



# Racism, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education and Research

An international literature review and field survey of British universities.

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## List of abbreviations

<b>BLM</b>	Black Lives Matter
<b>CNCDH</b>	National Consultative Commission on Human Rights
<b>CPED</b>	Permanent Conference of Equality and Diversity Officers
<b>CRT</b>	Critical Race Theory
<b>DU</b>	University Diploma
<b>EDI</b>	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
<b>HERI</b>	Higher Education and Research Institutions
<b>MOOC</b>	Massive Open Online Course
<b>ONDES</b>	National Observatory of Discrimination and Equality in Higher Education
<b>SLR</b>	Systematic Literature Review
<b>REC</b>	Race Equality Charter
<b>SSV</b>	Sexual and Sexist Violence

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Not everything that is confronted can  
be changed, but nothing can be  
changed until it is confronted.

James Baldwin (1962)

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*For more information on the ARCHERIF project, visit <https://www.archerif.fr/>*

## Executive summary

The ARCHERIF project, funded by the AMIDEX Foundation of Aix-Marseille University, aims to study manifestations of racism in Higher Education and Research Institutions (HERIs) in France and to develop educational resources to combat racism more effectively. This report summarises the results of our Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on racism in HERIs worldwide and a field survey conducted between April and May 2024 at eight British universities to compare the SLR with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and anti-discrimination policies actually implemented on the ground. By comparing the international SLR with a field survey, we were able to establish a more realistic assessment of the effectiveness or shortcomings of the EDI and anti-racism policies and education in place at these institutions. This enabled us to identify the most promising approaches as well as the pitfalls to avoid. In the rest of this report, we first present the French policies on combating racism in HERIs (§1) before summarising the results of the international SLR (§2) and the field survey conducted at eight British universities (§3). Finally, an overall summary is provided in section §4.

### 1

#### **French Policies to Combat Racism in Higher Education and Research**

All the existing studies and reports, including (Hajjat, 2025) ; (Hamel, 2025) ; (CNCDDH, 2025) ; (Bergamaschi et al., 2026) ; (Druez, 2016) ; (Gillet et al., 2022) have demonstrated that racialised minorities, whether they are French citizens or immigrants, are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, mainly due to their skin colour or appearance, thus to racism. Existing studies on discriminations in the HERI sector in France have tended to focus solely on students to the detriment of other categories of staff — ethnic minority Faculty and administrators, who are also exposed to racism.

A study of French policies to combat discrimination in HERIs reveals a gap between the institutional discourse and the means implemented to combat discriminations on the ground. In the name of a supposed ‘universalism’ and ‘republicanism’ where all citizens are supposedly equal in theory but not in reality, this colour-blind state policy constitutes a major obstacle to demonstrating the extent of racism and to developing targeted measures to combat it more effectively. The lack of ethnic statistics at the national levels is another factor that renders it difficult to demonstrate the under-representation, or total absence of racialised people in certain sectors, especially in management positions. The reasons given for this absence of ethnic statistics are numerous.

The French Revolution affirmed individualism in the conception of French citizenship, leaving no room for minority groups or community particularities that could threaten the supposed ‘universalism’ of its Republic. In this ideological context, only two legal entities are recognised: the state and individuals. The state does not deal with groups or minorities in order to guarantee equal treatment for all and excludes institutional recognition of minorities (Gilbert & Keane, 2016).

Thus, affirmative action or positive discrimination towards minorities is considered to be contrary to the principle of equality. The only positive actions permitted are those based on geographic location, i.e. an area identified as “difficult” or economically disadvantaged in terms of priority education

(Gilbert & Keane, 2016) (Brahim, 2021). Furthermore, in France, the prevalence of common law in cases of racism is highlighted by the fact that parliamentarians support a legal universalism that neglects the specific needs of minority groups (Brahim, 2021). The memory of the Holocaust, with the extermination of six million European Jews during the Second World War, still haunts European consciences, reminding them of the deviant uses to which ethnic statistics could be put by a new fascist regime. (Weiss & Blassel, 2023) summed up the arguments against collecting ethnic statistics in France:

*“Ethnic data are accused of “ethnicising” French society. Furthermore, French integration policies are supposed to lead to a process of assimilation resulting in the disappearance of differences and conformity to an imagined French culture. This is why France does not officially recognise minority groups within the nation. This political and academic discourse linking “republican discourse”, universalism and “colour blindness” (Hajjat, 2021b, p. 419) has been used to justify the absence of ethnic census data in France.”*

However, in the face of persistent inequalities and discrimination, the European Commission's anti-racism coordinator believed that the *statu quo* against collecting ethnic data is an obstacle to effectively combating racial discrimination:

*“An important basis for being able to {nda: combat racism and truly reverse the trend} is to have data on discrimination. We need to know where we stand. Collecting data on equality broken down by racial or ethnic origin is therefore crucial. Without measuring and quantifying the extent of discrimination and inequality in Europe, it becomes very difficult to tackle it effectively. Furthermore, accurate and comparable data are essential for making visible the extent and nature of discrimination experienced by marginalised groups. They also enable the development of effective and targeted policies. With good data, policymakers can better design, adapt, monitor and evaluate policies [...], equality data is a powerful tool in the fight against racism, discrimination and exclusion1 .”* Ms Michaela Moua, quoted in (Brzozowski, 2021).

In France, the former spokesperson for Macron's first government, Sibeth Ndiaye also believed that the lack of ethnic statistics in France was a hindrance to tackling racial inequalities in the French society:

*‘It is urgent to revisit the issue of the representation of people of colour in the public, political, economic and cultural life of our country,’ says the member of La République en Marche and government spokesperson. In particular, she proposes to reopen the debate on ethnic statistics ‘in a calm manner’<sup>2</sup> - Sibeth Ndiaye, *Le Monde*, 13 June 2020.*

The repercussions of her declaration were swift and very hostile: she was replaced as government spokesperson three weeks later. In reality, there are cases where the prohibition rule on collecting ethnic statistics can be waived when the reasons are precisely to document inequalities or

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs Michaela Moua, interviewed by Alexandra Brzozowski, in *Special Report | The Fight Against Racial Discrimination*, Euractiv, July 2021. Online at <https://en.euractiv.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/special-report/EU-equality-bodies-and-the-fight-against-racial-discrimination-Special-Report-1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/06/13/sibeth-ndiaye-nous-payons-aujourd-hui-l-effacement-de-l-universalisme-republicain\\_6042708\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/06/13/sibeth-ndiaye-nous-payons-aujourd-hui-l-effacement-de-l-universalisme-republicain_6042708_3232.html).

discriminatory behaviours, and when the data processing protocols are clearly regulated. Indeed, as (Hamel, 2025) pointed out:

*"public institutions are perfectly entitled to collect information on origin in order to compile statistics and document ethno-racial discrimination, provided that the objective is precisely to reveal and correct it. However, not only is this possibility ignored, but the rumour that such statistics are prohibited persists despite denials by the National Commission for Information Technology and Civil Liberties (CNIL 2007) and the Defender of Rights (2024)."*

By contrast, in the United Kingdom<sup>3</sup>, public organisations are only required to collect ethnic statistics on their employees. The Equality Act 2010 allows them to use 'positive action' measures to correct inequalities by specifically targeting the recruitment of ethnic minorities to positions where they are under-represented.

With regard more specifically to HERIs in France, the *National Plan to combat racism, antisemitism and discrimination based on origin (2018-2020)* (DILCRAH, 2018) required the creation of 'racism and anti-Semitism' officers in each HERI. In many cases, these officers are full-time teaching staff who are not trained on discrimination issues and lack the resources to carry out their duties effectively. The latest version of France's *National Plan to combat racism, antisemitism and discrimination based on the origin 2023-2026*, presented by Élisabeth Borne on 30 January 2023, recognised that racism is a scourge that runs counter to the values of the Republic and must be eradicated through ambitious public policies, the commitment of public authorities, education, knowledge and respect for differences. According to this *2023-26 National antiracism plan*, in France, approximately 1,200,000 people suffer from racist or antisemitic discrimination or attacks, accompanied by violent acts and hate propaganda each year (Borne, 2023). It proposed approximately 80 measures organised around five main areas listed here below.

1	Denounce the reality of racism, antisemitism and xenophobia
2	Measure the phenomenon
3	Improve education and training
4	Punish offenders
5	Support victims

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the national ethnic statistics compiled by the British Parliament: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01156/>. Visited on 9/03/2026.

This 2023-26 National antiracism plan also recommended six lines of action that HERIs are expected to implement:

1	"Create equality missions accompanied by monitoring and listening units
2	Appoint officials responsible for combating racism and antisemitism
3	Provide training and education on combating racism
4	Conduct statistical surveys to measure the extent of racial discrimination
5	Organise awareness-raising activities through communication campaigns and partnerships with associations
6	Declare a commitment to action through charters and/or labels" (Borne, 2023)

However, only the first area of action required governed by law and is therefore mandatory for HERIs. The fact that the other five action points are not binding weakens this plan. These six lines of action converge with the objectives of the ARCHERIF project.

To determine the degree of implementation of the actions recommended in this 2023-26 Plan by HERIs, we examined the websites of 23 French universities. The choice of these 23 universities was guided by the need to have all the regions of France represented and the major universities that influence the overall HERI policies. According to Campus France, there are 78 universities in France<sup>4</sup>. Our sample therefore represents 30% of this total. The 23 universities studied are listed in the table below.

Aix-Marseille University	University of Bordeaux	University of Lille
University of Clermont Auvergne	University of Western Brittany	University of New Caledonia
University of Montpellier	University of Nantes	University of Lorraine
University of Orléans	University of Rennes 2	University of Strasbourg
University of Pau and the Adour Region	University of Toulouse Paul Sabatier	University of Franche-Comté
University of the Antilles	University of Gustave Eiffel	University of Polynesia
University of Lyon 1	University of Côte d'Azur	University of Réunion
University of Paris 8	University of Lyon 3	

*Table 1. List of 23 universities studied for their degree of implementation of the French national plan to combat racism, antisemitism and discrimination based on origin 2023-2026.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/enseignement-superieur-francais#:~:text=La%20France%20compte%20plus%20de,45%20%C3%A9coles%20sup%C3%A9rieures%20d'art> . Accessed on 24/02/2026

The map below shows the locations of the 23 universities studied.

