

# NUS Race Equity Impact Report 2017-2018



## Foreword 2017-2018

In July 2017, we published our Race Equity Plan, with the full backing of the NUS UK Board. This bold and ambitious five-year programme will tackle racial inequalities and begin the process of addressing institutional racism within the organisation.

The Impact Report has looked back at the progress made so far - as well as some of the lessons we've learned. As we head into the 2018-19 academic year, our work on race equity will continue to be an organisational priority.

The Race Equity plan is ambitious and unlike many we have seen before. It has a dual function that seeks to dismantle institutional racism while supporting the development of individuals. Whilst focusing on the individuals at NUS is imperative, this must go hand in hand with eradicating institutional racism and the decisions, rights and opportunities that underpin it. Our commitment to learning as we go is hugely important, and we'll continue building on this learning as we head into the future.

We're grateful to everyone who's been involved in the development and implementation of the Plan, and to all our colleagues who've engaged so positively with the need for change. We've seen them trying to become better allies, embracing discomfort, and challenging themselves and each other on their individual and collective journeys.

Finally, our biggest thanks go to the Black<sup>[1]</sup>, Muslim and Jewish volunteers, officers and staff who first recounted their lived experiences to the Runnymede Trust in the hope of creating a better future. Although we know this will ultimately be positive, the race equity work has often been hard, requiring significant commitment and additional emotional resilience.

Thank you for taking the time to read the Report; please feel free to share it with friends and colleagues.

**Simon Blake, NUS CEO**

**Shakira Martin, NUS President**

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<sup>1</sup>NUS uses 'Black' as an inclusive term to refer to people of African, Arab, Asian, Caribbean, South and Latin American heritage.

# Introduction

## The past 18 months have been a critical and defining time for race equity within the NUS.

Although we're only at the start of our journey, we've already achieved a huge amount, and we now have the foundations in place to start addressing racial disparities within the organisation. Unsurprisingly, the process of addressing racism has not been without its challenges: these are covered in the Report.

In January 2017, our race equity work began by acknowledging there was a lack of trust within the organisation, and centred on addressing the impact of the Runnymede Review. From this, we created the Race Equity Plan to Tackle Institutional Racism - a five-year programme of work underpinned by three principles: impact, quality and rebuilding trust. Naturally, being led by these values meant we took time to create the Plan, as we wanted to carry out research, consult with relevant stakeholders and refer to data we already had on racial disparities within the organisation. This approach received positive feedback from stakeholders who felt their views had been valued and considered. It also ensured we didn't adopt a deficit model - which would simply locate the problem with Black, Muslim or Jewish people - and acknowledged the need to tackle racism on an institutional level.

The Report highlights the progress we've made, our key outputs and our achievements over the past 18 months. However, it doesn't capture the entirety of the work that's been undertaken. And, because the programme of work began before the Race Equity Plan launched last July, some of the data covers work done between January and June 2017. This has been included for two reasons: to show baseline data for some areas of work, and to highlight the impact of work done before the Race Equity Plan began.

Although our work focuses on addressing institutional racism, the issue is more importantly about people. Therefore, much of the first few months was spent focusing on our colleagues - in particular, those who have been impacted by racism in the organisation: our Black, Muslim and Jewish colleagues.

Lastly, NUS' race equity work is grounded in the view that racism is deeply embedded across society, including within institutions. Creating lasting change requires long term commitment. Although we have started addressing the Runnymede Review's findings - and achieved some positive outcomes in the past 18 months - we recognise this is only the start of the journey; we have a long way to go before this becomes a racially just organisation.

# Background

In February 2016, following a complaint by our then Black Students' Officer, NUS commissioned an independent review to investigate the allegation it was institutionally racist.

The Runnymede Trust carried out this review and, in December 2016, shared its findings and recommendations in a report which concluded: *"There remains no doubt in our minds that NUS as an employer has seriously failed to support Black staff, officers and volunteers and has considerable work to do to address the poor understanding and engagement of race and racism amongst white staff and associates."*

NUS welcomes both the findings and recommendations, without reservation.

