

Internal Race Action Group – Action Plan Update

Advance HE is a member-led charity of and for the sector that works with partners across the globe to improve higher education for staff, students and society.

Advance HE has a long history of working in race equality in the higher education and research sector. This work stretches from sector wide statistical reports and consultancy through to the operation, development and delivery of the voluntary Race Equality Charter (REC). In the same way that we support our members, we have an internal commitment to take action to improve the representation and success of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people.

The purpose of this report is to provide our members, the sector and stakeholders with an overview of the work undertaken since November 2020 on our internal approach to inclusion and race equality. This includes the priorities we identified for development through our data analysis, detail on key actions, and describes progress and challenges to date. We are also proactive in looking to the future with our efforts to ensure Advance HE is a holistically inclusive organisation in which every member of staff can thrive.

What is the Race Action Group and our Race Action Plan?

The CEO's Race Action Group (RAG) was established in November 2020, expanding in March 2021 to become the equivalent of our 'self-assessment team', applying core components of the [Race Equality Charter process](#) that many of our members undertake, with modifications that reflect our much smaller and different organisational context. The membership of the group is drawn from across the entire organisation, has diverse racial representation (minimum 40%), and shares the common goal of developing meaningful actions to progress race equality at Advance HE.

The RAG led an analysis of our data and produced a set of actions to address the inequalities and challenges we identified. This Race Action Plan was signed off by our Chief Executive Group (CEG) and the EDI Committee of Advance HE's Board in October 2022. You can read the action plan in the appendix to this report.

Key themes and analysis

Recruitment, promotion and representation (related actions: 3.1-3.2, 4.1-4.3): In 2021, Advance HE had a total of 160 current members of staff, with 20 staff (13%) for which their ethnicity data was unknown. Overall, 12% of staff identified as belonging to an ethnicity encompassed by the Black, Asian, and minority ethnic grouping.

Data showed Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff underrepresented amongst Advance HE's managers and overrepresented on fixed-term contracts. Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff were particularly underrepresented at the highest levels of Advance HE, amongst senior leaders and at the Chief Executive's Group.

Recruitment data from March 2021 to March 2022 showed 32% minority ethnic representation in applications (though only 53% of applications returned an equality monitoring form), 23% in shortlisted candidates, and 20% at appointment stage.

With the 2021 data indicating racial diversity at 12%, Advance HE set a stretching key performance indicator (KPI) for the organisation to reach 16% by the end of the period covered by the current organisational strategy, in 2024, and reach 17% by the delivery of a new action plan in 2025/26.

Diversity in Governance (related actions: 3.1, 3.3): In 2022, across all members of the Board, associated committees and Strategic Advisory Groups (SAGs), 21.7% identified as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. Most groups and committees had representation over the organisational KPI (16%), including Advance HE's Board (18% representation).

Training and development (related actions: 4.5-4.8): Advance HE did not collect data on how many Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff take up training, which is a priority for action.

Culture and staff experience (related actions: 1.1-1.2, 2.1-2.2; 4.7-4.11): Externally facilitated focus groups and interviews with Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff revealed some colleagues experienced a challenging internal environment. Advance HE's culture and management had not sufficiently tackled and addressed these challenges; bullying and discrimination policies and associated reporting mechanisms were not working effectively.

Alignment between internal and external approaches to EDI (related actions: 5.1-5.3): Advance HE had not consistently or effectively embedded EDI or race equality practice across the organisation. Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, particularly those leading EDI initiatives, had not been consistently supported or equipped effectively to thrive in their roles.

Progress and actions to date

The self-assessment and analysis summarised above led to the creation of an action plan which we started fully delivering in January 2023. Some initial actions were able to be started earlier as priorities were identified. We have made progress in delivering actions related to the development and improvement of critical systems, policies and processes that drive inclusion and representation. Progress and actions delivered to date include:

- All staff training (2.5 days) was provided on race equality in 2020/21 and EDI is now embedded in learning and development (L&D); data on L&D is now being captured.
- The People team has expanded, with a Lead Business Partner for Learning and Development in post, and Assistant Director for People and Inclusion recruited.
- A revised recruitment process has been developed and implemented, with a focus on inclusion and recruiting candidates from underrepresented groups.
- A specialist recruitment agency has been used to embed inclusion in executive recruitment for recent vacancies.
- A new pay structure has been implemented, which clarifies career progression routes for staff which specifically considered EDI implications as part of its design.
- New organisational values have been adopted: 'Impact, Inclusion and Integrity'.
- A new competency framework sets expectations for inclusion related practice, behaviours and skills for everyone in Advance HE.
- Internal policies on inclusion, discrimination and harassment have been updated.
- A new HR system has been procured and is now operational. This process involved a wide range of colleagues and had EDI considerations embedded throughout.
- A pilot Supervision Programme has been run for externally facing EDI colleagues and an aligned programme for senior colleagues and the CEO.
- Each member of the executive team has an objective that relates to race equality.
- A Race Action Plan Dashboard has been created to report on actions and progress.
- Data on grievances and disciplinaries has been reviewed by ethnicity and gender.