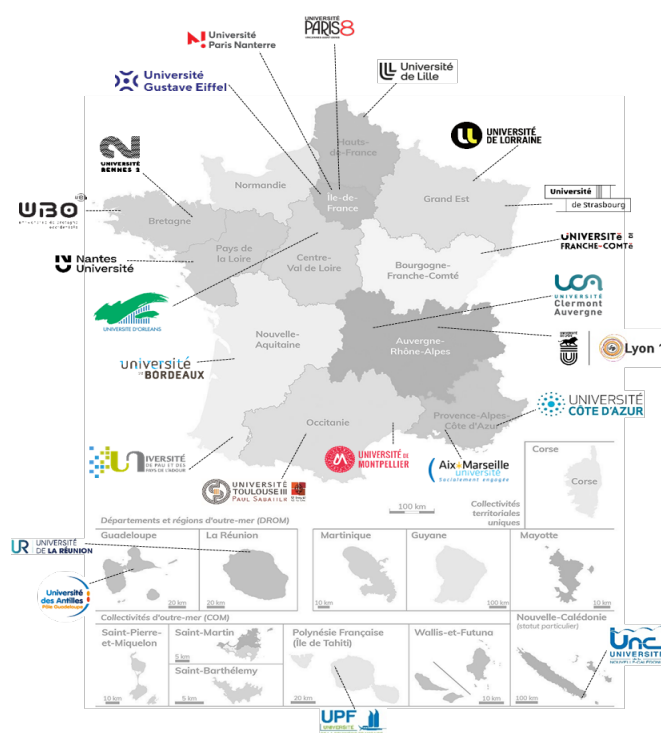


Figure 1. The geographical location of the 23 universities whose websites were examined.

The level to which these 23 universities had implemented the six lines of action in the 2023-26 National antiracism Plan is summarised below.

### 1. Equality missions, monitoring and listening units

All 23 universities had an Equality mission or service. Most had appointed a Vice-president in charge of equality, but the titles varied depending for each. In most cases, these Equality missions focused their actions on gender equality and Sexual and Sexist Violence (SSV) and on harassment. Most universities had monitoring and listening units (*cellule d'écoute*) which could be contacted by email or telephone. Face-to-face meetings mainly took place after a report had been filed. Depending on the university, the human resources allocated to these units ranged from two to more than fifteen people. They generally included family doctors, psychologists, lawyers and equality officer(s). In some cases, the identities of the staff members were clearly displayed, in other

cases, everything was anonymous with no information about the composition of these units. The Acadiscri survey highlighted the limited effectiveness of these listening and reporting units (Hajjat *et al.*, 2022).

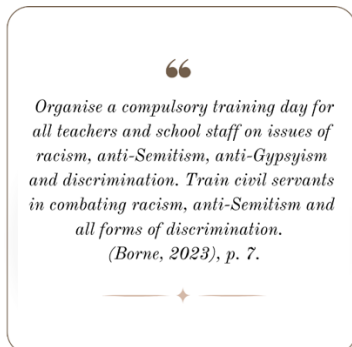
### 2. Equality and anti-discrimination officers

The title of 'equality referent' encompassed various responsibilities: combating discrimination, gender equality, conflict mediation, secularism, and whistleblower management. In the 23 universities surveyed, few had staff specifically dedicated to addressing racism. At the national level, staff dedicated to equality and diversity tasks in the various HERIs were housed under the Permanent Conference of

Equality and Diversity Officers (CPED<sup>5</sup>), a group of HERIs created in 2011 with the aim of supporting the implementation of gender equality policies and combating discrimination. The vast majority of equality and anti-discrimination officers in French HERIs were from the white majority group, i.e. the group historically responsible for racial discrimination, often with no direct experience of racism and lacking training or a real understanding of the different levels and forms of racism. This reduced trust between that victims and the people they are supposed to confide in. The few victims of racism who do report incidents are often met with lack of empathy, minimisation or evasive responses. As the authors of the Acadiscri survey noted, feelings of powerlessness, the predominance of hierarchy and institutional inaction lead to fatalism in the face of discrimination. Informal solutions such as decisions to remove victims or reprisals against whistleblowers are common, and institutional responses can have harmful consequences for victims, even beyond the university (Bozec *et al.*, 2024).

### **3. Provide training and education on combating racism**

Training and education in the fight against racism is considered a fundamental area of action in the 2023-26 National Plan. Among the 15 key measures listed are training courses targeting teaching staff:



Other recommended courses are aimed at students:

*"Invite the relevant authorities (deans' conferences) to strengthen teaching modules for students in all disciplines on combating racism, anti-Gypsyism, anti-Semitism and discrimination based on origin.*

*In art, architecture and journalism schools and in all public institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, include training content on combating racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy stereotypes, discrimination and the role of culture in the emancipation and representation of citizens. Include a module on combating racism, anti-Gypsyism, anti-Semitism and discrimination based on origin in all initial training courses for students in the health professions" (Borne, 2023), p. 7.*

To the best of our knowledge, these recommendations for antiracism education have not been implemented. The few training courses found were optional and dealt with all the forms of discrimination, often neglecting racism. In many cases, they were not training courses *per se*, but optional awareness-raising sessions. The only training course we identified that specifically addressed racism is a short fee-paying (€800) vocational diploma (*diplôme universitaire*) offered by the University of Paris 8<sup>6</sup>. The course is open to professionals, teachers and special needs educators. As a vocational diploma, this training is not integrated into the initial curricula of different disciplines in the university. It will therefore not reach the majority of students and staff (administrative and teaching-researchers) at this institution. The University of Picardie Jules Verne announced the launching of a 50-minute massive open online course (MOOC) for its

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cped-egalite.fr/>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://fc.univ-paris8.fr/-formation-a-la-lutte-contre-le-racisme-et-l-antisemitisme-du->

students<sup>7</sup>. However, we were unable to find any information about this course. It was therefore not possible to determine how many people had taken the course nor its effectiveness.

Some universities have entered into partnerships with external organisations to offer awareness-raising sessions on racial discrimination. For instance, the University of Orléans entered into partnership with the Holocaust Memorial<sup>8</sup> on 20 March 2024<sup>9</sup>. Aix-Marseille University established a partnership with the *Camp des Milles*<sup>10</sup>, a former second World War two internment camp located outside its campuses, through which it offers a one day “*awareness-raising on the fight against extremism, racism, antisemitism and discrimination*” to its 80,000 students and 10,000 staff. It is difficult to know how many people who make up this large university have been able to part awareness-raising session. Indeed, those wishing to attend have to overcome many obstacles amongst the distance of the venue at more than 20 kilometers from its main campuses; transportation issues and the possibility of taking a day off from work or classes. Furthermore, the memorial sites chosen in these partnerships all have links with the Holocaust. The emphasis put on antisemitism to the detriment of discrimination affecting other ethnic groups (anti-Black racism, anti-Muslim racism, Islamophobia, anti-Gypsyism, anti-Asian racism, ...) entertains tensions and resentment amongst different ethnic minority groups. On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2026, Aix-Marseille university announced a second partnership with “*SOS Racism*” association “*to combat racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of*

*discrimination through awareness-raising and training for students and staff, as well as support for victims within the university community*”<sup>11</sup>. It remains to be seen what type of actions will really be implemented, at what levels and targeted to which groups within this institution.

The recourse to human rights organisations such as *The International League Against Racism and Antisemitism* (LICRA) to make occasional interventions on French campuses is observable trend of HERIs in their attempts to respond to the 2023-26 Plan's requirements for training and awareness-raising. While these partnerships with memory institutions or human rights associations is not in of itself objectionable, the reliance on external partnerships to fulfil one of the fundamental missions of HERIs, i.e., education and research to combat racial discrimination within their institutional cultures and practices amounts to *de facto* outsourcing ‘the racism problem’ to organisations far removed from the academic world and its realities. In reality, these sporadic awareness-raising sessions and occasional interventions by associations outside of HERIs are disconnected from the academic cultures and practices which enabled racism to be entrenched within these institutions. Furthermore, the number of awareness raising sessions that these external partners can run per annum, is very limited compared to university populations which run into tens of thousands of people, thus raising the question of their real usefulness. Only the integration of anti-racist education into initial and continuing education programs, in all the disciplines, and trainings offered to

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<sup>7</sup> <https://egalite.univ-littoral.fr/une-formation-pour-comprendre-et-combattre-le-racisme-et-lantisemitisme/>. Accessed on 24/06/2026.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.memorialdelashoah.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.univ-orleans.fr/fr/univ/zoom-sur/le-memorial-de-la-shoah-signe-sa-1ere-convention-de-partenariat-avec-une-universite> Accessed on mai 2024.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.univ-amu.fr/fr/public/actualites/signature-de-convention-entre-aix-marseille-universite-et-la-fondation-du-camp>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.lamarseillaise.fr/societe/aix-marseille-universite-s-allie-avec-sos-racisme-KJ19766862>.

administrative and teaching staff in the various departments and in the central services have the potential to rise to the scale of the challenges, i.e. to tackle the tacit mechanisms, the (un)conscious prejudices that are deeply embedded in institutional cultures and practices which enable the perpetuation of racism.

#### **4. Measuring the extent of racism and racial discrimination**

The National Plan (2023-2026) recommended conducting victimisation surveys to measure the extent of racial discrimination. In reality, many universities are reluctant to do so. The surveys that had been done were funded by other agencies and primarily targeted students. The Acadiscri survey is one of the few surveys in France to focus on discriminations in HERIs that did not limit its study to students alone. In its initial version which ran from 2020 to 2022, only six out of the 78<sup>12</sup> French universities agreed to take part. In its second version as the ESTRADES project, eight more universities took part, thus bringing the total to fourteen universities after four years of effort<sup>13</sup>. This low number once again underscores the sensitivity surrounding the issue of discrimination, and *a fortiori* racism, as well as the reluctance, or even refusal of French HERIs to allow surveys that would give a realistic picture of the state of discrimination in their institutions.

A second initiative is the National Observatory on Discrimination and Equality in Higher Education (ONDES)<sup>14</sup>, created in 2022 by Gustave Eiffel University in collaboration with France Université (formerly the Conference of

French University Presidents). ONDES' mission is to "*observe and objectify inequalities and discrimination. To this end, the Observatory is open to work from all disciplines, provided that it sheds light on the issue of equality and discrimination in the field of higher education and research*"<sup>15</sup>. The research methodology used by the Observatory is testing, which enables it to quantify cases of discrimination during social interactions using known and controlled information (Chareyron *et al.*, 2023). Their results showed that students with North African sounding patronyms were less likely to be admitted into master's programmes than their white counterparts (Chareyron *et al.*, 2023). This observatory has published several other reports that measured discriminations in HERIs in different contexts (master's programme admission rates based on ethnic origin, discriminatory hiring practices, islamophobia, etc.). It remains to be seen how the various institutional partners of this observatory which included France Université (French University Chancellors), will leverage the reports published by this Observatory to implement actions aimed at tackling the discriminations identified.

#### **5. Organise awareness-raising activities through communication campaigns and partnerships with associations.**

Awareness-raising, commemorative ceremonies and the establishment of partnerships with associations were among the key lines of action recommended in the French 2023-2026 *National Antiracism Plan*. The month of march is generally dedicated to the fight against discriminations. 8th March is

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<sup>12</sup> Figures provided by Campus France  
<https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/enseignement-superieur-francais#:~:text=La%20France%20compte%20plus%20de,45%20%C3%A9coles%20sup%C3%A9rieures%20d'art> Accessed on 12/03/2025.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://acadiscri.hypotheses.org/etablisements-enquetes>. Accessed on 12/03/2025.

