the same basis as men, there was nearly a 50-year period (from 1826 to 1873) when we did not. All universities must acknowledge their contribution historically to the problems we are facing today.

When it comes to race, the picture across UK institutions is even more complex. Many have a long history of focussing on traditional Western and European curricula that have paid little, if any, attention to other cultures and their histories. Numbers of academic staff with a BAME background have generally been very low (often less than 10 %) and our institutions have been historically poor at joining up the dots on these issues.

If you are a student from a BAME background, universities can look and feel very 'white' and if you accept a place to study at one of them, you may find yourself in a situation where you will rarely, if ever, be taught by lecturers and professors like yourself. In these circumstances, the evidence is that over time, a small, but measurable attainment gap develops, and you become less likely to take up postgraduate study, particularly at doctoral level. The pipeline of BAME talent into an academic role is thus perturbed at an early stage.

At UCL, we hosted a panel discussion and open meeting entitled 'Why isn't my Professor black?' and a subsequent event called 'Why is my curriculum white?'. These were landmark events for us and the sector, during which it became very clear that BAME students and staff are constantly exposed to situations and signals that are tantamount to a subtle, but nevertheless personally disturbing, level of institutional racism. This is rarely deliberate or overt, but it is manifest in the daily lives of staff and students of colour and seems embedded in the current culture of our university system.

It is important in tackling all forms of discrimination to understand and acknowledge first of all that the problem exists in your organisation, that it will usually be multifactorial and complex, and that there is no quick fix. Tackling individual elements of these problems in isolation is unlikely to work, and progress is best achieved via a systematic, comprehensive and coordinated approach. It is critically important that such a change programme is owned and led by everybody in a leadership position in the institution, starting at the top. Such leaders have to be prepared to roll up their sleeves and get involved in some of the detail, and for sufficient time, to effect the cultural change that will be essential at all levels of the institution if the ultimate objective is to be achieved.

Significant progress has been made in gender equality through such an approach as encouraged by the Athena SWAN charter of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), now part of Advance HE. This accreditation programme focuses on recognition then continuous improvement and progression through bronze, silver and gold awards at both departmental/school and institutional level. It is both demanding and rewarding to achieve the higher levels of recognition in this scheme and underlying that level of performance is a lot of hard work by individuals dedicated to seeing equality, diversity, and inclusion improve in their part of the university, with women usually over-represented amongst those that commit their time and effort to such improvements. The advantages of leading on activities from both the top and at grass roots level has now gathered a momentum that is bringing about significant and visible changes for our students, our academic and professional support staff, and our senior leadership.

A similar programme has recently been developed by Advance HE to help promote greater racial equality, called the Race Equality Charter Mark. Although still in its infancy (compared to Athena SWAN) we have found this programme to be very helpful in guiding us forward in taking a comprehensive approach. It has spawned an action plan that is comprehensive and that begins to address both the breadth and depth of the problem. We are moving forward with projects on the attainment of our BAME students, on mentoring and sponsorship schemes for our current BAME staff, on leadership training in these issues for Deans and other senior academics, and on facilitating and supporting the recruitment of BAME staff. We are under no illusion that this will be a very tough problem to crack, but we are committed as an institution to making progress in this critical area.

Professional search agencies also have a fundamental role to play in supporting the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda of universities. At UCL, we insist that this is prominent in the culture of such agencies, that they can speak with passion about this set of issues, and that they are committed to this wholeheartedly in their candidate search strategies. With respect to gender, we look for a balanced approach to the candidates contacted, to our long-lists and shortlists and ultimately to our appointees. With respect to race we expect the list of candidates contacted to include individuals from BAME backgrounds and we are working towards the approach recently announced by the BBC of no senior roles going forward to interview without at least one shortlisted BAME candidate. This may prove more difficult in academia in the short term, but we intend to try putting such a policy into effect.

Universities are all about their people and they have an insatiable appetite for recruiting and retaining staff and students with talent and creativity. Their future is dependent on getting the very best to come to them from all groups in society and from all walks of life. Universities thrive in both education and research when individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to learn, and to combine talents to tackle complex problems together. Such an environment is highly creative. Equality, diversity and inclusion isn't just about being fair and just in our universities. It is the very life blood of the institution and its purpose. For the future of our world we simply cannot afford to get it wrong.