In January 2017, NUS started to address the findings of the review. And, in July 2017, it launched a five-year Race Equity Plan to Tackle Institutional Racism<sup>2</sup>. This has nine main areas of focus:

1. Dealing with incidents of racism
2. Wellbeing
3. Leadership and decision making
4. Race equity knowledge
5. Tackling Islamophobia and anti-Semitism
6. Diversifying NUS
7. Developing and career progression of Black staff
8. Creating healthy NUS spaces
9. Enabling the success of this Plan

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<sup>2</sup>NUS's race equity work uses the definitions of Institutional Racism set out by the Institute of Race Relations and the Lawrence Inquiry report: Institutional racism is that which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and culture of public or private institutions – reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn (Institute of Race Relations, undated). This can result in the: collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin Macpherson (1999).

The Plan purposely focuses on *equity*, not *equality*. Race *equality* in the workplace implies everyone, regardless of race, has equal access to opportunities and is treated equally under policies and practices. However, it doesn't acknowledge that racism operates on an institutional, systemic level - leading to inequality in employees' experiences.

Therefore, to ensure there is equality, the systems of power must be addressed - through a range of avenues such as the redistribution of resource, providing support and by changing workplace practices. This is why our work is about equity and not equality. Race *equity* is about addressing the barriers to *equality* - barriers that have been created by all forms of racism.

At the heart of the Plan are the experiences of Black, Muslim and Jewish staff, officers and volunteers. However, it also acknowledges these aren't homogenous groups: they have a diversity of experiences and opinions.

### Aim

The aim of NUS' five-year race equity programme is to tackle institutional racism and become a racially just organisation. Our goal is to become a place where Black, Muslim and Jewish staff, officers and volunteers are recruited, retained and able to thrive within the organisation.

# Race Equity Workstreams

Our race equity programme has nine main areas of focus. Here, we take a look at what we're trying to achieve and what's been done so far.



# 1. Dealing with incidents of racism

## What are our goals?

- ▶ All NUS staff, officers and volunteers have a clear understanding of behavioural expectations around race equity.
- ▶ Anyone in the organisation is able to identify and take action to deal with racism, not just those directly affected.
- ▶ There are clear channels where people can flag and report racism.
- ▶ A set of robust, consistent policies and procedures to deal with racism.
- ▶ Knowledgeable and confident people providing a consistent and supportive first-line response to racism.
- ▶ Knowledgeable and confident policy/process owners, investigators and decision makers.
- ▶ A culture where there is a consistently zero-tolerance approach to racism.
- ▶ A high level of confidence and trust in NUS' approach to dealing with racism.

## What have we done this year?

- ▶ Introduced an anonymous and confidential whistleblowing channel to reduce the number of racist incidents and issues that go unreported. This can be done online or via a phone helpline run by an external company – Expolink. So far, we've received and dealt with five reports.
- ▶ A comprehensive project to improve the processes for dealing with racist incidents is in progress. This includes reviewing relevant policies, mapping and reviewing current reporting and complaints channels, and interviewing key stakeholders. This will lead to a revision of current policies and procedures, ensuring a person-centred approach is taken when dealing with these types of incidents.
- ▶ Developed a factsheet for all managers - *Dealing With Racist Incidents Briefing* - which included a focus on racial micro-aggressions. Accompanying this was a briefing session for the Executive and Leadership teams, focusing on responding to racist incidents and identifying their roles and responsibilities within the process.
- ▶ NEC members received a briefing where they learned how to report incidents more formally, and were informed about the range of channels available to provide NUS with feedback on poor practices and behaviours, including issues around race equity and racism.

## 2. Wellbeing

### What are our goals?

- ▶ All staff, officers and volunteers are fully aware of the impact of racist incidents and racial micro-aggressions on health, wellbeing and employment.
- ▶ Reduced isolation experienced by Black, Muslim and Jewish staff, officers and volunteers.
- ▶ Reduced levels of racism-related stress experienced by Black, Muslim and Jewish staff, officers and volunteers.
- ▶ A protective and proactive culture of dealing with racist incidents, prioritising the victim.

