

Community accountability for racial justice - a programme for universities and colleges

A guide for branches:

The Community Accountability programme developed by UCU's Black Members' Standing Committee is intended as an awareness-raising and action-based tool for UCU branches and members to begin the journey towards racial justice in universities and colleges.

The document is designed to help activists to:

- Extend the community of influence on their employer;
- Build deeper and more extensive alliances for racial justice both within and beyond the organisation;
- Bring the lessons of abolitionist thinking to universities and colleges;
- Move the power away from the employer.

It should be regarded as an organising tool. Branches may wish to focus on selected points at first or to plan a series of actions highlighting different aspects of the programme.

As an organising tool, the programme should:

- Be used to create conversations with a wider group of members and non-members, including conversations about how we think about racism and racial justice and the role universities and colleges have played in perpetuating systemic racism;
- Form the basis of negotiations between the employer and the union and community;
- Inform a series of awareness raising and/or campaigning events to build alliances between union members and the wider community;
- Used to devise a programme of change that makes the organisation accountable to the community.

What is an organising plan?

Don't be put off - an organising plan is just a plan of what you want to achieve and a breakdown of the steps and allies you will need to do it. We know that not all UCU members have a community of support at work. Try to use the accountability programme as a document to create your campaign community.

Maybe think about the following steps:

a. How can you create a group to work on this? Could you run an open discussion of the programme with staff and students? How does the document make people feel - about their own experience in education or the organisation? About how universities and colleges relate to the wider community? What do people want to do about it? Does any part of the programme seem more important or urgent to your group? If so, try to discuss why this is and what you would like to achieve. Maybe read the accountability programme document alongside reading an introduction to abolitionism? (we will be linking some further resources via the UCU black members website);

b. How can you reach out to the wider community to build support? How can you campaign to show how racism in your workplace has an impact on the whole community? Maybe try a small event with local groups? Something easy like a social media campaign to get some local allies together? Your workplace group probably needs to do a bit of research

about who is active and influential in the community - don't be shy of approaching religious organisations or charities, sister unions and community groups. Try to build a mixed team that reflects different aspects of the community. It might be helpful to identify one or two key demands and start to build a set of allies around them;

c. How can you make the employer engage with your group and your allies? Different employers have different 'soft spots' - some like to hang out with local politicians and influencers, some care about social media publicity, some care about the views of influential alumni. Your objective is to bring the employer to the table and to ensure your demands shape the agenda of what is discussed. You can use the regular negotiating forum for unions to meet the employer, but this is not enough to make the employer accountable to the community. Think about how to make the organisation feel the pressure of public opinion. Think about how to make it impossible not to speak to you. Think Marcus Rashford.

d. How can you create an ongoing process of accountability? The programme document has some ideas about this, but you might want to set up your own community panel to 'evaluate' the organisation. Publicise your results. Say you are going to inspect again at a specified later date - and challenge the organisation to show how it will improve and address its shortcomings by then. Offer to help. Introduce the employer to 'critical friends' from the community. Make sure that the dialogue you have with the employer is always open to public scrutiny.

e. Encourage and reward. If the employer shows goodwill and tries to make progress, collaborate on a public event to showcase this. Let people know that building a better world is not a one-off action. Make people want to be associated with your group and the project, because people love to be on the side of rightness and goodness. Make it fun and glamorous and pleasurable and make sure you publicise and share everything you do.

Checklist

Branches and members might find the following prompts useful when considering how best to use the document:

1. Have you circulated the Community Accountability document to colleagues within the branch or region?
2. If you are a member of your branch committee have you placed the document before fellow officers to plan how best to meet its objectives?
3. Would it be possible for your branch to host a meeting to discuss the document?
4. What types of community groups and sister organisations would you engage with?
5. Does your institution produce data on precarious and outsourced contracts disaggregated by race/ethnicity? Does the branch have an opportunity to interrogate this data?
6. How would your institution create a space for civic debate which included the community?