...And the problem of lack of diversity in the student population persists...

By The Rt. Hon. Baroness Tessa Blackstone

In recent years there has been some progress in the proportion of young people from low income backgrounds who go to university. For those of us who believe that in a socially just society students in HE should be drawn from all social groups, without huge disparities in their representation in our universities, this is indeed good news. Moreover, it shows that those who wring their hands and say the statistics on low participation in HE from low socio-economic groups cannot be mitigated need to think again.

In 2004, 14% of 18 year olds from low-income backgrounds went to university. Recent figures show the proportion has risen to 20%. The disparities are still high, since whilst one in five young people from poor neighbourhoods go to university, three in five from the most advantaged do so.

What changes are needed to reduce these stubborn disparities further? In answering this question, I want to focus on what universities can do to tackle this challenge. Of course, what happens in our schools is of great importance but it ill behoves the HE sector to absolve itself of any responsibility by passing it all back to schools, blaming them for the unequal representation of university students from different socio-economic groups. In the most difficult neighbourhoods, schools face immense challenges, including drug abuse, street violence, gang warfare, extreme poverty, dysfunctional families, poor housing conditions and indifference or even hostility to learning and lack of respect for teachers. Many face up to these challenges and get some remarkable results, but examination grades are unlikely to match those of schools operating in a much more favourable environment.

Universities need to do more than recognise this, they need also to take action to help overcome the educational consequences of schooling in difficult environments. The most obvious action is to require lower grades to enter a degree course from students who went to schools where these huge challenges exist. My question is whatever happened to contextual admissions? They have been widely debated yet implemented on a very small scale. In fact, universities have become increasingly stratified according to the grades they require, on a descending scale from the A*, A, A or above offers through to A, B, B offers down to the D,E,E's. This leads to social as well as academic selection since pupils in independent schools are likely to get the best grades on average and those in state schools with parents in professional managerial occupations will on average get better grades than the children of manual workers.

This has the consequence of making our universities much less diverse than they might be. We are creating a social elite in the most selective universities and leaving the socially disadvantaged including many from ethnic minorities in much less selective institutions. This really need not happen. Some Ivy League universities in the USA have adopted a policy of promoting diversity amongst their students by actively seeking entrants from a wide range of backgrounds. To achieve this, they offer places to students which do not just rely on higher grade point averages but which search out potential, rejecting prior academic achievement as the main criterion in offering places. Evaluations of the outcomes show most of these entrants, in spite of lower entry grades, do remarkably well. The universities argue that their more diverse student population enriches the experience of all students including those from the most highly privileged groups by expanding their horizons and introducing them to people from social backgrounds they have never rubbed shoulders with before. They recognise that an international reputation based on research is compatible with having a diverse student population reflective of the wider society.

My hope, therefore, is to see more comprehensive universities with more socially and academically mixed populations. Only if this happens will we tackle the lack of social mobility in our society and provide properly for those who aspire to high achievements but face seemingly invincible barriers. Without a more proactive role by the Office for Students and by the Government too, it is unlikely that the current approach to student admissions will change except at the margins. There needs to be a radical approach to incentivising universities financially to adopt contextual admissions. These incentives should also be used to support students selected in this way once they are admitted and then throughout their studies. There is also increasing evidence that on graduation the most privileged students get the easiest access to high status and highly paid employment. Universities need to take more responsibility for securing the best possible destinations in employment or further study for the one in five from poor backgrounds I mentioned at the beginning. Most of these students cannot rely on their families to help them. Without guidance and help they end up in inappropriately low-level work which does not make good use of their skills and knowledge and fail to build on them later. In a knowledge economy we can ill afford such waste. In a socially just society we need to address this problem.

