Equality Challenge Unit

Race equality charter mark:
Improving the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students

Application handbook: Awards trial 2014/15

Contents

Introduction

This handbook provides an overview of the process for submitting an application to ECU's race equality charter mark, and provides guidance for institutions on completing the application form.

Race equality charter mark trial application form
www.ecu.ac.uk/our-projects/race-equality-charter-mark-trial

Only official trial participants will be eligible to submit an award in spring/summer 2015.

The guidance is relevant to the charter mark trial, which is taking place until spring/summer 2015. Please note that the content is subject to change following feedback from the trial participants, and guidance and forms will be updated for the launch of the charter mark.

However, the handbook provides a good outline of future requirements for institutions who wish to prepare for early submission following the launch of the full charter mark.

Guiding principles

The charter mark process is based on five key principles. In applying to be part of the charter mark trial, institutions are committing to adopting these principles within their policies, practices, action plans and culture:

1   Racial inequalities are a significant issue within higher education. Racial inequalities are not necessarily overt, isolated incidents. Racism is an everyday facet of UK society and racial inequalities manifest themselves in everyday situations, processes and behaviours.

    The purpose of this principle is not to suggest that overt racism does not still exist, as it evidently does. However, overt racism can sometimes distract from tackling more covert racial inequalities that can be more difficult to identify and address. Subtle differences in actions, decisions and behaviours can build into significant differences in outcome and experience for minority ethnic staff and students. It is these subtle micro-inequalities that need to be addressed, in addition to the overt, macro inequalities.

2   UK higher education cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of the whole population and until individuals from all ethnic backgrounds can benefit equally from the opportunities it affords.

    While some progress has been made in race equality in higher education, it has been limited and slow. The UK population is becoming increasingly diverse and unless action is taken now to expedite progress, the pool of individuals who benefit from higher education, and from whom higher education can benefit, will become steadily smaller.

3 In developing solutions to racial inequalities, it is important that they are aimed at achieving long-term institutional culture change, avoiding a deficit model where solutions are aimed at changing the individual.

A 'deficit' approach refers to actions that focus on changing or adapting minority ethnic individuals to fit in with existing structures, processes and cultures, rather than interrogating the issues within those structures, processes and cultures.

That is not to say that targeted development programmes such as mentoring are not useful, but they should be developed and framed carefully and thoughtfully with involvement from minority ethnic staff and students. The focus might be on supporting individuals in overcoming the barriers that are in their way and/or building and maintaining resilience while change is implemented, rather than solely how they can change to fit-in.

4 Black and minority ethnic staff and students are not a homogenous group. People from different ethnic backgrounds have different experiences and outcomes of higher education, and that complexity needs to be considered in analysing data and considering actions.

In analysing data, care needs to be taken to ensure that ethnicity is properly understood by those undertaking the analyses and that the methods of aggregating data avoid misleading any explorations and misdirecting well-intentioned actions. The experiences and outcomes of different minority ethnic groups vary significantly, and actions may need to vary accordingly.

5 All individuals have multiple identities, and the intersection of those identities should be considered wherever possible.

Race intersects with other identities in a multitude of ways, and institutions should be mindful of this in exploring issues and developing solutions. For example, the experiences of, and outcomes within, higher education will be very different for a Black woman compared to a Black man. In addition to gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age will all impact on an individual's experiences and outcomes. While everything within the race charter mark application should be considered through the primary lens of race and ethnicity, their interaction with other identities cannot be ignored.

Committing to apply to the charter mark

Deciding to apply for the charter mark award is a significant commitment and one that should be taken with the involvement of:

= minority ethnic staff and students

= relevant staff and student networks

= senior management

= equality and diversity and human resources teams

= heads of departments/heads of faculty

There are implications for signing up to the charter mark in addition to the work involved in preparing the charter mark application. These are outlined below.

Commitment from senior management

Race equality is a difficult issue to discuss and manage. It cannot be tackled in isolation, and requires commitment from the whole institution. Tackling racial inequalities also requires a sustained commitment; actions need time to be implemented and resourcing needs to be reliably maintained over a long period of time. While it will be possible to see short-term improvements, systemic culture change takes time and tenacity to achieve.

