UCL

Labours of Love: Understanding, Indexing and Redressing the Hidden Labour of Black Staff and Students at UCL (Short report)

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The project, led by a Black researcher, researched the various forms of hidden labour that are undertaken by Black staff and students at UCL. Data was gathered by 1) anonymous questionnaire, 2) staff or student 1-hour focus groups, and 3) individual 30-minute interviews, thereby giving precedence to the lived experience and knowledge of Black[1] people in the academy. The resultant insights produced via discussions with 25 staff/students and 38 completed questionnaires includes:

- an index of labours performed;
- an index of costs to staff/students of these labours;
- a set of recommendations for redress;
- a set of recommendations for transformation.

Rationale:

- Love and community care, especially a desire that 'it should be better for others in the future';
- Tangible, actionable recommendations that UCL can direct institutional energy and strategy towards;
- The work of antiracism and justice in the academy is a growing national imperative, and redress **as well as** transformation is required to improve UCL culture;
- Sustained reflection and acting on feedback in order to develop is core to the pursuit of excellence.

Methodological notes and reflections:
- Focus groups provided such rich detail that future projects may choose to focus on this method instead of solo interviews. Both methods have the additional benefit of providing communal validation and safety, in contrast to the dismissiveness or denial encountered when these experiences are raised elsewhere, as reported by participants.
- Care and attention was also paid to the accessing and handling of demographic data, given the risk to anonymity from small % cohort.
- Offering compensation was critical – it would have been hypocritical to ask for yet more free labour in transforming the academy from those who are already so overburdened, and all participants expressed their agreement with this stance. The exception was the questionnaire, which we were unable to compensate for, due to the requirements of anonymity in its completion.
- We centred a Black Feminist ethics of care, as outlined by Collins in 1989. In the interview space, interviewees were treated as co-collaborators in knowledge production.

Indexes and Recommendations
The following indexes represent common experiences across respondents, but are not exhaustive lists; the recommendations include allowing for flexibility, individual choice, and continued receptivity to hearing from Black staff/students. The second set of recommendations offers meaningful opportunities for change that could tangibly improve Black students/staff ability to thrive at UCL, and the more rich those transformations, the less the need for the kinds of redress as detailed in the first set of recommendations. The full report also includes a set of examples that illustrate how the costs of labour might map onto the forms of redress, to mitigate the impacts on these staff/students (and in turn, on everything the university could be achieving in terms of e.g. attainment, retention, research output).

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[1] For the purpose of this research, we mean of African or Caribbean descent, including mixed.

Index of Labour

Labour	Description
Emotional	Mental activity and emotional regulation resultant from lived experience of oppression and drawing on that lived experience to make change
Pedagogical	Responsibility to teach both peers and seniors, to be a spokesperson for Black life and interests
Pastoral	Feeling responsibility to take care of fellow marginalised people
Institutional Transformation	Responsibility to 'fix' racism in the university as a secondary job alongside work/study
Administrative	Either unofficial liaison/rep roles, or undervalued ones that are expected of Black staff/students
Physical	Asked to perform racialised/gendered tasks

Index of Costs

Health/Wellbeing	Exhaustion and deteriorating mental health, resultant from consistently dealing with racial trauma
Opportunity	Outputs suffered, as time and energy are devoted to labour that is not valued as an output by the institution e.g. lower grade attainment, fewer publications, degree interruptions
Time	Time and energy spent performing labour e.g. time creating space for Black students, or in extra EDI service roles
Social	Damaged relationships with colleagues, institution, senior staff; isolation; work encroachment into time outside of work

By mapping out the current, evidently ubiquitous, realities for Black staff and students, and proposing recommendations for the future, this research offers UCL a set of tangible anti-racist measures. Centering care, love, and justice in the academy in this way is the kind of 'disruptive thinking' - and action – that is considered characteristic of UCL. This report details some ways in which that centering can happen in practice, and help UCL move from those promissory notes to receipts. Several of these recommendations might usefully be drawn together in an achievable way; we can imagine, for example, resources being directed to the creation of a Black staff/student hub/centre/space, through which people could access community, targeted support and guidance, networks, funding, and, until it is ceases to be necessary, the administration of redress.

Recommendations for Redress

Redress	Description
Financial	Tangible compensation for labour
Recognition	Acknowledgement that the labour exists and is valued by the institution
Wellbeing Support	Wellbeing day for recovery; mental health support; a dedicated centre providing tailored support for Black people, with Black staff
Time	Difficult to quantify, much less compensate time lost in a tangible way, but e.g. TOIL, reduced workload, extra time to progress
Grades	Addressing attainment gaps resultant from labour demanded elsewhere e.g. extenuating circumstances process; valuing this labour as academic attainment; reconsidering metrics
Career Support	Support that understands/negotiates racialised labour inequalities and resultant lost opportunities e.g. making the labour legible on CVs and for career progression

Recommendations for Transformation

Training	More effective, and compulsory training to mitigate the extra labours performed, and training relevant to oppressed groups
Evenly-shared labour	Labour to be shared between all staff and students rather than disproportionately undertaken by Black members of UCL, and labour that can only be conducted by Black members to be offset
Black space/centre	Centralised space within university for community belonging, events and support networks, handling redress requests, and funding for community uplift
Funding	Dedicated funding for EDI initiatives and participation to be fairly paid, and funding for existing peer support networks
Demographics	Increased numbers of Black staff and students, but not to continue spreading burdens solely among this demographic; addressing pipeline issues with Black staff in leadership positions; hiring Black staff beyond just 'Black' disciplines; supported school outreach to encourage Black applicants
Recognition and Visibility	Valuing the labour of transforming the academy appropriately; regular reporting and accountability on progress; considered as important an output as teaching or research

To guide the consideration and implementation of these recommendations, we offer the following as examples of best practice:

At UCL
- Recognition of time/labour and advocacy by managers within professional services
- Building on Athena Swan (gender equality) work at UCL to also encompass racialised inequities.
- Learning from disability justice, including the concept of 'reasonable adjustments'
- Greater allocation of budget/admin support/buy-out for EDI Vice-Deans
- Knowledge in the Widening Participation and Bartlett Promise teams
- B-Mentor
- Gender Expression Fund
- Time/funds to be together on or off-campus

Beyond UCL
- The Black Cultural Center at DePaul University
- Ubiquity of diversity statements in job applications in the US
- Policies, also in US universities, addressing these labour inequities through a) mechanisms for service labour which is then used to identify inequities, and b) in-built incentives/support for said work, e.g. teaching releases / stipends
- 'Extenuating circumstances' process responsive to issues of race
- 5% of an employee's time can be given to work towards EDI goals
- Cambridge's one-off payment of £1000 to all employees in recognition of their work during the difficult period of the pandemic
- Black student programme at SOAS: 'The Ebony Initiative'