UCU Week of Action Against Workplace Racism 2023

The theme of this year's UCU Week of Action Against Workplace Racism is,

Enough is Enough: Time for Action

This year's Week of Action Against Workplace Racism takes place against the backdrop of unprecedented industrial action across the higher education sector. To take part in this year's Week of Action (3rd/4th week of February) please assist your nearest branch engaged in strike action by taking part in a Week of Action Against Workplace Racism 'teach out'. A list of the branches on strike and where the picket line is taking place can be found here:
https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12788/University-strikes-ON-this-week-union-confirms

If your branch is on strike you may want to consider hosting a Week of Action Against Workplace Racism 'teach out'. If you're in a sector not affected by the current round of industrial action, please contact your nearest strike branch and discuss ways in which you may be able help them deliver an anti-racism session on the picket line.

Resources to help you organise a session on anti-racism can be found below. The material produced this year include prompts from last year's UCU Black Members' Conference on the Ethnicity Pay Gap, EDI's and educational institutions and Mental Health and Black Workers. Some background material and supplementary questions are set out below to assist picket line discussions. Scroll further down the Week of Action Against Workplace Racism page to find a range of resources from guidance on setting up a Community Accountability programme to 'witness' films which are ideal for a lunchtime classroom-based meeting.

The Ethnicity Pay Gap and Cost of living Crisis

Background:

HESA statistics show that out of 22,835 professors, 164 are black
The Ethnicity Pay Gap – mean is 29% median 34% less
Cost of living crisis adversely affects black members on lower incomes.
Cost of living is in double digits for the first time in 40 years and energy cost have gone up by 150%.
The impacts of Covid 19 as well result in homelessness and food banks.
The cost-of-living crisis widens the ethnicity pay gap
Casualised contracts and lower contracts tend to have a higher percentage of black staff.

Challenges:

➢ What strategies should the branch adopt to mitigate these factors listed above?
➢ What strategies are needed to mitigate these in recruitment and progression?
➢ Does your institution have ethnicity pay gap reporting, inclusive recruitment policies and panel diversity as standard with anti-racism training?
➢ What can the branch do to make sure these things are in place and properly monitored?

EDI and Black Workers experiences

Background:

EDI policies are often instituted from the top down and see students as consumers.
An example of an institution using an image for diversity purposes and then the person was made redundant. Black staff organised and 'managed' and asked to endorse Prevent and not to engage in solidarity with eg Palestine. Those who object to those 'managing' Black History Month and endorsing colonialism are regarded as troublemakers.
These are distracting, confusing, and isolating. Confusing as the intentions are supposed to be good. Members must be aware of the dangers of the divide and rule tactic and to understand when institutions merely pay lip service as people still face discrimination behind the corporate facade. This emphasises the importance of collective action and a radical challenge.

Challenges:

> ➢ Does your institution deliver initiatives around Black History Month or Black Lives Matter or display its Equality and Diversity credentials? Is this done in conjunction with the branch and/or black staff?
> ➢ Does any of the above improve the working conditions for staff, particularly black staff?
> ➢ How can the branch challenge the employer to show improvement and address its shortcomings?
> ➢ What types of community groups and organisations does the employer engage with?
> ➢ Can the branch develop its own links with community groups and organisations?

Mental Health and Race

Background:

Evidence shows that workers have a disparity in mental health support due to the trauma of tackling racism and are subject to stereotypical judgements by health care professionals.
Experiences shared on the nature of some job interviews include the idea of why she/he 'did not fit'. This affects physical and mental health.
Statistics, eg black people are 4 times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act. South Asian women are more at risk from suicide, older black men are more likely to be sectioned.
In tribunal cases the panel is more likely to be white; there is a need for more representation in the court system as well as the health care system.
Experiencing racism increases the likelihood of mental health problems.
Systemic and structural racism needs to be addressed. Barriers to accessing mental health services include not being listened to.
Another contributory factor to adverse mental health outcomes is the issue of white people not as qualified as black people being promoted.

Challenges:

> ➢ Does the employer ensure staff recruitment practices are fully 'equality proofed'? How is the branch involved in this process?
> ➢ What is so problematic about someone being described as 'not a good fit' when it comes to either employment or promotion?

➢ Does the branch have a role to play in securing adequate and appropriate mental health support for members?