<sup>14</sup> <https://ondes.univ-gustave-eiffel.fr/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://ondes.univ-gustave-eiffel.fr/observatoire/presentation-de-londes>. Accessed on 24/02/2026.

the International Women's Rights Day while 21<sup>st</sup> March has been designated by the United Nations as the “*International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*”<sup>16</sup>. During this month, universities host events aimed at raising awareness about different types of discrimination (gender, ethnic origin, race, religion, disability and sexuality). However, the intensity of the events programming varies from one institution to another. Some makes it a month-long affair while others limit themselves to a few days devoted to a single type of discrimination, often sexism. Out of the 23 universities surveyed, only 11 addressed the issue of racism during these events.

Furthermore, most anti-racism events are led by non-racialised people, i.e. members of the majority group historically responsible for racism. Racialised ethnic minorities are rarely invited to speak, and their experiences are rarely taken into account. Many of these annual events have become performative top-down public relations exercise with no real impact on the ground. The vast majority of teaching and administrative staff do not feel concerned by these commemorative events and do not take participate in them. Once the month of march is over, the rest of the year, it is “business as usual”.

## 6. Declaring commitment through charters and/or labels

The sixth action point recommended by the French *2023-2026 National Antiracism Plan* is the creation of charters and/or labels as a signal of a strong commitment to equality and the fight against discrimination. French universities are already signatories of several charters targeting discrimination based on other grounds, whether developed by associations, foundations, or public or private

institutions. For instance, the **LGBT+ Charter of Commitment by L'Autre Cercle**, designed specifically for the higher education sector, was launched in 2022 in the presence of Sylvie Retailleau, the former Minister of Higher Education and Research. This charter has been signed by several organisations including a number of universities. **The Diversity Charter**<sup>17</sup> originated from the private sector. It was crafted in a 2004 report published by the Institut Montaigne entitled ‘*Les oubliés de l'égalité des chances*’ (The forgotten ones of equal opportunities). Its objective is to “promote equal opportunities in employment’ and non-discrimination”. On the Diversity Charter website, we could only identify six universities that had signed it. Upon careful examination of the text of this charter, the concept of diversity remains vague and racism is not explicitly mentioned. **The Diversity label** developed by Afnor<sup>18</sup> in collaboration with the French government was introduced in 2008 following the creation of the Professional Equality label in 2004. The Diversity label is intended to acknowledge efforts made by a professional organisation to adopt inclusive and non-discriminatory practices in its human resources, recruitment and career development processes. However, the exorbitant cost of obtaining this label and its unsuitability for HERIs constitutes a barrier to its adoption by universities (AFMD & CPED, 2021).

In summary, French universities have signed charters specifically dedicated to gender equality and/or diversity (often focusing on gender and disability). However, there is no charter or label dedicated to combating racism and racial discrimination in France.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/end-racism-day>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.charte-diversite.com/>. Accessed on 24/02/2026.

<sup>18</sup> <https://certification.afnor.org/ressources-humaines/label-diversite>. Accessed on 24/06/2026.

Thus, despite public statements and speeches published on the websites of HERIs, the 80 measures and the six action lines recommended in the French 2023-2026 *Antiracism Plan* have remained largely unimplemented. This lack of implementation is not due solely to reluctance by French HERIs themselves. It comes right from the top of the French state. In its 2023 annual report *'On the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia'*, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDDH)<sup>19</sup> highlighted the apathy and lack of political commitment on the part of Emmanuel Macron's government to implement any of the measures in the 2023-2026 *National Antiracism Plan*, as well as the complacency of the French legal and judicial system towards perpetrators of racism:

*'It is regrettable that the government does not share the same concern,' laments Jean-Marie Burguburu, president of the CNCDDH. "It has been too passive in its response to the explosion of anti-Semitic acts across the country in the aftermath of 7 October. It should have immediately mobilised the state apparatus, accelerating the implementation of the National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination adopted by Élisabeth Borne in early 2023."*<sup>20</sup> (CNCDDH, 2024).

The CNCDDH report also highlighted that, overall, tolerance towards racialised people, particularly Blacks, as well as Jews and Roma, had declined, while racist acts had increased significantly. Confirming the findings of previous studies, this report also showed that 96% of victims of racism do not file complaints because of the complacency of French courts towards perpetrators. Courts rarely pursued

complaints of racism, thus contributing to the sense of impunity of perpetrators:

*"The figures from the Ministry of Justice are therefore particularly worrying. In 2022, 55% of racist cases were dismissed, which is much higher than in general litigation. There has also been a 17% decrease in the number of racist cases referred by public prosecutors and a 16% decrease in the number of people charged with racist offences."* (CNCDDH, 2024).

Among the measures recommended by the CNCDDH, some are of particular interest to HERIs:

“

- *Develop research and data collection on discrimination.*
- *Make anti-discrimination awareness training compulsory.*
- *Combat the "black number"<sup>21</sup>.*
- *Offer awareness kits in higher education.*
- *Improve the training of recruitment panels.*
- *Ensure effective funding for the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.*
- *Establish a label to guarantee the non-discriminatory nature of recruitment software.*

(CNCDDH, 2024).

”

These measures are in line with those of the French 2023-2026 *National Antiracism Plan* detailed above. They also converge with the objectives of the ARCHERIF project. An example is the *Discrimination Prevention Kit for Higher Education* ((AFMD & CPED, 2021) published by the French Association of Diversity Managers (AFMD), the Permanent Conference of Equality and Diversity Officers (CPED) in partnership with the Defender of Rights, the Ministry of Higher Education,

<sup>19</sup> Appointed as the 'independent national rapporteur on the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia' in 1990, the CNCDDH (National Consultative Commission on Human Rights) submits an annual report to the government assessing the state of racism in France. <https://www.cncddh.fr/actualite/la-cncddh-publie-le-rapport-2023-sur-la-lutte-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-la>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.cncddh.fr/actualite/la-cncddh-publie-le-rapport-2023-sur-la-lutte-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-la>

<sup>21</sup> According to this report, the expression 'black number ("chiffre noir")' refers to the invisibility of all unreported racist acts, which escape the justice system, CNCDDH (2023), p. 17.

Research and Innovation, and JuriSup, the legal affairs network for HERIs. In the absence of information about which institutions have

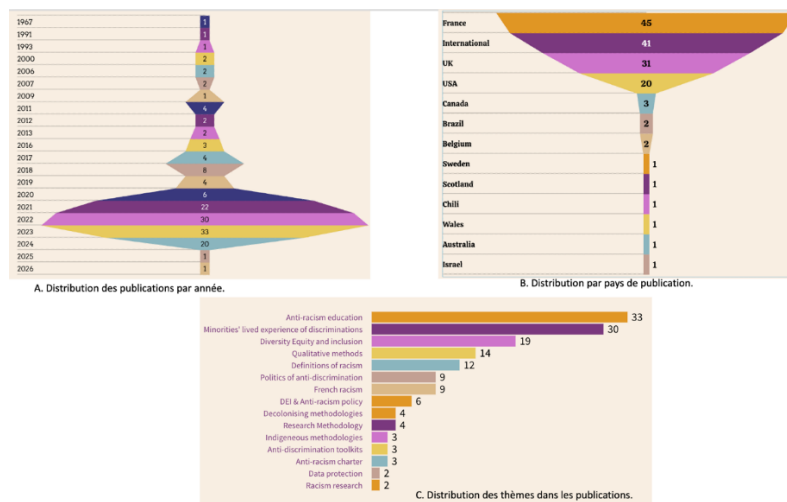
implemented this kit and of the criteria for evaluating its effectiveness, it is difficult to determine its real impact.

## 2 International Review of Literature on Racism in Higher Education and Research

Our international Systematic Literature Review (SLR) showed the persistence of systemic and institutional racism in HERIs of the countries represented. The selection of publications included in this SLR followed the PRISMA<sup>22</sup> statement. Based on searches from the two major multidisciplinary bibliographic databases, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, approximately 150 publications were read and analysed for this SLR

### 1. Distribution of publications analysed

Figure 2a below shows the distribution of publications by year, confirming the surge in interest in this topic in the years immediately following the racist murder of George Floyd in 2020. Given that the years 2025 and 2026 had not begun by the time of data gathering in June 2024), there were very few publications for these years although some were already visible as early views. Figure 2b gives the distribution by country of publication. It shows that 45% of the publications came from researchers based in France; 41% were international studies with no one country of field work; the United Kingdom accounted for 31% of publications while the United States accounted for 20%. In total, 76% of the publications came from researchers based in European countries which enhanced the relevance of the SLR *vis-à-vis* the project's objectives.



Figures 2a, b, c Distribution of publications by country, by theme, and their evolution over time.

<sup>22</sup> "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses."  
<https://www.prisma-statement.org/>.

Figure 2c gives the distribution of the topics in these publications. The top five themes were “anti-racism education; the lived experiences of racism of ethnic minorities; the impact of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies; qualitative research methods; definitions of racism.

## **2.2 Anti-racist education in higher education worldwide**

Several studies have shown that educational systems are deeply political activities, often exploited by the dominant political ideology. The responsibility of European pseudo-scientific theories of the 18th and 19th centuries in the propagation of scientific and biological racism and, thus in the slavery and colonialism enterprise has been amply demonstrated. In the recent period, *Nature* magazine, the number one scientific journal in the world, published a special issue entitled “*Racism: Overcoming science’s toxic legacy*”<sup>23</sup> in 2022. This special issue aimed to examine the role this journal, as a very influential institution on the global science stage, had played in promoting racist theories by former authors and influential figures. In the special issue, (Ball, 2022) recalled the responsibility of British scientists such as the naturalist Thomas Henry Huxley in propounding theories that legitimised slavery, colonisation and scientific racism. In the wake of the BLM movement, British universities have begun to examine their colonial and slavery heritage. Some institutions have gone as far as allocating funds to support marginalised and discriminated communities and to promote education and research on race and racism involving students and researchers from ethnic minorities<sup>24</sup>. The critical appraisal undertaken by certain British institutions of their racism, slavery and

colonial heritage has been likened to the one undertaken by Germany on its Nazi heritage after WWII (Ball, 2022).

In the medical field, the highly influential scientific journal *The Lancet* also launched a series in 2022 entitled “*The Lancet Series on racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and health*”<sup>25</sup> to examine “*how historical systems and structures of power and oppression, and discriminatory ideologies have shaped today’s policies and practices, and are the root causes of racial inequalities in health*” (Abubakar et al., 2022).

Our SLR showed that most of the research on anti-racist education and pedagogy were done by authors in North America and the United Kingdom.

In the United Kingdom, (Jankowski, 2021) showed the important role played by psychology, as a discipline, in minimising racism by disregarding its effects on social relations and on health. Other scientific fields, again mainly in English-speaking countries, have begun a critical examination of their slavery and colonial heritage and thus of their responsibilities for the persistence of today’s racism. This led to attempts to develop anti-racist education and to calls to decolonise the curricula of HERIs still largely dominated by eurocentrism.

The majority of publications on anti-racist education and pedagogy leverage **Critical Race Theory (CRT)** and **Black feminist and abolitionist methodologies** as conceptual

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d42859-022-00031-8/index.html>.

