

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY REPORT 2021

5.1 FOSTERING GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT GROUPS

Included in this section:

Black History Month, International Women's Day, Disability History month, LGBT+ History Month, Equality Networks, EDI Events and Engagement Group, Dignity at Work and Study, Brexit

5.2.1 BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month (BHM) is an annual global reflection and celebration of Black History throughout the month of October. The overall theme for 2020 was 'Dig deeper, look closer, think bigger'.

5.2.2 The University's successful [programme](#) for BHM 2020 was extensive and encompassed ideas from a range of staff and students who participated in the Black History Month Working Group. AUSA and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students Forum hosted events, as did individual societies and Schools. 452 delegates engaged with the events, with more accessing the exhibitions and talks. A new EDI Events and Engagement Group has been established as a direct legacy of BHM 2020 (see Section 5.2.18)

5.2.3 Examples of the events included:

- A reading, workshop and question and answer event with Tendai Huchu, a Zimbabwean author (35 attendees)
- Talk on *Two Kings: Empire, Abolition, and Aberdeen* (36 attendees)
- Talk on *Charles Heddle: An Afro-Scottish trader and the abolition of the slave trade in Sierra Leone* (105 attendees)
- Talk on *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor - Music, Life, Legacy* (44 attendees)
- A panel discussion addressing the under-representation of Black women in Scottish politics with Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, previously MP for Ochil and South Perthshire and SNP National Women's and Equalities Convener and Fatima Zahra Joji, Director of the 50/50 campaign and a leader in local community projects in Aberdeenshire (24 attendees)
- An interactive talk with Jamala Osman, social activist, entrepreneur and wellbeing adviser (25 attendees)
- Podcasts exploring the intersectionality of mental health and race and racism
- Online exhibitions regarding the University's links with slavery and the achievements of its first Black students
- In conversation with Professor Chris Jackson (47 attendees)
- Online exhibitions on the topic of the North East's links to slavery

5.2.4 Feedback forms were collated and analysed, including suggestions for legacy events or for BHM 2021. The feedback indicates that 452 people engaged with the events delivered, with the following detail:

Events and Promotions

- Twelve events were featured in the programme, with eight blog 'stories', and seven online activities or podcasts
- Promotional social media posts began on 26 September
- 224,000 social media impressions have been made to date

Audience feedback

- 92% of responses rated the quality of events as 'very good' or 'good quality'
- 76% of responders were 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied with the programme overall
- 59% of responders had never attended an online event with University previously



Figure 4: some of the speakers at the University's Black History Month celebrations, from left to right, Jamala Osman, Professor Christopher Jackson, Professor James Thuo Gathii



Figure 5: The University's banner for the Black History Month events programme

5.2.5 Action:

Deliver race equality events throughout the year, focussing on intersectionality (Action 3.1)

5.2.6 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day (IWD) has been celebrated globally since 1911 as an opportunity to mark the impact that women have made culturally, socially and economically on a local, national and international level. The celebration also presents the opportunity to highlight the ongoing challenges that women face in the workplace and in wider society.

- 5.2.7 The University hosted an IWD event on Friday March 6, 2020 embracing the official theme *'#EachforEqual - An equal world is an enabled world.'* Three fantastic keynote speakers - Professor Linley Lord (Pro Vice chancellor and President of Curtin Singapore since April 2018), Gail Kent (Director of Policy at Facebook) and Dr Linda Papadopoulos (psychologist, author, keynote speaker, columnist, host and broadcaster) – presented powerful presentations on how to actively challenge stereotypes and bias, broaden perceptions, improve wellbeing and mental health and celebrate personal achievements.
- 5.2.8 The aim was to reinvigorate the event through a greater emphasis on participatory activities developing the skills and knowledge of attendees, encouraging their confidence and as a result, contributing to unlocking and showcasing the North-East's talent.
- 5.2.9 Additionally, by opening the event to a wider community external to the University, it supported the University's access and articulation activities and its central role in the cultural and social external environment. Local schools were heavily involved in the conference and participated fully. The University was delighted to welcome 24 senior phase school pupils from Lochside Academy, St Margaret's School for Girls and St Machar Academy to the event. This event was also recognised as a flagship occasion in the University's 525th anniversary celebrations.
- 5.2.10 The 2020 event was the most successful International Women's Day celebration to date with 200 attendees.

