

MANSFIELD COLLEGE
RACE EQUALITY WORKING GROUP REPORT
8 FEBRUARY 2021

Adopted by Governing Body on 03 March 2021

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I. Introduction

I.1 Objectives

Mansfield has the highest state sector intake of Oxford colleges. Open, friendly and welcoming, it leads the way on access to Oxford University for students from state schools. According to our website, we are strongly committed to providing a fair working environment which promotes equality, respect and inclusion.¹ We value diversity and difference as necessary elements of a vibrant intellectual culture.

The Race Equality Working Group (REWG) was established in Michaelmas 2020 to consider and address issues of racial inequality among Mansfield college staff and to make recommendations for positive change in this area. For our purposes, “staff” includes everyone who has an employment contract with the college. The remit of this group did not include students unless they worked for the college. Its objectives, which emerged through a process of discussion amongst the group members, were:

1. To consider how Mansfield College could promote race equality among staff and achieve lasting institutional change in its processes.
2. To identify a series of practical proposals intended to provide the basis for discussion at staff meetings and College committees. These proposals were to help ensure that employees’ experience of working at Oxford is not adversely affected by ethnicity.
3. To contribute to the development of the College’s new equality objectives.

I.2. Membership

The group was composed of a "coalition of the willing" whose membership was drawn from across the college reflecting both the academic and operations side of Mansfield. The co-chairs deemed it an essential condition that the group should be composed of both Black Minority Ethnic (BME) and white staff. Discussion members included Samantha Cuss (co-chair), Sarah Farrow, Adrian King, Helen Lacey, Paul Lodge, Michèle Mendelssohn (co-chair), Derek McCormack, Amber Murrey, Ravi Shankaran.

Members agreed to serve on a temporary basis. Ravi Shankaran and Paul Lodge were not able to contribute to the drafting and review of this report, but their discussion contributions were much appreciated.

I.3 Ground Rules

Due to the sensitive nature of this group, at our first meeting on 2 October 2020 we unanimously adopted a set of ground ground rules before beginning our conversations. These ground rules were adapted from existing available resources.² At the outset, we established that the group was intended to be a forum for discussion, not for debate. Our aim was not to “win” on a point or to convince others that we were right. It was about

¹ <https://www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk/values-and-ethos>

² MNYS Anti-Racism Committee Every Congregation Challenge; [Ground Rules and Tools: Facilitating Productive Discussions](#) (UCAR); <https://werepair.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Guide-to-Respectful-Conversations.pdf>

working together. Everyone was asked to consider different perspectives with sensitivity and respect. All members were asked to be prepared to gently but firmly remind each other of the rules they agreed to if they are not being followed during the discussion. Working together in this common space meant adopting the following principles. We offer them here because we think they provide some important guidelines for fostering the kind of atmosphere in which discussions about sensitive issues can be undertaken.

- Our common goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the equality issues we face as a College and to make suggestions about how they can be addressed.
- Maintaining confidentiality: All information shared in this space stays in this space unless explicit permission is given by the person sharing the story that it can be shared in another setting.
- Respect: We agree to treat each others' reflections and questions with respect. We acknowledge that we may be at different stages of learning about issues of race and equality. However, this does not mean we should ignore problematic statements. When these arise, we'll strive to address each other with care and respect, with the goal of helping each other learn. Assume everyone's good intentions but also acknowledge the impact of saying something that hurts someone else, even if it is unintended.
- Trust: Trust that people are doing the best they can; we all make mistakes and have bad days; when these occur, let's challenge and encourage each other to do better. We acknowledge once again that we may be at different stages of learning on the topic.
- Listen actively: respect others when they are talking.
- Don't assume colleagues know the race equality issues that affect your area of work. Share what you know about problems and practices in your area of the college, university and world. Working at Oxford can sometimes lead to a silo mentality—we don't know what's happening in different parts of the college, let alone the university. This reduces our ability and capacity to tackle institutional racism. By sharing information in this group, we can be more effective.
- Individual Experience: We agree that no one should be required or expected to speak for their whole race, ethnicity or gender. We can't, even if we wanted to.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
- Share the air: Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have a tendency to dominate discussions, take a step back and help the group invite others to speak. If you tend to stay quiet, challenge yourself to share ideas so others can learn from you. If you are exceedingly quiet, do expect that the facilitator will call on you in meetings to participate.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability – our success as a group depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.

1.4 Report Remit

This report was co-authored by the members of REWG. It is the result of 7 one-hour meetings during Michaelmas 2020 and Hilary 2021, as well as some additional one-off meetings with individual members when they were unable to attend because of scheduling conflicts. The recommendations made reflect the authors' deep engagement with issues

during the time available to them. However, it is important to note the limited nature of what could be achieved in such an amount of time. We therefore intend this report as a preliminary contribution to the ongoing process through which issues of racial equality are addressed by the College community.

