

Conversations...

Title

Conversations about race, racism and anti-racism
(Oxford Brookes University)

An Initiative proposed by 'Anti-Racism Action Group'

A year-long programme of 14 webinars on different themes related to race, racism and anti-racism. For 2020/21 our aim is to test out this programme of conversations and see what enables engagement and what overcomes individual and organisational resistances; the aim is to create a sense of increased confidence to engage in conversations about race and racism at Oxford Brookes University.

Vision

We want to address the many ways in which structural racism in our society can be discussed and ideally overcome within our programmes of learning, teaching, and working together at OBU. The main aim of this series of conversations is to offer an anti-racist pedagogy which brings together everyone from OBU interested in critically assessing the historical evolution of race and racism, but perhaps more importantly looking at the impact of racism on our lives, work and teaching, and about how we can overcome it. There will also be an opportunity to consider what racism means in everyday interactions, both within and outside the University, and in sites such as the workplace, places of worship or public sites. With the broad focus on social justice and anti-racism we feel this programme of conversations supports OBU's work towards embedding Active Citizenship into learning, and our broader race equality agenda.

This programme is not about teaching the topics of race and racism, in the established university format of a lecture and seminar! It is about inter-personal engagement with race, racism and anti-racism! The didactic nature of our conversations do not derive from teaching others but from bringing others in, and from allowing ourselves to be seen as living individuals, with different experiences. These conversations about race, racism and anti-racism emerge from our desire to overcome academic boundaries and often sterile intellectual conversations about how to overcome racism in HE. By so doing, we also hope to encourage institutional innovations necessary to make a real difference in the lives of all those harmed by racism in its various manifestations.

We feel that this series of *Conversations...* is an important step towards restructuring the production of knowledge across the university as it will be the first time when an open conversation about race, racism, anti-racism will take place within an integrative, non-academic but pedagogical format that could foster equitable and learning environments for all of us. These conversations bring together BAME and non-BAME^{1*} members of our university, hoping to create a synergy and new modes of intellectual engagement that promote anti-racist thinking and de-privilege historical ideas of European/Western superiority.

^{1*} We recognise that use of the term 'BAME' is contested, inadequate and problematic. Other terminologies will also be used by the speakers according to their own identification and experience.

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University-wide participation

Members of staff, students and administration are free to take as many of the units/conversations as they wanted, over the course of the year. Through doing so, it is hoped that we can create a conversation that involves the whole university community. We want to take a dialogue approach in order to breakdown 'them and us' oppositions and help to foster a better understanding of how different people approach the issues of race, racism and anti-racism. Our aim is to jointly produce knowledge whilst along the way explore and address the discomfort and difficulties which often accompany discussions about race in higher education in order to productively move beyond them.

Audience

VCG and Senior Staff
Academic Staff - including Associate Lecturers
Professional Services Staff (including Casual Staff)
Undergraduate students
Postgraduate students

Guidelines for participation

To safeguard participants on the course, our ground rules will provide a framework for the community we work with to ensure open, respectful dialogue and maximum participation. The following ground rules will be implemented:

1. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
2. Respectfully challenge one another by asking questions, but personal attacks are not acceptable. We encourage participants to focus on ideas and criticise them, not the person presenting them.
3. Instead of invalidating somebody else's story with one's own interpretation of their experience, share your own story and experience. The conversation aims to build dialogue and discussion not consensus.
4. Remember that the goal is primarily to gain a deeper understanding rather than prove you are right. Be respectful of other people's views while assertive in your beliefs.
5. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses - they can be as disrespectful as words.
6. Be sensitive in your use of language and terminology pertaining to race, gender, sexuality, age and dis/ability.

Delivery

Delivery via Zoom platform. Participants will need to register for each session and will have the opportunity to add a note on their interest, specific questions, and hopes for what the session will cover.

The talk will be recorded and will be available online once this is completed.

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Incorporation into existing initiatives/processes at Brookes

- To become a recognised part of the **EXPLORE programme** for Academic Staff Development.
- To contribute to the institutional learning and development projects being catalysed via OCSLD under the 'Teaching and Learning Community' umbrella (<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/ocslld/teaching-and-learning/brookes-teaching-and-learning-community/>)
- Advertise via OCSLD's upcoming series of online learning linked to the **Brookes Guiding Principles - 'Principles into Practice.'**

Duration (The 'pilot' programme for 2020-21)

Semester 1 & 2 Study Plan

Start date October 2020

Time: In order to allow as wider participation as possible we can offer the webinar during the lunch or in the evening, allowing those with care and family responsibilities to engage in the synchronous participation

Each semester will have 7 webinars each.

Components

Typically, each webinar will form part of a short standalone unit, each one taught through two main components:

1. Asynchronous component: 1) a talk for max 20 –25 minutes with an accompanying set reading, alongside access to resources for general reference (e.g. podcasts, reading lists)
2. Synchronous component: Q & A for max 30 minutes with those taking part/listening to that particular talk

The asynchronous parts of the course (set reading and resources) would allow those interested in the subject of the talk to prepare for the discussions that take place in the live Q & A led by the speaker.

Speakers:

We have a number of OBU speakers from different faculties/directorates and across the university (see the list below) who have registered their interest in designing and delivering different talks.

Semester 1

Graham van Wyk: anti-racist university (week 5)

Tamsin Barber, Doerthe Rosenow, Ingrid Medby and Stuart Whigham: white privilege (week 6)

Mariama Sheriff: microaggression (week 7)

Fonbeyin Henry Abanda: racialisation of COVID-19 Pandemic (week 8)

Shemil Mathew: faith and religion (week 9)

Yue Ang: law and people of colour (week 10)

Marius Turda: anti-racist teaching (week 11)

Conversations...

Semester 2

Cato Marks: colourism

Sola Adesola: challenging discrimination

Lydia Igweh: mental health

Nabeela Talib: immigration and citizenship

Pauline Brandt: the media

Joe Tah: senior management

Measuring feedback and evaluation:

- a. Engagement levels with the audiences (ensure we can track participants to monitor take up by staff groups)
- b. Feedback on initial satisfaction: Satisfaction feedback - recognising that 'discomfort' may be the necessary 'satisfaction' and 'outreach'!
- c. How effective is the programme in equipping participants to:
 - i) feel confident to engage in further conversations, ii) take meaningful action in their work/study, iii) be encouraged to further their own learning,

Measuring Long-term planning

If run successfully, this programme:

- a) becomes part of the mainstream Staff Development/CPD - for both Academic and Professional Services Staff
- b) becomes a University-wide Student module

Key stakeholders

Sponsor

Professor Anne-Marie Kilday - PVC Student and Staff Experience

VCG supporters/stakeholders

Dr Astrid Schloerscheidt - PVC Access and Participation

Ruth Davies - Director of Human Resources

Development and strategic engagement

Heads of Departments

EDI Champions in each Faculty and Directorate

BAME Staff Network

LGBTQ+ Staff Forum

Staff Disability Network