### What have we done this year?

- ▶ A specialist counselling support service has been set up to support Black, Muslim and Jewish staff and officers experiencing racism within NUS and/or the wider society. So far, 16 colleagues have used the service, receiving a total of 190 hours of counselling by Nafsiyat.
- ▶ 18 out of 20 Full Time Officers have an agreed personal wellbeing and safety plan, which includes dealing with hate crime, the cumulative effects of racism, social media trolling, verbal and physical abuse, and dealing with negative press/media.
- ▶ The employee assistance service provided by HSF health plan has been extended to ensure all NUS volunteers - including all board and committee members - have wellbeing support available to them.
- ▶ The Black Staff Group continues to provide a safe space for Black staff to explore their experiences, while also informing the work being done by NUS. Some of the Group's work has focused on self-care and collective care.



### 3. Leadership and decision making

#### What are our goals?

- ▶ High levels of trust in the NUS Senior Leadership Team among Black, Muslim and Jewish staff.
- ▶ Black, Muslim and Jewish staff are increasingly engaged with NUS and more likely to recommend it as a good place to work.
- ▶ Visible leadership on race equity - by the board, Full Time Officer team and Senior Leadership Team - based on confidence and comfort in dealing with race equity issues, including racism.
- ▶ Decisions and organisational change within NUS are communicated clearly and show consideration of race equity.
- ▶ Clear, two-way communication channels ensure that the experiences of those affected by racism and race equity issues within NUS are reported to senior leaders and decision makers.

#### What have we done this year?

- ▶ We've appointed a Race Equity Director who will provide strategic oversight on this programme of work and ensure race equity is embedded across the organisation.
- ▶ Race Equity objectives for all leadership and management roles have been agreed for implementation.
- ▶ There are now regular meetings between the CEO, People and Talent Team, the Trade Union and the Chairs of the Black Staff Group, with the aim of focusing on the engagement and experiences of Black staff and addressing any issues raised.
- ▶ In November 2017, we appointed the Pecan Partnership to undertake organisational culture development work on four priority areas from the Race Equity Plan: a vision for race equity, wellbeing, building trust, and creating healthier political spaces.
- ▶ To date the Pecan Partnership has:
  - Completed desk-based research using existing data about NUS culture: previous culture research from 2016, the Runnymede Review, the Race Equity Plan, employee engagement surveys and consultation data.
  - Interviewed approximately 15 staff and officers.
  - Conducted approximately eight focus groups with staff, officers and managers.
  - Run a short staff survey.
  - Delivered workshops across the organisation, sharing the outcome of the research and exploring how staff can influence a positive workplace culture.
  - Created a vision for race equity to help everyone understand what this looks like within our organisation.

## 4. Race equity knowledge

### What are our goals?

- ▶ Improved awareness and confidence of understanding racism and race equity, by NUS staff, officers and volunteers.
- ▶ Improved awareness of what allyship<sup>3</sup> looks like in practice.
- ▶ Line managers are better supported, and better able to deal with and talk about issues relating to race and racism.

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<sup>3</sup>Allyship is not an identity—it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Allyship is not self-defined—our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with (The Anti-Oppression Network).

### What have we done this year?

- ▶ From February 2017 to June 2018, 256 staff, officers and board members received mandatory Creating Equity at Work training. This was developed to ensure everyone has a basic understanding of liberation, equity, diversity and inclusion, and how this links to the workplace. 25 sessions were delivered in total and overall satisfaction scores ranged from 82-98%.
- ▶ Results from the Creating Equity at Work training sessions include:
  - 96% of participants agreed all topics were relevant to them.
  - 100% fully retained all the information needed to successfully perform the skills they learned.
  - 100% fully retained the importance of creating an inclusive and equitable environment for colleagues and the organisation.
  - 100% fully retained information on how power, privilege and oppression manifest in everyday life.
  - 82% fully retained how to use information from liberation groups to help support colleagues.
  - *“As a direct result of this training, I will challenge my own behaviours.”*
  - *“I will work to become a better ally at all times and challenge unconscious bias.”*
- ▶ 21 Race Equity Training sessions were delivered by an external consultant to all staff and officers. In total, 211 staff, officers and volunteers were trained to counter the deficit of trust outlined in the Runnymede Review and provide a safe space for both white and Black staff. These sessions were initially delivered to white and Black staff

separately. Results from sessions delivered between October 2017 and February 2018 include:

