

8 October 2020

Dear colleagues,

Black Lives Matter-LSHTM has been following with interest the process concerning decolonizing the curriculum, and we have been pleased to see – for the first time, and after repeated requests – a genuine commitment from LSHTM leadership to funding this work. However, we were flabbergasted when we learned the details of the plans for filling the position. Instead of advertising the post, opening a competitive selection process, or taking positive action to invite applications from minoritized people who made the requests for funding in the first place, the only candidate being considered was a white man who was already involved in the process and heavily favoured by members of the committee. In addition, despite us reaching out to inquire about and a representative from our group attending to observe the decolonizing the curriculum meetings, the responsible committee did not make the BLM network aware of the decision to create this post. This prevented us from giving feedback early, thus potentially slowing down the process.

This experience demonstrates a startling disconnect between the School's stated goals (to tackle institutional racism) and the means it employs to do this (choosing to pay a well-connected white man for a job that mostly Black and other racially minoritized women have been doing for free). The expectation of free labour has understandably disenchanted many minoritized people from participating in the process for decolonizing the curriculum to date. However, the allocation of resources to this project presents a much needed opportunity to change these circumstances.

In our letter of 24 August 2020, we focused on the need to allocate resources for anti-racism work. Today, we would like to make explicit a message we believed to be implicit in that communication:

Anti-racism resources are not for white people.

Anti-racism resources are not for white people's career advancement.

Far from being a coincidence or an oversight, this experience reflects committee members' own implicit biases, which created an environment in which a white man was favoured for such a position and invited to participate in the drafting of the post's terms of reference, rather than any one of the numerous minoritized staff and students who we know have made similar requests over the years. In other words, white privilege in action. Every white person on the committee should have recognized that this plan was antithetical to the initiative's broader goals and spoken out against it from the beginning. The labour involved in raising these objections should not rest with racially minoritized people. This poses additional risks to them: burdens that white people do not carry.

Given that the vast majority of experts in decolonization are Black or otherwise racially minoritized, enlisting a white man to do this work exposes the [common claim](#), that lack of diversity is due to a limited pool of Black talent, as the disingenuous excuse that it is. Rather, stunted opportunities are more often a function of the lack of networks to which minoritized people are allowed access, along with the tokenism that relegates them to roles that keep white people comfortable.

Dr Janice Gassam Asare [points](#) to three possible actions that organizations can take to increase diversity in their ranks: (1) restrict referral hiring in order to identify candidates outside managers' limited networks; (2) increase accountability by integrating equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) objectives into performance assessments; and (3) create growth opportunities for minoritized staff, including mentorships, training, and leadership pathways.

LSHTM's newfound commitment to anti-racism creates opportunities to put such principles into practice across a myriad of human resource processes, but decolonization initiatives must be emblematic in that regard. The position for decolonizing the curriculum needs to be leveraged to create opportunities for minoritized staff, fuelling their future career growth within the planned Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and laying a solid foundation for more diverse teaching.

Cordially,

Black Lives Matter-LSHTM Steering Committee