<sup>24</sup> The University of Glasgow allocated [£20 million](#) to repair its legacy of slavery. Owing to pressure from its students, University College London (UCL) funded the “[Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation](#)” to the tune of £350 000. Several research centres in British higher education institutions are dedicated to the study of race, racism and ethnicity, see for instance, the [Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity](#) at Manchester University.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.thelancet.com/series/racism-xenophobia-discrimination-health>.

frameworks to deconstruct white hegemony and eurocentrism that underpin higher education curricula and pedagogical approaches. The first step towards a truly anti-racist education is the recognition of the existence of structural and systemic inequalities within western education systems. Drawing on CRT and ethnography, (Duncan, 2021) showed how Black teachers in the United States leveraged their own experiences of racism to engage in anti-racist pedagogy.

(Toliver & Hadley, 2021) showed that white teachers in the initial teacher training courses were unable to imagine an equitable space for racialised children, thus contributing to the omnipresence of “whiteness” in the American education system. (Bonilla-Silva, 2013<sup>26</sup>, p. 28) observed that “*Whiteness is so pervasive that white people can appear “reasonable” and even “moral” while opposing almost any practical approach to addressing de facto racial inequality.*” These studies detailed the many avoidance strategies used by Whites to evade discussions about racism and thus maintain white supremacy. These included “*Overwhelming niceness, claims of reverse racism, attempts to redirect blame, and constant emotional displays are all weapons that protect the onto-epistemological weeds of whiteness*” (Toliver & Hadley, 2021).

Hawkman (2020<sup>27</sup>) defined whiteness as “*a hegemonic, hierarchical, and constantly evolving power structure, as well as an identity construct that informs how individuals perceive themselves and society, and which is based on the dehumanisation of the racial other.*” (p. 404).

(Adeniji & Foster, 2022) described the experiences of Black student teachers tasked with teaching diversity courses in the United States. The authors noted that the authenticity and relevance of anti-racist education and pedagogy continued to be framed by white fragility. The result is a “whitening of critical pedagogies”.

Observing the major role that educators can play in “*promoting anti-racist pedagogy and encouraging teacher trainees to engage in critical self-examination with regard to dominant narratives*”, (Janes, 2024) showed how teacher training programmes in Australia contributed to perpetuating a system and curriculum that predominantly favoured white people.

Using critical whiteness studies as a theoretical framework, (Cohen, 2024) examined the resistance to multicultural education among Israeli Jewish undergraduate students.

### ***2.3 Live experience of racism amongst ethnic minorities in higher education***

(Wheeler, 2011)’s study of the lived experiences of Black teachers in the United States remains valid when compared to the findings of more recent studies and from several countries. The experience of ethnic minorities at university is generally characterised by a spectrum of discriminations, ranging from seemingly innocuous everyday comments (racial microaggressions) to more serious behaviour patterns that create a toxic environment and cause long term mental health damage. In addition to being under-represented at management positions and in certain

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<sup>26</sup> Bonilla-Silva, E. (2013), *Racism without Racists: Colour-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality*, 4th ed. Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

<sup>27</sup> Hawkman, A. M., & Shear, S. B. (2020). Introduction—Taking responsibility, doing the work: An introduction to marking the invisible. In A. M. Hawkman & S. B. Shear (Eds.), *Marking the “invisible”: Articulating whiteness in social studies education* (p. 25-26). Information Age Publishing.

disciplines, racialised minorities are subjected to bias and prejudice during recruitment procedures. When they end up being recruited, it is often in temporary or in operational positions (catering, logistics, cleaning, security). The few who manage to attain positions as lecturers and researchers are often marginalised and isolated in their departments, and their careers are often slowed down. Those who attain the highest echelons as university professors are often alone in this space. This engenders the **'burden of symbolism'**, i.e., *"the notion that Black people have a special responsibility to be exemplary and literal representatives of their race (Banks, 1984 p. 335)<sup>28</sup>"*, resulting in **'racial fatigue'** (Harley 2008<sup>29</sup>) and (Wheeler, 2011).

Other studies reported other forms of racial discrimination including assumptions of inferiority, of second-class citizenship, of criminality, micro-invalidations, exoticisation, micro-aggressions (Lui & Anglin, 2021) and excessive workloads (Puplampu *et al.*, 2023). Black professors reported having to work harder to prove their academic worth. The psychological impacts were emotional exhaustion, a permanent state of anxiety, and the need to be constantly vigilant and never make mistakes.

In a study on the experience of women scientists of colour<sup>30</sup> in the UK, (Salmon, 2022) highlighted the intersection of gender and race discrimination. Women scientists were subjected to various forms of microaggressions in their research careers, including **micro-assaults**, **micro-insults** and **micro-invalidations** that contributed to their feelings of isolation, invisibility and, paradoxically, hypervisibility. The study by (Warner, 2022) showed that institutional

racism, although hidden, was omnipresent in initial teacher training education in the UK.

Publications from Latin America painted a similar picture. (Ayala *et al.*, 2024) showed the prevalence of ethnic prejudice and racism in the Chilean education system. Chilean teachers held explicit and implicit prejudices about the learning abilities of Haitian students which they tried to conceal while reproducing stereotypes associated with these students' nationality in their assessment of their learning abilities. (Valério *et al.*, 2021) showed that black female students at a public university in Brazil were subjected to experiences of **everyday racism**, including discriminatory treatment, racist jokes and stereotypes, which reinforced their sense of isolation and the perception that the university is not a space for black women.

(Tichavakunda, 2021) concluded that **the persistence of racism is due to bad faith**: *"Bad faith is the disavowal of all contrary evidence, which allows people to maintain their worldview at all costs."* (Tichavakunda, 2021) This explains the relentless attacks on critical race theory in education, the continued denigration of research on racial microaggressions, and *"the persistent difficulty in classifying racist violence on campuses as hate crimes."*

In order to enact an anti-racist education, the fundamental question is how to challenge **'the irrational, persuade the illogical, or debate the incorrigible?'** [...]. *In other words, for the person who considers Black people to be less than human, no evidence, in any form, will allow them to see otherwise."* (Tichavakunda, 2021).

Tichavakunda's analysis echoes that of the eminent African American sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Dubois (1995) that no

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<sup>28</sup> Banks, W. M. (1984). Afro-American scholars in the university: Roles and conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 27(3), 325-338.

<sup>29</sup> Harley, D. A. (2008). Maids of academe: African American women faculty at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of African American Studies*, 12(1), 19-36.

<sup>30</sup> En anglais dans l'article, *Women of Colour* (WOC).

amount of evidence will change the beliefs of truly racist people:

*‘In the struggle against racial prejudice, we were not simply confronted with the rational and conscious determination of white people to oppress us; we were confronted with centuries-old complexes that were largely buried in unconscious habits and irrational impulses.’<sup>31</sup>*

#### **2.4 The inadequacy of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies in combating racism**

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies are not a recent invention. They date back to the civil rights struggles of Black Americans in the 1950s and 1960s (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018); (Bursell, 2024). The fact that racism remains prevalent in Western societies indicates that diversity and unconscious bias trainings are insufficient to bring about lasting change in terms of reducing prejudice and discrimination. Indeed, (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018) observed that ironically, *“research on the low effectiveness of these training programmes comes from academia’*. Hence, it was paradoxical that organisations and universities continued to provide these training programmes to their personnel and students. The fundamental reasons for these shortcomings lay in human psychology. According to (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018):

- There is *“ample evidence that training alone does not change attitudes or behaviours, or does so only slightly and not for long.”* Essentially, short-term training does not change individuals' deeply held beliefs and attitudes in the long term. The effects of such training tend to fade away within a few days or weeks.
- Anti-bias training can activate the very stereotypes that it seeks to eliminate in

people's subconscious, thus becoming counterproductive. To mitigate this, research showed that increased contact with the discriminated groups can foster empathy and thus reduce bias.

- Placing unrealistic expectations on EDI training can lead to complacency or to ‘gaming the system’. Such trainings can serve to mask persistent discriminatory behaviours or an institutional culture marked by bias and discrimination.
- Hostility, resentment, and even animosity from white people who feel threatened by the mere mention of diversity and racial equality, given the historical evidence of racism from this group. As a result, the benefits of such trainings will not be adopted or implemented with sincerity. As a mitigation measure, the authors recommended presenting multiculturalism and EDI training as part of the “majority culture” so that white people feel included.
- The authors' surveys revealed that *“80% of companies with diversity training make it mandatory, and 43% of colleges and universities with staff training make it mandatory.”* However, organisational research have shown that people react negatively to efforts to control them. The mandatory nature of these training courses contributed to employees, particularly whites, feeling controlled and therefore not supporting the objectives of the training. To counter this, the authors recommended presenting the need for this training as something that is necessary internally and beneficial to everyone, rather than as an injunction from the institution or the hierarchy.
- Finally, discrimination, particularly of the racial type, does not stem solely from

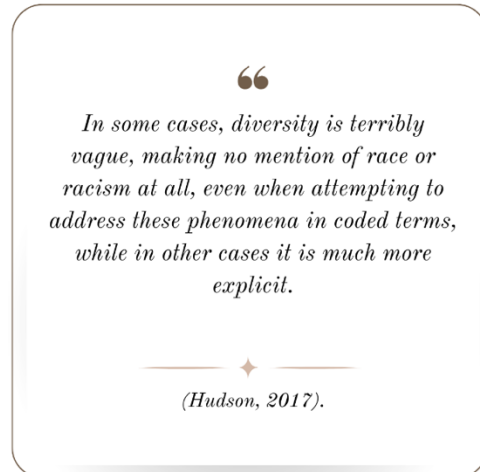
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<sup>31</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois (p. 296) cited in Holt, T.C. Marking: Race, race-making, and the writing of history. *Am. Hist. Rev.* 1995, 100, 1–20.

unconscious bias. Individuals who are racist deeply believe that their 'race' / skin colour / culture / civilisation / language / country is superior to others. Consequently, anti-bias training alone cannot eradicate these deeply held prejudices and the resulting discrimination against groups deemed inferior.

(Dobbin & Kalev, 2018)'s findings were corroborated by more recent studies. (Bursell, 2024) tested the Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention developed by the psychologist Patricia (Devine et al., 2012) on 125 social workers in Sweden regarding implicit biases towards Muslims. The results showed that although *"the intervention increased participants' awareness of implicit biases and prejudices, it did not reduce participants' implicit biases."* EDI is particularly ineffective in addressing structural discrimination which requires the involvement of institutional decision-makers. As (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018) observed: *"The anti-discrimination measures that work best are those that involve decision-makers in solving the problem themselves."* These findings on the long-term ineffectiveness of EDI policies were corroborated by our field survey of EDI and antiracism policies deployed at eight universities in the UK. EDI has become, at best, a symbolic gesture that does not address the roots of systemic and structural racism and does not transform the historical cultures and attitudes that have entrenched them, and at worst, it has become a public relations exercise. Furthermore, EDI initiatives differ from country to country. They were widespread in American institutions until 2025 when they were dismantled by the return of Donald Trump and white supremacists to the white house.

