



UK Research
and Innovation

Response to open letter on racial justice in higher education

Dear Dr Keston Perry, Dr Richard Itaman, Dr Nicola Rollock and Angelique Golding

Thank you for your open letter dated 2 July 2020. I sincerely apologise that it has taken me such a long time to reply.

I very much appreciate you taking the time to write to research funders including UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) about your concerns and welcome your recommendations on tackling racism and racial injustice in higher education. I am particularly impressed by your inclusion of colleagues from right across the higher education student and staff community.

The sector has engaged with us on these issues and your letter includes many helpful and constructive ideas in line with those supplied by other members of the sector who have contacted us. We have been responding to many of these in our various public channels but would welcome a chance to meet with the co-signatories to your letter. We remain committed to listening to all.

We also welcome your challenge to the sector, including research funders such as UKRI, to work with urgency and energy to eliminate racism within higher education. We agree with you that progress has been far too slow, and more must be done by all parts of the system. We recognise that eradicating racism and the systemic inequalities that exist in our society

and within the research and innovation system cannot simply be solved by writing a statement. We want to steward a research and innovation system that values the contributions of all and recognises that a diversity of ideas, opinions, knowledge and experiences enrich our work, support creativity and effective problem solving and strengthen our knowledge economy.

It is imperative to foster a research and innovation culture that brings together a diversity of talent in an environment where difference is welcomed and valued, and disagreement triggers engaged and inclusive discussion. We must create a research and innovation system where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and has the opportunity to contribute and to flourish. We have recently published [examples of our programme of work to increase participation and address under-representation](#). We are committed to working with our partners to make this a reality.

You have raised some specific points, which I pick up on below.

Culture and understanding

You propose that committees, boards and advisory groups set up to address racism be led by those with first-hand experience. We agree that people with lived experience are central to addressing these issues.

To improve our own diversity and culture within UKRI we have taken steps to increase diversity in our own recruitment pipelines, ensuring that we bring diverse voices into our own governance and accountability structures.

In addition, we recognise the importance of close and deep engagement with our community and stakeholders, including the wider public, beyond participation in committees. For example, we have worked in partnership with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic researchers in the scoping and design of recent funding opportunities, including those to understand the disproportionate social, cultural and economic effects of COVID in Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities, and the celebration of classical composers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

As we increase participation, depth and reach across the sector, we are cognisant of the need to do so in a way that does not cause adverse effects or over-burden any one group to address the problem. We are working to pilot changes in our engagement approaches and are developing plans for race equality summits, to be held across the UK in partnership with regional hosts. We expect to publish more information about these events in early 2021 and will share this with you and others who have engaged directly with us on issues of racial inequalities.

We will also continue to engage in ongoing conversations with UK and international partners as we recognise that we need to work with others to drive change, at scale, and to share good practice, innovative solutions and novel ideas.

Transparency

We welcome your recommendation that funding bodies make public the number of applicants for awards and grants by ethnic group.

We recently published [harmonised diversity data](#) for all seven UKRI disciplinary research councils covering the period from 2014-15 to 2018-19. This publication also included new, previously unpublished data on award values and has been made available in a range of formats to facilitate access and analysis. We added to this information in December 2020 by providing [detailed analysis of our funding portfolio across and within ethnic groups](#). We continue to analyse our data and provide the sector with more information about our funding portfolio. Next will be releases that contain intersectional and call level analysis.

High quality data are essential to understanding inequalities in the research and innovation system. We are continuously reviewing and improving transparency within our funding processes and systems, monitoring and analysing who has applied for funding, and who has received it. We continue to develop our data capabilities to understand whom we fund and how we fund.

