



POSITIVE ACTION TRAINEESHIPS CASE STUDIES



CONTEXT

In 2015 CILIP/ARA published A study of the UK information workforce which found:

“Low ethnic diversity: - 96.7% of the LARKIM* workforce identify as ‘white’ compared to 87.5% identifying as ‘white’ in UK Labour Force Survey statistics.”

* LARKIM = library, archives, records, information management and knowledge management

This was also set against the context of the Equality Act 2010 which protects people from being treated less favourably in employment recruitment and selection because they have a protected characteristic. The Act allows for two broad areas in which positive action can occur - through "encouragement and training" or through "recruitment and promotion".

These case studies review the hands-on experiences of 3 universities that have investigated the potential for growing diversity in the LARKIM workforce through the creation of positive action traineeships and developing the underpinning strategy.

AT A GLANCE

OUR 3 INSTITUTIONS

- Goldsmiths, University of London
- Lancaster University
- University of Leeds

KEY LEARNING

- How to advertise, recruit for and run a traineeship
- Potential pitfalls and solutions
- How to include this work in your library strategy

OUR STUDY AUTHORS



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Case Study 1: Goldsmiths Positive action traineeship

Responding to the national context

Like many institutions, the Goldsmith's library management team discussed the CILIP/ARA report shortly after publication but no specific actions were taken forward. However, in 2019 an initiative at the King's Fund centre inspired a conversation that led to the creation of a Positive Action Graduate Traineeship within the library service at Goldsmiths targeted at recent Global Ethnic Majority graduates.

By piecing together a number of fractional vacancies, the library team were able to create the post from within their funded establishment. They acknowledge that, as part of an earlier restructure, they had gained the freedom to re-shape a pool of assistant level posts, provided they remained within the agreed FTE (full time equivalent) and this was an advantage when taking forward this initiative.

However, the strategic context was also important for ensuring support from across the university. The first priority in the Goldsmith's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2017-2021 was to "Liberate our Degrees".

This meant that gaining senior management support for the creation of the Traineeship was straight forward. The HR department were equally supportive, as were the EDI team and the Students' Union. In fact, it should be noted that the student voice was significant in providing a level of confidence that this was the right approach. In 2019, student protests against racism and several reports written within the institution meant that the issue of racism was very high on the agenda. The library management team were provided with advice from the HR EDI team that the CILIP/ARA report provided a significant body of evidence to support creating a Positive Action traineeship and no further legal advice was asked for.

Making it happen - the recruitment process

However, the recruitment process did throw up some challenges in that the library team favoured local advertising whilst the HR team favoured the more standard Jobs.ac.uk approach. The library team didn't feel that this would attract a sufficiently diverse range of candidates so they approached the Careers team for advice. This led to the Traineeship being advertised specifically to recent (within the last 3 years) Goldsmith's graduates. It transpired that this had a number of advantages. A Careers adviser joined the interview panel and gave feedback on both application and interview to the candidates, making this a very positive experience for all 20 people who applied. In fact, two further candidates also went on to secure roles within the library service.

The aim to 'liberate our degrees' means to proactively challenge the white, middle class, ableist, male-dominated curricula that are prevalent across the Higher Education sector, and to centre the work of marginalised scholars on race, sexuality, gender and disability within academia.

Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2017-2021, Goldsmith's University

The traineeship in action

The Positive Action Graduate Traineeship was designed as a one year post based in the Reader Services team. However, the library team felt that it was important for the successful candidate to gain a wide experience of library work and therefore each team enabled the trainee to work with them for a period of time. As a result, the whole library team became involved in the initiative and were very supportive. A buddy was also appointed for the Trainee which helped them navigate the university, its systems and helped them to settle in overall. The Trainee was also asked to complete a specific project toward the end of their year.



The first traineeship proved successful and so the initiative has continued. At the time of writing, the second post holder is in place and plans are being made to recruit again for September 2023.

