

Race Equality Charter – a guide

A guide for officers and union staff

Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU's) Race Equality Charter (REC) is a framework for change that can help your institution and students identify institutional and cultural barriers standing in the way of students and staff who experience structural racism. This briefing will explain the Race Equality Charter and give you some arguments you might use to persuade your institution to adopt it.

A bit of background

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) owns and manages the Race Equality Charter (REC). ECU is an independent organization that works to further and support equality in higher education institutions across all four nations of the UK and in colleges in Scotland. It also manages the Athena SWAN Charter, which is focused on enabling institutions to improve gender equality in a variety of areas, although it is focused predominantly on staff, including routes into academia.

Development of the Race Equality Charter began in 2012, with the Charter being launched in January 2016. It works on:

- Academic and Professional and Support staff
- Student progression and attainment
- Diversity in the curriculum

There are currently 9 bronze award holders, and the Charter continues to be developed as the sector progresses on race equality work.

It is based on five guiding principles:

- Racial inequalities are a significant structural issue within higher education.
- It is necessary for the sector to engage with the talents of its whole population.

- Solutions to racial inequality must be long term, focused on changing the institutions' cultures.
- People from different ethnic backgrounds have different experiences, and are not a homogenous group.
- Individuals experience the intersection of different oppressions, and this should be considered.

Institutions must commit to these principles, more fully explained on Equality Challenge Unit's website, when they become REC members. In particular, it recognizes that a deficit model of racial inequality, which rests the burden of change within black student populations, is insufficient.

The Race Equality Charter can help you evidence, shape and drive positive change on racial justice within your institutions, but subscription alone cannot 'fix' structural oppressions relating to race within the institution.

Getting access to the REC

Check on the Equality Challenge Unit website whether your institution works with them already, and whether they are already engaged with the Race Equality Charter. If they are,

then work with the key contact to ensure that you can help facilitate student leadership at all levels for change around racial injustice tackled within the framework the Race Equality Charter provides.

Institutions in England and Northern Ireland can subscribe to Equality Challenge Unit to receive a wide range of services including the Race Equality Charter, and the cost of subscription is related to the income of the institution. Institutions in Scotland or Wales have existing access to ECU, but will have to pay a Funding Council subsidized membership fee to join the Race Equality Charter.

As such, elected student leadership, student groups and students' union staff can help to lobby institutions in a variety of ways to join the Race Equality Charter and use it to shape further work on racial justice within your institutions. Addressing the cost of the subscription is important, but recognizing and highlighting the necessity for positive change and the support that the Race Equality Charter can give an institution to achieve its equality goals.

The Race Equality Charter supports new and existing work on tackling racial inequality. It requires and demonstrates commitment from the institution to tackling all forms of race discrimination.

First you must understand and build the case for change. More details on tackling the Black Attainment Gap¹, decolonizing the curriculum

¹ The "Black Attainment Gap is the terminology used by NUS to relate to the attainment gap between black and white students.

and challenging racial inequality in your institutions is in our briefings here.

Consider who at the institution might support becoming part of the Race Equality Charter - in particular understanding who needs to actively support the Charter. Some individuals or groups you may want to consider:

- Senior staff with responsibility for learning and teaching or student experience
- Widening participation or access committees, including in England those who set the Access and Participation Agreement for your institution
- Equality and Diversity institutional staff
- Institution teaching departments or schools looking for support to improve satisfaction or attainment

To join the Race Equality Charter, ECU requires a letter of endorsement from your vice-chancellor, principal, direction or equivalent. Responsibility for moving the Race Equality Charter forward may, however, sit elsewhere.