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**Advancing Equality in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study of the Athena SWAN  
and Race Equality Charters**

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## **Executive Summary**

This study is based on a project funded by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust that explored the impact of the Athena SWAN charter mark (ASC) and the Race Equality charter mark (REC) on equality policy and inclusion in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK. Very little is known about the impact of the ASC beyond STEMM<sup>1</sup> faculties, the impact of the relatively recent introduction of the REC, or about HEIs managing both charter marks together. This study focuses on interviews and focus groups with individuals involved with either the ASC or the REC in UK HEIs. The study aims were: to identify aspects of good practice on gender and race equality in HEIs working towards or awarded charter mark awards; to explore the influence of charter marks on work practices and to identify issues for future research and policy making in the area of equality and diversity practice in HEIs. The research for this report was conducted between January and December 2018 and is based on ten in-depth interviews and five focus groups with individuals from a range of different roles working in seven UK HEIs (see Appendix 1 and 2).

## **Key findings**

### **Positive change as a result of charter marks**

Across all interviews and focus groups in this project, respondents saw the charter mark process as enabling positive change in advancing gender and race equality in universities. Respondents consistently discussed the ways in which engaging in the process had brought about change, and gave examples of good practice that had resulted from working towards the charter marks.

### **The challenges involved in creating and sustaining change**

Whilst participants in all HEIs identified the ways in which the charter marks had enabled change, and gave examples of the kinds of change that had resulted from engaging with the charter marks, they also discussed the challenges that had emerged from the process. They spoke particularly about the danger of the charter marks encouraging ‘tick box’ or superficial change; the difficulty of achieving the kinds of institution-wide or even larger societal change that they saw as being required, and the struggle to engage and communicate messages of gender and race equality across to all of their colleagues.

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<sup>1</sup> STEMM subjects are Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine

### **Institutional responsibility for charter marks**

For all of the institutions participating in the study, there were key issues regarding the overall institutional responsibility for the charter mark process. These issues included the necessity of gaining or sustaining support from the highest levels of senior management, the question of whether the charter mark fell within the remit of an academic or Human Resources department, and the question of whether there should be a designated and salaried position exclusively focused on the charter marks in the HEI.

### **Workload issues**

The heavy administrative workload of the charter marks was discussed in all of the interviews and focus groups. In particular, participants were concerned about the process itself and whether it could be adapted or changed, the problems of gaining access to the required data in their institution, the weight of the workload falling disproportionately on women and BME<sup>2</sup> staff, whether and how work on charter marks was recognised in workload models, and the hidden emotional labour involved in working on charter marks.

### **The ASC and the REC**

As discussed in the methods section, although each participating HEI was invited to be part of the study on the basis of their work on either the ASC or REC, in practice almost all HEIs were in the position to comment on both. ASC award holders were in the process of considering or preparing to work on the REC, and all REC members and award holders held at least an institutional bronze ASC award. In all interviews and focus groups, therefore, there were discussions of both charter marks. These discussions focused on issues ranging from the difficulties of managing both charter marks at once, the idea of competing or conflicting equalities agendas, the possibility that just one equalities charter mark should replace the existing two, and the question of whether the REC was necessary for institutions in different geographical areas of the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> In this report, the term Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) is used to describe those from Black British, Black African, British Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and other non-White backgrounds, as used in the 2011 census. There are limitations to the term, particularly in the heterogeneity of the multiple groups signified by the term, but it remains a useful designation in a field such as higher education where White identities remain dominant.

## **Key recommendations**

### **Clear and coherent data collection mechanisms**

A consistent finding across the study was the difficulty participants had experienced in obtaining the data sets required for charter mark applications. In many cases, the application process had precipitated changes to the ways that the HEI collected and stored data related to equality, diversity and inclusion. In the cases where such changes have not been made, we recommend that all HEIs develop coherent and transparent data collection and representation processes.

### **Senior management investment**

In order for award applications to be taken seriously across the institution, a clear investment and support was needed at senior management level. We suggest this includes a senior manager leading and chairing the self-assessment team to demonstrate the HEI's commitment to the charter mark. A clear, ring-fenced financial and workload allocation would also ensure that senior and middle-level managers demonstrate and sustain their commitment to the charter marks.

### **Charter marks as a catalyst for wider institutional change**

All of the respondents emphasised that applying for and gaining the charter marks should be linked to wider institutional and cultural change, rather than being seen as a simple 'tick box' exercise. We suggest that the charter marks should lead to significant changes in practice and outcomes in relation to the experiences of women and BME staff, evidenced in strategic policy making in individual departments and across the whole institution.

### **Sharing good practice across the higher education sector**

In order for HEIs to develop and improve their practices, we recommend mechanisms to ensure a sharing of good practice across the sector. The HEIs that participated in our research demonstrated clear examples of good practice in relation to gender and race. If these were shared across the sector this would result in shared knowledge and learning across the sector – to determine what works and what does not.

**Uniformity between ASC and REC charter marks**

From our findings, we suggest similar processes for both charter marks to enable uniformity of practice. Each charter mark should be available for individual departments and faculties and each should be tied to research funding. If HEIs are serious about advancing gender and racial equality, tying the charter marks to funding would demonstrate their commitment to this.

## **Introduction and Background**

This report presents the findings from a project that explores the impacts and institutional experiences of the ASC and REC. Both are schemes run by Advance HE<sup>3</sup> in the UK, aimed at addressing inequalities in UK Higher Education.

The ‘Scientific Women’s Academic Network’ (SWAN) was established in the early 2000s as a web resource by the Athena Project, which sought to advance career equality for female academics working in STEMM subjects (Fox, 2014). In 2005, the Equality Challenge Unit (now part of Advance HE) combined the SWAN network and Athena Project to form the ASC for Women in Science (Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017). The charter mark offers three levels of awards, at gold, silver and bronze, and is based on four key areas – representation, progression of students into academia, journey through career milestones, and the working environment for all staff. The achievement of an institutional bronze award requires a self-assessment of gender equality in the institution or department, a four-year action plan, and an organisational structure to implement the proposed actions (Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017)

Applications can be made at whole institution or department level, though a bronze institutional award must be achieved before any departmental application can be made.

Between 2005 and 2011, 20 institutions achieved an Athena SWAN award. Awareness of the award shifted considerably in 2011, when the Chief Medical Officer of the British Medical Research Council announced that applicants for medical research funding would not be considered unless their medical school or faculty held at least a silver Athena SWAN award. This announcement precipitated an increase of 400% in medical school or faculty applications for Athena SWAN awards (Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017), while total awards granted nationally increased from 22 to 180 between 2011 and 2014 (Barnard, 2017, p. 158).

In 2015, significant changes were made to the framework of assessment for the award, and to its scope. Firstly, the award was broadened to include all academic departments, in contrast to its previous focus on STEMM subjects. Secondly, professional and support staff were included alongside academic staff as part of the self-assessment and action plan processes. Finally, the remit of the award was extended to include transgender staff and students, and to focus on gender equality rather than explicitly on female staff. These changes demonstrated a

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<sup>3</sup> AdvanceHE was formed in March 2018 and combined the Equality Challenge Unit, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and the Higher Education Academy into one single organisation. AdvanceHE works to develop practice in higher education with a focus on governance, teaching and learning, leadership and management and equality and diversity (see <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/about-us>)



growing awareness on the part of the awarding body, the Equality Challenge Unit, that the inequalities in the higher education workplace are multiple, intersectional and complex, and that a focus on female academic staff in STEMM subject areas might limit the impact and success of the Athena SWAN project. As well as widening the scope of the Athena SWAN award, the Equality Challenge Unit, launched a new charter mark to address racial inequality in universities. The REC was launched in January 2016, following smaller pilot versions of the charter in the previous two years.

The REC is similar to the ASC in terms of the process of self-assessment using both quantitative and qualitative data, and the compiling of an action plan in response to that data. Like the ASC, the REC is awarded at sequential levels of bronze and silver, though it is not yet possible to gain a gold level REC award. There are several key differences between the charters, however. The REC has an explicit focus on students as well as staff, and action plans are required to address differences in undergraduate student retention and degree achievement between ethnic groups, as well as to show how the curriculum can be diversified. To date, the REC can only be applied for as a whole institution; individual schools or departments cannot apply for an REC award. Perhaps most importantly, the REC has not been linked to research award funding, and therefore does not occupy the same imperative position as the ASC. Finally, the REC was introduced some eleven years after the ASC, and seven years after the ASC was connected to medical research funding. As a consequence of this chronology, any institution deciding to apply for the REC is almost certain to have previously applied for and to be currently holding ASC awards at both whole-institution and department or faculty level. When institutions choose to apply for the REC, they therefore take on race equality work addition to an existing charter mark workload. Currently, 48 institutions are members of the REC, with a total of 10 of these institutions holding a bronze award, in contrast to the 159 members of the ASC holding a total of 766 institution-wide and departmental awards ranging from bronze to gold (see <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter/members-award-holders/>). These differences between the ASC and REC charter marks are explored later in the Findings section of this report; the following section outlines the current context of gender and race equality in UK Higher Education.

### **Inequalities in higher education: Gender**

As noted above, the ASC grew out of projects aimed at increasing the representation of women in academic science, and has sought to address the multiple ways in which gendered inequalities are experienced in academia. Of particular focus have been issues of women's access to senior academic positions, the proportions of women on teaching-only or temporary contracts, and inequalities in access to and perceptions of part-time academic positions. As the award has been extended to encompass all academic disciplines and professional and support services staff, these representation issues have emerged as systemic and enduring, despite the considerable numbers of ASC applications and awards. As a consequence, existing studies of the effects of the ASC consistently highlight both the importance and potentially positive impacts of work to reduce gender equality (Galley and Colvin, 2013), and the stubborn nature of the barriers to its success (see, for example, Munir *et al.*, 2013; Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017).