Senior managers, including governing bodies, need to take responsibility for advancing race equality and demonstrate and promote commitment by example. To encourage and persuade busy staff and students to take ownership of actions and commit to the race equality agenda (which can lead to uncomfortable conversations and self-reflection), they need to perceive it as high priority and at the centre of the university agenda.

Involvement from departments

Unlike ECU's other charter marks (Athena SWAN and the gender equality charter mark), the race charter does not include departmental applications in addition to the institutional awards. Instead, heads of department will need to take responsibility for race equality in their area in order for institutional submissions to be successful.

The data requested throughout the application is required for individual departments, and many of the actions, or at least the implementation of actions, will need to be department-specific.

Institutions should consider how this will work within existing structures before applying, and ensure that individual departments are aware of the charter mark, and the implications for them. While an initial bronze award will be possible without individual departments having already undertaken actions, a bronze renewal and a silver award will not be possible without solid evidence of local accountability and progress (see the section below on award levels for more information).

Publication of successful applications

One of the requirements of the charter mark is that successful applicants must publish their submission once they have been awarded the charter mark.

By publishing your submission, staff and students at your institution can understand the programme of work being undertaken, and get involved wherever relevant. It also allows prospective staff and students to understand the institution's commitment to advancing race equality, which may impact on their decision to apply.

Levels of award

All of ECU's charter marks are designed to offer incremental recognition of improvement with three levels of award: bronze, silver and gold.

Your institution can choose which level it wishes to apply at. The application form and process is the same for all levels, but the requirements are different. Institutions are required to reapply for the charter mark every three years with additional renewal requirements.

Bronze

A bronze award recognises that the university has a solid foundation for eliminating racial inequalities and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff.

A bronze award is focused on commitment and intent to act. Applications should be candid about any issues identified and ambitious in how they plan to address them. Institutions should acknowledge the scale of what needs to be accomplished. Actions should be measurable, time-bound and realistic, but at the same time reflecting the ambition and desire of the institution to change over the next three years.

Bronze institutions are characterised by:

= their acknowledgment that the institution needs to eliminate racial inequalities, through embedding actions across the whole institution

= having senior and middle management commitment to advancing race equality demonstrated through their involvement with this work and the allocation of adequate resources

= having commitment from heads of department as demonstrated through their involvement, ownership of actions and allocation of local resources

Bronze institutions will need to have:

= established a self-assessment team, chaired by a senior leader within the institution

= conducted a survey of minority ethnic staff and students to gain an insight into the culture of the institution

= interrogated qualitative and quantitative data on the experiences and outcomes for minority ethnic staff and students

= consulted with minority ethnic staff and students on existing issues and the development of actions and initiatives

= created a comprehensive, evidence-based action plan, with specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) actions. Actions should be owned by people who have adequate influence and seniority to complete them, and should be embedded within the work objectives of those individuals so that they are personally accountable for progress.

Bronze renewal

In addition to the requirements of a bronze award, for a renewal institutions will need to demonstrate progress against their previous action plan. Bronze renewals demonstrate ongoing commitment to tackling racial inequalities, and can provide evidence of actions having been completed, but the institution is not yet ready for a silver award.

Institutions applying for a bronze renewal will have to provide further evidence of departmental involvement and increased local accountability since the last application. This might be evidenced, for example, through an increase in actions owned by departments, ownership of data by individual departments, public commitment by departments.

Bronze renewals are still focused on intent, with actions having been taken since the last award, but without the necessary progress of a silver award.

Silver

In addition to the requirements for a bronze award, a silver award recognises a significant record of activity and achievement by the institution in promoting race equality and in addressing challenges across the whole institution. Applications should demonstrate that equality is well-embedded within the institution with strong leadership in promoting the charter principles, and evidence of the impact of race equality activities. Crucially, where progress has been made, the institution should be able to trace the cause.