However, we want to acknowledge that, contrary to our normal practice, it is with regret that EDI data were not collected at the point of application for our recent rapid response call to address the COVID-19 pandemic, which we implemented using a greatly simplified application process in order to facilitate rapid deployment of funds. The data on awardees has been collected retrospectively for COVID-19 calls, and we have been collecting EDI data for all rapid response COVID applications since 31 July, in line with our standard practice. We are reviewing and considering the lessons learned to inform our ways of working and improving our responses to the challenges facing our system in recovering and building back from the impact of COVID-19.

You recommended that funders introduce specific criteria for institutions applying for grants concerning how they are promoting racial justice. This is something that our current processes and policies support. For example, within our funding terms and conditions, we include the expectation that the recipient institution should ensure that EDI is considered and supported in line with the Equality Act 2010. Positive action – taking steps to promote positive attitudes and practices that enhance race equality – is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and can be used to promote racial justice. In addition, our funding terms and conditions can be used in different ways to support EDI. For example, we included a specific requirement in our recent COVID-19 costed extension policy to ensure research organisations both maintain the balance of their 2020/21 grant funding by protected characteristics, and mitigate for disadvantages incurred through the pandemic to protected groups.

Our overall approach is to reshape the system so that it genuinely supports, promotes, and recognises the importance of diversity – whether that takes the form of diverse teams, ideas, projects, places or people. As part of this commitment, we have been reviewing our policies. As we undertake [work to streamline and simplify our processes](#), embedding good practice in equality, diversity and inclusion remains critical to supporting our commitments to address inequalities, challenges and issues, and drive transparency and accountability. Providing accessible data and information

on our decision-making facilitates analysis and insight for our sector. It also ensures we are subject to constructive external scrutiny which will support us and the wider sector as we seek to drive transformative change.

More generally, we are reviewing our peer review processes and ensuring that we embed best practice with respect to EDI. We have already recently committed to introducing a standardised narrative CV format for our grant applications that allows applicants to evidence their contributions in a wider range of ways, supporting and valuing diverse contributions.

Working with our workforce

Your letter recommends that funding bodies scrutinise the ethnic profile of their own work force and be explicit in how their employment practice advances racial justice. As an employer of 7,500 people we are committed to promoting racial justice in our organisation and are creating frameworks to review our own employment structures, processes and systems.

Following our Black Lives Matter statement in June 2020, we have held a series of events internally over the summer to reflect on what our Black Lives Matter statement means for our staff, for our UKRI community, the work we do and how we do it. These workshops were led by external facilitators and have been attended by around 1,000 employees. We are committed to continuing this programme of meaningful conversations with staff about anti-racism and supporting staff-led activities to further this agenda.

We published our [2019 Gender Pay Gap report](#) in June 2020, which commits us to conducting a published equal pay audit that includes ethnicity. We will conduct more detailed analysis of the data during 2021, which will include analyses addressed at understanding ethnicity and intersectional pay gaps. We are taking action to attract a broad range of people into roles across UKRI. For example, we are working with specialist recruitment agencies, inviting interest from Black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants and tracking conversion rates. We are developing a set of monetary and non-monetary benefits provided to our employees in

recognition of the skills, capabilities and experience they bring and the contributions they make to the organisation.

We have also revised our HR EDI plan, committing to additional actions such as commissioning a project with input from leading academics and behavioural economists to understand better the pioneering thinking for and among employers; strengthening and building staff inclusion networks; reviewing and developing the EDI training provision available. This work builds on and shares the good practice that exists across our councils.

Catalysing change

As you have noted, action is urgently needed. Our priority is to change the conversation about equality, diversity and inclusion to emphasise the transformative value of diversity in the research and innovation system. We need to ensure that everything we do recognises and supports a diversity of people who bring different approaches and experiences to the research and innovation system. Excellence comes in many forms and it is essential to building the creative community needed to fuel our collective knowledge economy.

UKRI will continue to partner with others to catalyse change and co-create a thriving, inclusive research and innovation system. Our goal remains collaboratively to transform the sector. We welcome the opportunity to work with you and others in this endeavour.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser

Chief Executive of UK Research and Innovation