

Race Equality Charter Review

Final report

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Foreword

The work to drive out racism in all its forms from our sector is imperative and incumbent on all of us, especially those in leadership positions; though we all have it within our gift to contribute to positive change. It is intolerable that students or staff in our sector are victims of racism or discrimination, deliberate or unconscious, on account of their race and ethnicity. We must do everything in our power – and it is in our collective power – to drive this out and create inclusive communities throughout higher education and research institutes. It is, therefore, in this context that I warmly welcome this report by Douglas Oloyede consultants to inform our planned review of the Race Equality Charter (REC).

These periodic reviews are built into the Charter to ensure that it remains relevant and effective for its users. This report, which explores sector experiences of the processes and early impact of the Charter, follows an independent review of REC submissions undertaken by Dr Nicola Rollock. She identified the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful submissions. Together, these works provide vital evidence, ensuring that the future development of the REC is sector-informed and evidence-based. We will continue to engage with the sector at every stage of our development work.

At the same time that this report was being written, Universities UK launched its publication, [‘Tackling racial harassment in higher education’](#) and Advance HE was proud to be part of the team that developed the themes and recommendations of that report. Among other things, the report highlighted the importance of a ‘whole institution response’ to tackle racism effectively. I believe the REC provides the outstanding framework for such an approach. It is therefore vital that we keep enhancing the REC so that the sector has the best means at its disposal to drive out racism and discrimination, and that is why the pages that follow are so important.

We look forward to working with the sector throughout the development of the REC and I invite and encourage you to join us in this work.

Alison Johns
Chief Executive
Advance HE

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the review

Racial inequalities in higher education

To set the scene for this review, we outline below key race equality issues in relation to students and staff in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that highlight the need for the Race Equality Charter (REC) and its continual improvement.

Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME)¹ student participation in higher education (HE) has increased over the last twenty years, yet the uneven representation of BAME students across different types of institutions remains a concern, with 25% of BAME students studying at 30 post-1992 universities (Tatlow 2015) and low BAME representation at elite universities such as Oxbridge (Reay 2018). However, it is differences in degree awarding levels between white and BAME students that have received the most attention of late. The Office for Students (OfS) have set HEIs a specific target to “eliminate the unexplained gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between white students and black students by 2024–25, and to eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030–31” (OfS 2018). This brings into sharp focus the need for the sector to identify effective methods to address the degree awarding gap, which remains at 13.2% (Advance HE 2019a), a decrease over the past five years from 15.6% in 2015/16 (ECU 2015) of just 2.4 percentage points. The gap is particularly stark between white and Black students, with the gap being 24.6% for Black (other) students, 23.9% for Black Africans, and 21.7% for Black Caribbeans. How readily able HEIs will be to take up the challenge is open to question. Research by Stephenson et al (2019) for the OfS on interventions targeted at BAME students found that “targeted interventions in relation to retention and success are few and those related to progression almost non-existent.” In a joint report aimed at closing the degree awarding gap, Universities UK and the NUS (2019) suggest that institutions will need to have strong leadership if they are to achieve the racially diverse and inclusive environments needed to address the inequalities that underpin the gap. Key to this will be developing a culture that addresses the unacceptable levels of racial harassment currently experienced by BAME students (EHRC 2019).

1 While recognising the problems with this term, this report uses the term Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) in line with Advance HE’s approach: “Advance HE is focused on advancing equality and eliminating discrimination and as a consequence regularly refers to the barriers and discrimination faced by minority ethnic groups. For our data and research to be relevant and useful, we adopt BAME as a commonly used term to ensure consistency with other public bodies and to benchmark against their data. However, we are aware of its limitations and try wherever possible to put information in context or disaggregate the data where relevant”.

Racial harassment is also a common experience among BAME HE staff (Ibid). Indeed, bullying and harassment predominate in the experience of Black female Professors as they struggle to establish their careers (Rollock 2019). A long line of research documents the negative experiences of BAME staff within HE, who consistently experience barriers to promotion, exclusion from decision-making, poor management, racial and cultural insensitivity, in addition to bullying and harassment (Leathwood et al 2009; Pilkington 2013; Bhopal 2014; Bhopal, Brown and Jackson 2015a; UCU 2012; 2016; Ishaq and Hussain 2019). Whilst progress has been made in the representation of BAME staff at the very highest contract levels (heads of institutions), with an increase in BAME representation from 0.8% in 2016/17 to 3.1% in 2017/18, BAME staff are still underrepresented at senior levels and overrepresented in lower levels (Advance HE 2019a).

There is still a long way to go to improve the experience and outcomes for BAME staff in institutions and, whilst much has been written about these experiences, there is far less research on what can be done to address these issues. A report that stands out in this regard is Bhopal, Brown and Jackson (2015b), which explored the issue of academic flight and how to encourage BAME academics to stay in UK HE. This study emphasised the need for committed leadership within HEIs on race equality as well as specific measures such as improved recruitment and promotion processes, the need for career sponsors and mentors, and the importance of training to raise awareness and change behaviour of staff more generally. Similarly, Singh and Kwhali (2015) recommend that HEIs take a proactive, holistic approach to ensure that diversity and equality are central to organisational strategy and managerial functions.

Racial inequalities and racism have recently been brought to the foreground in the HE sector, as in many others, by the Black Lives Matter movement. There has been widespread student and staff engagement with the movement across the HE sector, and many universities have issued statements in support, some of which have been criticised as being 'tokenistic and superficial' by staff and students in light of the racial inequalities that persist in HE (Batty 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has similarly shone a light on racial disparities in 2020, with UK research revealing a higher risk of contracting Covid-19 and poorer outcomes for BAME people (Public Health England 2020). Against this backdrop, this review of the REC, a unique tool designed to help HEIs address racial inequalities, is timely.

The Race Equality Charter (REC)

The REC was established by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) in 2015, with the aim to improve the representation, progression and success of BAME staff and students within HE. It was developed in consultation with the sector and with reference to the successes of the Athena Swan Charter, which focuses on advancing gender equality in HEIs. After being trialled in 2015, REC has been in full operation since 2016. Since 2018, REC has been managed by Advance HE, which was formed by a merger of ECU, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

The REC is underpinned by five principles which institutions must commit to adopt to become REC members:

- 1 Racial inequalities are a significant issue within higher education. Racial inequalities are not necessarily overt, isolated incidents. Racism is an everyday facet of UK society and racial inequalities manifest themselves in everyday situations, processes and behaviours.
- 2 UK higher education cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of the whole population and until individuals from all ethnic backgrounds can benefit equally from the opportunities it affords.
- 3 In developing solutions to racial inequalities, it is important that they are aimed at achieving long-term institutional culture change, avoiding a deficit model where solutions are aimed at changing the individual.
- 4 Minority ethnic staff and students are not a homogeneous group. People from different ethnic backgrounds have different experiences of, and outcomes from/within, higher education, and that complexity needs to be considered in analysing data and developing actions.
- 5 All individuals have multiple identities, and the intersection of those identities should be considered wherever possible.

Developed with reference to the Athena Swan Charter approach, the REC is a framework and evidence-based methodology for systematically identifying racial inequalities and actions to address them. It takes a pipeline approach (considering entry, progression and outcomes) in relation to students, academic staff and professional and support staff. Institutions are required to undertake a comprehensive self-assessment involving analysis of staff and student data, a survey of staff and students and consultation activity with BAME staff and students in order to identify areas of differential experiences, representation and outcomes for BAME people, from which specific, targeted actions to advance race equality are developed.

The process and findings of the self-assessment and the resulting action plan are presented in a submission for a REC award. REC submissions are assessed through a peer panel review process managed by Advance HE, with panels recommending submission outcomes to Advance HE.

Both REC and the Athena Swan Charter are designed to offer incremental recognition of improvement with different levels of award. Athena Swan offers Bronze, Silver and Gold awards, both at institution and department level, while REC currently offers Bronze and Silver levels at institution level, which recognise the following:

- + **Bronze award** – A Bronze REC award recognises that the university has a solid foundation for eliminating racial inequalities and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff and students. It acknowledges commitment and preparation to act
- + **Bronze renewal** – In addition to the requirements of a Bronze award, for a renewal, institutions will need to demonstrate progress against their previous action plan
- + **Silver award** – In addition to the requirements for a Bronze award, a Silver award recognises a significant record of activity and achievement by the institution in promoting race equality and in addressing challenges across the whole institution.

Prior research relating to the REC

A small body of prior research pertaining to the REC provides additional background information and areas for investigation for this review.

The literature welcomed the advent of the REC as a long-overdue framework for universities to focus their work around race equality (Boliver 2018; Bhopal 2018; Bhopal and Pitkin 2018; Bhopal and Henderson 2019). The process of the REC, involving consideration of data and evidence, creation of an action plan and a cycle of evaluation, is seen as offering a systematic approach to long-term institutional cultural change (Bhopal and Pitkin 2018). Additionally, Bhopal (2018: 53) sees the REC as *'a significant step in addressing racial inequalities in higher education but also in challenging whiteness and white privilege in the white space of the academy'*.

Despite being conducted not long after REC's launch, two studies identified progress being made by participant institutions. Bhopal and Pitkin (2018) identified progress made by REC institutions, including work to address the lack of representation of BAME staff at all levels, but particularly at senior levels; work to ensure fairer recruitment processes and career progression and conducting research on and putting specific interventions in place to address the BAME degree awarding gap. Reported benefits of REC participation were enabling staff to confront a culture which encouraged a 'fear of race' and encouraging dialogue about how to address racial inequalities in HEIs at all levels, for both staff and students (Bhopal and Pitkin 2018). Subsequently, Bhopal and Henderson (2019) found that the REC process had revealed previously unseen inequalities across the institution, and precipitated changes such as to the ways that HEIs collected and stored data related to equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as the introduction of new strategies for engaging with issues of student attainment and retention (Bhopal and Henderson 2019).

However, the available literature also surfaces a number of challenges to participation in and achievement through REC have been identified. Firstly, the prioritising of gender over race equality in UK HEIs over the last few decades (Bhopal et al 2018), which has had the effect of placing Athena Swan at a higher level of priority to that of REC (Bhopal and Henderson 2019) and has impacted on participation rates in REC and the resources committed to REC within participating institutions (Bhopal 2018; Bhopal and Pitkin 2018). Additionally, Bhopal (2018) has suggested that Athena Swan has benefitted white middle-class women in STEMM while BAME women remain disadvantaged in HE.

A range of other barriers to REC participation were identified by Bhopal and Henderson (2019), including access to resources, lack of senior support and the perception of REC as being resource intensive. In terms of implementation, they identified a heavy administrative workload and the issue that the weight of the workload typically falls disproportionately on women and BAME staff. With regard to achieving culture change through REC, participants in Bhopal and Pitkin (2018) and Bhopal and Henderson (2019) suggested that achievement of a REC award will not necessarily lead to long-term action and change in an institution, with awards sometimes sought for reputation's sake.

Review of the REC

Advance HE made a commitment to evaluate the impact of REC four years on from its launch in two phases.

Phase one

Phase one of the review took place in 2019, involving an independent review of all REC submissions up to that point to identify characteristics of successful and unsuccessful submissions, undertaken by Dr Nicola Rollock, an academic and consultant specialising in racial justice in education and the workplace. The overarching conclusion from the phase one review was that while the REC generally provides an important set of principles aimed at underpinning the work carried out by members, more support is needed to shape HEIs' understanding of race and racism to enable them to work proactively to eliminate racial disparities and improve success and outcomes of BAME staff and students.

In unsuccessful REC submissions, it is evident that:

- + data is being collated in a conceptual vacuum with a lack of understanding or engagement with how race and racism operate, resulting in actions lacking specificity, ambition and rigour
- + there is limited identification of context-specific race equality issues thus resulting in the lack of evidence-based SMART² actions/lack of realistic or clear timescales

2 Specific, measurable, realistic and time-bound.

- + action-planning is poor, including actions being vague, not focused on race, not directed clearly at addressing the problem nor linked to outcomes
- + there is a lack of focus of activities on white staff and leaders and the ways in which structural inequalities manifest and remain embedded and perpetuated through processes and policies (focusing on systems of white privilege and power which are crucial to working toward racial justice)
- + full institution and senior management commitment to the work/identification of resources is lacking.

While in unsuccessful renewals there is:

- + limited evidence of progress against the previous action plan
- + little evidencing of local accountability and involvement
- + loss of institutional knowledge from first submission
- + lack of reflection on approach to dealing with race inequality.

Phase two

Subsequently, Advance HE commissioned a team of consultants experienced in race equality, the REC and research and evaluation from Douglas Oloyede, a specialist HE equality, diversity and inclusion consultancy, to undertake phase two of the review to evaluate the REC process and its impact on race equality within member institutions. In particular, Advance HE aimed for the second phase of the review to:

- + explore the experiences of REC members at different stages of their REC journey, including those with an award, those who have not yet submitted, and those who have been unsuccessful on previous attempts, including:
 - what barriers and challenges have been experienced by institutions while preparing a REC submission
 - views and experiences of REC requirements
- + establish a baseline for future reviews of the impact and value of REC on enhancing race equality in member institutions, including:
 - impacts within institutions after achieving an award
- + identify any areas where REC processes or practice should be improved.

Now with 15 institutional award holders following more than 40 applications, this will be the first impact evaluation and in-depth process evaluation of REC. The second phase is intended to complement phase one of the review and provide further recommendations to increase REC's impact.

Athena Swan Charter development

It is important to reference the recent review of the Athena Swan Charter, which took place in 2019 (Advance HE 2020a). Advance HE has since begun the developmental work to deliver a holistically transformed Charter by early 2021 (Advance HE 2020b). As similar frameworks and methodologies, the REC faces some of the same criticisms and challenges as Athena Swan, and some common areas of challenge to address are anticipated. However, race and gender equality are very different, and, as noted above, HEIs are typically at a different stage with each (Bhopal et al 2018). This review was therefore independent from the Athena Swan review and invited a fresh perspective on the REC. Notwithstanding, we reference relevant recommendations from the Athena Swan review, and recent actions taken by Advance HE, where these correspond with our findings and suggestions, in particular in relation to Charter processes.

1.2 Methodology

The approach taken to phase two of the review of REC used a combination of two distinct types of evaluation:

- 1 An **impact** evaluation: focusing on the overall effect of REC.
- 2 A **process** evaluation: focusing on the extent to which REC is being delivered as intended, how it operates and achieves its impact.

1. Impact evaluation

This element of the evaluation addressed the research question: *What effect has REC had in meeting its key aim to 'improve the representation, progression and success of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students within higher education'?*

Given that REC only formally launched in 2016, impact was not necessarily expected to be seen at this stage. Nevertheless, this review took the opportunity to assess impact along with progress, which also establishes a benchmark for future impact evaluations of REC.

Institutional data analysis

Given the nature of REC, which encourages institutions to analyse their specific contexts and derive appropriate actions based on this analysis, change was compared within institutions over time (rather than between institutions which have participated in REC and those which have not). Indicators were selected from data required in REC submissions, many of which are not available as part of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) staff or student records, another reason that REC award holders were not compared with the rest of the sector. A final reason is that institutions, whether now REC award holders or not, often had quite different starting places or benchmarks as to relevant indicators before REC was launched, so comparison between REC award holders and the rest of the sector at this stage would have proven inconclusive.

To understand impact, a comparison was made of indicators over time specifically within institutions that received a bronze award:

- + during the April 2015 REC pilot
- + during the July 2016 submission round.

For institutions that applied after these dates, given that the next successful submissions were in 2018 and the length of the awards is three years, meaning that action plans in submissions from 2018 onwards will not have been fully implemented, it would be too early at this stage to robustly assess impact.

This represents a total of nine institutions from which to sample for the impact evaluation. These nine represent an appropriate cross section of institutions by nation/location, mission group, and size. Of these nine, all participated in the research in some capacity and seven provided data on the selected indicators.

In order to understand impact and to answer the research question, a range of specific indicators covering representation, progression, recruitment and success, selected on the basis of their importance to REC's overall aim and agreed with Advance HE, were measured, included in Table 12. Institutions were asked to provide their most recently available data on these indicators. The benchmark from which to measure change was derived from data provided in institutions' submissions to the 2015 and 2016 rounds, pertaining to the most recent time points included. Data were individually requested in the same format and using the same calculations as that provided in their original submissions. Not all institutions in the impact sample were able to provide data pertaining to all indicators. It is worth noting that not all of the areas covered by the indicators would necessarily have been identified as a priority for institutional action by all award holding institutions. Institutions developed context specific actions based on analysis of their data.

In addition to quantitative indicators, in order to understand qualitative impact on experience and perception, we sought to compare measures from institutional REC surveys of staff and students; however, most institutions were either not able to provide this information or changes to survey questions made these incomparable over time. In any case this would have been merely indicative since the survey samples would have differed and these are not representative. Instead, experiences and perceptions of BAME staff were explored in focus groups and interviews.

Focus groups

In order to further understand experience and perception surrounding how impacts were achieved and reasons they may not have been achieved within institutions, with the consent and cooperation of institutions, two focus groups were held with BAME staff in two of the impact evaluation institutions – one with professional and support staff (n=2), another with academic staff (n=3). One interview was also held with a BAME member of academic staff. Unfortunately, the timing of the review did not facilitate holding focus groups with students. Focus group discussion guides are included at Appendix 4.

2. Process evaluation

Building on the work of the impact evaluation, a process evaluation was undertaken to examine:

- 1 How impacts identified through the impact evaluation were achieved and/or why they were not achieved.
- 2 The process of preparing and submitting a REC application within institutions (including REC requirements, resource implications, support, information, advice, and guidance provided by Advance HE).
- 3 The REC process and practices managed by Advance HE.

Central research questions to guide the process evaluation were:

- + **design:** What aspects of the design of the REC framework and process are working more and less well, and why?
- + **barriers:** What challenges are there to implementation of the REC process, pre-, during and post-submission? How are/might they be overcome?
- + **satisfaction:** How satisfied are institutions with the REC framework and process? What suggestions do they have for the future?

These questions were explored through:

Online survey

An online survey created in Jisc Online Surveys (Appendix 1) open from 11 to 26 August 2020 sought views and experiences of the REC framework and process from pre-member stage onwards, resourcing of REC, the self-assessment process and preparing submissions, the REC award and peer review process, success/challenges in gaining awards, and progress made and impact achieved. All current and former REC member institutions, as well as institutions known to be preparing to become members, were invited to take part in the survey. The response rate from institutions invited to take part was 52.0%, with at least one response from 39 institutions of 75 invited to take part (n=77; responses per institution ranged from one to five). The survey was primarily intended for staff and students within institutions who have been involved in REC, ie self-assessment team (SAT) members, and multiple responses per institution were welcomed to collect different perspectives. REC lead contacts in institutions were asked additional questions. Additionally, a set of questions was included to gather perspectives from other stakeholders of REC not involved in REC work within an institution (eg REC Patrons, those working on race equality in HE like academics and practitioners).

Results from the survey are often reported in figures throughout the report, while the corresponding tables can be found in Appendix 2.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to gather perspectives not captured in the survey, and to focus in on particular aspects of REC.

11 interviews were conducted via Zoom with:

- + **Senior champions/leaders of REC** (one in an award holding institution, another in a member institution) to gain insight into leadership of REC within an institution (expressions of interest invited)
- + **REC Patrons** to gain insight into the role of REC Patrons as well as their experience and knowledge of race equality in HE (expressions of interest invited)
- + **REC panellists** (a mixture of experienced and recent panellists) to gather insight into and perspectives on the panel process (expressions of interest invited)
- + **Higher Education Race Action Group (HERAG) members** involved in REC work (two in award holding institutions, one in a member institution) to gain cross-sectoral insight into REC as well as individual institutions' experiences (nominated by HERAG)
- + **Advance HE staff** leading and managing REC to gain insight into the implementation of the REC process within Advance HE, Advance HE's knowledge of sector progress and challenges with REC, and the context of Advance HE's charters development (eg as a result of the recent review of Athena Swan).

All research participants returned signed consent forms. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed. Participants in all methods and institutions are anonymised in this report. All data are confidential to the research team. Interview discussion guides are provided as Appendix 3.

Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analysed in SPSS and qualitative data from the survey and interviews were analysed in Excel using thematic analysis. Analysis was conducted by all team members and a sample of data was double coded to ensure consistency in approach.

1.3 Research sample

Survey respondents

The ethnicity and gender of survey respondents (n=83) are reported below. Information about other equality characteristics can be found in Appendix 2. 56.7% of survey respondents were from BAME backgrounds while 39.7% were white.

Table 1: Ethnic group of survey respondents

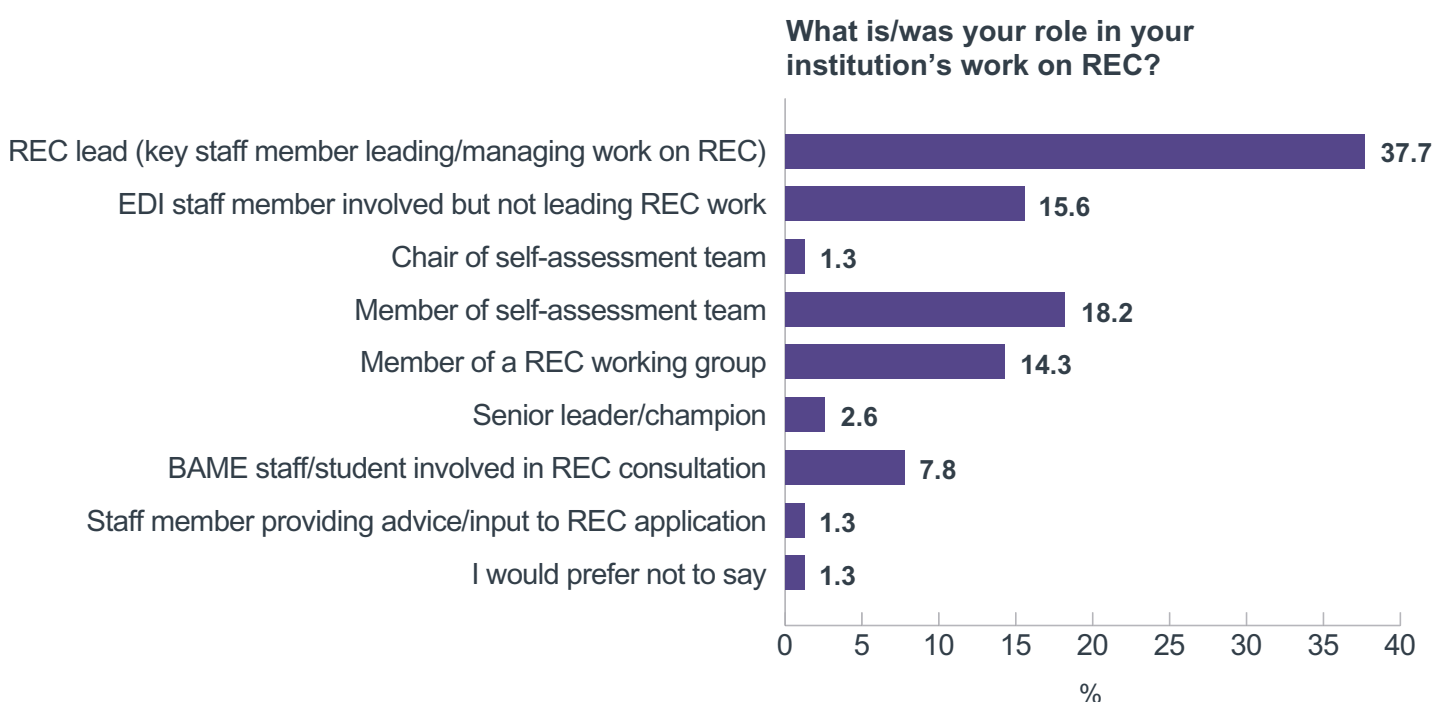
	Frequency	Percent
Arab	1	1.2
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	1.2
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British – Indian	11	13.3
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British – Pakistani	5	6.0
Any other Asian background (specify if you wish)	1	1.2
Black, Black Scottish or Black British – African	7	8.4
Black, Black Scottish or Black British – Caribbean	6	7.2
Any other Black background (specify if you wish)	1	1.2
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	3	3.6
Mixed/multiple – White and Asian	1	1.2
Mixed/multiple – White and Black African	1	1.2
Mixed/multiple – White and Black Caribbean	5	6.0
Any other mixed or multiple background (specify if you wish)	3	3.6
White – English	23	27.7
White – Irish	1	1.2
White – Scottish	2	2.4
White – Welsh	1	1.2
Any other white background (specify if you wish)	6	7.2
Other ethnic group	1	1.2
Prefer not to say	3	3.6
Total	83	100.0

Table 2: Gender of survey respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Man	21	25.3
Woman	60	72.3
Prefer not to say	2	2.4
Total	83	100.0

5.6% of survey respondents (n=5) were students involved in their institution's preparations for joining or work on the REC, 80.9% (n=72) were staff involved, and 9.0% (n=8) identified as key stakeholders of REC.

Information on respondents' involvement in their institution's work on REC is included in Figure 1 below. The largest proportion of respondents (37.7%, n=29) was comprised of REC leads (key staff members leading or managing an institution's work on REC), while the second largest was other members of Self-assessment teams (SATs) (18.2%, n=14), and the others ranged across different scopes of involvement.

Figure 1: Survey respondents' involvement in REC

Interview and focus group participants

79.9% (n=11) of participants to provide equality monitoring data were from BAME backgrounds while 20.1% (n=3) were white.

Table 3: Ethnic group of interview and focus group participants

	Frequency	Percent
Arab	1	6.7
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	6.7
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British – Pakistani	3	20.0
Any other Asian background (specify if you wish)	1	6.7
Black, Black Scottish or Black British – Caribbean	4	26.7
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	1	6.7
Any other mixed or multiple background (specify if you wish)	1	6.7
White – English	1	6.7
White – Irish	1	6.7
Any other white background (specify if you wish)	1	6.7
Total	15	100.0

Table 4: Gender of interview and focus group participants

	Frequency	Percent
Man	4	28.6
Woman	10	71.4
Total	14	100.0

1.4 About this report

This report is structured according to the REC ‘journey’. It begins with an examination of the process of becoming a REC member; next considers resourcing of REC; the self-assessment process and preparing REC submissions; the REC award and peer review process; achieving REC awards; and impacts achieved, and progress made within institutions. The report ends by bringing together key themes and recommendations from all of these sections, and looking ahead at what is next for REC.

2 Becoming a REC member

2.1 Section summary

- + REC membership has increased from 30 institutions taking part in the REC trial in 2015 to 71 in 2020
- + there are a wide range of drivers that lead institutions to become REC members. Those rated as most important by those currently preparing to join REC were – concern about the lack of progression of BAME academic and/or research staff, the BAME degree awarding gap and/or the lack of BAME representation at senior levels in the institution
- + qualitative data from REC members, stakeholders and Advance HE indicates that a combination of factors has driven the increase in uptake of REC in recent years, including the Office for Student's (OfS) requirements around the BAME degree awarding gap, a push from BAME staff and students, institutions' experience of doing Athena Swan and perception that the REC offers a robust framework for addressing race equality and, more latterly, the Black Lives Matter movement
- + primary barriers institutions face to becoming REC members relate to resourcing REC participation, insufficient willingness or confidence to talk openly about race and how racism manifests within the institution, a lack of financial incentives or mandate to undertake REC and the perceived high workload of REC. However, senior level sign-off on the requirements of the current REC principles was not reported as a barrier
- + results indicate that institutions may be insufficiently prepared in terms of knowledge and understanding relating to most of the REC principles prior to joining
- + institutions commonly undertake significant pre-membership work to overcome any challenges/ barriers they face to becoming a member and put themselves in a strong position to undertake REC, often including extensive dialogue and engagement with BAME staff and students and other key stakeholders and institutional leaders
- + some become members but do not fully overcome their pre-membership barriers. Some who were not yet members are not confident they can overcome their pre-membership barriers
- + to help increase REC membership, the majority of survey respondents felt greater access to Advance HE support and activities prior to REC membership would be highly beneficial, especially for increasing understanding of race equality among senior leaders and those leading on REC, and greater sharing of learning between institutions. Advance HE was also aware of the need for, and already developing more pre-membership support
- + other ideas for how to increase REC membership included a more formal pre-membership development phase, mandating REC participation at a certain point of Athena Swan participation, developing stronger links with existing race equality external drivers, such as OfS requirements, and increasing awareness of and engagement with REC through various means, such as using the role of REC Patron to engage governing bodies and funding bodies with REC.

2.2 Introduction

To explore the beginning of institutions' REC journeys, this section presents research findings relating to:

- + [The rationale for REC membership](#)
- + [Challenges and barriers to becoming a REC member](#)
- + [Preparedness to become a REC member](#)
- + [Overcoming challenges and barriers and preparing for membership](#)
- + [What would help institutions to become REC members](#)

It ends with [discussion and recommendations](#).

Overview of REC membership

In order to apply for a REC award an institution needs to be a REC member. To become a REC member, the head of the institution must commit to adopting the five REC principles within policies, practices, action plans and culture, confirming this commitment within a letter of endorsement sent to Advance HE. Membership grants members access to the REC members' logo and a range of support from Advance HE. The requirement is for a member to undertake the REC self-assessment process to prepare an application and submit this within three years of becoming a member.

REC membership has increased over the years, from 30 institutions who signed up to take part in the REC trial in 2015 to 71 in 2020. Aside from during the trial, the largest increase in membership was seen in 2019 when 17 new members joined (Figure 2).

Figure 2: New REC members by year



2.3 The rationale for REC membership

Perspectives from non-members

There are many drivers for institutions to join the REC. Among the respondents who said their institution was not yet a REC member but was actively considering or preparing to become a member (n=19), all of the reasons for doing so, that were asked about in the survey, were rated as at least moderately important by more than half of respondents. The reasons that were rated as very or extremely important by the largest number of respondents were:

- + concern about the lack of (or to improve the) progression of BAME academic and/or research staff (73.7%; n=14)
- + concern about (or to reduce) the institution's BAME degree awarding gap (66.7%; n=14)
- + concern about the lack of BAME representation at senior levels in the institution (63.1%; n=12).

Thus, issues relating to the staff pipeline and equity in student attainment are commonly critical drivers for institutions' engagement with REC.

While not deemed of very or extreme importance by most, the reasons rated as at least moderately important by more than half of respondents included:

- + our institution wants to decolonise the curriculum, teaching and learning (94.1%; n=16)
- + as a response to lower levels of satisfaction from BAME students in the National Student Survey (NSS) (81.4%; n=13)
- + as a response to lower levels of satisfaction by BAME staff in employee satisfaction/engagement surveys (78.8%; n=14)
- + as a response to the Black Lives Matter Movement (77.8%; n=14)
- + our institution has a number of Athena Swan awards and now wants to focus on race and ethnicity (73.7%; n=14)
- + as a response to complaints of racism made by staff (58.8%; n=10).

Hence a wide range of drivers, both staff and student related, contribute to institutions' decision to pursue the REC.

Free text comments revealed two other common reasons for becoming a REC member among these respondents. First, a push to become a REC member from the university community, often from a BAME network:

“because the leadership has been very slow on addressing issues of racial injustice in our community and our BAME network has pushed them to commit to the REC.”

(Student involved in REC working group, non-member)

Second, because of what REC offers in terms of a robust framework for addressing race equality, described by one respondent as a 'holistic approach to race equality'. For example, another respondent explained that the institution saw REC as a means to:

“further overall culture change and competency in respect of race and anti-racism in a predominantly white institution.”

(EDI staff, non-member)

Other reasons cited in comments highlighted leadership commitment to EDI and pressure experienced as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement as drivers for their pursuit of REC membership.

Perspectives from REC members, stakeholders and Advance HE

Interview data revealed a range of reasons why institutions have joined the REC. Several interviewees expressed a combination of influences that they felt had led to institutions becoming members, especially more so in recent years.

A recurring theme was the perception that an increased awareness of racial inequalities in HE and the need to tackle them, for example, the recent Equality and Human Rights Commission report examining racial harassment in universities (EHRC 2019), had impacted on universities' desire to join the REC.

“I think it partly reflects the sort of greater knowledge about the problems about some of the data that was coming out showing that the higher education sector still has a long way to go.”

(REC Patron)

Another shared view, echoing that of non-members, was that institutions choose to become REC members because the REC offers a robust framework for them to analyse race equality and identify and commit to action.

“From my perspective, [REC] drives change in terms of the fact that you have to evaluate the data, you have to present it and you know, you can't really move away from it. Once you've done that, it's out there, isn't it, and that's quite helpful...to inform and change and put interventions into place.”

(REC Senior Lead, member institution)

Three interview participants expressed how universities' experience with the Athena Swan Charter had paved the way for them to become REC members.

“I think ... there's that shift now ... towards intersectionality, and the idea that we were just doing Athena Swan and nothing else didn't really make any sense anymore.”

(REC Senior Lead, member institution)

A second respondent had seen this occur across the sector:

“[Institutions have] got a lot of experience with the Athena Swan process and... I think at one level, they might be thinking, well, could we replicate some of that learning if we follow this process here?”

(REC Patron)

One interview participant suggested that networking between institutions was probably playing a part in the growth in REC membership since 2019:

“I imagine people are ringing up their colleagues at other institutions, saying what did you think about this process? Was it worthwhile, etcetera, etcetera? I think there must be an element of that going on.”

(REC Patron)

Echoing the responses from some non-members, some interview participants felt that recent events, including the Black Lives Matter movement, were likely to increase REC membership further:

“There’s a realisation that this is becoming increasingly important as an area....Partly Black Lives Matter and the general sort of feeling and I think you’ll probably find an even greater increase in the coming year now, because I think Covid has just highlighted racial inequality so much in a way that universities will want to show that they’re doing something”.

(REC Patron)

Advance HE staff members spoke of a clear increase in interest in the REC during 2019 and identified two external drivers they perceived had encouraged some institutions to become members. One was the Office for Students’ Access and Participation Plan requirements around the gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between white and Black students (OfS 2018) and the other was the Government’s Cabinet Office Race Disparity Unit work³.

“What was notable for me was that I felt in the space of one year to the next institutions which had previously predominantly been talking about Athena Swan were now saying, actually, our priority is getting REC and our priority is looking at race equality. And the Office for Students work and the work that the Government’s Cabinet Office were doing with their Race Disparity Unit, those were the clearest drivers that I could spot.”

(Advance HE staff member)

3 See: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/race-disparity-unit

Advance HE staff also explained how the new membership model it had created after its formation via the merger of ECU, HEA and the Leadership Foundation, in addition to a campaign to raise awareness of the REC, had been effective in increasing engagement.

“2019 was the year that Advance HE developed their model... and that we really started to raise the profile of REC. ... We started speaking with institutions about the REC, picking up with those that had become members and didn’t do anything about their membership, and also those that had started conversations but had not joined. And then we developed a campaign to raise awareness, heighten the issues and communicate with institutions more regularly.”

(Advance HE staff member)

2.4 Challenges and barriers to becoming a REC member

Both respondents preparing to become REC members and those who were already REC members were asked if their institution had experienced or was currently experiencing any challenges and/or barriers it had to overcome in order for it to become a member of REC.

Perspectives from non-members

Among respondents preparing to become members, all of the challenges asked about were reported by at least two respondents, suggesting there are a wide range of barriers to REC membership. However, it should be noted that four respondents reported no challenges, so this experience is by no means universal. The most frequently reported challenge was securing staff resource to carry out the workload for REC (68.4%; n=13), followed by the institution not being willing or feeling confident enough to talk openly about race and how racism manifests within the institution (57.9%; n=11). The least frequently cited challenges amongst these respondents were securing the backing of BAME staff and students and senior leader’s unwillingness to accept the REC principles (both with 10.5%; n=2) (Table 5). Comments indicated several other challenges, including lack of confidence at senior manager level:

“The VC is willing and committed but there are senior managers who are not confident enough.”

(REC lead, non-member)

Table 5: Barriers to REC participation

	Non-members	Members
Securing staff resource to carry out the workload for REC	68.4%	71.1%
Institution not willing or feeling confident enough to talk openly about race and how racism manifests within the institution	57.9%	33.3%
Concerns of difficulties managing Athena Swan and REC at the same time	21.1%	51.1%
Securing senior manager involvement	21.1%	35.6%
Securing the backing of BAME staff and students	10.5%	26.7%
Senior leader's unwillingness to accept the REC principles	10.5%	2.2%
Other	10.5%	15.6%

Perspectives from members and stakeholders

Among existing members, all but one of the challenges asked about were reported by multiple respondents. As was seen among responses from non-members, the most frequently reported challenge was securing staff resource to carry out the workload for REC (71.1%; n=32) (Table 5). This was echoed in two of the interviews:

"I think one barrier would definitely be resource and capacity."

(REC lead, members institution)

The next most frequent challenge to becoming a REC member reported among members was concerns of difficulties managing Athena Swan and REC at the same time (51.1%; n=23), which again relates to resources.

Mirroring responses from non-members, the least common challenge experienced was senior leader's unwillingness to accept the REC principles (2.2%; n=1), suggesting that senior level sign-off on the requirements of the current REC principles were not barriers to participation for these institutions.

Another challenge to membership growth mentioned in survey comments by members was a lack of a financial incentives to encourage or mandate institutions to do REC, which these participants felt had increased Athena Swan engagement:

"What the actual benefits of REC are. Athena Swan is attached to funding for example..."

(EDI staff, member institution)

“Athena Swan only really gained momentum when it was linked to external funding. Needs to be a V-C priority in order to resource appropriately and take their senior team with them on changing culture.”

(Stakeholder)

This was also reflected in four interviews, with one explaining that the linkage of funding to Athena Swan had led to a prioritising of Athena Swan over REC as well as the funding of specific posts:

“I think people are preoccupied with Athena Swan because the funding does matter.
...The link to funding has created opportunities for people to become specialists.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

It should be noted that while the NIHR has required all funding applicants to hold a Silver Award of the Athena Swan Charter since 2014, during the course of this research the NIHR announced that this will no longer be compulsory, though applicants will still need to demonstrate their commitment to EDI⁴.

Additionally, the perception that the REC workload is excessive was mentioned as a reason for some institutions choosing not to join the REC in survey comments and by three interview participants, especially with regard to the data requirements:

“In other words, this [the data workload] is what stops institutions from applying. So maybe there are ways of simplifying slightly what’s requested while not really coming massively down with the expectations.”

(REC lead and panellist)

Perspectives from Advance HE

Advance HE staff identified several factors they had perceived as influencing universities’ decision not to join REC. They echoed the responses of non-members in suggesting that a common barrier is an institution not being willing or feeling confident enough to talk openly about race and how racism manifests within the institution. They compared institutions’ willingness to join Athena Swan with that for REC, explaining there can be greater nervousness to commit to REC due to lesser confidence or understanding of race equality:

“What we have felt is that an institution seems to feel like they need to be in a more advanced position to be seen to be signing up to the REC principles, than compared to Athena Swan. And I think part of this goes back to what we have found about the lack of capacity or lack of understanding or lack of willingness to embrace talking about race inequality as opposed to talking about gender inequality. ... That the institution may be seen to have challenges related to race equality seems to be a greater barrier to participation than the equivalent for Athena Swan.”

(Advance HE staff member)

4 See: [www.Advance HE.ac.uk/news-and-views/Advance HE-responds-nihrs-announcement-funding-criteria-including-athena-Swan](https://www.advancehe.ac.uk/news-and-views/Advance-HE-responds-nihrs-announcement-funding-criteria-including-athena-Swan)

In common with survey respondents, they also identified the challenge of resourcing in terms of the perceived burden of pulling together a REC application.

Additionally, Advance HE highlighted confidence in being able to frame the discussion around REC participation, linked to fear of a negative response from BAME staff and students, as a common barrier:

“The main one is confidence and framing the discussion and the worry of once they highlight that they want to do this work, the response they might get from their BAME staff and students.”
(Advance HE staff member)

Interestingly, negative responses from BAME staff and students was not selected as a common challenge to REC membership by survey respondents, though several who are current members gave examples of such backlash and dialogue and engagement they had undertaken to address this (see further in section 2.5), indicating that this is in fact a challenge faced by some institutions.

Advance HE's perceptions varied from those of the non-member and member survey respondents in two further ways. In contrast to survey respondents, they perceived universities not feeling ready to take the step of signing up to the REC principles as a key barrier, as well as seeing the timeline from joining to first submission being too short, or the ‘ticking clock element of signing up to the principles’. The first discrepancy may be because this was not a barrier for these institutions when it is for others. The other is a surprise since the amount of work institutions told us they do before joining REC would indicate that the timeline is not long enough for institutions to undertake all the preparations required and to complete a REC application (see further in section 2.5). Perhaps these respondents do not think it is unreasonable to need to undertake pre-membership work and do not see that this should be undertaken within the window from signing-up to first submission.