Of particular focus for ASC action planning in HEIs has been the issue of childcare, with many initiatives in HEIs centred around recognition of caring responsibilities and the mitigation of their impact on academic careers (Caffrey *et al.*, 2016). However, this focus is limited in its effects both by the wider societal gendered distribution of emotional and familial labour, and by the danger that associating childcare with women's careers in fact reinforces the perception of care as women's responsibility (Barnard, 2017; Moreau and Robertson, 2017) or problem (Garforth and Kerr, 2009). Similarly, HEIs have worked to provide clearer advice and guidance around criteria for recruitment, appraisal and promotion in actions that seek to redress the imbalance of women to men in senior positions. While there is some evidence to suggest that these actions can be effective (Barnard, 2017), there are also concerns that such actions do little to challenge gendered perceptions of academic excellence (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012), of care and institutional caring roles (Leathwood and Hey, 2009) or of women as requiring additional support (Van den Brink and Stobbe, 2014), all of which are significant barriers to career progression and gender equality in the academy. The statistics below, taken from Advance HE's 'Equality in Higher Education' report (2018a), highlight some current inequalities in UK HEIs in the areas of contract type and career progression<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> We are aware that the statistics cited here represent gender as a binary category, and that current research highlights the possibility of collecting statistical data without reinforcing this binary (see, for

As demonstrated in Table 1 below, although women comprise a higher percentage of the total Higher Education workforce than men, there are inequalities in the types of staff role occupied. In 2016/2017, women were significantly over-represented in professional and support services, with men taking only 37.4% of these roles. Meanwhile, despite being in the majority in the total Higher Education staff by just over 8%, female academic staff were in the minority by almost 10%. Of a total of 192,040 men employed in HE, 59.3% were in academic roles. In contrast, 40.7% of 227,670 female HE employees were in academic roles, representing a difference of 18.6%.

**Table 1: All staff in Higher Education by gender (2016-2017)**

Staff Type	Female (No.)	Female (%)	Male (No.)	Male (%)
Academic	94,475	45.7	112,395	54.3
Professional and support	133,195	62.6	79,640	37.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>227,670</b>	<b>54.2</b>	<b>192,040</b>	<b>45.8</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: staff statistical report (Advance HE, 2018a)

Table 2 highlights further inequalities in terms of contract types. In both academic and professional and support services, women were more likely than men to be on a fixed term rather than an open-ended contract. There were further important contract differences in academic staffing, with 5% more women than men on teaching-only contracts, over 5% fewer women than men on research-only contracts, and 17.8% fewer women than men on research and teaching contracts. Given that teaching-only contracts are the least prestigious of these contract types, it is significant that women occupied the majority of these, and the minority in higher-status contracts associated with research. Women also took the majority of part-time contracts across the whole of the HE workplace. This difference was most marked in professional and support services contracts, where 79.6% of all employees on part-time contracts were women. In academic staff, 55.6% of employees on part-time academic contracts were women, representing a smaller but nevertheless significant difference in modes of academic working between men and women.

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example, Woodford *et al.*, (2019)). An opportunity for future research would be to reconsider the binary category as a basis for statistical equalities data collection.

**Table 2: Staff by gender and type of contract (2016-2017)**

Type of contract	Female (No.)	Female (%)	Male (No.)	Male (%)
Academic – open ended/permanent	60,355	63.9	76,670	68.2
Academic- fixed term	34,120	36.1	35,730	31.8
<b>Total academic</b>	<b>94,475</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>110,230</b>	<b>100</b>
Professional and support staff – open-ended/permanent	113,535	85.2	68,760	86.3
Professional and support staff – fixed term	19,660	14.8	10,885	13.7
<b>Total PSP</b>	<b>133,195</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>79,640</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>227,670</b>		<b>192,040</b>	

Source: Equality in higher education: staff statistical report (Advance HE, 2018a).

Whilst the differences in Table 2 between men and women were relatively small, there were far more significant differences as levels of seniority increased. Table 3 below shows that less than a quarter of professorial roles were occupied by women across all UK HEIs, despite women occupying 45.7% of all academic contracts in total. This suggests that women were over-represented in less senior academic roles, and under-represented in more senior roles. Similarly, although men made up only 37.4% of professional services and support staff contracts, 45.9% of the most senior level roles were taken by men.

**Table 3: Professors by gender (2016-2017)**

Gender	No.	%
Female	5050	24.6
Male	15,500	75.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,550</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: staff statistical report (AdvanceHE, 2018a).

In addition to the gender differences in levels of seniority, there were also significant differences in salary. Of professional and support services staff earning at the highest pay grade, less than half (48.2%) were women despite women making up 62.6% of that workforce. In academic roles, 71% of those earning in the highest salary spine were men.

### **Inequalities in Higher Education: Race**

Due to the REC's dual focus on staff and students, this section addresses each in turn. Both sections use the term 'institutional racism', defined as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (MacPherson, 1999, p. 49, 6.34).

The relatively recent construction of the REC, along with the relatively small number of award-holding HEIs, means that there is little existing evidence of the impact of the REC. These sections therefore focus primarily upon the current racial inequalities in HEIs that the REC aims to address.

### **Race and inequality in Higher Education: Staff**

Recent scholarship on race in the UK academy consistently highlights the pervasiveness of institutional racism (Ahmed, 2007; Bhopal, 2016; Bhopal, Brown and Jackson, 2015; Law *et al.*, 2004), which persists despite the presence of equality and diversity policies and the 2010 Equalities Act. Institutional racism works in overt and covert ways (Stockfelt, 2018). In its covert form, racism is felt in BME staff exclusion from decision-making practices and cultural insensitivity, and in the performance and reproduction of the university as an elite, White space at all levels of the institution (Bhopal, 2018). As stated in a recent report by the Trade Unions Congress, 'BME workers too often experience racism at work, which is part of their everyday life. And more times than not it's hidden. There are more obvious racist incidents that take place. But also the more hidden types such as micro-aggressions, implicit bias and prejudice' (TUC, 2017, p. 4). While covert racism is difficult to pinpoint and to prove, high proportions of BME academics have also experienced overt racist bullying and harassment from managers (72% of respondents) and colleagues (69% of respondents), according to a recent UCU report (2016). The combined effects of these forms of institutional racism can be seen in the significant under-representation of BME staff in UK HEIs, and particularly at levels of seniority in both academic and professional and support services. The effects can also be seen in the high proportions of UK BME academics who consider a move

overseas due to their experiences of marginalisation in UK HEIs (Bhopal, Brown and Jackson, 2015; ECU, 2015).

In terms of career progression in academic or professional and support services in HEIs, research has found racist practices in recruitment, promotions and pay (Bhopal, 2016; 2018; Bhopal, Brown and Jackson, 2015; UCU, 2016). In addition to these measurable inequalities, the daily experience of racial marginalisation and exclusion remains deeply ingrained in the cultures of HEIs (Bhopal, 2018; Pilkington, 2013), and is a significant and normalised aspect of institutional life for many BME employees. Due to this institutional culture, it is difficult for BME staff to raise or report their concerns and experiences, for fear of being discredited and therefore experiencing further career disadvantages (Stockfelt, 2018). The insidiousness of racist practices across the academy has proved difficult to challenge through equality and diversity policies thus far. However, the REC has been found to offer the potential to address racism in the academy, not least by providing a framework through which difficult conversations can take place, and specific actions planned (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2018). As the statistics below suggest, the kinds of change promised by the REC are urgent if the significant inequalities in entry into the academic workplace, access to secure and permanent employment and career progression as a BME member of staff are to be addressed. Current research findings (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2018) suggest that although the REC has been found to offer a potentially powerful framework for beginning to address institutional racism in HEIs, there is evidence that considerably more resource investment and incentive is needed in order for the charter mark to be as effective as is necessary.

In 2016/2017, 9.4% of all staff working in UK HEIs identified as BME. Between 2003/2004 and 2016/2017 there has been a significant increase in the numbers of BME staff working in HEIs. The numbers of staff who were UK BME increased from 4.8% to 7.6% and the increase of staff was most pronounced for professional and support staff (4.8% in 2003/2004 to 8.4% in 2016/2017). The proportion of BME academic staff increased from 4.8% to 6.7% (Advance HE, 2018a). As Table 4 demonstrates, however, there were differences within the overall category of BME, with the highest proportion of BME staff identifying as Indian (23.3% of all BME staff) and the lowest proportions identifying as Arab (1.3%) and Black other (1.5%).

**Table 4: All BME staff in UK HEIs by ethnic group 2016-2017 (UK nationals)**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Black (total)</b>	<b>6380</b>	<b>21.5</b>
Caribbean	3100	10.4
African	2845	9.6
Other	435	1.5
<b>Asian (total)</b>	<b>12,725</b>	<b>42.9</b>
Indian	6900	23.3
Pakistani	2300	7.7
Bangladeshi	1085	3.7
Other	2440	8.2
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>3075</b>	<b>10.4</b>
<b>Mixed (total)</b>	<b>5130</b>	<b>17.3</b>
Black Caribbean/White	1035	3.5
Black African/White	475	1.6
Asian/White	1580	5.3
Other	2045	6.9
<b>Other (total)</b>	<b>2375</b>	<b>8.0</b>
Arab	380	1.3
Other	1995	6.7
<b>All BME</b>	<b>27,555</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: staff statistical report (Advance HE, 2018a).

