

## **Continuing Black History Month at St George's, University of London**

### **Liz Grand, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser**

This year, as with many institutions, St George's, University of London, has placed increased focus and commitment on being an anti-racist university. The killing of George Floyd on 25 May prompted much needed important conversations within our institution on how we can better support our staff and students from minority ethnic backgrounds and enhance our anti-racist work. Like many other institutions, we adopted an anti-racism statement but alongside this, we also initiated an institutional review of race equality. This review focused on continuing work that is ongoing whilst also taking a consultative approach to devise new recommendations for action with input from staff and students across the organisation. One recommendation put forward by our students was a Black History Month Working Group, open to staff and students, to bring together ideas, plans and resources into one place. It was proposed that this group remains in place throughout the year, not just for October, to ensure a continued focus on Black History & related work across the institution.

This group came together in August 2020 and is facilitated by the Diversity and Inclusion Adviser. Membership is open to all staff and students and currently includes our Student Union Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officers, our Staff Race and Ethnicity Network Chairs, members of our Communications Team and additional interested staff and students. Members of the group are diverse in terms of ethnic background ensuring those with lived experience of racism and being racialised as Black and minority ethnic or "BME" are included as well as White staff who must engage with this work and support progress in this area as anti-racist allies.

#### Black and Beyond: Celebrating Black Excellence

The main focus of this group thus far, has been an institution-wide campaign, Black and Beyond: Celebrating Black Excellence. This campaign was instigated by two of our students who were keen to see increased representation and celebration of our Black staff and students at St Georges, recognising the importance of role models from Black backgrounds.

The idea was brought to the Black History Month Working group and was taken forward as a staff/student collaboration, enabling the voices of a diverse group to design and develop an institution-wide campaign.

Black and Beyond: Celebrating Black excellence aims to centre the contributions and achievements of our Black staff, students and alumni, featuring profiles of individuals from across our St George's community. Individuals are profiled discussing their individual journeys, achievements and advice for others. In celebrating excellence, the campaign aims to recognise the wide-ranging contributions these individuals have made in academia or beyond, and the different ways in which these achievements can inspire us.

#### Visible Commitment from Senior Management

This campaign launched in October 2020 to celebrate Black History Month but is continuing to run throughout the academic year. Alongside launching this campaign, we also developed videos from our Principal and our Deputy Principal sharing their own personal and professional reflections on the importance of Black History Month and the work that St George's is doing and needs to do. This aimed to speak to the concerns raised by members of the Black History Month Working Group that commitment from Senior Management was not visible enough, even at this important time. Whilst we had produced numerous communications to our staff and students following the killing of George Floyd prior to this point, we recognised the need to use a new communications medium to demonstrate this commitment. This demonstrated the huge value of the student/staff collaborative

nature of the group and the importance of those different perspectives in informing how best to communicate this commitment which is so essential.

#### On-Site Display

So far, the Black and Beyond campaign has taken place online, sharing profiles via our existing communications channels and on our website. However, we are in the process of developing an on-site display which will feature these individual profiles in the corridors of the University. This speaks directly to the core aim of the idea for this campaign, to improve visibility and provide role models for our students across the institution. Furthermore, it communicates recognition and celebration of the contributions these individuals have made to St George's. It also aims to signal our commitment to continuing the sharing and celebration of Black histories, stories and identities beyond October and beyond this year alone.

At the point that this display is ready, we will be hosting a virtual launch event to promote and celebrate the campaign in its new form. This launch will include a panel event involving our Principal, the two students who prompted the campaign, our Student Union President and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officers and a representative from our Staff Race and Ethnicity Network. The panel will come together to discuss the aims of the campaign as well as why it is needed, and the importance of the wider work St George's is doing and is committed to. The involvement of our Principal in this event is hugely important in continuing to ensure visible commitment from our most Senior member of staff both for this campaign, for the continuation of Black History Month and for the work St George's is doing more widely.

#### Black History Month Funding

As the Black History Month Working Group has continued to meet and develop activities and events, it has remained in touch with those working on the Institutional Review of Race Equality which has been ongoing during this time. This link up to wider diversity and inclusion work has been essential as an additional recommendation coming through the Review was for an annual Black History Month fund to be made available for use by both staff and students. The Black History Month Working Group then came together to collectively produce a funding proposal, outlining why the funding is needed, examples of what it would be used for and a specific request for the amount. This has now been approved by our Executive Board and Director of Finance. An annual fund of £6,000 has been made available for staff and students to bid for to support individual events, activities and projects relating to Black history. This is huge progress for the Working Group and the University as a whole and will enable a much wider range of events and projects to take place.

It is also important to note that the group also takes an intersectional approach and has been considering plans for events such as LGBT+ History Month and International Women's Day, as well as inputting into events that sit outside the group. In this way, the group acts as a consultative space in which both staff and students can collectively discuss and share their perspectives on ways in which the University can best celebrate, support and make visible the different members of its diverse community.

#### Additional events

Following the Black and Beyond campaign, the Black History Month Working Group has continued to collaboratively plan and discuss ideas and activities for the year ahead. Additional students have joined the group bringing thoughts and ideas as well as important questions and topics for the working group to discuss in terms of how we continue the focus on and engagement with Black history more widely.

Additional activities include a panel event exploring mental health in Nollywood, hosted by our Staff Race and Ethnicity Network and an “in conversation with” event with one of our staff members exploring their recent research into race and racism in primary care. We are also hosting an event later this month in which the very same students who prompted Black and Beyond campaign will interview one of our alumni who has been featured in this campaign to hear more about his career journey, achievements and insights.

The collaborative approach across staff and students of this Working Group has enabled the sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences which have been so valuable in shaping the events and activities that have taken place. Furthermore, the group has enabled the meeting of various Network chairs across staff and student networks which has enhanced awareness, communication and mutual support between these groups and highlighted opportunities for collaboration. Furthermore, having members of the staff Communications Team and members from the Student Union has greatly enhanced communication of the Working Group’s outputs.