In regard to funding links with REC, while acknowledging the impact on Athena Swan membership, Advance HE staff were cautious of similar links for REC due to their experience that it can lead to less genuine engagement with a charter.

“I think it is something that we need to be cautious around. Because although it did have an incentivizing effect in Athena Swan, I think we're also seeing the backlash of that link in terms of people's perception of the charter as something that's done to them rather than something they're choosing to do”.

(Advance HE staff member)

While the ultimate goal is to grow REC membership, Advance HE staff members also stressed the importance that institutions join when they are ready:

“We would never go into an institution and say ‘Oh, yes, you must do [REC]. It's fabulous’. It's not about that. For us, it's about actually acknowledging where you need to be in order to do this important work.”

(Advance HE staff member)

2.5 Preparedness to become REC members

Survey respondents who were considering or preparing to become REC members and those who were already members were asked to rate their institution's preparedness for REC prior to joining through a series of questions about understanding of racial inequalities in the institution, acknowledgement of structural racism as a cause of race inequalities, and recognition of the institutional drivers for undertaking REC. These questions were informed by the REC principles (see section 1.1) which are designed to underpin institutions' involvement in and approach to REC.

More respondents agreed than disagreed that their institution had 'sufficient recognition of the institutional drivers (business case) for undertaking the REC'. Agreement was stronger among non-members than members.

Among members, more than half of respondents disagreed that their institution possessed all other aspects of preparedness related to the REC principles prior to their REC participation. This included having 'sufficient understanding of the different experiences and outcomes of different minority ethnic groups for undertaking REC'; 'sufficient acknowledgement of structural racism as a cause of race inequalities at the institution for undertaking the REC' and 'sufficient understanding of the different experiences and outcomes in relation to intersections of identities for undertaking the REC'.

More than half of non-members similarly disagreed that their institution had 'sufficient understanding of the different experiences and outcomes in relation to intersections of identities for undertaking the REC'. However, there was around equal agreement and disagreement that their institution had 'sufficient understanding of the different experiences and outcomes of different minority ethnic groups for undertaking REC' and 'sufficient acknowledgement of structural racism as a cause of race inequalities at the institution for undertaking the REC', suggesting a broader range of perceptions of these aspects of preparedness among non-members than members.

These results indicate that institutions are most likely to be prepared in regard to having identified the institutional drivers for becoming a REC member and are less likely to be prepared in terms of the other REC principles, especially in regard to their understanding relating to intersectionality. Of course, institutions may further develop their understanding and capacity regarding the REC principles after they have joined (see section 2.5 for actions taken to prepare), however this nonetheless suggests an area of preparation or early work post joining REC which Advance HE could further support.

2.6 Overcoming challenges and preparing for REC membership

Perspectives from members

Existing REC members were asked how they overcame the challenges/barriers to becoming a REC member that they had identified. The most frequent type of action, mentioned by 13 survey respondents, was dialogue and engagement to make the case for becoming a REC member, for instance with senior management to secure senior backing:

“Creating many open conversations with senior managers to organise events and meetings to raise awareness.”

(REC lead, member institution)

Engagement led by a BAME senior management champion for REC supported one institution to secure senior level backing and resourcing for REC.

“One of our Deans pushed this with Senior Management, who was a [BAME] Female Professor.”

(EDI staff member)

Several institutions had employed open dialogue and evidence of racial inequalities to persuade students and/or staff of the benefits of and need for REC participation.

“BAME staff and students wanted assurance that this was not a tick box exercise. Many staff and students are unwilling to talk about institutional racism. We delivered presentations and held many meetings with those who tried to derail the process. We influenced them and [were] incredibly patient. We used data to show where the issues were and discussed how we could work together to change the institution.”

(REC lead, member institution)

One mentioned how Advance HE had supported it to engage key stakeholders:

“It was important for us to educate colleagues and student leaders about REC (what it is, why we need to engage etc); and one of the ways that we did this was to hold a REC learning session run by Advance HE. This helped raise awareness about REC’s significance as well as brought to light racial inequalities both within the institution and across the HE sector.”

Four respondents explained how their institution had increased resources available to enable REC participation.

“The university was committed to REC and resource was found.”

(REC working group member, member institution)

For some, a significant amount of work was undertaken to overcome barriers to REC membership and participation:

“We invested in senior EDI leadership and expertise. We developed a strong EDI function, EDI strategy and action plan that is holistic and intersectional. We invested in business analytics – systems and processes, we also invested in HR people and systems. All of which built capacity, capability and confidence. We undertook a senior leadership programme to understand structural inequalities and to establish their role as inclusive leaders.”
(REC lead, member institution)

One REC lead expressed how their institution had not experienced challenges per se, but had taken its time to prepare to join REC, which had been worthwhile:

“I wouldn’t say challenges/barriers; it has been a long process to get where we are (just joined the Charter) but I think because of that we’re in a really good position to move forward – every step of the process has been thought out and I am confident that I now have the full support of the senior leadership team.”
(REC lead, member institution)

Importantly, several respondents emphasised that although they had successfully become REC members, some of the challenges they experienced pre-membership were still ongoing.

“I’m not sure we have overcome all of them – but we are doing our best.”
(REC lead, member institution)

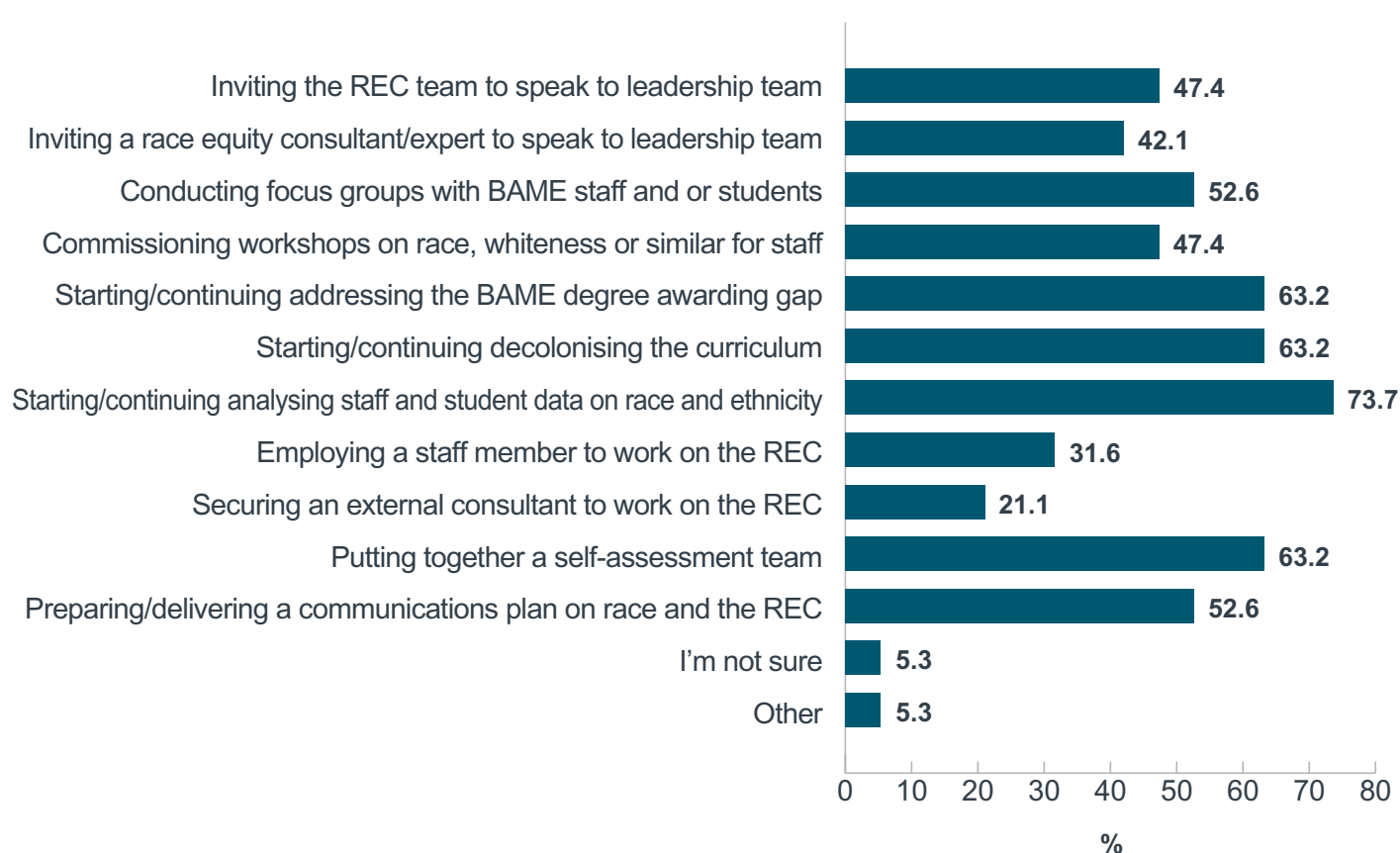
Perspectives from non-members

Respondents who were preparing to become REC members (n=19) were asked what steps they were taking to prepare their institution for becoming a REC member. All respondents reported that steps were being taken to prepare for REC membership. All of the steps asked about were being taken by at least one institution, confirming that a wide range of preparatory work takes place. The most common actions being taken were:

- + starting/continuing analysing staff and student data on race and ethnicity (73.7%; n=14)
- + starting/continuing addressing the BAME degree awarding gap (63.2%; n=12)
- + starting/continuing decolonising the curriculum, teaching and learning (63.2%; n=12)
- + putting together a self-assessment team (63.2%; n=12).

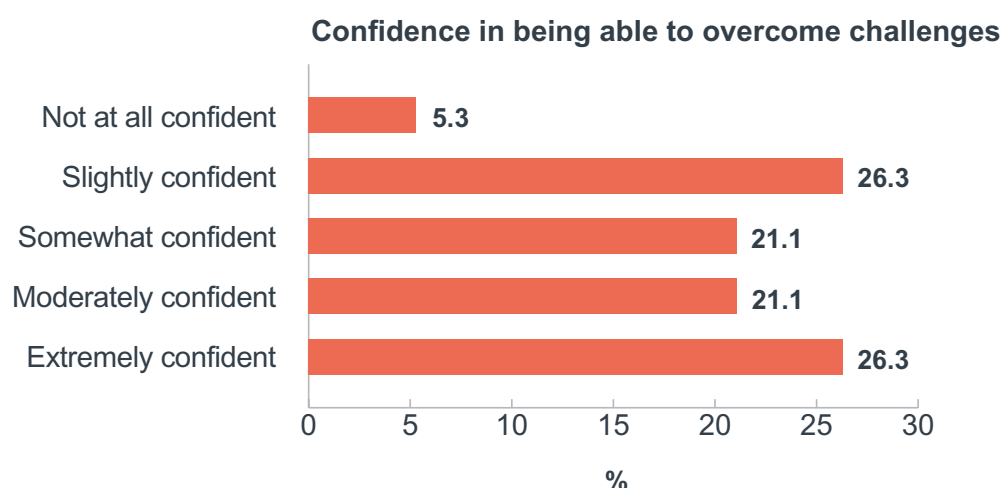
The least common actions were 'securing the services of an external consultant to work on the REC' (21.1%; n=4) and 'employing a staff member to work on the REC' (31.6%; n=6) (Figure 3). Given the finding that resources were a primary challenge pre-membership it is surprising the latter action was relatively uncommon. The only other action reported in comments was establishing a 'Strategic Race Advisory Group' to oversee the setting of a strategic direction for race equality and REC preparations.

Figure 3: Steps being taken to prepare for REC membership



Respondents preparing to become members were asked how confident they were that they would be able to overcome the challenges/barriers to membership they had identified. Almost half (47.4%; n=9) were moderately or extremely confident that they would overcome them. However, a substantial proportion (31.6%; n=6) was only slightly confident or not confident at all (Figure 4). This indicates that some institutions face pre-membership barriers that are extremely challenging to overcome, and some may fail to do so, potentially resulting in them not joining the charter or hampering progress once they do so.

Figure 4: Confidence in overcoming barriers to REC membership among non-members



2.7 What would help institutions to become REC members

Perspectives from non-members

Survey respondents from institutions preparing to become REC members were asked what would make it easier for institutions to become members. The majority selected: training on race equality for senior leaders available before joining the Charter (84.2%; n=16); support from the REC staff team for institutions thinking of/preparing to join the Charter (68.4%; n=13); training on race equality for REC leads available before joining the Charter (63.2%; n=12) and contact/networking with other REC institutions to learn from experiences of others (63.2%; n=12) (Table 6). Additionally, more than half (57.9%; n=11) indicated that greater synergy between REC and Athena Swan would be beneficial, though none chose to specify what form this should take. Slightly less than half (47.4%; n= 9) felt external drivers and incentives (eg funding links to REC) would help more institutions join the REC.

Very few selected 'a longer period of time between becoming a member and having to submit an application (currently 3 years) and 'other changes to the REC requirements or process' (both selected by 15.8%; n=3). This indicates the majority are happy with the current REC process (though we note the desire for greater synergy with Athena Swan) and timeline from joining to submission, but feel greater access to Advance HE support and activities prior to REC membership would be highly beneficial, especially for increasing the understanding of race equality among senior leaders and those leading on REC, and greater sharing of learning between institutions.

One respondent suggested there could be a more formal costed pre-membership development phase:

“It would be helpful to be able to be part of REC-related networking and have access to Advance HE development support BEFORE becoming a formal member. There could be more transparency about the additional REC membership costs. Potential for staging of costs for the development stage – prior to the formal self-assessment phase.”

(EDI staff, non-member)

Table 6: What would help more institutions to become REC members?

	Non-members	Stakeholders
Training on race equality for senior leaders available before joining the Charter	84.2%	81.8%
Support from the REC staff team for institutions thinking of/preparing to join the Charter	68.4%	72.7%
Training on race equality for REC leads available before joining the Charter	63.2%	72.7%
Contact/networking with other REC institutions to learn from experiences of others	63.2%	81.8%
External drivers and incentives (eg funding links with the REC)	47.4%	63.6%
Enhanced written guidance on what to put in place before joining the Charter	52.6%	54.5%
Greater synergy between the REC and Athena Swan Charters	57.9%	45.5%
Availability of additional guidance and support during the self-assessment process	42.1%	54.5%
Written materials explaining the benefits of joining the REC	42.1%	45.5%
A longer period of time between becoming a member and having to submit an application (currently 3 years)	15.8%	27.3%
Other changes to the REC requirements or process (please specify)	15.8%	9.1%
Other	10.5%	9.1%

Perspectives from stakeholders

Stakeholders of REC who responded to the survey were similarly asked what would help more institutions to become REC members. They concurred with the four top selections of non-member respondents, though in a slightly different order of preference. Both, however, agreed that training on race equality for senior leaders available before joining the Charter was one of the most helpful of the suggested ideas (81.1%; n=9) (Table 6). The responses of stakeholders also align with those of non-members in terms of the two options that were selected by the least respondents – a longer period of time between becoming a member and having to submit an application and other changes to the REC requirements or process. There is thus consensus among these survey respondents that the current REC framework and timeline from joining to submission is appropriate but there is a need for additional access to or provision of support, particularly learning and capacity building, in the pre-membership phase to enable more institutions to join.

Also rated as helpful by more than half of stakeholder respondents was ‘external drivers and incentives (eg funding links with the REC) (63.6%; n=7). This was also discussed in interviews, with a Patron suggested funding links to REC similar to those previously in place for Athena Swan would increase engagement, and more strategic engagement with research councils, including by Patrons, could facilitate this:

“I think that some concerted pushing at the senior level ... someone needs to be talking to the research councils consistently....I think that there are areas like Wellcome and Health Foundation and the Kings Fund who can really push this. So, I think you should be looking at where you can get leverage. ... So that’s where I think the patrons may have a role, and you may have to extend your Patron network, but it’s utilising them effectively to act as channels for you.”

(REC Patron)

However, this was not a universally shared view among stakeholder interview participants. For example, another Patron felt that institutions are already engaged with race equality, just not necessarily with the REC:

“I really do not believe you need to incentivise them to engage with [REC] because ... there’s lots of evidence and things that they’ve been doing ... they’re fully versed in terms of the attainment gap ... so the bind to the subject is already there. I don’t think it is about engaging with the subject or recognising the importance of the need. I think many universities are doing that.”

(REC Patron)

Other suggestions were made by stakeholder survey respondents for ways to mandate REC engagement. These included a change to how REC membership works as part of Advance HE's membership package in addition to more pre-membership support:

“[Advance HE] could consult with its institutional members to include entry as part of their basic membership package – then supported by their Membership Manager to identify any additional paid for services they require to support their submission.”

(Stakeholder)

Another suggested some form of linkage of Athena Swan and REC to mandate REC engagement:

“To remove the mantra that there is not enough resource to consider REC to link Athena Swan and REC together insofar as one award at AS will require REC to be engaged with before AS revised/new application can be submitted.”

(Stakeholder)

Meanwhile, a REC panellist interview participant felt there was opportunity to develop stronger links between REC and Access and Participation Plans as well as the NSS:

“Is there a possibility where the REC can be embedded within the Access and Participation Plan somehow ... and then you find that in order to get your Access and Participation funding next year, you would have had to show impact. And when we think about things like the NSS, is there a relationship between that and the work that's been done in REC? So, what I'm suggesting here is that REC is operating in isolation from all of these other drivers, but these drivers are the ones that give you mobility on the league tables.”

(REC panellist)

A need to increase awareness and engagement with REC, especially to 'explain the benefits' of the Charter, was a recurring theme in the interviews. One REC Patron felt that there has not been sufficient publicity about REC across the sector and this was a missed opportunity:

“I think it's about the REC making itself a bit more noticeable. ... I think it's that [HEIs] just don't really understand what it is, because it's not publicised as much, and I don't think it's seen as having the same value.”

(REC Patron)

Another Patron suggested that the role of Patron could be utilised to help to increase participation in REC, particularly through engaging governing bodies:

“I’ve always felt that one of the things that’s lacking in the REC, and it’s probably one thing the Patrons could have done more of, was ... to do more to persuade institutions to take on this work... And so, my role could have been talking to boards. ... Something proactive that the REC could have done is contact institutions and try to get someone at a more senior level to engage with the institution at the board level ... because the boards are the ones that really run the universities and they can put a lot of pressure on the senior leadership teams to address this agenda ... and particularly the chairs are very important... More clever strategic pressure might get more to sign up.”

(REC Patron)

A HERAG interview participant felt that both HERAG members and people with experience of doing REC could help to increase engagement with REC:

“I think it’s really important that Advance HE engages with HERAG but also people who’ve done REC to go out and catalyse and evangelise REC because it needs to be catalysed. Particularly in the context of Black Lives Matter.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

Perspectives from Advance HE

Advance HE staff outlined they are undertaking increasing amounts of pre-membership activity focused on building capacity for REC membership, but that resourcing this element alongside post-membership support and peer-review services is sometimes challenging:

“We are definitely trying to do much more organisational development work and coaching with institutions.”

(Advance HE staff member)

There was recognition of the opportunity to support institutions to build understanding of race equality and undertake some of the first steps to put them in a place to be a REC member through Advance HE’s wider equality and diversity work.

“So I think what we are looking to do is to articulate a much more coherent suite of supports around race equality, so that an institution isn’t looking at it as a binary choice of doing REC, and therefore doing race equality work, or doing nothing, so that there are options available to institutions, depending on where they are in their journey. ...that’s really helping them understand what’s an appropriate next step for that institution and where they are in their thinking and planning.”

(Advance HE staff member)

2.8 Discussion and recommendations

Drivers for REC membership

Very positively, membership of REC has increased over the years, and especially in 2019, yet there remain many institutions who are not yet members. This research found that internal institutional drivers for REC participation, such as concerns about progression of BAME staff and student attainment, as well as a combination of external factors, including the Office for Students' requirements around the BAME degree awarding gap, and, more latterly, the Black Lives Matter movement, has driven this increase in uptake of REC membership. While these drivers are having an impact, there is currently no specific requirement for an institution to articulate its overarching institutional case or rationale for pursuing work on race equality as part of REC. Incorporating such a requirement could enable institutions to develop a deeper understanding of their drivers for doing REC, supporting greater senior-level and institutional buy-in to the process. This case could then be made a part of the requirements of the Head of Institution's letter of endorsement. To lead and support institutions to articulate their rationales, Advance HE should develop its own case for race equality in HE as part of its forthcoming race equality strategy.

Advance HE has already undertaken promotional activity around REC as part of its new membership model, but our findings suggest there are some missed opportunities for publicising the REC, such as using REC Patrons and people with experience of doing REC to engage those at different levels in institutions.

The issue of a lack of funding links to REC, while there were previously such links for Athena Swan, was raised by many of our research participants, with a common view and first-hand experience that this has led to a prioritisation of Athena Swan and has impacted on REC participation. During the course of this research, the NIHR link to Athena Swan was removed, thus the landscape has shifted. However, it cannot be ignored that REC has not yet benefited from any funding links or explicit 'extrinsic motivators', as one participant put it. Participants suggested a range of ideas that Advance HE could explore for how such motivators could be strengthened or developed, such as a requirement for REC participation at a certain point of Athena Swan participation, stronger links with OfS requirements, and exploration of links with various funding bodies.

[See recommendations 1, 2 and 3.](#)

Supporting the pre-membership phase

Our research identifies that institutions commonly experience internal challenges and barriers to REC participation. Additionally, REC membership is not something institutions take lightly, and it is common for institutions to want to put themselves in a strong position to undertake the REC self-assessment process prior to joining. Consequently, institutions typically undertake significant pre-membership work to overcome any barriers they face and put themselves in a strong position to embark on the REC process. However, we found that some become members but do not fully overcome their pre-membership barriers, which may hamper their progress. Additionally, some who were not yet members were not confident they could overcome their pre-membership barriers, indicating a risk of losing such potential members. There is clearly a need for more guidance and support for institutions in the pre-membership phase to enable them to prepare for undertaking REC.

Indeed, the majority of survey respondents felt greater access to Advance HE support and activities prior to REC membership would be highly beneficial, especially for increasing understanding of race equality among senior leaders and those leading on REC, and greater sharing of learning between institutions. Advance HE was also aware of the need for, and already developing more pre-membership support, as well as developmental work on race equality not specific to REC.

Importantly, our results indicate that institutions may be insufficiently prepared in terms of knowledge and understanding relating to the REC principles prior to joining REC. As the principles are fundamental to being successful in the REC, this is an area where Advance HE could provide further focused support during the pre- and early membership phases.

[See recommendations 6 and 8.](#)

3 Resourcing REC

3.1 Section summary

- + current Advance HE guidance on resourcing of REC suggests 0.5 FTE for project management, as well as work allocation for SAT members, resourcing of data work and delivery of action plans post-submission
- + there was wide variation in approaches to resourcing REC across institutions and resourcing approaches for REC commonly evolve over time
- + almost an equal proportion of institutions had dedicated staff resource in place for REC as did not have dedicated staff (though with formal allocation of REC work)
- + while the amount of dedicated resource (FTE) for REC differs between institutions, the majority had more than the recommended 0.5 FTE, suggesting that the current Advance HE recommendation on this is too low
- + the dedicated resource in place provides a range of different functions. The most frequently cited function was project management/coordination, followed by race equality expertise and data expertise
- + REC leads personally work a range of total hours per week on REC, reflecting the wide variation in resourcing approaches for REC
- + the majority of REC leads felt their current resourcing for REC was not appropriate. Comments revealed this was often due to insufficient resource being in place, though there were differing views on the pros and cons of dedicated REC roles
- + respondents emphasised the need for REC resourcing to continue post-application in order to drive progress on the action plan
- + results indicate that it is common for institutions to make use of external resource and expertise to support REC work, and this is found to be useful. Advance HE and independent consultants are the main avenues for this support and the most common types of support are feedback on submissions and training of various types to support institutional knowledge and understanding of race equality and the REC.

3.2 Introduction

This section considers findings relating to:

- + [Resource in place for REC within institutions](#)
- + [Use of external resource and support](#)

It ends with [discussion and recommendations](#).

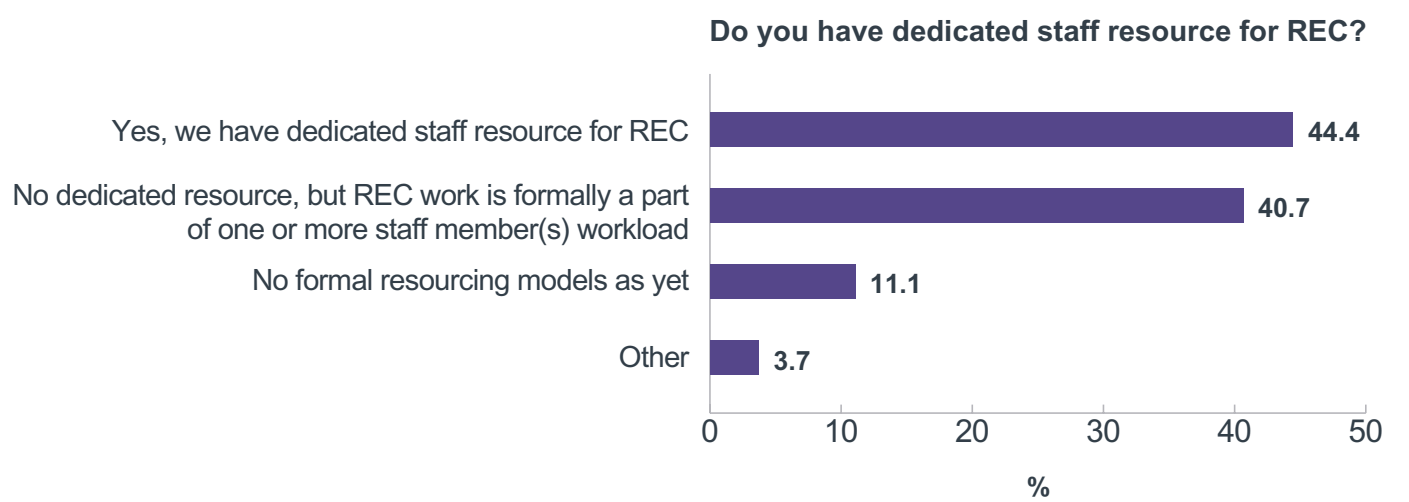
Current guidance on resourcing REC

Advance HE’s REC handbook is clear that applying for the REC and delivering on commitments within the application is a large piece of work and requires sufficient resource. The handbook estimates that project management work, to manage the REC process and support the chair of the SAT, will require at least half a full-time post (0.5 full-time equivalent [FTE]) for the duration of the self-assessment and application. In addition, the handbook highlights that SAT members will need time for meetings and work between meetings, which should be built into work allocation models. Resourcing of data collection and analysis is also highlighted, particularly regarding qualitative data (free text survey responses and interviews or focus group data). Finally, resources are recommended for implementation of the action plan following a successful submission.

3.3 Resource in place for REC

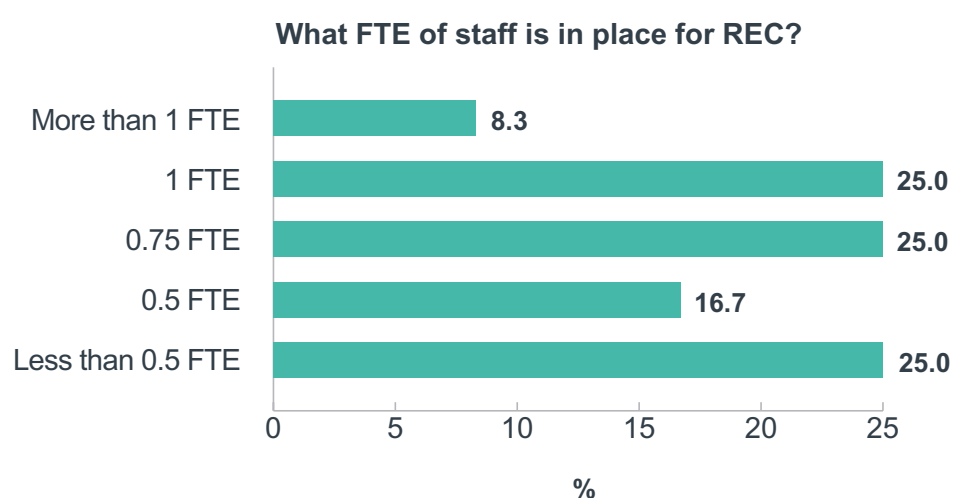
Institutional REC leads were asked if their institution had any dedicated staff resource for REC eg member(s) of staff who coordinate REC work. 44.4% (n=12) said they did and 40.7% (n=11) said they did not, but that REC work is formally a part of one or more staff member(s) workload. 11.1% (n=3) had no formal resourcing models yet (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Dedicated staff resource for REC



Among the 12 respondents with dedicated staff resource, 25.0% had resource of either 1 FTE, 0.75 FTE or less than 0.5 FTE. Fewer had 0.5 FTE (16.7%) or more than 1 FTE (8.3%) (Figure 6). This indicates wide variation in the levels of dedicated staff resourcing among institutions working on REC. However, more than half (58.3%; n=7) have more than the recommended 0.5 FTE in place, which indicates that this recommendation is not deemed sufficient by these institutions.

Figure 6: FTE of staff dedicated to REC



Functions provided

The dedicated resource in place provided a range of different functions. The most frequently cited function was project management/coordination (90.9%; n=10), followed by race equality expertise (81.8%; n=9), data expertise (72.7%; n=8) and lastly senior leadership (36.4%; n=4). Free text comments revealed that other functions provided by such staff are communications and community engagement.

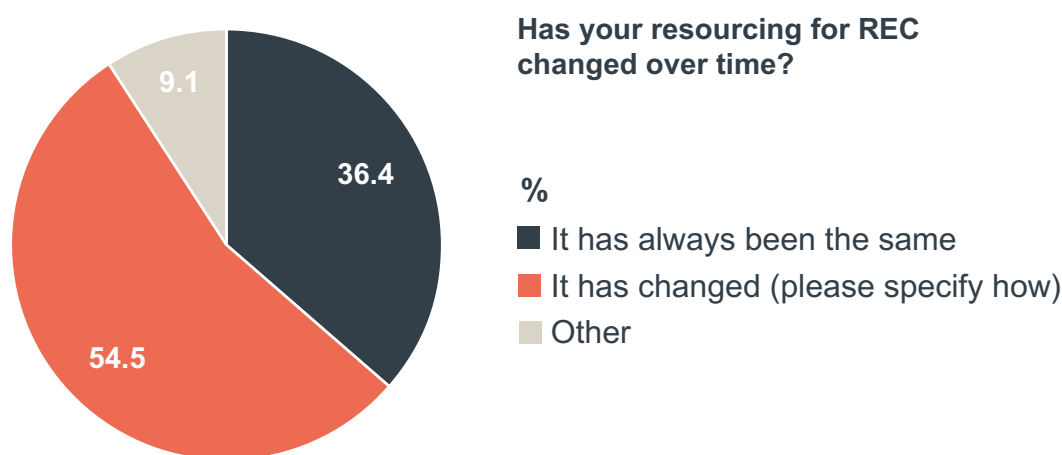
Evolution of resourcing

Respondents were asked if their resourcing models for REC had always been the same or had changed since they had joined the charter. Slightly more than half (54.4%; n=6) indicated their resourcing had changed (Figure 7). Comments outlined a range of different models over the years in some institutions:

“For the first application, the institution had two part time staff working on the applications. Their work constituted the time of one person, and 1/3 person’s time. Now the institution has one full time person coordinating the work, with assistance from a data advisor.”

(REC lead)

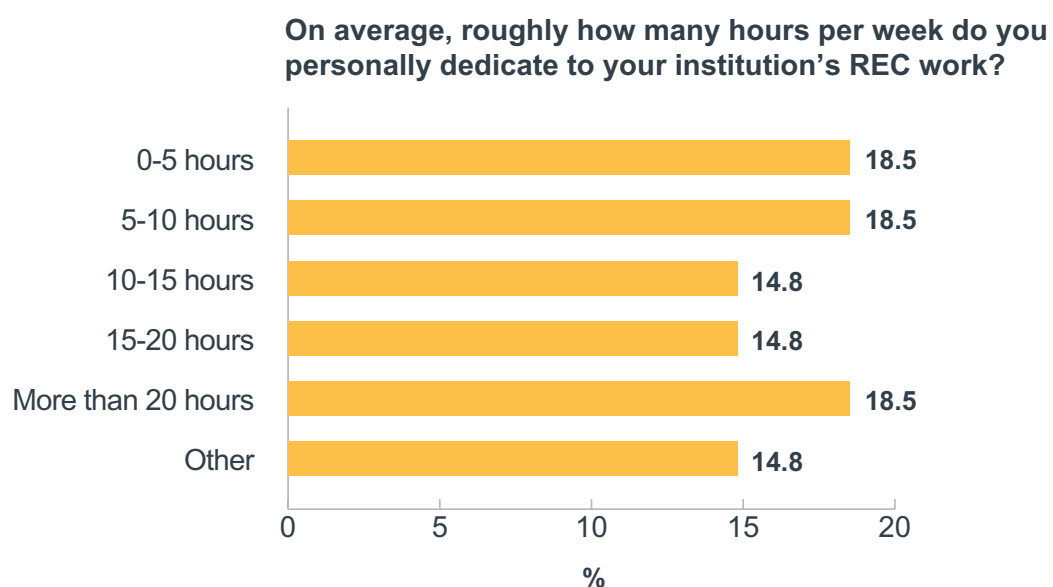
Figure 7: Has resourcing for REC changed?



Hours worked by REC leads

As another indicator of resourcing of REC, REC lead respondents were asked how many hours per week they dedicate to REC, on average. The results were extremely mixed, reflecting the range of different resourcing models in place across the institutions who responded to the survey (Figure 8). One respondent helpfully reflected that “it varies – during the application preparation it became almost my sole activity; now it is more 10-15 hours on average”.

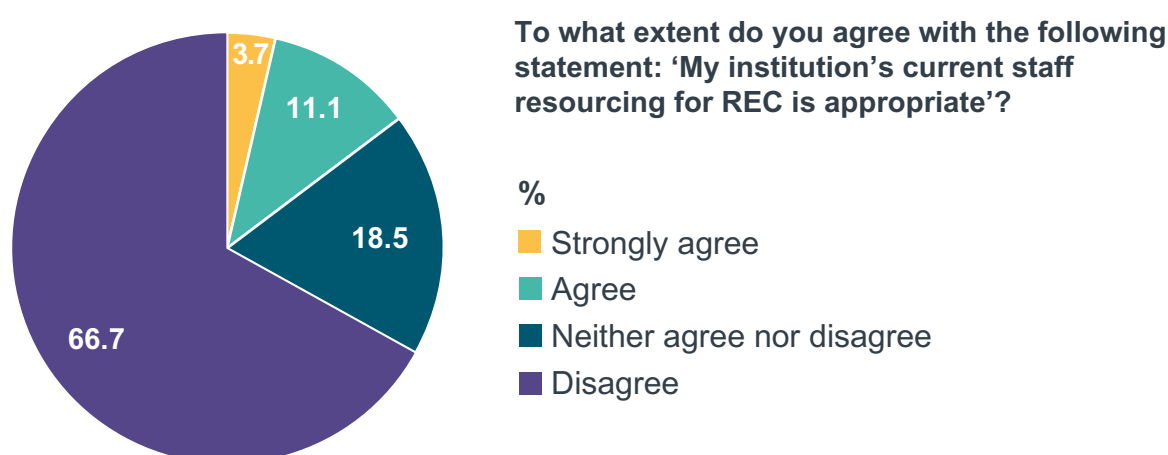
Figure 8: REC leads’ hours worked on REC per week



Views on current staff resourcing

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that ‘my institution’s current staff resourcing for REC is appropriate’. The majority (66.7; n=18) disagreed. Just 3.7% (n=1) strongly agreed and 11.1% (n=3) agreed (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Appropriateness of current resourcing for REC



Comments revealed a wide range of views on institutions’ current REC resourcing. The most common theme among them was that there was insufficient resource for REC. For example, one respondent had been unrealistically tasked with REC on top of Athena Swan responsibilities and strongly felt dedicated REC resource was required:

“My job focus is Athena Swan, but I have been tasked with helping lead on the REC for the previously unsuccessful submission... it was unrealistic to expect me to be able to take on the REC fully on top of all the Athena Swan work. If the University is to take race equality seriously, I firmly believe there should be a dedicated resource, even if just part-time. There is so much work to do in all areas and particularly this one, and our tiny team cannot manage all the competing demands and constantly feels overwhelmed and overloaded.”

(REC lead)

An interview participant suggested that institutions need to realise the scale and importance of the work involved in doing REC and resource it accordingly:

“I think resources is a key thing. [Institutions need to] realise that they need to hire another person to help. ... it was a lot of work and I think it needs resources. So, there’s also something about the institution putting the money up for it.”

(SAT Chair)

The impact of competing demands of Athena Swan and REC on staff resource occurred frequently among comments, for example:

“I prepared the previous application for the REC, but I have been clear that I cannot prepare both Athena Swan and REC applications, the process is far too burdensome and the workload inhumane.”

(REC lead)

There were mixed views about the benefits of having a dedicated REC role versus an approach that embedded REC responsibilities more widely. One respondent felt that as well as a dedicated role, it is important to have a senior staff member with influence to take on some of the work:

“I’m 1 FTE and my role is primarily to resource our REC application – I think it’s useful having a full time person to do the work, but I think it’s also important that there’s someone senior in the EDI/central resource who contributes some elements as well – it makes sense for me to do the majority of the work but there’s some influencing and some scenarios where someone with more authority could get better results”

(REC lead)

Another felt it is preferable not to have a dedicated role in order to better embed the work across the institution:

“The current structure of a REC application is a significant piece of work and balancing that commitment is challenging alongside other commitments of the role. I wouldn’t however advocate a specific REC role, I don’t think that embeds good practice across an institution.”

(REC lead)

Another respondent was positive about a new structure in development that aimed to draw on resource from across the institution:

“We are setting a programme management structure with 7 workstreams, resourced by staff from across the organisation.”

(REC lead)

While in a minority, one REC lead felt resourcing was adequate due to input from EDI colleagues and SAT members:

“Given that other EDI colleagues make a significant contribution to REC work, plus contribution of SAT members, I believe we are resourced to do the work.”

(REC lead)

Importantly, when asked what would help their institution to make further progress on REC, 74.5% (n=41) said ‘additional dedicated staff resources for REC’, aligning with the majority view that current resourcing of REC is insufficient and suggesting that this is a barrier to making progress on REC.

Ideas for resourcing REC

A range of recommendations were made by respondents, including the need to consider REC resourcing post-application to drive progress:

“In the year leading to the application a minimum of 1 FTE is required. Post application 0.75 FTE is required to support implementation, as leads for work areas do not progress work without the pressure/support.”

(REC lead)

Another was to split responsibilities into staff and student aspects of REC:

“My experience has shown that at least two people are needed to work full time on coordinating work on the REC. Ideally one to work on student related issues and the other on staff. This would ensure that all aspects of race equality are addressed across the institution effectively.”

(REC lead)

One interview participant suggested that Advance HE should not only recommend an amount of staff resource needed for REC but also give an indication of the financial commitment that was needed according to institution size:

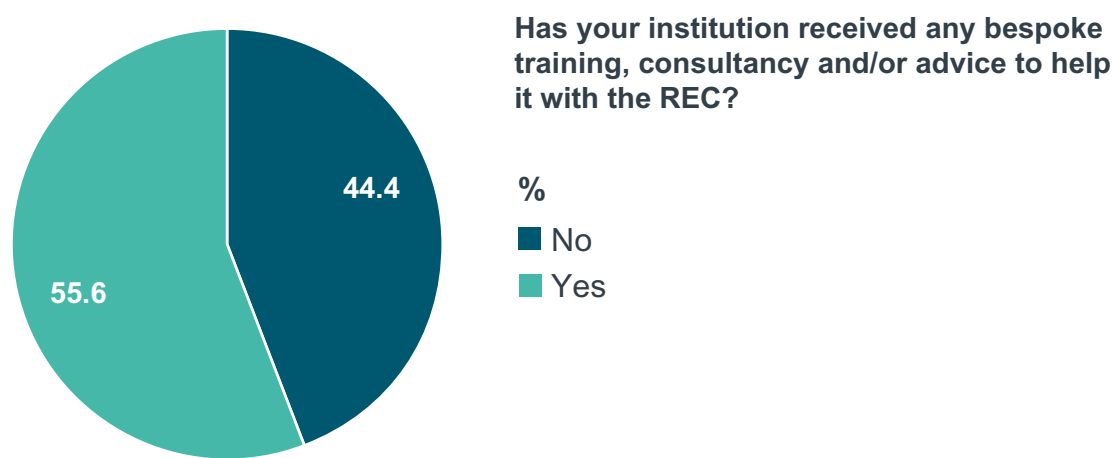
“It is about material resources ... the point of racism has always been the circulation of resources and benefits and privilege, as in power. ... I think my other recommendation is definitely to set a limit of how much resources an institution has to put into the work, not just in terms of people, but saying if your institution is this big, you at least need to set up £100,000 pounds for the work.”