Although the proportions of BME staff in HEIs are increasing, those identifying as BME remain more likely to be on fixed term, temporary academic contracts compared to White groups (32.2% compared to 28.2% White). This is also the case for professional and support staff (ECU, 2018a) (Table 5).

**Table 5: BME UK staff in HEIs by type of contract (2016-2017)**

Type of contract	White (No.)	White (%)	BME (No.)	BME (%)
Academic – open ended/permanent	86785	71.8	8615	67.8
Academic- fixed term	34015	28.2	4090	32.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,0805</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11,705</b>	<b>100</b>
Professional and support staff – open-ended/permanent	14,3960	87.5	14,045	82.7
Professional and support staff – fixed term	20,500	12.5	2935	17.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>164,465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>169,980</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: staff statistical report (Advance HE, 2018a).

In 2016/2017, UK BME staff were also more likely to be underrepresented in the highest contract levels and overrepresented in the lowest contract levels. For example, only 0.8% of UK heads of institutions were BME, and 5.5% of academic managers and directors. Of all research-only contracts in UK HEIs, UK BME academics held 12.2% of these. UK BME academics held a lower percentage (9.1%), with UK White academics occupying the remaining 90.9% of these. A larger proportion of White academics were on the highest pay range of £58,754 or more compared to BME staff (18.1% White staff compared to 17.0% BME). Furthermore, there were only 85 Black professors in the UK compared to 13,535 who were White (Table 6).

**Table 6: UK Professors in HEIs by ethnicity (2016-2017)**

Ethnicity	No.	%
White	13,535	91.6
<b>BME (total)</b>	<b>1235</b>	<b>8.4</b>
Black	85	0.6
Asian	495	3.3
Chinese	300	2.0
Mixed	165	1.1
Other	185	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,770</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: staff statistical report (Advance HE, 2018a).



The data suggests that BME groups continue to be marginalised in HEIs; they are less likely to access high-status contracts or occupy senior managerial positions, less likely to be professors and less likely to be on the highest pay range compared to their White colleagues.

### **Race and inequality in Higher Education: Students**

Like BME staff, BME students are disadvantaged at all stages of their university education. Although numbers of BME students attending HEIs has increased overall, there remain significant inequalities in access to Russell Group universities (Boliver, 2016; Sundorph *et al.*, 2017), and these inequalities are even more pronounced in access to elite universities such as Oxbridge (Guardian, 2017). Once at university, BME students are less likely than White students to complete their course of study (SMF/UPP, 2018), or to achieve a 2.1 or First Class degree (Advance HE, 2018b). As a consequence of lower achievement levels, labour market outcomes for Black students are worse than those for White students, and Black students are less likely to qualify for post-graduate study and entry into the academic workplace (SMF/UPP, 2018). The covert racism that sustains the elite, White culture of the university pervades student as well as staff experience, with curriculum content and reading lists found to overwhelmingly privilege knowledge produced by White scholars (Bhambra *et al.*, 2018; Bhopal, 2018) and BME students highly likely to experience racism during their time at university (Bhopal, 2018; Kimura, 2014).

In 2016/2017, 98.4% of all UK-domiciled students disclosed their ethnicity, of which 22.7% identified as BME. A total of 419,105 students identified as BME, a 60% increase from 2003/2004. There were important differences within the BME category; 42.3% of all BME students were Asian, making Asian students the largest BME population in UK higher education, but the majority of these students were Indian or Pakistani, and only 5.5% were Bangladeshi. Black students were the largest growing proportion of students BME students between the years 2003/2004 and 2016/2017, increasing from 4.4% to 7% of the total student population. Of these, the smallest proportion were from a Caribbean background, making up 6.6% of the BME student population, and 1.5% of the total student population. Table 7 shows the differences between White and BME ethnicities as a proportion of the total student population.

**Table 7: BME UK-domiciled students in HEIs by ethnicity (2016-2017)**

Ethnicity	No.	%
White	1,417,300	77.3
<b>BME (total)</b>	<b>395,690</b>	<b>22.7</b>
<b>Black (total)</b>	<b>122,150</b>	<b>7.0</b>
Caribbean	26,780	1.5
African	89,010	5.2
Other	6360	0.4
<b>Asian (total)</b>	<b>167,935</b>	<b>9.6</b>
Indian	61,480	3.4
Pakistani	51,285	2.9
Bangladeshi	20,345	1.2
Other	34,820	2.0
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>15,575</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>Mixed<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>64,350</b>	<b>3.7</b>
<b>Other (total)</b>	<b>25,680</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Arab	8230	0.5
Other	17,450	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,844,770</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: students statistical report (Advance HE, 2018b)

Once in higher education, there are differences in levels of achievement and retention for White and BME students. In 2016/2017, White students were more likely to qualify for their first degree compared to BME students (91.3% compared to 86.9% BME). Black other students (83.3%) and Black Caribbean (82.9%) students were less likely to qualify compared to Chinese (93.9%) and Indian (91.8%) students. White students were more likely to receive a first or 2.1 degree (78.4%) compared to BME groups (63.4%) which is a gap of 15.0 percentage points. Black students were less likely than White and other groups to receive a first or 2.1 degree (Table 8).

<sup>5</sup> The ECU statistical report does not break down the mixed category for students, as it does for staff.

**Table 8: UK students' first degree by ethnicity (first or 2:1) (2016-2017)**

Ethnicity	No.	%
White	188,600	79.6
<b>BME (total)</b>	<b>41,430</b>	<b>66.0</b>
<b>Black (total)</b>	<b>10,415</b>	<b>55.5</b>
Caribbean	2425	58.8
African	7530	54.7
Other	460	54.1
<b>Asian (total)</b>	<b>18,710</b>	<b>68.7</b>
Indian	7620	74.6
Pakistani	5435	64.7
Bangladeshi	2360	66.5
Other	3295	65.7
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>1855</b>	<b>75.1</b>
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>7980</b>	<b>72.6</b>
<b>Other (total)</b>	<b>2470</b>	<b>67.3</b>
Arab	715	67.3
Other	1755	67.2
<b>All qualifiers</b>	<b>244,005</b>	<b>76.6</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: students statistical report (Advance HE, 2018b).

Modes of study and progression from undergraduate study to post-graduate study or employment are also markedly different according to ethnicity. White students were more likely than BME students to study part-time (27% compared to 19%). This was the case for all degree levels except for research postgraduates. 23% of students studying for a first undergraduate degree were BME, and 22% of students studying for a post-graduate taught degree were BME. BME students were less likely to be studying for research postgraduate degrees (16.8%). White leavers (60.5%) were more likely to be in full-time employment six months after graduating compared to 53.9% of BME leavers. BME leavers were almost twice as likely to be unemployed six months after graduation than White students (7.3% BME leavers, 3.9% White leavers). It is worth noting that the unemployment measure is the only category in which BME students or leavers are more highly represented than White students.

The data suggests that BME students are less likely to leave higher education with a first class or 2:1 degree and they are less likely to be employed six months after graduating compared to their White peers. There are also significant differences in student retention according to ethnicity, with BME students less likely (86.9%) to complete their degree study than White students (91.3%). Within the BME group, Black students were the least likely to continue with their undergraduate degrees (85.2% Black Caribbean) compared to 93.7% of Chinese and 91.5% of Indian entrants who continued or qualified for their degrees (Table 9).

**Table 9: UK first degree entrants continuation/qualification by ethnicity (2016-2017)**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
White	271,290	74.9
<b>BME (total)</b>	<b>90,865</b>	<b>25.1</b>
<b>Black (total)</b>	<b>27,265</b>	<b>7.5</b>
Caribbean	5545	1.5
African	20,215	5.6
Other	1505	0.4
<b>Asian (total)</b>	<b>39,535</b>	<b>10.9</b>
Indian	13,160	3.6
Pakistani	12,575	3.5
Bangladeshi	5890	1.6
Other	7910	2.2
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>3150</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>14025</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>Other (total)</b>	<b>5560</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Arab	1960	0.5
Other	3600	1.0
<b>All entrants</b>	<b>362,155</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Equality in higher education: students statistical report (Advance HE, 2018b).

### **Research aims**

Whilst there have been some significant advances in gender equality, women still remain under represented in university senior decision-making roles (Advance HE, 2018a). This is also the case for BME groups (Bhopal, 2016). Crucially, increasing diversity in the student body - both in terms of gender and BME representation - has not resulted in similar changes to the staff body. Participation in gender equality schemes has been shown to be an effective means to begin to advance gender equality (Munir, 2014). Such schemes can provide organizational change and serve as a framework for advancing gender and race equality activities, particularly in relation to the sharing of good practice. However, as noted by Caffrey *et al.* (2016), little is known about the institutional experiences of applying for charter marks, and working with their criteria and processes. Furthermore, due to the ASC's origins in STEMM disciplines, many of the existing studies are of STEMM faculty's responses to the charter mark. Because of the relatively recent introduction of the REC, there is only one published study exploring its effectiveness (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2018). There are currently no published studies exploring both the gender and race equality charter marks together. This project therefore offers an important, timely and original insight into the ways that these two charter marks are shaping and influencing practice in universities.

The project aims were:

- To explore the impact of the charter marks on work practices;
- To explore good practice and how it can be improved and
- To identify issues for future research and policymaking.