In terms of the substance, the concept of EDI functions as a container into which organisations put all their social policies, making it a "catch-all" concept that serves to elude the root causes of the systemic inequalities observed. (Hudson, 2017) observed that:



Furthermore, indicators are rarely developed to measure the impact of EDI policies in the institutions where they are implemented (Ibekwe, 2023).

As a result, EDI has become primarily a public relations strategy with many organisations displaying images of racialised people on their websites, who are often placed in the role of users, students or customers, while the positions of power remain firmly in "white hands" (Sibanda, 2025). A review of the websites of 62 higher education institutions in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom by (Buckner et al., 2021) arrived at similar conclusions about the instrumentalisation of international students who pay exorbitant tuition fees. The emphasis on smiling faces in the advertisements of western institutions ignores the reality of the racism experienced by these international students who come mainly from countries situated in the so-called "Global South"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> This terminology, which has become widespread in official discourse, is problematic because it reproduces the very prejudices and stereotypes it is supposed to combat. In fact, the classification of 'Global South' and 'Global

North' is neither geographically, culturally nor economically justified. Some countries considered part of the 'Global North' are actually in the Southern Hemisphere (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea), while

(Kraus *et al.*, 2022) analysed how ‘colour blind’ policies constituted a barrier to racial equality. (Kapoor & Cavanagh, 2024) criticised the current trend of ‘diversity management’ in universities, consisting in training on unconscious bias as the means to ensure anti-racist education. This approach is ineffective and flawed because as the authors noted, it fails to take into account *“the significant psychoanalytic dimensions of racism’ while denying ‘any meaningful or collective engagement, precisely with the unconscious.”* This has the undesirable consequence of viewing racism *“as both a symptom and an individual responsibility, thereby depoliticising the fight against global/structural racism”* (Kapoor & Cavanagh, 2024). The authors observed that the most lasting changes were the result of grassroots movements: *“The radicalism of progressive subaltern movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Left Dalit, and Palestinian groups) lies in their refusal to accept the racial status quo, which helps to break the chain of subjugation (unlike traditional universities and development agencies, whose anti-racist work can end up reproducing it)”*. For (Kapoor & Cavanagh, 2024), the roots of racism lie in capitalism: *“It is, after all, capitalism’s dependence on inequality and exploitation that makes racial (and gender) domination necessary.”* Known as **racial capitalism**, this concept *“implies moving beyond an analysis focused on individual discrimination to focus on the ways in which race is constitutive of the market economy – or articulated in another way to capitalism (...) ‘racialisation’, that is, the social processes of race production.”* (Ashiagbor & Zevounou, 2025), p. 123

While being fully aware of its limitations but following the popular adage that “half a

loaf is better than none”, we believe that EDI training and policies remain necessary. Indeed, the ethnoracial makeup a field of knowledge, of a service or of an organisation has real effects on the social and cultural environment within that organisation (Furner *et al.*, 2022). Although ineffective in the long term, EDI and implicit /anti-bias training have the potential to raise awareness:

“  
*Unlike critics of diversity training such as Noon (2018), who describe diversity training as ‘useless’ because it targets individual attitudes when the problem is structural, I would argue that implicit bias training has the potential to contribute to improving organisational diversity and equity.*  
 ”  
 (Bursell, 2024).

Also (Ball, 2022) rightly observed that the **‘lack of diversity and racism are linked.’** Hence, while increasing the diversity in ethnic representation of an organisation will not automatically eradicate racism and other inequalities, the complete absence of ethnic minorities in certain spaces is an indicator of an even greater level of prejudice and racism within that organisation.

### **2.5 Calls to decolonise higher education curricula**

Calls to decolonise the eurocentric university curricula originated in the *Rhodes Must Fall* movement which began in 2015 at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa (Kwoba *et al.*, 2019). The campaign to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes led to a broader movement for the decolonisation of the education system in South Africa. These calls gained traction in English-speaking countries, particularly in the UK and the

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some countries classified as belonging to the Global South are actually in the Northern Hemisphere (the Caribbean islands).

United States (Howe, 2021), (Sunnemark & Thörn, 2023).

(Tamimi *et al.*, 2023) described the efforts of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College London (KCL) to decolonise their content. The department offered a course on decolonial research methods to its students and conducted semi-structured interviews with academics and students on initiatives to be taken. (Warnock *et al.*, 2023) observed that in Canada, although undergraduate medical education programmes recognised the importance of addressing racism, a truly anti-racist education had not been achieved.

In Europe, calls to decolonise the curricula have been met with much resistance. In France, the rise of nationalist and far-right ideologies has been accompanied in the HERI sector by the emergence of a countermovement, the *Observatoire du décolonialisme* (Decolonialism Observatory<sup>33</sup>), renamed as the 'Observatoire de l'éthique universitaire' (University Ethics Observatory<sup>34</sup>). Bringing together academics opposed to any critical appraisal of the hegemony of the western perspective in higher education and research, one of the self-assigned missions of this observatory is to deconstruct the supposed 'wokism' threatening academic freedom, secularism and the French republican order. Boosted by the attacks by American conservative and republican movements that led to the dismantling of EDI policies, the banning of CRT in schools, and the teaching of history of slavery and segregation in the United States, this observatory seeks to discredit and stigmatise the few academics engaged in decolonial studies in France. The goal being to shut down any examination of persistent

inequalities in the French society from a critical race-theoretic perspective, which is nevertheless crucial to understand the systemic and structural nature of the discriminations that disproportionately affect racialised French citizens and immigrants.

## **2.6 Anti-racism education at the national level**

To be effective, anti-racist education projects need to be implemented at the national level and then rolled out at different levels of government (cities, provinces and regions). In the United Kingdom, (Felix, 2022) retraced the history of anti-racist initiatives in the national education programme. The Centre for Heritage at Newcastle University published a toolkit to facilitate anti-racist educational practice (Dixon, 2023). It included "*publications and project portfolios from nationally and internationally renowned anti-racist educators, critical race theorists, thought leaders in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and others working inside and outside academia to support inclusive teaching and learning, curriculum development and collaborative knowledge co-production.*" This toolkit offers guidance on how to apply anti-racist principles and approaches that can transform teaching and research in the arts, museum and heritage studies.

Again, some of the most notable changes in the UK in this area have been brought about by grassroots students' led movements. The student association Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) aims to "*reduce inequalities in higher education by gathering evidence on effective measures and encouraging the use of evidence-based practices.*"<sup>35</sup> This association identified "*among the inequalities in higher education in*

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.arretsurimages.net/articles/observatoire-du-decolonialisme-faux-think-tank-vrai-media-dopinion>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.decolonialisme.fr/>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://taso.org.uk/about/>.

the United Kingdom, the gap between students from marginalised ethnic backgrounds and their white peers in terms of graduation rates is one of the most persistent and long-standing.” Reducing the degree awarding gap between white and racialised students is seen as an important focus of the fight against racism in the UK’s HERIs. We will dwell more on this in the section devoted to our field survey of British universities (see §3 *infra*).

The Scottish Ministry of Education published a report entitled “Promoting and developing racial equality and anti-racist education: an overview” which defined “the imperative to integrate anti-racism into the ethics and practice of our education system”. This report enables teachers to have difficult conversations about race and racism with their pupils. In particular, a guide helps practitioners explore the following questions: “What is racial equality and anti-racist education? Why do we need to discuss it in all schools? What do we need to do individually and collectively to promote racial equality and anti-racist education?” (Education Scotland, 2023). In partnership with the national “Combating Racism on Campus” project led by Advance HE<sup>36</sup>, Scotland also launched an anti-racist curriculum project for the Scottish higher education sector<sup>37</sup>. The aim of this project is to “help colleagues in higher education to systematically integrate racial

equality into higher education and continuing education curricula in Scotland<sup>38</sup>”.

Similarly, the devolved government of Wales adopted an anti-racism plan that requires its schools and universities to integrate anti-racist education into their institutional practice. This plan, which began in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder, involved members of the BAME<sup>39</sup> ethnic minorities in Wales. The Welsh Government’s action plan for initial teacher training acknowledged the need to decolonise the pedagogy and “reimagine initial teacher training within an anti-racist paradigm” (Davis *et al.*, 2024). An anti-racist education goes simply beyond being ‘non-racist’. This government’s plan involved increasing the recruitment of trainee teachers from BAME backgrounds in Wales, decolonising the curriculum, and creating safe spaces where people can express themselves, ask questions and make mistakes without being stigmatised. It will be interesting to see how this plan is rolled out and what impact it is having on combating racism in Welsh education system.

The Welsh devolved government’s highly ambitious goal is for Wales to become ‘an anti-racist nation by 2030’.  
(Welsh Government, 2022b)

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/anti-racist-curriculum-project>.

<sup>38</sup> Advance HE, & QAA Scotland. (2022). Anti-Racist Curriculum Project. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/anti-racist-curriculum-project>. Consulted 7/10/2025.

<sup>39</sup> BAME stands for « Black, Asian Minority Ethnic ».

The analysis of the EDI policies of 23 universities in France (§1) and the systematic literature review (SLR) (§2) presented above were completed by a field survey of eight British universities in the spring of 2024. Our SLR had shown that, in Europe, the UK was the most advanced country in terms of anti-discrimination policies, particularly racism. Hence, our field survey was aimed at understanding the legislative framework and institutional cultures that enabled these advances, and how these policies were implemented and what impact they have had. The survey adopted a qualitative approach involving individual semi-structured interviews with people in charge of EDI policies at the eight universities listed below.

N°	Institution	Fonctions
1	University of Oxford	Head of EDI
2	University of Liverpool	EDI officer
3	University College London (UCL)	Former Vice-Dean of the EDI for Arts and Humanities
4	University of London (UoL)	Head of Inclusion
5	Institut of Advanced Legal Studies London (IALS)	Head Librarian
6	King's College London (KCL)	Professor of Social Policy and Race Studies
7	University of Sussex	Lecturer and researcher, School of Global Studies
8	University of the Arts London (UAL)	Former head of EDI and the Racial Equality Charter.

Table 2. List of British universities where interviews were conducted.

Three of these institutions (Oxford, UCL and Liverpool) are part of the Russell Group<sup>40</sup>. The interviews were enriched by the reading of institutional documents on EDI and anti-racism policies of these eight British universities. The main findings of the interviews are summarised in the following sections.

### 3.1 The advances in EDI and antiracism policies in British universities

#### 1. A favourable legal framework for tackling racial discrimination

All our participants attributed the possibility of deploying EDI and anti-racism policies in their institutions to a series of equality and non-discrimination laws in the UK of which the major one is the **Equality Act** of 2010. As stated on the UK government

website, the Equality Act ‘provides additional support to groups of people who share a “protected characteristic” (e.g. race, gender or sexual orientation) in order to equalise opportunities. You can take proportionate measures that aim to reduce disadvantages, meet different needs and increase participation<sup>41</sup>’.


<sup>40</sup> The Russell Group is a collective of 24 research-intensive British universities. Its members share a commitment to and interest in research, as well as exceptional teaching and learning experiences. <https://www.studyin-uk.com/uk-study-info/russell-group-universities/>.