- 98% of participants now recognise how to confront their personal feelings in order to overcome inaction on racial justice.
  - 92% can articulate the systematic nature of racism.
  - 98% recognise the emotional impact of racism.
  - 90% can describe how racism (including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism) manifests in the workplace.
  - 100% recognise their personal role and responsibility in fighting racism.
  - 86% know what action they could take in response to a variety of circumstances.
  - 91% can identify methods they can use to increase their understanding of racism and of others around them.
  - 97% fully intend to use the skills they learned on the course.
  - 91% have increased their confidence in talking about issues relating to race and racism.
  - 94% have a better understanding of what overt and covert racism looks like.
  - 96% have better awareness of and confidence around race equity.
  - 96% have increased their confidence in and understanding of how to flag and report racism.
  - 87% have increased their knowledge and confidence in dealing with incidents of racism.
  - 98% have an increased understanding of racism and how it can manifest both in the workplace and also in our online and face-to-face spaces.
  - 87% have an increased understanding of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, including how these forms of racism can manifest in the workplace and in our online and face-to-face spaces.
- Qualitative data from the Race Equity Training also illustrates the impact of the sessions:
- *"We were really encouraged to reflect on the uncomfortableness I felt when talking about race and the fear of saying something wrong and being seen as a bad person. I think I gained an acceptance that it's fine to feel uncomfortable when talking about race because that means I need to learn more. And I have accepted the fact that I will make mistakes but as long as you apologise to anyone you might have hurt and just really reflect on what you did wrong and then move on - rather than holding a nervousness and guilt inside - you can be much better at challenging racism when you see it and being open to reflecting on and improving your own behaviour."*
  - *"As white colleagues, we realised the importance of educating ourselves."*
  - *"I learnt about micro-aggressions and how they impact others even though the intent is good."*
- Leadership on Race Equity training has been delivered to all the NUS Leadership Team, in order to empower them to practice visible leadership on tackling racism and promoting race equity. We've yet to evaluate this training.

## 5. Tackling Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

### What are our goals?

- ▶ Staff, officers and volunteers understand what Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are, and how these forms of racism can manifest in the workplace as well as in online and face-to-face spaces.
- ▶ NUS has a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.
- ▶ All Muslim and Jewish staff, officers, volunteers and event delegates feel safe in our workplaces and spaces.

### What have we done this year?

- ▶ Started to develop formal relationships with the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS).
- ▶ Amended all diversity monitoring processes to ensure that 'Jewish' is a category for both ethnicity and religion.
- ▶ Ensured NUS events and meetings do not clash with major religious events and festivals, including Muslim and Jewish festivals or days of remembrance.
- ▶ On Holocaust Memorial Day, a range of resources - such as *How to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day* - were launched by Izzy Lenga, NUS Vice President (Welfare) and Shakira Martin, NUS President. This formed part of #OurLivingMemory campaign, a joint campaign run by NUS, UJS and HET (Holocaust Educational Trust).
- ▶ During Islamophobia Awareness Month, NUS Women's Officer, Hareem Ghani and NUS Black Students' Officer, Ilyas Nagdee launched a series of events to help raise awareness about the day-to-day realities experienced by British Muslim students, including gendered Islamophobia. This included a Muslim Women in Leadership event and the launch of NUS' Muslim Students Survey.

## 6. Diversifying NUS

### What are our goals?

- ▶ NUS becomes a racially diverse organisation, with Black people represented at every level of leadership, including in our main governance decision-making bodies.