(REC Senior Lead)

3.4 External resource and support

Over half the respondents (55.6%; n=15) had received bespoke training, consultancy and/or advice to assist it with its REC work (Figure 10). The vast majority who had done so had found it useful or very useful (93.4%; n=14).

Figure 10: Bespoke training, consultancy and/or advice received for REC



Respondents were asked who provided this support and what type of support this was. Around equal numbers have used Advance HE and independent consultants (Table 7). Advance HE support was most commonly used for feedback on submissions and training. Consultants were most commonly used to review REC submissions and for training. Three reported using both Advance HE and consultants, such as:

“Attended Advance HE Intro to REC and two-day training course. Used 1 x day consultancy to launch REC. Worked with independent consultants to develop race equality training and to review draft application.”
(REC lead)

There was one example of an institution using another HEI to provide a mock panel to review its draft submission, who explained further:

“For our first application, we ran our own mock-panel made up of EandD advisors from other universities we have a relationship with.”
(REC lead)

Table 7: External support for REC

Type of support	Advance HE	Advance HE and consultant	Consultant	Other HEIs	Total
Feedback	2				2
Focus groups			1		1
Mock panel				1	1
Review of submission			3		3
Training	1	3	1		5
AHE pilot of external feedback	1				1
Total	4	3	5	1	13

3.5 Discussion and recommendations

This research finds that adequate resourcing for REC is essential yet there is wide variation in approaches to resourcing REC across institutions. It is by no means universal to have dedicated staff in place for REC, with an equal proportion having and not having dedicated staff (though with some form of work allocation for REC). Respondents had a range of views on the pros and cons of having dedicated REC roles or embedding responsibilities more widely, suggesting that each institution needs to develop its own model. However, respondents emphasised the need for REC resourcing to continue post-application in order to drive progress on the action plan and that this is not always the case, indicating a need for stronger advice on this subject.

Where there is dedicated resource, the majority had more than the recommended 0.5 FTE. Moreover, the majority of REC leads felt their current resourcing for REC, whether dedicated or not, was not appropriate, with comments revealing that they felt they had insufficient resource for REC, particularly when there are competing demands of Athena Swan and REC work. The current recommendation within the handbook as to the resource required for REC is thus too low for most institutions, and we would suggest this is increased to between one and two FTE depending on the size of the institution. Yet, resourcing REC is not just about people, but also about money. An idea proposed is for guidance to be provided on the financial commitment required to deliver REC.

We found that it is common for institutions to make use of external resource and expertise to support REC work, again indicating that internal resource and race equality expertise are often not enough. Advance HE and independent consultants are the main avenues for this support and the most common types of support are feedback on submissions and training of various types to support institutional knowledge and understanding of race equality and the REC. The provision of enhanced guidance, resources and educational opportunities, as outlined elsewhere in this report, may go some way to reducing the need for institutions to look externally for support. Additionally, Advance HE could do more to help institutions to identify external support when this is needed.

[See recommendations 16, 17 and 19.](#)

4 Self-assessment process and preparing submissions

4.1 Section summary

- + among interview participants, there was consensus that the self-assessment approach provides a structure and robust evidence base to guide an institution's race equality work, which is particularly important due to there often being a lack of expertise and experience in this area within universities.

Self-Assessment Teams (SATs)

- + the majority of survey respondents' SATs contained all of the categories of representation recommended by Advance HE, though representation of staff on different contract types and from across faculties/departments was less consistent
- + the ratio of BAME to white members varied across SATs, yet most were of roughly even or slightly fewer BAME than white members. This is positive as substantial BAME representation is important, as well as ensuring the burden of race equality work does not fall solely on BAME staff
- + recruitment of SAT members was a minor challenge for more than half of respondents. Challenges included securing appropriate representation of BAME staff and students, while not over-burdening them with REC work, staff involved in the student experience, learning and teaching, and data experts
- + the vast majority felt their SAT composition is appropriate, while slightly less felt their SAT functions well, suggesting a good composition does not necessarily equate with a well-functioning SAT. Several felt there is a balance to be struck between the breadth of representation required and a size of SAT that can be effective and found sub or working group structures effective
- + respondents reported that SAT members' contribution can be variable, with factors such as time available and understanding of their role impacting this
- + effective leadership and chairing, recognition and support for members and pragmatic or flexible approaches to SAT composition and organisation were reported as having positive results.

Data requirements

- + interview participants felt the data requirements, though extensive, are needed for enabling identification of the racial inequalities to be addressed
- + survey respondents felt the REC data requirements have a range of benefits, especially enabling differentiation of the experiences and issues affecting different racial and ethnic groups
- + however, several interview participants felt that there is a need for a greater focus on intersectionality within the data requirements, especially in order to understand experiences and barriers for BAME women

- + the data requirements were viewed as difficult to some degree by almost all respondents. The largest proportion find them somewhat or moderately difficult, but few find them extremely difficult
- + the most common data issues respondents had come up against were obtaining the required data, the volume of the data, working with small numbers and analysis
- + suggestions for what would help institutions with the data requirements included an online application system, data templates/tools and more guidance, as well as improved data collection and increased data expertise internally
- + the REC survey was found to be useful by the majority of respondents, especially in relation to enabling identification of actions and interventions for their action plan. However, it was found to be slightly or somewhat difficult to implement by more than half. There were also recurrent criticisms of the survey questions
- + the majority had undertaken focus groups and found them to be useful for illuminating the experiences of BAME staff and/or students, enabling identification of actions and interventions and communicating lived experiences of BAME staff and students to senior leadership.

Communications

- + only a little over a third had a communications plan for REC in place, suggesting an area for development for institutions
- + those with a plan thought it was effective for communicating the institution's REC work in relation to the REC principles, though the need to address structural racism and take an intersectional approach were felt to be slightly less well communicated.

Action plans

- + the most challenging aspects of action planning for the majority were identifying how an action plan's progress and impact will be measured, how to schedule actions appropriately, and identifying appropriate actions that will help to address racial inequalities identified through the self-assessment
- + slightly fewer also found identifying SMART actions and assigning responsibility for actions challenging. Another challenge was gaining buy-in to actions from those in positions of power, a lack of which sometimes resulted in a weakening of the plan
- + a lack of overarching direction in action plans and/or coherency between the plan and the narrative in the submission were described as pitfalls by a panellist
- + timing was an important factor, with several reporting they did not have enough time left after the lengthy self-assessment to create a robust action plan.

Timeline and workload

- + the vast majority of respondents found that three SAT meetings was not sufficient to undertake the self-assessment and prepare a REC application, with some having met many more times than this
- + frequency of REC SAT meetings while undertaking the self-assessment and preparing a REC submission varied, with the largest proportion having met monthly. Most felt their SAT met often enough
- + the time it took to undertake the self-assessment and prepare a REC submission spanned from less than one year up to more than three years, with most taking between one and two years
- + more than half disagreed that the workload involved in preparing their institution's most recent REC submission was appropriately shared/allocated among relevant staff/SAT members. Several felt that it cannot be fully shared either because most of the work necessarily should fall to individuals employed to work on REC, or because there is a need for consistency in a submission
- + the largest proportion of respondents felt the workload involved in preparing a REC submission was either 'a bit too much' or 'excessive'. However, around a quarter felt it was 'appropriate/about right'. Only a very small number felt it was 'not enough/too light touch'
- + qualitative data revealed a range of opinions about workload, including that it is extensive but is needed in order to undertake a robust self-assessment and/or to create conversations around race and develop understanding of racism, while several felt that it reduced time for taking action to advance race equality.

REC handbook and the self-assessment process

- + just over half of respondents had found the REC handbook to be either useful or very useful during the self-assessment process, with the remainder either not having a view about this or finding it not useful
- + it was most effective for providing understanding of the REC principles, the data requirements, the commitment required from senior management, how to complete the application form, and how to design the REC survey. It was less effective for providing understanding of how to complete a SMART action plan, how to use qualitative data in the application, how to devise actions to address the issues identified, and the role of benchmarking in the self-evaluation
- + suggestions for improving the handbook and other REC guidance materials included: more guidance on action planning, more guidance on data, including how to format and present the data, more examples of good practice to illustrate the expectations of submission and making it more user-friendly, including through digitising it. Additionally, a majority felt that examples of good practice and positive action provisions to address racial inequalities would support better action plans.

Preparing the REC application

- + more than half found completing a REC application either moderately or extremely difficult and more than third found it slightly or somewhat difficult
- + the most challenging sections of the application were: professional and support staff, the action plan and academic staff sections
- + other challenges reflected those explored above, such as obtaining the required data, analysing and presenting the data and the volume of work involved in preparing the submission.

4.2 Introduction

This section presents research findings relating to key aspects of the REC self-assessment process and preparation of submissions:

- + [Views on the benefits of the self-assessment process](#)
- + [Self-assessment teams \(SATs\)](#)
- + [The data requirements](#)
- + [Communications](#)
- + [Actions plans](#)
- + [The REC Handbook and other guidance for the self-assessment process](#)
- + [Preparing the application](#)

It ends with [discussion and recommendations](#).

The requirements

A robust (candid, thorough, accurate and specific) self-assessment process is required in order for institutions to prepare and submit a REC award application. As per the REC handbook, in order to apply for a Bronze REC award an institution is required to:

- + conduct a survey of minority ethnic staff and students to gain insight into the culture of the institution
- + interrogate qualitative and quantitative data on the experiences and outcomes for minority ethnic staff and students across a range of areas required in the application form
- + consult with minority ethnic staff and students on existing issues and the development of actions and initiatives

- + complete a REC application form which presents the results of all of the above with in-depth analyses and commentary providing a clear sense of the institution's race-specific issues, aims and priorities
- + create a comprehensive, evidence-based action plan, with SMART actions to tackle race inequalities.

For Bronze level award renewals, in addition to the initial requirements, institutions will need to demonstrate progress against their previous action plan, thus exploring progress forms part of the self-assessment process.

For Silver level awards, in addition to Bronze level requirements, institutions must demonstrate a significant record of activity and achievement in promoting race equality and in addressing challenges across the whole institution, thus examining progress and impacts forms part of the self-assessment process. Additionally, there is an expectation at Silver level for actions to reflect the learning that has taken place and the progress that has been made.

4.3 Benefits of the self-assessment process

The overarching benefits of the self-assessment approach that underpins REC were explored with interview participants. There was consensus that the approach provides a structure and robust evidence base to guide an institution's work, which for one institution had helped to engage senior colleagues:

"The main thing was that it gave us the focus to do the work. So, it gave us a structured approach to analyse what the key equality issues were. And I think, in that regard strategically, it's quite important.... I think we knew generally what the issues were, but it provided that robust evidence base in order to have that commitment from the senior executive team... And it was a good driver to bring people together to do that piece of work."

(REC lead and HERAG member)

Another felt universities need the clear framework and self-reflective process provided by REC in order to better understand race equality in their context:

"I think it gives universities a clear framework of what is required to understand race equality within higher education. I do think a lot of institutions will seek validation and they don't understand race equality. So, actually having some sort of framework that gets you to question 'are your systems working, are your processes working'?"

(REC lead)

Additionally, while acknowledging the criticism it sometimes receives, another participant explained how a robust self-assessment approach is important due to a lack of expertise and experience in race equality in the HE sector:

“Some people say it’s a clunky way of doing it. But actually, because organisations are not very exercised or well experienced at dealing with race inequality and racial inequality data and issues, it’s actually probably the first time for many organisations that they’ve actually looked at these issues in a systematic way. Not to please the funder, but actually to do so in a longitudinal way, a pipeline way.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

4.4 Self-assessment teams

Self-assessment teams (SATs) are responsible for undertaking the self-assessment process that underpins the REC process within institutions, developing appropriate actions in response, and leading the institution’s preparation of an application for a REC award. SATs may also be responsible for ensuring that resulting action plans are fulfilled. How the SAT is structured will depend on the institution; it may be one large SAT with smaller sub-groups for specific actions, or one SAT which undertakes everything together.

Advance HE’s REC handbook states that institutions need to establish a strong and effective SAT. It recommends:

- + a senior chair (an academic at pro vice-chancellor level or equivalent)
- + people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds
- + individuals with knowledge, skills and experience in advancing race equality
- + representatives from each of the institution’s academic faculties and relevant central departments (they recommend a senior representative from each)
- + a balance of professional and support staff and academics, and people at different grades within the institution
- + full-time and part-time staff, and staff on open-ended and fixed-term contracts
- + representatives from any minority ethnic staff and student groups
- + student representation
- + a data expert.

Among survey respondents, 74.5% (n=41) reported having a SAT in place, with 9.1% (n=5) having previously had one in place and 5.5% (n=3) currently putting one together. This reflects the differing stages in the REC journey amongst the survey sample.

SAT composition

REC lead respondents were asked additional questions about SAT composition that drew on the Advance HE handbook guidance. All REC leads who said they had a SAT said their SAT included 'individuals with knowledge, skills and experience in advancing race equality' (100%; n=28) (Table 8). Other categories selected by almost all REC leads were 'people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds' (96.4%; n=27); 'a senior leader as Chair' (92.9%; n=26) and 'HR representation' (92.9%; n=26). 'BAME student representatives' (85.7%; n=24), 'BAME staff network representatives' (85.7%; n=24) and 'a balance of professional and support staff and academics' (82.1%; n=23) were selected by only slightly fewer respondents. Meanwhile, 'staff at different grades within the institution' and 'data expert(s)' were selected by around three quarters each (78.6%; n=22 and 75%; n=21 respectively).

Table 8: SAT composition

	Percent
A senior leader as Chair	92.9%
People from a variety of ethnic backgrounds	96.4%
BAME student representatives	85.7%
BAME staff network representatives	85.7%
Individuals with knowledge, skills and experience in advancing race equality	100.0%
Representatives from each of the institution's academic faculties and relevant central departments	53.6%
A balance of professional and support staff and academics	82.1%
Staff at different grades within the institution	78.6%
Full-time and part-time staff, and staff on open-ended and fixed-term contracts	57.1%
HR representation	92.9%
Data expert(s)	75.0%
Athena Swan expert(s)	67.9%
Other	3.6%

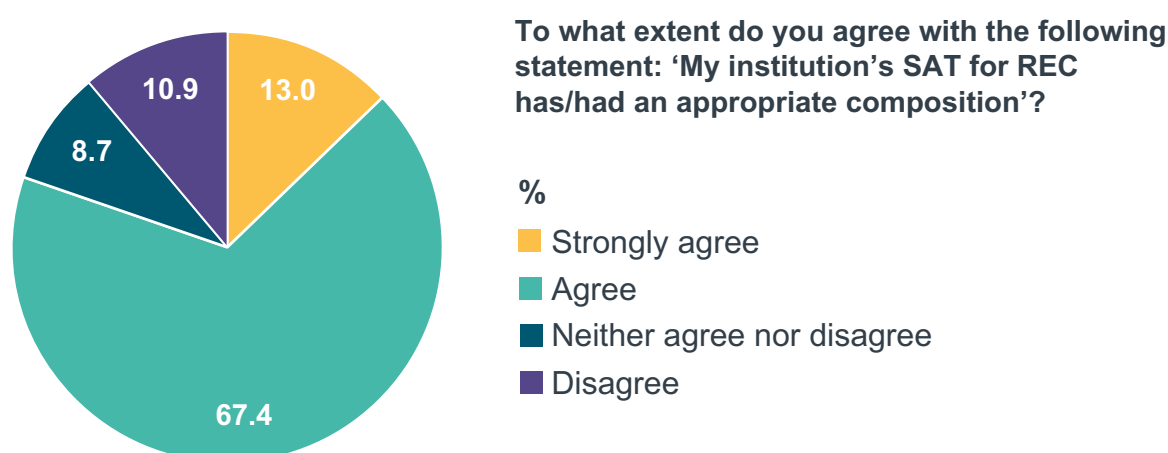
The three categories with relatively lower rates of selection were 'Athena Swan expert(s)' (67.9%; n=19), 'full-time and part-time staff, and staff on open-ended and fixed-term contracts' (57.1%; n=16), and 'representatives from each of the institution's academic faculties and relevant central departments' (53.6%; n=15), though all were present in more than half of the SATs. Other SAT members reported by respondents included union representatives. The majority of SATs thus appear to contain most of the different forms of representation recommended by Advance HE, though representation of different contract types and from across faculties and departments is less consistent. HR representation is not specified in the REC Handbook but is very common, suggesting this would be a helpful addition to the guidance.

In regard to ethnicity among SAT members, the reported ratio of BAME to white members varied considerably, ranging from 20/80 BAME/white in one SAT to 80/20 BAME/white in another. Of the 22 respondents who provided this information, the most common ratios were 40/60 (n=7) and 50/50 (n=6) BAME/white, followed by 30/70 (n=4). Thus, it is most common to have slightly more white people than BAME people or a balance of BAME and white members. This finding is positive, as it is important that there is both substantial BAME representation on the SAT while the burden of the work does not fall solely on BAME staff and white people participate. As one REC SAT Chair said:

"I think the more white people get involved in doing it the better because I think we (BAME people) get punished in other ways for doing this work...we keep just being drained and exploited in a way and that's just not okay. It's replicating the same thing you want to stop."
(SAT Chair)

Also, given the typical distribution of BAME staff, having a majority of BAME SAT members would indicate that there was not enough senior involvement. However, as a minority of SATs had either significantly more BAME than white participants or white than BAME participants, additional guidance may be needed on this.

All respondents from REC member institutions were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statement: 'My institution's SAT for REC has/had an appropriate composition'. The vast majority (80.4%; n=37) agreed or strongly agreed, with only 10.9% (n=5) disagreeing (Figure 11).

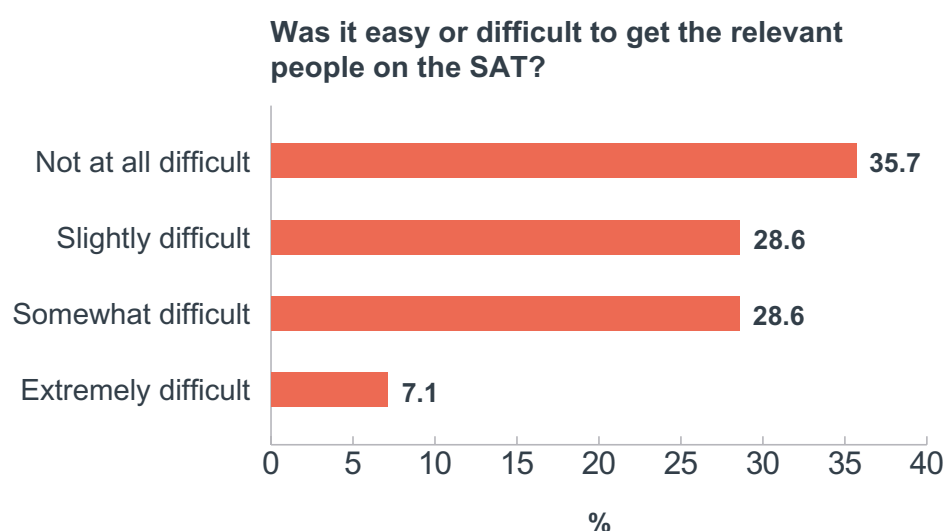
Figure 11: Appropriateness of SAT composition

Recruiting SAT members

More than a third of REC leads found it 'not difficult at all' to get the relevant people on their SAT (35.7%; n=10). Combined together, more than half found it either 'slightly' or 'somewhat difficult' (57.2%; n=16) but few found it extremely difficult (7.1%; n=2) (Figure 12). Overall, this suggests experiences of recruiting REC SAT members vary, but it tends to be a minor challenge, not a major one. However, some comments suggested that recruitment does present challenges for some:

"Identifying people, persuading them, recognising the time and mental commitment are all challenges."

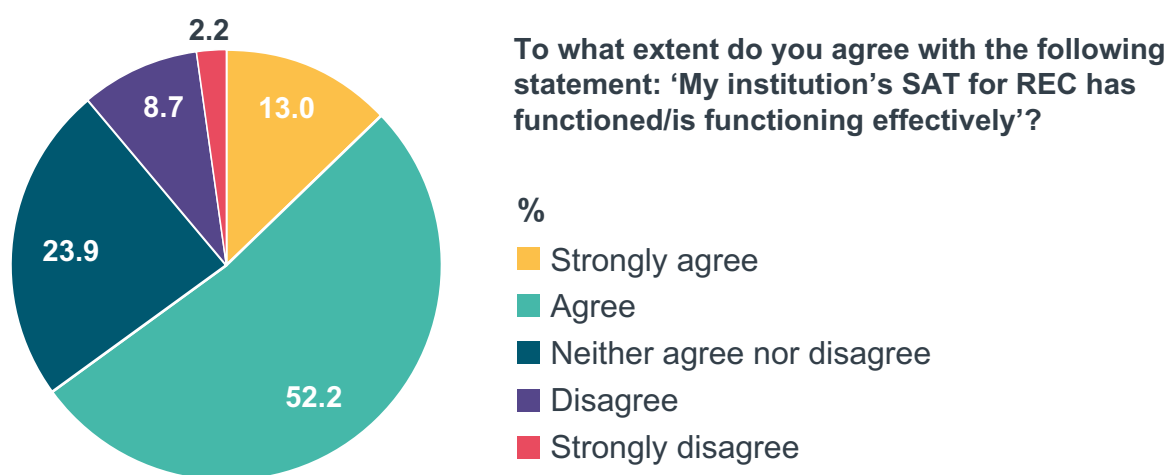
(REC lead)

Figure 12: Level of difficulty recruiting SAT members

Efficacy of SATs

All respondents from REC member institutions were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statement: ‘my institution’s SAT for REC has functioned/is functioning effectively’. The majority agreed or strongly agreed (65.2%; n=30), and only 10.9% (n=5) disagreed (Figure 13). Agreement was slightly lower than to the question about composition, indicating that an appropriate composition does not necessarily equate with effective functioning of a SAT.

Figure 13: Efficacy of SATs



Perspectives on SAT composition and efficacy

While the survey results regarding composition show consistency with Advance HE guidance and most respondents feel their SAT composition is appropriate, respondents’ comments reveal a range of reflections on and challenges regarding composition and efficacy.

Chief among these was the need to ensure appropriate representation of BAME staff and students, senior leaders, and those working in areas of importance to the application, or with the skills needed to complete the application.

In regard to BAME staff and students, some had experienced challenges at first but had achieved a better representation over time, though senior BAME representation was hard to come by:

“When we first started there wasn’t a good ethnic balance however, after 1 year, this began to change and more BAME staff were personally invited which helped shift the balance and now our REC SAT has even ethnic balance. However, as there are no BAME staff in grade 10, this is something that is missing.”

(REC lead)

Representation of students and staff involved in the student experience, learning and teaching was a commonly reported gap:

“More student representation is needed. The REC application is focused 50% on staff and 50% on students, therefore the REC SAT should make up equal student representation.”

(REC lead)

“There are 2 student representatives (myself being one); whilst this is good the 2nd rep is a paid Sabbatical Officer – should have more members who are primary to the student experience.”

(BAME student SAT member)

Several comments reflected on the challenge of including BAME people while not over-burdening them with REC work:

“Hard to know how to balance the ethnic composition of the SAT. On the one hand, you need the voices and the experience; on the other you do not want to over-burden minoritised staff.”

(REC lead)

Representation of people with the necessary skills for the self-assessment process was also highlighted as a learning point:

“Doing the REC for the first time is also a journey of discovery on how complex a data task it is. At times, the SAT has been overwhelmed by the scale of it and we have had to rethink our approach and recruit specialist data support.”

(REC lead)

Balancing representation with a size that is practical was a key concern, with many reporting the SAT cannot include all representation required and function effectively:

“In order to be representative of different areas, grades, staff types, students, ethnicities/ genders, etc, you end up with a big committee. This makes it more difficult to use the SAT as a committee to drive the application and process and change. Smaller committees/teams are generally more effective. There is a fundamental conflict in the way Advance HE wants SATs set up and the consequence of size, representation versus effectiveness.”

(EDI staff member)

Having sub-groups or working groups was a common solution that appeared to solve this problem for some, for example:

“We have found a structure that splits the team in which one group is focused on the action plan and the other group is creating efficient ideas to implement new processes and ideas.”

(Member of REC working group)

The contribution of members was another recurring concern. Several reported struggling with commitment and contribution, one linked this to a lack of understanding of the work involved and time available to do it:

“I think we’ve also assumed that everyone will have time to contribute to reviewing a lot of data and working on actions, however we do struggle with commitment... so potentially would advise a thorough advert for individuals and agreements with line managers regarding workload.”

(REC lead)

Another noted that senior staff and students contributed the least:

“There were senior (white) staff who were happy to be named as SAT members but in reality did nothing to contribute even though their involvement was really neededWe had a number of Students’ Union reps on the SAT but they did not really contribute to discussions or provide input to the writing or action planning. Again, their involvement would have been valuable.”

(REC lead)

However, two explained approaches taken to resolve issues such as contribution and commitment:

“The new Chair of the SAT made it clear early on that if people were not going to be actively involved, that they should ask themselves what they were doing there. That set everything on the right track to ensure engagement and a collective effort to make decisions and prepare the submission.”

(REC lead)

“We put a lot of time and effort into making it work and ensuring members were supported and recognised.”

(REC lead)

Others stressed the emotional toll of the work and the challenges this poses:

“It is a significant time commitment, emotionally draining and requires expertise. All this means maintaining a SAT is tricky.”

(REC lead)

Three mentioned the need for effective coordination of the SAT, and someone with the remit and time to do this:

“The facilitation of the project was done by someone with other commitments and responsibilities. There was insufficient support and the SAT could have benefited from coordination by more people.”

(SAT member)

Several shared examples of approaches they had taken that had had positive results. This included effective chairing and BAME leadership of the SAT:

“In the past 12 months we have changed our SAT and it is chaired by a member of our BAME staff community who has taken responsibility for the membership with support from senior colleagues in the University.”

(REC lead)

A pragmatic and iterative approach was described by two respondents, for example:

“We are revising SAT membership as we go through [the] process, bringing in new skills and voices where we recognise we need them – or where people come to us wanting to be involved.”

(REC lead)

There were two reflections about the remit of the SAT with regard to advancing race equality, with one suggesting a REC SAT be limited to focusing on REC and another example having a broader remit:

“A REC SAT functions better if there are other groups contributing to advancing race equality.”

(SAT member)

“I think we are starting to generate better discussions mainly because the group isn’t looking specifically at the REC but at the wider issues impacting the University. The group is called the Race Equality Steering Group and the focus isn’t on getting a charter mark.”

(REC lead)

Perspectives from REC SAT Chairs

Interview participants who were REC SAT Chairs conveyed the need for REC SAT Chairs to be supported and recognised for their important and demanding contribution:

“It has taken time to make clear the support I needed and what we’ve realised along the way is that this position needed to be paid, that it needed to be counted as an important role ... and then suddenly it became a really much more demanding role with no compensation of any kind or recognition. And so, we had to fight for that and that was agreed, and it was made retrospective.”

(SAT Chair)

The support of EDI staff was particularly valued:

“I also have an EDI department that is very supportive. So that has meant that I don’t feel I’m doing something against everything.”

(SAT Chair)

Additionally, having top-level senior leadership support has supported Chairs in their roles:

“The Vice Chancellor has been very supportive, and the university was quite open to do the process. So, the process has had university support rather than what I hear from other friends and colleagues [in other institutions] that they are working against the university”.

(SAT Chair)

In regard to challenges encountered in SAT meetings, one Chair shared the experience of dealing with resistance to change, lack of contribution from members and a lack of understanding in the group:

“In the SAT meetings it was always a mixture of resistance to change and a little bit of when people just don’t say yes or no or to anything, they just sit there. And there are some that are very vocal, and they’re always sort of claiming, oh, what about the white working-class boys of the north”.

(SAT Chair)

Another shared the challenge of moving individuals on from identifying issues to solutions, where effective chairing and leadership was required:

“There’s a lot of talking that goes on in the working groups and actually getting people to engage with the data to really get down and look at what the issues are is a challenge.... The other challenge is managing those people who are very good at identifying issues, but very reluctant to consider solutions. And I think there is really an opportunity to support colleagues in these kind of roles. But also, that sometimes you just have got to draw a line here and just say... we need to get this done.”

(SAT Chair)

4.5 Data requirements

Need for and benefits of the data requirements

For most interview participants, while recognising the amount of work required to meet the data requirements, the view was that they are central to the self-assessment and necessary in order to enable institutions to identify the racial inequalities that need to be addressed.

“The thing that the REC does is that it does enable a logical, very systematic, very data heavy approach to looking at the outcomes of the organisation’s practices. ... It does enable you to find out where your highest or worst disparities are, through which you can then establish priorities, and from those priorities establish, hopefully smart action plans.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

This included the requirements in terms of disaggregation of data into smaller categories, particularly into ethnic groups:

“I think the fact that you’re looking at BAME versus white, home versus International, it also helps to unpick some of the myths about representation and highlight representation gaps. I think that the breakdown into smaller categories, ie looking at Black Caribbean and Black African is very important because it again highlights some of the socio-economic interplay that actually different communities experience.”

(REC lead)

Survey respondents were asked about the benefits of the REC data requirements. Benefits asked about included enabling differentiation of the experiences and issues affecting different racial and ethnic groups; BAME academic, research, and teaching staff; different groups of BAME professional and support staff and/or different groups of BAME students; enabling design of appropriate actions to address the issues identified in the data; and enabling communication of the experiences and issues facing BAME staff and students to the senior leadership in the institution and/or to the wider university community. All of the benefits asked about were chosen by at least 60.0% of respondents, indicating that the requirements have a wide range of benefits. The highest-ranking benefit was enabling differentiation of the experiences and issues affecting different racial and ethnic groups, echoing the views of interview participants that disaggregation of data by ethnic group enables identification of any specific issues for different groups.

However, a recurring view among interview participants was the need for greater focus within the data requirements on intersections of race and other characteristics, especially gender, suggesting that the current requirements do not go far enough in this regard:

“Why is gender equality not part of race equality? ... The other day I was reviewing an application for a university and throughout every section, I said, intersectionality, intersectionality. ... You should always be looking with an intersectional lens, it’s not binary. What about a black male versus a black female – are the experiences the same?”

(REC panellist)

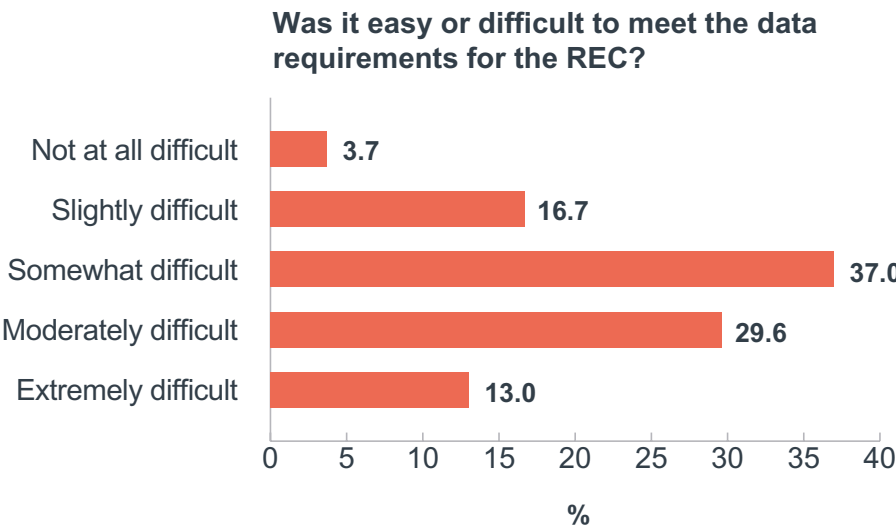
“The failure to look intersectionally, it hides a lot the experiences of Black women in particular about the fact that they are systematically excluded from the higher echelons of the academic career pathway.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

Level of difficulty

All survey respondents involved in REC within their institution were asked whether the data requirements were easy or difficult. Almost all respondents (96.3%; n=52) find the requirements at least slightly difficult, with largest numbers finding them somewhat difficult (37.0%; n=20) or moderately difficult (29.6%; n=16). However, a lower proportion find them extremely difficult (13%; n=7), suggesting the data requirements are difficult but not insurmountable for most (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Level of difficulty of the data requirements



Respondents were asked to comment on the two most difficult data issues that they came up against. By far the most common data issue related to obtaining the required data, which was mentioned by 18 respondents.

For several, this was to do with data not being centralised:

“The fragmentation of data among different departments within the university.”
(REC lead)

“Depending on your university set up, it can take months to work out who owns what data, how you can access it, and work it up into usable figures – THEN you can start analysis.”
(EDI staff member)

Another barrier to obtaining the data was gaps in data collection:

“A lot of the data was missing/not being recorded.”
(SAT member)

For others, there were gatekeepers who stood in the way of accessing the data:

“Members noted that they had trouble accessing data, as they were reliant on other staff – this became their ‘limiting factor’ in obtaining data.”

(SAT member)

One made the line between barriers to obtaining data and structural racism:

“Institutional racism, as demonstrated in the myriad of small reasons that delayed this data. Overcoming this has been key in realigning the institution to begin to actually face what structural racism looks like in practice and gear up to consistently challenge it.”

(SAT member)

The next most common data issue was the volume of the data requirements and the time required for data analysis, which was mentioned by eight respondents. This was viewed as highly resource intensive:

“The sheer amount of data required, in its various breakdowns. You could have someone working full-time on REC data alone for a year, and it still wouldn’t be enough to complete an application.”

(EDI staff member)

Related to this, a recurring view was that the data requirements of REC become the focus of the REC, rather than action to address racial inequalities:

“I personally felt [you] could get lost in the data rather than looking at an action approach to ensure impact for those within the university.”

(REC working group member)

A further recurrent data issue was working with small numbers, which was highlighted by six respondents. This mostly related to there being small numbers of BAME staff and students, which made disaggregation, analysis and reporting more challenging:

“Small numbers are a constant challenge, balancing showing ethnicity disaggregated, with intersectionality without having such small numbers all of the time.”

(REC lead)

“What REC doesn’t seem to recognise though is that numbers are often *so small* (grade X, Faculty Y, UK/Overseas, this particular ethnicity) you cannot do anything meaningful with that data. Yet the REC process demands that you break all data down to these [detailed] levels. What ends up in the application itself is probably not even a third of all the data work that has to go on.”

(EDI staff member)

Analysis of the data was a further recurrent issue, with benchmarking challenging for some and drawing conclusions from the data challenging for others:

“The biggest two challenges are benchmarking data and analysis of that data.”

(REC lead)

This issue related to a lack of data analysis expertise and capacity for several:

“The lack of a central data analysis capacity that could service the application.”

(REC lead)

Presenting the data was also a challenge cited by several respondents, with a gap in guidance and tools from Advance HE mentioned several times:

“Lack of guidance on how to format and present data. No working template. An old Excel template was never updated, and this was a missed opportunity to make it easier for institutions and not have everyone reinvent the wheel unnecessarily.”

(REC lead)

Other issues included the timing of data availability and REC submission deadlines:

“Staff and student data are available at different times in the year (staff is end of July and student is generally early November). This makes consistency across the submission in terms of years covered difficult because of the tight turnaround for adding the 19/20 data for a February deadline.”

(REC lead)

What would help regarding data?

In answer to the question ‘what would help your institution to make further progress on REC’, 48.1% (n=25) said ‘REC data analysis tools/resources/support/training’. Within comments, six respondents felt that providing additional data tools and guidance would reduce the workload and difficulties involved in meeting the data requirements, while another expressed how this would “help to prevent differences in what to analyse, the methodologies used, what and how to present analysed information.”

A range of ideas were suggested. While 17 were in favour of an online application system for REC (see further in Section 5), four additionally specified that such a system could reduce the data workload and difficulties experienced:

“Online application would ideally contain sample data tables. This would help limit data collection and analysis.”

(REC lead)

“I think that an online REC application could make reporting on data easier. If we could transfer our REC data into an online system that categorises it, it would be useful. It would make things much quicker.”

(REC lead)

As well as templates and examples of the data required, one suggested that all of the data considered during the self-assessment should not be required within the REC submission, and instead the focus should be on key messages or key issues from the data:

“The data requests are too open ended. It would be much easier if Advance HE had provided workable templates/examples of the data needed. ... In many applications, the amounts of detail provided are so great that it seems incredible that they have been properly assessed by panels. Emphasis should be on identifying key messages in the data so as to tell a clear story.”

(REC lead)

Another felt that greater flexibility in the data requirements as well as guidance on data presentation would be helpful:

“The data requirements are far too rigid and onerous. The data requested is correct, but the format is not flexible, and no help or assistance is given with presentation other than the suggestion to look at a successful application.”

(REC lead)

However, one interview participant was wary of allowing institutions to choose which data to present in their submission for fear of cherry-picking good stories:

“It would be easy to pick and choose elements of the institution where you do well, and actually not having to provide so much data could be an excuse to provide just better-looking data.”

(REC lead and panellist)

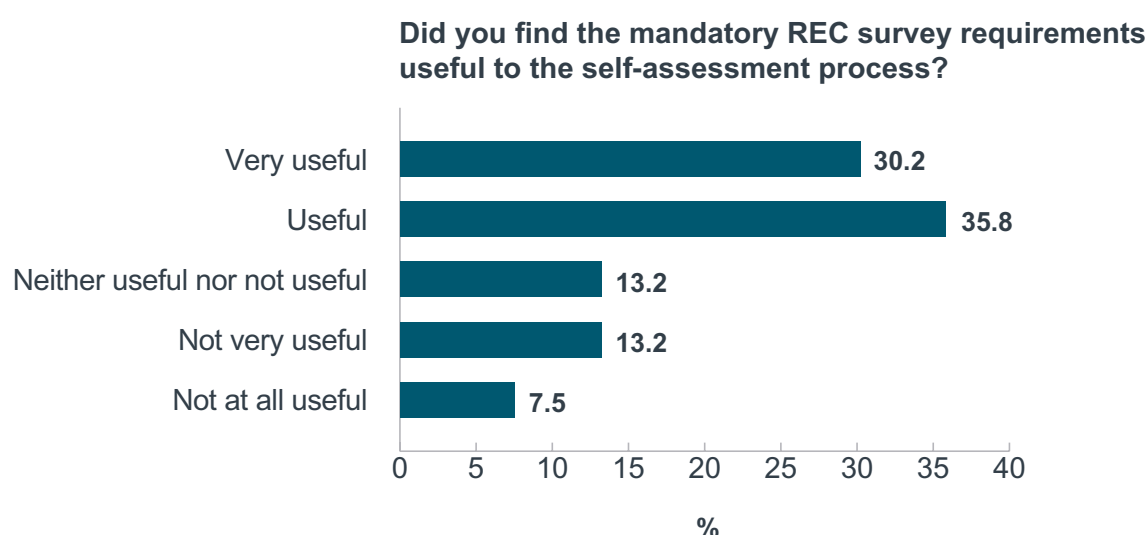
With regard to internal factors or changes that would help institutions with the self-assessment process, 40.0% (n=22) of survey respondents said ‘improved/extended internal data collection regarding race and ethnicity’ would support them to make further progress on the REC. This echoes the earlier reported common challenge of data availability and is an area where further advice and guidance could be provided.

Additionally, 38.0% (n=21) said ‘additional data analysis expertise’ would support them to make further progress with REC, again echoing the challenges experienced in undertaking the data analysis required for the self-assessment and suggesting that all institutions need to ensure this expertise is in place.

REC survey requirements

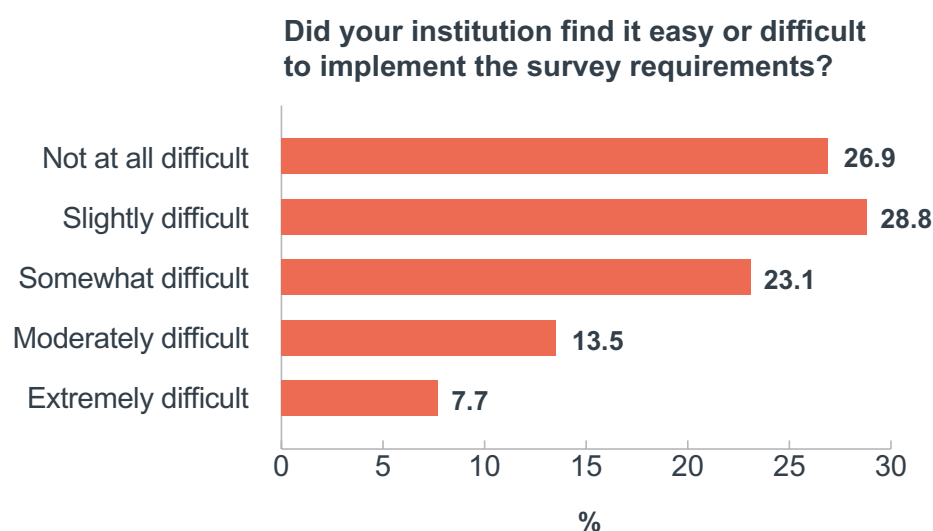
Respondents were asked if the mandatory REC survey requirements were useful to the self-assessment process. The majority (66.0%; n=35) found the survey useful or very useful. Less than a third of this number found the survey not very useful or not at all useful (20.7%; n=11) (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Usefulness of the REC survey requirements



Respondents were asked what the data they obtained as a result of the survey enabled them to do. The only option selected by more than half of respondents was enabling identification of actions and interventions for their action plan (59.2%; n=29). Next was enabling communication of lived experiences of BAME staff and students to senior leadership (44.9%; n=22). All the other options were selected by less than 40.0%.