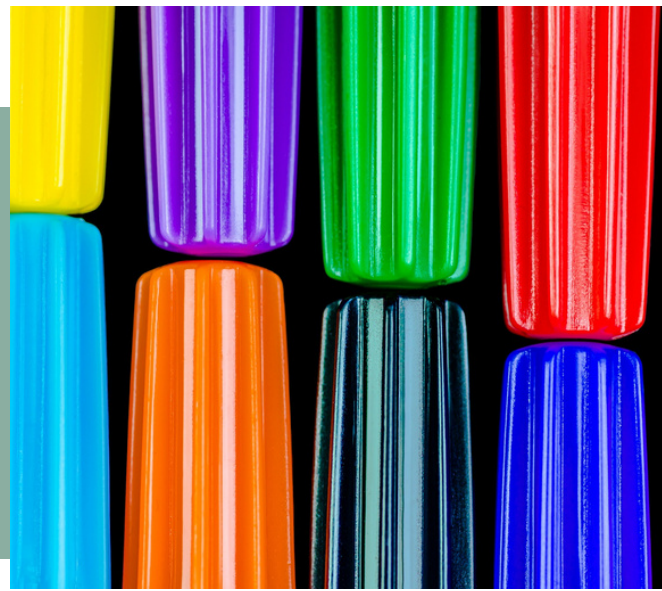
The Goldsmith's team are rightly proud of their success with this initiative. However, they are also thinking more broadly about potential impacts across the sector. Whilst they are aware of a small number of other Positive Action (or similar) traineeships, they are concerned that these people are potentially working in isolation. Greater connectivity across the sector would be advantageous. In addition, it was noted that the creation of a traineeship does not necessarily guarantee these staff moving on to positions within the library and information profession or even staying within higher education. Although this should not be regarded as a disincentive in terms of creating a traineeship. The team are continuing to discuss the issue and contribute to national debate.

In conclusion, library staff at Goldsmith's acknowledge that Positive Action is by no means the only action to address underrepresentation of Global Majority staff but it is a step in the right direction.



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Case Study 2: Lancaster Alternative routes to creating a traineeship



Inspired to take action

The library management team at Lancaster University had also seen the King's Fund work and that of Goldsmith's University and were therefore keen to engage with this area. However, unlike Goldsmith's they immediately encountered internal barriers. The HR department expressed serious reservations about creating such a traineeship. However, the library team were determined to find a route to make this happen and, on reflection, feel that the process they followed has worked extremely well for them.

Creating an inclusive application process

The approach Lancaster adopted was to create a graduate traineeship which incorporated a significant EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) element within the job description and which would be advertised proactively to all underrepresented groups.

To attract a truly diverse range of candidates, Lancaster undertook a review of their recruitment process to remove as many barriers to application as possible. To help them with this review, they consulted the University of Salford's Inclusive recruitment checklist which describes itself as a "... checklist ... for recruiting managers and their panels to use when designing an inclusive recruitment process from the job advert, job description and through to interview." When designing the job description for the traineeship, Lancaster therefore worked hard to ensure that the language was understandable and approachable, removing any jargon and ensuring that the qualifications and expertise being sought were truly necessary and not just included by default.

One element the Lancaster library team were unable to change was the recruitment system's requirement for an application form, covering letter and CV. This felt unnecessarily onerous for this type of role and could deter recent graduates from applying. However, they were supported by the Careers team who circulated the advertisement widely and offered support in the application process.

Refreshing the interview process

All of this meant that Lancaster received 16 applications from a very diverse field of candidates including graduates with a Global Majority background, disability and from the LGBTQ+ community. The Student Union joined the interview panel alongside three library staff which meant that the candidates were assessed from a wider perspective. The team were determined that the interview would be a really positive process and for each candidate to feel they had given their best. Candidates were therefore sent interview questions in advance and questions were kept quite broad and general so that all candidates should be able to answer. In addition, all candidates received lots of practical information such as travel and parking advice, where to arrive etc. The interview itself included a 'guided discussion' on EDI topics. Although a time limit had been given, it became clear that further guidance was needed on what is meant by a guided discussion.



