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The Race Equality Charter in UK Universities: A framework for change? (0257)

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Whilst there have been some significant advances in gender equality, women still remain under-represented in universities' senior decision-making roles (ECU, 2017). This is also the case for BME groups (Bhopal, Brown and Jackson, 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 advance gender equality (Caffrey *et al.*, 2016; Gregory-Smith, 2017; Ovseiko *et al.*, 2017; Robertson *et al.*, 2017). Such schemes can provide organizational change and serve as a framework for advancing gender equality activities, particularly in relation to the sharing of good practice. As yet, there is very little research on whether race equality schemes are similarly effective, and on how institutions manage and resource demands for both gender and racial equality measures. This paper reports findings from two related projects, the first focused entirely on institutional experiences and understandings of the REC award, and the second, building on the findings of the first, looking at both the REC and the ASC awards. Both projects have explored the ways that institutions and institutional practices have changed in response to the charter mark policy, as well as the ways that the award application processes have been experienced by those involved. For the purposes of this paper, the presentation of findings will focus on the REC award specifically. This focus is as a response to the dearth of current literature on the impact of race equality schemes in universities. We therefore look at the REC both as an example of charter mark policy in the UK, and as an example of race equality policy in relation to the ASC award's focus on gender.

In both studies, institutions were selected for participation by a process of purposive sampling based on university type, so that red brick, Russell Group, post-1992 and Million Plus institutions were represented. Due to the small number of institutions currently awarded a Bronze REC award, both studies also included 'member' universities working towards the award. All participating institutions for the ASC element of the second study had achieved a Bronze ASC award. In total, thirty institutions were involved across the two studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Diversity and Equality Officers and the chair of the charter mark self-assessment team at each participating institution. The interviews addressed: the process of applying for the charter marks; what impact the charter marks has had on equality practices; aspects of good practice before and as a result of the charter mark; and the challenges experienced either in applying for the charter mark or in putting the resulting changes into practice. In the second study, this data was supplemented by a total of eight focus groups, each of 3-6 members of the charter mark self-assessment team in participating universities. The focus groups sought to account for the range of experiences of the charter mark application processes, and the collective and collaborative nature of the process. The focus groups covered: the process of applying for the award; perceived benefits and costs of the process; and the perceived importance of equity programmes in universities. These findings are based on the interview data from both studies, and the focus group data from the second study.

Interview and focus group data has been analysed using a process of constant comparative analysis to generate and refine key themes (Roulston, 2001). If thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data [that] ... minimally organises and describes the data set in (rich) detail' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 7) then, as Boyatzis (1998) has argued, it can enable the researcher to interpret the meanings and various aspects of the data, in relation to the research questions. The analysis focuses on the respondents' experiences to analyse the meanings they attribute to these experiences.

When looking at the REC award as an example of the charter mark policy, our findings suggest that the charter mark policy has the potential to provide a framework for challenging longstanding exclusionary institutional practice, but that there are significant challenges associated with the charter mark policy in practice, particularly in terms of the demands made upon monetary resource and staff time. We have found examples of highly successful changes made as a result of institutions' applications for charter mark awards. Often, however, the institutional changes required by charter mark awards depend upon the perseverance of an individual or small set of individuals, and are therefore fragile and vulnerable to shifts in institutional personnel and policy at a local level.

When the REC award is seen in relation to the ASC award, we find that institutions that have been successful in achieving an REC award often have previous success with achieving ASC awards, but that some institutions with a record of success with ASC awards are reluctant to take on the additional work of the REC award application. For some institutions, making changes to gendered institutional culture and practices has led to wider thinking and challenging around intersecting issues of equality and diversity, including race and ethnicity. In these institutional contexts, the REC is seen as an important progression from their ASC success. On the other hand, the experience of applying for an ASC award can mean that some institutions are less keen to add further charter mark applications to this considerable workload. The risk in both possible responses is that race and ethnicity are secondary to gender in institutional equality priorities. In the second response, race and ethnicity equality risks being dismissed altogether as an institutional concern.

The paper concludes by outlining the policy implications from these two studies, giving examples of best practice as well as a discussion of measures through which the REC might be more widely and more effectively taken up across the UK university sector.

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