Building on the requirements for the bronze renewal, a silver level award demonstrates even more local accountability. Applications will evidence strong local ownership of actions, perhaps through specific departmental statements and action plans. Departments will be able to evidence the progress they have individually made to create an inclusive culture for their minority ethnic staff and students.

Additionally, there is an expectation at silver level for actions to reflect the learning that has taken place and the progress that has been made. Institutions are likely to have thought further about the impact of multiple identities and their intersection with ethnicity, and this should be reflected in the application.

Gold awards

As the charter mark progresses we will establish detailed descriptions for what is required at gold level and also for silver renewal.

The self assessment team

To participate in any ECU charter mark, your institution will need to establish a self-assessment team responsible for undertaking a full evaluation of the institution to identify racial inequalities and barriers.

Having an effective self-assessment team will be key to the success of an application to the charter mark. Your submission will require significant reflective analysis, and this should be driven as far as possible by the full team, rather than a reliance on individuals with particular knowledge or expertise in race equality (although it is also important to include this expertise within the team).

The self-assessment team will lead your institution through the charter mark process by:

= reviewing quantitative and qualitative data

= reviewing policies and practices, and the outcome of policies and practices

= reviewing the results of the staff and student survey and managing other forms of involvement and engagement

= managing the process of developing SMART actions and action plans and submitting an application to ECU for the charter mark

The self-assessment team must meet at least three times over the course of the self-assessment process leading up to the charter mark application. How the self-assessment team is structured will depend on your institution; you may have one large team with smaller sub-groups for specific actions, or one team that undertakes everything together.

A self-assessment team can be a committee in its own right or it can operate under the umbrella of another group. Where a self-assessment team operates under the umbrella of another group it must follow the race charter mark framework, and reflect the expected composition given below.

Composition

The self-assessment team must be chaired by someone at pro vice-chancellor level or above, with the rest of the team comprising:

= different levels and areas of the institution – it is likely that the team will include a representative from each of the institution's faculties/departments/schools (you will want each of the main areas of your institution to be represented while maintaining a manageable group size) and comprise a mixture of grades and roles

= a balance of professional and support staff and academics

= people from different ethnic backgrounds

= representatives from any minority ethnic staff and student groups

= full-time and part-time staff, and staff on open-ended and fixed-term contracts

Your institution is also likely to want student representation on the self-assessment team. This may be difficult as the trial will span two academic years, and your institution may want to think about who the most appropriate representative might be, and how their role at the institution may change throughout the course of the trial.

Convening your self-assessment team

You are best placed to decide on the size and representation of your self-assessment team and how it will operate with other committees and structures. You know your institution's culture and decision-making processes and so the following is for guidance only.

The chair

The chair's role is crucial as they are publicly stating their commitment to race equality, and have overall responsibility for the success of the charter mark application.

Their role in self-assessment team meetings will ensure:

= that the power balance within the self-assessment team is maintained, that everyone is able to have their say and that stronger voices and hierarchy do not overpower discussions and decisions

= that all members of the self-assessment team take responsibility for completing tasks and the charter mark process

= that equality and diversity/human resources self-assessment team members are not overloaded with tasks or assumed to take responsibility for the ultimate submission

There are also logistical issues to consider.

= How many meetings will you have, when will they be and for how long?

= Who will decide on the agenda for self-assessment team meetings, especially the first meeting?

= Will they be minuted? Who will have responsibility for that?

= How will the chair communicate the work of and progress of the self-assessment team to senior management teams and committees and the rest of the institution?

= How will the chair ensure the success of the self-assessment team and the charter mark process?

Size

As with any committee or team it can be difficult to know how many people create the optimum for discussions and decisions. Finding enough people to meet the requirements set out above may also be challenging and difficult to balance with size. For example, ensuring ethnic diversity within the self-assessment team may not correlate with including senior managers and/or staff across different departments/faculties/schools.

Large groups may provide an element of safety in numbers whereby people feel more comfortable taking part and contributing and you will have a good variety of opinions, backgrounds and ideas. On the other hand, it is easy for voices to be lost in big meetings, especially where people may be expressing something quite challenging or personal.