### **Research Methods**

Qualitative research methods were used to explore the impact of the ASC and the REC in HEIs in the UK. We wanted to explore the different impact and effects of these charter marks in HEIs that had been successful in gaining a bronze award in either the ASC or the REC. We invited a total of seven institutions to take part in the study. Of these, four were selected based on their participation in the ASC, and three based on their participation in the REC. Although we aimed to invite award holders in both cases, the smaller number of institutions holding a bronze REC award meant that we also included REC member institutions that were working towards a bronze award at the time of the research. Whilst each institution was invited on the basis of their work on *either* the ASC or the REC charter mark, in practice all

participating institutions had some experience of working with both charter marks. HEIs that had been successful in ASC were considering or had previously considered becoming members of the REC, and all members or award holders of the REC that participated in the research were also award holders of the ASC. As a result, the research explored the impacts for HEIs on working on either one of the charter marks *and* the impacts of working on or preparing to work on both charter marks. We sought to capture experiences across the considerable range of HEIs in the stratified UK system, and therefore included Russell Group (the most elite in the UK), post-1992 (former polytechnics), red brick (civic universities founded during the industrial revolution) and plate glass universities (which gained status in the 1960s).

We conducted ten interviews and five focus groups across the seven participating institutions. The aim of the focus groups was to explore the views of members of the institutional self-assessment teams (SAT). These interdisciplinary teams are made up of staff from a variety of levels of seniority and from both academic staff and professional and support services. Collectively, they respond to institutional data on gender or race inequality, and construct an action plan as part of the charter mark application process. Each SAT has a chair, who leads the data gathering, report writing and action plan construction process. Where possible, we conducted interviews with the Equality and Diversity Manager and the SAT chair for the ASC or REC charter mark in each institution. In three institutions, it was not possible within the timeframe of the research to arrange both of these interviews, and one interview was conducted with either the Equality and Diversity manager or the SAT chair. Focus groups of 3-7 members of the SAT were arranged in five of the seven institutions. The combination of interviews and focus groups in the participating institutions enabled us to explore the perspectives of those working on charter marks in a variety of capacities and institutional roles in each HEI. The focus groups were a particularly rich source of data as they encouraged discussions between participants who had previously not reflected together about their experiences of working on the charter marks. In several cases, focus group participants noted that the research had offered them an opportunity to think about their experiences with their colleagues in a new or different way.

### ***Recruitment and selection of participants***

Potential participants were located using Advance HE's open-access information on member and award holding institutions for each charter mark. Contact was made either through the details provided by Advance HE or through the HEIs' equality and diversity web pages. Information was sent to relevant staff members about the purposes of the study and the requirements for participation. At this point, we asked whether a focus group with members of the SAT would be possible, as well as one-to-one interviews with the staff members themselves. A convenient time for the interviews and focus groups was established, and all participants were provided with a participant information sheet and consent form by email. These were also provided in hard copy when data collection was conducted in person. Four of the ten interviews were conducted over the telephone. All other interviews and all of the focus groups were conducted in person.

### ***Ethics***

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Birmingham ethics committee. Participant information and consent forms were sent by email when participation was agreed. Consent forms were returned and stored securely and confidentially. Data was stored on password-protected computers and was only accessible to the researchers, according to the University of Birmingham's research policy, and in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation.

### ***Data Analysis***

All of the interview and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed. We used thematic analysis to code the data, creating headings for themes and sub-themes that emerged as common across the data set, according to the interests of our research questions (Roulston, 2001). In particular, we focused on our participants' experiences of the rewards and challenges of charter mark applications, in order to gain a sense of the specific potentials of the policy as well as the possible barriers to its success. The codes and themes were cross-checked by both researchers to enhance reliability and validity of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The following sections set out five main themes emerging from the data. Within each

overarching theme, there are sub-themes which specify a commonly discussed aspect of the overall theme which we consider to be important to emphasise. In each section and sub-section, we use quotations from the interview and focus group data in order to allow the participants' words to speak alongside our analysis. Due to the similarity in themes that emerged in data from ASC and REC awarded or member institutions, the following findings focus on both charter marks together. Where data is quoted, we indicate whether the interview or focus group was based on ASC or the REC.

### **Key Findings**

Our findings demonstrate that the charter marks offer a significant and important framework for addressing inequalities in universities. This findings section explores the potential for positive change, the difficulty of achieving and sustaining change and the institutional challenges of working with the charter marks more.

#### **1. Positive change as a result of the charter marks**

Across all interviews and focus groups in this project, respondents saw the charter mark process as enabling positive change in advancing gender and race equality in universities. Respondents consistently discussed the ways in which engaging in the process had brought about change, and gave examples of good practice that had resulted from working towards the charter marks.

#### ***How charter marks enabled positive change***

For some participants, the process of collecting, analysing and presenting the data required by a charter mark application had revealed previously unseen inequalities across the institution as a whole, and had prompted action and change as a response:

*When we looked across the most influential senior committees at faculty level and university level and we broke that down and we looked at who was involved and the ethnicity of the people who were involved and we found a serious lack of diversity, like no one across the thing...and that was a real shock. It was an incredible shock when we looked at all the sort of research committees, the*



*promotions committee, the senior leadership team, and although at university level we could see this was the case, it was an incredible shock. So one of the pleasing things was that actually highlighting that and people actually saying we hadn't realised this was an issue, we've seen over the past couple of years that this really has changed. And we can see at the faculty level and those senior leadership teams, some of them are really quite diverse now and I think that's been the direct impact of highlighting that through the REC process (P9, Black male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

In several cases, the charter mark also proved useful in giving a much-needed framework for uncomfortable and difficult conversations, particularly on the topic of race:

*I think that it [the REC] is safe, and I really value that in this country because it can become very opinionated. And if you just go, 'Yeah, but what does the data say?' That's my standard thing, 'The data doesn't seem to indicate that'. And that makes everyone safe, not just BAME<sup>6</sup> people. It makes White people safe, because they can be part of it and not have to say too much, they just have to interpret the data and come up with appropriate action without kind of feeling that they're being unfairly judged for having particular views, or being hesitant about what's ok and what's not ok. It's like, you just worry about the data, you just worry about the process, and then we see what we get out of it. And I believe in that, on as potentially explosive a topic as race equality, I think it's a pretty great formula (P14, Asian male, plate glass, REC member).*

Reflecting on how the ASC had been effective in their institution, several participants highlighted the connection between the charter mark and medical research funding, which they saw as having prompted HEIs to take gender equality issues more seriously:

*When there was that threat, which still exists, when they said, 'Well actually you can't apply for this research fund without it,' that idea that unless you have this in place you can't do other things, that it's a bottom line, is a very powerful argument. Rightly or wrongly, it is. It's the one I used. It was like, 'Well, give me ten grand and I'll get this going, and otherwise we can't apply for this, this and this. And that would have cost us, last year alone, x million. What do you want to*

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<sup>6</sup> BAME is a term often used to define those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

*do?’ It’s a very simple decision for a VC [Vice Chancellor] (P19, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

The positive change made possible through the framework of the charter mark is therefore in itself enabled by this connection to funding, which introduces an imperative for institutions, and results in a widespread consideration of gender equality across the HEI:

*Having these issues being considered as part of our school, like on our school exec [Executive] and things, I just don’t think that would have happened without ASC. And now it’s a standard item on all agendas, and I think it really brings all equality and diversity in. Because ASC is widely known, it’s making people aware of everything, and I think that’s really valuable, and definitely noticeable, but I’m still a bit sad that – well, I’m half happy that it was all originally driven by money, because somebody said we have to have a silver to get funding, and on the other hand that’s what works (P26, White female, red brick, ASC award holder).*

Some participants also remarked upon the positive changes that had come about as a result of the ASC departmental awards, which they saw as having increased engagement in gender equality issues at local levels throughout their HEIs:

*I see the departmental submissions as a way of continuing to build the kind of ownership and engagement with gender equality and getting systems in place. Getting people to put money towards it, getting, you know, broadening it out, so that’s why I think it’s important. Because if it’s an institutional thing, it’s at the top level, you can forget about, you just see it on people’s email signature. But if it’s, say you’ve got a reasonably small sized department, or unit, whatever it is, and they get an award, then that is theirs, you know, that is their award and they’ve worked for it and you have to have 12 people involved in it, you know, at least. All the kind of thing, so it’s a kind of ownership thing really (P18, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

### ***Examples of good practice***

There were many examples of good practice in all of the participating HEIs, both in terms of achieving success in the charter mark process, and in terms of new policies or practices that had been introduced as a result of the process and its action plan. Some HEIs, particularly

those with a history of success in achieving charter mark awards, had learned how to make the application process smoother and more effective:

*It is critical to have a data person there, good representation, ensuring that teaching and learning, HR [Human Resources], training and development, that all the constituent parts of the university are engaged within it. The student union is also critical to being there and to sort of supporting and working together in terms of looking at a whole student journey through to the sort of, to staff as well. Having a senior person who is leading it and chairing that SAT [Self-Assessment Team], who can make decision or who can take things back to the SLT [Senior Leadership Team] is really important, and for them to be someone who doesn't shy away, doesn't inhibit discussion and difficult conversations as well, and are prepared to sort of be challenged and listen to some uncomfortable discussions and conversations as well (P11, Asian male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

In other HEIs, participants drew on previous experiences of working on specific areas of equality and diversity when outlining what was involved in a successful charter mark application:

*It has to be embedded into processes that happen anyway. For example, some of the reasonable adjustments – this is for disabled students – we knew that the information was not coming through, so we actually had members of student services going to each and every department meeting and having the conversation. Yes, there are twenty-odd departments, but they meet anyway. My faculty meet anyway. The panel would meet anyway, so it's making sure that there is this discussion at every opportunity that's happening anyway (P3, Asian female, post-1992, REC member).*

In another example of working successfully towards and with the charter mark, one HEI had adopted a strategy of drop-in information sessions explicitly about the Athena SWAN charter, in order than anyone who might be interested in the process could find out more on an informal basis:

*At the moment they're [drop-in sessions] run by the university project manager, the ASC lead, and she comes on a monthly basis for a couple of hours for people to drop in, and usually me or another member of staff will be there as well to be*

