

Engaging students to support inclusive cultural change

Case study 2 – Race Equality Advocates

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Anglia Ruskin University

1. About the project

The Collaborative Development Fund supports the development of our members by addressing key sector challenges together, through a series of innovative projects. Topics are co-created with the sector and projects aim to highlight different approaches, in different contexts, to support members to understand how practice might be learned from and applied. Awards are made based on the expertise of teams and the evidence and the relevance to sector-wide practice from an open call for submissions.

Working collaboratively across six University Alliance Universities in England, this project, led by Kingston University, explores the key attributes of student engagement programmes which support meaningful, far-reaching, and sustained transformation to a more inclusive higher education,

Research indicates that students who actively engage with their University through not only their academic curricula, but also co-curricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to achieve better outcomes (Thomas, 2012). However, not all university students engage with their institutions to the same degree. These groups include mature students and those who are first generation to higher education, students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as those from lower socio-economic households.

This case study forms part of a project that aims to surface the work of various student engagement programmes in six higher education institutions in England which have been developed to support inclusivity in their universities.

1.1 Summary section

This case study surfaces an initiative that universities may wish to consider. It was designed by Anglia Ruskin University with the intention of helping to better understand how to transform and enable inclusive cultures and ways of working in higher education through programmes which centre students on the identification and implementation of key areas of work that raise awareness of racism and promote and support antiracist activities, and that facilitate lobbying opportunities with senior leaders within the institution.

1.2 Name of programme and university

Race Equality Advocates, Anglia Ruskin University (ARU)

1.3 What is the programme trying to achieve?

The programme is one of several initiatives undertaken by the university to tackle differences in experience and outcomes between Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and the White community. Work within the programme is focussed on benefitting Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students. The programme also contributes to the University's vision to "Transform lives through innovative, inclusive and entrepreneurial education and research" and its Access and Participation Plan.

The Advocates programme is also a key part of the Race Equality Strategy, launched in 2021, which sets out an ambitious cultural change approach to achieving race equality. Institutional research highlighted several issues that needed to be addressed, including the need for courses to reflect broader cultural perspectives, a confidence disparity in achieving good grades and in assessment processes, and a lack of diverse role models across the institution.

The Advocates are a team of students (approximately 16) employed by the University to lead and deliver antiracist activities, raising awareness of racism and its impact, running educational activities and events, and supporting curriculum diversification. Two strands were developed within the programme to address these issues. The first strand is the Diversification of the Curricula and the second is on developing a Sense of Belonging. Both strands drive activities which support staff and students to better understand how racial inequalities manifest.

1.4 Who is involved?

Established in academic year 2018–19 and based on the model developed at University of Hertfordshire, the programme is led by the Head of Diversity and Cultural Change with colleagues from Anglia Learning and Teaching and the Students' Union. The programme is sponsored by the Director of Student and Library Services and the Deputy VC of Education. It sits within the Diversity and Cultural Change team within Student and Library Services and reports to the institutional Student Success Steering Group, Education Committee and Race

Equality Steering Group. Faculty Race Equality Leads work in partnership with advocates and within the scope of the Race Equality Strategy.

1.5 Impacts and Achievements

While it is acknowledged that a lot of work remains to be done, the programme has had numerous successes, not least the high-quality outputs that the Advocates have delivered over the years.

The Advocates have produced a number of resources, including podcasts, blog posts and training materials for staff and students (such as diversification guidance and tools to be implemented across faculties). They have also hosted a series of termly events and activities on race and anti-racism and carried out projects in collaboration with staff, alumni and student networks.

1.5.1 Summary of Key Impacts and Outputs

- + Development of a Diversification Toolkit
- + Development of CPD resources on themes related to race equality such as Microaggressions, White privilege, Allyship, Antiracism and many more
- + Development of a bespoke site with diversification resources on the University's Virtual Learning Environment
- + Creation of an Anti-Racist Module for students
- + Creation of the 5-stage Unlearning series for staff
- + New Race Equality Faculty Lead roles (x4) on a 0.5 contract
- + Adoption of an institutional Race Equality Strategy

Since the advocates programme was first introduced, it has played a pivotal role in identifying key areas of work and lobbying senior leaders within the institution to support actions. The development and implementation of the Race Equality Strategy has been a particularly important success for the programme and has secured its continuation. Similarly, the buy-in from senior colleagues to introduce Faculty Leads was based on the success of the Advocates programme. This investment in the implementation of our strategic aims signals their importance to colleagues and students. It ensures we have dedicated teams in place to build expertise and deliver collaborative projects to achieve cultural change.

1.6 Quotes

"Being a Race Equality advocate has been the most intellectually stimulating work I have ever done. From learning about the different and often subtle elements that advantage some students over others, to being able to contribute to higher-level staff discussions around curriculum diversification, it has been a priceless learning experience." – Viktorija B, BSc (Hons) Business Management, Year 3

"Our Student Advocates continue to play a major role in our work on race equality. This year they have been raising awareness of anti-racism, whiteness, privilege, and related themes, and developing tools for the University to diversify curricula." – Professor Roderick Watkins, Vice Chancellor, 25 May 2021

1.7 This case study exemplifies the following toolkit attributes:

Intentional

The programme has a coherent and consistent narrative around racial equity and inclusion, focusing on developing racial literacies and anti-racist practices.

Visible

The programme is shared with a variety of key stakeholders at all levels, promoting a coherent and consistent narrative around equity and inclusion and the creation of an inclusive institutional culture.

Embedded

The Advocates programme is aligned to the University's vision to "Transform lives through innovative, inclusive and entrepreneurial education and research", as well as the Access and Participation targets. It is also a central plank in the delivery of ARU's Race Equality Strategy which sets out an ambitious cultural change approach to achieving race equality, with the programme's KPIs held within the Race Equality Strategy. This alignment contributed to the decision to widen and focus the scope of the programme so that it could be tailored to the needs of individual faculties, resulting in the additional funding of four academic Faculty Race Equality Leads to support the work of the advocates.



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