



Consultation on Language and Terminology relating to Race and Ethnicity

May 2022

1. Context

Queen's signed up to the Race Equality Charter (REC, Advance HE) in 2020 as part of its Racial Equity Programme. The QGI/REC team, in partnership with the QUB Racial Equity Champions Network and the iRise Staff Network, held three focus groups on language and terminology during 2021/22. All staff and particularly those who identify as Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic, as well as staff with an interest or expertise in racial equity, were invited to share their views on appropriate language and terminology in relation to race and ethnicity.

2. Aims

The aims of the consultation were to:

- agree a collective language when we talk about race, ethnicity, and cultural diversity at Queen's for the purposes of discussions on racial equity and statistical reporting
- co-create a guidance document for Queen's staff and students on appropriate, respectful, inclusive and sensitive language and terminology to use when discussing race and ethnicity.

3. Definitions

The focus groups explored definitions of Race and Ethnicity and reviewed material from the Law Society, current practice in Higher Education institutions and the external sector. Definitions from the Law Society are given below for reference.

RACE

"Race is a categorisation that is based mainly on physical attributes or traits, assigning people to a specific race simply by having similar appearances or skin colour (e.g. Black or White).

It is now widely accepted that race is a social construct. However, having been racialised and shared common experiences of racism, racial identity is important to many and can be a basis for collective organising and support for racially minoritized individuals." *The Law Society, UK*.¹

¹ [A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language | The Law Society](#)

ETHNICITY

“Ethnicity is broader than race and has usually been used to refer to long shared cultural experiences, religious practices, traditions, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins (e.g. African-Caribbean, Indian, Irish).

Ethnicity can be seen as a more positive identity than one forged from the shared negative experiences of racism. It's more commonly used and asked about within diversity questionnaires in the UK.” *The Law Society, UK.*²

4. Summary of findings from Queen's Staff Consultation Workshops

4.1 General considerations

- There is no agreed consensus on language and terminology relating to race and ethnicity; furthermore, language has limitations and will continue to evolve. What is deemed as appropriate and respectful language to use by one individual may be considered as an offensive term by someone else. This reflects broader society and reinforces the need to facilitate open and honest discussions on the topic of race and ethnicity in Queen's.
- Language and words matter. It is important that Queen's takes responsibility to support staff in ensuring that outdated, offensive and inappropriate language and terminology relating to race and ethnicity are not used.
- Fear of saying the wrong thing can dominate discussion in this area (driven in part by the media), when efforts should be focussed on addressing the problematic behaviours, processes and culture that negatively impact racial equity.
- Northern Ireland is less ethnically diverse than other parts of the UK. It was noted that this context is important in the discussion about race and ethnicity as Queen's may be behind other UK institutions in our discussions and shared understanding.
- As a multicultural campus, values of personal integrity and mutual respect underpin inclusivity and a sense of belonging.
- All staff welcomed the opportunity to share their views on this topic and to listen to the views of others.

4.2 Good practice

- Adopt a growth mindset when it comes to language related to race and ethnicity. Appreciate that others may have different views, and that all views are valid.

² [A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language | The Law Society](#)



- Accept that racism is not the sole liability of any specific race and that it is inherent in all races.
- Commit to continuous learning on issues relating to race and ethnicity, both from the point of view of language but also more broadly.
- Ensure that categories used when collecting information or data on race and ethnicity are as inclusive as possible and are reflective of those used in broader society e.g. Office of National Statistics³ (ONS), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency⁴ (NISRA).
- Ensure that there is consistency in the categories used for race and ethnicity across Queen's e.g. use the same options for 'Ethnicity' for both staff and students in all data capture forms, surveys etc.
- Ensure that individuals know why information on race and ethnicity is being collected.
- The term 'BAME' should not be used to refer to people. This acronym for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' should only be used in statistical reporting and data capture, not in communications or when referring to staff and students (people freely self-identify). It was recognised that using aggregate data in relation to race and ethnicity is both useful and necessary in racial equity work e.g. in order to have meaningful sample sizes. If using the term in statistical reporting, it is preferable to use the words 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' (rather than the acronym) where possible.
- Use of the term 'under-represented' was considered to be appropriate, and preferable to 'minority ethnic'; however, comparators from the NI Census (2022) will be necessary to determine which groups of people are under-represented at Queen's based on the wider N.I population (NB: Census data was published during completion of this report⁵).
- Individuals should seek to be respectful in all interactions within Queen's community. If inadvertently using an inappropriate term, one should acknowledge mistakes, apologise, and reflect on it as a learning opportunity.

4.2 What we should avoid

- Refrain from using the term 'other' in categorising people based on race or ethnicity. This term was seen as problematic as it can make an individual feel as though their ethnicity is deemed as irrelevant or unimportant.
- Avoid using broad categorisations such as 'BAME' in communications and discussion, or when describing an individual, as this suggests that all ethnic minority people are

³ [Home - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁴ [Home | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://nisra.gov.uk)

⁵ [census-2021-ms-b01.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://live.com/census-2021-ms-b01.xlsx)



part of one homogenous group and does not reflect the experiences of different ethnic groups within this categorisation. The term is acceptable to use for reporting purposes (see 4.1).

- The terms 'POC' (People of Colour) and 'BIPOC' (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) were considered broadly as being used elsewhere e.g. USA and not generally used in the UK or Northern Ireland. There was less support for the use of these terms at Queen's at the present time.
- The term 'minorities' was considered problematic and was deemed by some to indicate 'inferior' and therefore, as a single word, should not be used to describe an individual or group of people. The term 'minoritised ethnic' or similar terms using 'minoritised' were also discussed with some being supportive of this term and others feeling it had negative connotations. The term 'minority ethnic' was considered appropriate when describing a group of people who do not belong to the majority ethnic group of the country where they are currently working/living.
- The term 'non-White' was not considered appropriate. The term implies white as the dominant/majority group and unhelpfully categorises anyone who does not identify as White into an 'Other' category. It also does not adequately recognise the identity or challenges faced by White minority groups e.g. Irish Travellers.

5. Conclusions

The Consultation provided a space for open and honest conversations about the language and terminology that is used in relation to race and ethnicity. Importantly, there is shared understanding of the need to continue these conversations. While there is no agreed 'correct' language and terminology, there is agreement on how individual identities can be described and how statistical reporting should use clearly defined, inclusive terms.

This summary document has been reviewed by the Racial Equity Champions Network and the iRISE network and represents current thinking in Queen's as of 2022.