

## OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

### Central Executive Committee (CEC)

22 – 24 January 2021

### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group Update

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The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **receive an update from the EDI Working Group**
- ii) **approve the request to change the Working Group to a Committee.**

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The CEC is asked to receive an update on the Working Group's progress but also approve the Group's request to form a Committee. This is because the Group is gaining extra responsibilities and foresee this continuing. An EDI Committee is also a more appropriate Group to oversee the delivery of Strategy project 14 (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan).

## 2. Introduction/Background

### 2.1

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group was set up early autumn with the objective of working through the pledges the Association made in our Black Lives Matter response statement. The Group's first meeting was in October 2020. The terms of reference for the Group is attached (Appendix 1).

Since its creation the Group used the Black Lives Matter statement pledges to create an action plan, designed to be a working document that can be added to as the Group began new projects (Appendix 2). This naturally means that at present the Action Plan is heavily centred around race but as the Group pick up new projects and the membership expands we expect there to be projects relating to lots of different protected characteristics.

## 3. Action Plan Highlights

### 3.1

The action plan in its entirety is attached but here are updates on the projects that the Group have been concentrating on.

3.2 Establishing an internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee with staff, Central Executive Committee and Trustee membership to help us be more proactive in this work

This forms part of the rationale behind our request to form a Committee. The Working Group was created so there was no delay in getting a start on this agenda, but the first pledge we made back in the summer was to create a formal EDI Committee.

In order to carry the necessary weight behind future recommendations and decisions it is our opinion that an EDI Committee must be formed with delegated powers or at least collective commitment that any proposals from said Committee are followed. Although the Committee will have a wider membership we would expect that smaller working or 'task and finish' groups would be created to work on different areas of the action plan and report back to the wider Committee.

3.3 Producing an equalities action plan and regularly reporting on its progress

The Group used the Black Lives Matter pledges as the starting point for an action plan (appendix 2). The intention is that this forms a fluid working document where new projects are added as often as requires.

As there is now an EDI Strategic project we have now begun to report to the Strategic Project Assurance Group and we will continue to produce an information paper like this for every CEC meeting. We still need to formally discuss how to report updates to the Board of Trustees but for now I will share this paper with them directly.

3.4 'Making 'Unconscious Bias' training mandatory for all Student Representatives, Staff Members and Trustees' and 'Seeking training on racial inequalities as part of inductions for Staff and Central Executive Committee'

We decided to group these two pledges together and are working on them simultaneously. At the time of creating the first pledge we were unaware of the concerns and criticisms of 'unconscious bias' training and so are doing some more research around a suitable replacement. In the meantime, every staff and CEC member along with any volunteers who are issued with @open accounts are asked to complete 'Equality Essentials' training so the vast majority of 'student representatives' will be doing some Equality training of some sort but we continue to explore whether this training is sufficient.

Two members of the Group are also working on a piece of training that can be incorporated into all volunteer inductions.

3.5 Running a consultation for Black students (also holding separate consultations for Asian and other Minority Ethnic students) to understand whether there are any barriers to their engagement with us and how we can better support and represent them

As part of Black History Month activities Patrice Belton ran a number of focus groups with Black students which provided us with some rich feedback. Our

Volunteering team also ran a session with students through Black History Month that gave them some quick wins for improvements, including a focus on skills gained whilst volunteering. The Community team ran a session with Black students over Student Voice Week where barriers to engagement were explored and again some good take-aways were obtained that the team are contemplating.

Between the above and data that we have picked up over the last few years we thought we had enough information to ask our Research team to sift through and evaluate for us, returning with some recommendations. This is scheduled to take place later this year.

### 3.6 Embedding equality considerations in all our processes

With the help of Sue Maccabe, the Group have been looking at Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) with a view to bring them in for mandatory completion at the planning stage for all events and projects. These should also be completed when creating policies and applied retrospectively for any existing policies.

We are using the Jan/Feb Freshers to pilot the EIA's and are still trying to earmark a policy to do the same exercise. Once the EIA's have been piloted any tweaks or edits can be made and then these will be rolled out along with completion guidance and staff training that may be necessary.

### 3.7 Reviewing our website and other online communication channels to identify how we can better represent Black voices

This project was timely as the OU had brought in external consultants to review their online communication. The consultancy has concluded and the OU have now shared with us the 'Guidance for reaching and engaging Black and Asian audiences' that has been produced as a result. We are yet to consider it in its entirety but hope that there are some improvements we can implement.

### 3.8 Creating a resource bank on our website that includes support services for Black students but also offers guidance for allies or those seeking more understanding around the issues

The Support Team have taken this challenge and have set a target to complete this by the end of February. They have gathered a number of different online resources but the challenge lies in presenting them in an accessible but visually appealing way given our website's limitations.

## 4. **Committee Membership**

- 4.1 Along with representation from each of the student facing teams (Support, Community, Volunteering and Comms) and continuing with the current co-chairing, we suggest also asking for a representative from each support Group, a Central Committee Representative, Board of Trustees member and representative from the OU.

We are aware that there are already a lot of commitments CEC members have and are keen to take advice on prescribing which roles should automatically become a member of the Committee or whether to keep it open to appointment from the CEC as a Group. We'd be keen to hear which you prefer and how many you would like to see on the Committee.

That being said, we would like to stress the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and ask that whatever the CEC's decision around their representation on the Committee we must stress that your commitment on these issues is paramount to its success.

## **5. Implementation Plan**

### **5.1**

Should the CEC grant the Group's request to transition to a Committee the proposed new members will be contacted to invite them to join. A new terms of reference will then be created to align more closely with Strategy project 14. The Committee will then provide an information paper to each CEC to update on progress.

## **6. Conclusion/Recommendation/for approval**

### **6.1**

The CEC are asked to receive the Group's update and approve the request to transition to a Committee. Should the request be granted the CEC is also asked for thoughts on the expanding membership of the Committee.

**Name: Patrice Belton and Verity Robinson**

**Title: Co-Chairs of the EDI Working Group (VP EDI and Head of Student Support)**