Advance HE

Expressions of interest for desk-based research exploring online harassment in professional and learning spaces affecting staff and students in colleges and universities spanning all protected characteristics.

# **Advance HE (the contractor)**

Advance HE was formed in March 2018, following the merger of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Our purpose is to advance the professional practice of higher education to improve outcomes for the benefit of students, staff and society. Advance HE has been created to be “of and for the sector” and is jointly owned by GuildHE and Universities UK.

We are driven by the strategic needs of higher education. Through our passion for excellence we aim to create an inclusive culture that champions the continuous development of teaching, leadership and research. We use an evidence-based approach to identify what works, and develop practice-based solutions.

Our vision is that the world-class reputation and standing of higher education is enhanced and recognised for transforming lives, enriching society and developing the economy for the better.

Further information about Advance HE is available on our website: [www.advance-he.ac.uk](https://heagateway.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/Consultancy/Documents/Commerical%20Team%20Support/Tenders/UK%20Tenders/Tenders%2018-19/Athena%20SWAN%20impact%20evaluation/www.advance-he.ac.uk).

# **Background**

In October 2019 the EHRC published its inquiry into racial harassment in publically funded universities in Great Britain. The EHRC report revealed that racial harassment was a common experience for students and staff. For example:

* 24% of students from an ethnic minority background said they had experienced racial harassment; 1 in 20 students said racism had made them leave their studies.
* More than a quarter of staff said they had experienced racist name-calling, insults and jokes; 3 in 20 said racial harassment caused them to leave their jobs.
* Racial harassment can have a serious impact on an individual’s mental health and wellbeing.
* The sector does not really understand the issue and staff lack confidence in dealing with race issues.
* Most staff and students who have experienced racial harassment do not report it.
* Many universities seriously underestimate the prevalence of racial harassment and are over-confident in their complaint handling processes.

The EHRC made a series of recommendations for the UK and devolved governments, funders, regulators and universities. Advance HE’s [Tackling Racism on Campus Project](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/tackling-racism-campus-raising-awareness-and-creating-conditions-confident-conversations) is part of a set of activities taken forward by SFC, Universities Scotland and the sector to address the EHRC recommendations. This project is overseen by Advance HE’s Race Steering Group.

As part of this project, Advance HE are seeking to commission research on the experiences of staff in further and higher education institutions of racial harassment and bullying in online spaces.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent transition to enforced remote and online working and learning across the college and university sector, institutions must consider how to safeguard their staff and students from racial harassment and bullying in online spaces. Remote working is likely to become more of a default option for some staff and a necessary contingency for institutions following the pandemic. As the sector adapts to video meetings, the online delivery of training, and virtual teaching and learning, consideration must be given to ensuring that these spaces are free from harassment and bullying, and that staff and students and equipped to respond safely and appropriately when incidents occur.

Whilst there is an existing and recent body of evidence which demonstrates the prevalence of racist bullying and harassment in colleges and universities, how this is experienced online and through other forms of virtual working has been less explored across all protected characteristics. With more staff and students working from home, there are unique challenges and impacts associated with experiencing harassment and bullying in professional online spaces, for example the lack of separation between work and home. Online bullying and harassment can include inappropriate behaviour conducted through a range of platforms such as email, social media, video-conferencing calls (i.e. Zoom, Teams etc.), online training, and virtual learning spaces. These experiences are often intersectional in nature, for example through sexist and racist remarks targeting BAME women.

This research will explore the forms and impacts of harassment and bullying in professional online spaces, with the aim of identifying the types of harassment and power dynamics reported by respondents, thus providing an evidence base for recommendations for institutions to consider.

# **The Desk Research**

To support the required work, the project team has identified the need to learn from previous research on bullying and harassment and how this is experienced online and through other forms of virtual working. This piece of research intends to identify what is known as well as gaps.

The scope of the desk research is likely to include:

* A review of recent academic and grey literature and research related to Scotland and the rest of the UK focusing on:
  + Online harassment
  + Harassment in the workplace (with a specific focus on, but not limited to, further and higher education).
  + Bystander approaches
  + Effective interventions
* The experience of both staff and students
* Multiple protected characteristics and their intersections to provide a broad evidence base
* Information related to ‘what works’ in relation to effective interventions to address online bullying and harassment

The methodology is likely to include:

* An outline of relevant sources will be identified and how relevant information will be extracted
* A review of relevant literature, research evidence and studies

The key output will be a research report detailing:

* The research brief, methodology and approach
* Key evidence and findings, to include an assessment of any additional factors that have supported effective interventions
* Conclusions and recommendations
* References and sources

The desk based research is expected to take 4 days to complete. This will include time for an initial meeting between the consultant and representatives of Advance HE, finalising details before desk-based research begins, the research itself, and a final meeting for the consultant to present findings.