*the local person to chat to. I don't know if that's going to continue now, we're just talking about what will happen over the summer, but, you know, some months there's been nobody, or it's just me and her. But for the most recent one, we had maybe up to about ten people from different departments dropping in at different times. Some, I think some of them had been told by their head of department, you know, like on the IPR, 'You need to find out what that's about.' But that in itself isn't a bad thing, because they were coming in completely, had no idea, 'Just tell me what this is' (P20, White Female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

In describing policies that had been introduced as a result of the charter marks, many HEIs highlighted changes to family-friendly or flexible working policies:

*Family caring is a big thing here, and you know, it's making sure we've got a family caring policy and strategy which works for people, so it's not just another HR[Human Resources]-invented tool. It's got to be the lived experience. People have got to say, 'Yeah, this really, really works for me' (P23, White female, red brick, ASC award holder).*

*So we've got a returning parents coaching programme for men and women who have taken parental leave to undergo some coaching to try and keep them in the workplace, because we always lose a lot of women at that point. We've got a mentoring connections programme, we're doing a lot of work around sexual harassment which we know can encourage people to leave the university or even leave Higher Education altogether (P28, White female, Russell Group, ASC award holder).*

In response to the REC's requirement to address student as well as staff experience, HEIs had also introduced new strategies for engaging with issues of student attainment and retention:

*We've got a student retention steering group. And they've done some really interesting work around particularly Black male students, and the data is showing that hopefully it looks like we've made quite an impact in terms of their retention, around the kind of focus group (P1, White female, post-1992, REC award holder).*

## 2. The challenges involved in creating and sustaining change

While participants at all HEIs identified the ways that the charter marks had enabled change, and gave examples of the kinds of change that had resulted in engaging with the charter marks, they also discussed the challenges that had emerged from the process. They spoke particularly about the danger of the charter marks encouraging ‘tick box’ or superficial change, the difficulty of achieving the kinds of institution-wide or even larger societal change that they saw as being required, and the struggle to get messages of gender and race equality across to all of their colleagues.

### *The danger of ‘tick-box’ change*

As highlighted above, the charter marks were often cited as a useful framework that enabled conversations and actions that might otherwise have been more difficult to justify. However, some participants expressed a concern that the use of the charter mark as a justification might encourage reductive understandings of gender and race equality:

*I have a real pet hate in HR [Human Resources] for when people say, ‘This is our ASC initiative.’ I think, ‘No, it’s not. Nothing is an ASC initiative. These are initiatives for the university to improve inclusivity or gender equality, and it just so happens that we report on it for ASC.’ In my view, we shouldn’t be doing anything because we’re thinking, ‘Oh, that would be good for ASC. That would score some points.’ We should be doing it because it’s good for the institution (P2, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

Similarly, several participants spoke of their concerns that the structuring of charter marks around the achievement of awards leads to a sense of completion, or of the work of equality and diversity being finished once the award is gained:

*It [Athena SWAN] can be really valuable, it can give us a lot of insight, but what if it just kind of stops there, stops at the reporting, ‘Ok, we’ve got it now.’ Or is it actually being used for actual change? And how is that going to happen? I think that’s really important (P22, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

For one REC member institution, the experience of this, ‘We’ve got it now’ response to gaining an Athena SWAN award directly informed their determination that the REC should be done differently:

*It can't be about, 'Well, we've done this now, so we can leave it.' And that's the risk, certainly the ASC will be at that stage soon with most schools, where it's, 'We've done that now, let's leave it.' I don't want the same to happen with race. I think race is really important, there's more of an issue with race here than there is with gender, I think (P17, Asian female, plate glass, REC member).*

The concerns expressed here outline not just a sense that work on equality, diversity and inclusion can be seen through the charter mark process as work that is possible to finish, but that gaining the award might actually close down, rather than open up, the avenues for further work on race or gender equality:

*I think it's been really helpful and I think the institution is really pleased with it. But we have to make sure it doesn't mean complacency and also allow people to go, 'How come you've got the race equality charter mark, but how come you're still doing this?' For us to go, 'Absolutely, you're right. Do you know what I mean?' It shouldn't close down conversations (P9, Black male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

### ***The need for institution-wide cultural change***

As discussed in the section above, several participants suggested that the gaining of a charter mark award might not result in long-term actions. Others highlighted not only the issue of long-term action but also day-to-day and local action that they saw as resistant to the changes of the charter mark process:

*I think there is a lot of talk about it, and I think we like to say, 'Oh, we have ASC silver, we have REC, we are a disability confident employer', and people like to put it on their LinkedIn pages and, but yeah, I'm not sure that this is rectified in the sort of actual day to day work. Even though it should be, even though, for example, service and leadership is vital for academic promotion, for example, but I'm not sure how much of leaders these people actually are (P12, Black male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

Participants often described an abstract kind of change – cultural or invisible – that they saw as not always captured by the charter mark framework, and as slower to respond to its processes:

*It's not just about the structure and the framework, it's also about physically, how does it feel walking onto campus, walking into a meeting and being perhaps in a minority in that meeting room setting or in a classroom setting? And the general awareness and cultural awareness that the university has about those dynamics as well as just the kind of academic side of it, also the kind of lived experience of it. And that culture change tends to be more gradual than the initial process and the push itself (P5, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

For many of these participants, the more concrete, easily discernible changes that had happened as a result of the charter marks would only be meaningful if accompanied, eventually, by the abstract changes that they saw as equally necessary:

*I think a lot needs to be done at senior level, because a lot of the issues are around, well, there's kind of visible issues and then there's invisible issues. So the visible issues are things like, who's sitting on the committees, how we're kind of, what sort of succession planning is going on, shadowing, you know, which ASC recommends, which I think people see as kind of, can see as kind of meddling and actually it's utterly crucial, because it's about voices and who's involved in decision making. But I think there's also, senior management need to – and I think they are starting to here in some places – get hold of the invisible stuff, the sexual harassment, the sexism, the poor professional practices in terms of promotion, encouragement, you know, sponsorship, all this kind of thing. They need to really get their heads around that, because as long as that, as long as that exists it's not, it's not real (P19, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

### ***Getting the message across***

As part of the kinds of institution-wide changes that participants saw as important to the charter mark process, the challenge of 'getting the message across' to all colleagues across the HEI was often discussed in interviews and focus groups. Some participants discussed the difficulty of translating a message of gender or race equality to their colleagues who were not involved in the charter mark work:

*People who come to the meetings are receptive to the message, and I think a lot of people on those meetings do talk about this challenge of, 'Well, I will have to go*

*to my colleagues and sell that message later,' so there are barriers (P12, Black male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

Participants found that they often came up against a reluctance to admit to inequalities of race or gender, with many in their institutions wanting to believe that these no longer existed in their workplaces. While the charter marks had created an opportunity for dialogue on these issues, it fell to those working on the charter marks to convince their colleagues of the value of acknowledging the presence of institutional sexism and racism in their HEI:

*I think that what happens is that you get a disparity and people kind of freak out a bit, like, 'Oh my god, we can't accept this as being the truth about us, because we identify with the institution and then what does that make us?' And it's just kind of like, 'Calm down everyone, it's fine. We all want a bronze award, don't we? OK, so we need to be honest about this and own up to it and just come up with actions. We don't need to feel that it's anyone's fault' (P14, Black male, plate glass, REC member).*

*Their mantra was, 'There is no gender discrimination here.' That is the first thing that was told to me by HR [Human Resources]. And I, one of the things I had to do, when I talk about making friends and networks and building relationships was to build a relationship with the head of HR. Because she was the one to say to me, 'There is no gender discrimination here.' And so that was a long term project (P18, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

Where these difficulties had been overcome enough for the charter mark process to continue, there remained the difficulty of assigning responsibility for equality to everyone in the institution:

*I think [what would make a difference is] an acknowledgement that this is actually everybody's problem, and actually everybody will benefit. I don't think that message has got across, and perhaps it's a really hard one for anyone to get their head around (P19, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*



### **3. Institutional responsibility for charter marks**

For all of the institutions participating in the study, there were key issues regarding the overall institutional responsibility for the charter mark process. These issues included the necessity of gaining or sustaining support from the highest levels of senior management, the question of whether the charter mark fell within the remit of an academic or Human Resources department, and the question of whether there should be a designated and salaried position exclusively focused on the charter mark in the HEI.

