

24 March 2023

To the Advance HE Race Equality Charter team,

As the Heads of School for all areas of science education and research at University of Sussex, including the Dean of the Brighton and Sussex Medical School, we are delighted to offer our strongest support for this application for a Race Equality Charter award. We can confirm that the information presented in the application relating to our areas (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of our Schools.

Our experience of engaging with and committing to the REC process has been not only energising and stimulating, but also deeply thought-provoking and challenging. Over recent years, the REC process has challenged us to ask demanding questions of our communities, our practices, our values, and our approaches – and that includes our own roles as institutional leaders. Each of our Schools has focused attention on distinctive topics and actions, given that the specific issues relating to each of the primary REC areas (academic staff, professional and support staff, student progression and awarding, diversity of the curriculum) vary in nuanced ways across our subject areas. However, common across all the Sciences is a strong commitment to our institutional *Antiracist Sussex* pledge, and this is a prominent focus of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee in each of our Schools.

In the School of Life Sciences, a comprehensive race equity action plan was developed in collaboration with BAME students, with concrete actions to address identified issues ranging from student experience to curriculum reform, from research and laboratory experience to recruitment and retention practices. With progress in implementing many of these actions, we have seen our BAME awarding gaps fall very substantially between 2018/19 and 2020/21, with the UK White:BAME access ratio also reducing over those three years. A key priority now is connecting race equity activity among the current students and staff in the School (e.g., dedicated mentoring support and teaching content) to new programmes in the wider community, including ongoing careers support for BAME alumni and widening participation work on BAME student leadership with local sixth-form students.

The pattern of progress in reducing awarding gaps has been observed across other Science Schools too. In the School of Engineering and informatics, for example, the non-UK BAME awarding gap dropped very substantially in that same three-year period. However, some fluctuations were observed in UK Asian and UK Black awarding gaps in that period (though they remain within our institutional targets), showing us that ongoing work is required to address deep issues. In line with that, our School has established a staff and student charter with guiding principles whereby diversity is highly prominent, incorporating actions such as classroom and extracurricular discussions of this area.

In Brighton and Sussex Medical School, the Equality, Diversity, and Staff Development Committee was established to focus on delivering an inclusive culture, and has hosted an annual conference since 2021 (with approx. 300 delegates at the inaugural event) focused on 'anti-racist practice in medical education', leading the way in reflective practice to improve the inclusivity of work in medical schools. Ongoing work includes student-centred work to decolonise the curriculum, and our colleagues are taking forward specific curriculum advancements in terms of teaching on inequalities and inclusion in healthcare, coupled with a programme of support for allyship and training for both students and staff.

In the School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, too, EDI leads have also explored potential strategies for decolonising the curriculum although this is at an early stage. However, significant steps have been taken to improve the diversity of the student population in physics and mathematics, with the access ratio of UK White:BAME following steadily from 2018/19 to 2020/21. This occurs alongside a significant BAME representation in the academic staff at senior as well as junior levels – though not yet reflected in professional and support staff – with nearly 20% of Grade 9 and Grade 10 staff identifying as BAME.

In the School of Psychology, our highly active EDI Committee oversees a comprehensive programme of work focused on developing an Inclusive Culture. Drawing upon expertise both within and beyond the School, we have led a regular data collection and analysis exercise, the Inclusive Culture Survey, which addresses a wide range of issues concerning the socio-relational and psychological foundations of wellbeing and belonging among our staff and students. We also have created a senior Deputy Director of Teaching and Learning role focused on strategic work to address awarding gaps, and to identify and remove barriers to attainment, and have also launched a programme of work on decolonising the programme in concert with the development of a major interdisciplinary, strategic research focus on 'Changing Societies'. We have also identified proactive race equity support for Early Career Researchers as a priority, and most recently have established a BAME PhD scholarship scheme with full funding for a programme of doctoral research in a specialist area selected from across the full spectrum of psychology.

In all of our Schools, we recognise that there is much that remains to be done in addressing core issues of diversity in our academic and professional services workforce, career progression, curriculum development, and student experience. However, EDI leads have prominent roles at a senior level in our Schools, and building on the actions and progress described above remains a personal and strategic priority for each of us in our roles as Head of School. We are actively committed to pursuing an anti-racist strategy across the Sciences that is consonant with our institutional values of kindness, integrity, inclusion, courage, and collaboration.

Rather than reiterating these values in a performative function, we regard these as crucial foundations for the success of our Schools, in terms of concrete actions that empower our staff and students as agents of change with respect to both education and research. We are confident that the institutional action plan to which we are committing as part of this Race Equality Charter application will enable us to add to the challenging yet crucial journey upon which we have already embarked. On behalf of our respective School communities, we would like to thank you for considering our application, and we look forward with enthusiasm to your feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Robin Banerjee
Head of School of Psychology

Professor Malcolm Dean
Dean of Brighton and Sussex Medical School

Professor Sarah Guthrie
Head of School of Life Sciences

Professor Vanessa Styles
Head of School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences

Professor Ian Wakeman
Head of School of Engineering and Informatics