Large groups can also become difficult to manage as there are more diaries to coordinate for meetings and more personalities to manage during discussions. As an approximate guide 14–15 is a rough average for self-assessment teams in other charter marks, but as institutions vary so much in size, you may not feel this number is appropriate.

Volunteers or nominees?

Ultimately, you need the self-assessment team to include people with authority, in addition to the chair. Once the team has reflected on the institution's progress and issues, they need to decide how to get things done. In three years' time, your institution will be applying again for the charter mark and you need to demonstrate progress. Your self-assessment team needs to have agreed actions that are ambitious but also realistic, with clear ownership for completion.

Again, consideration is needed to ensure you have the right balance of people on the team. Those with authority may not necessarily cover the areas of representation outlined

above, and you will need to consider how to balance the two. You are likely to want senior academic involvement from key faculties/departments/schools to ensure actions are embedded at the local level.

People who volunteer are likely to be very committed to the aims of the self-assessment team and keen to contribute and get involved, but they may not fit the requirements above and/or have the appropriate authority within their area. Nominees may feel like participation is another thing they don't have time for, and need a bit more encouragement to get fully involved.

Participating in the self-assessment team is a big commitment, and should be reflected in the workload of members. People need to be given the time to attend meetings and take responsibility for tasks throughout the next year. As it is being chaired by a pro vice-chancellor or above, it should have some traction, and if senior managers can communicate the self-assessment team as a university priority with ultimate oversight at senior management level, then people may be more likely and willing to engage.

Future proofing

You may want to think ahead and decide what happens once you have submitted your application for the charter mark.

= How will senior managers monitor progress against actions?

= Who will 'own' the action plan?

= How will the institution ensure that actions are owned and implemented at a local level?

If an existing committee structure will be absorbing the work of the self-assessment team, you may want to ensure that the chair of that committee, or another representative is on the self-assessment team so there is some continuity.

Self-assessment team information in your application

Part of your application will include a section describing your self-assessment team. The description should include:

= who was on it (job title is adequate, rather than their name if preferred), what role they played within the team and their experience in working on race issues

= how often they met and who was at each meeting

= what their role will be, as a group and as individuals, following your submission

= how departments have been involved within the team, and how departments have taken ownership of race equality in their area

The evaluation panel that will assess your institution's submission expects to see evidence of a rigorous and thorough process, including regular meetings (at least three over the course of the trial). It is unlikely that any one individual will be responsible for the whole application; your final submission should be the result of intensive group work and collaboration across the self-assessment team and the institution.

Involvement and consultation

Staff and student survey

The staff and student survey is a mandatory part of the charter mark application. For the purpose of the trial, ECU will provide a prescribed survey for participating institutions to use, and a review of that survey will be undertaken as part of the trial evaluation.

One of the tasks for the self-assessment team will be to review the findings from the survey and consider the implications in the evaluation and development of actions. As part of the self-assessment team description within your application, institutions should set out:

= how the staff and student survey was conducted, disseminated and analysed

= how many responses were received, broken down by ethnicity (as far as possible), staff/students and within staff, academics/professional and support staff

These details should be provided within section 2c of the application form. You are not expected to provide the full results of the survey in this section – they should be embedded throughout the application within the relevant sections. However, you may wish to include how the survey results were shared within your institution, how the self-assessment team used the results and anything else you feel is relevant in relation to the survey.

Wider involvement and consultation

In addition to the mandatory survey, a crucial part of the self-assessment process will be to involve and consult with minority ethnic staff and students throughout the charter mark process. This will help your institution to identify racial inequalities and barriers, and establish solutions and actions. Additionally, your staff and students will help you to prioritise actions and ensure that initiatives are implemented in the right way.

In addition to describing the self-assessment team, this section of your application will include a description of how minority ethnic staff and students have been involved and consulted more widely throughout the evaluation process and development of the action plan.

You should also include information on how the work of the self-assessment team has been communicated to the institution as a whole to ensure all staff and students are aware of the work and understand the institution's commitment to the charter mark. This might be followed-up by department-specific communications.