#### ***Senior level involvement***

All institutions highlighted how support from senior levels of the university is crucial to gaining the resources necessary for success in the charter mark process:

*I think getting senior management on board is imperative to drawing anything forward, and unfortunately I think without that backing it's very difficult to get any sort of financial assistance or time resource which you will need to push forward. I think everything that we've managed to push forward with regards to ASC has been because we had that backing. So I think with signing up to the REC, having that backing is really imperative to getting the results that you need (P5, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

For some participants, senior level involvement could make the difference between an action plan that is successfully carried through, and one that is harder to manage:

*It's like herding cats, trying to put an action plan together, and I think you definitely need the weight of senior people. I've certainly noticed that a lot more interest was taken in the action plan and in contributing to the new action plan once the principal had said how important it was to him. Suddenly everyone was very interested. Whereas probably last time around, although the principal was interested, he was less vocal about it. So people didn't, they were happy for me to say they would do an action and then they'd turn around and say, 'We're too busy. We're not going to do that' (P28, White female, Russell Group ASC award holder).*

However, some participants warned against the assumption that senior managers' support for the process necessarily equates to their active participation in the process:

*I was talking to someone at ECU [Equality Challenge Unit] the other day, and they said, 'Well the thing is, ASC is like an umbrella, so it starts at the top with the senior buy-in, and then it kind of goes down like that.' And I went, 'I have to say, my experience was completely the reverse of that, in that it started from the bottom and went up.' And the very last thing was the letter from the vice chancellor based on, you know, endorsing the award. Which I wrote, you know, so it went for approval and it came back completely unchanged, but there is this sense that that's what it is, but that's not what it is. But it usually gets to a point where you have to have at least a nominal buy-in, and whatever that involves, whether it's money or time (P18, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

### **Academic or Human Resources Responsibility?**

For many participating HEIs, the question of which department or institutional role has overall responsibility for the charter marks was complex and fraught. Some participants identified a difference in approach between Human Resources and academics:

*And partly I think that's because ASC has been dominated until relatively recently by HR [Human Resources]. And I'm not an HR expert and I don't think in an HR way. I'm not a corporate person. I would say it's more of a political activist approach that I would take, so I think I would have found it difficult and more about sort of compliance and stuff like that before, if it had been that way. (P18, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder)*

In HEIs where the responsibility had been assigned to Human Resources, there were limitations to what was possible to address from this role or department. This was particularly the case for the REC, which includes student as well as staff issues:

*It's been led through [the Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion] and HR [Human Resources], and it's difficult for him to actually have any influence with the students; it's not his job. That's been one of the hard things. People say we must tackle the attainment gap...he's not an academic, so it's hard for him to intervene in academic matters, so that's one of the difficulties (P10, White male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

In HEIs where there was a history of success in achieving ASC awards and where the process of the REC was beginning to take place, there were further concerns about whether, for the sake of efficiency, a combined approach might be taken. Such a combined approach would give those who had been responsible for leading ASC committees the additional responsibility for working on race and the REC:

*You may be interested in diversity issues, but you're not necessarily interested in all diversity issues, and I'm not qualified to discuss certain protected characteristics just because I'm very passionate about race and gender issues. And I think there is, you may be interested in ASC, but what is your history in addressing and understanding these issues [of race]? (P15, Black female, plate glass, REC member).*

### ***Designated charter mark 'person'***

Many HEIs have taken the approach of having a designated role with direct responsibility for either one or both of the Athena SWAN and Race Equality charter marks. This approach was discussed in several of the interviews and focus groups. Some participants expressed concern that the responsibility for gender or race equality is solely taken by one person with a designated role:

*My concern is that it [the charter mark process] is resource heavy, and I think the solution to that in a lot of institutions is to bring in someone to work on the charters. What's the point in that? You're basically putting someone, creating another role by doing the charter, and that person is then the one who knows all about it and knows all the issues and understands how it works. It's kind of, you're limiting the potential impact because one person is working on it. It's similar to the issue that I have with my role, which is, 'Oh, don't worry about that, she's our EDI [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion] manager so she'll do it. She does all EDI. Don't worry about the charter, just get her to do it.' And then it becomes one person's problem and not the institution's problem (P1, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

For other participants, the concern was that one role would not be sufficient for the multiple facets of the charter mark process:

*If you are at a university that hasn't systematically dealt with race inequality, having someone part time to carry that weight is not enough. And I think you need people who can do the admin parts, and you need people who can do the promotion parts, and they're quite separate roles. You can't expect a person to do all of them. There's not enough time for it, and it requires different characteristics (P14, Asian male, plate glass, REC member).*

#### **4. Workload issues**

The heavy administrative workload of the charter marks was discussed in all of the interviews and focus groups. In particular, participants were concerned about the process itself and whether it could be adapted or changed, the problems of gaining access to the required data in their institution, the weight of the workload falling disproportionately on women and BME staff, whether work on charter marks was recognised in workload models, and the hidden emotional labour involved in working on charter marks.

##### ***The charter mark process***

Reflecting on the workload of the charter mark process, some participants highlighted the volume of data required by the application:

*If I was to be critical in terms of the REC it's the amount of data and information that they look to be included and I think there's a level of data that I'm not sure how helpful it is, and I think it puts a lot of pressure on institutions to gather and it goes down to where you, you're looking at um a particular faculty or department and you're looking at the difference of ethnic groups, then you're looking at UK, non-UK, you're looking at them at different grades, and the amount of work, you know, just for one area, if you multiply that by how many departments or faculties you have is, um, an incredible amount of work, and I'm not sure how helpful it is and how much it can tell you in terms of helping you to sort of move forward (P11, Black male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

For other participants, while the necessity of addressing gender and race equality in universities was clear, there were questions about whether an award was the most useful approach:

*There is a lot of work involved. I, yeah, it's been a bit of a, it has been an eye-opener. It's a really hard – is it worth it? I mean of course in the ideal world, for me, I'd love to be in the position where we didn't have ASC, because we'd just got it right, but at the moment we haven't, which is why it's there. It's really hard to sort of qualify. You know you need, you need something. Does it have to be an award, that's the question (P23, Black male, red brick, ASC award holder).*

### **Access to institutional data**

Given that a key part of the charter mark workload was, as identified above, the volume of data required, this workload was multiplied in institutions that did not have ready access to or systems for recording data on race and gender:

*It sounds really simple, but there are so many different places to get the data from, and within HR as an example we have 20 different systems and none of them talk to each other (P2, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

However, several participants cited their first Athena SWAN application as the impetus for the institution to develop more responsive and transparent data collection systems:

*I did that analysis myself, literally by hand. I just literally went back to the REF<sup>7</sup> site and sort of saw, 'Well, how many people did we submit in each area? What according to our records did we – how many people were employed in that department or area?' And actually trying to work out, of the possible people. So, that's how we had to do it, so it was a bit clunky, frankly, but it was the best we could do. So a lot of our actions coming out of that are actually to do better next time (P19, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

*The biggest problem to begin with was to persuade someone that we needed the data in the right format to be able to do that. That has improved hugely and the systems for that are much better. So for the main data that you need, that is much more manageable now, but at the time just trying to get someone to do that data because they were busy doing admissions data or the KPI [Key Performance*

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<sup>7</sup> The REF is the Research Excellence Framework, which assesses the quality of research in UK universities.

*Indicator] data or whatever, was very challenging (P24, White female, red brick, ASC award holder).*

### ***Overrepresentation of women/BME staff in charter mark work***

As noted in previous research on the impacts and experiences of Athena SWAN (see, for example, Munir *et al.*, 2013; Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017), there are concerns that the workload of the charter is in danger of reproducing the very inequalities the charter seeks to address. We have found this to be equally true in the case of the REC. In one HEI, the concentration of BME staff in Race Equality committee meetings was in stark and noticeable contrast to their daily experience of working in the university:

*I only started in April last year, so I'd noticed it was a very White campus, and I'd noticed that every time I saw one of you two [gestures to the other focus group participants] I'd be like, 'Oh, there must be a race equality meeting, because I never normally see other BME members of staff!' (P15, Black female, plate glass, REC member).*

As noted by another participant, there is an irony to this overrepresentation:

*I just think it's ironic, really, that you have these charter marks in place to improve equality, and then the people who end up doing all the work and really hard graft to get it sorted are those that you want to make the equality for. It's about how we are spreading the load (P3, Asian female, post-1992, REC member).*

For some participants, there were particular concerns that the differing values placed on charter mark work and academic research were detrimental to academics involved in equalities work:

*Our seminar organiser says that she can tell exactly when the ASC deadlines are by the number of women that turn down seminar invitations, which I thought was quite telling. But like with anything, if it's recognised in the correct way, then that's fine, but it's not valued as much as research income or anything like that (P26, White female, red brick, ASC award holder).*

### ***Recognition of charter mark work in institutional workload models***

Different HEIs cited varying practices in terms of whether charter mark work was officially recognised as part of an institutional work load model:

*And there's no protected time for staff to go [to the charter mark committee meetings]. I think that's really important, for the network and the committee as well. So separate from the network, which is about getting support and having somewhere that people can go and talk to each other about what's going on, the committees themselves, the staff that are involved in them, it's really hard to get release from your day duties. So we don't get buy-out, we're doing it within our normal roles (P17, Asian female, plate glass, REC member).*

Some participants highlighted varied practice even within single institutions, with allowances in workload models given or refused on case-by-case bases, depending on the inclination of a line manager:

*We've gone in circles here with workload models here, so they've only just implemented quite a new one and it's literally kind of still being worked out in practice during these last few months really. So when I put mine into my manager, I wasn't given a breakdown of all the things I could ask for, but I literally just put it in and estimated how many hours it actually took. I don't actually know what they actually then put in the thing, but that's, again, that's happening on a goodwill basis (P21, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

### ***Emotional labour***

Although much of the discussions of charter mark workload in interviews and focus groups centred around the practical aspects of an award application, some participants referred to the more hidden emotional labour that goes with conducting work on issues of equality and diversity. This emotional labour is all the more significant given the overrepresentation of women and BME staff doing charter mark work, in that there is a risk of reproducing associations between gender, emotion and care in HEIs (Leathwood and Hey, 2009).

*I remember in the first few months, when I had this label on me, a lot of people were pleased to see me, apparently. I got, I heard a lot of war stories, really. I heard a lot about people's war wounds, quite difficult stories. And I still do get*

*those, it's like people see the opportunity to talk to someone who's, that is their job, kind of thing (P18, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

*It can be emotionally and physically draining dealing with a lot of these things, so I think that's one of the things as a very key observation of dealing with this, is that it's very difficult for me to go and pack my bags and separate myself from this process, and say, 'Right, that's done,' and switch off my computer and off I go. It's not like any other type of work that I've done. And it's emotionally draining, and I don't know whether the university even understands and appreciates that, because I think they just see it like any other thing, as a resource. A resource that is there (P15, Black female, plate glass, REC award holder).*

## **5. The ASC and the REC**

As discussed in the methods section above, although each participating HEI was invited to be part of the study on the basis of their work on either the ASC or the REC, in practice almost all HEIs were in the position to comment on both. ASC award holders were in the process of considering or preparing to work on the REC, and all REC members and award holders held at least an institutional bronze ASC award. In all interviews and focus groups, therefore, there were discussions of both charter marks. These discussions focused on issues ranging from the difficulties of managing both charter marks at once, the idea of competing or conflicting equalities agendas, the possibility that just one equalities charter mark should replace the existing two, and the relationship between the REC and geographical location.