5.2.11 The event offered a morning of inspirational talks with a question and answer session, a networking lunch and a speed mentoring session in the afternoon.

5.2.12 Key metrics:

Attracting new audiences - 46% of respondents had not attended this event before, compared to only 20% of respondents in 2019

Event quality - 88% of all respondents indicated that they were very likely to attend again in the future

Accessibility - 98% of respondents reported that the event was accessible

Sustainability – 93% of respondents reported that the sustainable paperless online booking process was easy to use

CPD and audience experience – 90% of respondents who attended the Speed Mentoring sessions found them enjoyable, this was a new feature of the event for 2020 and will continue to be included in the event format in future years.

4,300 people engaged with the University's stories on Instagram and Facebook



Figure 6: Lochside Academy pupils meet with conference keynote speaker Dr Linda Papadopoulos

“The young women who represented Lochside Academy at the International Women’s Day at The University of Aberdeen on Friday, March 6, 2020 had a truly memorable day in the presence of so many inspirational women from all walks of life. I really appreciate the opportunity given to our next generation of leaders to take part in this day and they all left with a great deal to consider as they move on to future studies and careers. The highlight for the group was spending time talking to one of the keynote speakers Dr Linda Papadopoulos.” **Mr Neil Hendry, Head Teacher of Lochside Academy.**



Figure 7: The University's IWD keynote speakers



Figure 8: A packed King's College Conference Centre for IWD 2020

5.2.13 The [programme](#) for IWD 2021 has been released for the University's events to take place virtually 8-13 March 2021. Events will be based on the 2021 campaign theme of #ChooseToChallenge - choose to challenge and call out gender bias, discrimination and stereotypes.

5.2.14 In 2021, the University will welcome keynote speakers Anna Whitehouse, straight-talking best-selling author, presenter, campaigner, and co-founder of '[Mother Pukka](#)', and Jeffery Tobias Halter, gender strategist, author and president of [YWomen](#). Feedback will be collated and reported in the next Equality Mainstreaming Report.

5.2.14 DISABILITY HISTORY MONTH

The University celebrated Disability History Month in 2020 in the following ways:

- ASK Session which provided students with the opportunity to ask staff questions about disability accessibility during the Covid-19 pandemic. Figure 9 shows promotional material.



Figure 9: ASK session promotional material

- [Podcast: Accessibility for Disabled Students](#)
- [Blog: Living with a stammer while studying at the University of Aberdeen](#)
- Re-shared existing blogs on Mental Health found throughout the [Student Channel](#)
- Launched a new [BeWell Podcast series](#) (focusing on topical issues impacting students). Episode 1 focused on mental health and racism and there are plans for a podcast on LGBT+ and mental health. Although in its infancy we are beginning to see some great engagement with this series which has had a total of 155 downloads since it was launched in November.
- [Vlog: A Disabled Students Guide to Getting Around Campus](#)
- Promoting World Aids Day and relevant resources
- Promoting the Disabled Students Forum
- Promoting support services
 - Assistive Tech
 - Disability Services
 - Inform reporting
- The Staff Disability Network promoted its work and members through a profile section in the Staff E-zine.