2024 representation data and analysis

Advance HE has grown significantly, and staff representation has remained at 12%, as of April 2024, similar to the organisational position in 2021. 'Unknown' responses have increased slightly, from 13% to 14%.

Employee 2023 data (comparison with 2021/22 figures)

	Minority Ethnic	2021/22	Response rate	Total members
Employees	12%	12%	84%	205

The Board and committee data is subject to changes due to the small numbers involved, but presents a largely positive picture of representation in Advance HE's governance structure. The Board remains at 18% representation, and most committees and strategic advisory groups (SAGs) are above the organisational KPI of 16%. The lack of representation in a few areas (the People and Remuneration, and Governance and Nominations Committees) will be considered in the next review of evidence and data, in September 2024, undertaken by the Race Action Group.

Board 2023 data (comparison with 2021/22 figures)

	Minority Ethnic	2021/22	Response rate	Total members
Board	18%	18%	85%	16

Committees 2023 data (comparison with 2021/22 figures)

Committee	Minority Ethnic	2021/22	Response rate	Total members
Audit, Finance & Risk	25%	20%	100%	5
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	67%	57.2%	38%	9
Governance and Nominations	0%	0%	80%	5
Peer Review Quality	33%	40%	50%	6
People and Remuneration	0%	0%	75%	6

Strategic Advisory Groups 2023 data (comparison with 2021/22 figures)

SAG	Minority Ethnic	2021/22	Response rate	Total members (maximum)
EDI	50%	53%	71%	18
Global Perspectives	11%	25%	64%	18
Governance	33%	8%	63%	18
Leadership and Management	18%	7%	69%	18
Teaching and Learning	33%	18%	69%	18

Critical reflection and proportionate response

Advance HE's 2023 staff engagement survey showed a positive trend in staff experience, including for staff that disclosed as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. Employee representation data hasn't progressed or reached the KPI of 16%. Many of the related actions that we expect would have an impact on representation are complete or nearing completion, but changes such as improved policies, recruitment process and training may not have had time to affect practice and therefore data on representation.

A key activity now is reviewing evidence and data and evaluating the effectiveness of our work. Advance HE is running employee focus groups in May 2024, and will then conduct a review of evidence to better understand changes or the lack of change in representation and experience. We will develop our action plan and review outcomes to consider how quickly we can drive change, while maintaining realistic but stretching KPIs.

Current activity

We have three working groups chaired by colleagues from across Advance HE.

Working Group	Priorities
Work with People team – core delivery	1. Review regular data on staff recruitment and demographics, with a focus on iterating actions and lowering rates of 'unknown' responses, informing a refreshed recruitment process. 2. Develop and review data on training and L&D offer and uptake by ethnicity - consider proportionality of more targeted interventions.
Development and innovation	1. Expand engagement to include consideration of disability and gender, including developing a functional approach to intersectionality to support coordination. 2. Support and coordinate focus groups on employee experience by race, disability and gender.
Evidence and accountability	1. Final dashboard on KPIs and actions, with updated data from working groups. 2. Support the Race Action Group to critically reflect on KPIs, diversity data, evidence from employee surveys and focus groups, and inform subsequent prioritisation of actions.

Including everyone

We know from our experience supporting members that our work on inclusion is most effective when it is meaningful for as broad a group of people as possible, and everyone can buy into a shared vision of what we want the organisation to be and feel like. We are also much smaller than our members, and have to be particularly mindful that the resource and time we put into initiatives is focused on specific priorities, that have a real, lasting impact.

The interventions in this action plan are therefore purposely designed by expert colleagues on the Race Action Group and in our wider working groups, from both a race equality lens, and a more holistic perspective, so that they are as universal as possible and relevant to everyone in the organisation.

Our commitment

Improving representation, belonging, and protecting Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff from discrimination and harassment is a priority. The Race Action Plan is an organisational commitment, and we are dedicated to its implementation and delivery.