Fabiha Askari, Graduate Trainee,
Lancaster University

Of the 10 candidates, 9 were appointable. All candidates were provided with feedback but they were also asked how they would like to receive this ie. email or a telephone call. Whilst a telephone call was standard HR practice, many students and graduates preferred email. In particular, a comment was received that email was much better for neuro-diverse candidates, enabling them to take time to reflect on the feedback. The candidates who hadn't been shortlisted were given feedback on how to improve their applications. Overall, the recruitment panel recognised that for many applicants this would be their first interview experience and they wanted it to be as constructive as possible.



Experience of the trainee

Whilst the successful candidate in year 1 did come from a Global Majority background, they have subsequently commented that they liked the fact that the traineeship wasn't just targeted to Global Majority graduates. In fact, they went as far as to say they might not have applied had this been the case as they felt this sounded potentially tokenistic. The library team has also taken care to enable the trainee to find their own areas to champion. For example, there was no expectation that they would join groups such as the anti-racism group unless they wanted to.

Lessons Learnt

A key lesson learnt for Lancaster was the amount of time this refreshed recruitment process took. Inevitably it was more time consuming first time around and there was a degree of learning curve. However, it was acknowledged that it was considerably more staff intensive than a standard recruitment round.

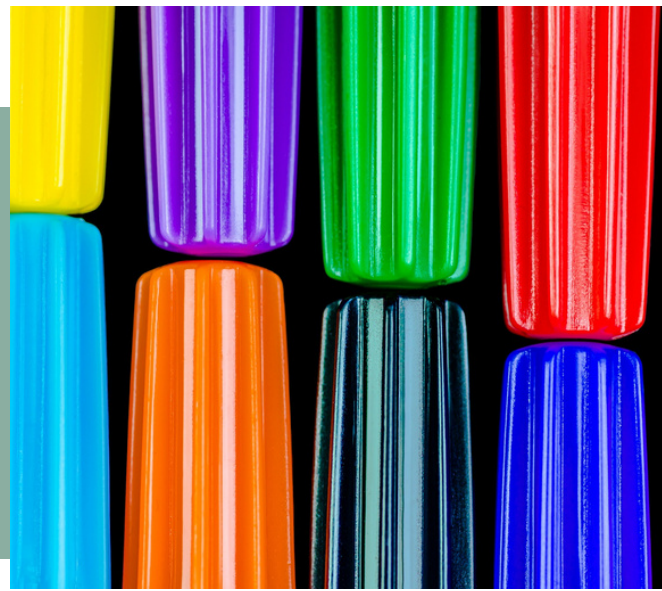
They are also keen to emphasise that EDI is only one of the 5 pillars in their library strategy but it is given equal weight alongside other objectives such as innovation and the shift in the digital/physical library. They also want to avoid giving the impression that the creation of this traineeship means that the box is ticked and the job done.

The Lancaster team do feel that their approach was successful and intend to repeat it. They have already used a similar approach to recruit to a short-term graduate placement looking at widening participation.

"My time at the Lancaster University Library over the last six months as a Research, Engagement and EDI Assistant (Graduate Trainee) has truly been fantastic and I feel beyond grateful to work alongside such an inspiring, hardworking and supportive team. During my time here, I have been able to explore different areas of the library, including our engagement activities within and beyond the university, to researching and learning more about systems such as PURE. This role has given me a constant space for growth, learning and seeking opportunities. Through the trust and support provided to me by my colleagues, I have felt empowered to share my thoughts and ideas about my own hopes for our library and how I wish for us to keep working towards making it a space that extends beyond just academia, and is a safe and inclusive environment for all staff, students and public - and especially for minoritised communities. I am thrilled to have this opportunity and I truly hope to see this role be adopted by more institutions in the future!" Fabiha Askari, Graduate Trainee, Lancaster University

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Case Study 3: Leeds Developing a strategic approach to support diversification of the workforce



Context

In 2022 the University of Leeds Library team launched Knowledge for all: Libraries Vision for 2030. openness, equity, inclusion and diversity for students and staff are key themes that run through the vision. Within the Opportunities for All section, Libraries have committed to:

Introduce positive action opportunities for under-represented communities, through internships, apprenticeships or graduate trainee programmes, and specific staff development programmes

In delivering this, they will tap into their own graduate talent, recognising that the diverse student body is not yet represented within its workforce. However, they also recognise that these initiatives are only part of the puzzle and that there needs to be a cultural shift to fully embrace EDI practices as the norm.