### ***Managing both charter marks at once***

Due to the fact that the ASC award was introduced earlier than the REC, all of the institutions in the study were approaching the REC with the lessons learned from their experiences of the ASC charter mark. Respondents therefore spoke of their awareness of the economic and time resources necessary to making a charter mark application successful:

*There was a group actually in this faculty, that have been kind of actively talking about it [the REC], wanting to kind of start the process, and I think in a not coordinated way, the ASC got in first. And then the REC, that group, which was*



*quite a localized group, realised what a massive job it is, and sort of stepped back, thinking, 'Well we need one of those'. One of me, and we haven't got the money for that at the moment (P18, White female, post-1992, ASC award holder).*

In some cases, the awareness of the work required to make a charter mark application successful resulted in an ambivalence towards beginning the process of focusing on race equality in the institution:

*Well, we haven't sat down yet to talk about the REC, but it's really hard, because you don't want to sound negative, and I do absolutely think we should do it, but I am concerned about resourcing, because it is a lot of work and I don't think anyone realizes quite how much work it is, so that is an issue (P2, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

In some institutions, the reluctance to begin work on another charter mark was framed as a kind of fatigue, with the charter marks seen as something from which institutions needed rest and respite.

*When we said we were going to apply or join the REC, quite rightly there was, there was a kind of intake of breath, and people said, 'Well, let's get ASC out of the way, then have a year off, and then do it,' because people realise there's a lot of work involved. And they just, they were just, 'Oh, do we really want to do this?' We do want to do it, we want to do it for all the right reasons, but people get put off by the workload. You know, the university wants to have the award, and it wants the accolade, and it wants to show itself off as a university that takes equality seriously, and can deliver, but it's the work that goes in that puts people off. And that's the negative side (P23, Black male, red brick, ASC award holder).*

In each of these instances, the work on gender equality required by the ASC framework has not only happened earlier than the work on race equality for the REC, but has left a legacy of reluctance to address other issues of equality in addition to gender.

### *Competing inequalities*

As well as giving institutions beginning the REC process previous experiences of the charter mark workload, ASC was seen by participants as occupying the majority of the resources spent on equalities work in their institutions. This focus on gender equality led to comparisons between the resources given to different marginalised groups:

*But I do wonder, given that the animal sciences institute has taken it [Athena SWAN] so seriously and has improved life for everybody, but it is always talking about ASC. I'm starting to wonder how some of the other marginalised groups feel about this focus (P28, White female, Russell Group, ASC award holder).*

In some institutions, working on the REC had allowed a comparison between gender equality and race equality in terms of the kinds of issues and conversations that were associated with each charter mark, and a further comparison of institutional readiness to confront these different issues:

*I think there is also, it's fair to say, it's an easier conversation, to talk about gender than it is when you trying to have a discussion about race. And for me, some of it is around people saying, "Well, ok, we can see around gender that it may be to do with childcare responsibility, people taking time out and then coming back in and so the lack of sort of time in terms of their progression," and other things, all of those things that they can talk about. When it comes to talking about race, there seems to be, all of a sudden it's a bit like, 'Why is this happening?' And no one wants to or would go there in terms of, people do sort of talk about institutional racism, and, you know, that's a conversation that institutions don't really want to have, so it becomes a bit more difficult (P11, Black male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

For other participants, the dual focus on gender and race meant that other marginalised groups were unseen, or losing out on key resources and input:

*Because we can see that generally, a lot of our protected characteristics are very happy. You know, religion, sexual orientation, they're all ok. But it's our disabled staff who are clearly not happy. And it does grate on me slightly that we're doing all of this stuff for gender and race when actually, things aren't perfect by any*

*means but it's our disabled staff where we have real issues (P2, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

### ***A single equalities charter mark***

In part because of the ways that resources and time were seen to be unequally balanced between different marginalised groups, and in part because of the dual workload of the ASC and the REC, many participants discussed the possibility of a single equalities charter mark that might replace the current gender and race charter marks.

*I think they could be put into one submission, because a lot of the recommendations you make around gender equality actually apply equally to race as well. So yeah, getting data is getting data, but I think it could be put into one submission, an equalities submission, rather than just ASC or REC. You could call it an equalities mark – especially if we're going to go down the lines of intersectionality, you know, we perhaps need to look at our wider equality credentials and just see what else we're doing as well. So I do think, I do think there is definitely scope to look at the whole thing, and to put it into an equalities submission (P23, Black male, red brick, ASC award holder).*

Some participants drew on their experiences in other organisations and other sectors to show how a single equalities framework might be successful.

*I used to work for the British Council, and in the British Council they have one thing, called the Diversity Assessment Framework. It would be useful, I think for ECU [Equality Challenge Unit] to have a look at how that works. It's just diversity, and it is kind of, because they work all over the world and lots of countries are in different positions in terms of equality than others, so the goalposts are quite wide. But that concept, of a Diversity Assessment Framework is something that potentially could be adapted, rather than being about race, and about gender. Perhaps, later on, you might get an LGBT one, disability charter, how many different people are you going to employ to be able to essentially get that tick? (P1, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

However, some respondents also raised concerns about the possibility that, under a single equalities framework, the hard-won focus on race equality of the REC might be lost or diluted:

*The other thing people talk about is, why not put it all together and just have one charter mark? But I'm not really in favour of that. I mean there's pros and cons with these things, but I think what you would find is, you just wouldn't have the focus and I think having that clear focus and being able to have those conversations about that single issue is really important, whereas it would be lost within a wider framework (P10, White male, Russell Group, REC award holder).*

*We want the specialist interest in race, because of the risk of dilution. We don't want to dilute race amongst all the other characteristics (P17, Asian female, plate glass, REC member).*

### ***The REC and geographical location***

In discussions of the REC with respondents in the HEIs which were either just beginning or had not yet begun to engage with the charter mark, the issue of geographical location was often referred to as a barrier or difficulty for their race equality work:

*And when I looked at the results [of initial race equality data analysis], I thought to myself, I know obviously there is a university benchmark, but we've also got to consider where we're positioned, we're not an inner London university, our campuses are not in ethnically diverse places, so there's some relativity to that, I think (P5, White female, post-1992, REC member).*

Respondents saw geographical location as affecting their race equality work in ways that did not impact on gender equality action:

*On different applications the meaning of the REC in different institutions is actually going to be quite different, which probably it has to be, in as much as, you take a city like [this city] and its racial composition is going to be very different to Bradford or wherever, and so the goal is going to be very different. Whereas everywhere has pretty much the same proportions of men and women, so it's a different challenge (P25, White male, red brick, ASC Bronze Award Holder).*

In one HEI, participating in the study as an ASC bronze award holding institution, a previously unsuccessful application for the REC was understood according to the specificity of their geographical location:

*We think there was a lot of lack of understanding from the judging side about the [area of UK] context. There's only one institution in [area] that has got an award, and I've seen one of the other institution's submissions and it was really good. I thought their action plan was really good – it was better than ours, and so I don't know why they didn't get an award. But it was [university] and they're in a tiny, tiny town, and there aren't people of colour there, and so you know if you go there that it is a very White institution. It's difficult to give it the same context as Birmingham or London or Bristol. And we felt that that was something that the judges weren't understanding (P28, White female, Russell Group, ASC Bronze Award Holder).*

## **Conclusions**

Across our sample, it was clear that both the Athena SWAN and Race Equality charter marks offer an important framework for equalities work in UK universities. Respondents saw the charter marks as having enabled difficult conversations to take place, providing justification for the importance of undertaking work to address gender and racial inequalities in their institutions. In particular, the connection between the Athena SWAN award and medical research funding was seen as having made gender equality a priority. The result of this was that good practice for gender equality had become a standard item on meeting agendas and appointment panels, and data systems had improved so that metrics on gender in recruitment, promotion and retention were accessible and up to date. Department and School-level Athena SWAN awards were also identified as prompting localised as well as institution-wide changes to practice. Without the weight of a connection to research council funding or an established process of moving from institution-wide to department-level awards, the REC was nevertheless seen as a vital tool for negotiating the discomfort around discussing issues of race in the workplace, with the gathering of triangulated data providing an evidence base from which to work.

However, discussions of both charter marks highlighted the slow nature of the kinds of cultural change that might see a more diverse professoriate, and a decolonised curriculum across all disciplines. The equalities work enabled by the charter marks therefore needs to be sustained and sustainable, and the project identified some significant barriers to long-term change. Institutional processes, and in particular chains of command in relation to equality,

diversity and inclusion work were often unclear, with many HEIs reporting a difficulty in determining which department or role had ultimate responsibility for steering the charter mark work. This finding, along with that of the importance of gaining support from senior and middle management level, suggests that a coherent, top-down strategy for equalities work is fundamental to identifying and implementing the key actions required by the charter mark process. It is also key to making the process robust enough to negotiate the personnel changes and institutional reorganisation that is typical of life in contemporary UK HEIs.