<sup>41</sup> Gov UK.org, Equality Act 2010 Guide. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-action-in-the-workplace-guidance-for-employers/positive-action-in-the-workplace#protected-characteristics>. Consulté le 30/05/2024.

While European countries all have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of the similar characteristics, the UK's Equality Act includes a provision called '**Positive Action**'. Employers can have recourse to positive action in order to increase the representation of marginalised or disadvantaged groups in positions where they are underrepresented, all things being equal.

The fact that public institutions in the UK are required to collect ethnic statistics makes it easy for them to demonstrate the under-representation of BAME people in all sectors of professional activity, compared to their representation in the British society.

Thus, to correct the under-representation of BAME people in senior management and teaching positions, universities have the option of invoking the positive action provision as well as putting in place **fair recruitment** policies.



All the higher education and research institutions where we conducted interviews had implemented fair recruitment measures that refer to positive action in job advertisements.

Another factor that legitimises the recourse to positive action is the fact that official reports commissioned by many sectors of the British society following the BLM movement or following high-profile cases of racism all concluded to the persistence of institutional racism. The fact that pieces of legislation explicitly acknowledged the existence of institutional racism provided a legal framework to implement policies aimed at correcting its effects in various public sectors. The former president of the UK Universities

Association (UKU), Professor David Richardson acknowledged the existence of institutional racism within the HERIs as a whole<sup>42</sup>.

## **2. EDI units endowed with significant human and financial resources**

British universities have EDI units whose size, human and financial resources easily rival with those of large departments or faculties in French universities. All the universities where we conducted interviews had a central EDI unit reporting directly to the Chancellor or Provost of the institution. The personnel in this central EDI unit are part of the university's Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The central EDI unit gathers under its remit all the other units dedicated to combating all forms of discrimination (gender equality, disability, religion, racism, etc.).

EDI units were endowed with significant human, financial and logistical resources in order to fulfill their missions (creation of EDI training programmes; discrimination and unconscious bias trainings, online platforms for reporting; year-long planning of awareness-raising events; disbursement of prizes; scholarships and affiliated research projects). This has the effect of making the fight against discrimination one of the priorities of these universities<sup>43</sup>.

In addition, the central EDI department is represented at all the levels of the university, ensuring that the university's commitment to EDI trickles down into its departments and official procedures (recruitment panels, commissions and juries). EDI officers are appointed in each department. Some institutions also appointed 'Diversity Champions' or 'Race Champions'. These are people who sit on departmental board meetings and recruitment panels to

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/apr/28/uk-universities-are-institutionally-racist-says-leading-vice-chancellor>

<sup>43</sup> See for example <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/tackling-racial-harassment-higher-0>

ensure that institutional procedures are non-discriminatory and fair.

This has the effect of cascading EDI policies into the institutional culture of the institution as reflected in the University of Liverpool's organisational chart below.

The result was that DEI policy was not simply centralised and deployed vertically (top-down) as is often the case in France, but was implemented at all levels of the university, to the point of becoming part of the shared institutional culture.

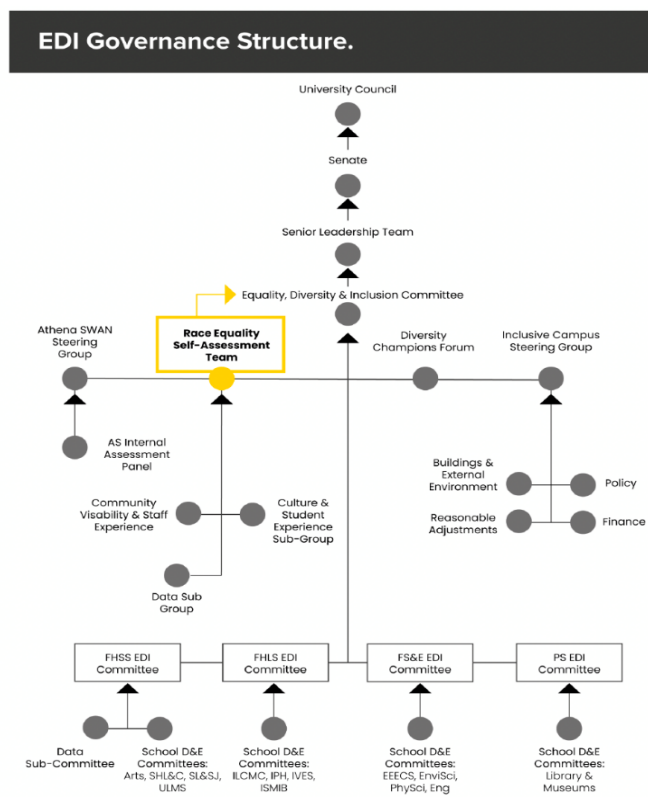


Figure 3. The cascade effect of EDI policy in the organisational structure. University of Liverpool, Race Equality Charter Application 2023, p. 68.

### 3. Involvement of ethnic minorities in EDI and anti-discrimination policies

Most people in charge of the implementation of EDI policies in British universities are BAME (black and minority ethnic), and the majority were women. Some of our participants played an important role in designing the Race Equality Charter (REC),

which has been signed by the majority of British universities (see §6 *infra*). Our participants worked closely with their Senior Leadership Team to implement their EDI policies. Thus, they possessed sufficient expertise to assess the effectiveness of these policies not only at their own institutions but at the national level.

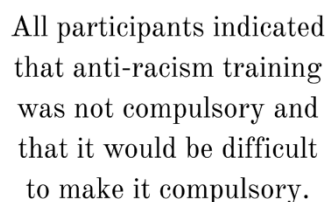
However, on the negative side, the oversolicitation of ethnic minorities to carry out the difficult work of combating racial discrimination, which is a by-product of white colonialism and imperialism, comes at a high psychological cost namely, **race battle fatigue** and mental health issues.

#### **4. A diverse offer of anti-discrimination courses for students, Faculty and staff**

All the British universities where we conducted interviews offered a range of training courses on various issues raised by EDI and racism. These courses covered topics such as “cultural awareness, implicit bias in the workplace, fair recruitment and selection, active bystanders, inclusive research cultures, inclusive leadership and management, and leadership diversification programmes”.

The courses were diversly called ‘Cultural Awareness’; ‘Implicit Bias in the Workplace’; ‘Fair Recruitment & Selection’; ‘Active Bystander’; ‘White Allyship/Active Allyship’; ‘Inclusive Research Cultures’; ‘Inclusive Leadership and Management’; ‘Diversifying Leadership’; ‘**Reverse mentoring**’. The latter is interesting in several respects because it involves reversing the traditional hierarchical relation of 'teacher→student' by placing the former in the place of the latter. Thus, it is the students, particularly those from racialised backgrounds, who raise their teachers' awareness about the complexities and nuances of racism and racial discrimination.

Some training courses are compulsory for newcomers, whether they are teachers, administrative staff or students. Others are mandatory for people in positions of management (department heads, directors, recruitment committee chairs). Some training courses have to be taken at regular intervals by the same staff.



All participants indicated that anti-racism training was not compulsory and that it would be difficult to make it compulsory.

EDI and antiracism courses on are offered at the departmental level but are also embedded within the curricula of university disciplines:

*"A compulsory workshop on racial equality was organised for staff at the School of Physical Sciences, and an EDI activity focusing on racial equality was incorporated into the key skills module in chemistry. The School of Engineering awarded 2.5 credits for EDI content in a 30-credit module, in collaboration with the ICE. " - Senior Leads University of Liverpool, Race Equality Charter Application 2023, p. 7.*

University libraries were involved in their institutions' EDI policies and efforts to decolonise curricula. This can take the shape of reorganising library collections and asking teachers and students to suggest works that included perspectives from authors from the Global South for the library to purchase.

#### **5. Online platforms and processes for reporting discrimination**

British universities all have online reporting systems for discrimination, variously called ‘**Report & Support**’ or ‘**Tell someone**’ that are clearly identifiable by members of their communities. The figure below shows the University of Liverpool's awareness campaigns encouraging the use of its online reporting platform.

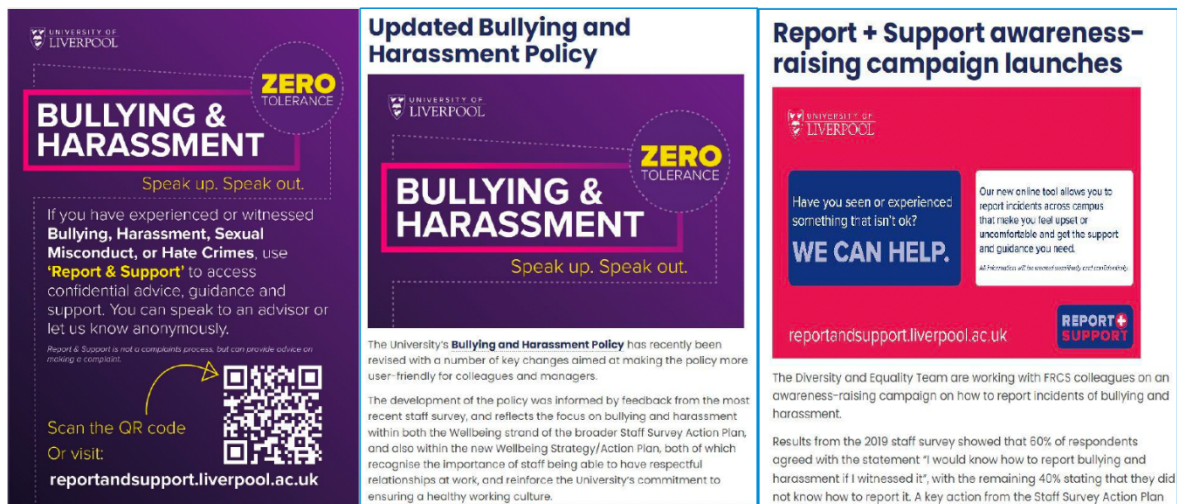


Figure 4. Awareness campaign against discrimination. University of Liverpool's Race Equality Charter Application 2023.

While the number of reported incidents had increased, our participants observed that this was not necessarily because of an intrinsic rise in cases of discrimination, rather people felt more 'empowered' to speak out, owing to the explicit recognition, by their institution, of the existence of systemic and institutional racism and also because of their institution's public commitment to the Race Equality Charter (REC). The BLM movement also facilitated conversations about race and racism. For these reasons, victims who had hitherto remained silent, felt able to speak out.

### 6. The impact of the Race Equality Charter (REC) for the UK Higher Education

The existence of a charter specifically dedicated to tackling racism in HERIs in the UK sets it apart from other European countries. **The Race Equality Charter**<sup>44</sup> (REC) is managed by an independent, non-for-profit organisation called **Advance HE**<sup>45</sup> which was formed from the **Equality Challenge Unit** (ECU) in 2015. One of Advance HE's missions

is to “address systemic inequalities and advance education to meet the changing needs of students and society (...) in order to create new approaches to equity, diversity and inclusion”. Advance HE publishes numerous online resources, including the “*Anti Racism Curriculum*” project<sup>46</sup>.