### What we've done this year?

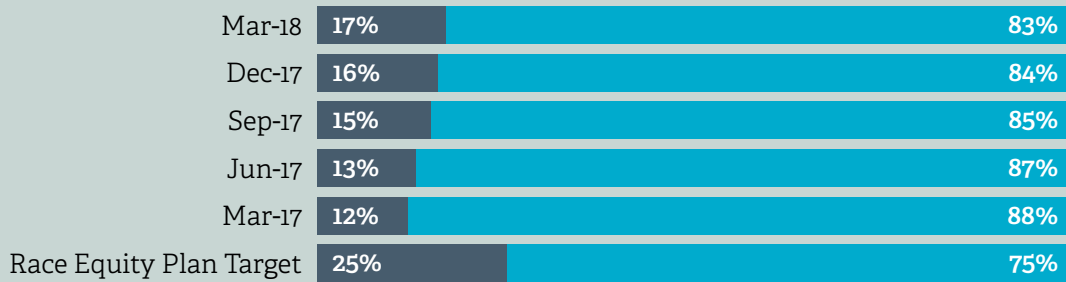
- ▶ NUS staff turnover, not including officers, fluctuates between 205-220 people. To increase the diversity of our workforce we've made changes and improvements to our recruitment processes and practices. This has led to an increase in the ethnic diversity of job applicants and staff. Actions we've taken include:
  - Developing an Employer Brand toolkit for the student movement, including NUS. It looks at how to integrate brand messaging - such as the importance of diversity - into job descriptions, job adverts, and internal and external communications.
  - Launching [su.careers](#): a job site for the student movement, including NUS. It's raised awareness of the professional roles, careers, development and progression opportunities available in the student movement, as well as the culture, values and work-life balance.
  - Procuring an online recruitment application tracking system. This system makes sure mandatory diversity monitoring information is captured during all applications. It also automates the anonymisation of applications, as well as diversity data reporting and analysis reports at each stage of the recruitment process by departments and recruiting managers.

- Using BAME Recruitment - a recruitment agency partner that specialises in attracting and headhunting Black talent - to increase the number of Black candidates applying for leadership roles.
  - Providing training and guidance on equity in the recruitment process, including how to mitigate unconscious bias.
  - Training for staff involved in shortlisting and selection panels.
  - A new approach to NUS job adverts, which includes informing applicants why diversity is important to the organisation.
  - Using a broader range of advertising media.
  - Using positive action to actively encourage Black applicants.
  - Amending NUS' recruitment policy so that all vacancies are advertised internally and externally.
- We're extremely pleased about the positive impact these initiatives have had on increasing the ethnic diversity of staff – as can be seen in the data on the following page. To date, we've been focusing on internal staff data; next year we'll start collecting and analysing volunteer and officer diversity data.
- As can be seen in the table on page 15, from January 2017 to March 2018, we haven't only attracted more Black applicants, we've also offered roles to more Black candidates. It's a positive start, but we're conscious that there's more we need to do, especially when it comes to improving the number of Black applicants that get shortlisted.
- The proportion of Black colleagues in our workforce, including senior staff, also saw a steady increase over a 12-month period, with the exception of managerial roles. We'll continue monitoring this data to see whether our work on diversifying NUS and developing Black talent has an impact on the proportion of Black managers within the organisation. We'll also make sure any future data analysis includes a focus on intersectionality and data on different ethnic groups, allowing us to identify any areas of bias or patterns of under-representation.

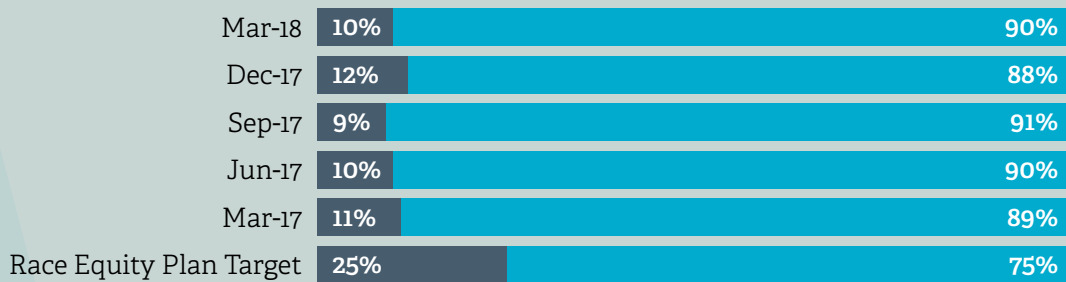
	Total Applications	% of Overall Applications Received from Black applicants	% of Shortlisted Black Candidates	% of Successful Black Candidates
Jan – Mar 2018	342	43%	18%	43%
Oct – Dec 2017	178	38%	16%	42%
July – Sept 2017	319	19%	17%	7%
April – June 2017	187	6%	21%	7%