As with the survey, details of how and when you consulted should be provided within section 2c of the application form, but you are not expected to provide the full results of them in this section – they should be embedded throughout the application at relevant points.

Staff and student networks

The description of your involvement and consultation should include how any relevant staff and student networks have been involved, and how they will continue to be involved in the future. Where references to staff and student networks are made, please provide details of the purpose and aims of the network, how many members the network has and any support the institution provides for the network.

You may wish to include a statement directly from your network to evidence their involvement within the process.

Where your institution has actions linked to the network (for example, providing additional funding or time for staff to attend meetings) you should reference them in this section.

Completing the application

The application form is available on the ECU website and your institution should respond to each section.

The style you use is entirely up to you; the evaluation panels are interested in your evidence and actions more than the layout of your application. However, clearly presented information will be easier to assess. If panellists are presented with a mass of data with no context or commentary, they are unlikely to know how to interpret it; likewise, if panellists are presented with lots of commentary but no evidence, it will be difficult for them to award points.

You should also consider that successful applications must be published, so it is worth spending time ensuring the application is accessible and easy to follow to maximise its impact on your website.

Generally, it makes sense for the reader of an application to be able to see within each section:

= what the evidence says – this includes both quantitative and qualitative data

= what the institution has done previously to rectify the issues and what impact that has had

= what the institution is going to do over the next three years as a result of the above and how and why those particular actions have been identified

Panellists will make a decision about the award based purely on your application. If you do not include information on actions or initiatives within the application they will not be included in the decision. Similarly, if the panel feel that data is missing or has been ignored without adequate explanation, it will have a negative impact on their decision.

Which staff and students are included?

ECU refers to minority ethnic staff and students as being anyone from a minority ethnic background, including White minority ethnic backgrounds.

Additionally, we would anticipate international staff and students being considered within your evaluation and action plan. International staff and students may still face issues and barriers based on differences in culture, background, language, accent and dialect, even where they may be White and/or have English as their first language.

However, your institution must differentiate between home and international staff and students and understand any issues and barriers accordingly. Your institution will need to strike a balance and prioritise actions according to need, based on data analysis and consultation. Panellists will be looking for clear distinctions between the issues and actions related to home minority ethnic staff and students and international staff and students. For example, if panellists feel that your application is too focused on international staff or students and has not adequately considered the needs of home staff, they will mark the application down.

Local context

Local context is crucial throughout the application in both analysing trends and issues, and identifying solutions; what works for one institution can provide inspiration and ideas, but may not be entirely right for another institution.

There is a specific section at the beginning of the application to describe your institution and the local area. This is your opportunity to help panellists understand your institution. If they are aware of the structures within which you are working, and the local communities within which you are based, it will help them to understand your current position and future plans. This may be especially important for specialist institutions, and those based in rural and/or less diverse parts of the UK.

You may wish to include information in this section on local community engagement activities and how local communities are encouraged to engage with the institution, if it is relevant. If you do describe this, it must be with specific consideration of ethnicity and race, rather than in general terms.

As well as the specific section at the beginning of the application, you are likely to refer to local structures and contexts throughout your application wherever relevant.

Linking with other work and evidence

As well as considering what new actions and initiatives your institution may wish to implement as a result of your self-evaluation, you will want to consider how to embed race equality into other existing areas and to join together existing relevant work.

For example, you may have a widening participation team that is already looking at issues of retention and degree attainment, linked to your institution's access agreements. Where that work is currently race-related, or could be race-related, you could tie it together with your charter mark work.

You may want to tie-in your charter mark action plan and analysis with your legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010 and HEFCE annual reporting statements. Successful charter mark applications may also be useful for demonstrating commitment to equality for the purposes of external funding bids, and any relevant research council requirements.

Similarly, there are many existing sources of information that may be relevant to your application and that may help inform your analysis and actions. Institutions that have been involved in surveys such as Careers in research online survey (CROS) or Principal investigators and research leaders' survey (PIRLS) may find it useful to look at their own results by ethnicity.