This entity administers two important charters concerned with EDI in higher education and research: the **Athena Swan** charter (for gender equality) which has been in existence for 20 years, and the **REC** has in existence for 10 years. In fact, the REC was born out of the Athena Swan charter.

The existence of the REC is not merely symbolic. It explicitly and publicly signals the commitment of UK universities to tackle racism with dedicated human and financial resources. This commitment is made at the highest level of the governance of HERIs, generally by their Chancellors or Provosts as well as by the Senior Leadership Team and student bodies via letters of support attached to their REC application:

<sup>44</sup> Charter for racial equality. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/about-us/2030-strategy>.

<sup>46</sup> See Advance HE. *Anti-Racist Curriculum Project*. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/anti-racist-curriculum-project>. Consultée le 23/02/2026.

« Action for racial equality exists because racism exists in our daily lives, our institutions and society as a whole. Racism in the UK is the exercise of historical power relations that produce discrimination and are motivated by ideology. It means that students and staff who identify and are identified as part of the white ethnic majority enjoy a position of relative privilege, usually unspoken and unrecognised, over black, Asian and ethnic minority students and staff. Racism manifests itself in the workplace, in student achievement, and in staff appointments and promotions. Racism must be combated by all. This statement names that challenge.” - Prof Michael Arthur, President and Vice-Chancellor, statement adopted by the University College London Board of Governors in Nov. 2019, REC Application 2020 (p. 1).

There is no equivalent in the French and European HERIs, either in terms of their official discourse or in terms of the measures and actions taken on the ground.

At the time of our interviews (April-May 2024), around 100 out of the 160 UK HERIs were signatories of the REC. The membership process requires the preparation of an application file, which generally takes two to three years to complete. This involves internal self-assessment and a comprehensive review of all institutional structures and procedures. This self-assessment phase is carried out internally by a team called the REC-SAT (REC-

Self-Assessment Team) which may become a permanent fixture once the application process is complete. Each HERI draws up an **Action Plan against Racism** (PACR) setting out the measures and actions it commits to take to combat racism at different levels of its institution such that this action plan permeates its institutional culture. Applications to the REC are reviewed by a panel set up by Advance HE comprising people from ethnic minorities and allies. The charter itself is periodically reviewed by experts in racial equality to ensure that it continues to meet the expectations of marginalised groups.

The entry point for all institutions that applied to the REC is a bronze medal. In other words, the fact that an institution completed the entire REC application process guarantees that it will receive at least a bronze award. The REC application process has prompted institutions to develop specific training modules to combat racism.

Membership to the REC allows enables HERIs to project a positive image of themselves in their communication campaigns. For instance, the University of Liverpool's 2023 REC application stated that all members of the management team had to undergo reverse mentoring training and that “**race equality was at the heart of its strategy for 2031**”:



Figure 5. University of Liverpool’s Race Equality Charter Application 2023, p. 5.

Several universities had specific funds allocated to research and education on race, racism and their slavery or colonial heritage.

They funded scholarships for students or guest lecturers from racialised backgrounds. For example, University College London (UCL)

provided **£350,000** in funding for the **Sarah Parker Redmond Centre for the Study of Racism & Racialisation**, initially headed by the eminent sociologist and historian Paul Gilroy. Other universities have funded research programmes on their colonial and slave-owning heritage in order to acknowledge past crimes and highlight the achievements of ethnic minorities in the UK. The **University of Glasgow allocated 20 million pounds sterling (£20 000 000)** « *in reparations to atone for its historical links to the transatlantic slave trade in what the University of West Indies has described as a “bold, historic” move*”<sup>47</sup>.

Our participants were unanimous in their view that the existence of the REC has enabled conversations about race and racism that would otherwise have been difficult. The willingness of British HERIs to engage in the REC was in no small part due to pressures from student organisations. In two high-profile cases, student movements brought their institutions (Goldsmiths University<sup>48</sup> and University of Sussex) to commit more firmly to antiracism and to the decolonisation of their curricula:

*“We learned from all this work that the only thing the university really responds to is public shaming, and then it starts saying, “OK, we’ll incorporate this into our operational plan or whatever”. The effective thing we did in this regard was a large open letter signed by over 1,200 people. We did this in collaboration with students and compiled a list of evidence of racial injustice and discrimination at Sussex*<sup>49</sup>.

But the impact of the REC goes beyond the HERI sector. The Government of Wales adopted the REC as framework, thereby

recognising its legitimacy and establishing it as the ‘standard’ for developing a national antiracism plan which must be implemented in all its HERIs:

*Wales, as a nation, is developing a national plan to combat racism. Wales is the only country to have stated that all universities must have participated in the racial equality initiative, namely the Racial Equality Charter, and it has invested a lot of money in universities recruiting equality officers and project managers, as well as funding these initiatives and training. So this is a national approach, and it is the only example we have seen of work on racial equality being mandated to some extent.* (Sally).

Despite these positive aspects, several participants highlighted the risk of misuse of the original intentions of charters and labels. In particular, the idea of awarding prizes for something that organisations should be doing anyway is a double-edged sword. Universities that have been awarded a bronze or a silver medal will use this to claim that they are effectively tackling racial inequalities. This in turn may mask real systemic inequalities. Institutions and organisations have learned to “game the system” in order to obtain these awards and then use them for public relations without making any real or lasting changes. Indeed, the ultra-liberal model of HERIs in the UK makes them dependent on international students who pay very high tuition fees<sup>50</sup>. A large proportion of these students come from Asian and African countries and are therefore racialised. Hence, presenting themselves as anti-racist and inclusive institutions by displaying awards, prizes or medals is a good

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/23/glasgow-university-slave-trade-reparations>.

<sup>48</sup> To learn more about the GARA movement at Goldsmiths, go to <https://www.goldsmithsu.org/activism/campaigns/the-gara-fund/>

<sup>49</sup> Link to the open letter questioning the governance of this university [https://actionnetwork.org/forms/racial-justice-at-sussex-open-letter-to-the-university-of-sussex-executive-group?source=direct\\_link&](https://actionnetwork.org/forms/racial-justice-at-sussex-open-letter-to-the-university-of-sussex-executive-group?source=direct_link&). Accessed on 9/10/2025.

<sup>50</sup> For the most prestigious universities, such as Oxford or Cambridge, fees can be as high as £50,000 per year. See, for example, <https://yocket.com/study-in-united-kingdom/cost-of-studying-in-uk#living-expenses-in-uk>. Accessed on 21/03/2025.

marketing strategy that enhances the attractiveness of British HERIs.

Being a signatory of the REC can also attract private donations whose donors are not always aligned with the ethics upheld by HERIs. This can make them vulnerable to ideological or political manipulations or to money laundering.

A participant explained how the REC was being diverted from its original intention, and how its implementation was potentially harming the very groups of people it is supposed to protect, in this case Black people. As one participant pointed out, charters, labels and awards are not an end in of themselves:

“  
*Charters are a start; a charter is a declaration of intent to do better. I don't want people to think that a charter mark is the final destination. It's not. It's part of the journey.* (Ralph).

## 7. Year-long antiracism campaigns

British universities have diversified their communication strategies about their EDI and anti-racism policies in order to increase their visibility and garner support from their entire communities. Amongst the events are organised annually are the following:

- **Annual EDI awards.** In a widely mediatised ceremony, awards are presented to individuals or groups who made efforts to integrate EDI or the antiracism activities into their research or teaching. For example, UCL organises an annual EDI

awards ceremony, which is publicised on its website, inviting its community to submit nominations for various categories:

“  
*Every year, EDI awards are presented to recognise and reward individuals whose role is not to work on EDI on a daily basis, but who have made significant contributions, to reward this work and to showcase it to the wider university community. See Call for nominations: UCL Inclusion Awards 2024<sup>51</sup>. I am about to submit a nomination for a group of my colleagues who have done some really great work on reverse mentoring and organising a whole series of events to try to tackle what they call “the degree awarding gap”. [...] I think it's also a good way to encourage people for whom this is not part of their job to do things and to at least make their work visible.” (Theresa)*

- **Acknowledgment of contributions of ethnic minorities** to the life of the institution or in their professional activities. Most universities have a dedicated webpage where they showcase their BAME staff.
- **Black History Month**, which has been commemorated since 1987 in the UK and since 1976 in the United States is the highlight of these events. The image below provides an overview of a web page dedicated to events or raising awareness of ethnic minorities by the University of Liverpool.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/news/2024/mar/call-nominations-ucl-inclusion-awards-2024>.

Figure 2c-5,6: Further Staff & Student news stories under the "Race Equality Charter" tag (including news item on Staff Sub-Group Chair, Prof. Lilian Otaye-Ebede)

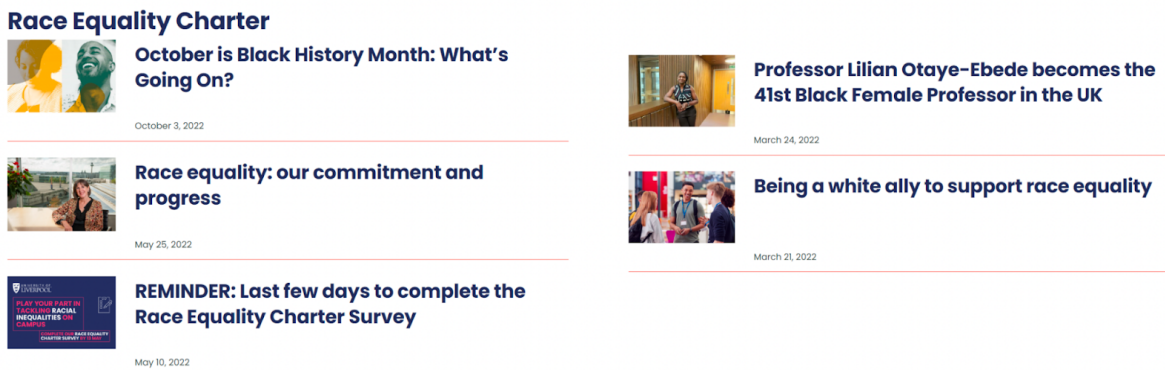


Figure 6. Web page on activities related to racial equality. University of Liverpool, REC Application, p. 20

### 3.2 Shortcomings of anti-discrimination policies at British universities

Despite the advances described above, our interviews pinpointed areas where EDI and anti-racism policies in UK HERIs' were either ineffectiveness or had shortcomings. They are summarized below.

#### 8. Under-representation of ethnic minorities in leadership positions

The existence of ethnic statistics in the UK provides data on the representation of different ethnic groups in all sectors of activity. Representation is therefore the only EDI policy for which British universities have measurable indicators. The publicity given to their annual EDI reports and their adherence to the REC made it possible to assess whether they were fulfilling the commitments made in their official statements and in their REC applications. The data produced by the universities themselves showed that racialised people were under-represented in the upper echelons of the university and in certain disciplines. While the student population in the UK has become more ethnically diverse, this demographic change was not reflected in the teaching staff which

remained predominantly white, particularly at the professor and leadership levels. Conversely, ethnic minorities were well represented at junior ranks and in operational roles (administrative staff, professional services). Within the BAME community, Black people were particularly under-represented in senior positions, accounting for barely 1% of the professorial body despite their proportion in the national population. The same inequalities were observed in student graduation rates. The data conclusively showed that there was a **Degree Awarding Gap (DAG)** between white students and their racialised counterparts. **The Office for Students (OFS)**<sup>52</sup> which oversees the quality of higher education and student welfare in the UK plays a leading role in pushing universities to address these gaps in degree attainment in order to reduce inequalities affecting students from marginalised or racialised backgrounds.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/>[https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/)

[guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/).