The majority of respondents (73.1%; n=38) found the survey requirements at least slightly difficult to implement, with more than half finding it slightly or somewhat difficult (51.9%; n=27), but fewer finding it moderately or extremely difficult (21.2%; n=11) (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Level of difficult of implementing REC survey

Among comments, 10 respondents reported that it was challenging to achieve good levels of participation in the survey.

“Promotion ended up not being a coordinated effort and therefore response rates were low and disappointing. Also, people are quite over-surveyed so that could have impacted on response rates. This is something Advance HE should keep in mind.”

(REC lead)

Some others described how the survey, particularly the free text analysis, was a great deal of work, but provided useful information for their submissions:

“We ended up producing 13 reports and a free text report, so a lot of work, but I am making much use of the survey in our submission and it is being shared across the university, so well worth it. Has given a voice to staff and students on race for the first time.”

(REC lead)

However, comments revealed various criticism of the survey design, with six survey respondents suggesting changing its design.

“The survey is long and old fashioned -it needs to be redesigned to use more modern methods – both in terms of questioning and technology.”

(REC lead)

Four respondents thought the survey questions could be improved:

“The survey was easy to implement but some of the questions we felt need reworking, for example, I believe I am treated equally by students, irrespective of my ethnicity or race. Some BAME staff felt that BAME students responded more positively to them because “they looked like them”. So BAME staff disagreeing with this question may not actually be negative in some cases.”

(REC lead)

Additionally, six respondents criticised the inflexibility of the survey:

“The inability to tweak questions or re-word them was extremely frustrating as some were very badly written. Staff and students commented on the vagueness of some questions, which reflected badly on the REC team who were not responsible for writing it, but it was mandatory.”

(REC lead)

“The survey was too restrictive. There should have been more freedom in the questions used, especially for renewals or larger institutes where we had more information which we needed to explore.”

(REC lead)

In regard to suggestions made by respondents for what could enable their institution to make further progress on REC, four suggested changes to the REC survey and one suggested that Advance HE could undertake the survey on behalf of institutions to help reduce the workload for institutions:

“Advance HE taking on some of the data work – the standardised survey is the most obvious candidate, or packaging HESA data for the university – would allow resource and focus to be spent on other things.”

(EDI staff member)

A SAT Chair suggested a multiple-choice survey to reduce the workload, combined with focus groups to gather qualitative data:

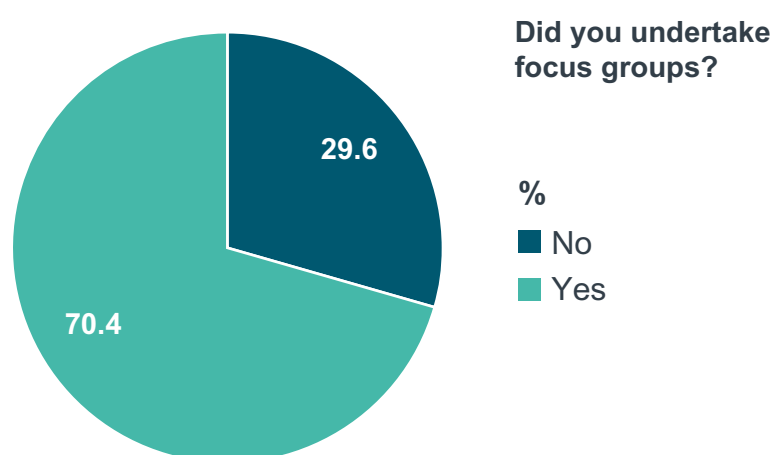
“I can absolutely see why they want to have a standardised survey... It is really hard to analyse [the free text] so I wonder whether it might be worth thinking about moving to a multiple-choice survey, which is more quantitative?”

(SAT Chair)

Focus groups

70.4% (n=38) of respondents' institutions had undertaken focus groups to inform their REC self-assessment process (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Undertaking focus groups



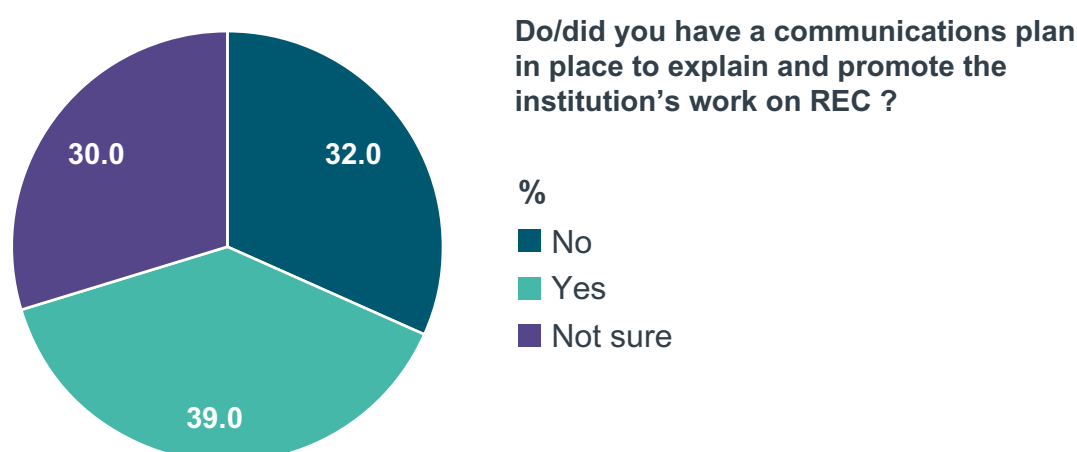
Respondents were asked what the focus groups enabled. The most frequently cited benefit was enabling the institution to more fully understand the experiences of BAME staff and students than just the survey on its own (75.7%; n=28). Both enabling identification of actions and interventions and communicating lived experiences of BAME staff and students to senior leadership were chosen by more than half of respondents (59.5%; n=22 and 51.4%; n=19 respectively). Other options were selected by fewer respondents. The focus groups were thus reported as beneficial in more ways than the survey, with enabling fuller understanding of BAME people's experiences being the chief benefit.

4.6 Communications

Communications plans

38.9% (n=21) of respondents said their institution had a communications plan in place to explain and promote the institution's work on REC to staff and students. Slightly fewer (31.5%; n=17) did not have one in place, while a large proportion (29.6%; n=16) did not know if they did or not (Figure 18). This suggests that it is by no means universal to have a communications plan for REC, suggesting an area for development for many institutions, which Advance HE could usefully support through its guidance and resources.

Figure 18: Communications plans



Respondents with a plan in place rated them as effective or very effective in all of the ways that were asked about, which related to the REC principles. The aspect the most respondents felt their plan was effective or very effective for was 'demonstrating the need to understand the experiences of different minority ethnic groups' (85.0%; n=17), followed by 'expressing the need for long-term culture change to make progress on race equality' (75.0%; n=15) and 'communicating the institution's drivers/ business case for participation in REC' (70.0%; n=14). Next was 'articulating that racism is structural and an everyday facet of UK society' (65.0%; n=13) and the lowest was 'demonstrating the need to understand the experiences of intersections of multiple identities' (60.0%; n=12). Communications plans, when in place, were thus thought to be effective in numerous important ways. However, it is noted that they are seen as slightly less effective in regard to explaining structural racism and the need for an intersectional approach. As these are important REC principles and need to be accepted and well understood in order to prepare a successful REC submission, greater focus on these aspects in REC communications plans would likely be beneficial.

4.7 Action planning

Respondents were asked about aspects of action planning and whether they found these difficult. The aspect rated by the largest proportion as somewhat, moderately or extremely difficult was 'identifying relevant targets and success measures for our actions' (54.2%; n=26) (Table 9). This was also the only aspect to be rated 'extremely difficult' by any respondents (6.3%; n=3). The next aspect with the most ratings in these categories of difficulty was 'prioritising our actions so that they would be implemented logically over the three years of the award' (52.1%; n=25), followed by 'generating actions to address the issues we identified in our self-assessment' (48.0%; n=23). Thus, identifying how an action plan's progress and impact will be measured, how to schedule actions appropriately as well as identifying appropriate actions that will help to address racial inequalities were the most challenging aspects of action planning for survey respondents.

Table 9: Level of difficulty of aspects of action planning

Generating actions to address the issues we identified in our self-assessment	Not at all difficult	16.70%
	Slightly difficult	35.40%
	Somewhat difficult	31.30%
	Moderately difficult	16.70%
	Extremely difficult	0.00%
Writing actions according to the SMART principles outlined in the handbook	Not at all difficult	10.40%
	Slightly difficult	47.90%
	Somewhat difficult	29.20%
	Moderately difficult	12.50%
	Extremely difficult	0.00%
Prioritising our actions so that they would be implemented logically over the 3 years of the award	Not at all difficult	8.30%
	Slightly difficult	39.60%
	Somewhat difficult	35.40%
	Moderately difficult	16.70%
	Extremely difficult	0.00%
Identifying relevant targets and success measures for our actions	Not at all difficult	10.40%
	Slightly difficult	35.40%
	Somewhat difficult	35.40%
	Moderately difficult	12.50%
	Extremely difficult	6.30%
Identifying who would be the named individual responsible for managing the implementation of relevant actions	Not at all difficult	22.90%
	Slightly difficult	35.40%
	Somewhat difficult	31.30%
	Moderately difficult	10.40%
	Extremely difficult	0.00%

Comments reflected these challenges and shared examples of how some of them were overcome. For example, one REC lead explained their issues with success measures:

“The big issue was that for some success measures, departments did not feel comfortable writing set success measures (I personally believe this was due to these areas/people would then be held accountable...). I think having the external review helped who gave backing of this is what is expected and by not doing this, our action plan would look weak. The second issue was that we felt if we did not put 100% success for some actions, that this may be perceived that we are happy with 90% and not eliminating issues.”

(REC lead)

The second issue mentioned here suggests a misconception regarding the SMART principles – success measures, like actions, need to be realistic and achievable, which entirely eliminating an issue is unlikely to be.

Another shared the difficulties of identifying actions that could address issues identified within the confines of the action plan. A theory of change approach, perhaps sitting behind an action plan, could help through enabling the detailed mapping of how actions should lead to desired changes.

“It was difficult creating action plans for very broad areas of the action plan such as promotions. Need to consider some of the themes in far more detail to create change as usually a single action is proposed to solve the problem, which may not be as successful.”

(REC working group member)

Another REC lead echoed and expanded on both of these challenges:

“Racism is hard to tackle and starting from a low base means real success measures like increases in representation feel unachievable – this frightens people and means they shy away – also there is not enough understanding of structural racism to properly identify actions – and universities operate by consensus – the majority decision makers are unaffected by racism – and so are slower to act. The quote from Audre Lorde is pertinent – The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

(REC Lead)

Similarly, Advance HE interview participants explained how in their experience, action plans in unsuccessful submissions often fall down on not identifying appropriate actions to address the issues highlighted through their self-assessment, including identifying actions focused on individuals rather than on structural change:

“Often in unsuccessful Bronze applications their action plan will feature very heavily further monitoring, further exploration, further investigation, as the applicant isn’t actually sure about the underlying cause of the issue that they’re seeing. ... A related issue is when they do know what the problem is and understand the underlying issue but haven’t put in place a proactive enough action to respond to this.... And often you’ll see that manifesting in actions which are very individual focused, so individual change mechanisms around mentoring and support for individuals, rather than more systemic focused interventions.”

(Advance HE staff member)

Two other aspects of action planning asked about in the survey – writing actions according to the SMART principles outlined in the handbook; and identifying who would be the named individual responsible for managing the implementation of relevant actions – were deemed somewhat or moderately difficult by 41.7% (n=20). While still difficult for some, respondents appear more confident in these aspects. This was also reflected in comments. For example, one REC lead mentioned that they drew on experience gained through work on Athena Swan action plans and elsewhere to help with developing SMART actions:

“We did a good robust Athena action plan (that was in our feedback, not me boasting!), and I have a background of many years of SMART action planning in local government which has been useful.”

(REC lead)

However, one interview participant who has been a REC panellist explained that, in his experience, designing SMART actions is not straightforward for many REC applicants:

“I don’t know how many times you can explain to people what SMART is, but it seems to be something that colleagues do not get in the same way that people do not get impact.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

Additionally, several did not find identifying named individuals responsible for actions an easy task, as one REC lead explained:

“Often the named individual would be myself or someone on the SAT because we didn’t have time to get appropriate agreement or buy-in.”

(REC lead)

There were a range of other challenges regarding action planning that were identified by respondents, including conflict between the actions that data suggests are needed and the actions institutions are willing to commit to, which was cited by six respondents, suggesting an issue with genuine understanding of and buy-in to the REC process among those in positions of power.

“Gatekeepers blocking actions within the university. Needing to continuously compromise on the actions which are required by the data.”

(REC lead)

“There are several conflicting priorities between what would be good for staff and what the institution is prepared to implement.”

(BAME student SAT member)

Another common challenge cited by four respondents was the time available for action planning, with a tendency to have to rush action planning after spending a long time on the rest of the self-assessment process, though one had learnt from this and had a different strategy for its current application:

“Unfortunately, the action planning was rushed so not as much thought was able to be put into it to make the actions SMART as would have been preferred. Also, there was not time to consult the whole SAT about the action plan. This time around, the timescales have been set and there will be a two-part action planning session as part of two SAT meetings so that all members can be engaged in contributing ideas around how to achieve the objectives.”

(REC lead)

There was a sense that action planning can sometimes occur as an afterthought and does not receive the attention it deserves, particularly at the end of a lengthy and resource intensive self-assessment process. As one interview participant put it:

“By the time most universities, most colleagues ... have actually got to the action plan they are usually exhausted.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

A REC panellist reflected that action plans they see in panels often lack a sense of direction and are often disconnected from the narrative in the submission:

“Sometimes the action plans can be a bit cold, so that people want to put all the things that they think they will be doing, and it’s not really coherent. So, you see, there’s lots of activity going on, but we don’t have a sense that there is an overarching plan for this is where our institution is going. What is important is to make sure that it is really strongly connected to the submission. Sometimes action plans are quite detached from what is being said in the narrative.”

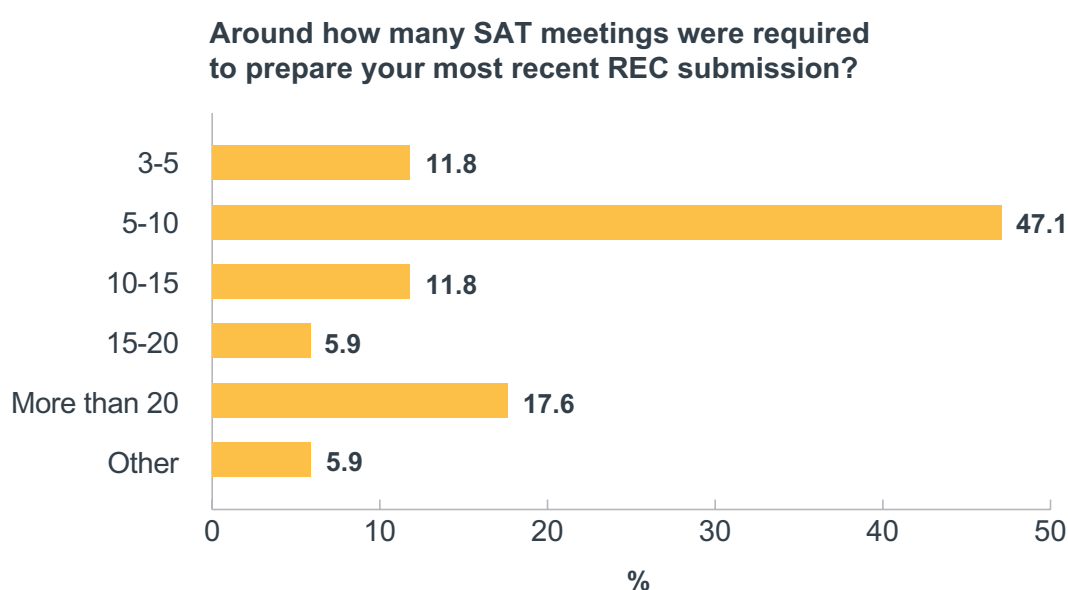
(REC panellist)

4.8 Timeline and workload

Number and frequency of SAT meetings

The REC handbook states that a SAT must meet at least three times over the course of the self-assessment process leading up to the application. REC lead survey respondents were asked how many meetings were required to prepare the institution's most recent submission. The number of meetings varied, but the most common was between five and ten meetings (47.1%; n=8). However, 17.6% (n=3) had met more than 20 times and 11.8% (n=2) had met three to five times (Figure 19). This indicates that three meetings is not found to be sufficient by most institutions, with some needing to meet many more times than this.

Figure 19: Number of SAT meetings to prepare a submission

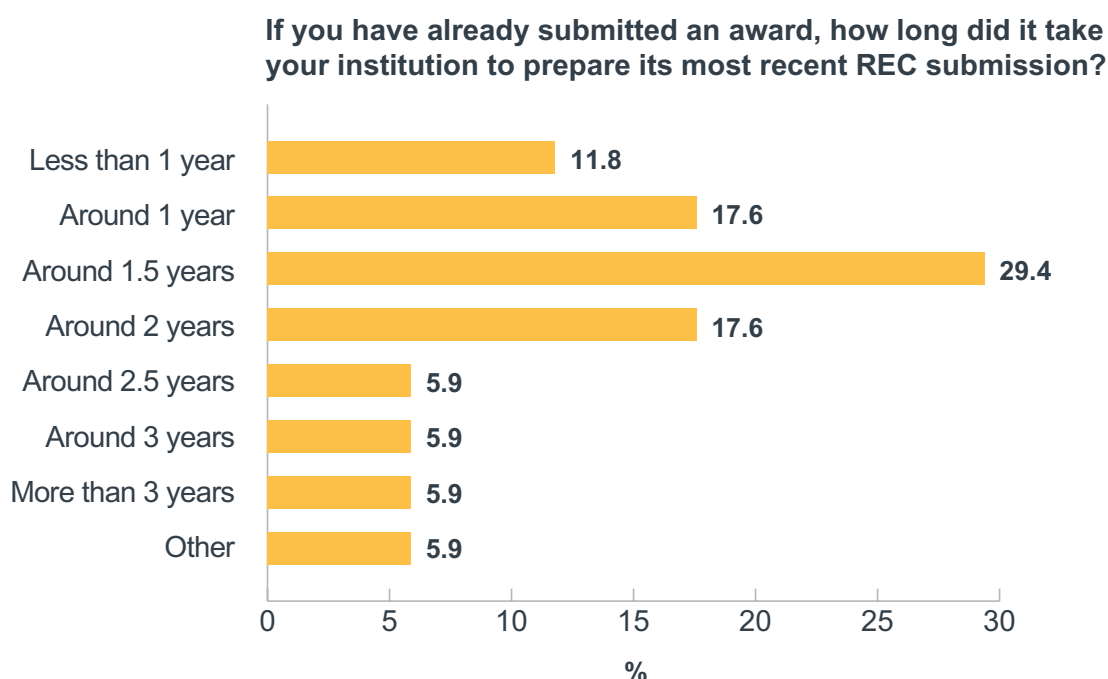


The largest proportion of REC leads said their SAT met monthly while preparing a REC submission (47.6%; n=10). A third of SATs met bi-monthly (33.3%; n=7) with only one meeting quarterly (4.8%; n=1). Other approaches were mentioned by three respondents and most involved a SAT meeting less frequently, for example quarterly, with working groups meeting more frequently. The majority of respondents answering this question felt that their SAT met frequently enough (65.0%; n=13).

Time it takes to prepare application

Those who have already submitted for a REC award were asked how long it took their institution to prepare its most recent submission. Answers spanned from less than one year (11.8%; n=2) up to more than three years (5.9%; n=1), showing that every institution's REC journey and timeline is different. However, most responses were clustered between one and two years, with 1.5 years the most common (29.4%; n=5) (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Timeline of preparing a submission



Sharing of workload

All REC member respondents who had previously submitted an application were asked whether they felt the workload involved in preparing the institution's most recent REC submission was appropriately shared/allocated among relevant staff/SAT members. More than half respondents (58.8%; n=10) disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Sharing of workload

Comments revealed a range of experiences and opinions about sharing of REC work. Several expressed how the majority of the workload fell to EDI or REC specific staff:

“It almost always falls to the EDI lead to write the bulk of the application. It’s extremely resource intensive.”

(REC lead)

One perspective was that such staff necessarily do most of the work as it is part of their day job; however, strategic work allocation could enable others to contribute more:

“We have an EDI team, so we are paid to do this as our day job – we have to take the lion’s share. Work was shared and all participants did the best they could. What needs to change is more structural – very senior leaders and all areas need to build into their business planning allocations of resources for these sorts of exercises.”

(REC lead)

Several survey respondents and one interview participant shared the view that the writing of the application cannot be shared since you need consistency:

“The idea is that you have a team of people that are working on these applications, but you cannot write a successful application unless you have one or two people at the helm... The whole thing has to be cohesive and you can’t achieve that with lots of people.”

(SAT Chair)

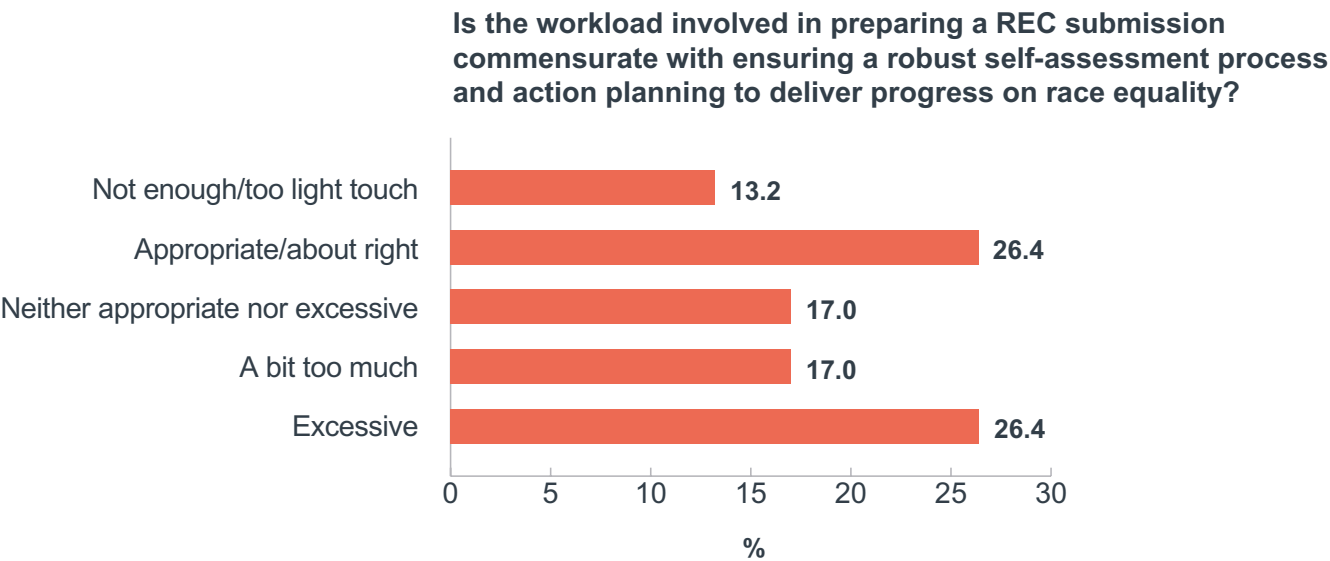
However, one respondent shared an alternative approach:

“Various departments were responsible for contributing to certain sections, which worked well.”
(REC lead)

Perspectives on REC workload

All survey respondents involved in REC in their institutions were asked whether the workload involved in preparing a REC submission is commensurate with ensuring a robust self-assessment process and action planning to deliver progress on race equality. Respondents revealed a range of opinions. Equal numbers felt the workload was ‘appropriate/about right’ as felt it was ‘excessive’ (26.4%; n=14 respectively). 13.2% (n=7) felt it was ‘not enough/too light touch’ and 17.0% (n=9) felt it was ‘a bit too much’. When combined, respondents who felt it was ‘a bit too much’ and ‘excessive’ totalled 43.4% (n=23), suggesting that overall, slightly more felt the workload is too much (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Views on workload



Comments expanded on these different perspectives. Several emphasised that the work is needed in order to undertake a robust self-assessment:

“There is an extensive amount of work needed to prepare the REC submission. Although this is very extensive, the self-assessment provides [a] clear ability to understand key facets within the entire academic process.”

(REC lead)

Another reflected that the work was needed to create conversations around and develop understanding of race and racism:

“I think what we are asked to do in terms of data, critique, comms, engagement is a lot, but then I think it is all needed to allow the challenging conversations to start, people to acknowledge the existence of systemic racism and then for progress to begin to be made.”

(REC lead)

However, several felt that the workload was excessive and reduced time for taking action to advance race equality:

“We have to spend so much time and energy preparing an absolutely huge submission rather than being able to focus on priorities and/or undertake actual race equality work.”

(RED lead)

As was seen in Section 4.3, a recurrent view was that the data requirements are too time consuming, with several respondents suggesting this can disguise or detract from the real issues and would benefit from being reduced:

“Think the REC could be streamlined to really focus in on key issues and thereby reduce the data load, which feels excessive; sometimes feel like we are wading through table after table of data which hides the real priority areas, especially for a first submission.”

(REC lead)

One respondent felt the workload could be split differently across different types/stages of REC application, for example:

“We analysed data for BAME/White, within the BAME categories, UK/Non-UK and at University/Faculty level. All of these are important, but for a first application it might be better to concentrate on some of these areas and then drill down at renewal.”

(REC lead)

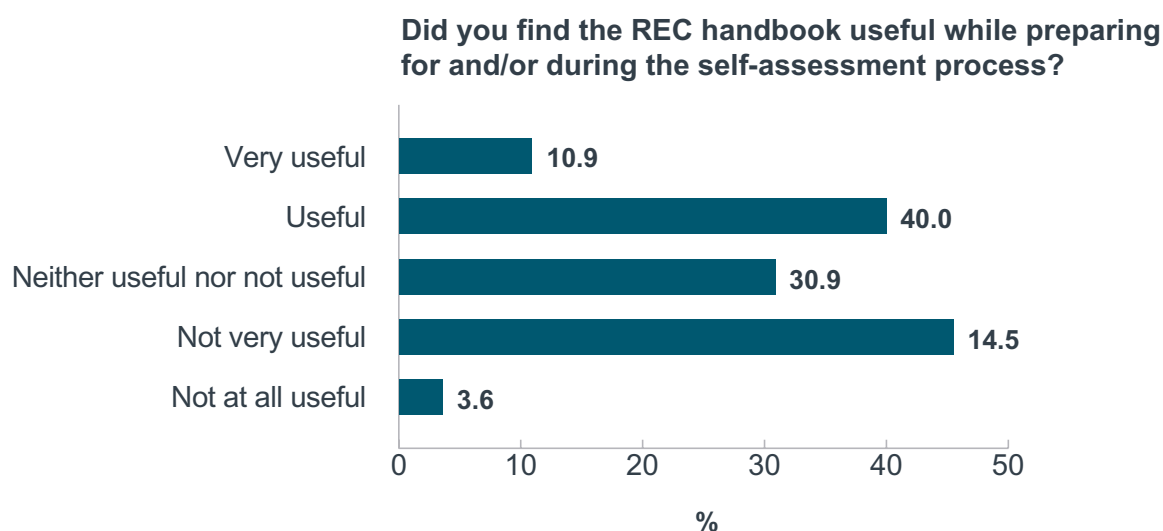
4.9 REC handbook and the self-assessment process

The REC handbook is the main piece of written guidance provided by Advance HE on undertaking the REC self-assessment process and preparing submissions.

Usefulness and effectiveness

Just over half of respondents had found the REC handbook to be either useful or very useful during the self-assessment process (50.9%; n=28). However, there were also some who did not find it useful (18.1%; n=10) (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Usefulness of the REC handbook



Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that the REC handbook had enabled their institution to understand a range of different aspects important to REC. The aspect that the highest proportion agreed the handbook had enabled the institution to understand was 'the REC principles' (76.0%; n=38). Next was 'the data requirements' (64.6%; n=32), followed by 'the commitment required from senior management' (64.0%; n=31), 'how to complete the application form' (60.0%; n=30) and 'how to design the REC survey' (58.0%; n=29). These were all agreed to by the majority, suggesting the handbook is effective in providing guidance in these areas for most institutions, though not that there is no room for improvement.

However, several aspects received less agreement, including ‘how to complete a SMART action plan’ (42.0%; n=21), ‘how to use qualitative data in the application’ (40.0%; n=20), ‘how to devise actions to address the issues identified in our self-assessment’ (38.0%; n=19) and ‘the role of benchmarking in the self-evaluation’ (34.7%; n=17). This indicates that the REC handbook does not provide such effective guidance in these aspects. The fact the action planning guidance falls in this category chimes with our earlier finding that the majority find action planning challenging.

Suggestions for improvements to the handbook and guidance materials

In answer to the question ‘what would help your institution to make further progress on REC’, 26.9% (n=14) said ‘enhanced digital REC handbook and guidance materials’. While not felt to be as important to supporting progress as some other factors, such as resourcing, respondents gave a number of suggestions on what could improve the usefulness of the REC handbook. The most common types of improvements suggested were additional guidance on action planning, additional guidance on the data requirements, providing more examples, and making the handbook more user-friendly, each being suggested by six respondents.

In terms of guidance on action planning, more guidance on what constitutes a SMART action was suggested, as well as worked examples of action planning.

“It could be made a lot clearer and give more guidance, especially around what is expected as far as SMART action plans are concerned. This guidance has always been inconsistent, yet this is one of the key areas that universities are marked down on.”

(REC lead)

“Include examples of best practice in action planning.”

(REC lead)

In regard to more guidance on the data requirements, this included providing clear guidance on or a template for formatting the data to reduce workload and create greater consistency across applications, more advice on using qualitative data and benchmarking.

“Give clear examples of how data should be presented. Standardising the format would make life so much easier.”

(EDI staff member)

“How to format and present data including a working template to use.”

(REC lead)

“Examples of ways to gain qualitative data outside of the survey.”

(REC lead)

“Detail of appropriate benchmarks with links to benchmarking sources.”

(REC lead)

A recurrent theme among suggestions was to include more examples to illustrate the requirements and what is deemed to be effective practice. Aside from examples of action planning, as already mentioned, this related to providing examples of good practice in meeting the other requirements, such as examples of data analysis and linking this to actions, and examples of reporting success and impact.

“It would be useful to give an example of some data, with written commentary and then action and then the full smart action so people know what to expect.”

(REC lead)

“Take out the guess work with examples of good practice at both Bronze and Silver level.”

(EDI staff member)

In relation to increasing the user-friendliness of the handbook, a recurring suggestion was to “digitise it – could it not be an online resource/website that is interactive in some way?” Another suggested that the handbook should not be a static document but a live online resource:

“The handbook has not been updated since Jan 2016. As with Athena Swan, I think Advance HE gets trapped in review/update cycles and published documents, rather than maintaining a ‘living’ handbook online.”

(EDI staff member)

Additional suggestions were to separate the handbook by level of award; reduce its length and make it more appropriate for a student audience.

While not suggested by many respondents, other suggestions for enhanced guidance materials included guidance relevant to different sizes of institution, guidance on culture change, more information on the assessment criteria, more guidance on the student pipeline, and more details of the workload involved in the REC process.

In terms of other resources that would be useful, a majority (75.0%; n=39) felt that ‘good practice resources regarding effective race equality actions and interventions’ would support them to make further progress with REC. One respondent explained that “although we have lots of data saying there’s an issue, no-one knows what to do about it or where to start and so it’s perceived as too difficult and too big a problem.”

A database of good practice was suggested by one respondent (such a database has recently been published by Advance HE (Advance HE 2020c)):

“Knowing and researching good practice is essential to building ideas for how to tackle issues and incorporating these into SMART actions. It would be great if there were a database with examples from across both HE and other sectors of how to confront certain issues, all in one place.”

(REC lead)

An interview participant felt examples and guidance on positive action provisions could help institutions to improve their action plans:

“I think the guidance and REC should be improved to actually incentivise or encourage people to think about the positive action provisions that people are undertaking. And actually, maybe some real guidance on positive action and examples of positive action that had been taken as a result of REC might help other organisations understand what they could do from a menu of options.”

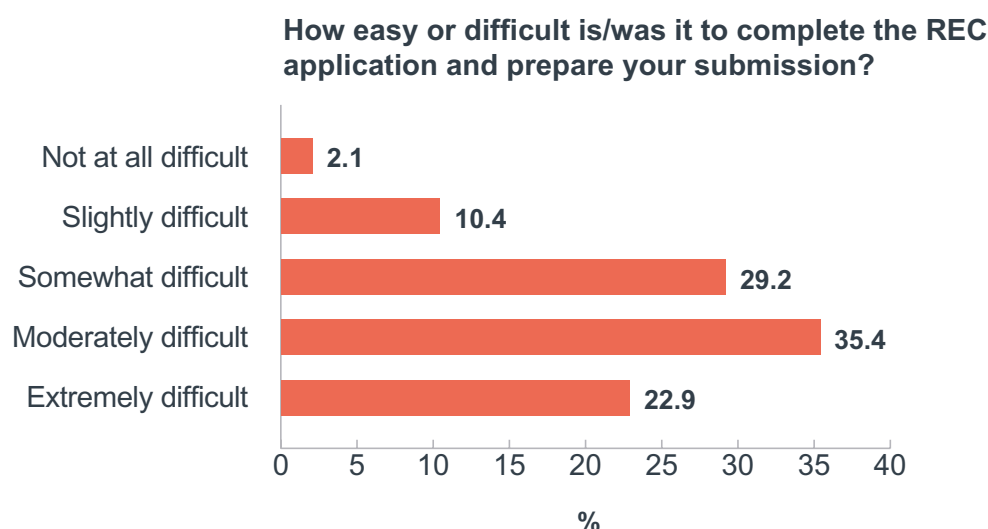
(REC lead and HERAG member)

4.10 Preparing the application

Level of difficulty

Respondents who had previously submitted a REC application were asked to rate how easy or difficult they found completing the application. The majority found it either moderately or extremely difficult (58.3%; n=28), while more than third found it slightly or somewhat difficult (39.6%; n=19). Only one found it not difficult at all (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Level of difficulty of preparing REC submission



Most challenging sections

Respondents were also asked which sections of the application form were most challenging to complete. The section found to be challenging by the largest proportion was 'professional and support staff: recruitment, progression and development' (62.8%; n=27). The next most challenging was the 'action plan' (53.5%; n=23), followed by 'academic staff: recruitment, progression and development' (48.8%; n=21). Other sections were selected as challenging by fewer respondents, ranging from 32.6% (n=14) for the 'student pipeline' to 16.3% (n=7) for the 'institution and local context', with the 'letter of endorsement' selected by the least respondents (2.3%; n=1).

Some of these aspects were also reflected in comments, for example in relation to action planning:

"Difficult to create a real clear and sustainable action plan."

(REC working group member)

Additionally, in relation to the staff sections:

"We are used to providing data on our student pipeline for other national requirements. But, data on staff in terms of progression and development required more focus."

(REC lead)

Conversely, in relation to the student sections:

"There was already quite a lot of organisational development work focusing on academic staff recruitment, progression and development.... However, with less formal links to student services, teaching and learning and curriculum/pedagogic development it was hard to get a handle on the progress and action planning in these areas."

(REC lead)

And in relation to local context:

"Institution/local context was a challenge because the diversity of the University isn't reflected in the local population – we have since received advice about this and I feel that we are in a better position this time around."

(REC lead)

Clearly, the institution's prior work and experience, as well as its context, make a difference in terms of what aspects of the application it finds most challenging.

Other challenges

Other issues experienced in preparing REC submissions highlighted in comments echo those explored earlier in this section, including challenges with engagement and accountability, difficulties obtaining the required data, analysing and presenting the data and the volume of work required, particularly for data analysis.

Another challenge specific to writing the application was squeezing all the required and desired information into the application within the word count:

“We initially prepared far too much information – it was quite challenging to give a flavour of our institution and context within the word count. We had to delete information we would have liked to have shared.”

(REC lead)

Contextual factors were also raised, such as the impact of Covid-19:

“It isn’t any specific section, it is the impact of Covid-19, loss of face to face working and discussion, concerns about isolation etc.”

(REC lead)

4.11 Discussion and recommendations

The self-assessment process is core to the REC methodology. Interview participants confirmed that the process provides a robust framework and structure for examining race equality, providing the vital evidence base needed to guide an institution’s race equality work. As an area in which universities are less experienced, this approach was felt to be all the more important. While not questioning the essence of this process, research participants outlined a range of challenges experienced during the process, as well as suggestions for what might help to address these, which are discussed below along with our other key findings from this section.

Self-assessment teams

SATs emerged as critical to the self-assessment process, however, they can be challenging to create and maintain. Most institutions are managing to meet Advance HE’s guidance regarding the different categories of representation on the SAT, though representation of staff on different contract types and from across faculties and departments was less consistent. The ratio of BAME to white members varied across SATs, but most were roughly even or had slightly fewer BAME than white members. This is positive, as the burden of race equality work should not fall solely on BAME staff while it is also important that BAME representation is high. However, with a minority of SATs containing either significantly more BAME than white members or significantly more white members than BAME members, there is a need for some further guidance on this aspect.

The efficacy of SATs was rated less highly than composition, suggesting a composition in line with Advance HE guidance does not necessarily equate with a well-functioning SAT. The most prominent issue was that of balancing the breadth of representation required and a size of SAT that can be effective. Some reported that sub or working group structures work well, and this is something Advance HE could consider recommending as standard. Additionally, respondents reported that SAT members' contributions can be variable, with factors such as time available and understanding of their role impacting this. Effective leadership, chairing, workload allocation models, recognition and support for members have helped some in this regard. The learning of institutions regarding developing and maintaining an effective SAT could be usefully shared to help others to do so. Additionally, further targeted guidance and support in these areas could increase the efficacy of SATs.

[See recommendations 18 and 25.](#)

Data requirements

Interview participants felt the data requirements, though extensive, are needed for enabling identification of the racial inequalities to be addressed. Survey respondents felt the REC data requirements have a range of benefits, especially enabling differentiation of the experiences and issues affecting different racial and ethnic groups, suggesting the requirement to disaggregate by ethnic group assists the self-assessment. However, several interview participants felt that there is a need for a greater focus on intersectionality within the data requirements for every award level, especially in order to understand the experiences and barriers for BAME women.

While important and helpful, most respondents found the data requirements difficult and labour intensive, with the data requirements making up the majority of the REC workload. The most common data issues were obtaining the required data, the volume of the data, working with small numbers and undertaking the analysis. Suggestions for what would help institutions with the data requirements included an online application system, data templates/tools and more guidance, as well as improved data collection and increased data expertise internally. Advance HE should consider what can be done to reduce the burden of the data requirements while maintaining the depth and scope of the self-assessment so that specific racial inequalities can be identified. Some of the innovations planned for Athena Swan regarding an online submission platform and data tools could also benefit REC, though institution-level data will remain important.

The REC survey was found to be useful by the majority of respondents, especially in relation to enabling identification of actions for their action plan. However, it was difficult to implement for more than half, with some reporting challenges in regard to response rate and others mentioning the high workload of analysing qualitative comments. There were also recurrent criticisms of the survey questions and calls for it to be either redesigned or more flexibility given for institutions to adapt it, though we found that institutions in our impact sample had adapted questions. There is evidently some work to be done to enhance the survey to ensure it is fit for purpose and is easier to implement and analyse.

Focus groups, on the other hand, were widely found to be useful for illuminating the experiences of BAME staff and/or students, enabling identification of actions and interventions and communicating lived experiences of BAME staff and students to senior leadership. These should remain as a key aspect of the data requirements.