It is important that any existing work that you include in your application is viewed through a primary lens of race equality. For example, you may have a women's mentoring scheme that all women are able to utilise. For that to be relevant to your application it is not enough simply to state that minority ethnic women are welcome to attend the mentoring scheme. For example you would need to have assessed:

= the ethnicity of the women who have used the mentoring scheme

= feedback from the scheme analysed by ethnicity to understand any differences in satisfaction

- = whether minority ethnic women felt included and considered within the scheme

- = how mentors were equipped to consider multiple identities within the scheme

As mentioned above, the evaluation panels will judge your institution's award purely on what is included in your application, so it is important that you get credit for work you have already undertaken, but the race-specific implications of that work must be understood and included.

Embedding actions within the application

As panellists are reading the application and understanding the issues and challenges that have been identified, they will want to be assured that appropriate actions have been put in place as a consequence (and also to understand the context of the actions). Within each section you should refer to relevant actions that are in place, with the action plan forming a comprehensive summary of actions at the end.

There is no need to write each action out in full with the owner and date of completion, but you will want to provide the main description of the action, and number/reference of the action. The panellists can refer to the full action plan for further detail if they need to.

Data

Data provides evidence of issues and actions, and is key to the self-evaluation and action plan. Data should be embedded throughout the application in relevant places and accompanied by candid commentary on trends and issues. For panellists to understand your application, and give it due credit, they will need to see clear links between the data and the commentary and the data and actions.

Evaluation panels will expect the commentary to highlight the difficulties and issues the institution currently has so that actions are targeted, meaningful and measurable. Applications could be returned for more information, or, in extreme cases, rejected where evaluation panels feel that data has not been adequately explored or acknowledged.

For smaller or specialist institutions with low numbers of staff and students (or fewer minority ethnic staff and students) evaluation panels will look for the same transparency and honesty in the commentary. However the panels will acknowledge that data analysis may not always be possible at the same level of detail as for larger or less specialist institutions.

Quantitative data

Try to be consistent when presenting quantitative data, and provide data for at least the last three years. Where your institution is unable to provide this data please give an explanation.

Wherever possible institutions should provide detailed ethnicity analysis by specific ethnic group rather than as a whole Black and minority ethnic group. Provide rounded numbers (to the nearest 5) as well as percentages, providing this does not leave staff vulnerable to being identified.

Data should be presented in whichever way you consider appropriate (tables or graphs), as long as it clearly highlights trends and draws these out in the narrative. However, both percentages and raw numbers should be presented.

Data should correspond to the section heading and should cover the three years preceding the submission. Reasons should be provided where data is unavailable, and, in most cases, a relevant action included.

Qualitative data

Statistical evidence is useful for identifying trends and issues, and also for monitoring long-term progress, however it has limitations. For example, statistics can identify that your senior management team is entirely from a White British background, but that does not tell you why, or how you can rectify the issue. To really understand your institution's culture you need to use data from a variety of sources, and wherever possible hear the lived experience of minority ethnic staff and students.

It is likely that as part of your self-assessment process you will:

= organise interviews and focus groups relating to race equality within the institution (these might be run by internal staff members or independent facilitators)

= scrutinise a variety of qualitative sources, for example, exit interview data, previous staff and student surveys, student evaluations, anecdotal evidence (which you will want to verify and explore further before acting upon)

Where you refer to these data sources within your application it is useful to provide context or background to how the data has been generated and analysed. While you must ensure individuals cannot be identified, where possible it is useful to state whether the data is from a staff member or student, and if a staff member, whether they are an academic or a member of professional and support staff.

Department-level data and anonymity

Your institution will need to be careful to ensure that staff and students cannot be identified in the data that is submitted and published. Where numbers become too small you will need to find a balance between transparency and anonymity. Institution-level data is likely to be more straight forward, but department-level data may be more difficult, and it will be up to your institution to decide how best to disaggregate data.

The purpose of department-level data is to ascertain local trends and issues. Without this, departments will not be able to have their own discussions and debates to address the issues that exist. Your method of defining a department will be up to you, and will depend on the size and structure of your institution.

