



BLACK PRISON EDUCATORS

CHARTER FOR PROFESSIONAL RESPECT

Black prison educators¹ carry out their life-changing work in some of the toughest working conditions in the tertiary education sector. Not only are they faced with unsafe physical conditions, from the dilapidation of the prison estate to the risk of verbal abuse and violence, they must also counter racism regularly in these institutions – against themselves as educators in a system where few Black people are in management positions, as well as against their Black students, who are disproportionately incarcerated.

PROFESSIONAL RESPECT

The professionalism of our members is under attack within further education as a whole, as well as specifically in the prison education sector. We have seen an erosion of pay and conditions which has resulted in a workforce that is overburdened and stressed, and an increase in management intrusion into our professional practice.

These issues are compounded by pervasive racism that exists across society and in the workplace, meaning that Black prison educators face additional

challenges to their professionalism. Members in prison education have told us that Black staff face daily discrimination, higher expectations and higher scrutiny, as well as having less access to promotional opportunities and leadership positions.

Black prison educators deserve to be treated with respect and have their professionalism taken seriously. In addition to the material impacts on pay and promotion as a result of the racial 'glass ceiling', there is a huge mental and emotional toll caused by everyday discrimination.

¹UCU use the term 'Black' in the political sense to refer to people who are descended through one or both parents from Africa, The Caribbean, Asia, (the Middle East to China) and Latin America. It refers to those from a visible minority who have a shared experience of oppression.



RACISM AS A WORKPLACE HAZARD IN PRISON EDUCATION

Prisons are a uniquely challenging environment when it comes to health and safety. While racism and discrimination can be experienced in any workplace, it is likely to be amplified in the prison environment.

The impact of racism on Black staff in prisons has not received much attention but it is clear that being exposed to such violent effects of racism will take a toll. Our members have described how they try to support and protect their students from racism, at the same time as experiencing it themselves, or witnessing the denial of it by their white colleagues. HMIP's thematic review on the experiences of Black prisoners and prison staff uncovered a 'gulf' between the experiences of Black staff and white staff, who often did not accept or recognise the findings of institutional racism.

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

Black people are disproportionately represented in the prison system. Research shows that racism, societal perceptions, the stereotyping of Black people, racial profiling and targeting racialised communities all play a part. A decolonised curriculum seeks to address the historical legacies by re-examining 'taught truths' where the contributions made by Black people are at best neglected and at worse omitted.

As Black educators we also recognise that Black people are failed by both the British education and justice systems – with higher exclusion rates in schools and higher conviction rates in the courts. As such we see our responsibility to counteract this through addressing the curriculum. And by delivering equitable learning that recognises and celebrates the contributions made by Black people and communities, decolonising learning is integral to building self-esteem, and empowering prisoners to look beyond the prison system.

CALL TO ACTION

The Black Prison Educators Charter seeks to shine a light on the experiences of Black prison educators and address two urgent themes: professional respect, and racism as a workplace hazard.

UCU calls on:

- **The MoJ and HMPPS to commit to tackling the pernicious racism** and under-representation of Black staff in senior roles in line with MoJ Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2.
- **HMPPS to develop tools to tackle racism** as a workplace hazard in line with HSE legislation
- **HMPPS's Race Action Programme and Race Disparity Unit to work with UCU to improve outcomes** by utilising data and feedback from staff to focus on areas of disproportionate outcomes; and to ensure discrimination is tackled.