[See recommendations 21, 22, 23, 31 and 33.](#)

Communications

Communicating the rationale for REC participation, what the institution is doing and why is vitally important to a successful REC process – both the self-assessment and the later implementation. Currently, the REC handbook suggests a specific communications plan in relation to the REC survey only, although evidence of how REC is communicated more broadly is requested in the application in relation to ‘2c – involvement, consultation and communication’. Only a little over a third of survey respondents had a communications plan for REC in place, suggesting an area for development for institutions. Those with a plan thought it was effective for communicating the institution’s REC work in relation to the REC principles, though the need to address structural racism and to take an intersectional approach were felt to be slightly less well communicated. This is not unexpected due to the limited suggested scope of the communications plan in the handbook, and because findings elsewhere in this report suggest issues with institutional understanding of structural racism and taking an intersectional approach. Indeed, institutional understanding of all the REC principles is required before these will make it into communications surrounding REC.

[See recommendation 5.](#)

Action planning

Action plans were one of the most difficult aspects of the REC application for most respondents. The most challenging aspects of action planning were identifying how progress and impact will be measured, scheduling actions, and identifying appropriate actions to address racial inequalities identified through the self-assessment. The latter often related to not knowing how to identify actions focused on structures in order to create systemic change. Also challenging were identifying SMART actions and assigning responsibility for actions, as well as gaining buy-in from those in positions of power, including SAT members, a lack of which sometimes resulted in a weakening of the action plan. Timing is a key factor in weaker action plans, with many reporting they did not have enough time (and energy) left after the lengthy self-assessment to create a robust action plan. This suggests a better balance between the work of the self-assessment and action planning is needed for this vital aspect of REC submissions to be afforded the attention it deserves.

When asked about current Advance HE guidance provided within the handbook (see further under 'handbook' discussion below), respondents felt it could provide better understanding of how to complete a SMART action plan and how to devise actions to address the issues identified in the self-assessment. Providing more detailed guidance with examples of effective action planning, along with training opportunities on this topic, could help to reduce the difficulties and challenges experienced in action planning. Additionally, a majority felt that providing examples of good practice and positive action provisions to address racial inequalities would support better action plans, and ultimately more progress to be made. Advance HE has recently published a good practice database using examples from REC submissions (Advance HE 2020c), which may go some way to meeting this need, though our findings suggest that more guidance on understanding and using positive action would be helpful.

Additionally, drawing on the approach used for the Athena Swan audit tool, it may be helpful for Advance HE to recommend some basic actions that would be expected within an action plan for Bronze award level.

[See recommendations 11 and 12.](#)

Preparing the submission – timeline, workload and level of difficulty

Every institution's REC journey and timeline is different. The time it takes to undertake the self-assessment and prepare a REC submission spans from less than one year up to more than three years, however, most take between one and two years. The vast majority find that three SAT meetings is not sufficient to undertake the self-assessment and prepare a REC application, with some needing to meet many more times than this. Advance HE's Handbook could be updated to more accurately reflect this range of experiences.

The largest proportion of respondents felt the workload in preparing a REC submission was either 'a bit too much' or 'excessive'. Opinions included that a high workload reduced time for taking action to advance race equality and that the data requirements, in particular, are too time consuming. However, around a quarter felt it was 'appropriate/about right', with views including that the workload is extensive but needed in order to undertake a robust self-assessment and/or to create conversations around race and develop understanding of racism. More radical suggestions for change to reduce the workload included splitting the workload across different phases/stages of REC application.

Another issue with workload involved in preparing a submission is that it is not common for this to be shared among relevant staff/SAT members, with this usually falling to an individual or small group. Several felt that this work cannot be shared, either because most of the work necessarily should fall to individuals employed to work on EDI/REC specifically, or because there is a need for consistency in voice in a submission. The resource implications of this was the main concern.

Completing a REC application is not straightforward – almost all respondents had found it at least slightly difficult to complete their REC submission, with more than half finding it either moderately or extremely difficult. The innovations suggested across this section and elsewhere in this report, including an online application system and enhanced guidance, should help to reduce both the workload and the challenges experienced in putting together a REC submission.

[See recommendation 17.](#)

REC handbook and the self-assessment process

The REC handbook is the main piece of written guidance on the REC and has not been updated since 2017. While a majority of respondents had found the REC handbook to be useful during the self-assessment process, respondents felt it was less effective for providing understanding of how to complete a SMART action plan, how to use qualitative data in the application, how to devise actions to address the issues identified in the self-assessment and the role of benchmarking in the self-evaluation. Many suggestions were made for how it could be updated and improved, or augmented with other resources, such as providing more guidance on action planning, more guidance on data requirements, more examples of good practice to illustrate the expectations of submissions, and there was a clear call to make it more user-friendly, including through digitising it. The handbook should be brought up to date, enhanced with additional guidance on these areas, as well as others noted elsewhere in this report.

[See recommendation 20.](#)

5 Award and peer review processes

5.1 Section summary

Award timelines and submission processes

- + the majority of respondents believe three years is sufficient time after joining REC for an institution to make its first submission. However, qualitative data indicates this is a challenging timescale for some and would benefit from greater flexibility or greater support in the pre- or early membership phases to assist institutions to do the necessary groundwork
- + the two submission deadlines of February and July each year were felt to be appropriate by the largest proportion of respondents, though many were ambivalent on this question. Comments revealed that some would prefer more time between the two dates and/or a change to the time of year of the date(s)
- + Advance HE is developing an online application system for Athena Swan and sees this as a process that could also be developed for REC. Roughly a third of survey respondents felt an online application system would be highly beneficial, especially in regard to reducing workload and standardising data
- + the majority of survey respondents felt that the current three-year award validity period is not sufficient time for an institution to implement the action plan from its successful submission and prepare its next submission. Almost all free text comments suggested increasing the time allowed, with most suggesting it should be five years. Recurrent views were that it is not possible to create and measure the necessary culture changes within three years and that aligning with the recent change to five years for Athena Swan award validity would be beneficial
- + a recurring theme among comments was the need for some kind of interim reporting to Advance HE, especially if the award validity period is to be extended, in order to ensure that institutions remain on track
- + REC renewals currently require much the same amount of work as a first submission. The streamlined renewals process introduced for Athena Swan was requested for REC by several participants and could offer a mechanism for reducing the workload of renewal applications while focusing renewals on progress made.

Panel review process

- + the largest proportion of survey respondents did not have a view on the efficacy of the REC panel review process for determining the outcomes of REC applications, likely due to not having experienced the process yet. However, among those with a view, more than three times as many felt it was effective as ineffective
- + comments included both positive comments about the robustness of the process and a number of concerns, including about the objectivity of the process, panellists' knowledge, the consistency of decision-making and low success rates

- + while few in number, suggestions made by survey respondents regarding revisions to the process included site visits, an oral examination, moving from a pass/fail outcome to more of an educative and supportive process, as well as more transparency regarding panel composition and selection
- + panellist interview participants were unanimous in believing that an independent peer review process involving discussion by a mixed group of panellists is important to a robust and credible assessment of submissions
- + some challenges in ensuring robust decision-making were expressed by panellists, like managing diverse views, ensuring everyone's views are heard and the varying knowledge and experience of panellists, yet effective chairing and moderation from Advance HE were found to be effective in handling these issues
- + panellists found that being a panellist is a big commitment in terms of time, though was worthwhile. It was often a learning and development opportunity, as well as a networking opportunity and a chance to 'give back'
- + Advance HE guidance and training for panellists was considered fit for purpose, with some scope for enhancement
- + Advance HE agreed that being a panellist is an important learning and development opportunity, though there are not enough panels to enable all volunteers to take part
- + managing the panels is resource intensive in terms of coordination, especially due to the REC team being small and the lack of a dedicated coordination staff member
- + while currently manageable, with a growing REC there is recognition of the need to make changes to ensure sustainability, which should also enable more time to be spent on development work for institutions
- + some of the planned changes to the Athena Swan peer review process have the potential to benefit REC, though REC staff emphasised the importance of not losing the discussion element of REC panels since this is necessary for considering race equality, an area in which institutions often have less experience.

Feedback on submissions

The majority of survey respondents were positive about the feedback they had received following their submission. Comments revealed that the level of detail is valued, as is a phone call to discuss the feedback, but a minority found feedback to be inconsistent.

5.2 Introduction

This section presents research findings relating to the REC:

- + [Award timelines and submission process](#) – the period of time from joining to first submission; submission deadlines and submission method; and the period of time from a successful award to the next submission
- + [Peer review process](#) – the panel review process that determines submission outcomes
- + [Feedback](#) – the feedback provided to REC applicants.

It ends with [discussion and recommendations](#).

About the REC award and peer review processes

Award timelines and submission method

- + institutions are required to make their first REC submission within three years of joining the Charter
- + there are two submission deadlines for REC in February and July each year
- + a completed application form in PDF is submitted via email to Advance HE
- + REC Awards conferred from 2016 are valid for three years from the award submission deadline. Where applicants seek to delay their submission and extend any current award validity, a request must be made in writing to Advance HE. There must be exceptional extenuating circumstances
- + should an applicant be unsuccessful in an award renewal they will be offered a grace period of one year in order to return with an improved submission.

Peer review process

Advance HE equality charter applications, both for the REC and the Athena Swan Charter, are reviewed by peer review panels convened by Advance HE. The panel recommends decisions on awards to Advance HE.

Panels are made up of at least three panellists, one of whom is also a chair appointed by Advance HE. Panellists are selected from a pool of people who have applied to Advance HE to become a panellist, or who are invited by Advance HE to be a panellist when their involvement in a panel will help achieve a more appropriate balance of panellists. All panellists (including the chair) are required to have undertaken training within the two years preceding the panel. At least two panellists that have previously attended a REC panel are sought but not guaranteed. The chair will have experience of participating in previous panels and has usually undertaken Advance HE's panellist chair training.

A meeting of the panel is run by the chair and supported by an Advance HE member of staff in the role of moderator who assists the panel by providing guidance on the application and assessment process and ensures that the panel complies with the requirements and guidance set out in the panellist role description. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, panels have been delivered through a remote meeting facility while previously these were conducted in person.

Panellists independently review applications in accordance with the guidance set out for applicants in the awards handbook and considering the assessment criteria laid out in the handbook, then collectively review the applications at the panel meeting and reach a unanimous decision on the outcome of the application.

Feedback

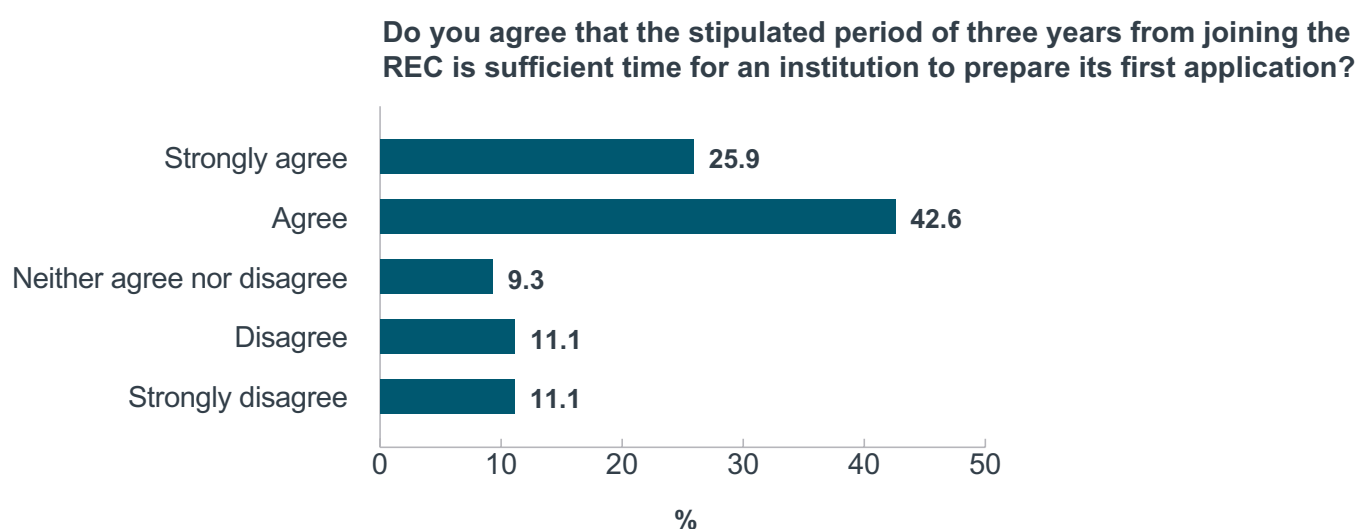
The panel gives constructive feedback on all submissions to highlight effective practice as well as areas in which the panel considers that improvements could be made. Advance HE provides this feedback to each applicant based on the panel discussion. This includes the rationale behind the decision reached.

5.3 Award timelines and submission process

Period from joining to first submission

Respondents were asked whether they think that the stipulated period of three years from joining the REC is sufficient time for an institution to prepare its first application. The majority agreed or strongly agreed that it is sufficient (68.5%; n=37). Less than a quarter disagreed or strongly disagreed (22.2%; n=12) (Figure 25). This suggests that the timeline is appropriate for most institutions.

Figure 25: Sufficiency of three-year period from joining to first submission



Those who disagreed that the timeline was sufficient were asked to explain their answer. All but one of those who provided a comment (n=7) felt that the time from joining to first submission should be longer, with three suggesting four years, and two suggesting five years. Reasons for extension included the length of time it can take to begin work on the REC:

“I would probably suggest four years feels more appropriate, as getting things off the ground can take a lot longer than planned.”

(REC lead)

Also, the time needed for engagement and to bring people on board:

“4 years minimum. You need at least one year to start conversations about why race equality is important, what it is and build key relationships with stakeholders.”

(REC lead)

Another respondent suggested more time was needed to collect the necessary data:

“I do not think there should be a timescale imposed and if one is required suggest 5 years, given many HEIs have not captured some of the data required to include ethnicity or the split by UK.”

(REC lead)

A further respondent suggested that three years is only sufficient if work commences immediately and more guidance on this would be beneficial:

“I think 3 years is enough time BUT – only if the institution gets off the ground straight away, which I don’t think is the case all the time. I think more direction to tell people to get working on this as soon as they sign up otherwise they will struggle to be successful. I would not suggest extending the time period allowed as I think people would just stall for longer in terms of beginning the hard work.”

(REC lead)

Another emphasised the fact that institutions can deliver much in a short timeframe if there is sufficient senior level backing of an initiative:

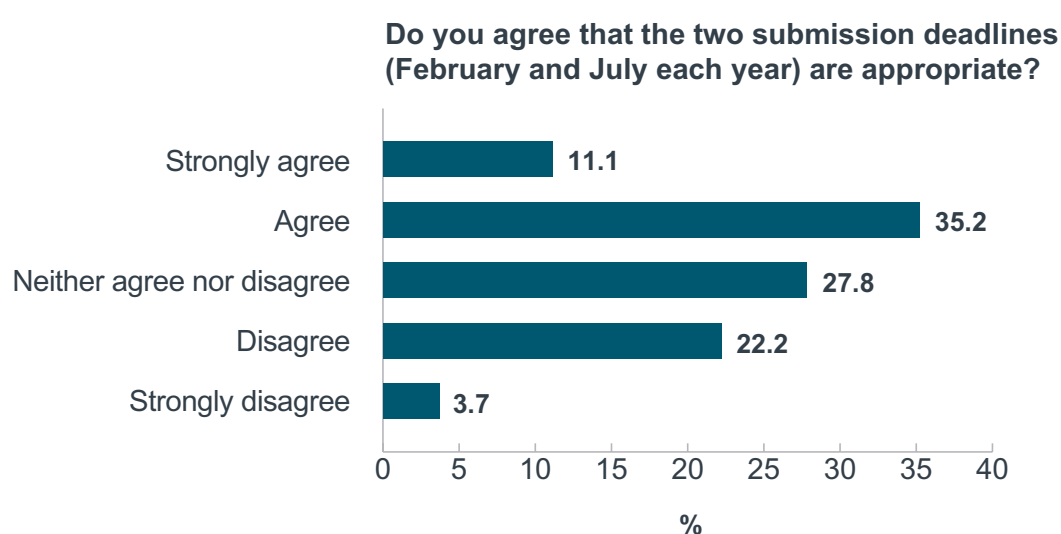
“Three years is sufficient time. If universities can move all provision online in March 2020 (within days) due to the pandemic – they can submit the REC within 3 years! It’s all about what senior leaders value and prioritise.”

(REC lead)

Submission deadlines

Survey respondents were asked whether they felt the two submission deadlines (February and July) are appropriate. The largest proportion of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the deadlines are appropriate (46.3%; n=25), with only around a quarter (25.9%; n=14) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. However, 27.8% (n=15) were ambivalent about the deadlines (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Appropriateness of submission deadlines



Comments explaining respondents' answers reflected this range of views. However, one frequent suggestion was that more time between the two deadlines would be helpful, such as having six months between them:

"I'd have thought that either six months between (ie February and August) or at the end of the two main semesters (ie December and March/April) would have been the deadlines."
(REC lead)

"February and July seem quite close together, another deadline later in the year could be useful."
(REC lead)

Another recurring suggestion was to change the time of year of the deadlines:

“These months do not align well with HESA returns etc so it’s often not possible to ensure that data years for staff and students are consistent. I don’t know if this is the case for all universities though. I would suggest pushing them back a couple months, so possibly offering May and September, as this would give more time to be able to ensure the final year was embedded in the application without a stressful push at the end.”

(REC lead)

“2 submission deadlines are appropriate as it allows flexibility. However, both dates pose issues with clashes concerning other deadlines (eg summer and winter exams).”

(SAT member)

“February is OK but then I would prefer to have the other date in October because that way when the decision comes back we can integrate into the budget.”

(REC lead)

There were mixed opinions about whether it would be better or not for the deadlines to match with those for Athena Swan:

“It is good that they don’t clash with the Athena Swan submission months of April and November.”

(REC lead)

“It would be beneficial for us if they were in line with our institutional Athena Swan application submission dates or vice-versa.”

(REC lead)

Another view expressed by five respondents was that there should be a rolling schedule without specific deadlines:

“Given the low volume of applications (1 per member), there should be no deadline.”

(REC lead)

Submission method

Currently, submission of application forms is by email to Advance HE. In answer to the question ‘what would help your institution to make further progress on REC’ almost a third (32.7%; n=17) said an ‘online application system’. As mentioned in Section 4, reasons for favouring this were to reduce workload, especially with regard to data, and to aid in consistency across submissions. As part of this system, there were suggestions for a ‘simplified application form’ and ‘data templates’.

Advance HE participants noted the benefit that:

“the Athena Swan review will fast track for REC all the things around systems and processes... So, developing an online application system for Athena Swan will enable us to fast track something similar for a REC.”

(Advance HE staff member)

However, one interview participant had reservations about an online system due to prior experience with the Stonewall system:

“I saw this online business with Stonewall... it was a pain in the posterior to get people to work on, whereas actually people have moved towards Microsoft teams and that does allow for a lot more collaborative working within an organisation. So, if you’re just uploading the document onto an online portal, that’s fine, but to complete the submission online, no, because actually it doesn’t allow for good collaborative SAT working.”

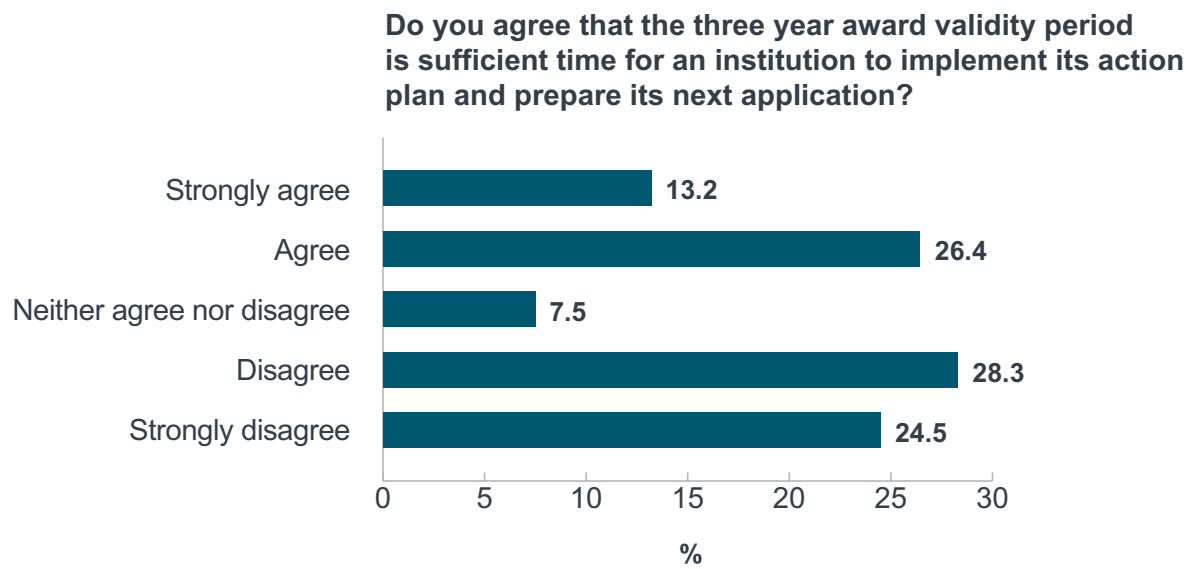
(REC lead and HERAG member)

It appears, then, that the planned online submission system for Athena Swan would also be welcomed by REC participants and could reduce the workload involved in formatting and presentation of submissions. However, it will be important that the system allows collaborative completion and review of the application.

Period from award to renewal

The majority of survey respondents (52.8%; n=28) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the current three-year award validity period is sufficient time for an institution to implement the action plan from its successful submission and prepare its next submission, which is required in order to either renew its award or to apply for the next level of award. However, 39.8% (n=21) agreed or strongly agreed that it is sufficient time (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Sufficiency of three-year award validity period



Comments made by respondents expanded on their answers to this question. 24 of the comments suggested increasing the time allowed, with the vast majority of these (n=13) suggesting it should be five years, while four respondents suggested it should be four years.

Reasons provided for extending the timeline included to allow the necessary time for actions to be implemented and results and impact reviewed, as well as to prepare the next application. There was a shared view that it is not possible to create and measure the necessary culture changes within three years:

“I would move the review period to 4-5 years. To implement change in an academic year can take time and then you need time for that change to take effect and to appropriately evaluate it. Three years isn’t long enough to see if something has really been beneficial.”
(REC lead)

The was echoed by two interview participants, one explaining that in their experience race equality takes longer to address than gender equality:

“The concern I have is that race equality takes much longer [than gender equality], so you need to allow organisations sufficient time to embed the deepest systemic changes that we need to see. ... it almost feels like by the time you finished doing [the REC submission] you are actually starting to think about the next plan, not the delivery of the actual plan.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

Seven survey respondents mentioned the recent extension of the award time period for the Athena Swan Charter and that this should be emulated for REC:

“I absolutely do not think 3 years is even close to enough time to be able to make progress on an action plan in time to prepare another submission starting after about 2 years. It would be ideal if this could be changed in line with the increases similar for Athena Swan, 5 years seems reasonable.”

(REC lead)

Another respondent mentioned the benefits of aligning with other institutional planning and reporting cycles, as well as the need for effective monitoring and review during implementation:

“I think it should be five years – this fits better with other University strategic plans, eg Access Agreement, and more importantly allows proper time for implementation, evaluation and review of impact. I would make it longer but stress it is a live document which can and should be effectively monitored and reviewed during its lifetime.”

(REC lead)

Indeed, a recurring theme among survey comments and interviews was the need for some kind of checking-in or interim reporting to Advance HE, especially if the time period is to be extended, in order to ensure that institutions remain on track:

“I think there could be an interim implementation monitoring check after 18 months.”

(SAT member)

“It could be 6 years with mid-evaluation check-ups at the three-year mark.”

(REC lead)

“Would be great to have a progress or interim reporting each year to ensure momentum and keep on the right track.”

(REC working group member)

One interview participant suggested a RAG (red, amber, green) rated action plan with cover letter could be submitted halfway through:

“What we could do, if we had a longer award, is ask for a midway update on the action plan to find out how actions have been progressing. Okay, with a cover note, but that wouldn’t be onerous, and it wouldn’t require new data. What it would require is evidence of progress, or a declaration of progress by simply RAG-ing it and signing-off by the head of institution.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

One respondent suggested a three year period for the majority of actions, five years for the remainder, which would presumably require some form of reporting at three years to ensure this requirement was met:

“Much of the action plan is very difficult to achieve within 3 years, but to not deter a lack of action, it should be that 80% of actions should be within 3 years whilst some should be within 5 years.”

(REC working group member)

An alternative to increasing the time period allowed was a proposal to reduce the requirements of renewals to make these more achievable within three years:

“Rather than increase the time, another option would be to reduce the scope of the application.”

(REC lead)

However, five comments suggested keeping the period as three years as they saw this as sufficient:

“Three years is a good time period as this should give institutions enough time to assess if their actions are working.”

(REC lead)

“I have acknowledged that change cannot realistically be implemented in one academic year. 3 is sufficient as it allows for the change to be implemented and its effects to be seen and evaluated.”

(SAT member)

Two expressed caveats to this, for example that three years can be enough if work commences immediately:

“I think the renewal timescale is appropriate – if the work is continuous. What actually happens (as is with Athena Swan) is Chairs stand down post award, new chairs take time to find their way, SATs are revised and new members take time to find their role, there is down time of at least 1.5 years after the award and then work towards the next submission is rushed.”

(REC lead)

Renewals process

Currently, REC award holding institutions must renew their award through a self-assessment process much the same as that for their first successful submission. The findings in relation to workload and areas of difficulty in Section 4 thus equally apply when preparing a renewal submission. The renewals process for first-time Athena Swan renewals (Advance HE 2019b) has recently been simplified and now focuses on progress made on action plans and identification of future priorities, including through a new action plan. It remains a robust process, while focusing more specifically on implementation and requiring less presentation of data. While not a specific question in our survey, two survey respondents chose to suggest that the REC renewals process could be similarly revised:

“Renewals should be in-line with the new streamlined Athena Swan process.”

(REC lead)

“Make the renewal process simpler [like Athena Swan]. Otherwise we spend most of our time putting together an enormous application to satisfy the panel and don't have enough time left to actually advance our initiatives.”

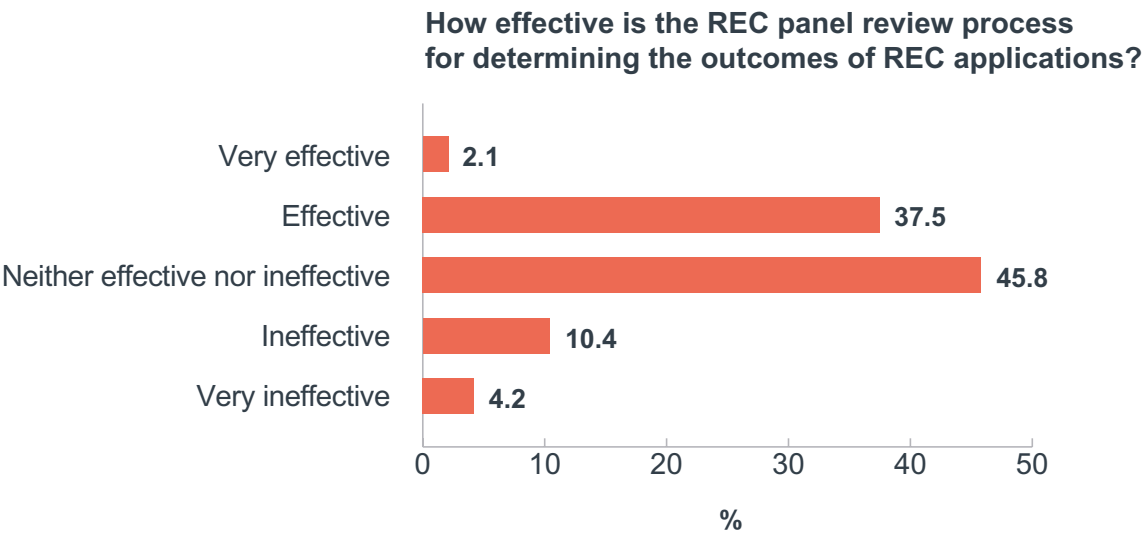
(REC lead)

This streamlined process could thus be adapted for REC to reduce some of the workload of first-time renewals while ensuring a focus on implementation and progress.

5.4 The peer review process

Survey respondents expressed mixed views as to the efficacy of the REC peer panel review process for determining the outcomes of REC applications. The largest proportion were ambivalent about it, finding it neither effective nor ineffective (45.8%; n=22). When combined, those who thought it was effective or very effective totalled 39.6% (n=19). Positively, only 14.6% (n=7) thought it was either ineffective or very ineffective (Figure 28). The large proportion of respondents who did not have a strong view one way or another is likely due to our sample including institutions who have not yet been through the process, which was indeed reflected in some comments. However, among those with a view on the process, more than three times as many felt it was effective than ineffective.

Figure 28: Efficacy of panel review process



Comments reflected a greater range of views on efficacy. Seven respondents commented positively about the current system. One was positive about its robustness and the fact that it is not easy to get a REC award:

“It’s a very thorough process so does not make a mockery of the award (ie, not every submission is successful).”
(REC lead)

One felt it was effective now, but might not be scalable should REC continue to grow:

“Currently, the REC panel review process seems to be quite effective. I suspect that the number of applications are still small enough to mean that there are fewer panels required, therefore the consistency of the panels can be maintained. Should it reach the level of Athena Swan applications there will be a need to make changes to ensure consistency.”
(REC lead)

However, 16 expressed concerns about the current system. Two had concerns about a lack of objectivity:

“The process is entirely subjective and unfair in my view. Panels can pick at applications rather than taking them as a whole. They read negatives into gaps rather than positives.”

(REC lead)

Two questioned panellists’ knowledge for assessing applications in certain aspects.

“In our experience the panel members had little understanding of the Scottish context.”

(REC lead)

“As an observer I heard a couple of comments by the panellists which shocked me such as ‘we know that international applications apply for every job so they should be disregarded in the analysis’. This was a ‘data academic’. I strongly feel you need people with a deep understanding of race equality on the panel.”

(REC lead)

Two had concerns about consistency of panel decisions.

“Panels are inconsistent, feedback is inconsistent, and I would hope that the changes that have been recommended through the Athena review are implemented with REC.”

(REC lead)

Two questioned low success rates, suggesting this reflected a review process that is too challenging:

“When we were unsuccessful so were the other six institutions who also applied – no one received an award. It might not have been as a result of the panel review process, but it should give ‘food for thought’.”

(REC lead)

Five felt the system would benefit from revision and made some suggestions. One proposed both a process involving dialogue and site visits to confirm the content of applications:

“I believe there should be more of a viva process allowing for dialogue and interrogation. Possibly visits akin to Ofsted. Institutions can write whatever they like in submissions and panels have no way of knowing the truth.”

(REC lead)

Another suggested changes to the outcomes available and a more developmental and supportive approach to maintain engagement:

“The REC process is a pass/fail outcome. While excellence should be rewarded, a more educative and supportive process might enable all institutions to engage with REC. Not achieving the award is very demotivating and doesn’t reflect the hard work that will in all likelihood be progressing anyway.”

(REC lead)

Two suggested greater transparency and information is provided on the process – one in terms of panel composition and how this is decided and another in terms of the moderation process within panels:

“Transparency about panels and their training would be helpful, in particular the selection process for panels for Russell Group vs post 1992 and the profile of panels.”

(EDI staff member)

Perspectives from panellists

The panel review process

All of the panellist interview participants (n=3) agreed that having a panel review process for REC is extremely important. Reasons given included the importance that peers make the assessment due to their practitioner and institutional knowledge, as well as the need for a social process in order to socially deconstruct race:

“I think that is vitally important. And I know there are faults with the whole peer review process ... but put it this way, if you are respected by your colleagues, it means a lot. Your colleagues are the ones who are in the game with you, so they know what’s happening on the ground. You can’t pull the wool over their eyes. ... I think with the REC process, the way it’s structured lends itself to a lot of integrity. ... And, race is socially constructed as we know. So, you want to deconstruct it socially. That’s the only way it will work.”

(REC panellist)

Additionally, the need was stressed for an independent process and a mixed group of experts coming together to discuss the applications to ensure robust outcomes:

“The idea that it’s assessed by an independent panel...I think that’s important, I think having it detached. ... So not having evaluators, having people independent from Advance HE. Having experts, including academics and practitioners, and some roles in HR, having a mix of people to be able to meet and sit and discuss. It’s important.”

(REC panellist)

While having a mixture of different types of HEI staff on panels was seen as a benefit, it contributed to a negative experience for one panellist, highlighting power differentials in HE:

“Occasionally, you might get someone who’s a bit of a clever clogs. I remember my very first meeting, because I didn’t want to fall on my face. So, I went through everything and read everything, made my notes and so on. And there was a Professor there. And when we had to introduce ourselves, the disdain he showed when I said I was support staff. But it became apparent to me that he hadn’t really read the stuff because he was so far off.”

(REC panellist)

Two panellists discussed the efficacy of discussion and decision-making on panels, highlighting the challenge of ensuring everyone's voice is heard:

“What can be a problem, as in any panel, is that some members might have a very strong opinion and might be able to sway the decision of the panel because they talk so much or because they have a very strong view, and some fellow members might just go with it. So, I think it needs a very careful and strong chair to be able to manage that and be able to, to ensure that all voices are heard.”

(REC panellist)

A panel chair also shared the challenges of managing divergent views, not influencing others' decisions and remaining focused on the content of the submission:

“When there's divergent views and these views can't be quantified by the outcome measures. So, remaining professional enough to not influence your colleagues' decision. Because your colleague has to make that assessment based on the outcome measures. And then the most challenging one I've found is when you see a pristine bid ... and you know that that institution, you know that those actions are performative, and you know that there will be no change. But the most difficult is to remain professional, and to assess the application based on what is presented in front of you and not the historical facts.”

(REC panellist)

Echoing responses in the survey, one panellist saw variation in panel knowledge and experience as a potential weakness of panel decision-making. However, they also saw this as beneficial because being a panellist is an opportunity to develop knowledge and experience. This points to the fact that as REC is relatively new the pool of experienced panellists is still developing.

“The weaknesses could be the variances in experiences and knowledge. So theoretical knowledge of how race and race equality and racism work. That is a disadvantage because if you have people at varying levels of competence it then spills over into confidence in making decisions. So, how do you rectify that I'm not sure yet. But then you need that because you need to bring people on the journey and upskill people, so I don't know what the answer is to that.”

(REC panellist)

Views on Advance HE support and guidance

All reported that the panels are well-managed by Advance HE and that the handbook was useful while reviewing applications:

“I think what it does for me, it takes away a lot of the subjectivity”

(REC panellist)

They all found the panellist training to be fit for purpose, though one felt it could be enhanced:

“I do it in advance of every panel to refresh myself on implicit bias, on general principles. So, I think it’s actually fit for purpose.”

(REC panellist)

“I think it wouldn’t harm the process to revisit the training and see how you can enhance that somewhat because it’s as Malcolm X says: ‘racism is like a new Cadillac, they reinvent a new model every year’. So, we always have to be refining the training to adapt to these more sophisticated race equality concepts.”

(REC panellist)

In terms of Advance HE moderation of panel meetings, one panel chair reported a positive experience of this support:

“We were doing a virtual panel. So [Advance HE staff] were actually there in the panel, throughout the whole thing. And from time to time, when I sort of slipped a bit they would be there, so it gave me confidence. ... there’s someone else there that can remind you, even when the conversations are becoming subjective they can say ‘oh okay, let’s remain objective here and based on the outcomes’. I think they did a very good job.”

(REC panellist)

Motivations to become a panellist

All of the panellist interview participants had wanted to become panellists in order to learn more about the REC and institutions’ work on race equality for the benefit of their own institutions’ future work. As well as this, one expressed the desire to help by being a panellist:

“I was so interested to see how others do it and being a REC panellist and being able to see what the process looked like in other places was a great learning opportunity....and to find out how it worked, what worked well, what didn’t ... and I think that the REC as a model and as a mechanism is really, really vital. And I wanted to be involved, to help out.”

(REC panellist)

Another expressed they were motivated by social justice:

“I am motivated by the social justice imperative...The marginalised, the oppressed...I’m motivated to help the disenfranchised, because clearly, those are the people who need it most. It’s about equity for me. ... the REC presented an opportunity to contribute because if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.”

(REC panellist)

Benefits of being a panellist

Panellist interview participants' desires to learn were met through their participation in the panel process. One panellist, who also leads REC work at their institution, had learnt about the REC process, hallmarks of successful and unsuccessful applications, as well as gained new contacts for networking:

"It helped me to learn more about the process, learn what's expected. Seeing other people's submissions in terms of how they present the data, what kind of initiatives they thought are useful to address the issues that they had, which all institutions are likely to have. ... I also found it really helpful to learn from the other panellists, what they see as making a difference, or what they see as a good application or a not so good application. So, learning about things that were useful then when we were developing our submission. And on another level, it was networking. Being able to get to know colleagues who work on similar topics... to keep contact with them and discuss and share."

(REC panellist)

Another newer panellist had found the experience to be enlightening and empowering:

"It was such an eye opener, because you have to read all the submissions before you make your comments, and I remember two of the ones that I thought were really, really good. There were experienced panel members there and they just tore them apart...But they showed us how to look at things ... helped you to kind of read between the lines. ...and it's actually empowered me to be even bolder."

(REC panellist)

Another, while acknowledging the workload involved, had learnt of others' initiatives and implemented some at their own institution:

"It's probably not the most attractive thing to read a 10,000-word REC application report. But you know ...in wading through those 10,000 words, I have learned so much. So, there are things in those 10,000 words initiatives that I said well, actually, I can do this at [my institution], and I've done that, so it's about education and it's giving back. So, I'm giving back but I'm getting as well."

(REC panellist)

One respondent, who had been a chair of a REC panel, explained the benefits of participating in REC panels for white panellists in terms of learning:

"I'm bringing people on this journey. Yes, white colleague, you need to come with me. You're not getting away. You're coming with me. So, I think at the end of it I'm satisfied that my white colleague has made a couple of steps further than where they would have if they didn't come on the journey, and that should be encouraged."

(REC panellist)

Challenges for panellists

A challenge reported by all of the panellists was the time requirement due to the length of REC submissions, with the time surpassing that which was advised by Advance HE:

“The challenging bit is that some REC submissions are really huge. So, the challenge is finding time. And the initial Advance HE suggestion was four or five hours on the reading and providing feedback. It’s not realistic. I found I usually spent two or three days to actually closely read it and match it with the guidelines and write it down. I think that’s challenging to be able to find time in and around doing your day job.”

(REC panellist)

Reviewing two submissions in one panel meeting was seen as a challenge:

“I think it’s a very big ask to get more than one submission per panel because REC submissions are monsters. So, to be asking for two submissions per panel I think is, particularly because you’re asking for it for free, I mean it’s a really big ask.”

(REC panellist)

Making sense of the data provided was the most onerous aspect for one panellist:

“What I find onerous is in terms of data literacy, that is where the onerous bit comes in because I find a lot of institutions top load the application with data, and they just shove data in. There’s no analysis of this data intersectionally, so you find that you just look at numbers and you are having to analyse it for yourself.”

(REC panellist)

However, the panellists felt the work was necessary:

“It is a big commitment. But I think it’s a necessary commitment. Because it’s such an important area. And if we want other institutions, want the sector to move forward, there is some level of additional work that needs to be done.”

(REC panellist)

Perspectives from Advance HE

Advance HE staff interviewed agreed with panellists that being a panellist is an important learning and development opportunity, and they were actively trying to recruit people of colour for this opportunity, while maintaining a balance of representation:

“We’re also trying to promote and do a positive action here by ensuring that we recruit and pinpoint people of colour in institutions who can come forward and be part of this process, because then that will help them with the work they’re doing in their institutions, giving them more of an insight and give them a bit more capital in the institutions as well to be taken seriously because they sat on a panel. ... and also, to make sure there’s a good representation of people of colour on the panel as well as professional service, academic, gender.”

(Advance HE staff member)

However, they had found demand to be a panellist or an observer too great to meet, meaning this opportunity is not available to everyone:

“What I have had is a lot of people saying ‘I want to be an observer. I want to be a panellist’. Of course, we only have two panels a year, so we have a waiting list.”

(Advance HE staff member)

Regarding Advance HE’s organisation and management of the panel process, it was described by Advance HE staff members as resource intensive in terms of coordination of the panels:

“So, it’s the responding to the emails ... all of those things that we need to get panellists to do ... And that’s before we even get to sending in feedback forms, being in the panel and making the notes and writing everything up. So just the sheer coordination of the people is quite a lot.”

(Advance HE staff member)

Developing personal relationships with panellists was found to be important to this coordination, and a small REC team combined with a lack of a specific REC coordination staff member was a challenge in this regard.

“It’s having a shared [between Athena Swan and REC] coordination team and not having somebody that is solely for REC. I think that is a particular issue for us.”