As a guide, it is likely to be an autonomous part of the institution where the head of the department (or faculty or school) has overall responsibility for resource allocation, budgets, academic strategy and policy in the department.

Your institution's structure will be included within the institutional description and local context section of the application, and this will provide an opportunity for you to outline your rationale for determining departments and how they fit within the overall structure of the institution.

Transparency is the main consideration in determining how to define your departments and what level of data to provide. Panellists need to be assured that your institution is being open and honest in its descriptions and data, and that any reticence to disclose data is for legitimate reasons.

Benchmarking staff and student data

Throughout your self-evaluation and subsequent action plan, you will want to benchmark your institution against comparators, both to measure your own progress and to ascertain where there may be good practice to learn from and strive towards. We are not prescriptive in what or how you benchmark as it will depend upon your own institutional context.

Evaluation panels will expect to see some level of benchmarking to demonstrate your institution's understanding of the scale of the issues you are facing. This will also provide panels with an indicator of your institution's ambitions and awareness of race equality initiatives.

Purpose of benchmarking

Benchmarking is for your institution's benefit; while panels are interested in the benchmarking data you use, and it can help to inform their decision to award the charter mark, the main focus should be in using the data to drive your institution's aspirations. Be ambitious in what you benchmark against and use the data to challenge your institution to make significant improvements as well as to measure progress and celebrate successes.

The first two guiding principles for the charter mark acknowledge that racial inequalities affect society and the higher education sector as a whole, which can make it difficult to find inspirational benchmarks. Benchmarking against an organisation that is at the same stage of work and facing the same challenges might lead to establishing which is the least bad, rather than which is making the most progress. You should be looking for a benchmark to chase, rather than a benchmark to justify your current position.

Local context

The demographics and culture of populations and institutions vary enormously and local context will be important in considering what actions to take and what benchmarks and targets to consider.

= Institutions are free to benchmark themselves against any appropriate comparators. For example, it would be inappropriate for an institution in a largely White area to benchmark all of their data against a London institution, regardless of commonalities in size and affiliation. However, there should be an acknowledgment that academic staff and/or staff in more senior positions may be more likely to move for their career, and will not necessarily be recruited from the local population.

= Benchmarks do not necessarily have to be higher-education specific, they just need to be relevant to your local context and what you are trying to achieve.

Benchmarking initiatives and actions

Benchmarking can be used not only to compare the demographics of your workforce or student population, but to measure the success of the initiatives you implement. For example, you might choose to introduce a programme of work to improve the rate of promotions for minority ethnic staff. Part of the evaluation of that programme of work could be to compare its success with programmes undertaken in other organisations tackling similar issues. Those organisations might be inside or outside of higher education.

Word limits and appendices

Words limits help ensure that submissions are of a readable length for evaluation panels.

= The total word limit for applications is 12,000 words. We do not stipulate how the words should be spread over each section.

= The word count includes all aspects of the application: the letter of endorsement, institutional description, local context, and all subsequent sections. It also includes any footnotes or other types of reference.

= The full action plan is excluded from the word limit. Your actions should be embedded into each section (see specific section on action plans). The complete action plan provides a summary of all actions, complete with information on ownership and timings and should be provided as an annex.

= Other than the action plan, no other appendices or annexes are permitted. Where they are included they will be ignored.

= Tables and graphs with data are exempt from the word count, providing they do not include standalone text or prose. Any text included within the table should only make sense within the context of the table or graph (for example, titles and data labels).

= Any standalone prose included in tables will be added to the total word count. If this leads to institutions going over the word count, they will be penalised.

Anonymity

We would like the charter mark applications to be evaluated anonymously as far as possible. We realise that this is challenging where institutions have unique structures, specialisms and locations, but we hope to make it as difficult as possible to identify an institution from their application.

The cover sheet with your institution's name will be removed and replaced by a reference number, and the name of your vice-chancellor or equivalent will be removed from the letter of endorsement before being circulated to panels. Please do not refer to your institution by name within the application to ensure that those reviewing it are not easily able to identify your institution.

Additional considerations

Positive action

It is likely that as part of your self-evaluation and development of your action plan your institution will consider positive action measures.