While the representation of BAME is measurable in UK HERIs, the effectiveness of other EDI and anti-racism policies could not be objectively measured because there were no performance indicators with which to measure them. Some initiatives emerged from some scientific disciplines to develop such impact indicators. However, their effectiveness remains difficult to establish:

“

*I don't think many faculties or departments have gone as far as UCL in terms of the gap in graduation rates, which is closely monitored with regular data on this subject. In addition, things like the percentages of different categories of staff recruited are monitored. The engineering faculty had put in place a real EDI strategy over several years and, being engineers, they had included indicators, but UCL does not yet have a detailed and comprehensive strategy. This has been left to the individual faculties and departments, and most of the people working on these issues at faculty and department level are not equipped to develop indicators, you see. Imagine people who work on literature, you ask them to design indicators, that may not be what they know how to do.” (Theresa)*

Our participants were also keen to emphasise that:

Simply increasing the representation of ethnic minorities does not automatically create an inclusive, equitable and anti-racist culture.

### **9. The inadequacy of EDI policies to effectively combat racism**

All our participants agreed that EDI and unconscious bias training does not produce lasting change, thus confirming the findings from the academic research in our SLR (see §2.3 *supra*). Participants unanimously agreed that policies and training alone cannot

eradicate systemic and structural racism and the inequalities they engender. One of the reasons cited why antiracism and antibias trainings were not as effective as hoped is that the very word ‘training’ suggests that the target audience lacks certain skills. This can create a feeling of low self-esteem that is not conducive to learning. Poorly designed EDI training can also generate feelings of guilt, leading to resentment and rejection of its messages and, consequently, to the failure of EDI and anti-racism policies.

Our interviews also revealed dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in the handling of complaints and the uncertainty about their outcomes. This discourages reporting. Finally, most universities did not have disaggregated data about the reasons for reported cases of discrimination. Hence, it was not possible to determine the proportion due to racism.

The application of sanctions was another point of dissatisfaction. All universities display a ‘zero tolerance’ policy towards discrimination, but in practice, this policy is not always respected. However, our participants were keen to emphasise that if a complaint for racial discrimination did indeed lead to a criminal case in the UK, the sanctions can be very severe for both the institution and the person accused:

“

*I should mention that the legal consequences of racial discrimination in this country, namely fines, are unlimited. Some fines for racial discrimination have exceeded £100,000 in compensation for victims. So there is no limit to these fines. There is also, of course, considerable reputational damage, because who would want to study or work in a place whose reputation is linked to discrimination? Talented people will make their choice and go elsewhere. So, there is a moral argument, a legal argument and a commercial argument. I think that much of what we are facing today stems from these early perceptions of black people as being less worthy, less valued than white people. (Ralph)*

The legal implications of racism is certainly not the case in France where many reported cases are simply closed by the justice system.

#### 10. The need to rebrand antiracism policies

Our participants noted the difficulty of implementing anti-racism-related policies. They emphasised the need to present EDI initiatives in an inclusive manner so as to garner broader support and thus avoid their rejection by other ethnic groups that make up the university. One possible way is to create 'safe spaces' where well-intentioned people can make mistakes or blunders without being accused of racism:

“

*Sometimes, part of what we experience in difficult situations is deliberate racism. But at the other, milder end of the spectrum, it is sometimes unintentional. It is the way people have always behaved, the things they have always said. So, I think the way we communicate can cause people to change or become defensive and pull away.” (Ralph)*

Many suggested that the antiracism policies should be integrated into the language of HERIs' core mission, namely academic excellence and the promise of quality education. Other suggestions included incorporating anti-racism policies into broader issues that affect everyone, such as “dignity and respect”, “well-being” or “cost of living”.

4

## Overall summary

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on racism in HERIs worldwide, supplemented by a field survey on EDI and anti-racism policies in the UK made a twofold contribution. On the one hand, it enabled a comparison of the findings from the academic research with the actual implementation of these policies in a national HERI setting, in this case, the UK, thus enabling us to identify best practices as well as shortcomings and pitfalls to avoid.

The SLR and the interviews we conducted showed that anti-racism is not just a subject to be taught and learned, but an attitude and an *ethos* requiring other modalities of action. Transforming HERIs into truly inclusive and anti-racist spaces will require strong institutional commitments at the highest levels. These commitments must be based on measurable actions that allow for rigorous monitoring of progress and should be done in a binding national framework that will oblige HERIs to implement the action plans set out in the “*French National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination Based on Origin 2023-2026.*”

The involvement of racialised minorities in the development and implementation of anti-racism policies is crucial to ensuring their relevance.

Let us not forget that the consequences of racism for victims are profound and devastating. At one end of the spectrum, in its everyday, trivialised form, racism creates a hostile environment for victims, leading to low self-esteem and mental health problems. At the other end of the spectrum, in its most violent form, racism can lead to death. This poignant testimony of one of our participants, himself and EDI officer, reminds us that the negative consequences of racism are not things relegated to the distant past but are very much a part of present-day reality for racialized persons:



*If one day you try to contact me and I am no longer here because Stephen Lawrence's<sup>53</sup> fate crossed mine, understand that I did not disappear because I am black. I disappeared because of hatred, racism and people's cowardice in being passive bystanders rather than committed actors for good.” (Ralph).*

In France, Black and Arab men are more regularly stopped and searched by the police than their white counterparts. Black and Arab people are still killed simply because of who they are<sup>54</sup>.

The racial awakening which followed the racist murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the global BLM movement was immediately countered by the return of far-right ideologies and parties in the West. This has created a geopolitical, cultural, media and social climate that is very hostile to antiracism research, education and policies and to any discourse or initiative in favour of EDI.

How can we explain the resurgence of brutal and explicit forms of racism in the West, despite decades of scientific evidence about the fallacy of different human races or of the superiority of one “race” over another?

The international literature review we carried out leads us to only one credible answer that is uncomfortable to contend with: the absence of **Interest Convergence** (IC). Derek Bell (1980), a black American law professor at Harvard University and founder of Critical Race Theory, defined it thus:



*‘Convergence of interests is the idea that Black people's interest in achieving racial equality will only be taken into account if it converges with White people's interests.’ (D. A. Bell, 1980).*

Derek Bell made this observation on the occasion of the landmark 1954 ‘*Brown v. Board of Education*’ ruling by the US Supreme Court, which ended segregation *de jure* in public schools in the United States. He argued that this decision was motivated by a convergence of interest, i.e., at that moment in history, the struggle for Black civil rights coincided with the interests of the white elite, thus allowing a decision that accidentally benefited Black people to be made. Bell's writings forcefully remind us that no progress can be taken for granted forever:



*Black people will never achieve total equality in this country. Even the Herculean efforts that we hail as successes will only produce temporary ‘spikes of progress,’ fleeting victories that will become meaningless as racial patterns adapt to maintain white domination. This is a difficult reality to accept, but one that history confirms. We must recognise it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.” (D. Bell, 1993).*

The return of Donald J. Trump and white supremacist ideology to the White House in 2025 have been accompanied with the dismantling of decades of affirmative action, of EDI policies and the rollback of civil rights in the United States that were hard won by decades of struggles and deaths.

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Lawrence was an 18-year-old British man of African descent who was killed in a racially motivated attack on the evening of 22 April 1993. This murder and its botched handling by the British judicial authorities became a symbol of the trauma of systemic racism in the United Kingdom. It sparked a movement of national awakening, comparable to the effect caused by the racist murder of George Floyd in the United States in 2020 and the global Black Lives Matter movement. A research centre on racism was established in his honour, the Stephen Lawrence Research Centre at the University of Montfort <https://www.dmu.ac.uk/research/centres-institutes/stephen-lawrence-research-centre/index.aspx>. This heinous racist crime and the guilt of the police forces who attempted to turn the attacks against the victim's family back on them is reminiscent of the way the French judiciary and law enforcement handled the case of Adama Traoré's death while in police custody.

<sup>54</sup> At least two cold-blooded murders were committed in France in 2025 by far-right militias against racialised people simply because of their skin colour. See [https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/mort-de-quentin-deranque-quels-sont-les-douze-meurtres-depuis-2022-attribues-a-l-extreme-droite-par-ff-20260219\\_ZW3SFEE3SJA07ADVQXXW05JRRY/](https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/mort-de-quentin-deranque-quels-sont-les-douze-meurtres-depuis-2022-attribues-a-l-extreme-droite-par-ff-20260219_ZW3SFEE3SJA07ADVQXXW05JRRY/). Accessed on 24/02/2026.

Apparently, racial equality is not yet perceived as being in the interest of the dominant white groups, which seek, above all, to preserve their millennial privileges.

***“It’s the economy, stupid”***. Behind this oft-repeated phrase attributed to James Carville in 1992 is a reality that anyone committed to any moral cause must bear in mind: identity groups only act in ways that benefit them. Appeals to morality, to logic or trainings cannot bring about profound and lasting change in mindsets, attitudes and beliefs of identity groups.

The African American sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois evoked deeply rooted psychological reflexes in dominant groups as the reason for the perpetuation of these injustices:

*“In the struggle against racial prejudice, we were not simply confronted with the rational and conscious determination of white people to oppress us; we were confronted with centuries-old complexes buried largely in unconscious habit and irrational impulse<sup>55</sup>.”*

EDI and anti-racism policies will likely continue in some form in the UK despite the rise of the far-right party *“Reform UK”* of Nigel Farage, because there is still a convergence of interest with the ultra-liberal economic model on which the UK HERIs are based. British universities need to attract ‘student-customers’ who pay exorbitant tuition fees. As these students come mainly from the so-called ‘Global South’, thus are racialised people, it is in the interest of British HERIs to continue to “sell” the image of being inclusive and anti-racist spaces.

In France on the other hand, the centralised socialist model of funding of HERIs makes them less dependent on tuition fees, although these fees have recently been multiplied by 10 times what French and EU students pay. There is therefore not yet a convergence of interest that would compel French HERIs to take a strong public stance to combat racism with concrete and measurable policies. However, as the world becomes more globalised, demographics and economic centres of gravity may begin to shift away from the West. The economic development of the so-called "Global South" countries will enable marginalised, colonised and discriminated peoples to reclaim their histories, bodies and wealth. *It’s really the economy stupid!*

The results of this first phase of the ARCHERIF project will serve as a basis for phase two which focuses on designing innovative educational resources to combat racism more effectively and on laying the foundations for an anti-racism charter for higher education and research in France.

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<sup>55</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois (p. 296) cited in Holt, T. C. Marking: Race, race-making, and the writing of history. *Am. Hist. Rev.* 1995, 100, 1–20.

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