# Black Lives Matter at Trinity Laban – Public Action Plan Update, February 2024

# INTRODUCTION

In March 2021, we published Trinity Laban’s [public anti-racism action plan and Black Lives Matter pledge](https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Black-Lives-Matter-at-Trinity-Laban.pdf). This action plan was developed in response to wide-ranging consultation with our Black students and alumni, and with industry experts. It acts as a roadmap for our ambitions to overcome the structural and systemic inequalities within our institution.

Two and a half years later, it is time to reflect upon that plan and understand where we have made progress and where there are areas of stasis or failure. The following update is not exhaustive: we have not included every action taken to effect positive change. Nor do we assume that the action taken so far is enough.

It is essential that all readers of this report understand that it is largely an anecdotal narrative. It is neither definitive nor celebratory – it is intended simply as a document that reflects on our progress as an institution and the significant work still to be done. We cannot demonstrate improvement upon all of the commitments laid out in the original action plan, but this is partially because our agenda for equality at Trinity Laban has grown and morphed beyond those original actions.

What is clear from this report is that while we can demonstrate significant action, we need to establish a data-led framework for recording and tracking our progress, to ensure that our commitment to change is embedded in the long term. We need to connect the different strands of work in the institution and evaluate our progress in a more forensic way.

We know that inequalities still exist at Trinity Laban as a consequence of social and cultural structures, and we are committed to addressing these in all aspects of our activity as an institution and community.

We welcome your ideas, comments and feedback on this update: please email Head of Brand and Communications Tessa Gillett on [t.gillett@trinitylaban.ac.uk](mailto:t.gillett@trinitylaban.ac.uk)

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# RESEARCH

In 2019/20, Trinity Laban established the first in-depth research exploring learning experiences of students from global majority and marginalised ethnic backgrounds linked to differential success within the conservatoire sector, taking a whole-institutional approach to supporting students from global majority and minority ethnic backgrounds. This large research project includes over 50 student participants and a number of staff from contrasting ethnic backgrounds from across the faculties and departments of Trinity Laban. A key focus of this work is understanding how student experiences of 'belonging' within education and at Trinity Laban shape variances in academic success and continuation between different students. This data, currently being analysed, provides a strong resource from which to support the success and belonging of students from global majority and marginalised ethnic backgrounds.

As part of this research, a number of students from global majority backgrounds have been employed and mentored, and continue to contribute to the research and actions arising from the work. This activity includes a number of complementary research projects which support findings from the larger research study. This initiative supports future researchers from global majority and marginalised ethnic backgrounds and ensures changes to institutional practice are properly informed by localised experiences.

The co-research approach has enabled the organisation of a festival for local people focused on supporting the dance of people from global majority backgrounds. Supported by funding gained from Arts Council England, the two-day festival – *Back on the Map* – involved local young and older people from African diasporic backgrounds coming to the Laban building to share their own experiences of dance and dancing, meet dancers and activists from global majority backgrounds, and contribute to discussion around how dance education can support global majority dancers better.

Research findings have been used to inform important changes to the Bachelor of Contemporary Dance programme (BACD) aimed at supporting the success and continuation of students from global majority and marginalised ethnic backgrounds. In the Faculty of Music, new activities have been developed in response to research findings highlighting the important role of students’ active contribution to learning, and to the need for increased intercultural and interdisciplinary mixing between students. Building on positive student feedback gained over the last two years, these *Improvisation and Dialogue* sessions are run by recent alumni co-researchers and enable students to reflect, share and use personal and collective experiences within music education and beyond as resources for composition and performance. Evaluation shows students feel the sessions boost their sense of belonging at Trinity Laban.

Significant changes made to the Student Engagement Strategy were also informed by the research and researchers’ experience of working with students and alumni. The strategy is now better aligned to support the participation of students from global majority and marginalised ethnic backgrounds in contributing to institutional change.

Presentations of this research at external events and conferences have been designed and delivered with student and alumni co-researchers, as part of efforts to build a more diverse and inclusive future of practitioners and researchers. Future presentations are currently being drafted and include contributing to the first conversations between dance conservatoires and institutions around how to support the belonging and success of students from global majority backgrounds.

In general, changes described above demonstrate a shift to a more student-centred approach at Trinity Laban aimed to enable students to identify and harness their strengths and interests earlier on in their journey, and use these to inform their learning. This whole-institution approach represents a pioneering approach to supporting the success and belonging of students from global majority and minority ethnic backgrounds.

# CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

## Faculty of Music

The Faculty’s partnership with Black Lives in Music aims to actively enhance the experiences of young people of African and Caribbean heritage within the Faculty by guiding and advising the Faculty on current and future initiatives. Roger Wilson, Director of Operations at Black Lives in Music, is now fully embedded in the FoM through his membership of Music Management Group (MMG), Performance Planning Group, attendance at departmental meetings, as a panel member on programme (re)validations along with other involvement in the operations of the Faculty. Roger’s engagement extends to students – during 2023/24 student induction, Black Lives in Music delivered inclusion workshops to all incoming students across all programmes. All activities are continuously monitored. In Autumn 2023, Roger was appointed to Trinity Laban’s Board of Governors.

Core modules in the revalidated BMus curriculum have been rewritten to reflect a more culturally relevant and diverse perspective with External Examiner Mykaell Riley commenting on the BMus provision that: *“the proactive approach to EDI to ensure future taught content reflected a broader range of composition, performance, and musicianship, was commendable.”*The MMus programme team continues to work to ensure the provision of positive employment of a range of cultures and individuals across the programme, and has recently highlighted work in the following modules: Research Lab - ‘Exploding the Canon’ talk given by Rebeca Omordia on African composers in the classical tradition; Opera and Theatre elective – Chi-Chi Nwanoku ‘Looking for the Back Mozart’; Instrumental and Vocal Teaching elective – Asynchronous learning on ‘Inclusion and Diversity’.  
By celebrating and recognising the significance of Black music outside of Western art music and popular music norms, the BAMPI programme promotes positive representations of diverse cultures; the Music and Society component, which examines critical race theory and gender politics, is particularly noteworthy. International students are encouraged to compose songs in their native language and non-Western languages are honoured through the introduction of ethnopoetics as a songwriting technique.

A repertoire review was conducted across all areas of the Musical Theatre programme, with coordinators tasked with expanding repertoire choices with a focus on underrepresented groups and broader theatrical choices. All production and project material has been considered to make sure that representation is appropriately portrayed, meeting the needs of today’s audiences and performers. Casting is also considered to ensure appropriate representation from both casting choices and student perspective.

Bespoke research funding has been made available to TL music staff in order to improve the underrepresentation of researchers of African and Afro-Caribbean heritage, with the first cohort beginning their PhD research in October 2022.  
The performance planning process has been revised to ensure that meaningful amplification of voices of African and Caribbean heritage is considered as part of all proposals. As part of the FoM’s commitment to amplify the music by under-represented composers and following on from the focus on the music of female composers in the 2018-19 'Venus Blazing' series, the Faculty’s public performance programme over the next two academic years will seek to highlight and celebrate the work of Black British composers and Black musical artists in Britain. The repertoire presented will range across all genres, featuring solo, small and large ensemble, and staged performances. This two-year initiative – *Kaleidoscope* - will incorporate a monitoring process to track its success.  
  
**Next steps:** Work continues to ensure that Principal Study repertoire requirements showcase compositions from a diverse range of individuals and cultures. Student feedback from the AY2021/22 BMus Programme survey included the comment that: *“Assessments were diverse, but content could have been more extensive.”*

Access to and exposure to a wide variety of role models in learning and teaching activities can sometimes be variable in the FoM, depending on the year group and department of the student. One solution, while this challenge is overcome, is to further increase the number of invited artists and guest lecturers from the global majority.

Faculty of Dance  
Trinity Laban’s Faculty of Dance has made important changes to its curricula aimed at acknowledging the vast contribution of Black people to its artform, and to supporting the success and continuation of students from global majority and marginalised ethnic backgrounds. These changes include ~~t~~he prioritisation of different dance artforms within student learning, such as the introduction of Hip Hop classes across undergraduate programmes, and a reframing of applied theories and practices to reveal the hidden voices in culture studies and dance history. External examiner Professor Angela Pickard highlighted this as a ‘good practice example’ stating that: *“Cultural Perspectives in Dance is a component that should be commended for its insights into the landscape, criticality and opportunities it offers students*.”