(Advance HE staff member)

While the scale of REC and REC submissions at present meant the panel process was manageable, there was recognition that, with REC growing, changes would be needed to ensure it was sustainable:

“Because we are seeing growth in engagement with REC, I think we are soon going to have to figure out how to make sure that some of the more logistical challenges around supporting and processing the panel services are done in a way that is scalable and sustainable. And because that has been the biggest resource draw for the Athena Swan charter. So, for me, I think solving the very heavily resource intensive panel process for REC will be one of the priority challenges for us to address in the coming months and years.”

(Advance HE staff member)

As a result of the Athena Swan review, Advance HE was aware of a need to professionalise the peer review process for Athena Swan, and was currently considering ways to do so, which it anticipated could also benefit REC:

“How do we professionalise the panel through the panellists and the chair processes, from having more training and support and development for people carrying out that role, to recognising their contribution either through financial reward or other mechanisms of recognition and reward. So, all the systems that we build around the peer review aspect of it should put us in a really good place for making similar enhancements for REC.”

(Advance HE staff member)

An efficient panel process was seen as having the added benefit of freeing-up more capacity to do developmental work:

“For that peer review process to be as efficient as possible to make sure we have the capacity to do more development work operationally, that is really, really important to us.”

(Advance HE staff member)

However, the discussion element of panel meetings was viewed by REC staff members as essential for REC, more so than for Athena Swan due to the different histories and levels of experience institutions have with race equality work. They felt that streamlining the panel review process in a way that removed this element would not be appropriate for REC at this point in time:

“There is a difference between REC and Athena Swan in the sense that gender has been prioritised in institutions, so people tend to get it more without talking about it. And a lot of people have become experts in Athena Swan too. Whereas with race equality, we’re still at the initial stages, we’re still at the step of getting people to listen and hear and actually create space for people to start working genuinely in this area. So, I believe the panel process needs to be long because we need to have those discussions, and we need to give the time and attention to those people that have worked 18 months on these submissions. So, I’m a little bit concerned about streamlining it too much.”

(Advance HE staff member)

There was, however, already work underway to innovate with remote panel delivery and to focus and streamline panel discussions:

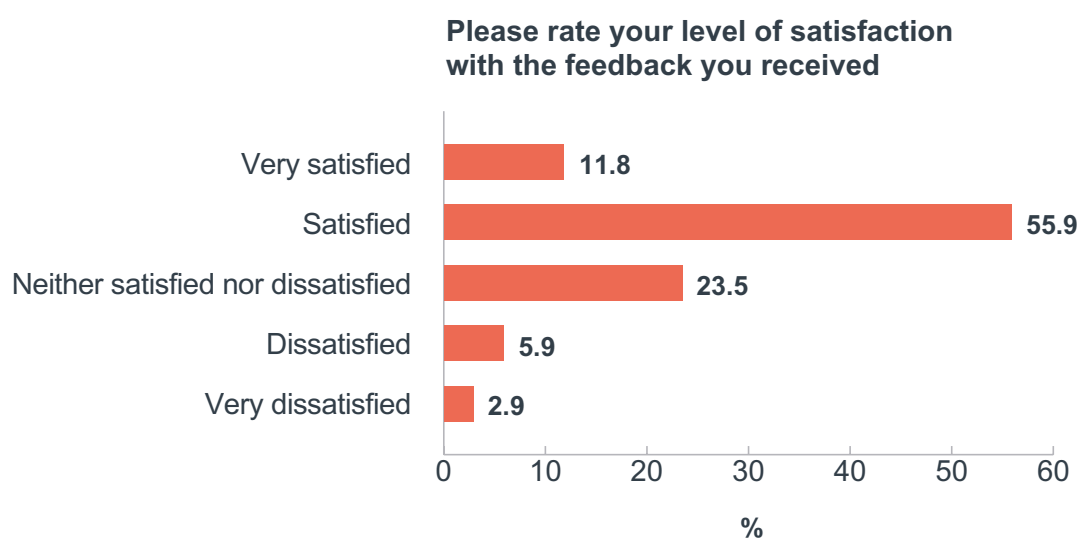
“With circumstances, we have moved to remote panels. That seems to be working quite well.”
(Advance HE staff member)

“We’ve now developed a feedback sheet, which is a pilot, for them to have a discussion of whether the submission has met the criteria or not, and if they haven’t, to then have a discussion about why. So, something different to shorten it, but not to lose the quality of discussion in the panel.”
(Advance HE staff member)

5.5 Feedback following a submission

The majority of survey respondents who had submitted an application were positive about the feedback they had received following their submission, with 67.7% (n=23) feeling satisfied or very satisfied. Only 8.8% (n=3) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Satisfaction with feedback following an application



Comments were mostly positive about the feedback received, though some raise some areas for enhancement. The level of detail and was praised by three respondents:

“The feedback was incredibly detailed and useful, we very much appreciated the time that they took to put this together. It has helped us target how to make the application better and improve our approach to the action plan. I was very surprised when we received this as they do not issue such detailed feedback for Athena Swan, which is an area I have focused most of my work in.”
(REC lead)

One felt the feedback reflected positively on a robust and fair panel review process:

“We felt that the feedback was fair and thorough. From the feedback and comments, we were reassured that panel members have gone through the application carefully and in a considered manner.”

(REC lead)

One similarly appreciated its constructiveness and thoroughness, though questioned the sustainability of this approach:

“In our experience, feedback received has been very constructive and thorough. Though it might be difficult to maintain this as the area grows and there are more members.”

(REC lead)

Two mentioned they had found a follow-up call to discuss the feedback helpful:

“The feedback was really helpful, in particular the call in which we could ask questions helped identify areas we needed to work on.”

(REC lead)

One respondent suggested more examples could further enhance the feedback:

“The feedback was comprehensive however more examples of what could have been done differently or how things could have been improved would have been useful in going forward.”

(REC lead)

However, three felt the feedback was inconsistent:

“Feedback differed from Advance HE guidance which was frustrating.”

(SAT member)

“We have identified some inconsistencies in the feedback.”

(SAT member)

One respondent suggested another manner to deliver the feedback to achieve more impact:

“Although I appreciate this may be challenging to organise I think there should be an option for feedback to be followed by a meeting (virtual or face to face) between Advance HE and key members of the REC SAT including VC to reiterate key actions outlined in the feedback. This meeting should be a priority for those HEIs who only just managed to achieve an award.”

(SAT member)

5.6 Discussion and recommendations

Period from joining to first submission

Although most survey respondents felt that three years is enough time to develop a first REC submission after joining the Charter, an important minority of institutions may require more time in the initial period to take the necessary steps that put them in a position to undertake the self-assessment process and prepare their first submission. This will to an extent depend on an institution's starting point and how much work they have undertaken to prepare before joining the Charter. Having an extended and/or more formal preparatory development phase, could support all institutions to identify and enact these key steps prior to embarking on the formal process of preparing a submission. This mirrors our earlier findings regarding what could support more institutions to become REC members, suggesting such a development could help on both fronts – increasing REC membership and enabling higher quality first submissions.

[See recommendation 7.](#)

Submission dates and method

The two annual REC submission deadlines were felt to be appropriate by the largest proportion of respondents, though many were ambivalent on this question, which is likely due to some not having yet submitted an application. Comments revealed that some would prefer more time between the two dates and/or a change to the time of year of the date(s). A more evenly spaced time period between the two would seem sensible, or provision of more dates across the year, as was recommended in the Athena Swan review.

As a result of the Athena Swan review an online submission facility is being developed by Advance HE. Around a third felt such an online submission process would be highly beneficial for REC. This was seen as a way to reduce the workload and increase consistency across submissions, however, it was also noted that it is important for such a system to allow for collaborative authorship of the application.

[See recommendations 21 and 24.](#)

Award validity period and renewals

There is no universal consensus on the timeline required to implement a REC action plan following a successful submission and prepare the next submission. However, the rationales for extension of the current three-year period provided in respondents' comments align with the third REC principle which states that actions developed to address racial inequalities should be aimed at achieving long-term institutional culture change. It is certainly questionable whether a three-year period is sufficient to implement and measure such change. There is a strong contingent in favour of extending the award period to five years, which would have the added benefit of aligning with the Athena Swan award period.

However, the issue of ensuring institutions remain on track during a longer implementation period was rightly raised. Some form of mid-point interim reporting or check-in could help institutions to maintain momentum. This could take the form of an updated action plan with RAG status and accompanying statement. Where progress was not being made, additional advice and support could then be made available, for example through a consultancy visit.

Additionally, several participants were in favour of adoption of the streamlined Athena Swan renewals process for REC. The approach, which is focused on reporting progress with implementation and identifying future priorities for action, could reduce the workload involved in preparing a first REC renewal submission and enable greater energy and resource to be dedicated to implementation.

[See recommendations 27, 28 and 30.](#)

The peer review process

Having a peer review process involving panel meetings and discussion was felt to be essential to ensuring robust decision making in the area of race equality because the sector is less experienced with race equality work and with the REC than with gender equality and the Athena Swan Charter. Additionally, for REC, it emerged that having a broad pool of panellists with a range of prior expertise and experience provides important learning and development, helps to spread good practice and encourages networking, though the downside of this is the questions raised in this section about consistency of panel assessment. Some of the actions taken to professionalise the panel review process being considered as a result of the Athena Swan review have the potential to also benefit REC. However, we would suggest in the short to medium term, a blended approach that employs both a more formal and transparent process to recruit a pool of experienced panellists and chairs whilst also providing the chance for others to expand their knowledge, and ultimately apply to join the pool, could help to professionalise the peer review process whilst continuing to have a wider impact on knowledge and expertise. The role of the Advance HE moderator will remain important to ensuring consistency in assessment in this context. Additionally, as the time commitment required of REC panellists and chairs is significant, thought should be given to some form of reward and/or recognition.

It is also important that the resource intensity of REC panels is reduced. The continuation of remote panels and new tools that are already beginning to streamline the process, in addition to the introduction of many of the other recommendations for changes to REC applications and requirements in this report, will help in this regard. If panel meetings remain, as we suggest, thought should be given to a sustainable model of resourcing the coordination of these for the future, since this currently takes up a disproportionate amount of time for the small REC team.

[See recommendations 13, 14 and 15.](#)

Feedback

The majority were satisfied with the feedback they had received from Advance HE following a submission. The level of detail in the written feedback and the chance for a follow-up phone call were particularly valued. The scalability of this approach to feedback to meet a growing REC should be considered. Additionally, the occasional issues with consistency raised by participants deserve attention. The feedback sheet being trialled could be a useful tool for producing consistent and constructive feedback focused on improvement. Updating and expanding on the handbook (as recommended in Section 4), and consistently referring to this in the panel assessment, could also support consistency.

[See recommendation 15.](#)

6 Achieving REC awards

6.1 Section summary

Success criteria

- + a Bronze award is for being prepared to achieve. Bronze award holders are expected to demonstrate that they have a 'solid foundation' for the promotion of race equity and inclusion in their institution
- + submissions should consist of a candid analysis of an institution's race equality issues, as reflected in their qualitative and quantitative data, and a plan of the actions that they will implement to address these issues
- + awards are for a period of three years and at the end of this period institutions need to demonstrate progress against their plan
- + to date there have been no successful submissions at Silver level. To achieve a Silver award, institutions have to demonstrate that they have a significant record of activity and achievement by the institution in promoting race equality and in addressing challenges across the whole institution.

Success factors

- + success rates for REC submissions have increased from 38% in 2015 to 71% in the latest (2020) round
- + survey respondents felt that the four factors that were extremely important for success were achieving engagement from senior managers; a focus on achieving long term institutional cultural change; the acknowledgement of race inequalities in the institution; and the robust analysis of the institution's data
- + interview respondents had less to say about success factors but having access to data expertise and getting the submission reviewed by an independent consultant were mentioned
- + SAT leads mentioned the important role of working groups with clear objectives and reporting deadlines and of having one or two people taking responsibility for pulling the submission together.

Factors contributing to unsuccessful submissions

- + no factors were seen as extremely important for explaining an institution's lack of success, but two factors were seen as very important by over 60.0% of respondents: problems with action planning and insufficient acknowledgement of race inequalities in the institution. Additionally, insufficient knowledge of race equality by those working on the REC was also a problem for half of respondents
- + Advance HE has a great deal of clarity on the factors that commonly lead to submissions not gaining the award. These include:
 - not understanding the REC principles and the evidence that demonstrates they have met the criteria
 - action plans that focus on further analysis rather than actions
 - action plans that do not address the issues
 - uncertainty about designing actions to address issues
 - BAME orientated solutions which reinforce a deficit model of race inequality rather than solutions that tackle the wider system
 - EDI leads not having sufficient expertise in race equality
- + panellists interviewed also provided a view on the factors common to unsuccessful applications:
 - not being frank or candid about the issues
 - presenting data but not analysing why they had the issue
 - not addressing issues identified in the data
 - not connecting issues with actions, and actions with success measures.

Improving success at REC

- + survey participants' most popular selection of the factors they felt would improve success at REC were the provision by Advance HE of data analysis tools, good practice resources (which have recently been produced), and increased networking opportunities with other REC applicants
- + Advance HE has a number of plans in place to increase the level of guidance and support available to institutions to enable more to achieve awards. They also want to make the expectations in respect to data more explicit.

6.2 Introduction

This section presents research findings relating to:

- + [Key ingredients of success in gaining REC awards](#)
- + [Barriers and challenges to achieving awards](#)
- + [What could help to improve success rates](#)

It ends with [discussion and recommendations](#).

Awards requirements

Bronze award

Bronze awards are not awarded for an institution's achievements in respect to race equity. Bronze is an award for being *prepared* to achieve. Bronze award holders are expected to demonstrate that they have a 'solid foundation' for the promotion of race equity and inclusion in their institution. Submissions are expected to be candid and critically reflective about the issues in respect to race inequality that are revealed in the analysis of the institution's quantitative and qualitative data. Central to having a successful submission is a plan of the actions that institutions are committing to carryout to address these issues, as is the demonstration of the senior and middle management support required to implement the plan. Actions need to be tailored to the specific context of the applying institution and as such each submission is unique.

According to the REC handbook, Bronze institutions are characterised by:

- + "their candid understanding of how race equality is perceived within their institution and a thorough acknowledgment of issues that exist for minority ethnic staff and students
- + their identification of context-specific priorities for race equality work with a clear understanding of their aims and what success looks like
- + a comprehensive, evidence-based action plan, underpinning the institution's race equality priorities and aims
- + having institution-wide senior and middle management commitment to advancing race equality demonstrated through their involvement with this work, ownership of actions and the allocation of adequate resources."

Bronze awards are for a period of three years during which the institution is expected to implement its action plan and be in a position at the end of the three-year period to demonstrate that they are making progress. If they are able to demonstrate that they are making progress then they will achieve a Bronze renewal. If they are able to demonstrate significant progress and impact on improving race equality then they could be eligible for a Silver award.

Bronze renewal

In addition to the requirements of a Bronze award, for a renewal, institutions need to demonstrate progress against their action plan by providing evidence of actions having been completed. Furthermore, Bronze renewal institutions will have to provide evidence that their Faculties are involved in addressing race inequity.

Silver awards

To date there have been no successful submissions at Silver level. To achieve a Silver award, institutions must demonstrate that they have “a significant record of activity and achievement by the institution in promoting race equality and in addressing challenges across the whole institution.” Applicants need to demonstrate that equality has been ‘well embedded’ by strong leadership and provide evidence of the impact of the measures they have taken to improve race equality. Crucially, where progress has been made, the institution should be able to ‘trace the cause’ suggesting that effective evaluation is central to achieving a Silver award.

The Silver award is also based on the demonstration of accountability by faculties (or similar) through the delivery of faculty level actions. As is the case for Athena Swan, gaining a Silver award also requires the demonstration of attention to intersectionality.

When questioned whether the requirements at Silver were too ‘big of an ask’ for institutions, one REC lead responded;

“It is a right ask [if you ask] me. And I don’t think we have to accommodate for the mediocrity and fear and panic of people. We have to push for what’s right, and people have to move a bit more to then do whatever they need to do to be able to move to that speed. ...the numbers have to be checked, and the action plan has to be checked and people have to...Well, they could reflect on what has made it difficult and how much the, you know, the resistance to change. Well, people have to come up with the reasons why they haven’t done the work.”

(REC lead)

Success rates

Whilst the success rates for the REC started at a lower level than the 50% success rate for first time Athena Swan awards, there has been a step change in success rates in 2019 and 2020 to 63% and 71% respectively (Table 10).

Table 10: REC applications and outcomes by year

Year	Members intending to submit	Members who submitted	Bronze awards awarded	Percentage awarded	Unsuccessful applications
2015	30	21	8	38.0%	13
2016	5	3	1	33.0%	2
2017	4	2	0	0%	2
2018	6	6	2	33.0%	4
2019	12	11	7	63.0%	4
2020	7	7	5	71.0%	2

When asked about the steps that Advance HE have put in place to improve institutions' success, they highlighted increased support and resources aimed at the developmental stage of an institution's engagement with REC.

"One of the reasons why we are so keen to start putting our resources into the developmental side of things, because to date our main contact with applicants has been the application process and then giving them their often-unsuccessful results. Whereas what we want to do is try and move in earlier in the process."

(Advance HE staff member)

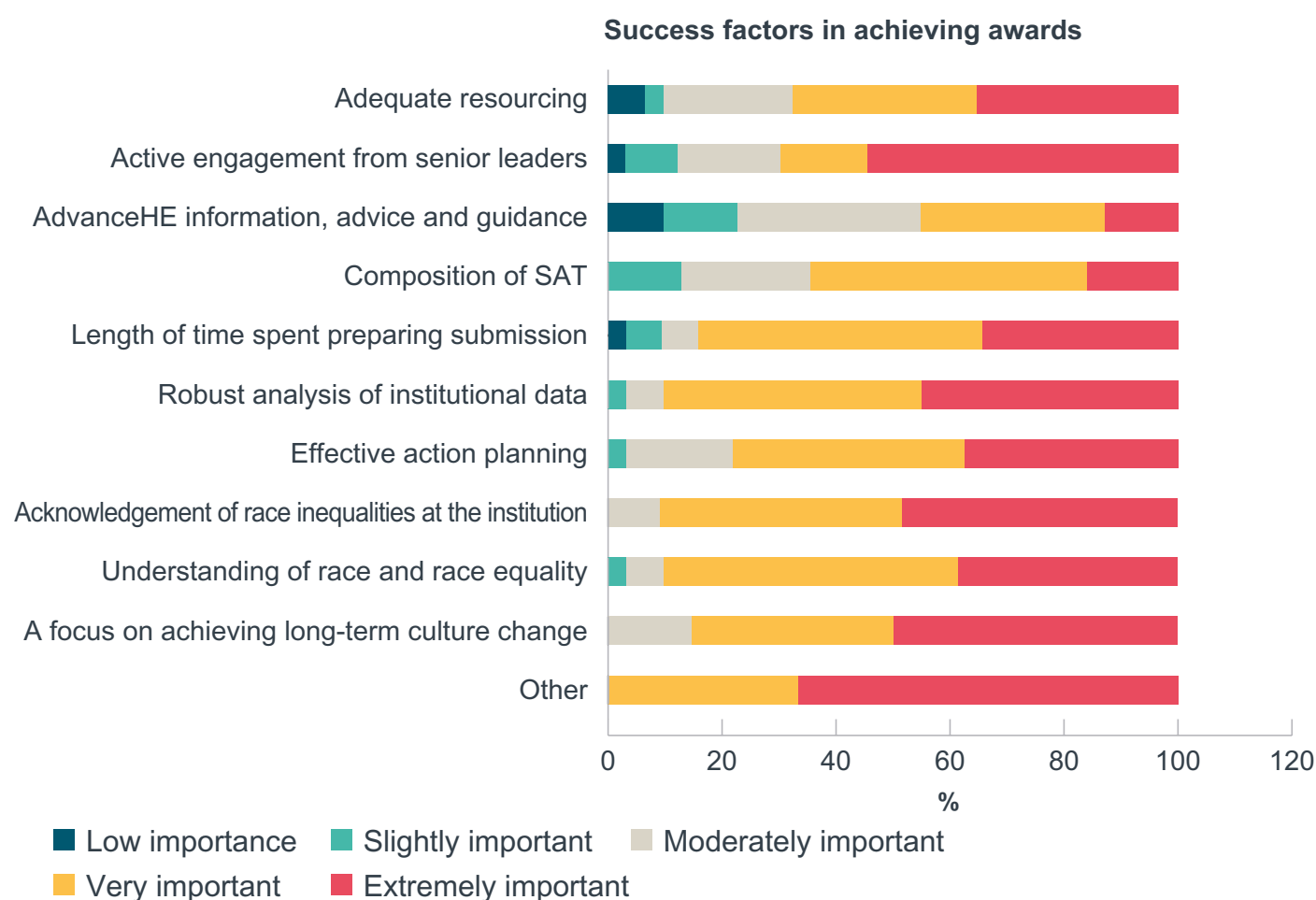
Of note is the consultancy pilot scheme Advance HE put in place in 2020. Institutions were able to have their draft submissions assessed by an associate prior to submitting them. Other initiatives that may be improving success rates are REC networking events.

"The networking events that run alongside that...which we're calling enhancing practice events to improve charter success...These are seminars around a particular topic, allowing colleagues across the sector to engage and network around a challenge or theme."

(Advance HE staff member)

6.3 Key ingredients of success

Figure 30: Factors influencing success in gaining a REC award



Institutions were asked to select the range of factors they thought underpinned their success in achieving a REC award. A total of 34 respondents completed this section. Of the specific factors listed, achieving engagement from senior managers was seen as extremely important by 54.4% (n=18) of respondents (Figure 30). A focus on achieving long-term institutional cultural change was also seen as extremely important by respondents (50.0% n=17). Two additional factors also seen as extremely important were the acknowledgement of race inequalities in the institution (48.0%, n=16) and the robust analysis of the institution's data (45.0%, n=14).

Four institutions felt that amongst the ‘other’ factors that were seen as extremely important for their success was the role of a committed individual, having a senior champion and obtaining a data expert. One institution also mentioned that having a sustainability plan was extremely important:

“The initial REC work was driven by a particularly committed and passionate individual who rallied the support of others towards a shared aim. Without [their] leadership, it never would have been successful. It is due to [their] determination, expertise, analytical skills and resilience that we became REC award holders as part of the pilot, which not many institutions were successful in achieving.”

(REC lead)

“In the end we did have the support of a data analyst who was able to handle data and understand, prepare the raw data to enable ease of manipulating the data for analysis to support the self-assessment process.”

(REC lead)

Four institutions chose to add further comment on what they attributed their institutions success to, apart from ‘working hard’ and that the work is ongoing, one commented:

“Strong commitment from academic staff group undertaking work on decolonising the curriculum. Strong commitment from staff leading student actions on awarding gap.”

(REC lead)

Another commented:

“Excellent project management – scheduling meetings, minutes of meetings, chasing people up for actions, etc.”

(REC lead)

Perspectives from interview participants

Interview participants had more to say about what led institutions to be unsuccessful, which will be explored in the next section, but one panellist highlighted the value of having an external consultant review the application before it is submitted to highlight areas for improvement within the submission:

“[They are] very good at stats and so on. And [they] said, this isn’t saying anything. And I think they just tried to blind with all these graphs, and charts and there are no explanations as to what is meant.”

(REC panellist)

Another panellist mentioned how helpful networking, support and information from the institutions who had been successful in the REC trial had been.

“I also found helpful materials shared at some of the REC events. So, members events where I remember [the SAT lead from an institution] presenting Kotter (Appelbaum et al 2021), how they did the submission. Or [SAT lead from another institution] about their first Bronze application. So, learning from those materials and simply reading other successful submissions and trying to figure out what works, how they went about presentation of data was helpful.”

(REC panellist)

One SAT chair, when asked what their key recommendation would be to new SAT leads, was the need for working groups and clear deadlines, and of making sure these expectations were incorporated in workload allocation schemes. This echoes findings in Section 4 regarding what supports a successful self-assessment process.

“I do think that it’s very easy to drift...I find definitely smaller working groups is...the way forward and with very specific limits in terms of we know what they’ll be looking at, and deadline setting. I suppose being open and honest from the outset about what the expectation is of people being involved in those groups. It’s not just a talking shop, we do need to do some actual work. And I think the challenge with this kind of work is getting that recognised in terms of workload, I think that’s a challenge for a lot of universities. This is an important citizenship role, but often people are taking it on top of their commitments.”

(SAT Chair)

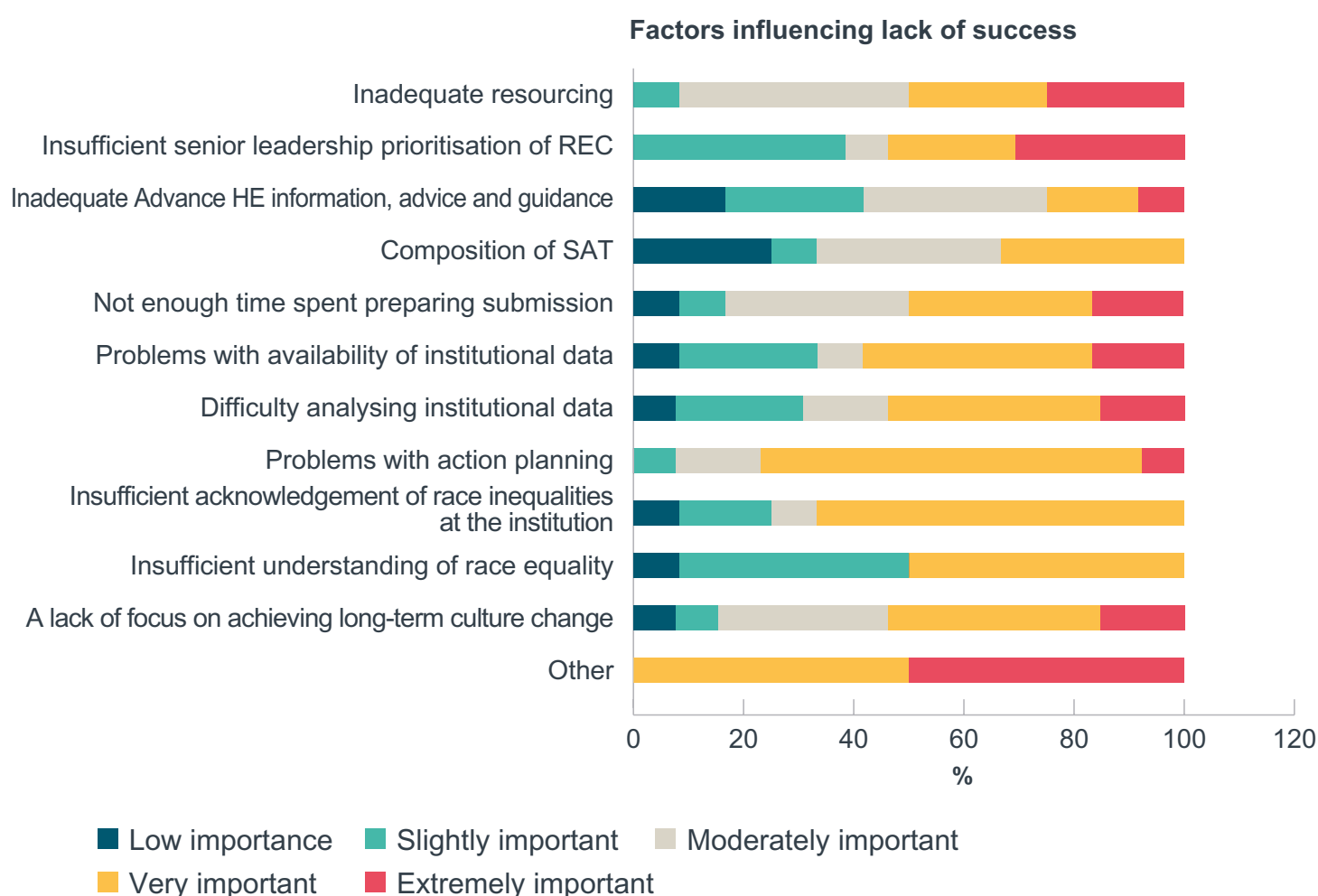
Another SAT Chair felt that although a wide team was involved in the self-assessment process, in reality the submission had to be pulled together by one or two people, again mirroring our earlier findings:

“The idea is that you have a team of people that are working on these applications, but you cannot write a successful application unless you have one or two people at the helm. The whole thing has to be cohesive and you can’t achieve that with lots of people.”

(SAT Chair)

6.4 Barriers and challenges to achieving awards

Figure 31: Factors influencing lack of success in gaining REC awards



When respondents were asked what they felt explained their lack of success in their application a total of 13 respondents took the opportunity to reply. No one factor was seen as extremely important (Figure 31). However, two factors were seen as very important by over 60.0% of respondents. These were problems with action planning (69.0%; n=9) and insufficient acknowledgement of race inequalities in the institution (66.7%; n=8). Additionally, 50.0% (n=6) felt that insufficient knowledge of race equality by those working on the REC was also a problem. A couple of the other issues raised in the 'other' section, were the loss of the individual who was driving the REC process initially, and the concern that the Scottish context was poorly understood by the panel.

When asked whether there was any further information respondents wanted to add about why they were not successful, respondents were frank about the standard of their submission, though unclear guidance was also seen as a factor.

“We were unsuccessful due to historical lack of commitment and expertise but also because the guidance is unclear and support lacking.”

(REC lead)

One respondent, whose institution had applied for a Bronze renewal, had experienced problems with local level implementation of the actions in its first submission, had struggled to demonstrate progress made and to design SMART actions:

“Although the institution has committed to the REC, the institutional aims did not trickle down sufficiently to the departments and faculties. There was no operationalisation or consideration at the more local level. In addition, we did not highlight enough progress since the first award and actions were not SMART enough, the latter was mainly due to running out of time towards the deadline to make them better.”

(REC lead)

Comments from one interview participant also raised the question of whether inconsistency in panel decision-making might be affecting the success of submissions. This is something that has been of concern with respect to Athena Swan (Advance HE 2020b).

“We hadn’t done enough work before submitting. I think we saw our submission as a way of analysing where we were and putting an action plan in place to make appropriate changes. Our feedback made it clear that for a Bronze award they would have expected changes to already be in place for us to have been successful.”

(REC lead)

Perspectives from interview participants

Interview participants had a lot to say about what made institutions unsuccessful in applying for REC awards.

Advance HE staff members

Advance HE staff have the advantage of seeing all unsuccessful applications in addition to the successful ones (while successful applicants have to publish their REC submissions, there is no such requirement for unsuccessful submissions). They were also able to draw on the Phase One of the REC Review that analysed the similarities and differences between successful and unsuccessful submissions (see further in Section 1.1).

Key factors that emerge from Advance HE's perspective are:

+ understanding the requirements:

"Applicants not fully understanding what is expected of them. So, I do think that that contributes to the success rates in some places. Where it's not really, really, really transparent around what's expected."

+ understanding the REC principles and the evidence needed to demonstrate they have met the criteria:

"We've got a job to do to continue to be really, really clear about the Principles, the criteria, and the evidence that we need to see to be able to say those criteria have been met. And so, I think that contributes to some of the success rates as well."

+ institutions having a full enough understanding of what their race equality issues are:

"Applications fall down at the point of having done enough to understand what their issues are, in order to suggest proactive interventions that will hopefully effect change."

+ action plans that focus on further analysis rather than actions:

"So often unsuccessful applications, their action plan will feature very heavily further monitoring, further exploration, further investigation, as if [the] applicant isn't actually sure about the underlying cause of the issue that they're seeing."

+ action plans that do not include actions or interventions that address the issues they have identified:

"A related issue is when they do know what the problem is and understand the underlying issue, but haven't put in place, a proactive enough action to respond to this."

+ uncertainty about how to design actions to address issues where the root cause is seen as societal:

"Where you have issues, which can be attributed to societal effects, or where institutions feel they don't have power to effect change or don't know how to change something."

+ focusing on individualistic BAME-orientated solutions, promoting a deficit model, rather than on solutions aimed at tackling inequity within the wider system:

"Often you'll see that manifesting in actions which are very individual focused, so individual change mechanisms around mentoring and support for individuals, rather than more systemic focused interventions, looking at how structural inequality manifests through processes."

+ EDI leads not having sufficient expertise in race equality:

"I have seen many people in EDI roles in institutions that have not worked on race or understand, because it's a very difficult complex area to progress. And so, there is a level of expertise and specialist experience that you need in order to get momentum in these areas and have those discussions when there is a lot of white fragility."

Panellists

The REC panellists we interviewed also provided a useful perspective on the commonalities they saw between unsuccessful applications.

- + not being frank or candid about the issues the institution faced in respect to race inequality:

“Not being really honest of what the issues are so that you kind of felt that, yes, there are issues and obviously every institution would have had issues, but they are not spelled out.”

- + presenting data but not analysing why the issue demonstrated by the data existed and then what the institution was going to do to address it:

“The not successful ones were the ones where what the data is purely described but not really analysed. They say: “we have this percentage of Black students” and this is left like this, without anything further saying why this might be happening. [and then] We have an issue, this is what we’re going to do about it.”

- + a disconnect between issues and actions, and actions and success measures in the submission:

“I think a big area where weaknesses can come up is the action plan as well, where you have actions that do not match the issues, or you have actions that do not have clear success measures.”

Many of the above issues to do with action planning echo our findings in Section 4 regarding what institutions find challenging and what they would value further guidance on, suggesting these difficulties contribute to lower chances of success.

In turn, one REC senior lead raised the challenge of inconsistencies in panellist judgements of what was acceptable, particularly when it came to the presentation of data:

“If Advance HE are not being prescriptive about how you present your data, and in the panel, people are not liking a particular style, that’s actually not fair. Everyone’s going to have slightly different ways of presenting things. I think if Advance HE like a particular style, if REC panels, like a particular style, then tell us what that is.”

(REC senior lead)

6.5 Improving success rates

Survey participants were asked to indicate which of a number of suggestions for how to improve institutions' success at REC they would endorse. As can be seen in Table 11 below, the two most popular were the provision of data analysis tools, good practice resources, as well as increased networking opportunities with other REC applicants.

Table 11: What could improve institutions' success?

	Percentage
REC data analysis tools/resources/support/training	22.0%
Online REC application system	3.7%
Enhanced digital REC handbook and guidance materials	7.4%
Good practice resources regarding effective race equality actions and interventions	18.5%
Additional race equality training opportunities	14.8%
More networking opportunities to share practice, challenges and solutions	18.5%
A longer period of time to prepare the application (currently three years)	3.7%

Advance HE has an awareness of the issues and where support would be helpful. The findings of this report will be used to inform the level of guidance and support provided to institutions.

"I think we need more guidance, particularly [around the] application form. I don't think the application form is explicit enough."

(Advance HE staff member)

They also want to make the expectations in respect to data more explicit:

"stipulations that you look at your data, you do analysis, you look at your patterns, you then identify the structural inequality and any negative patterns. And then you debrief on those patterns that you found. Maybe we need to be really explicit [about] it."

(Advance HE staff member)

As noted in Section 4, Advance HE has already produced a good practice database (Advance HE 2020c) providing evidence-based examples of REC good practice from across the sector, which may go some way towards meeting the need for more examples of good practice.

Advance HE also shared its planned direction of travel, which is to provide support and advice on addressing race inequality more generally rather than just on the REC. This would prevent “a binary choice of doing REC, and therefore doing race equality work, or doing nothing.” Institutions would be able to engage with support according to where they were on their race equality journey:

“I think our strategic direction for REC is a kind of suite of supports for institutions to help them tackle race inequality within their own contexts and improve the lived experience for their staff and students and community”.

(Advance HE staff member)

Interview participants also raised the need to provide SATs with more guidance and support on designing SMART action plans. As found elsewhere in this report and here, there seems to be a real challenge for institutions in getting to grips with what is required.

Besides additional guidance and training on action planning, one suggestion was to require action plans to start with the rationale for the action – the issue or data that the action has been designed to address. This could help to focus institutions’ action design on the issues they are trying to address and would also make it easier for SATs to identify what success would look like. The other considerable benefit of doing it this way is that it would enable the action plan to be used as a standalone document.

“I think you need to have a rationale for your objective. Yes, so I want the evidence base for the objective to be included in the actual plan because it actually helps me to understand the action plan better.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

A REC Patron raised the importance of institutions understanding their own context and by doing so their action plan would address the issues they need to address for them to succeed in their own context.

“I think that’s the priority; first for the HEI to understand its own position to have a sense of the context of the scene and to basically be able to set its own plan to move itself forward from where it is, rather than trying to reach some utopia that you know not everybody will or can or should be putting their efforts there at this point in time.”

(REC Patron)

One interview participant also suggested that action identification would be strengthened if Advance HE proactively encouraged the use of positive action to address race inequalities.

“I think the guidance and REC should be improved [to] actually incentivise or encourage people to think about the positive action provisions that people are undertaking. And actually, maybe some real guidance on positive action and examples of the positive action that had been taken as a result of REC might help other organisations understand what they could do from a menu of options.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

6.6 Discussion and recommendations

The four factors seen to most underpin the success of institutions at Bronze level (engagement from senior managers; long-term institutional cultural change; acknowledgement of race inequalities and the robust analysis of data) are also the factors that underpin REC's strength as a framework to drive real change. The REC provides a systematic approach for institutions to investigate, understand and address structural racism and to do this in a way that addresses the whole pipeline – from entry to exit across both student and staff journeys in HE. When institutions utilise the framework as a tool for leadership to drive change, and their submissions describe this process, these will be the ones that succeed. This is because to tackle structural inequalities you need to understand the factors that are sustaining the status quo, have identified interventions that will address these issues and have the power and resources to implement these interventions.

The strength of REC is in its capacity to drive change. What will undermine the utility and credibility of the framework is if the emphasis changes from helping institutions to use the framework effectively to helping them write submissions that will pass. This is the danger of Advance HE providing consultancy support just prior to submission, such as through the recent pilot feedback scheme. By then it is too late to correct any fundamental missteps, and yet the pressure to increase success rates could lead to consultants teaching institutions to 'game the system' rather than fixing the issues at hand.

Below we offer suggestions for areas in which enhanced support and guidance might, at the right points in the REC journey, continue the positive upward trend in success rates and ensure a focus on REC as a framework for change.

Enhancing developmental support

Advance HE wants to provide more developmental and consistent support to institutions throughout their REC journey, and this needs to be fully endorsed. There is also a clear need to expand and update the handbook, including the addition of new content on the areas identified in this section as factors influencing a lack of success, and to provide other resources and educational opportunities.

The confidence and capability to identify, acknowledge and understand race inequalities were key factors seen as leading to some institutions' success, and others' lack of success. This reflects other findings in the review which highlight the challenge institutions can face having the frank conversations they need to have if they are to identify the factors that are sustaining race inequality in their institutions. In Section 2, we outlined the argument for providing opportunities for support and development on race equality and the REC framework prior to membership, and there is a clear need for this to be maintained during the membership period.

[See recommendations 7, 8 and 9.](#)

Action planning support

Difficulty with action planning is also something that has been raised as a challenge in Section 4 as well as here. An action plan should follow logically on from the preceding steps in the methodology and should set the institution on the path of implementation. That institutions are struggling with this again suggests that REC materials and consultancy needs to ensure that institutions that are new to REC can develop a deeper understanding of how to use the framework to establish a strategic approach to reducing race inequalities. The recommendations on action plans made in Section 4.4 are also relevant here, and two additional recommendations are, firstly, to ensure that the action plan column starts with the rationale for the activity. This means that it is clear what the issue is that the action is designed to address, and that it includes enough information so that the action plan can be read as a standalone document (cross referenced so the reader who wanted more detail could find it easily). Clarity about what the start of the issue is, or the baseline position, could also help with identifying what success would look like, another area often challenging for SATs. Secondly, Advance HE recommending and providing guidance on taking a theory of change approach could help SATs map out the causal pathway they need to intervene in if they are to achieve the progress and impacts they seek. Taking such an approach would also support better impact evaluation and support better success at renewals and/or applications for the next level of award.

[See recommendations 11 and 12.](#)

Data analysis support

Increased data analysis tools and supports also emerge as a request in this section of the report and recommendations on this topic made in Section 4 equally apply here. Currently, Advance HE is scoping the feasibility of providing Athena Swan members with access to a tool to access and analyse EDI data collected centrally (such as by HESA and UCAS). Such a tool could also support REC members, though there will still be a need to collect and analyse institutional data, such as on staff recruitment and promotions, as well as on complaints and grievances. In the meantime, an updated data analysis spreadsheet could meet this need, alongside enhanced guidance and examples of effective practice in analysis, narrative and linked action identification.

[See recommendations 21 and 22.](#)

Networking

Learning from each other also appears to be a key factor in providing support to institutions engaging with REC. At present REC members are provided with networking events as part of their package and it certainly appears that any efforts to extend and widen the opportunities for more of this would be welcomed.