### Black Colleagues as % of Workforce

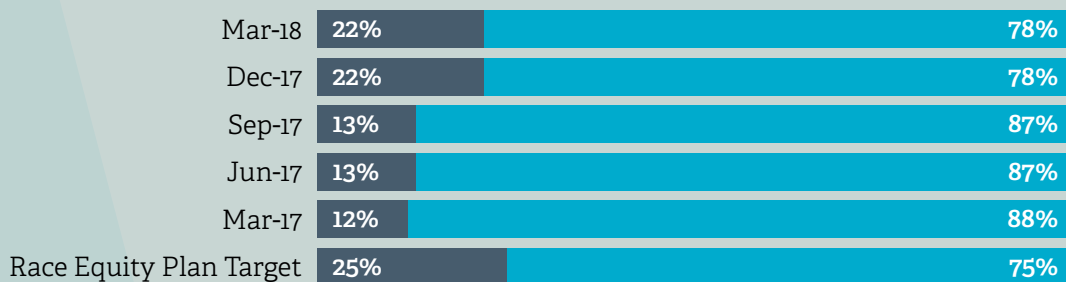
#### All Colleagues



#### Managers



#### Senior Leaders



Black ■  
White ■

## 7. Developing and career progression of Black staff

### What are our goals?

- ▶ Black staff feel encouraged and supported in developing and progressing their careers.
- ▶ Black staff are aware of the options available to help them develop and progress in their careers.
- ▶ There is visible career progression for Black staff.

### What have we done this year?

- ▶ From April 2017 to March 2018, 16% of all internal moves and promotions were made by Black staff. This is the first year this has been monitored, so we'll be able to provide comparative data in the future.
- ▶ 17 Black staff and officers each received three hours of career coaching from an external coach. Although the sessions haven't yet been evaluated, anecdotal evidence suggests they've had an extremely positive impact, giving staff the opportunity to think about their options when it comes to developing and progressing their careers.



## 8. Creating healthy NUS Spaces

### What are our goals?

- ▶ Healthier forms of debate and discussion at political events and in the workplace.
- ▶ Healthier social media exchanges.
- ▶ A zero-tolerance approach to racism and hate crime, both online and offline.
- ▶ Event delegates are advocates of students getting involved in student politics.

### What have we done this year?

- ▶ Members of the National Executive Council (NEC) were given a session on culture, behaviour and healthy politics. They were also briefed on the Institutional Racism Review and the Race Equity Plan.
- ▶ We ran an online campaign and promoted advice about how to conduct yourself on social media, and the importance of creating healthier political spaces at all of our democratic conferences over the past 18 months. As a result, we've seen some improvement in social media behaviour and have had fewer complaints about social media posts.
- ▶ As part of our work on Dealing with Racist Incidents, we're currently creating an officer disciplinary policy, a volunteer disciplinary policy and a new social media policy. These will be in place later this year.

## 9. Enabling the success of the Race Equity Plan

### What are our goals?

- ▶ An NUS-wide vision for race equity.
- ▶ A sense of ownership of this vision, and a clear race equity action plan for NUS staff and officers.
- ▶ Clear accountability at the top of NUS in terms of achieving our race equity vision and Plan.
- ▶ A clear operational plan to achieve race equity, including allocating action owners and accountability for delivery.
- ▶ Dedicated resources and budget to help us deliver our race equity vision and plan.
- ▶ A defined process to measure the impact of our Race Equity Plan.
- ▶ Regular reports and communications on the progress of our Race Equity Plan.
- ▶ Other organisations wanting to learn from our successes and failures.

### What have we done this year?

- ▶ Agreed an NUS UK Board and an executive level sponsor for race equity who will be accountable for achieving our Race Equity Plan.
- ▶ Established a Steering Group, chaired by the NUS National President, to oversee delivery of the work. The group feeds into the HR Sub Committee and NUS UK Board for governance and decision making.
- ▶ Provided race equity progress updates to the Executive Team, HR Sub Committee and NUS UK Board.
- ▶ Created a Race Equity and Inclusion Team, which included recruiting a Race Equity and Inclusion Project Officer and Race Equity Director in 2018.
- ▶ Recruited organisational change experts to support this cultural change, to ensure the impact of our race equity work is sustainable. Part of this process has seen them carry out consultations in order to develop a race equity vision.
- ▶ Officers with manifestos that include work on race, racism and race equity have met up so they can share their agendas for the forthcoming year. This included identifying areas of joined up work and opportunities for joined up communications about things we're doing to improve the experiences of Black, Muslim and Jewish staff, officers and students.
- ▶ Allocated Race Equity Plan actions to key teams across the organisation.