Approximately 50% of all commissioned performance work in Dance is now led by artists from the global majority. Commissioned artists since 2020 include Joel Brown, Rhys Dennis & Waddah Sinada, Kristina & Sade Alleyne, Divya Kasturi, Matt Harding, Kennedy Muntanga, Sarah Golding & Yukiko Masui, Jean Abreau, Akeim Toussaint Buck and Takeshi Matsumoto.

A significant development on the flagship BA in Contemporary Dance is the increase of a student-centred approach to learning. This begins from students' arrival, meaning all learning is directed by the diverse assets and experiences students bring to learning. For example, Experiential Anatomy classes are now centred as a way of empowering students and recognising difference between students. The mode of delivery has changed for some content, generally towards a more 'hands-on' and student-based approach in smaller groups. This new pedagogical style enables closer attention to students' interests and needs, and supports stronger peer-learning relationships.

Acknowledging how non-integrated approaches can increase student workloads and create inequalities in access between different groups, elements of the BA in Contemporary Dance that previously would have been ‘extracurricular’ or optional have now been embedded into student learning. Participation is now compulsory and importantly also credit-bearing, for example, creative writing classes and small group sessions in the library. This activity recognises how workload and additional commitments vary between students as well as acknowledging the role of student belonging in shaping the propensity of students to pursue optional components or support.

Library resources are being scrutinised and updated to better include underrepresented work, and search terms are being looked at so that students can find those sources. The library has also put together book chats and socials that encourage deeper engagement with this collection.

Across all programmes, the positive impact of these changes is being felt, with an increase in undergraduate independent research projects and postgraduate research centring issues around cultural diversity in dance. Alumni engagement is increasing, with alumni from the global majority leading collaborations with Trinity Laban and building support links with current students via the sharing of work and research.

Partnership working has been a cornerstone of the Faculty’s success, most notably via deep engagement with Black Artists in Dance who have supported programme leaders, teaching staff and students to share their experiences, and advised on improved practice.

**Next steps:** Overall, more is still required to engage students in an intended shift of culture within dance education and how those shifts relate more broadly to current dance practices, the ideas of what contemporary dance is and who it is for. Current sector practices are far more diverse and hybrid, compared to what students might have been exposed to through their education so far.

The number of students participating in co-curricular activity has been relatively small, but evaluative feedback that was collated after those activities has been entirely positive. Nearly all activities described above were piloted as optional co-curricular activities, i.e. through a series of sign-up masterclasses, before they were developed more substantially and implemented into the curriculum. Informal feedback suggested that many students do not have the capacity to participate in co-curricular activity and prioritise compulsory coursework alongside working or other commitments.

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Trinity Laban continues to develop strong links with local communities in South-East London to provide access to music at the pre-HE level to all children. Our involvement with the Lewisham London Borough of Culture 2022 extended our mission to provide “wide access to performances, learning and participatory programmes for our local, regional…communities” (TL Strategic Plan). As detailed in the TL Access and Participation Plan 2020-25, TL has ‘set and met demanding targets for BAME participation in…outreach activities (minimum 50%)”. TL has also increased to 30% the percentage of global majority students studying on our flagship progression programme Junior Trinity.

A key component of the Children and Young People’s programme in both faculties is work directly in schools and with youth groups, which in Lewisham and Greenwich have a high proportion of young Black people.

In the Faculty of Dance, the Children and Young People team are mirroring moves to develop the dance curriculum on the HE programmes. Hip Hop is now a core component of the Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) curriculum, and space is being made for other African Dance forms through intensives and masterclasses. Teachers across CAT and the youth programme share contextual information about the history and lineage of dance forms, highlighting, crediting and celebrating historical and contemporary Black Creatives in the dance form, acknowledge connections to Black culture through music/accompaniment in the stimulus chosen and drawing from diverse reference points when sharing resources and imagery. Significant work has taken place in this team to diversify teaching staff, and visiting and commissioned artists.

Trinity Laban’s cross-faculty Community and Artist Development team are taking similar steps to increase the representation of artists and teachers from the global majority, and ensuring that programme curricula contain forms and materials from Black traditions. A code of conduct has been developed across programmes with older people to facilitate an inclusive environment for new members joining the group.

In the Faculty of Music’s Children and Young People team, one example of progress and success is TL’s Jazz Hang partnership with Tomorrow’s Warriors, which continues to flourish. 2023/24 is the fourth year of the programme, and in this year’s cohort, over 50% of the participants are of Black or Mixed ethnicity background. The weekly programme has moved to Lewisham Music’s base in Bellingham, and has enabled more targeted outreach activities in local secondary schools with a high proportion of Black students.