Our findings suggest that the most significant barrier to creating lasting change from charter marks is in resourcing and workload. The significant workload of the charter mark processes was often reinforced by a lack of recognition both within institutions and across the university sector, and a pervading acknowledgement that equalities work is not valued as highly as research funding or publications. The charter marks were perceived most negatively where they disproportionately impacted upon the careers of women and BME staff, and where they required work far above and beyond what was recognised or rewarded by the institution. There is therefore a requirement that institutions continue to invest in equalities work, and improve recognition of this work in workload models and in promotions and appointment criteria.

Most worryingly, a common perception of the REC was as an additional, often impossible, equalities workload, largely due to experiences of working on the ASC. As a consequence of this perception, HEIs responded by considering economising strategies such as combining roles focusing on race and gender, or arguing that the REC was less necessary in a particular institutional context. Given the potential, noted above, for the charter marks to enable difficult and necessary conversations on separate issues of gender and race equalities in universities, and given the particular discomfort of discussions of race and racism, we would see these economising strategies as a backwards step. Rather than approaching the REC with a logic of economising and efficiency, we would suggest that the REC requires significant investment of resources and time at institution-wide and localised levels, as has been shown to be effective in relation to the ASC.

## **Recommendations**

### **Clear and coherent data collection mechanisms**

A consistent finding across the study was the difficulty participants had experienced in obtaining the data sets required for charter mark applications. In many cases, the application process had precipitated changes to the ways that the HEI collected and stored data related to equality, diversity and inclusion. In the cases where such changes have not been made, we recommend that all HEIs develop coherent and transparent data collection and representation processes.

### **Senior management investment**

In order for award applications to be taken seriously across the institution, a clear investment and support was needed at senior management level. We suggest this includes a senior manager leading and chairing the self-assessment team to demonstrate the HEI's commitment to the charter mark. A clear, ring-fenced financial and workload allocation would also ensure that senior and middle-level managers demonstrate and sustain their commitment to the charter marks.

### **Charter marks as a catalyst for wider institutional change**

All of the respondents emphasised that applying for and gaining the charter marks should be linked to wider institutional and cultural change, rather than being seen as a simple 'tick box' exercise. The charter marks should lead to significant changes in practice and outcomes in relation to the experiences of women and BME staff evidenced in strategic policy making in individual departments and across the whole institution.

### **Sharing good practice across the higher education sector**

In order for HEIs to develop and improve their practices, we recommend mechanisms to ensure a sharing of good practice across the sector. The HEIs that participated in our research demonstrated clear examples of good practice in relation to gender and race, if these were shared across the sector this would result in shared knowledge and learning across the sector – to determine what works and what does not.

**Uniformity between ASC and REC charter marks**

From our findings, we suggest similar processes for both charter marks to enable uniformity of practice. Each charter mark should be available for individual departments and faculties and each should be tied to research funding. If HEIs are serious about advancing gender and racial equality, tying the charter marks to funding would demonstrate their commitment to this.



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**Appendix 1: Participating institutions and individuals**

Participant	Race/Gender	Role	Institution
1	White female	EDI manager	REC member post-92
2	White female	HR manager	
3	Asian female	Deputy Dean	
4	White female	HR consultant	
5	White female	HR ASC co-ordinator	
6	Black male	Deputy HoD	
7	Black female	Student Union Officer	
8	White female	Student Union VP	
9	Black male	EDI Manager	REC award holder Russell Group
10	White male	VP Social Responsibility	
11	Black male	EDI Manager	
12	Asian male	EDI Data Analyst	
13	Asian female	Student Union Diversity Officer	
14	Asian male	PGT SAT Chair	REC member plate glass
15	Black female	Technology officer	
16	Asian female	Research associate	
17	Asian female	Lecturer	
18	White female	ASC Research Fellow	ASC award holder post-92
19	White female	Associate Dean	
20	White female	Lecturer	
21	Asian female	Research assistant	
22	Asian male	Lecturer	
23	Black male	EDI manager	ASC award holder, red brick
24	White female	Professor	
25	White male	Lecturer	
26	White female	Lecturer	
27	White female	Administrator	
28	White female	EDI manager	ASC award holder, RG
29	White female	Head of directorate/equality lead	ASC award holder

## **Appendix 2: Ethics Documents**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR ASC RESPONDENTS**

***Study Title: Advancing Equality in Higher Education: an exploratory study of the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters***

Researchers: **Professor Kalwant Bhopal and Holly Henderson**

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form before undertaking an interview.**

#### **What is the research about?**

*This study is about exploring your views on the Athena SWAN Charter. It is particularly interested in examining aspects of good practice in higher education institutions. It will use interviews and focus group to explore what can be learnt in relation to policy making regarding gender in higher education, as well as contribute to inclusive policy making in this area.*

#### **Why am I being asked to take part?**

*We have approached you because you are part of the Diversity and Equality team/self-assessment team and your institution either applied for the Athena SWAN Charter or is intending to apply in the next 3 years. Your participation is entirely voluntary.*

#### **What will I have to do if I take part?**

*We would like you to take part in a short interview or focus group about your experiences of the Athena SWAN Charter. The interview and focus group will be digitally recorded and the data transcribed by the researcher who will be conducting the interview or focus group. Only the principal researcher and research assistant will have access to the data and the data will be used (with your consent) for future publications from the study.*

#### **Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

*By taking part you will become more aware of your perspectives on the Athena SWAN Charter. Collectively, all information gathered will be of benefit to universities as the information will help to provide a better understanding of how universities tackle issues of diversity and equality.*

#### **Are there any risks involved?**

*In taking part there is no risk greater than those risks faced in everyday life. As only a small number of universities are taking part in this study, it may be possible your university could be identified, however we will endeavour to ensure we anonymise your university.*

**Will my participation be confidential?**

*We comply with the Data Protection Act and our own University policy on data management and storage. All information will remain confidential as no participant names will be attached to it. All data will be stored on a password protected computer only accessible to the researchers. Your details will not be shared with any third parties.*

**What happens if I change my mind?**

*You have the right to withdraw at any time up to one month after you have participated without your legal rights being affected. There is no penalty for withdrawing and there will be no ill feeling. You may email the research team if you decide to withdraw.*

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

*In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you should contact the chair of our ethics committee.*

**Where can I get more information?**

*If you would like to ask any questions about this research please get in touch with the principal investigator of the study:*

Professor Kalwant Bhopal  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
B15 2TT  
[K.Bhopal@bham.ac.uk](mailto:K.Bhopal@bham.ac.uk)

*Alternatively, you can contact the Research Assistant for the study:*

Holly Henderson  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
B15 2TT  
[hch582@bham.ac.uk](mailto:hch582@bham.ac.uk)

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR REC RESPONDENTS**

**Study Title: Advancing Equality in Higher Education: an exploratory study of the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters**

Researchers: **Professor Kalwant Bhopal and Holly Henderson**

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form before undertaking an interview.**

### **What is the research about?**

*This study is about exploring your views on the Race Equality Charter. It is particularly interested in examining aspects of good practice in higher education institutions. It will use interviews and focus groups to explore what can be learnt in relation to policy making regarding race in higher education, as well as contribute to inclusive policy making in this area.*

### **Why am I being asked to take part?**

*We have approached you because you are part of the Diversity and Equality team/self-assessment team and your institution either applied for the Race Equality Charter or is intending to apply in the next 3 years. Your participation is entirely voluntary.*

### **What will I have to do if I take part?**

*We would like you to take part in an interview or short focus group about your experiences of the Race Equality Charter. The interview/focus group will be digitally recorded and the data transcribed by the researcher who will be conducting the focus group. Only the principal researcher and research assistant will have access to the data and the data will be used (with your consent) for future publications from the study.*

### **Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

*By taking part you will become more aware of your perspectives on the Race Equality Charter. Collectively, all information gathered will be of benefit to universities as the information will help to provide a better understanding of how universities tackle issues of diversity and equality.*

### **Are there any risks involved?**

*In taking part there is no risk greater than those risks faced in everyday life. As only a small number of universities are taking part in this study, it may be possible your university could be identified, however we will endeavour to ensure we anonymise your university.*

### **Will my participation be confidential?**

*We comply with the Data Protection Act and our own University policy on data management and storage. All information will remain confidential as no participant names will be attached to it. All data will be stored on a password protected computer only accessible to the researchers. Your details will not be shared with any third parties.*

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Professor Kalwant Bhopal  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
B15 2TT

[K.Bhopal@bham.ac.uk](mailto:K.Bhopal@bham.ac.uk)

*Alternatively, you can contact the Research Assistant for the study:*

Holly Henderson  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
B15 2TT  
hch582@bham.ac.uk



## CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION

Study title: **Advancing Equality in Higher Education: an exploratory study of the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters**

Name of Researchers: **Professor Kalwant Bhopal and Holly Henderson**

*Please sign next to each box to indicate that you have read and understood the statement*

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected. Should I wish to withdraw from the interview and/or survey I can do so within one month of taking part.	
3.	I agree to take part in the above study.	
4.	I agree to my voice being digitally recorded and understand this sound file will be deleted after transcription.	

### Data Protection Act

I understand that data collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on computer, and that any files containing information about me will be made anonymous.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Date                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher                      Date                      Signature

### CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Study title: **Advancing Equality in Higher Education: an exploratory study of the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters**

Name of Researchers: **Professor Kalwant Bhopal and Holly Henderson**

*Please sign next to each box to indicate that you have read and understood the statement*

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected. Should I wish to withdraw from the interview and/or survey I can do so within one month of taking part.	
3.	I agree to take part in the above study.	
4.	I agree to my voice being digitally recorded and understand this sound file will be deleted after transcription.	

#### **Data Protection Act**

I understand that data collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on computer, and that any files containing information about me will be made anonymous.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