The report covers the 3 broad sections that our meetings focussed on:

1. RECRUITMENT
2. EXPERIENCE and ENVIRONMENT
3. GOVERNANCE

These sections were adopted from *Oxford University's Race Equality Plan* and adapted to suit the Mansfield College context and reflect the working experiences we have observed there.

<https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/raceequalitycharteractionplanfinalpdf>

1.5 Report Implementation

The goal of this report is to offer steps towards fostering anti-racist workplace practices. We see it as valuable opportunity for the Mansfield community to actively engage with important issues of bias and racism and also to continue our journey towards a more inclusive and diverse community. We hope these recommendations will be received in the constructive and positive spirit in which they are offered.

We are sympathetic to the COVID-related pressures under which the College is currently being run. However, given the urgencies of diversification and racial justice at Oxford, we have a duty to ensure that our actions and recruitment processes are inclusive and anti-racist. Indeed, the purpose and function of our working group is to help ensure this is so (irrespective of the current health crisis).

We recommend that this report be circulated as early as possible and reviewed at every level of the College, including but not limited to: discussion at Governing Body, in the Senior Management team, as well as at the All Staff meeting run by the Bursar.

2. RECRUITMENT and RETENTION

2.1 Current Context

The group spent some time considering and reflecting upon recruitment processes in the College and wider University. It noted where these processes were implemented inconsistently. It also considered where they could have addressed issues of race inequality more directly.

The overall aim of the College should be to increase the racial diversity and feeling of inclusion among the College academic, professional, and support staff.

The group welcomes the fact that the College is recruiting a Head of Human Resources. This will strengthen the clarity and consistency of College recruitment processes. We also note that many of the points in this report will fall under the remit of the person appointed to this position. We look forward to engaging constructively with that person as part of College-wide conversations around the issues addressed in this report.

2.2. Recommendations

The group recommends that the points below are noted and addressed in future recruitment processes as far as possible. It should also be noted that when “we” is used in the context of recommendations without reference to a specific group, individual or committee, it refers to the College community. The REWG makes these recommendations on the basis that, as a College community, we all have responsibility for recognising and improving race equality.

1. There should be ongoing consideration of how Oxford University is perceived by applicants who are unfamiliar with it. Our discussions revealed how closed Oxford appears to the outside world -- particularly to personnel of colour and to highly-qualified non-native speakers of English. Job advertisements and descriptions must address this issue by avoiding opaque, Oxford-specific language that might put off applicants, e.g. “battels”, “stint”, “scout” etc.
2. We should consult with current BME staff to understand experiences and perceptions of recruitment processes. Discussions in the REWG showed that our staff possess significant knowledge and understanding of the context of and constraints on recruitment within Oxford.
3. We should review how we advertise to potential applicants in order to reach as diverse a group as possible. We note that the college already uses a range of processes and platforms for advertising. These include national and local press and some forms of social media.

We recommend supplementing our external advertising by advertising internally in order to make use of staff networks across all departments. Our discussions revealed that Samantha Cuss (Accounts), Adrian King (IT) and Ravi Shankaran (Catering) all learned about their job opportunities through either (i) word of mouth or (ii) the local press (e.g. *The Oxford Mail*, *Daily Info*).

4. Inclusion statements should be included in every job advertisement to encourage applications from people who might otherwise think that “Oxford University is not for me”. We note that this is already happening within the College. For an example of good practice, we note the recently advertised Personnel Manager post which clearly states: “Applications are particularly welcome from Black, Asian and Minority

Ethnic candidates, who are under-represented in senior college posts at Mansfield. Mansfield College and the University of Oxford are Equal Opportunities Employers.”

5. Barriers to recruitment should be kept under review. Oxford is a very expensive city, and its costs impact different groups unevenly within and across Colleges. Although we recognise that these impacts are often beyond our control as a College, where possible we should explore take steps to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living and working in Oxford.

During the recruitment process the potential for bias can be reduced in a number of ways. The group considers that following issues are particularly important:

1. Equality and implicit bias training should be required for all members of recruitment panels. It should not be assumed that the membership of every recruitment panel is familiar with equal opportunities training and issues of race equality. We think it is good practice to remind recruitment panels of these issues at the beginning of every process and to direct them to suitable training material where necessary.
2. The use of name-blind CVs should be considered. Numbered applications are used in some fields. We should consider where and if this appropriate as part of the promotion of issues of racial equality.
3. As far as possible we should avoid all-white shortlists for recruitment to College posts. This should go some way towards countering biases that are structurally embedded within the hiring process and which disadvantage people of colour. This recommendation is based on extensive research about implicit bias in hiring committees, even when members of the committee are well-intentioned. These sorts of active policies have been proven to help ensure that non-white candidates have a fair(er) chance in majority white societies with complex structural and psychological racisms.
4. We should ensure that recruitment panels are as diverse as possible. A commitment to the diversity of hiring panels should be embedded actively in the recruitment process. This needs to be balanced, however, with the fact that the labour of equality and diversity work often falls disproportionately on those for whom that work is most necessary. As a matter of course the constitution of recruitment panels should be reported at GB.
5. We should ensure that the collection of recruitment monitoring forms is systematic and transparent.
6. We should embed in the recruitment process opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their commitment to race equality and racially inclusive workplace practices. For instance, during interviews, candidates can be asked to demonstrate their commitment by giving practical examples of their experience of working to ensure diversity and inclusion in the workplace. It is not sufficient for candidates to say they believe in race equality. They should also be able to reflect on how their beliefs are enacted in work practices that contribute to the kind of community of values towards which Mansfield is working collectively. To ascertain this, interviewers could consider asking questions such as:
 - “How do you demonstrate your commitment to race equality or racial inclusion in your work practices?”
 - “Can you give an example of how your attention to issues of race

equality has directed your actions at work?”

- “What strategies have you used to respond to a racial diversity or inclusion challenge?”

7. We should be vigilant about and address possible bias in applicant materials. For example, in letters of recommendation, robust research shows that referees are more inclined to signal doubts about female applicants and applicants of colour. Often unconsciously, race and gender bias is built in to them. On average, letters for men are 16% longer than letters for women and letters for women are 2.5x as likely to make a minimal assurance (‘she can do the job’) rather than a ringing endorsement (‘she is the best for the job’). Letters of reference for women are 7x more likely to mention personal life - something that is almost always irrelevant for the application.³

8. Retention of BME staff. The group noted that as part of its personnel process the College should work to ensure that BME staff at all grades are supported to pursue their leadership aspirations to progress in their roles. As part of this the College could:

- Advertise the range of free courses available to staff via the University.
- Improve communications to increase College-wide awareness of BME mentoring schemes (see Pivot BME mentoring scheme⁴) and peer support.
- Ensure that exit interviews are performed on a regular basis when staff leave. This might provide information that can feed into our ongoing improvement of issues of race equality.

Real action is offering faculty and leadership positions to non-prototypical candidates. As the only Black member of division-chief search committees, I often heard colleagues remark that the Black candidate’s CV was thinner than the White man’s — fewer manuscripts, leadership positions, and grants — without acknowledging that the White man had been groomed, sponsored, and uplifted by people who looked like him throughout his 400-year head start. And without ascribing value to the time and energy Black candidates had dedicated to recruiting and mentoring people who look like them.

-- Vanessa Grubbs, M.D. (University of California, San Francisco) in
"Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion That Matter." *New England Journal of Medicine* 383
4 (2020).

³ There are “small but significant differences by gender and race in the average length of letters as well as the types of language used”, as noted in Akos P, Kretchmar J. Gender and ethnic bias in letters of recommendation: considerations for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*. February 15, 2018. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.5330/1096-2409-20.1.102>

See also: Elmore, Joshua. *Impact of Gendered Topics in Letters of Recommendation on Perceived Importance for Making a Hiring Decision in Geosciences*. (Columbia University, 2020) and <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/dental/athena-swan/genderbiasposter.pdf>

⁴ [https://www.ox.ac.uk/staff/news-listing/2016-05-13-pivot-new-bme-mentoring-scheme#:~:text=The%20Equality%20and%20Diversity%20Unit,and%20Minority%20Ethnic%20\(BME\).&text=All%20mentees%20will%20also%20be,workshops%20complementing%20the%20mentoring%20schemes.](https://www.ox.ac.uk/staff/news-listing/2016-05-13-pivot-new-bme-mentoring-scheme#:~:text=The%20Equality%20and%20Diversity%20Unit,and%20Minority%20Ethnic%20(BME).&text=All%20mentees%20will%20also%20be,workshops%20complementing%20the%20mentoring%20schemes.)

3. EXPERIENCE and ENVIRONMENT

3.1. Current Context

The group noted that the issue of race equality does not end after the process of recruitment. It extends into the everyday working environment and experience of all members of the College. Similarly, the University's institution-wide consultation concluded that:

Due to the devolved structure of Oxford, engagement at local level and shifts in culture are key means of effecting change. Consultation has shown some uncertainty about discussing race.⁵

The group noted that Oxford poses particular challenges here. Colleges remain deeply hierarchical institutions structured around problematic notions of neutral meritocracy, accumulated and inherited wealth, and tacit acceptance of inequality. Such issues still structure the working environment across Oxford in ways that are inimical to atmospheres of inclusiveness and diversity. In this respect, we are fortunate to be at a College that is actively seeking to transform how Colleges are organized and experienced by all staff.