# Stakeholder feedback

A core part of our race equity work is making sure we consult with our Black, Muslim and Jewish colleagues, keep them informed about our progress, and provide them with opportunities to give feedback.

As part of this process, key stakeholders were asked to share which initiatives they've been most pleased with over the past 18 months, and what they'd like us to focus and/or improve on next year.

Areas of work stakeholders have been most pleased with over the past year:

- ▶ A specialist counselling service available to all Black, Muslim and Jewish staff.
- ▶ Work that's been done to diversify the workforce and increase Black representation: *"It provides a clear indication that we are practising what we preach and that the work we are doing is effective."*
- ▶ Coaching sessions provided for Black staff.
- ▶ Creating Equity at Work and Race Equity Training sessions.

Areas stakeholders would like our race equity work to focus or improve on in the forthcoming year:

- ▶ A focus on developing Black talent within the organisation, with a particular goal of increasing the numbers of Black women in management positions, mentoring opportunities and professional training: *"I'd like to see continued efforts from the organisation in retaining and supporting Black talent, particularly helping Black female talent to move upwards."*
- ▶ Addressing the attrition rates of Black women staff.
- ▶ Improving how racist incidents are dealt with and raising awareness of the various channels people can use to report incidents: *"I think it is important to make sure all Black staff know how they can access the anonymous reporting channels, where to find the briefings with more information and the newly revised policies."*
- ▶ Identifying patterns by disaggregating Black staff data into ethnic groups.
- ▶ Visible leadership focused on addressing all forms of racism by senior leaders in the organisation.
- ▶ Ensuring all future training sessions provide participants with electronic copies of training slides and resources.

# Challenges and lessons learnt



Creating the necessary changes based on the Runnymede Review findings and addressing institutional racism is not a small task. It requires deep commitment, a programme of work that challenges the status quo, and behaviour change - and all this takes time. And, as there isn't a blueprint for this type of work in organisations, we've had to spearhead ways of working, projects and initiatives. It's been a challenging process, but we've learned a great deal, and we'll ensure our learnings inform the priorities we set out for our work in Year Two of the Race Equity Plan.

In the Race Equity Plan we committed to sharing our learnings, successes and failures. We did this in the hope our approach and experiences could educate and inspire others to rethink traditional approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion. Here are some of the key challenges and lessons we've learned over the past eighteen months:

- ▶ Participating in an investigation into institutional racism and receiving the findings impacted many colleagues' morale, workplace satisfaction and, at times, employee relationships. As a result, we intentionally took our time to be sensitive to this, while also ensuring there was regular dialogue with stakeholders.
- ▶ If an organisation embarks on a journey to address institutional racism, it will require colleagues within the organisation - particularly white colleagues - to feel and embrace discomfort. Race and racism are topics people continue to struggle to talk about; space must be provided for them to not only feel the discomfort but also learn how to move beyond it.
- ▶ Creating a Race Equity and Inclusion Team was one of our first actions in addressing the findings of the Runnymede Report, and we've ensured we have adequate resource to implement the Race Equity Plan - including prioritising race equity activity within our learning and development budget. In addition, a significant amount of staff time has been dedicated to the development and delivery of the work; time has also been allocated for all staff to attend race equity training and briefing sessions and the Black Staff Group.
- ▶ Ensuring our work is informed or led by race equity experts has been crucial in creating impact and developing trust in key stakeholders. All our internal and external experts have been Black, so it has been important to work out how we safeguard their wellbeing, and also consider the emotional labour they would experience when challenging institutional practices and people - while potentially also experiencing the very issues they are trying to address.