Performance activity in local schools has expanded hugely over the past 2 years, helped significantly by the roll-out of the Jazz on Tour concerts programme in schools. In 2022/23, this reached 14 different schools, supported by learning resources exploring the legacy of the Black musicians celebrated, with all of the schools carefully selected on the basis of both their demographic context and the impact the programme might be able to have on their music provision.

Efforts to increase the number of global majority students on Trinity Laban’s Junior Trinity programme centre around partnerships with schools and orchestral outreach teams. Just under £200k is available to support students from under-represented backgrounds or financial need.

**Next steps:** Across all public engagement and CYP teams, further curriculum development work is underway, as is work to ensure that staffing is representative. There are areas that need particular focus, such as the Junior Trinity programme and some more traditional elements of the youth dance offer.

There are many areas of excellent practice in which young Black people are being given inclusive opportunities to engage with and develop their skills and passion for the performing arts: it is essential that the Faculties connect to this work to support continuation into HE programmes.

# RECRUITMENT

Staff recruitment practices have developed towards a better level of inclusivity. All vacancies are now published on websites and with agencies that have a significant global majority readership, and this list is regularly reviewed and updated. All vacancies are also shared with our partners Black Lives in Music and Black Artists in Dance for wider circulation. In addition, an underrepresentation statement has been added to TL job advertisements to set out a clear intention to address a lack of diversity in some areas.

There are areas of excellence emerging at Trinity Laban in terms of representative recruitment. Our new Popular Music programme has been introduced with a commitment to ensuring that staff are representative of the professional industry at large; the ability to grow this staff from scratch has enabled rapid progress. The staff includes Dr Tony Briscoe, module leader in Music Production; Paramdeep Sokhy, UK's leading Grime and Drill producer; Bassist Yolanda Charles MBE, band leader and role model for a generation of young black artists; Dele Sosimi, Artist in Residence for Afrobeat and Groove; and Music and Society Teacher Alexander Douglas is editor of the British Journal of Ethnomusicology and an expert on critical race theory. Many of these staff members are now growing their remit within the Faculty of Music to extend beyond the Popular Music provision.

Diversity statistics are collected on shortlisted applicants and reported quarterly to the HR and Remunerations committee, and annually to the Equality and Diversity Board. This data is enabling a deeper understanding of where Trinity Laban should be making improvements.

**Next steps:** Trinity Laban’s Recruitment Policy was rewritten in 2021 but some areas remain in development, such as regular recruitment and selection training for line managers, Equality Impact Assessments for all recruitment advertising campaigns, and the realisation of a Recruitment Panel Register to give recruiting panels access to global majority staff. Improvements are also needed to ensure that job descriptions and interviews contain clear requirements for equality competencies.

# TRAINING

In 2021, Trinity Laban partnered with Theatre Peckham to deliver their ‘5 pillars of anti-racism’ training to 175 salaried staff and a further 25 hourly-paid staff. Some heads of departments have been supported to roll that training onto their departmental staff. Additional mandatory training has been delivered to Dance staff by Black Artists in Dance.

All new students receive Equality and Diversity Training with Advance HE covering anti-racism and bystander intervention at the point of enrolment at Trinity Laban. New music students also receive an induction session with Black Lives in Music focused specifically on race and issues of representation within classical music and conservatoires.

**Next steps:** A clear agreement needs to be made to ensure that all hourly-paid staff can access anti-racism training, in part to ensure their accountability. Similarly, it is fundamental to the success of Trinity Laban’s equality and diversity work that salaried staff are on-boarded with relevant training and then offered opportunities to refresh and update their training.

# PROCESSES & SYSTEMS

A micro-aggression portal was launched in 2021, and is continually monitored and updated to ensure ease of use. Entries are tracked by the Equality and Diversity Board, so that systemic patterns of behaviour can be spotted and responded to. The portal has been cited by other institutions as an example of good practice.

The student complaints and disciplinary processes were reviewed in consultation with students, in order to make Black and other students from minority groups feel safer reporting their concerns. Several actions were identified and are now in operation. Internal training on the actioning of complaints is provided for all programme leaders and key support staff at the beginning of each academic year, with sessions open to all teaching staff.