Methods of utilising positive action have been possible through equality legislation for some years. Positive action falls into two main areas.

= Being able to target initiatives and actions at particular groups of people because of a known underrepresentation or differences in outcome. For example, specific training and development opportunities for specific groups of staff or students to address a particular underrepresentation.

= Being able to consider a particular identity in a recruitment situation where two candidates are equally qualified and able to do the job. In this situation where you cannot choose between them, you are able to offer the job to someone from a known underrepresented group. There are very specific legal requirements around the use of positive action that your institution will want to consider.

Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination, although the two are often confused. Positive discrimination allows organisations to recruit people for positions based on a particular characteristic, regardless of whether there is someone more qualified, and it is illegal in the UK.

The confusion between positive action and positive discrimination can lead to misunderstandings that might cause tension and upset if communicated incorrectly. Race is a particularly sensitive area and positive action initiatives related to race may be perceived differently to positive action in

other areas, for example gender. This does not mean that your institution should not consider introducing them, but that you will need to consider how they are introduced and ensure:

- minority ethnic staff and students are involved in the development of any positive action initiatives

- your institution considers the communication and implementation of positive action initiatives, as well as the initiative itself

Impact and innovation

Throughout your application, the emphasis should be on impact and instigating change. It is important that any data analysis looks at root causes of issues, identifying and implementing appropriate evidence-based actions, and evaluating the impact of those actions.

When devising actions, or describing actions that have already been taken, it will be important to stress how they were delivered and what happened as a consequence. For example, stating that training has been rolled out in a particular areas is not enough, you need to illustrate whether the training was mandatory, who and how many people attended it, what the feedback was from the training and what impact it has had. It might be that an initiative had limited impact because of how it was implemented or supported by senior managers, rather than because of the idea itself, and it will be important to identify that.

It is also important that innovation is embraced by the sector. Where institutions implement new or untested initiatives they take an element of risk as there is no guarantee that the initiative will work. However, innovation is encouraged within the charter mark framework, and innovative initatives will be acknowledged and rewarded, regardless of the outcome, as long as they are based on evidence and a sound rationale.

Submitting your application

Once you have completed your trial charter mark application, it should be emailed to ECU no later than 5pm on **Friday 10 April 2015**. Future awards dates will be announced in due course.

Your application should be emailed as one consolidated PDF document including all relevant information, to **racecharter@ecu.ac.uk**.

Once received, submissions will be acknowledged by return email. If you do not receive an acknowledgement that we have received your submissions within two working days following the deadline, please contact us.

ECU will print your application in black and white. If you wish for panellists to review your application in colour, then please ensure you additionally send us eight colour hardcopies of your application. The hardcopies will be accepted up to five days after the deadline, providing you have emailed a copy of the completed application on time. Please indicate in your original email that you are sending us hardcopies.

It is possible that panellists may request additional information from your institution. Please be prepared for such requests, which are likely to be within two months of your submission.

Evaluation panels

The evaluation panels will comprise academics, professional and support staff and students of different ethnicities. They will also include a human resources or equality and diversity professional. A member of ECU staff will be present to moderate.

The evaluation panel will review up to four submissions in advance of the panel meeting. On the day they will discuss each one and agree whether the submission is successful. The panel can make one of four decisions about the submission:

= it is successful at the level at which it has been submitted and the institution should receive an award at this level

= it is successful, but at a lower level to which it has been submitted – for example, the panel may agree that a silver level submission does not yet meet the silver requirements but should receive a bronze level award

= it is almost ready to be successful but the panel would like a little more information or clarity on certain points. In this instance, the submitting institution will have up to four weeks (for the purposes of the trial) to prove more information and for the panel to come to a decision

= it is not yet ready to be awarded the charter mark, and even with additional information the submission will still be unsuccessful

The evaluation panel meetings will be fully noted and individual feedback from the discussions will be provided to all institutions, regardless of their success.

Status of the award

We anticipate that any awards conferred in the trial will stand for three years, following which institutions will be required to reapply for the charter mark.