About the Authors

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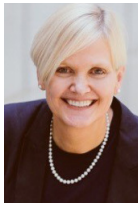
Professor Gill Valentine is Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sheffield. Gill works closely with the President and Vice-Chancellor, acting as his Deputy and undertaking a wide range of portfolio roles in the University, including oversight of strategic planning, international engagement. Gill has a keen interest in equality and diversity, chairing the University's ED&IC Committee, and in 2017 she won the Excellence in Diversity Award for Diversity Champion for the Education Sector. She has also developed the University's BAME strategy which will be launched in the current academic year.

Professor Nora Colton



Professor Nora Ann Colton is Director of Education at UCL Institute of Ophthalmology and Moorfields Eye Hospital where she oversees the development of a joint education strategy aimed at bringing these two organisations together to offer world leading education in vision and eye health. Nora was previously the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) at the University of East London where she oversaw all academic affairs. She is a Principal Fellow of the HEA. She serves as a nonexecutive and governor on a number of boards. Before coming to the UK, she was a Professor and Chair of the Economics Department at Drew University in New Jersey, USA. She received her D.Phil. from St. Antony's College, Oxford University, in economics with a specialisation in the Middle East. She is fluent in Arabic. She has been a visiting Professor at American University in Beirut and the University of Electronic Science and Technology in Chengdu, China.

Baroness Valerie Amos

Baroness Amos joined as Director of SOAS University of London in September 2015. From 2010, she served as Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the UN. She served in a number of roles in the public sector including in local government and as Chief Executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Valerie was an adviser to the Mandela Government on leadership, change, management and strategy issues between 1994 and 1998. She was appointed a Labour Life Peer in 1997 and became a member of the Government in 1998. She was a Foreign Office Minister, Secretary of State for International Development, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord President of the Council. She also served as UK High Commissioner to Australia before joining the UN. In June 2016, she was made a Companion of Honour in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Sheila Gupta

Sheila Gupta joined the University of Sussex as the Director of Human Resources in January 2017. With over 28 years' experience within HR and Recruitment in the Higher Education Sector, Sheila has shaped and implemented innovative people strategies for various institutions from small specialist HEIs like the Institute of Education to the Universities of Edinburgh and most recently Sussex. She has been invited to speak at Conferences in the UK, Europe and the US, on topics relating to good governance, talent management, advancing gender equality and embedding equality and diversity into leadership development in higher education. She also served as an Independent Member of the Education Honours Committee for six years.

Professor Michael Arthur

President & Provost of UCL, Professor Michael Arthur is internationally renowned for his contribution to education and to medical research. Having been Dean of Medicine at Southampton University, he became Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds in 2004. At the time of his appointment, he was the first Vice-Chancellor of a Russell Group university to have attended a comprehensive school. He was appointed President and Provost of UCL in September 2013. He is the former Chair of the Advisory Group for National Specialised Services (NHS), the Worldwide Universities Network and the Russell Group of Universities. He is a former Member of the Medical Research Council and a former US/UK Fulbright Commissioner.

The Rt. Hon. Baroness Blackstone

Baroness Blackstone has enjoyed a distinguished career in education, politics and public life having been a lecturer at the London School of Economics, a member of the Central Policy Review Staff at the Cabinet Office, a Professor at the Institute of Education, Deputy Education Officer of the Inner London Education Authority, Master of Birkbeck College, University of London and Vice Chancellor of the University of Greenwich. She was Minister of State for Education and Employment from 1997 until 2001 and Minister for the Arts from 2001 until 2003. She has been the Chair of the General Advisory Council of the BBC, the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Royal Institute of British Architects Trust, and of the Board of Great Ormond Street Hospital and is currently Chair of the British Library Board, the Franco-British Council, the Orbit Group of housing associations and the Trustees of the British Lung Foundation.

Dr Wendy Piatt

Dr Wendy Piatt works on a range of projects primarily in academia and health sectors including UCL East – a new campus on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and Oriel – a new centre for eye health and research in St Pancras – in addition to serving as an advisor to Wild Search. She was CEO and Director General of the Russell Group until 2017, having established the organisation as a company limited by guarantee in 2007. She was a senior civil servant in Whitehall at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and the Department for Education in the 2000s and also served as an advisor to the Secretary of State for Business and Skills from 2009-10.

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