[See recommendation 10.](#)

7 Impact achieved and progress made

7.1 Section summary

In this section, impact is used to mean measurable change, while progress means actions having been implemented, but where the institution has not yet necessarily seen an impact. Given that REC formally launched in 2016, impact was not necessarily expected to be seen at this stage.

Nevertheless, this review took the opportunity to assess impact along with progress, which also establishes a benchmark for future impact evaluations to measure the selected indicators.

Although it was not expected at this stage, the review found evidence of positive impacts which indicate that REC is beginning to make a difference. Even where no impacts had yet been achieved, REC had enabled progress. Findings also indicate that REC supports some progress even before an award is achieved.

Impact in institutions which have held awards since 2015/16

- + at least one area of impact was identified by survey respondents from each institution which has held a REC award since 2015 or 2016 that participated
- + institutional data provided by seven institutions show impact in some indicators measured in all seven institutions
- + across indicators, 20.0-66.7% survey respondents felt that achieved impacts were somewhat or mostly attributable to REC.

Academic staff

- + of the six institutions to provide data for indicators concerning representation of BAME people among academic staff, all achieved some impact between the two time points measured
- + five saw an increase in the proportion of BAME staff overall. However, the scale of change was small, which is not unexpected given that REC formally began in 2016
- + impacts across broad ethnic groups and UK/non-UK staff are uneven and Black staff have tended to benefit less than other ethnic groups from impacts achieved
- + four out of five institutions reported an increase in the proportion of Professors that is BAME, with the largest increase being 3.0 percentage points (pp).

Professional and support staff

- + greater impact was seen in increases to the proportion of Professional and Support staff that is BAME than in the proportion of academic staff that is BAME
- + as was seen in relation to academic staff, impacts across broad ethnic groups are uneven and Black staff have tended to benefit less than other ethnic groups from impacts achieved, with notable decreases in representation in the majority of sampled institutions (n=4).

Recruitment

- + increases in both the proportion of BAME applicants who are shortlisted, and the proportion of BAME applicants shortlisted who are appointed, were uneven. However, the scale of change in this area was at times larger than changes in representation
- + several institutions reported that formal recruitment processes had been made more equitable as part of REC participation. However, qualitative findings offer insight into the complexity of informal processes which disadvantage BAME staff thereby undermining the impact of formal recruitment processes.

Students

- + greater impact has been achieved in increasing proportions of students that are BAME than that seen with staff. However, as with staff, increases across ethnic groups were uneven: three institutions reported small decreases in the proportion of UK undergraduate students that is Black
- + there were positive changes to overall representation of BAME students among postgraduate students
- + across all staff and student indicators, the most dramatic changes were seen in the reduction of the degree awarding gap between white and BAME students for 'good degrees' (First/2:1s). Respondents indicate that changes in this area have a number of drivers, not only REC.

Other areas of impact

- + other areas in which impact was reported by some institutions included improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades, improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees, improving retention of BAME staff, reducing the proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts, and more equitable promotions processes.

Promotions

- + several institutions reported that formal promotions processes had been made to be more equitable as part of REC participation. However, qualitative findings offer insight into the complexity of informal processes which disadvantage BAME staff and which undermine the impact of formal promotions processes.

Limitations of REC data and impact methodology

- + REC data are not required to be further broken down by other characteristics, such as gender. Other research and evidence indicates (Advance HE 2019; Rollock 2019) that the impacts noted above will be uneven not only across ethnic groups but by other characteristics. For instance, improvements in BAME representation will likely have tended to benefit BAME men more than BAME women, and particularly Black women, who continue to be very underrepresented among Professors for example (Rollock 2019). These experiences and criticisms were echoed by BAME women who participated in qualitative research as part of the REC review, who made the link between this and the separation between REC and Athena Swan.

Impacts on BAME staff experiences and perceptions

- + three institutions among the sample of nine which has held a REC award since 2015 or 2016 reported in the survey that they had achieved impact in the form of improved experiences of BAME staff and students
- + however, data from BAME qualitative research participants do not, on the whole, indicate an improvement in experiences and perceptions of BAME staff due to institutional participation in REC. Some research participants however had made effective use of REC data at a local level to demand change.

Progress made within institutions

- + even where no impacts had yet been achieved, REC still enabled progress, even among institutions which are not yet award holders. Nine respondents from award holding institutions reported at least one area of progress, but no areas of impact, and among those from institutions which do not yet have awards, 23 respondents indicated that they had made progress in at least one area measured
- + among award holders, the largest proportion reported that they had made progress in raising awareness of race equality in the institution, followed by improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, and improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff
- + across all but one area of progress, at least 44.4% of respondents reported some attribution to REC, ranging from somewhat to almost entirely, with the average proportion being a majority of 64.1%
- + among members which do not yet have awards, the largest proportion reported that they had made progress in raising awareness of race equality in the institution, followed by gaining an understanding of the specific race equality challenges in their institution. Across all but one area of progress, at least 25.0% of respondents reported some attribution to REC, ranging from somewhat to almost entirely, with the average proportion being a majority of 57.4%.

Barriers and challenges to achieving impact and making progress

- + focus group participants identified specific barriers relating to ongoing informal processes in recruitment and promotions which disadvantage BAME staff. Other barriers and challenges to achieving impact and making progress noted by respondents included: a lack of commitment, particularly leadership commitment, a lack of accountability, resistance, difficulties of delivering across the institution, challenges of balancing REC work with Athena Swan work, insufficient resourcing, lack of buy-in within the institution, concern about overburdening small numbers of BAME staff, employment of a deficit model, and lack of understanding and acknowledgement of structural racism and whiteness, Covid-19, a culture of denial; lack of incentives to implement the action plan, lack of a structure for implementation, fear, competing priorities, and lack of SMART actions
- + issues of measurement and data quality made progress and impact difficult to capture in some institutions.

What would help institutions to make progress and achieve impact?

- + in terms of internal factors or changes that would help their institution to make further progress on REC, the largest proportion of respondents selected greater buy-in to and engagement with race equality across the institution, followed by additional dedicated staff resources for REC, and greater senior-level engagement with and prioritisation of race equality
- + in terms of external factors or changes that would help their institution to make further progress on REC, the largest proportion of respondents selected good practice resources regarding effective race equality actions and interventions, followed by educational resources relating to the REC principles, and addition of white privilege and power to the REC principles. Notably, these were all selected by more respondents than areas concerning data, training, networking, and digital resources.

7.2 Introduction

In this section, impact is used to mean measurable change, while progress means actions having been implemented, but where the institution has not yet necessarily seen an impact. Given that REC formally launched in 2016, impact was not necessarily expected to be seen at this stage. Nevertheless, this review took the opportunity to assess impact along with progress. The findings serve to provide a benchmark for future impact evaluations to measure the selected indicators.

This section presents what, if any, impact participation in REC has produced within institutions, relating to REC's broad aims to improve the representation, progression and success of BAME staff and students within higher education. The scope of findings detailed in Section 7.3 is a subsample of nine institutions that have held REC awards since 2015 or 2016; of these nine, all participated in the research in some capacity and seven provided data on selected indicators to measure change within institutions over time. These data were supplemented by focus groups with BAME staff in two institutions. The methodology for Section 7.3 is detailed in full in Section 1.2. Impact is additionally explored among more recent award holders.

Next, the section examines what progress has been made within institutions and finds that, even where no impacts had yet been achieved, REC enabled progress. Progress is examined among both REC award holding institutions and REC member institutions which do not yet have awards.

The section additionally covers structures in place to oversee progress post awards, barriers and challenges to achieving impact and making progress within institutions, and finally what would help institutions to make further progress and achieve impact.

7.3 Impacts achieved by institutions with awards

Institutions which have held awards since 2015/16

Academic staff

Of the six institutions to provide data for indicators concerning representation of BAME people among academic staff, all achieved some impact between the measure provided in their first submission (submitted in 2015 or 2016, with data usually pertaining to 2013/14), and the data provided or obtained in 2020 (ranging from pertaining to 2015-2020, usually pertaining to 2018/19) (Table 12). Five saw an increase in the proportion of BAME staff overall. However, the scale of change was small: ranging from 1.9 to 2.6 percentage points⁵ (pp). One saw a small decrease, however, this is a relatively small institution where the departure of a small number of staff greatly impacts on proportions.

5 The difference (+/-) between two percentages.

Table 12: Percentage point change within impact institutions over time

Indicator	HEI 1	HEI 2	HEI 3	HEI 4	HEI 5	HEI 6	HEI 7
Proportion of academic staff that is BAME	1.85%	2.10%		2.5	2.1	-1.08%	2.6
Proportion of academic staff that is Asian	-0.05%	0.50%		1.6	2	0.69%	1.9
Proportion of academic staff that is Black	-0.23%	0.10%		0.1	1	-0.49%	-0.9
Proportion of academic staff that is Chinese	1.03%	-0.20%			0	-1.28%	-0.2
Proportion of academic staff that is Mixed/Other	-0.02%	1.40%		0.7	0	1.40%	0.2
Proportion of UK academic staff that is BAME		1.30%		2.9		-1.06%	1
Proportion of UK academic staff that is Asian		-0.40%		1.9			1.8
Proportion of UK academic staff that is Black		0.00%		0.3			-0.5
Proportion of UK academic staff that is Chinese		-0.20%					-0.4
Proportion of UK academic staff that is Mixed/Other		1.70%		0.7			-0.1
Proportion of non-UK academic staff that is BAME		8.50%		0.0		2.86%	4.2
Proportion of non-UK academic staff that is Asian		10.70%		-0.2			3.4
Proportion of non-UK academic staff that is Black		1.10%		-0.2			-1.4
Proportion of non-UK academic staff that is Chinese		1.00%					0.4
Proportion of non-UK academic staff that is Mixed/Other		-4.30%		0.5			0.8
Proportion of Professors that is BAME	0.64%		0.1	3.0		-3.50%	2.4
Proportion of academic staff that is BAME in the department/faculty/school identified as least representative	3.19%		6.5	8.8		0.00%	-4.3
Proportion of Professional and Support staff that is BAME	1.04%	0.30%	7.7	2.7	0	1.66%	-0.2
Proportion of Professional and Support staff that is Asian	1.57%	0.20%	10	0.8	0		1
Proportion of Professional and Support staff that is Black	-1.42%	-0.30%	8.2	0.6	-1	0.00%	-0.7
Proportion of Professional and Support staff that is Chinese	0.27%	0.00%			0		-0.6
Proportion of Professional and Support staff that is Mixed/Other	-0.31%	0.40%	6.6	1.3	0	0.00%	-1.5
Proportion of Professional and Support staff that is BAME in the directorate/staff group identified as least representative		0.00%	16.6	1.9		4.80%	
Shortlists as % of applicants that were BAME (academic)	1.65%			-0.7			10.4
Appointments as % of shortlisted that were BAME (academic)	9.65%			-7.9			1.3
Shortlists as % of applicants that were BAME (Professional and Support)	-0.85%			-1.2	2.71		3.1
Appointments as % of shortlisted that were BAME (Professional and Support)	1.44%			-0.1	-1.5		2.3
Grievances – complainants BME %	6.00%	0.00%	-7.9	-11.0			
Proportion of UK (UG) students that is BAME	10.42%	-2.00%	9.3	14.4	5.6	0.74%	0.5
Proportion of UK students that is Asian	5.68%	-1.90%	-9.1	8.1	0.8	0.22%	10.7
Proportion of UK students that is Black	1.52%	-0.90%	-1.3	1.8	3.8	-0.15%	0.8
Proportion of UK students that is Chinese	0.25%	0.00%				-0.14%	-6.5
Proportion of UK students that is Mixed/Other	2.35%	0.80%	-1.1	4.5	1.1	0.81%	-4.1
Proportion of non-UK students that is BAME	3.43%	-10.40%			1.7	5.40%	
Proportion of non-UK students that is Asian	-0.95%	-1.70%			-2.2	-1.95%	
Proportion of non-UK students that is Black	-0.39%	-8.20%			4.3	0.44%	
Proportion of non-UK students that is Chinese	4.47%	-0.30%				5.00%	
Proportion of non-UK students that is Mixed/Other	0.43%	-0.50%			1.1	1.90%	
Proportion of PGT that is BAME		3.20%	3.9	3.5	12.5	-4.20%	8.9
Proportion of PGR that is BAME	5.06%	1.20%	5.5	-0.3	4.1	-6.50%	
Degree awarding gap (proportion achieving a first/2:1) between BAME/white	0.00%	1.70%	-8		-2.6	12.40%	
Degree awarding gap (proportion achieving a first/2:1) between Asian/white	0.00%	-2.50%	-5.5	-3.0			-1
Degree awarding gap (proportion achieving a first/2:1) between Black/white	-9.00%	9.70%	-12	-3.6	0.1		-13.3
Degree awarding gap (proportion achieving a first/2:1) between Chinese/white							
Degree awarding gap (proportion achieving a first/2:1) between Mixed/other/white	0.00%	2.40%	-2.9	7.2	2.8		-4.9

However, changes in representation across ethnic groups were uneven: five saw increases in the proportion of academic staff that is Asian; just three in the proportion of academic staff that is Black; only one in the proportion of academic staff that is Chinese; and four in the proportion of academic staff that is Mixed or Other.

Changes in representation across UK/non-UK staff were also uneven. For example, only one of the six institutions reported an increase in the proportion of UK academic staff that is Black. While all institutions to provide data for the proportion of non-UK academic staff that is BAME (four) reported either an increase (three institutions, with the largest an increase of 8.5pp) or no change (one institution), just one reported an increase in the proportion of non-UK academic staff that is Black (of 1.1pp).

Four out of five institutions reported an increase in the proportion of Professors that is BAME, with the largest increase being 3.0pp. Notably, three reported an increase in the proportion of academic staff that is BAME in the department, faculty or school which had been identified as least representative at the time of their first submission, with the largest increase being 8.8pp and the second largest 6.5pp.

It is not possible to empirically demonstrate a certain relationship between the above impacts and award holder status of REC, given the possible contributory effects of other influences and difficulties of measuring these. However, respondents to the survey were asked to what extent they attribute impact to REC. In relation to improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, 33.3% felt that impact was somewhat attributable to REC. The creation of more equitable recruitment and promotion processes were seen as key to achieving impact in this area, in which five institutions reported impact. For example, one institution described that they had achieved impact in this area through the following measures: recruiting managers being required to provide reasons for their choice of candidates at shortlisting stage, and to attend mandatory training for recruitment, unconscious bias, performance management and the performance review process. However, qualitative findings offer insight into the complexity of informal processes which disadvantage BAME staff thereby undermining the impact of formal recruitment processes. This is explored in Section 7.6.

Professional and support staff

Across the sample of institutions, greater impact was seen in increases to the proportion of Professional and Support staff that is BAME than in the proportion of academic staff that is BAME. Five institutions reported increases, one no change, and in the only institution which reported a decrease, this was of just 0.2pp. The largest increase was a substantial 7.7pp. Of particular note, three institutions reported that in the directorate or staff group that they had identified as least representative at the time of their first submission, there was an increase in the proportion of Professional and Support staff that is BAME, with the largest increase being 16.6pp. 50.0% of survey respondents from the impact sample felt that impact in relation to improving representation of BAME people among Professional and Support staff was somewhat attributable to REC.

However, again increases were uneven across ethnic groups: four of seven institutions reported decreases in the proportion of Professional and Support staff that is Black, while one reported an increase of 8.2pp.

When asked how and why they achieved measured impact in increasing representation of both academic and Professional and Support staff, one institution said “We have [Key Performance Indicators] in a balanced scorecard and new HR tools”.

Recruitment

In spite of some positive changes in representation (as well as some decreases for some ethnic groups, notably Black Professional and Support staff), changes to the proportions of BAME applicants who are shortlisted, and of those shortlisted who are appointed, were uneven: just one institution reported increases in each of these for both academic and Professional and Support staff.

However, the scale of change in this area was at times larger than changes in representation: one institution reported an increase of 10.4pp in the proportion of shortlists that was BAME (calculated as a proportion of BAME applicants), and another an increase of 9.7pp in the proportion of appointments that was BAME (calculated as a proportion of BAME applicants shortlisted).

25.0% of survey respondents from the impact sample felt that impact in terms of creating more equitable recruitment processes was mostly attributable to REC, while 25.0% felt it was somewhat attributable to REC.

The next indicators examined in the institutional data analysis relate to students or to staff and students.

Students

Greater impact has been achieved in increasing proportions of students that are BAME than that seen with staff. Six of seven institutions reported an increase among UK undergraduate students overall, with the largest being 14.4pp. However, as with staff, increases across ethnic groups were uneven: three institutions reported small decreases in the proportion of UK undergraduate students that is Black.

In relation to improving representation of BAME people among students, 40.0% of survey respondents felt that impact was somewhat attributable to REC. Two respondents to the survey from two institutions identified separate Widening Participation work including Access Agreements as a key factor.

Pipeline

There were positive changes to overall representation of BAME students among postgraduate students, with five institutions reporting an increase among PGT students, with the largest increase being 12.5pp. The increase among PGR students was somewhat smaller, with the largest increase in the four institutions demonstrating one being 5.5pp.

Degree awarding gap

Across all staff and student indicators, the most dramatic changes were seen in the reduction of the degree awarding gap between white and BAME students for 'good degrees' (First/2:1s), which is not surprising given drivers for change coming from several directions (eg the Office for Students), not only from REC, and this was noted by some survey respondents. The largest reductions were seen to the gap between white and Black students (which is also where the largest disparities tend to lie in institutions and across the sector). The largest reduction was a narrowing of 13.3pp while the next largest was of 12pp. However, in two institutions this gap increased.

In relation to reducing the degree awarding gap, 16.7% felt that impact was mostly attributable to REC, while 16.7% felt it was somewhat attributable to REC. In contrast to increases in representation among students, which two respondents felt was driven mainly by Widening Participation (WP) activity, one respondent said that REC had been the key driver for work to narrow the degree awarding gap. In that institution, work to address the gap is undertaken at departmental level; four departments with the biggest gaps were chosen initially. Some of the initiatives include looking at how to support commuting students (evidence indicates that BAME students in some areas are more likely to live at home and commute to university than white students) (NUS 2015). Another institution said 'The REC highlighted the need for work in this area. However, the key driver was the TEF that acted as the tipping point. The Access Agreement has also enhanced the work in this area.'

Other areas of impact

Respondents to the survey from across institutions which have held REC awards since 2015 or 2016 (n=13) identified additional areas of impact to those captured by the selected indicators for institutional data analysis, including:

- + improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades (38.5% of respondents). 20.0% of survey respondents from the impact sample felt that this impact was somewhat attributable to REC
- + improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees (30.8%). 50.0% of survey respondents from the impact sample felt that this impact was somewhat attributable to REC
- + improving retention of BAME staff (23.1%). 33.3% of survey respondents from the impact sample

felt that this impact was mostly attributable to REC, while 33.3% felt it was somewhat attributable to REC

- + reducing the proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts (7.7%)
- + more equitable promotions processes (23.1%). 33.0% of survey respondents from the impact sample felt that this impact was somewhat attributable to REC.

It is worth highlighting again here that not all of these areas would have been identified as a priority for institutional action by all institutions. Institutions developed context specific actions based on analysis of their data.

At least one area of impact was identified by each institution which has held a REC award since 2015 or 2016. Two institutions identified only one area of impact and both selected the degree awarding gap, which corresponds to the above analysis of institutional data.

Promotions

When asked how and why they achieved measured impact in terms of creating a more equitable promotions process, one institution said:

“a lot of work has been carried out to ensure that the promotion process is as equitable and fair as possible such as: i) regular review of the promotion criteria matrix; ii) anonymous application directly to School Promotion Panels (it was felt that departmental promotion panels were acting as gate keepers); iii) all panel members are required to have attended unconscious bias training before participating as panel members; iv) all academics are encouraged to submit applications annually.”

However, qualitative findings offer insight into the complexity of informal processes which disadvantage BAME staff and which undermine the impact of formal promotions processes (explored in Section 7.6).

Limitations of REC data and impact methodology

Institutions were asked to provide updated data which were required in their 2015/16 REC submissions, so that comparison could be made of change within institutions over time. In REC submissions these data are not required to be further broken down by other characteristics, such as gender. Other research and evidence indicates (Advance HE 2019; Rollock 2019) that the impacts noted above will be uneven not only across ethnic groups, but by other characteristics. For instance, improvements in BAME representation will likely have tended to benefit BAME men more than BAME women, and particularly Black women, who continue to be very underrepresented among Professors for example (Rollock 2019).

Echoing findings in Section 4, one focus group participant was critical of the use of the category 'BAME' and felt that REC does not take intersectionality adequately into account:

"BAME to me serves to obscure the reality of certain groups and certainly I would say Black women...I think [the institution] has been quite good in terms of presenting a favourable picture of BAME...as an overall category, and I think it could legitimately claim that there's been some progress in that aspect if you look at promotions and things like that. However, for you know Black women like me, Asian women. I'm not sure that we would...say that we have shared that...I feel there is a specific issue around Black women that the university hasn't properly engaged with....[the category BAME] is being used to hide a multitude of sins, and...I see it as a tool of anti-Blackness."

They linked this to the separation between REC and Athena Swan:

"It's about how you conceptualise [REC] alongside Athena Swan isn't it, because the argument is always about gender so therefore we cover it under Athena Swan. But actually I think Black women fall. They literally fall out of this whole kind of thing anyway because when we look at Athena Swan by and large, we know the beneficiaries of that have been white women. It's only very recently that they've started to engage explicitly [with] intersectionality."

They noted these experiences were shared with Black women at other institutions, because they felt few institutions, although they may be REC members, want to meaningfully acknowledge the particular barriers faced by Black women.

Impacts on BAME staff experiences and perceptions

One measure of BAME staff experiences and perceptions is the proportion of grievance complainants that was BAME. Of four institutions to provide data for this indicator, one reported an increase, while two reported decreases of 7.9pp and 11.0pp (one reported no change). Reported increases may, however, be due to greater confidence in reporting and/or improved data collection.

Three institutions among the sample of nine which has held a REC award since 2015 or 2016 reported in the survey that they had achieved impact in the form of improved experiences of BAME staff and students (which institutions may assess through REC surveys or focus groups). The largest proportion of respondents to attribute change to REC identified this in the area of improved experiences of BAME staff and students: 66.7% felt that impact was somewhat attributable to REC. One highlighted the key role of leadership and expertise within the institution in order to achieve this change. In another, this was a priority area for REC actions. The institution held awareness raising workshops and identified communication about REC as important. BAME participants in their development programme were able to feedback directly to the HOI about their experiences and share recommendations to improve BAME staff and student experiences. The respondent felt that these recommendations had been taken seriously and that this was why experiences improved.

The experiences of BAME staff were further explored in focus groups held with BAME staff in two institutions (the timing of the REC review did not facilitate holding focus groups with students).

Participants did not agree that staff at their institution were treated on their merits irrespective of their ethnicity or race.

Participants also indicated that they disagreed that 'racially inappropriate behaviour, language and banter are not tolerated' at their institution. They noted that in spite of REC, the wider political context (shaped notably by the referendum on EU membership) had increased their observations of racist language, and argued that colleagues now felt they had a 'licence' to use this language.

However, one interview respondent noted that in their institution,

"I've seen a massive change.... I found this university to be like the least diverse university I have ever attended. ...I can see just a student body [that is more] diverse I think when I started it was like 15% or something... And now it's like 22%. And I can physically see the changes...in terms of our staff like it's changed from, BAME staff so we've had like 10 academic staff now we've got 16...I think I've seen more individual not systemic changes yet [because] that takes a lot longer, but small things which do make a difference on people's experiences and sense of belonging and for myself I'd say I feel more welcome in the university now [because] they are listening to us, we are putting ideas forward....And, I think we only had like three BAME people on the REC self-assessment team when I first started, and now...we have 11 BAME staff, plus students and 11 white staff. For now, the conversations are a lot more I think everyone's. I think people are seeing the changes, we are a lot more open about our experiences."

Participants also spoke of positive impacts of having data due to REC participation, and being able to use these data to ask questions at local level, and to evidence racism in the institution as a basis for change.

Recent award holders

Among respondents from award holding institutions which did not form part of the impact sample (n=58), some reported impact in the above areas (12.1%, n=7). It is not surprising that this is a low proportion, since these respondents are from institutions which achieved their awards in 2018 or later, meaning that they are two years or less into implementation of their prepared action plans so it would be early to measure impact at this stage. Of these, the largest proportion of respondents (28.6%, n=2) selected 'Improving representation of BAME people among students', which also corresponds to impacts observed within the impact sample. Respondents identified WP activity as another driver for this achievement. Each other area was selected by one respondent (Table 13).

Table 13: Impacts measured since REC award by more recent award holders

Since your REC award, has your institution measured impact in any of the following areas?	Number	Percent
Improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff	1	14.3%
Improving representation of BAME people among academic staff	1	14.3%
More equitable recruitment processes	1	14.3%
More equitable promotions processes	1	14.3%
Reducing proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts	1	14.3%
Improving representation of BAME people among students	2	28.6%
Improved experiences of BAME staff and students	1	14.3%
Reducing degree awarding gap between white and BAME students	1	14.3%
Other	1	14.3%

Respondents felt that these areas of impact were somewhat (reducing proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts, reducing degree awarding gap) mostly (improving representation among Professional and Support staff) or almost entirely (in the case of improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, and more equitable recruitment and promotions processes) attributable to REC. In relation to improvements in representation among students, respondents were split into feeling it was unclear whether impact was attributable to REC and feeling that it was somewhat attributable (n=2), and in relation to improved experiences of staff and students, respondents felt it was unclear whether impact was attributable to REC. Again, this is not unexpected since these institutions are very early on their REC journeys.

7.4 Progress being made by institutions

Even where no impacts had yet been achieved, REC still enabled progress. Additionally, findings indicate that REC supports some progress, even before an award is achieved.

Award holders

Respondents with awards were asked whether, since their REC award, their institution had made progress in key areas relating to REC's aims. Progress means actions having been implemented, but where the institution had not yet necessarily seen an impact (a measurable change), but expects to (Table 14).

28 respondents indicated that they had made progress in at least one area measured. These results should be taken as indicative of progress being made, even where impact may not yet be evidenced: nine respondents reported at least one area of progress, but no areas of impact.

Of those who reported at least one area of progress, the largest proportion, 89.3% (n=25) reported that they had made progress in raising awareness of race equality in the institution. The second largest proportion (42.9%, n=12) indicated that they had made progress in improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, followed by improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff (35.7%, n=10).

Table 14: Progress made since REC award by award holders

Since your REC award, has your institution made progress in any of the following areas?	Number	Percent
Raising awareness of race equality in the institution	25	89.3%
Improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff	10	35.7%
Improving representation of BAME people among academic staff	12	42.9%
Improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades	7	25.0%
Improving retention of BAME staff	2	7.1%
Improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees	8	28.6%
More equitable recruitment processes	9	32.1%
More equitable promotions processes	5	17.9%
Reducing proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts	1	3.6%
Improving representation of BAME people among students	8	28.6%
Improved experiences of BAME staff and students	5	17.9%
Reducing degree awarding gap between white and BAME students	9	32.1%
Other	2	7.1%

Respondents were asked to what extent they felt progress made was enabled by REC.

- + in relation to raising awareness, 44.0% (n=11) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, 8.0% (n=2) felt it was mostly attributable to REC, and 4.0% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, 41.7% (n=5) felt that progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 8.3% (n=1) felt that progress was mostly attributable to REC
- + In relation to improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff, an equal proportion (30.0%, n=3) felt that progress was somewhat or mostly attributable to REC, while 10.0% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades, 57.1% (n=4) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 14.3% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees, 50.0% (n=4) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 12.5% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to more equitable recruitment processes, 44.4% (n=4) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 22.2% (n=2) felt that it was mostly attributable to REC
- + in relation to more equitable promotions processes, 50.0% (n=2) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 25.0% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC.
- + in relation to reducing the proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts, 100.0% (n=1) felt progress was mostly attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people among students, 50.0% (n=4) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC
- + in relation to improved experiences of BAME staff and students, 60.0% (n=3) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC
- + finally, in relation to reducing the degree awarding gap between white and BAME students, 33.3% (n=3) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 11.1% (n=1) felt progress was mostly attributable to REC.

In sum, across almost all areas of progress, at least 44.4% of respondents reported some attribution to REC, ranging from somewhat to almost entirely, with the average proportion being a majority of 64.1%. Only in relation to improving retention of BAME staff did all respondents feel that progress was not attributable to REC (100.0%, n=1).

Institutions which do not yet have awards

Respondents from institutions which do not yet have awards were asked whether, since their institution joined REC, their institution had made progress in key areas relating to REC's aims, including steps towards achieving impact (Table 15).

23 respondents indicated that they had made progress in at least one area measured. This indicates that REC supports some progress, even before an award is achieved.

Of those who reported at least one area of progress, in line with award holders, the largest proportion, 91.3% (n=21) reported that they had made progress in raising awareness of race equality in the institution. The second largest proportion (69.6%, n=16) indicated they had made progress in gaining an understanding of the specific race equality challenges in their institution. The next largest was a substantially smaller proportion (34.8%, n=8), who reported that they had made progress in improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees. It is notable that these results differ from those of award holders, with larger proportions reporting progress in creating more equitable recruitment and promotions processes than in improving representation of BAME people among academic and professional and support staff. This suggests that institutions which are at the beginning of their REC journeys focus efforts on making progress in terms of process change and representation on decision making bodies, perhaps in preparation to submit. Process change may also be understood as a precondition for changes in representation, in which there is no progress in most institutions until after the institution has gained a REC award.

Table 15: Progress made since REC award by members

Since your institution joined REC, has your institution made progress in any of the following areas?	Number	Percent
Raising awareness of race equality in the institution	21	91.3%
Improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff	3	13.0%
Improving representation of BAME people among academic staff	6	26.1%
Improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades	4	17.4%
Improving retention of BAME staff	4	17.4%
Improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees	8	34.8%
More equitable recruitment processes	8	34.8%
More equitable promotions processes	8	34.8%
Improving representation of BAME people among students	3	13.0%
Improved experiences of BAME staff and students	6	26.1%
Reducing degree awarding gap between white and BAME students	7	30.4%
Gaining an understanding of the specific race equality challenges in your institution	16	69.6%
Other	1	4.3%

Respondents were asked to what extent they felt progress made was enabled by REC.

- + in relation to raising awareness, 33.3% (n=7) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 28.6% (n=6) felt it was mostly attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, 16.7% (n=1) felt that progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 16.7% (n=1) felt that progress was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff, 33.3 (n=1) felt that progress was mostly attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades, 25.0% (n=1) felt that progress was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to improving retention of BAME staff, 75.0% (n=3) felt that progress was somewhat attributable to REC

- + in relation to improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees, 50.0% (n=4) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 25.0% (n=2) felt that it was mostly attributable to REC
- + in relation to more equitable recruitment processes, 62.5% (n=5) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and an equal proportion (12.5%, n=1) felt that it was mostly or almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to more equitable promotions processes, 37.5% (n=3) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 12.5% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to reducing the proportion of BAME staff on fixed term contracts, 100.0% (n=1) felt progress was mostly attributable to REC
- + in relation to improved experiences of BAME staff and students, 33.3% (n=2) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, and 16.7% (n=1) felt that it was almost entirely attributable to REC
- + in relation to reducing the degree awarding gap between white and BAME students, 28.6% (n=2) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC
- + Finally, in relation to gaining an understanding of the specific race equality challenges in their institution, 18.8% (n=3) felt progress was somewhat attributable to REC, 43.8% (n=7) felt it was mostly attributable to RE, and 6.3% (n=1) felt it was almost entirely attributable to REC.

In sum, across almost all areas of progress, at least 25.0% of respondents reported some attribution to REC, ranging from somewhat to almost entirely, with the average proportion being a majority of 57.4%.

Only in relation to improving representation of BAME people among students were all respondents either not sure whether progress was attributable to REC (33.3%, n=1) or did not feel that it was (66.7%, n=2). This is in line with findings reported elsewhere in the report that changes in this area have multiple drivers.

7.5 Structures in place to oversee progress post awards

Respondents were asked whether, after successfully gaining a REC award, they had a committee (or similar body) to which those responsible for implementing REC action plans report their progress. A majority of 70.0% of respondents (n=21) reported that they did, while 16.7% (n=5) did not and 13.3% (n=4) were not sure. For those who do not, a lack of an accountability mechanism in the form of such a committee may hamper progress. Specific guidance as to what, if any, committee structures should be in place following successful awards does not form part of the REC handbook, though in submissions institutions are required to 'specify how progress on the plan will be driven, managed and monitored within the institution's core business reporting processes'. However, it is possible that actions in those institutions which do not have a committee have been devolved and form part of local accountability mechanisms. Nevertheless, without a cross institution oversight mechanism, tracking progress and impact would likely prove difficult.

Respondents were asked how many committees they had in place, and these ranged from 1-10. The largest number of respondents (nine) had one committee, while four had two, one had three, one had eight and one had 10. One respondent indicated that they had only recently established such a committee in preparation to resubmit, which corroborates other findings in this report that in some institutions, action slows down between gaining and renewing a REC award.

Respondents were asked if those responsible for implementing actions now had specific objectives and key performance indicators written into their workloads. The largest proportion of respondents, 44.8% (n=13) indicated that they did not, while 24.1% did (n=7) and 31.0% (n=9) were not sure. A lack of objectives and key performance indicators concerning REC action plan implementation may serve to hamper progress.

7.6 Barriers and challenges to achieving impact and making progress

Just one institution in the impact sample reported impact in all areas covered by REC. Institutions reported a range of challenges and barriers to achieving impact and making progress, examined together below.

Recruitment

Recruitment was further explored in focus groups held with BAME staff in two institutions from the impact sample. Possible reasons for a lack of progress/impact in recruitment were explored. One participant with experience of sitting on recruitment panels felt that the highest value being given to publication records was a factor, which they felt would disadvantage BAME staff.

Participants indicated that at times, while formal processes were on their surface more equitable, there are other factors at play. For example, one academic participant shared that they were aware of some new 'interim' roles being created and not being advertised, which were filled by white staff and went on to become permanent roles. This observation was echoed in a focus group with BAME

Professional and Support staff. One participant shared experiences of sitting on interview panels, where senior members of the panel had effectively chosen a favoured candidate before the interview, and said afterwards ‘I’m so glad [another candidate] performed [badly] because...I would have had to have pulled rank and told you...to score [them] down.’

In one School, a pledge had been made that a BAME member of staff would sit on all recruitment panels. However, one participant noted that although there was a pool of BAME staff trained for this purpose, in practice the same person tended to be asked to sit on all recruitment panels. They felt that this particular person was favoured because they ‘rubber stamped’ decisions of white colleagues. This indicates a need to strive to have more than one BAME person on a recruitment panel, and to invite a range of colleagues to take on this role.

Promotions

Promotions were further explored in focus groups held with BAME staff in two institutions from the impact sample, indicating that at times, while formal processes were on their surface more equitable, similar to recruitment, there are other factors at play. In their recent experience of the process, one participant had experienced and observed informal processes at work at department level differentially impacting on the success of white and BAME applicants. It was felt that if departmental actors knew that BAME applicants intended to apply for promotion, the latter may find their workload increased to prevent them from achieving the requirements for promotion. Moreover, white and Black colleagues were assessed differently by the department promotions panel, and differentially encouraged to apply for research vs. teaching roles at higher grades. Specifically, Black colleagues with more experience were judged to not have adequate experience, while white colleagues with less experience were judged to be ready for promotion.

“I think the [bar] is set higher...for some people than others. What I was being required to evidence for my promotion was not the expectation...of white women in my department. What I was being required to demonstrate was like leaps and bounds ahead. ...But then you wanted me to do that bit more. Now...the only impression I can take from that is that you haven’t seen what I’ve done. [And] you’re not giving it the same value...you give other things. So, because I’m not coming out and drinking coffee with you, or doing...social things with you, you don’t quite see what my contribution is. And I think there’s a lot of that, perhaps that happens, unconsciously, or otherwise at [the institution]. And to me when I look at... the promotions framework. I actually think it’s quite a good document...I knew what I needed to do to map my experience against it. But even so, these disparities are still there in terms of how your evidence is interpreted and ultimately how this [is] judged.”

A participant at another institution agreed:

‘It takes BAME or people of colour much longer to get promoted’.

Participants also raised other important informal processes, like whether a line manager encourages a member of staff to apply, being differential across white and BAME staff, with real impacts on those who had not been encouraged, and had not applied until a year after white colleagues with whom they started at the same time, in spite of having achieved more. Also mentioned were the importance of informal social gatherings from which BAME colleagues are excluded, award nominations and other means of ‘informal sponsorship’, including allocation of administrative roles. When this is done via ‘knocking on doors’,

“that’s racism because essentially you’re picking someone because...you know them. They’re culturally the same as you...that’s where the problems happen...I don’t think it happens at the promotion panel itself... it happens as you take those steps to go to the promotion panel.”

Professional and support staff also shared problems that they had had with progression. For example, one spent a number of years at the top of their pay grade, seeking opportunities from their line manager to develop and progress,

“having to look for lots of avenues myself. Nobody was helping me, nobody was like saying...I’ll mentor you, I’ll support you here.”

Other barriers and challenges

Beyond the specific challenges identified above in relation to both recruitment and promotions, when asked why their institutions had not yet achieved measured impact in the areas which they did not select, and whether or not they anticipate that the institution will do so, respondents identified **a lack of commitment, particularly leadership commitment**, as a barrier to achieving impact.

One respondent said:

“The university, though committed to the work, has not had adequate leadership and accountability for the REC action plan...there was no cascading down to more local levels from the institutional level. So...it hasn’t necessarily been a whole-institutional effort.”

(REC lead)

Another felt,

“The REC process is not designed for progress. The gatekeepers continue to maintain these roles. There is no strong accountability on the REC after the award.”

(REC lead)

Lack of commitment and accountability can also manifest as **resistance** from senior management, which was also noted by more recent award holders:

“Where there is already that resistance to start with, it just continues and even though we had... really detailed feedback on our application and areas for further improvement...and...reported that back to the Vice Chancellor...that resistance still stays there... every single meeting I’ve had to go to since that I have to explain the rationale for doing everything again.”

(REC lead)

Yet resistance was identified at all levels, not only senior management, including from SAT members. Buy in from HR was specifically raised by other respondents, with some viewing HR as a key barrier to formulating and progressing actions within their institution. One interview respondent said,

“I think our from our HR side, we just don’t have the expertise within race equality... everything they say it is positive discrimination.”

(REC lead)

Respondents also identified **difficulties of delivering across the institution**. This was a commonly reported challenge, given that REC operates only at institutional level, rather than also at departmental level as does Athena Swan. Conversely, another said ‘actions are being implemented in localised fashion meaning no real impact’.

Others mentioned **challenges of balancing REC work with Athena Swan**:

“REC has taken a lower priority than Athena Swan, which has the advantage of: (i) financial incentives with NIHR funding...; (ii) more kudos – for no good reason, in fact probably for all the wrong reasons, related to implicit racial bias. There is a brief opportunity for this to change, and for REC to take on a more important role in the overall EDI effort, following the social and political events of June 2020. However, the moment is passing and what we need is HERAG and other organisations to campaign for the full implementation of the Racial Disparity Unit’s plans initiated under Prime Minister May. This is a major issue that the government are clearly aiming at ducking.”

(REC lead)

Challenges of balancing REC and Athena Swan was also a key issue identified in Section 3 and Section 4 of this report. This is therefore a wider issue related to managing and implementing REC that serves to contribute to a lack of progress made and impact achieved.

Others mentioned **insufficient resourcing**, echoing findings from Sections 3.

Respondents mentioned lack of **buy-in within the institution**. Some specifically mentioned buy-in from white staff:

“I think I think the more white people get involved in doing it the better...because I think we [BAME staff] get punished in other ways for doing this work.”

(SAT chair)

While others raised the need to gain the trust of BAME staff. One said

‘This university has a difficult poor history in race [relations], which it will need to reconcile before moving forward. This must be part of the process and [it] has taken time to gain [the] trust of BAME colleagues.’

(REC lead)

One interview respondent described how challenging progressing REC work can be in predominantly white institutions, particularly those that lack BAME representation in any leadership roles:

“At a senior level, [REC] is seen as a bit of a badge of honour....it really shouldn't be because we've just got so far to go and we're so far behind and as a sector and as an organisation... particularly as a person of colour leading a bit of work, and how difficult it was, I think it just came, as...a bit of a slap in the face...it's been nothing but a struggle for past two years when you've been doing this work, it's been daily struggles and battles and negotiations and...then at the end of all that to...feel like...people really think we've done something great...when all I feel that we've done is written all our problems down on a piece of paper and said, what we need to do about it...the reality is, you're still negotiating in a fairly white environment...[we] don't really have diverse leaders or anyone really in that management chain...even like heads of schools or departments...there's no one visible so it really feels like it's kind of this bottom up lead thing and you're battling against the top.”