- ▶ Work to address the Review findings started immediately. However, because issues of inequity and marginalisation continued to exist within the organisation, the race equity delivery team was often more reactive than proactive. Naturally, this affected the pace of the work and added to the lack of trust among key stakeholders.
- ▶ We spent a significant amount of time recruiting the key roles needed to deliver the Race Equity Plan. There's a limited pool of people in the UK who understand race equity in the same way our organisation is beginning to, so it took time to get the right people in place. This had a negative impact on the level of work undertaken in key areas of the Race Equity Plan, especially in relation to challenging Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.
- ▶ Ensuring strong relationships with both internal and external stakeholders is crucial to success. This requires a clear plan of engagement, which is based on regular communication, an agreed point of contact and ongoing consultation. Moving forward, we need to ensure consistent, robust relationships with both internal and external stakeholders, particularly with Muslim and Jewish stakeholders and our Full Time Officers and volunteers.
- ▶ Our primary focus has been on delivering the work needed to achieve race equity. However, something that required equal attention was our internal communication about this work - to make sure colleagues engaged with the Plan. Unfortunately, at times we prioritised delivering the work over delivering this communication, which meant colleagues weren't being kept up to date on the progress - leading to a lack of transparency. This also had an impact on trust and led some colleagues to question whether the work is still an organisational priority.
- ▶ Providing colleagues with an opportunity to develop their understanding of race equity through training sessions, briefings and all-colleague updates has created a shared common language across the organisation. This enables colleagues to enter conversations on inclusive practice with a mutual understanding of issues such as racism, micro-aggressions, white fragility<sup>4</sup> and privilege.
- ▶ In any workplace, the organisational culture will have an impact on issues of equity. This is particularly true in NUS, where our working culture has compounded issues of race equity - hence why our work on organisational change is crucial to the success of our race equity work. Delivering this work on culture and race equity has really helped us to engage colleagues in the

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<sup>4</sup>White fragility is a response to real conversations about race, which can manifest as defensiveness, anger, avoidance, guilt, silence and feelings of being attacked.

topic of race equity, and helped them consider where they are on their personal journey of understanding and allyship.

- ▶ Due to our staff turnover rate (approximately 30% per year, not including officers), it's a challenge to make sure all employees have the required level of knowledge on race equity, and feel prepared to enter an organisation that proactively talks about and confronts racism. We also need to be particularly mindful of the experiences of Black, Muslim and Jewish colleagues joining NUS, and consider the support they may need in order to fully participate in the organisation.
- ▶ Challenging institutional racism requires everyone in the organisation to commit to being on this learning journey: it requires a shift in working practices, and means power and privilege must be challenged. For many colleagues, engaging with the topic led to discomfort, white fragility and fear - sometimes leading to inaction, and even perpetuating the very issues we were trying to tackle.
- ▶ External, independent stakeholders provide scrutiny and expertise, which are crucial to the success of this programme. External, independent trainers and culture change experts have helped us build trust and engagement in this work. Moving forward, we're looking to include external experts in our HR Subcommittee and Race Equity Steering Group as well.
- ▶ When undertaking a race equity programme of work, a key priority is to ensure leaders are equipped to drive the agenda forward proactively. This should include providing leaders with clear guidance on racially equitable behaviours and practice. Without this, there's a danger of inaction and of race equity becoming over-intellectualised. Our leaders went through their race equity learning journey at the same time as staff, and fast-tracking this group's learning may have been a better way to improve colleagues' experiences of equity in the organisation sooner.
- ▶ Although stakeholders provide an organisation with invaluable insight and feedback, asking for this should be done with sensitivity - and in a way that minimises the fatigue of experiencing racism and then having to educate people about it. For example, colleagues should be provided with a range of ways in which they can get involved in this work, such as helping co-design projects.
- ▶ Allyship is a mobilising concept in challenging racism: it allows colleagues to not only acknowledge their own privilege and understand how they may contribute to race inequity, but also provides a way in which colleagues can be active participants in challenging racism. This is a concept we intend to continue to use and build on within our work.

# What's happening in Year Two of the Race Equity Plan?

Next year, we'll be delivering some exciting projects that build on the work outlined in this report. The areas we'll be focusing on are:

- ▶ Embedding race equity learning and translating it into active allyship.
- ▶ Continuing to diversify NUS and develop our Black talent.
- ▶ Improving ways of dealing with racist incidents.
- ▶ Raising awareness of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and improving the experiences of Jewish and Muslim colleagues.
- ▶ Creating healthier student politics.



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This report will be available online in Welsh [www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk) | [www.nusconnect.org.uk](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk)