# **The Interviews**

The aim of this research is to build on existing research findings relating to racial harassment and bullying in colleges and universities to specifically focus on how this is experienced in online and remote working environments. The approach taken will focus on lived experiences in order to capture the forms and impacts of racist harassment and bullying in online spaces. This study is exploratory in nature as there is not a large body of existing scholarship in this area.

The scope of this research is likely to include:

* The lived experience of BAME staff in Scottish colleges and universities of racial harassment and bullying in online professional spaces (for example in meetings, lectures, training, email communication, video conferencing etc.).
* The intersectional nature of racial harassment and bullying in online professional spaces (for example experiencing discrimination on the basis of race and gender, race and sexuality, race and religion etc.).
* The impact of experiencing racial harassment and bullying in online professional spaces on staff personal and professional lives, including their mental health and wellbeing.
* The views of BAME staff in Scottish colleges and universities on what their institutions could do to address racial harassment and bullying in online professional spaces.

The methodology is likely to include:

* Design of discussion guide
* Ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with staff in Scottish colleges and universities to scope out key themes and gather examples of lived experiences. These will be conducted over phone or video-call
* Analysis of interviews

Advance HE will assist with the recruitment of interview participants through our contacts and networks in Scottish colleges and universities and the wider sector. Advance HE can provide standard consent forms for research participants.

The key output will be a research report detailing:

* The research brief, methodology and approach
* Key findings including themes and examples of lived experiences
* Conclusions and recommendations for improved practice in further and higher education based on interview findings

The qualitative research is expected to take 9 days to complete. This will include:

* an initial meeting between the consultant and representatives of Advance HE (0.5 days)
* design of discussion guide (0.5 days)
* admin related to participant recruitment (1.5 days)
* conduct 10 interviews (3 days)
* analysis and write up of interviews (3 days)
* present findings to Advance HE (0.5 days)

# **To Express Interest**

Candidates should deliver a concise expression of interest focusing on the proposed work. We welcome expressions of interest from researchers for either the desk-based research or interviews, or for both. The expression of interest should include the following information:

* Candidate or organisation details including name, legal status, full contact details and lead contact
* Details or brief CVs of staff who will undertake the work, to include details of professional experience and expertise relevant to the project, including any experience gained in the HE/FE sector and in race equality work
* A clear breakdown of how much time each person will contribute to the project
* Samples of other pieces of work which are similar in focus, scope and tone to the project
* Reasons for interest in undertaking the work
* Proposed approach and methodology to deliver the project, including a suggested timetable for the work, including key milestones and clear timescales for completing the project

Please return your response to [kay.steven@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:kay.steven@advance-he.ac.uk) to arrive no later than 12 noon on Wednesday 23rd September 2020.

# **Fees**

The day rate for this work is £400. Advance HE will pay for the proposed work upon delivery of the final report(s).

# **The Contract**

## Selection criteria

In awarding the contract, Advance HE will consider the quality of the expression of interest, taking account of the factors listed in this document and in particular the proposed methodology.

Each candidate’s tender shall be assessed on the following:

* relevant experience and research credibility
* understanding of race equality issues in Scotland’s colleges and universities
* understanding of race equality and diversity practice in further and higher education
* appropriateness of the proposed methodology in terms of securing credible and robust research
* feasibility of completing the proposed programme of work to a high quality within the specific timetable
* understanding of the need to work closely with Advance HE throughout the project

## Timing

The project should be undertaken between 2nd October 2020 and 27th November 2020. The candidate should note the following key dates:

* deadline for receipt of expression of interest: 12 noon on 23rd September 2020
* interviews of shortlisted candidates if required: 1st October 2020
* award of tender to successful candidate: 2nd October 2020
* final report submitted: 12 noon on 27th November 2020

Advance HE reserves the right to interview shortlisted applicants.

The dates set out in this paragraph are provisional only and may be altered by Advance HE at its discretion.

## Reporting responsibilities

The successful candidate will report to David Bass, Assistant Director, Membership (Scotland, Wales, Ireland).

## Further information

For further details, please contact Kay Steven, Policy and Programme Advisor (Scotland).

Email : [kay.steven@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:kay.steven@advance-he.ac.uk)

Phone : 0131 322 3738

## **Advance HE rights to change or cancel**

Advance HE reserves the right, without prior notice and in its absolute discretion, to change or terminate the tendering procedure for the project, including requesting additional information, at any time before signing the contract with the successful candidate.

The information contained in this calls for expressions of interest and all other information made available at any time to the candidates by and on behalf of Advance HE is supplied on the basis that the candidates will keep such information confidential at all times and that such information will be used only for the purposes of participating in the bidding process.

No information contained in this document or any other written, oral or other information made available to the candidate shall form the basis of any warranty, representation or term of any contract by Advance HE with any third party.

Advance HE does not accept any responsibility or liability for the accuracy or completeness of this document or any other oral or written information provided by Advance HE to any candidate.