3.2. Recommendations

The group considered how Mansfield might build upon its work by focusing on the following areas:

1. Increase awareness of the Mansfield College Policy and Procedure on Harassment.⁶ The latest version was approved by the Mansfield College Welfare Committee on 6 June 2016. Ensure it is regularly updated so that it is current, relevant and clear what steps are to be taken if harassment and discrimination occur. Involve the new Personnel Manager in this.
2. The group noted that REWG is currently one of the few College contexts where staff and academics regularly come together. When Covid-19 restrictions permit, we would like to see more such opportunities for mixing. These could include more collective college events, such as the summer BBQ, which committee members highlighted as a positive instance of low-key community-building. In general, we recommend moving away from hierarchical divisions between academic and non-academic staff to foster a stronger sense of collective experience.
3. It is now standard in many organizations for staff to receive training in issues of equality, inclusion and diversity – e.g. on implicit bias and race awareness. However, this is not the case within the College. It is the group's view that Mansfield should identify and provide ongoing training to all staff. This should include both static training (e.g. as offered on the University EDU website) as well as participatory workshops on implicit bias and race awareness. Rather than a once off exercise this training should be regular and mandatory -- equivalent, for instance, to the annual Fire Safety training. The content

⁵ <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/raceequalitycharteractionplanfinalpdf>

⁶ Mansfield College Policy and Procedure on Harassment
https://www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk/sites/www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk/files/inline-files/Harassment%20Policy_0.pdf

of such training should also be regularly reviewed in light of ongoing research and best practice.

4. Once communal dining returns we should implement 'decolonized menus' offering a diverse and inclusive range of dining options. These should not be organized as a "special" events but as a regular, ongoing part of how menus are planned in college. In other words, we are not advocating a one-off "international" menu day but suggesting the incorporation of diverse foods (Caribbean, Polish, etc.) throughout menus on a regular basis.
5. Many other areas of the cultural life of the College are ripe for decolonization, including our musical and Chapel events. Given this, the group recommends that a 'decolonizing' audit of the cultural life of the College be undertaken and appropriate changes recommended. We should examine all areas of our practice and routines on an ongoing basis, and make sure that equality becomes embedded in our culture. Some starting points include:
 - a. Reviewing the fabric and architecture of college (chapel, art, library, corridors) and the messages that they give to different members of our community. The College has already taken significant positive steps here with respect to gender diversity but we should continue to explore this issue in relation to the representation of a range of groups.
 - b. Reviewing all public facing elements of the College including websites and promotional material in order to ensure that they are representative of the kind of community we value and aspire to be.
 - c. Cultivating awareness of issues of cultural appropriation.
 - d. Promoting and celebrating a full range of diversity in our scholarship, learning and teaching. This parallels efforts being undertaken in departments including, but not limited to, Geography and Zoology.

4. GOVERNANCE

4.1 Recommendation

- I. Our group did not have sufficient time to review or make detailed recommendations about the Governance of the College. However, we strongly recommend the establishment of a *permanent* Race Equality committee. The permanent committee would allow for fresh ideas and a range of experiences to be included as well as addressing the ever-changing nature of the University. As a further benefit, this would keep issues of race equality at the forefront of the college community and culture. We realise that there may be an understandable reluctance to create more College committees. However, given the importance of this issue the existence of a Race Equality we believe this proposal should be considered seriously by Governing Body.

- a. Membership

Membership of this committee should be rotating and as diverse as possible. Any staff member is welcome to volunteer to join or chair the committee. BME staff should be warmly encouraged to put themselves forward to chair or co-chair the committee. Membership should ideally range across different academic subjects and College departments. For instance, for reasons outside our control, the Michaelmas 2020 committee did not include scientists. Nor did it include colleagues of Eastern European descent.

- b. Reporting

The Race Equality committee should report to GB. It should be a standing item on the reserved agenda of that committee. The committee should also report to the new Personnel Manager and Senior Management team to ensure that the committee's views filter through to all areas of the College.

We recommend that the Race Equality committee's report or subsequent discussion of attendant issues never be rolled into other agenda items (e.g. Equality), especially for the first 3 years of its implementation. This is to ensure that ongoing discussion of race equality has an opportunity to 'bed in' to GB and management's reflections and processes.

To retain Black faculty, institutional leadership has to believe, validate, and act on Black people's experiences of racism; the fact that someone denies that a racially biased act was intentional doesn't mean it didn't happen. Real action goes beyond, "I'm sorry that happened to you" or a one-time "diversity" training. It requires shifting to a culture that allows open dialogue and continuous learning at all levels — no one can be exempt.

-- Vanessa Grubbs, M.D. (University of California, San Francisco) in
"Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion That Matter." *New England Journal of Medicine* 383 4
(2020).