5.2.15 LGBT+ HISTORY MONTH

LGBT History Month was celebrated in 2020 and 2021 in the following ways:

- A-Z of LGBT+ sessions, covering terminology and the history of the LGBT+ equality movements offered to staff (40 staff have attended to date) and specific Q&A sessions have been delivered to InfoHub , Centre for Academic Development and School of Social Sciences
- Promotion on social media of the support available to staff and students e.g. Staff and PG Student LBGT+ Network, LGBT+ Students Forum and Trans Student Forum, as well as support mechanisms across University Directorates and Schools
- Student blogs e.g. on the importance of pronouns, LGBT+ literature and LGBT+ wellbeing, and [reading list](#) published on Staff E-Zine and student social media channels
- Alumni blog on work since graduating as an LGBT+ alumnus on the inclusion of LGBT+ people in the Scottish census
- Lecture on The Enlightenment and Female Sexuality from Professor Bill Naphy
- Lockdown Pride [video](#) produced and shared

5.2.16 EQUALITY NETWORKS

The University's Staff Equality Networks have continued to play a key and central role in the development of EDI policies, practices and initiatives. The chairs of all the networks are members of EDIC, positioning them at the heart of EDI decision-making.

5.2.17 The contribution of the Networks has been invaluable during the pandemic, with the chairs engaging proactively in decision-making and offering safe spaces for colleagues to share experiences and/or discuss how the University can continue to support EDI.

5.2.18 The University is delighted that three new networks have been established since 2019 – the Parents and Carers Network, Race Equality Network and Women's Development Network (WDN). A Mental Health Network is planned and will be established in the first half of 2021.

5.2.19 Key contributions and achievements of the Networks include:

Disability Network Group

- Engaging Profiles organised and published for Disability History Month 2020 featuring the co-chairs of the Network

“When we meet, you feel you are surrounded by friends,” David says. “And whether we meet in person or virtually, the events of recent months have shown just how important that is for everyone. The University has done remarkably well in helping as many people, disabled or otherwise, to adapt to new arrangements. As an employer, it is very proactive in this area and many others but we can always strive to be better. Covid has demonstrated that when needed, we can all adapt and the Staff Disability Network will be here to drive this attitude forward and to support our staff as we all come to terms with the new normal.” Extract from profiles published in the Staff E-zine for Disability History Month. David Hutchison, co-chair of the Staff Disability Network Group.

- Important and fruitful links with the Student Disability Forum have been made
- Meetings have continued virtually during the pandemic
- Has fed in the concerns of members regarding the continued use of reasonable adjustments during remote working and this has led to increased support being provided

Staff and PG Student LGBT+ Network

- Weekly catchups held for members since the beginning of the pandemic
- Alerted the University to the potential of difficult home situations for LGBT+ people during the pandemic
- Chair of the Network co-chaired the Aberdeen 2040 Inclusive Workstream
- A-Z of LGBT+ session developed and delivered across key dates such as LGBT History Month
- Significant support with the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index
- Participated in the University's celebrations and outreach at Grampian Pride 2019

Women's Development Network (WDN)

- Established with a remit to act as a forum for development, debate and networking for anyone who identifies as a woman at all grades, career paths and ethnic groups; share ideas, experiences, knowledge and opportunities; promote equality of opportunity for women; provide a source of information and support relating to development processes and mechanisms.
- Facilitated the University's membership with WHEN (Women in Higher Education Network) and secured 50 free memberships for the University
- Events have been held e.g. on 9 September 2020 Clare Moriarty was a guest speaker on the topic of “Leadership in its widest context”

Race Equality Network

- Co-chaired by an academic and professional services colleague, the Network has been growing steadily since its establishment in 2020. Almost 60 colleagues are registered.



- The Network has been discussing and contributing to the outcomes of the listening activities on race
- The network has established a section on its Microsoft Teams site for staff who want to be 'race allies' rather than be part of the Network and resources are shared there, as well as discussion

Parents and Carers Network

- The Network now has two chairs – one focussing on parents and one on carers
- The Network is mainly based on Facebook and its membership has grown significantly since the start of the pandemic, with almost 200 members registered
- Significant support has been provided by the Network chairs during the pandemic and they have been proactive in feeding experiences back to senior management. This process has informed decisions and led to the development of a structured discussion template which managers and staff can use to discuss caring responsibilities during the pandemic.
- The Network worked jointly with the WDN to analyse the report *Sharing the Caring* (2020) published by WHEN and to raise recommendations at EDIC which were then actioned by the Senior Vice-Principal.

