

University Executive Group (UEG) Response: Open Letter on Racial Justice

Background

On Tuesday 7th September representatives of the authors of the racial justice open letter met with representatives of the UEG. The meeting was held on Teams and minutes are now available [link].

There were six demands in the open letter that covered:

- (1) Funding for the independent University of Sussex Students Union, Race Equity Advocate scheme
- (2) Police on campus and that police presence on campus will not be normalised,
- (3) Recruitment constraints and promotions, and an anti-racist approach to staff recruitment and promotion processes.
- (4) Funding of the Sussex Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff Network.
- (5) Invest greater in community-led programmes for racial justice, such as Sussex Anti-Racism Action (SARA)
- (6) Commit to anti-racism training for all members of the UEG

At the meeting the following Next Steps were agreed:

- Share minutes with all present and, once agreed, make them publicly available
- UEG to publish a response to the Open Letter, in light of this meeting
- Work together collaboratively to make progress on the issues raised, with added clarity that future collaboration will be contingent on a commitment from UEG to make concrete changes in light of the open letter and this meeting
- KH to undertake a comprehensive handover with his permanent replacement to ensure that work continues in this area after his interim appointment ends
- GP to arrange a follow-on meeting with USSU on student antiracist priorities
- AC (for University and College Union) and KH (for UEG) to follow up on collaborative approach to race equity training across the University
- Students and staff at the meeting take up KH's personal invitation to further dialogue with him on the issues at stake

UEG Response

The following actions are a consequence of the open letter meeting, and in response to the open letter. The UEG is responding directly to these in good faith and with a commitment to encourage dialogue and progress with our university community.

1. **Work together collaboratively** to make progress on the issues raised, with added clarity that future collaboration will be contingent on a commitment from UEG to make concrete changes considering the open letter and this meeting
 - The UEG agrees to continue its process of change and transformation as signified in its appointment of an interim and now Permanent Pro Vice Chancellor Culture, Equality and Inclusion. This is a crucial area of leadership for the UEG regarding its equalities and Inclusive Sussex agenda. The Pro Vice Chancellor Culture, Equality and Inclusion continues to engage the Sussex community and invites dialogue with those wishing to contribute to the university's efforts to improve race equality in academic and professional domains.
 - In Adam Tickell's (Vice Chancellor) Black Lives Matter announcement he stated that *it is our responsibility as a university to be clear that there can be no neutral ground towards racist practices wherever they are found, including in our own institution*. Following on from this we propose to shortly commit the university to

becoming 'Antiracist Sussex' while outlining the key commitments of such a pledge.

- Such a pledge includes university leaders sharing their work on race equality, revising and aiming to debias recruitment and promotions processes, and the sharing of key milestones from the Race Equality Action plan,
 - In addition, the PVC CEI is currently working to explore development opportunities for the UEG's strategic approach to and understanding of race, racism, and antiracism. It includes working to develop their own racial literacy, encourage reflexivity, critical thought, and strategic vision on racial equality as tied to an Inclusive Sussex:
 - We are working diligently to make our equalities, and in this case race equality work more coherent, transparent and proactive.
- **Police on Campus** - The Head of Estates and Facilities, Robert Hutton, has stated that following the escalation of security measures due to Covid regulations over lockdown and some of the unfortunate and regrettable incidents that transpired, security on campus will return to its regular levels. There will be no planned or normalised police presence on campus.
- In addition, the Head of Estates and Facilities is encouraged by the prospect of the Director of Student Experience, facilitating a regular dialogue between the police and the Student Union to ensure that the safeguarding of students off campus and any related concerns, are shared and mutually agreed.
- The **Network for BAME Staff** is supported by and should be working in collaboration with the EDI lead for Race. Funding has always been available for the BAME Staff network Lead though there has been no expression of interest to chair the network over the previous year. Currently, the new Equality Charter Manager is working to raise awareness of the network and to include BAME staff in its development from October 2021. There is a budget available for related activities that is allocated to all the staff network chairs. The Interim PVC CEI has proposed an increase in the time available for this role.
- **Recruitment constraints and promotions** – It is appreciated that, for many staff, the University's prudence in relation to its finances will have led to a perception that there is a recruitment "freeze." There is not an all-encompassing blanket ban on recruitment. Recruitment continues where there is a clear and present case for it. A large number of staff were recruited last year and will be recruited this year. The Size and Shape agenda is an example of how the University is taking a prudent approach to managing institutional finances at a time of great uncertainty. In addition, as proposed by the Race Equality Charter's subgroup (Staff), the University will review and improve its recruitment approaches and processes, using an anti-racist lens and working collaboratively with the BAME staff network and the EDI lead for race equity.
2. PVC CEI (Interim) to undertake a **comprehensive handover** with his permanent replacement to ensure that work continues in this area after his interim appointment.
- Interim PVC CEI Kevin Hylton has commenced a handover of priorities and actions for David Ruebain our Permanent PVC CEI. Such priorities are embedded in an action planning and communications overview that includes structural, governance, policy and engagement initiatives.

3. **Student Experience to arrange a follow-on meeting with USSU on student antiracist priorities**
 - DPVC Student Experience, Graeme Pedlingham, with the PVC for Education and Students agree to follow up their meeting with the CEO USSU and USSU colleagues to outline a mutual agenda for the Race Equity Advocates and Student Connectors programmes to operate more sympathetically and effectively. There seems to be an appetite to explore different approaches to this work while being open to new creative ways forward to ensure the advocacy work of the race equity advocates is not lost.
4. AC (for UCU) and KH (for UEG) to follow up on **collaborative approach to race equity training** across the University.
 - Alice Corble (UCU) met with Kevin Hylton and Sharon Neal (Associate Director HR Culture and Inclusion) to discuss current plans for **UEG race equality training**. The meeting was productive as AC presented ideas from the unions' race equality group established in 2020. Following this meeting four prospective agencies are being considered to deliver race equality and antiracism training for the UEG.
 - These plans also have implications for the wider university leadership team and community.
5. Students and staff at the meeting take up the **PVC CEI's personal invitation to further dialogue** with him on the issues at stake. This invitation is extended to include Sussex Anti-Racism Action whose manifesto will be shared with the UEG as part of its antiracism development work.