(REC lead and HERAG member)

The issue of a lack of BAME senior leaders was raised by several respondents.

Yet while representation of BAME staff was seen as key to making progress, **respondents raised concern about overburdening small numbers of BAME staff**, echoing similar concerns raised in Section 4.

Other respondents mentioned employment of a **deficit model**, and lack of understanding and acknowledgement of **structural racism and whiteness**.

In relation to challenges implementing REC action plans specifically, respondents added the following barriers: **Covid-19, a culture of denial, lack of incentives to implement the action plan, lack of a structure for implementation, fear, competing priorities and lack of SMART actions**.

Respondents identified that they struggled with developing SMART actions, as explored in Section 4, and panellists interviewed also identified that action plans could be improved. An effective action plan is a key precondition for implementing actions, making progress and achieving impact.

Two respondents mentioned that the BLM movement was providing a renewed impetus for action at their institution. One said:

“I think we are yet to see the full impact, but it has certainly started a conversation. A combination of the profile of the BLM movement and our active BAME Network has also been very instrumental in achieving some of these aims in recent months. I think being in the process of applying for the REC has given us some additional leverage from a business case perspective to ensure race equality is on the agenda.”

(Staff SAT member)

This driver was echoed by some interview respondents, though scepticism was also expressed that this current impetus was being driven by the 'right' reasons (beyond concern with institutional reputation), and that it would last.

Several respondents mentioned that they expect to see impact over the longer term. However, **issues of measurement and data quality** made capturing change difficult: in one institution for example, data collection processes to capture change consistently across the institution were still in the process of being set up.

7.7 What would help institutions to make progress and achieve impact

Respondents were asked what internal factors or changes would help their institution to make further progress on REC (Table 16).

The largest proportion of respondents (76.4%, n=42) selected greater buy-in to and engagement with race equality across the institution. The second largest proportion (74.5%, n=41) selected additional dedicated staff resources for REC, echoing findings from Section 3, while the third largest proportion (63.6%, n=35) selected greater senior-level engagement with and prioritisation of race equality. This analysis corresponds to the challenges and barriers noted above. Notably, 60.0% of respondents (n=33) selected additional financial resources for REC self-assessment and/or implementation of REC action plan. These were all selected by more respondents than areas concerning data and race equality knowledge.

Table 16: Internal factors or changes that could help institutions make progress

What internal factors or changes would help your institution to make further progress on REC?	Number	Percent
Additional dedicated staff resources for REC	41	74.5%
Greater senior-level engagement with and prioritisation of race equality	35	63.6%
Greater knowledge and competence in race equality among those working on REC	20	36.4%
Additional financial resources for REC self-assessment and/or implementation of REC action plan	33	60.0%
Greater buy-in to and engagement with race equality across the institution	42	76.4%
Additional data analysis expertise	21	38.2%
Improved / extended internal data collection regarding race and ethnicity	22	40.0%
Other	6	10.9%

In comments, respondents further mentioned use of positive action within institutions, for example:

“More robust interventions, such as: quota systems, affirmative action for recruitment of staff, affirmative actions for BAME student communities.”

(REC working group member)

Respondents were also asked what **external** factors or changes would help their institution to make further progress on REC (Table 17).

The largest proportion of respondents (75.0%, n=39) selected good practice resources regarding effective race equality actions and interventions (Advance HE published an initial database of good practice examples in September 2020, shortly after this research was undertaken (Advance HE 2020c)). The second largest proportion (61.5%, n=32) selected educational resources relating to the REC principles, while the third largest proportion (59.6%, n=31) selected addition of white privilege and power to the REC principles. One respondent said “*We absolutely need white privilege to be part of REC as this is a barrier to its progression within the institution*”, and this sentiment was echoed in interviews. Notably, these areas were all selected by more respondents than areas concerning data, training, networking, and digital resources.

Table 17: External support, guidance or resources that could help institutions make progress

What additional external support, guidance or resources would help your institution to make further progress on the REC?	Number	Percent
REC data analysis tools / resources / support / training	25	48.1%
Online REC application system	17	32.7%
Enhanced digital REC handbook and guidance materials	14	26.9%
Good practice resources regarding effective race equality actions and interventions	39	75.0%
Additional race equality training opportunities	26	50.0%
More networking opportunities to share practice, challenges and solutions	25	48.1%
Addition of white privilege and power to the REC principles	31	59.6%
Educational resources relating to the REC principles	32	61.5%
Other	4	7.7%

7.8 Discussion and recommendations

Although still in its early stages having launched in 2016, and although impact was not necessarily yet expected, REC is already driving both progress and impact within institutions. These findings provide a benchmark for future impact evaluations. Respondents report impact even where they have only recently achieved REC awards, and they report progress even where impacts have not yet been achieved. Findings suggest that at pre-award stage, REC is most effective at driving progress in raising awareness of race equality in the institution, gaining an understanding of the specific race equality challenges in their institution, improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees, and creating more equitable recruitment processes (with the largest proportions to attribute change to REC found in the latter). Post-award, findings suggest that REC is most effective at driving progress in raising awareness of race equality in the institution, improving representation of BAME people among academic staff, improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff, creating more equitable promotions processes and improving representation of BAME people among staff at higher grades (with the largest proportions to attribute change to REC found in the latter two areas). Indeed, among institutions which have held REC awards the longest, five saw a small increase in representation among BAME academic staff, five saw a small increase in representation among BAME professional and support staff, and four an increase in the proportion of Professors that is BAME. 50.0% of respondents among the impact sample attributed change in the areas of creating more equitable recruitment processes, improving representation of BAME people on decision making boards and committees, and improving representation of BAME people among professional and support staff to REC to some degree, while 66.6% did so in relation to improving retention of BAME staff.

Based on the data analysed in this section, areas of change which suggest the greatest attribution to REC overall are in relation to increasing representation of BAME people among staff, and particularly among professional and support staff. There are particular challenges relating to changing representation among academic staff, including the pool available based on declining representation through the pipeline from undergraduate students onwards, particularly in some subject areas, and lack of feasibility of anonymity in recruitment, to name just two examples. Work to increase representation among students has multiple drivers, so is less readily attributable to REC. Among institutions which have held REC awards the longest, the most dramatic changes were seen in reducing the degree awarding gap; some but not all of these institutions identify REC as the key driver for work to reduce the gap, while there are other key drivers including the Office for Students.

Uneven impact across ethnic groups

However, importantly, impact is uneven across ethnic groups. Black academic (both UK and non-UK) and Black professional and support staff have tended to benefit less from achieved impacts than staff from other ethnic groups, with in fact notable decreases in representation among Black staff as well as UK Black students in some institutions that have held REC awards for the longest. While the degree awarding gap between white and Black students has positively narrowed considerably in some institutions, in two institutions which have held REC awards the longest, this gap increased.

Research conducted as part of the REC review corroborates other research findings that Black women and women of colour experience specific barriers which the current REC data requirements obscure.

[See recommendations 31, 32, 33 and 34.](#)

Informal processes

Although both recruitment and promotions processes have been made to be more formally equitable because of participation in REC, qualitative research with BAME staff sheds light on the continuation of informal processes which serve to discriminate against BAME staff in institutions. Moreover, our research with BAME staff in two institutions, together with some interviews, does not on the whole indicate improved experiences of BAME staff.

[See recommendation 35.](#)

Post-submission structures

REC award holders do not all have committees in place to which those responsible for action plan implementation report progress, nor do most have workload objectives or KPIs in place. This is likely to hamper implementation as well as monitoring and review of progress, all of which are essential to being able to make progress, achieve impact and renew or achieve the next level of REC award.

[See recommendation 26.](#)

Supporting other areas of challenge

Institutions report a range of challenges and barriers to achieving impact and making progress. Many of these relate to internal challenges and barriers. Recommendations arising as to what can be done sector-wide to help to mitigate these challenges and barriers include several made elsewhere in this report. Additionally, we suggest enabling greater progress and impact to be achieved at a local level, in order to facilitate delivery across the institution, greater accountability and institutional buy in.

Furthermore, respondents identified lack of understanding and acknowledgement of structural racism and whiteness as a barrier to achieving impact and making progress. They identified that educational resources relating to the REC principles and the addition of white privilege and power to the REC principles would help their institutions to make further progress on REC.

[See recommendations 4, 8, 11, 17, 27, 28 and 36.](#)

8 What next for REC? Priorities for enhancing REC's impact

Tackling racial inequality and achieving racial justice in higher education is challenging. It requires comprehensive holistic approaches to address systemic inequities and it requires addressing three complex pathways. Yet, just four years after its official launch, REC is already beginning to make a difference and support institutions to succeed. Our findings demonstrate that REC is driving both progress and impact on race equality within institutions. At least one area of impact was identified by survey respondents from each institution which has held a REC award since 2015 or 2016 that participated. Institutional data provided by seven institutions (of the nine which have held REC awards since 2015 or 2016) show impact in at least some indicators in all seven institutions. Progress was reported in the wider survey, which included both REC award and non-award holders for which it would be too soon to measure impact. Nine respondents from award holding institutions reported at least one area of progress, and among non-award holders, 23 respondents indicated that they had made progress in at least one area measured.

Additionally, the success rate for REC awards is increasing. Importantly, the factors respondents attribute to this success in achieving awards are the ones essential for systemic change: active engagement from senior managers, a focus on achieving long-term institutional cultural change; the acknowledgement of race inequalities in the institution, and the robust analysis of the institution's data. This suggests that the impact and progress being made have been achieved through institutions having engaged with the framework required for systemic change, leading them to change aspects of their operations that have sustained inequity and not simply as a result of institutions becoming better at writing submissions.

Disappointingly though, impact achieved so far by the institutions with REC awards since 2015 or 2016 that participated has not yet reached the most disadvantaged groups, Black staff and students. There is also concern that the situation may be worse for Black women and women of colour, but the current REC data requirements mean this is obscured from view.

Because success is predicated on achieving complex organisational change, although one of the hopes expressed by respondents for one of the outcomes of this review was to identify ways in which to reduce the workload involved, especially the extent of the data requirements, the latter has not proved as possible or as desirable as respondents may have wished. For example, the differential outcomes for Black staff and students can only be identified because of the granulation of the BAME category. Granulation of data, therefore, needs to remain an essential feature of REC. The same is the case for all the factors that ensure the validity and utility of the REC framework. Instead, what we do in the remainder of this section is to suggest ways to make the hard work of all of those responsible for delivering REC more effective and efficient. By doing so we anticipate that these measures will increase confidence in the sector that the framework, if used appropriately and with adequate resources, will deliver further progress and impact on race equity.

This section explores the key priorities for enhancing REC's impact arising from this review. It concludes by bringing together the recommendations from across this report, supplemented with some additional overarching recommendations.

8.1 Discussion

Theme 1: Securing buy-in and commitment to REC

Emerging as key barriers to success throughout the review were the need for greater senior manager and institutional buy-in. Senior manager buy-in is vital for success because they hold the budgets that provide the resources and the power and influence to ensure the cooperation of managers and staff. Getting buy-in across the institution more generally is equally vital as REC relies on much effort from a wide community of colleagues and students across the whole institution. This is challenging enough to achieve even when there is goodwill. If REC is met with significant resistance, then the impact on those carrying out the self-assessment process (and particularly BAME people) is considerable, in addition to undermining the process.

Developing a case for racial justice

Although recent events such as the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on the BAME community (Public Health England 2020) and the Black Lives Matter movement may have raised concern about race inequity across the sector, both Critical Race Theory (Rollock and Gillborn 2011) and theories of organisational change (Appelbaum et al 2021) suggest that buy-in will only be obtained when there is an alignment of interests and a specific understanding of the 'pain' or losses for the organisation for not changing in the desired direction. In the private sector there is a well-articulated 'business case for diversity' supported by an increasingly robust body of evidence of the benefits that diversity and inclusion can bring to organisations (McKinsey 2020). Advance HE, as a priority in developing its forthcoming race equality strategy, should develop a well-articulated case about the drivers and benefits for the HE sector of improving race equality and achieving racial justice. To operationalise this, REC needs to include advice and guidance on how institutions can contextualise this case for racial justice for their own specific contexts. This case should then be included as an essential part of the rationale in the letter of endorsement from the vice-chancellor (or equivalent). Of course, values or moral based drivers will be central as well, but values and commitment are often not enough to garner the resources both of time and finances that a sustained change programme for race equality requires.

A benefit of developing a context specific case for racial justice is that it highlights the areas and managers within the institution that need to take ownership of relevant aspects of the action plan and who need to be accountable for the deliverables against the plan. As such, having a well thought out case for racial justice will inform strategic thought and action on race equality within the institution. Having a clear understanding of the costs and benefits of addressing race inequalities should also make it easier for institutions to justify the staff resources needed to do REC.

Extrinsic motivators and raising the profile of REC

The need for explicit extrinsic motivators for REC was raised by respondents to this review. Although there can be a concern that extrinsic motivators, such as a link to funding, may lead institutions to feel coerced, there is little doubt that the link to NIHR funding drove engagement with Athena Swan in the past. However, public accountability, such as reporting and benchmarking by the Office for Students of various institution performance indicators, including on the BAME degree awarding gap, and similarly the public reporting of gender pay gap information, does also have a motivating impact. So, if funders ask applicant institutions to demonstrate what they are doing to address race inequality then this may help to raise the profile of REC among institutions. The review has surfaced that REC Patrons have been underutilised since the official launch of REC in 2016. There is a valuable role that Patrons could play by talking to university boards and national bodies to inform about and encourage engagement with REC. For example, Patrons, in addition to Advance HE, could play a role in encouraging funders such as UKRI and The Wellcome Trust to ask institutions that are not engaging with REC why they are not doing so, and if not how they can demonstrate that they are tackling race inequality in their institutions.

Pre-membership support

An important finding of the review is that many institutions are engaging in a considerable amount of preparatory work before becoming REC members. They do this to overcome barriers they face to becoming members and to put themselves in a strong position to embark on the REC process. Respondents wanted greater access to Advance HE support and activities prior to REC membership, particularly for increasing the understanding of race equality among senior leaders and those leading on REC, and greater sharing of learning between institutions. This should not only enable more institutions to become members but also support more to be successful at REC.

[Link to Theme 1 recommendations](#)

Theme 2: Maintaining recent good award success rates

Since 2019 there has been a step change in REC success rates from below 40% to over 70% in 2020. REC requires a large commitment from institutions and so identifying factors that underpin success so that they can be maintained and developed further is important.

Developmental support

The review has highlighted the importance of increasing understanding of race equality, structural racism, and white privilege and advantage, and of ensuring that those involved in the self-assessment process really understand the theoretical and research evidence basis of the REC principles, as well as how they would be enacted in practice. Advance HE should consider the merit of offering a race equality package that is not just focused on REC but on providing developmental support for institutions on their race equality journey at whatever stage they are at.

Once institutions are ready to become REC members and start the self-assessment process, we would suggest that their package needs to include increased consultancy support during the first few months of membership to ensure that the self-assessment process gets off to a good start, midway through the process and at the end before their first submission. This would mean that there would be the timely identification of issues, and the signposting to relevant training and resources, thereby enhancing institutions' likelihood of success.

In the past, Advance HE has benefitted from the lead that HERAG provided in creating opportunities for dissemination of leading-edge research and development by race experts in the sector through networking events and annual think tanks. Advance HE, in addition to practical skills-based workshops on subjects such as data analysis and action planning, should consider commissioning sector race equality expertise to develop theory and evidence-based content on relevant topics. Understanding the theory and research evidence that informs a strategic approach to race equality enables individuals responsible for leading race equality to adapt their approach and best practice examples to their own context more effectively.

Improving action plans

There is an urgent need for additional guidance and support to be provided to improve practice when it comes to developing action plans. Across the review, preparing action plans surfaced as one of the most challenging aspects of preparing a submission and a key stumbling block in achieving awards, as well as a process that often does not receive the time and attention it deserves at the end of a lengthy self-assessment process.

At present, the template provided is only an example and not a requirement, with institutions free to choose to use another template. We would suggest though, that there is an advantage in requiring that institutions all use the same action plan template for REC so that a consistent approach and the training and examples used to help institutions develop that approach can be established. The current template with the issue column strengthened to include rationale for the action, in addition to issue, would suffice.

The guidance provided on action plans needs to be considerably enhanced. In addition to a detailed description of what needs to be done to prepare an action plan there should be contrasting examples of poor and excellent plans. Elsewhere in this section, we recommend including an additional section in the handbook or accompanying materials on developing a theory of change. Developing a theory of change involves mapping out the causal mechanisms that actions will need to influence in order to achieve a desired outcome. Understanding the causal pathway will help institutions to not only identify what they need to do but the order in which they do it, all of which should make it easier to draw up their action plans.

Generating ideas for actions has also been identified as a challenge by respondents. Advance HE has recently produced a REC good practice database, and we additionally suggest provision of enhanced guidance on using positive action.

Professionalising the peer review process

Consistency in panel decision-making has been a major concern that the Athena Swan review was tasked to address and there was some evidence of similar concerns from our interviewees and survey respondents. The recommendation arising out of that review is that the panellist role is professionalised, with potential members having to apply for the role. Appointed panellists would then receive an honorarium. There certainly could be no argument for why REC panel members, many of whom are people of colour, should be providing their labour for free, whilst Athena Swan panellists are not. We would therefore recommend that the two schemes align on this point. However, being part of a panel is one of the best ways for SAT members to learn and understand what is required to make a successful submission. It also provides a great networking opportunity. We therefore suggest that, running alongside any plan to professionalise panel membership, a panellist training scheme is developed for those with less experience of race equality and/or REC, in which they could observe panels and be shadow panel members.

[Link to Theme 2 recommendations](#)

Theme 3: Reducing the workload and data burden

Adequate resourcing

The utility of the REC framework for achieving progress and impact in respect to reducing race inequality has been both recognised and demonstrated throughout this review. There is no one part or aspect of the process that stands out as not necessary or which could be significantly reduced. The argument therefore needs to be that to reduce the burden of the workload on those leading REC, the amount of resource made available to implement REC needs to be increased, with suggestions in Section 3 of this report ranging from one to two full time equivalents depending on the size of the institution. Advance HE should be proactive about communicating with the sector, and particularly senior leaders in the sector about the need to resource work on race equality properly if they want to demonstrate their commitment.

Institutions also need to be challenged with the irony that the very BAME staff that experience inequity are the ones whose voluntary labour is being sought to fix race inequity in the institution. However, unlike the membership of other institutional committees or acting-up or secondment opportunities in institutions, involvement in REC is not necessarily a career enabler. In line with the recommendations of the Athena Swan review, institutions need to be asked to demonstrate how they reward and recognise the work of those working on race equality in their institution and how this is factored into their workload models.

Following the successful submission for an institution's first REC award, recommendations elsewhere in this section on increasing the award validity period to five years and of introducing a streamlined renewals process would make the work of implementing the action plan and reporting on progress more achievable.

Data innovations

Although the data requirements of REC are relatively extensive, what emerged from the review is that respondents recognised that they are necessary for enabling identification of the racial inequalities to be addressed. It was felt that the REC data requirements had a range of benefits, especially enabling differentiation of the experiences and issues affecting different racial and ethnic groups. So, in reducing the burden of data in REC the aim becomes not the reduction of the amount of data but to reduce the challenge of utilising this data. Amongst survey respondents, in addition to resources, support and training on data collection and analysis, there was a real desire for an online application form that would include standardised data tables and graphs. This is also a recommendation from the Athena Swan review and REC would benefit from a similar approach. Whilst this is being developed, as a matter of urgency Advance HE needs to develop a data template spreadsheet. This should be supported with comprehensive written guidance and short 'explainer' videos. One of the recommendations arising from the review about enhancing the REC handbook is also relevant here – to move it online so that it could be interactive. Written text could be interspersed with videos and interactive examples. This would help to improve members' understanding of the data requirements.

In order to reduce the data burden of Athena Swan applications a key recommendation of the Athena Swan review is that [“Advance HE and JISC create an on-line data resourceenabling institutions to download, cut and analyse EDI data collected centrally by HESA, OfS, UCAS and SFC, all data which are mandatory for the application”](#) (Advance HE 2020a: 11). Whilst the new Athena Swan Governance Committee is testing this and the other ideas in the review, if the central provision of data is the direction of travel it would certainly make sense for the provision of REC data to be on a similar basis. It needs to be noted though that some data is not collected centrally and is important for the REC self-assessment process, such as data on complaints and grievances and staff recruitment.

An enhanced REC survey

The survey is another area for reform. Whilst most respondents found it useful, particularly for identifying actions and interventions, there was strong feedback about the standard of the survey questions. Advance HE needs to prioritise addressing deficiencies in the questionnaire as a matter of urgency, and we would suggest it draws on race and research experts within the sector to do so. Advance HE could recruit a working group of sector experts to oversee the process, thus securing sector buy-in to the survey. One option for possible alignment with Athena Swan is to consider how the REC survey could also contain relevant items from the forthcoming Athena Swan culture survey.

Respondents also highlighted the challenge of achieving a good response rate. If there is a move to centralise the application and data analysis process, centralising the survey may also be an option. Advance HE could run the survey nationally, with institutions being able to access their own results for further analysis.

Enhancing REC processes

REC would also benefit from the recommendations in the Athena Swan review that will make the submission processes easier. We recommend increasing the number of submission dates, or at the very least ensuring there is six months between them, if REC retains just two submission dates. This would enable institutions to choose a submission date that fits in with the dates when different types of data are available to the institution. Increasing submission dates would potentially increase the opportunity for more people to be involved as panellists, reduce the burden of reviewing multiple submissions and retain the time within the panel session for the discussion that was welcomed by our research participants.

As mentioned, respondents to the review would welcome an online submission system, because it would make it clear what information needed to be provided and how it needed to be presented. As well as making the submission process easier, the consistency in presentation that would result would, it was believed, also help to ensure consistency in panel decision making. Respondents also wanted REC guidance to move online and to contain more examples, including short videos and other more interactive material where relevant.

Effective SATs

One suggestion emerging from REC leads of successful institutions, which is unlikely to reduce workload but is likely to make the time and effort applied more effective, is the recommendation that SATs adopt a working group structure, with each group having clear objectives and reporting deadlines. At present, the guidance only mentions this as a possibility but Advance HE should make this a strong recommendation and in enhanced guidance, provide examples and video testimony from REC leads on why and how they have made this structure so effective. Additionally, greater developmental support for SATs emerged as part of the enhanced support and consultancy that respondents would value.

[Link to theme 3 recommendations](#)

Theme 4: Enabling greater progress and impact to be achieved

Five-year award validity with interim reporting

In Section 5 it is reported that the majority of survey respondents felt that the current three-year award validity period is not sufficient time for an institution to implement their action plan. Shared views were that it is not possible to create and measure the necessary culture changes within three years and that aligning with the recent change to five years for Athena Swan Charter award validity would be beneficial.

However, our research identified challenges for institutions in maintaining momentum and delivering action following an award. Findings from the survey revealed that most REC award holders do not have workload objectives or KPIs in place relating to REC implementation. In a worst-case scenario an institution could spend three years developing its plan for action, then spend the next five years not fully implementing the plan, then apply for a further extension at bronze renewal time, fail to renew and then be given a further year's grace before their award is removed. Yet for all of that potentially 10-year period of inaction, institutions would be able to be a member of REC and display the REC logo on the institution's website.

Institutions, therefore, need to be incentivised to implement their action plans and to be accountable for that implementation, thus some form of transparent process to maintain the implementation of action plans is essential. One suggestion for doing this is to introduce a reporting requirement into the REC award period at the midway point or at intervals. Institutions could be required to submit a RAG rated action plan plus covering statement to demonstrate the activity they have engaged in. If institutions were unable to demonstrate activity against the action plan then they could be signposted to consultancy support. Ultimately, there could also be the option of 'pausing an award'. Knowing that institutions were being asked to be transparent and accountable for how they were implementing their commitments to tackling race inequalities would help to sustain the credibility of the award.

Pathway to Silver level

To date there has been no successful REC submission at Silver level. This does not necessarily create a sense of competition and achievement that might incentivise and motivate institutions to persevere. Introducing a midpoint assessment of progress would enable institutions to more effectively assess whether they are on course to achieve Silver at their next assessment or will be applying for a Bronze renewal. Additionally, if the recommendations of the Athena Swan review are implemented regarding moving from demonstrating impact to demonstrating progress and achievement for Silver level, then Silver level awards become more attainable. If a similar revision to Silver level criteria was applied to REC it would make progression through the award levels more attainable, motivating effort. With an attainable pathway to Silver available, a streamlined Bronze renewal process similar to that currently used for Athena Swan (Advance HE 2019b) could be a fall-back principally aimed at those institutions who for whatever reason have not been able to make sufficient progress on the action plans following their midpoint review, rather than the default position for all second round award holders. If the midpoint review is found to be helpful in maintaining momentum in implementing Bronze level action plans, a similar midpoint review could also be instigated between Silver and Gold, though by definition the EDI governance structures of silver organisations should be driving this momentum internally.

Progress for Black staff and students

The lack of impact for Black staff and students among the institutions who have held REC awards since 2015 or 2016 is the most disappointing finding of the impact evaluation within this review. Black academic (both UK and non-UK) and Black Professional and Support staff have tended to benefit less from achieved impacts than staff from other ethnic groups, with in fact notable decreases in representation among Black staff as well as UK Black students in some institutions that have held REC awards for the longest. While the degree awarding gap between white and Black students has positively narrowed considerably in some institutions, in two institutions which have held REC awards the longest, this gap increased. These findings suggest that there needs to be a recognition that anti-Blackness – racism against people visibly (or perceived to be) of African descent (Dumas 2015) is at play within HEIs and will require a specific focus if the inequitable outcomes for Black staff and students are not to continue.

The recommendation arising out of the impact evaluation in this review is that there is a specific REC principle recognising anti-Black racism. Whilst a focus on white privilege and advantage is vital to the REC, this focus does not prompt the recognition that all non-Black groups are capable of anti-Black racism and can enact anti-Black beliefs and practices and benefit from structural anti-Blackness. Having such a principle will strengthen the requirement for the granulation and analysis of the BAME category and prompt the design of interventions and actions aimed specifically at Black staff and students.

Elsewhere in the review there is the recommendation that guidance and examples of positive action is provided by REC. Organisations are allowed to take positive action which may involve treating one group more favourably where this is a proportionate way to help members to overcome a disadvantage or participate more fully, or in order to meet needs they have that are different from the population as a whole (GEO 2010). In particular, how long the under-representation has lasted and being able to demonstrate the success or failure of other action taken to tackle those barriers strengthens the case for using positive action (EHRC 2016). Where REC renewal, Silver or Gold application data demonstrate a lack of progression of Black staff and/or students, a requirement could be that specific actions are included in the action plan to address this.

One issue that might potentially be addressed by positive action approaches is the finding from the impact evaluation in this review that although both recruitment and promotions processes have been made to be more formally equitable because of participation in REC, informal processes still serve to discriminate against BAME staff in institutions. Further, our research also highlights that Black women and women of colour experience specific barriers. Although the emphasis in these situations would be on reducing discrimination and increasing inclusion, positive action schemes such as formal sponsorship schemes could be considered. A formal sponsorship scheme would be one in which Black staff members could be championed by an influential career advocate who has a responsibility for addressing career barriers and leveraging career accelerating opportunities. This is just one example, and many of the REC good practice examples could also shift focus from BAME to Black if the data warranted it.

In order to identify the needs of Black women, however, an intersectional analysis of REC data will be required. Although the consideration of intersectionality is said to be mandatory in REC, in reality at Bronze level this can be ‘aspirational’ and only involve ‘building in mechanisms to understand and explore intersectionality’. At Silver, the emphasis is still on ‘thinking’ rather than acting, though the thinking should be more advanced. The results of this review lend weight to the argument that it is time for REC to include a requirement for an intersectional analysis of race and gender at all award levels, and if issues arise in the data that relevant actions are included in the action plan. Although Advance HE may be reluctant to do anything to increase the data requirements of REC, if the central provision of some form of data analysis portal is proceeding, it would be a missed opportunity not to include a capacity for the intersectional analysis of the data on the basis of race and gender in that provision. Doing so would bring intersectional analysis into the scope of Athena Swan Bronze as well as REC and make it easier to bring further alignment of the two Charters if that is the outcome of any review in the future.

Driving local action

At present faculty (or similar) level awards are not available as part of REC, although a focus on faculty is required. Faculty level data is required at Bronze, and the expectation is that the head of each faculty comment on this data. At Bronze renewal and at Silver level, institutions will have to provide further evidence of faculty involvement and increased local accountability since the last application. Faculty level awards could offer the benefit of more targeted and accountable ownership of action plans, and therefore could drive implementation. Building on the trial of adapting REC for small and specialist institutions, Advance HE should provide the opportunity for faculties to apply for REC, without it becoming a requirement. Although there will be upfront costs to develop the awards and provide support to faculties, since the faculty would be paying an additional administrative fee for their submission, if the demand is there, then any additional resource required within Advance HE should be self-funding.

Faculty level awards may also create an opportunity to reduce the amount of data required at the institutional level. There would need to be enough granularisation of data to identify which faculties needed to be prioritised, but some of the more detailed analysis would be included in the faculty submission rather than at the institutional level.

Enabling measurement of progress and impact

As institutions progress through the awards they are increasingly expected to demonstrate progress and achievement, success and impact. In our review, respondents identified that they found it challenging to identify how progress and impact will be measured, how to schedule actions, and identify appropriate actions to address racial inequalities identified through the self-assessment. “A lack of overarching direction as well as coherency” was how one experienced panellist expressed it. The factors that sustain inequity are often complex but the more clarity about the causal

interrelationships between these factors, the greater the possibility of designing effective actions and interventions to address them. A practice that aids this process is setting out a theory of change when describing the rationale behind a proposed intervention. At present, the REC handbook does not include specific guidance on designing a theory of change, or of impact evaluation, a methodology which a theory of change supports. The Office for Students provides resources on evaluation and many institutions will already be implementing their suggestions in order to provide evidence that they are fulfilling their Access and Participation Plan. Whilst we would encourage REC to include a section in the handbook on theory of change and impact evaluation in which they explain the benefits of these approaches and provide examples, REC would not need to develop bespoke evaluation materials but could signpost resources for REC members.

[Link to Theme 4 recommendations](#)

Theme 5: Resourcing the future growth and development of REC

Increasing REC membership would yield more resources, but Advance HE may need to provide the resources initially to enable this to happen. In the same way that institutions need to accept that if they want to make demonstrable progress on race inequality they need to resource this work appropriately, the same is also the case for Advance HE. Growth in REC will depend on providing the resources, support and networking institutions are seeking, yet implementing any of the significant recommendations made in this review will require additional dedicated resources. To take one example, implementing the development of an updated and expanded online interactive REC handbook will be a significant project and require significant resource over the next year. Parallel to this would be the development of the online application and data templates. In the meantime, the ongoing support to REC members and preparation for panels would need to continue, especially if REC aligns to Athena Swan by having more submission dates.

The suggested work in Theme 1 to raise the profile of REC and of work to address race inequalities more generally would require the capacity in Advance HE to develop a sustained communications plan of activities, while maintaining the capacity to respond to events and issues as they arose. For example, one Patron noted that there had been no statement from REC in response to the Black Lives Matter protests over the summer of 2020. REC provides an excellent framework for addressing race equalities, but institutions can use their own strategy, and some in this research preferred to get on with activity rather than go through the REC process. Lending weight to this last point is our finding that the growth in REC membership in 2019 can be attributed mainly to institutional drivers such as the degree awarding gap and concern about the progression of BAME staff. If Advance HE wants to claim a place at the forefront of progress to address race inequalities, then it will need to put the resources, strategy and policy in place that will enable it to do so.

[Link to Theme 5 recommendation](#)

8.2 Recommendations

Theme 1: Securing buy-in and commitment

- 1 Advance HE should produce a detailed case for racial justice that identifies the drivers and the benefits of addressing racial inequality in the HE sector, and incorporate a requirement for institutions to develop their own case as part of REC participation.**

To be supported through:

- + a new section in the REC handbook providing guidance on how this case can be contextualised to an institution
- + a requirement to address the institution's drivers and benefits for addressing race inequality in the letter from the Head of Institution applying for membership.

- 2 Building on the recent campaign to raise awareness of REC, undertake further activity to publicise REC and the benefits of REC participation to institutions which are not yet members.**

This could include:

- + expanding the Patron network and utilise Patrons as champions of REC to engage with HEI senior leaders, governing bodies, funding bodies and other relevant sector agencies
- + sourcing people who have experience of working on REC in institutions to talk about the need for and benefits of REC participation.

- 3 Consider options for increasing 'extrinsic motivators' for REC participation.**

Suggestions include:

- + require REC participation at a certain point of Athena Swan participation (eg for a Silver Institution Award)
- + produce a strong and clearly articulated business case outlining the benefits for institutions of tackling race inequality. For example, making the links with relevant OfS requirements and the potential improvements in an institution's rankings in league tables by improving employability and student satisfaction
- + explore with various funding bodies (eg URKI) whether REC could be cited/required as a means for institutions to demonstrate consideration of race equality.

- 4 Deliver further training and engagement with senior leaders on race equality and REC.**

- 5 Expand the guidance in the handbook regarding designing communication plans that can help to secure commitment to REC within institutions.**

- 6 Formalise and expand pre-membership support for REC, including enhanced guidance and resources, to enable institutions to take necessary steps to prepare for embarking on the process to prepare their first REC submission.** This should include more educational resources and opportunities to develop understanding of the REC principles and how these should be applied during the REC self-assessment process.

[Additionally, see recommendations 9 and 10.](#)

Theme 2: Maintaining the recent good award success rate

- 7 Improve the clarity and content of the handbook and other relevant materials to enable REC members to have a full understanding of the framework and the factors that lead to success in tackling race inequalities, including the theoretical and research base that underpins the framework:**
- + strengthen the focus on structural racism and add white privilege and power within the REC principles and provide educational resources and opportunities to develop understanding of the REC principles and how these should be applied during the REC self-assessment process
 - + commission sector race equality experts and academics to develop content on the theoretic and research evidence base for strategic racial justice practice.
- 8 Create a race equality package for institutions to be able to engage with Advance HE materials, resources, training, support and networking to improve an institution's capacity to engage with race equity, without having to commit to REC.**
- 9 Provide REC members with enhanced consultancy support at the start of their membership, during the self-assessment process, in addition to continuing the scheme offering external review of their submissions.**
- 10 Extend opportunities for REC members, and those planning to join, to network and share practice.**
- 11 Enhance and extend guidance and training opportunities on action planning, especially in relation to the areas of challenge identified in this review:**
- + amend the action plan template so that the rationale section comes first, require all REC applicants to use the template and provide comprehensive guidance, training and examples on how to use this
 - + provide enhanced guidance with examples of the analysis – issue identification – understanding – action success chain.
 - + provide practical guidance and workshops on action identification including introducing a theory of change approach.
 - + consider ways to ensure institutions spend enough time on action planning.

12 Provide more good practice resources regarding effective race equality actions and interventions, and positive action:

- + publicise the recently published REC good practice database and continue to add to this resource on an ongoing basis
- + provide additional resources about positive action to increase understanding and confidence in this area
- + consider provision of a checklist of basic actions which need to be in place in order to gain a REC Bronze award (similar to the Athena Swan audit tool). This tool should be evidence based using the recently published good practice database.

13 Recruit, on an ongoing or periodic basis, a pool of REC panellists and chairs with race equality and REC expertise via a transparent and formal process, making sure the process enables substantial BAME representation in the pool.

For this pool:

- + introduce reward and/or recognition for appointed panellists and chairs
- + continue to provide training to all panel members and chairs.

14 Consider developing a panellist training scheme for those with less experience of race equality and/or REC, to include observation of panels, to expand knowledge and develop a pipeline of panellists and chairs.

15 Maintain panel meetings for the assessment of REC submissions to enable the vital discussion element of the assessment, while easing the coordination burden by:

- + continuing to deliver panels via remote meeting facility wherever appropriate
- + continuing to develop the feedback sheet approach to help focus and streamline panel discussions to consideration of the assessment criteria
- + reviewing current internal resourcing for REC panel coordination to ensure there is sufficient REC-dedicated resource for this.

Theme 3: Reducing workload and data burden

- 16 Lead a sector wide conversation about adequate resourcing of race equality work in the sector.**
- 17 Enhance guidance on REC resourcing:**
 - + update the handbook to reflect the range of experiences found in this review regarding the timeline and the number of SAT meetings required to prepare a REC submission
 - + increase the resource recommendation for REC to at least one FTE to provide a more accurate estimate of what is required, noting that the size of the institution will influence what is appropriate
 - + stress more strongly that this resource is required to continue post submission to drive implementation
 - + provide real-life examples of approaches to resourcing REC from different institution types and sizes
 - + include guidance on the financial commitment required for REC, according to the size of institution.
- 18 Provide guidance on the BAME: white ratio of SATs in light of the need for substantial BAME representation while avoiding overburdening BAME staff and ensuring that white people participate.**
- 19 Develop a list/database of independent consultants with specialist knowledge of the REC to help institutions source independent support.**
- 20 Update and digitise the handbook (so that it is a living document which can be updated should any need arise) and supporting materials, providing additional guidance on all the areas highlighted as areas of need in this report. Provide examples throughout to illustrate requirements and expectations.**
- 21 Aligning with developments for Athena Swan, provide an online application process and application forms to ensure a standardised approach to data, while ensuring this system allows collaborative authorship of the application. In the meantime, provide data templates with supporting guidance and a standard format for data presentation within submissions.**
- 22 Consider whether any other data innovations that are brought in for Athena Swan, such as an online data resource to enable institutions to download and analyse EDI data collected centrally, might be appropriate for REC (ensuring that institutions supplement this with their own data where necessary eg complaints and grievances). Such a resource should seek to enable intersectional analysis of data by race and gender.**

- 23 Redesign the REC survey with input from experts to address the concerns raised, while bearing in mind comparability of the survey over time to measure change within institutions. Additionally, consider the feasibility of Advance HE running this survey on behalf of REC member institutions to reduce the data workload.**
- 24 Either revise the REC submission deadlines so that there is a six-month period between the two, taking care not to clash with other key dates or busy periods, or align with any planned changes to the Athena Swan deadlines to provide more deadlines throughout the year.**
- 25 Support enhanced SAT efficacy and recognition:**
 - + recommend that SATs use a sub or working group model to improve effectiveness while maintaining appropriate representation, providing examples of effective models used in different institutional contexts
 - + provide guidance on how to recruit, induct, recognise and support SAT members and chairs, including workload allocation approaches
 - + provide additional educational resources and opportunities specifically for SAT members and chairs.

Theme 4: Enabling greater progress and impact to be achieved

- 26 Provide enhanced guidance as to what structures should be in place post REC award to enable implementation, monitoring and review of action plans.**
- 27 Extend the REC award validity period to five years to provide greater time for implementation of action plans and measurement of change.**
- 28 Develop a method for interim reporting on progress during the five-year award period to help institutions maintain momentum and check they are on the right track.** This might take the form of mid-point submission of an updated action plan with RAG status and a covering letter/statement.
- 29 Consider aligning with any changes to Silver level criteria brought in for Athena Swan in relation to focusing on significant progress against Bronze level action plans, including what has been achieved, what has been learnt and what has not worked.**
- 30 Adapt the streamlined Athena Swan renewals process for REC.**
- 31 Consistently disaggregate and require disaggregation of 'BAME' data by ethnic group.**
- 32 Include a focus on anti-Blackness within the scope of REC, including the development of resources and training for institutions, and introduction of a dedicated REC principle addressing anti-Blackness.**

- 33 Make it a requirement that REC data be broken down by gender, for all levels of award. Develop templates, training and guidance to support institutions to undertake this analysis.**
- 34 Advance HE to further consider the relationship between REC and Athena Swan, particularly in relation to requirements regarding the intersection of race and gender.**
- 35 Increase attention to raising awareness of and mitigating informal processes in recruitment and promotions which disadvantage BAME staff:**
- + REC member institutions should be encouraged to conduct dedicated research about these processes with BAME staff and students in their institutions, and to implement recommendations arising from BAME staff and students
 - + REC should ask institutions to evidence their approaches to addressing these informal processes in submissions.
- 36 Development of faculty level REC awards to enable progress and impact to be achieved at local level.**
- 37 Include a specific section in the handbook on theory of change and impact evaluation, signposting to existing resources.**

Additionally, see recommendations 11 and 12.

Theme 5: Resourcing the future growth and development of REC

- 38 Ensure the necessary resources, strategy and policies are put in place to deliver the recommendations in this review and ensure the sustainability of REC for the future.**

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