**Next Steps:** An institutional commitment to review the complaints and disciplinary systems for staff has not been met and will now be prioritised.

Similarly, there is a need to review the Performance Management system, aiming for top-down accountability to ensure inclusive practice and regular opportunities for feedback and reflection, with budget allocated for ongoing development by all individuals at Trinity Laban.

# STUDENT & STAFF REPRESENTATION

All faculties and departments now actively invite global majority artists to work with our students and visiting teachers and lecturers, and the institution remains invested in its Black Culture 365 programme, showcasing Black art all year round. Notably, many of the BC365 events are student-led, enabling TL to directly activate and enable their interests. A team of paid student content creators is recruited and trained each year to enable external-facing social media initiatives ensuring that student and staff stories can be told first-hand, building respect and awareness within the TL community. In addition, significant celebrations of Trinity Laban’s Black history have taken place, including the installation of two commemorative plaques for Fela Kuti and John Blanke.

Through TL’s partnerships with Black Lives in Music and Black Artists in Dance, we provide regular time and space for Black staff and students to meet, discuss their experiences and provide anonymous feedback to the institution.

Trinity Laban’s research project *Understanding differential success between students from different ethnic backgrounds in Music and Dance: Student belonging at Trinity Laban* continues to explore and address variations between white and global majority students’ academic success (‘differential attainment’ and withdrawal) continues. The project uses a range of qualitative methods to explore student experiences across different ethnic and social groups, with a focus on understanding variations in students’ sense of belonging within the institution.

Trinity Laban quickly established alternative language to the acronym ‘BAME’ in 2020, now choosing to use phraseology agreed with individuals on a case-by-case basis, or the term ‘global majority’ unless required by law or statutory reporting to continue with ‘BAME’.

We have undertaken an overhaul of the way in which student feedback is collected and actioned, removing some of the gatekeeping that could take place in the previous system. All students will attend termly programme forums, which will include a space for students to discuss students’ experiences with Programme Leaders and other relevant teaching / faculty staff. As part of this new forum, the programme leader will, with the assistance of student representatives, create and maintain an action grid as a record of what action will be taken to address issues raised. Student representatives work to ensure that all voices are heard and encourage attendance and progress against actions. The completed and updated Action Grids will be submitted for consideration by the Faculty Quality Committee and will be monitored to ensure progress and used as part of the institution’s periodic reviews.

During 2022/23, the Research Department and Trinity Laban Research Degree Programme implemented a new initiative aimed at practitioner-researchers of colour, with assistance from a new funding stream from Research England entitled ‘Enhancing Research Culture’. Two musicians specialising in jazz research are now fully supported by the institution in terms of a fee waiver and bursary to complete doctoral studies, and a third is planned for 23-24. In addition, during 2022, Trinity Laban, in collaboration with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, hosted the second iteration of the international ‘Shared Narratives’ conference, a sharing of work from artist-researchers of colour at both postgraduate and faculty level. This conference was co-organised by Dr Uchenna Ngwe, a recent graduate of the Trinity Laban Research Degree Programme. Another conference is planned for 2024.

**Next Steps:** The size of Trinity Laban and annual changeover of elected officers has meant that TLSU’s engagement with this work has fluctuated. A closer link needs to be formed to ensure that Black and global majority students receive a continuity of representation within TLSU, ideally via diversification of TLSU officers, and the provision of training and events. Trinity Laban will prioritise gathering data on the structures and challenges limiting marginalised students pursuing representation and TLSU roles.

Changes to student feedback systems are a step in the right direction, and a commitment is needed to monitoring how these have impacted on the experience of global majority students and / or whether they have resulted in more feedback being gathered and addressed.

# GOVERNANCE

50% of board vacancies since 2021 have been filled by global majority individuals, and work continues to make progress in this area. Similarly, committee membership has been led by postholders or alignment with governor expertise, but a more diverse board of governors is improving representation on the board’s committees.

The Equality and Diversity Board, reconstituted in 2021, is the formal committee for monitoring Trinity Laban’s progress against our anti-racism actions. The committee meets once a term, ensuring accountability at all levels, reviewing data and informing future activity.

**Next steps:** The work of the Equality and Diversity Board needs to be shared openly on the TL website and in regular communications with staff and students. Board and committee membership will remain under continual review.