

# Invitation to Tender to Identify Career Barriers and Enablers for Professional Staff of Colour in UK Higher Education – Phase 1

## Background

The Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA ([www.ahua.ac.uk](http://www.ahua.ac.uk))) is the representative body for senior University managers (Registrars, Chief Operating Officers, Heads of Administration, University Secretaries) in the United Kingdom and Ireland, with Associate Members in other countries. The AHUA has 200 individual members from 140 institutions and is managed by an elected Executive Committee.

The Association aims to represent the collective views of members on key issues and policies to the higher education (HE) sector, government and other stakeholders. It also brings together members to exchange information, share knowledge and experience, and to develop colleagues who aim to go on to senior roles in HE administration.

Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) indicates that there is a lack of ethnic diversity within the grouping Managers, Directors and Senior officials within professional service roles in HE. This is reflected in the membership of the AHUA which is predominately white.

Whilst the AHUA cannot directly influence the membership of the organisation (as it is reliant on appointment decisions made by individual member universities) the Association is committed to taking actions to enhance the diversity of the membership through commissioning initiatives which support career progression of professional service staff of colour<sup>1</sup>. This research project is the second action the Association has taken in this space having previously commissioned the delivery of a reciprocal mentoring scheme for professional service staff of colour.

There is a broad range of research on the **experiences** of staff of colour in Higher Education. Much of the research in this space has focused on the experience of academic staff, mixed academic / professional service cohorts, and/or explored intersectionality in the progression process (mainly gender/race intersectionality). See for example:

- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1615118>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0892020618791002>

A gap in the research is high-quality evidence on the experience of professional service staff of colour in terms of **actions** that support race equality and career progression within UK Higher Education professional services. Given the significant difference between academic promotion and professional service progression, specific research in this space is warranted. In developing this initial project brief AHUA has had discussions with a range of stakeholders working within the equality and diversity space including HR directors, EDI leads, project managers of race equality projects, AdvanceHE, AHEP and independent consultants.

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<sup>1</sup> We recognise that referring to 'staff of colour' is one way to refer to a community of people that share the experiences of race and racism. AHUA are continuously seeking ways to better engage and reflect the sector and community, and welcome feedback on our choice of language.

## Project Objectives

The key project objectives are:

- To develop a more detailed understanding of key junctures where career progression of professional service staff of colour stalls.
- Identify approaches that have been implemented to support diversity with a specific focus on career progression within professional services.
- Development of a final project report which will be disseminated by AHUA to the sector through sharing with other professional service membership organisations (AHEP, UHR, BUFDG, AUDE etc) and through sector blogs such as WONKHE.
- Develop case studies to be disseminated through the AdvanceHE Race Equality database of good practice<sup>2</sup>.
- Recommend scope for a potential broader phase 2 project based upon these initial findings.

We would anticipate that the project would take a mixed methods approach and are open to suggestions from bidders as to the exact approach they would take to meet the project objectives. At initial scoping we anticipate that the project is likely to include the following activities:

### Desk based research

- A review of the existing literature highlighting professional service staff focused interventions.
- Work with a range of HEIs (6-10) to analyse data already (including Race-Equality Charter Submissions, staff demographic data, recruitment and selection data etc) available within institutions and through this identify key points at which progression stalls.

### Primary data collection

- Interviews and focus group discussions with staff at different levels of seniority within professional services as to the actions which have supported (or hindered) career progression.
- Identification of evidenced actions which are supporting career progression of professional service staff of colour.

### Out of scope:

- We recognise that exploring professional staff of colour's experiences will surface intersectional issues. Whilst Phase 1 provides an overarching view of the issues which may touch on intersectional issues, we anticipate a more explicit focus on intersectionality in Phase 2.

### AHUA Support

The AHUA would work with our members to support access by the research team:

- to institutional documentation and data (for example staff demographic data (for example as to which professional service areas have higher levels of representation), progression data and staff survey data)
- support access to potential interview / focus group participants
- support dissemination of the outputs of the research.

AHUA would also support the research team access data held by other HE professional service bodies (e.g. AHEP, AUDE, UHR, BUFDG) which would also offer opportunities for additional data collection and access to participants.

The project will be supported by a reference group with the following membership:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/good-practice-initiatives>

- Chair and member of the AHUA Executive Committee:  
Andrew Young, Chief Operating Officer, LSE
- An AHUA member of colour:  
Rita Akushie, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Finance and Operations, University of London
- A representative from AHEP:  
Arun Verma, Head of Inclusion, University of London
- A participant from the AHUA Reciprocal Mentoring Programme:  
Adrian Thomas, Director of Recruitment and Admissions, LSE
- An independent member with expertise in the EDI space:  
Tinu Cornish, Managing Consultant, Sea-Change Consultancy
- An EDI lead for a UK University:  
Mhairi Taylor, Deputy Director (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion), University of Dundee

### Dissemination

The dissemination will be led by AHUA and would include engagement with AHEP, AdvanceHE and include mid-project communications and consultation with key stakeholders to shape the final form of outputs of the project. We would anticipate that the outcomes of the project would be launched to members at the AHUA Spring 2025 conference. We would welcome proposals from researchers who would be interested in further independent dissemination beyond the tendered work (for example through publications in academic journals and wider dissemination through sector focused channels (WonkHE / Times Higher Education)).

### Project Remit

We are seeking to appoint a researcher(s) to undertake this project. Their remit will include:

1. Undertaking the detailed design of the study; choosing an appropriate methodology and research tools.
2. Undertaking all research (desk research, interviews / focus groups) and administration associated with the proposed research.
3. Analysing and evaluating data to provide an accurate picture of current progression challenges and enabling actions to support career progression of professional service staff of colour.
4. Presentation of an interim report and discussion with the project reference group.
5. Presentation of a final written report.
6. Presentation and documentation of the data for future use.
7. Being available to discuss progress and findings with the AHUA at regular meetings.

**A budget of up to £20,000 (including VAT and expenses) is available for this project.**

### Submitting your proposal

If you would like to tender, please set your proposal out in **no more than 4 sides of A4**. Please include:

- a detailed outline and rationale of the proposed methodology and research methods. We recognise that conducting interviews and/or focus groups on issues of race and racism can be triggering and lead to distress for participants. We expect those conducting the research to demonstrate experience in how to gather data ethically and without harm (for example, using trauma-informed approaches to gathering data);
- a work plan and timeline for project delivery;
- a budget, brief justification of resources and demonstration of value for money;
- an overview of your track record of delivery of similar projects;
- Please also include a 2-page CV (one per consultant, if applicable), and the contact details of



two referees with your application.

Please submit your proposal to AHUA via [info@ahua.ac.uk](mailto:info@ahua.ac.uk) by 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024 @ 1200. Bidders who are shortlisted will be invited to present their proposal to a selection panel during the second half of August 2024.