With a Deputy University Librarian who personally benefitted from the Ambitious Futures Graduate Programme for University Leadership, they are keen to find ways to create routes for the University to attract, recruit and retain current students and recent graduates to join their workforce and also to build networks and generate social capital so that trainees feel a sense of connection and belonging.

Creating a cultural shift

University of Leeds Libraries has embarked on a Cultural Shift that embraces institutional values of inclusivity, integrity, collaboration and compassion in all their activities. They recognise that realising this aspiration will require buy-in from staff across their community. To ensure actions are initiated and progress continues they have formed Culture Shift Groups, each led by two Co-Chairs. Each group draws its membership from across grades and teams to provide representation. The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group will play a key role in enabling the diversification of the workforce through their expertise, experience, collaboration and advocacy.

In moving forward to create graduate internships, apprenticeships and traineeships, they also want to consider what happens next for these candidates by providing wrap-around support that might enable connections to be made in other areas of the university or at other institutions that may help a graduate to visualise a varied and rewarding career in the sector.

The University of Leeds Libraries team are at the beginning of a journey. Their strategic vision creates a clear direction of travel but now they are in the process of turning this into actions that deliver positive and equitable outcomes. Working in close partnership with the University's Equality and Inclusion Unit they hope their approach as trailblazers will inspire others to follow in their footsteps to help to diversify the workforce.

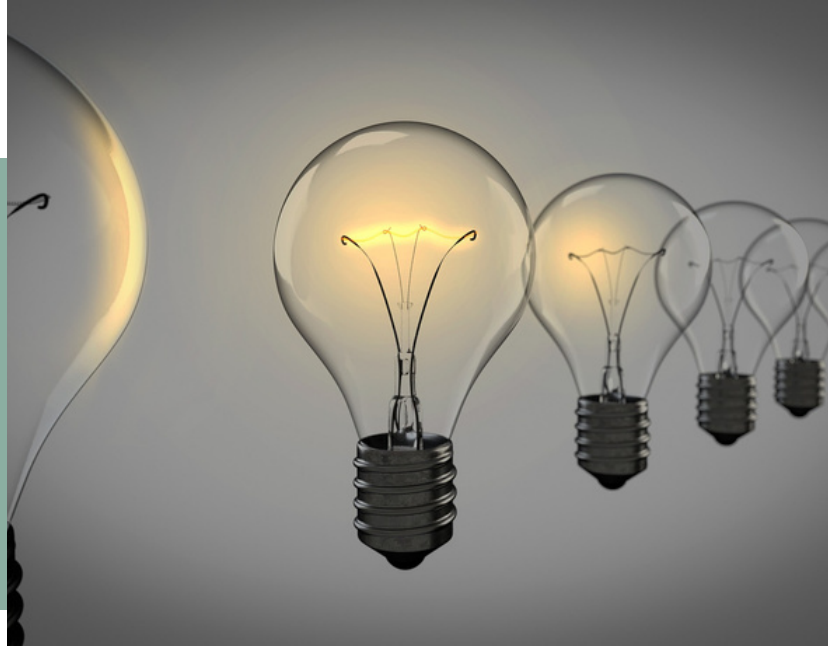
University of Leeds strategy objective

Empower our staff at all levels, supporting them to achieve their full potential, and develop a strong talent and succession pipeline.

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SCONUL would like to thank Elizabeth Malone for her time in effort in interviewing the institutions and pulling together the written case studies