

Department of Earth Sciences Response to BAME Report.

The Earth Sciences is one of the least diverse fields in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) in terms of race and ethnicity, both nationally and internationally. An often-quoted recent study reports there has been little change in the proportion of PhDs awarded in the Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences over the past 40 years to non-white ethnic groups in the US (14%)¹. The situation in the UK is no better. The most recent data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)² indicates that only 10.2% of UK students enrolled full-time in Geology degrees in 2018-19 identify as coming from non-white ethnic backgrounds. This significantly lags other STEM subjects such as Physics, Maths, Chemistry, and Engineering, where 16.7%, 23.8%, 24.2%, and 29.2% of full-time UK students identify as coming from non-white backgrounds.

Our Department is no different to other UK Earth Sciences departments: of our current UK students (May 2020), only 9.7% identify as coming from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. However, being 'average' for the subject is not good enough, and we must become significantly better in attracting and admitting BAME students to our Department. To this end, we refocused and increased our outreach efforts in 2018 to more explicitly focus on attracting BAME students to apply to our course. Attracting students to the course is, however, only one aspect of encouraging diversity. Once admitted, it is vital that they are valued members of our community, and that we remove any barriers to their success and enable them to flourish both in the Department and the field of Earth Sciences.

It is against this background that we are grateful to our student community, who convened an *Ad Hoc* working group to look at BAME issues across the Department, led by Ben Fernando and Gwen Antell, with contributions from many others. We welcome their report³ in the spirit of constructive dialogue that is necessary to improve inclusivity and diversity in our Department, and in the wider Earth Sciences. This matter is of great importance to us and the report complements efforts already underway in the Department on access and student admissions processes⁴. Importantly, the report also addresses issues of inclusion within the Department, as well as issues relevant to the postgraduate community.

Their report makes 42 recommendations, of which 30 are suggested for direct implementation, and 12 are for consideration by the Department. Of the 30 recommendations suggested for direct implementation, 12 were already in progress prior to receipt of this report (1, 2, 11, 12, 22, 24, 27, 28, 33, 36, 37, & 39) and one had previously been implemented and abandoned (7), although we are happy to try again. Of the remaining 17 recommendations for implementation, we are happy to commit to 12 on the timescales suggested (8, 14, 15, 20, 21, 31, 32, 34, 35, 40, 41 & 42). We will address item 18 on a longer timetable than that proposed because we are currently reviewing our undergraduate course and don't feel it appropriate to produce new promotional materials ahead of the implementation of the new course structure. When that review is complete we will, of course, develop promotional materials that reflect the full diversity of activities that take place within the department. We will consider item 23 if we can identify a suitable course and provider, and we will commit to 29 & 30 if someone suitable steps forward to take on these roles. Regarding recommendation 13, we are happy to, and do, nominate BAME members for awards. For showcase programs, we are clear that participation in such

programs can only be voluntary. We will obviously support BAME members who wish to participate in such programs, but we are wary of nominating people to such programs unless they have expressed a wish to be nominated.

Of the twelve recommendations for consideration, nine are already in progress (4, 6, 9, 16, 17, 19, 25, 26, & 38) and we are very happy to consider the remaining three (3, 5 & 10) in consultation with the broad Department.

We would like to thank our student community for their efforts in putting this report together, and especially postgraduates Gwen Antell, J.D. Dianala, Ben Fernando, Ritwika Sengupta, and Roberta Wilkinson (in alphabetical order).

Barriers to equity and inclusion are tackled best when we work together as a community. There is always more we can do to broaden participation, and we encourage the support of our undergraduates, postgraduates, postdocs, staff, and faculty in making our Department a welcoming environment to all.

Chris Ballentine, *Head of Department*
Conall MacNiocaill, *Director of Teaching*
Erin Saupe, *Chair of Workplace and Equality Committee*
Roger Benson, *Admissions Coordinator*

References:

- ¹ Bernard, R.E., Cooperdock, E.H.G. 2018. No progress on diversity in 40 years. *Nature Geoscience*, **11**, 292–295. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41561-018-0116-6>
- ² <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-8>
- ³ “Recommendations for improving racial equality, diversity, and inclusion in Department of Earth Sciences, University of Oxford”. Available here: <https://www.earth.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BAME-EDI-Report.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://www.earth.ox.ac.uk/2020/06/concrete-actions-needed-for-diversity-equality-inclusivity-in-earth-sciences/>
- ⁵ A detailed response to the report is available here: <https://www.earth.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Detailed-Department-response-to-Recommendations-from-the-Ad-Hoc-BAME-Working-Group.pdf>