

Black Lives Matter: Email sent to Senior Leaders – Thursday 4 June 2020

Dear all,

I am writing to you to ensure you are aware, and in a position to proactively respond, to the distressing experiences that are currently affecting our black students and staff.

As you will be aware, the killing of George Floyd has brought into stark focus the systemic racism that is still experienced by black people in many parts of the world. The University put out a [statement](#) alongside a statement from the Students' Union, making its anti-racism stance clear.

In response to this, and the wider experience that our students are facing, a number of our student groups have also published an open letter, which I have attached here. The letter raises important issues, and highlights that whilst, as you will be aware, we are doing a lot to address race inequality which directly impacts our students and our staff, it is not having sufficient impact, and our students are not aware of the work that is taking place.

The Vice Chancellor and I have already agreed to meet with staff and students to listen to and hear concerns that are being raised, and we will be compiling a University-led response to the letter.

However, I have said to you before that my job, and the job of all who lead in EDI, is not to do EDI for everyone else within the University, but to help everyone within the University embed EDI in all that they do. This is a time that critically highlights the importance of us all proactively engaging with the important issues that are being raised and felt by our colleagues and our students.

Therefore, as I know many of you are already doing, if you are approached by colleagues or students asking them about our response to the letter, please take the time to listen to them, to talk about the things that you are doing locally, and to think with your leadership colleagues about how you could do more. The EDI team and Race Equality Charter group are very happy to help you reflect on thoughts and ideas, provide guidance around discussions, and recommend materials that you may use to help you and others work through what can be very challenging and difficult issues.

I hope you will permit me to share a few things which help me, and remind me of my own privileged perspective when I tackle these conversations. Firstly, as a white woman, I recognise that I will never experience the feelings that those who are BME experience. I have shared my own personal explanation of white privilege with you before, but to remind you: I've been in many meetings when I've felt that I have not been listened to or taken seriously. And after those meetings I have reflected on the issue, and perhaps put it down to my gender, my age, or my disciplinary fit within the wider context.

I have also reflected on the fact that maybe I was inexperienced, or said something in a hurtful or clumsy way. But I have never left a meeting and thought that someone treated me the way that they did because of the colour of my skin. Secondly, I have a thirteen-year-old son. He is just becoming independent, and has on occasion been out with his friends alone. In preparing him for this, me and my husband have spoken to him about his personal

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safety, crossing the road, holding on to his mobile phone, being careful with his cash, and knowing how to get home if he needs to.

We have never sat him down and talked to him about how to respond if he is approached by a member of the police, to talk him through how he should behave to avoid being taken into custody. Every black male student, and every parent of a black male man that I have spoken to about this matter has told me that they have had this conversation with their own thirteen-year-old son.

Sadly, racism is prevalent, within the UK, and within our own University, and we should not be scared of admitting it. It does not mean we are all personally racist, but it does mean that are not sufficiently proactively anti-racist. Most, but not all of you, who receive this email, will not be from a BME background. It is even more important that we engage in this debate, and do not ask our BME colleagues to take the burden of this discussion. We are extremely fortunate at the University to have a proactive and engaged BME staff network, and I am honoured to co-chair the Race Equality Charter with Stacy Johnson. But we must all take on a responsibility to lead our work in anti-racism.

I will end with just highlighting some materials that I have personally found helpful over the past few days. Firstly, [this is a video](#) which talks about how to be an ally.

I also found [this resource](#). The SU [Stronger Together](#) videos are an excellent resource that portray the student voice. And finally, [this book by Reni Eddo-Lodge](#), a necessarily painful but important read.

Please do feel free to get in touch with your local EDI Directors or [Coordinators](#) if you would like to talk through any issues that are raised to you. I will also share our response to the open letter with you all when it has been completed.

Thank you all. I appreciate you taking the time to prioritise this important matter in a period which I know is extremely busy for you all.

Take care



Sarah Sharples

Pro-Vice Chancellor for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and People