

24 August 2020

Dear colleagues,

Since our original letter of 2 June 2020, urging LSHTM to take a strong stand against institutional racism at the School, Black Lives Matter-LSHTM has been gratified by the leadership's public statements about pursuing an antiracist agenda. However, we are also concerned that the process of decolonisation may itself be replicating the same default practices it is aiming to dismantle, specifically with regard to recognising and rewarding the work of the BIPOC people who are carrying it forward.

At these early stages of action, it is crucial to proactively counter the tendency to simply 'accept' the labour that is seemingly offered free of charge. Instead, we urge the members of the LSHTM community – especially those with power and influence – to assume personal responsibility for mobilising the School's considerable resources to tackle its post-colonial legacy.

Anti-racism work is just that: work. Like all work, it requires a specific skills-set and dedicated time. Unlike other jobs, it also requires considerable emotional labour, wherein racialised people may be asked to relive painful experiences or to present rational arguments and objective data that support their basic civil rights. While BIPOC people are clearly and personally invested in achieving racial justice, they also have day jobs. This means that activism, in fields as competitive and demanding as academia, may come at the expense of publishing; informal mentoring, at the expense of professional networking; and education of white peers, at the expense of fluid collaboration with them.

Ironically, then, anti-racism work can actually exacerbate the structural inequalities that BIPOC people already experience. This dynamic is on full display at LSHTM, where the Decolonising Global Health (DGH) group's repeated requests for financial support go unanswered, where the EDI network is expected to work on a voluntary basis, and where the senior leadership team (SLT)'s pledges to decolonise the school have been, so far, unaccompanied by any dedicated budget. Likewise, both the DGH and Black Lives Matter groups are asked to prepare for and attend meetings during working hours, provide documents and proposals to school leadership, and otherwise produce work that would be compensated in any other context – on a tight timeline and to a high professional standard. There is barely a cursory acknowledgement that this work can only be accomplished by passing up career-building opportunities and/or sacrificing personal time. When, additionally, the SLT fails to respond positively to our requested feedback; when the School misleadingly communicates our activities as sanctioned or sponsored by the institution; or when resource shortages are cited despite glowing financial reports¹, the result is a further erosion of trust.

¹ London School of Hygiene and Tropical/ Medicine. Financial Statements 2018/19. Available at: <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/files/financial-statement-2018-19.pdf>

To rectify this situation, we ask that the School:

- (1) Allocate sufficient resources – including administrative and professional human resources – for the anti-racism work that the School proclaims to champion;
- (2) Integrate explicit criteria focused on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into all professional performance assessments;
- (3) Seek input from DGH and/or Black Lives Matter-LSHTM with regard to how our work is represented; and
- (4) Be sensitive to the fact that our capacity to deliver on any SLT request for (unpaid) labour depends to a large extent on our (personal, volunteer) capacity.

As the School takes forward plans to assemble an anti-racism and decolonial task force, it is imperative that its members have sufficient resources (in the form of remuneration, allocated time, and knowledge) to perform its duties. We are convinced that this investment will pay off in dividends, both by increasing LSHTM's credibility with international partners in global health and reducing its vulnerability to legal challenges. More importantly, decisively taking responsibility for LSHTM's institutional legacy is morally the right thing to do. Allowing the victims of racism to assume the burden of dismantling it is, quite frankly, unbecoming of an institution of the calibre of LSHTM.

Cordially,

Black Lives Matter- LSHTM