Menopause Network

- The University established a Menopause Network in 2019
- The Network supports colleagues who wish to discuss issues related to the menopause and contribute to University policy on this

5.2.20 EDI EVENTS AND ENGAGEMENT GROUP

As a legacy of the 2020 Black History Month celebrations a new EDI Events and Engagement Group has been established, comprising staff and student equality networks and forums as well as colleagues from HR, Events, Student Experience, Stakeholder Engagement and Communications. The Group has secured funding to plan and deliver a series of events and engagement initiatives across the year, taking the University's Diversity Calendar into account. The Group has agreed that a flexible approach should be taken, for example, not focussing all events in relation to Black History Month in the month of October. The Group will also decide whether the successful Inclusion Week format achieved in 2019 should be taken forward again as an opportunity to showcase work and inclusion in its broadest sense.

5.2.21 A key aspect of the remit of the Group is to take cognisance of intersectionality as an important theme throughout its work.

5.2.22 Action:

Plan an events calendar for 2021 and seek approval of this from EDIC (Action 10.1)

Communicate with the staff and student community on the work of the Group and the events and engagement planned (Action 10.2)

Work with staff and students from across the University to harness expertise, lived experience, interests and knowledge and elevate and support EDI initiatives taking place across the University (Action 10.3)

Secure an annual budget for the work of the Group (Action 10.4)

5.2.23 DIGNITY AT WORK AND STUDY

The University established a Dignity at Work and Study Working Group in 2020 comprising staff from across the University, Trade Union representatives and senior staff. The purpose was to evaluate arrangements pertaining to dignity at work and study and to formulate recommendations for improvement. The key aim of the exercise was to develop an overarching Dignity at Work & Study Toolkit which contains policies, procedures and guidance material.



5.2.22 Initial work centred on what the University understands by the term 'dignity' and following on, how that manifests in the University's teaching, learning, social and cultural context for both staff and students. There was a strong view that 'dignity' did not relate only to the protected characteristics as stated in the Equality Act 2010, but that it was an umbrella term which had different meanings for individuals – ranging from being thanked for completing tasks at work to understanding personal circumstances of staff and students. The task then was to encapsulate those varied understandings in documents which were supportive, clear and would contribute to creating a culture where dignity became a common language. Clearly, links to ongoing work related to this area e.g. tackling racial harassment and gender-based violence were explored and taken cognisance of.

5.2.23 During the past year the following policies and guidance have been compiled and are in final draft format awaiting approval:

- Dignity at Work and Study Guide
- Dignity at Work and Study Policy
- Code of Conduct for Staff
- Dignity at Work and Study Guidance Notes
- Informal Action Staff Guidance
- Informal Action Student Guidance
- Formal Action Staff Guidance
- Formal Action Student Guidance
- Dealing with Difficult Conversations Guidance
- Supportive Networks Guidance
- Dealing with a Report of Bullying Guidance
- Accusations of Bullying Staff Guidance
- Accusations of Bullying Student Guidance

5.2.24 The Group is currently drafting a policy in relation to staff: student relationships and conflict of interest. The next stage will be to develop appropriate, compelling training and awareness raising of the issues covered by the dignity at work and study documents and finalising the Toolkit of documentation and guidance prior to implementation which is planned for mid-2021. A report on the implementation and impact of these will be provided in the 2023 Mainstreaming report.

5.2.25 Action:

Implement the Dignity at Work and Study Toolkit and roll out appropriate training by December 2021 (Action 7.3)

5.2.26 BREXIT

Building on the support offered to staff and students outlined in the 2019 report, the University recognises the ongoing uncertainty the UK's exit from the European Union has created for staff and students. The University remains committed to staff and students who join us from across the world and has taken proactive action to provide guidance where available and appropriate. Our dedicated Brexit webpages are a resource for both staff and students and offers latest developments. We continue to provide regular communications. In addition, support to staff and students regarding their status in the UK is provided and where required, information on how to navigate through the new immigration system is also offered.