

JEN: Hi everyone, thank you so much for joining us today  
My name is Jennifer Todd from jobs.ac.uk and today I'm having a conversation with Professor Kiran Trehan from the University of York about diversity and inclusivity in staff in higher education.

Professor Trehan, welcome, and we're thrilled to be chatting to you today.

KIRAN: I'm delighted to be talking to you on a topic in an area that I think is just so critical and vital.

JEN: We're thrilled to have you so thank you very much for taking the time.

Could you maybe tell us a little bit about yourself? A little bit about what you do at the University of York just to get started?

KIRAN: Yes of course, so I'm Kiran Trehan, and I'm Pro Vice Chancellor for Partnerships and Engagement at the University of York, and I'm also a Professor of Entrepreneurship and the Director of the Centre for Women's Enterprise Leadership and Diversity. Now, when you talk about who am I, those titles don't say anything really about me and my experience in higher education, so who am I? Well, I'm a kid who grew up in the east end of London, in the back streets of the east end of London, when the east end of London doesn't look like as it does now. So, there was no Canary Wharf, and children like me didn't have opportunities to go to university or were even encouraged to go to university you know?

Often we were told to lower our expectations rather than raising our aspirations so I think it's really timely talking about my journey into higher education, from senior lecturer to pro vice chancellor. Was this a planned journey? You know, did I always dream of being a PVC? Absolutely not, but there is something very special about chance encounters, so in many ways, I stumbled into academia.

Academia was not a career of choice. I was working in industry at the time and we were short of architects and planners and I tried to think slightly outside of the box, made contact with my local university on the Monday, I was invited for lunch on the Tuesday and they asked me if I would do a guest lecture on one of their sort of CIPD programs at the time. But, I was also offered a job! Now, those things don't happen now, and it probably broke every single rule that was going, but it was a really

interesting journey because I'm a really cautious person - I never take risks - and yet there was something really appealing in that moment, and I only had that night to make up my decision, and the rest is history because I clearly did take the job, and it was a really exciting time. It was a time when business schools were just beginning to evolve and develop, and management schools and so I joined as an SL, several years later I became a Head of Department and again that wasn't a planned choice, it wasn't a strategic move to become, you know, a senior lecturer.

I became head of department, I did my PhD part-time and I got my chair for the kind of research that I was doing, and so the journey into education has been both rewarding, exciting and challenging in equal measures, but underpinning that journey for me has been a process of self-reflection, you know from where we start and where we end up is not always a clearly planned process so don't lose sight of chance encounters and moment-in-time opportunities, and also those doubts - can I do this? I know when I moved from SL to Head of Department I was filled with fear and trepidation, can I do this? Do I really want to do this? What are the implications for my research? But I think I've shown that you can lead, and leadership is so important to help both change the system and influence the system, and you do that by kind of listening to other voices, learning to walk and feel comfortable in your own shoes. So the next time someone says to you, what's your five-year plan? Did you know you were going to be an SL and then Head of Department?

Then I had a number of key strategic roles across the University but I chose to use them as opportunities to learn, opportunities to drive the kind of research that I wanted to do, which was all about engagement and partnerships, how to take the research that you do and make it visible to the external communities, and how do you work with those communities? So I feel that when people talk about privileged upbringings, I feel I've had a really privileged time in academia, not because of all the doors that were open for me, not because I went to the best schools possible, not because university was a door that was opened for me but just through hard work single-minded determination and curiosity, and so privilege comes in many ways and our career choices come in different ways.

JEN: Thank you, wow, that sounds like quite a career journey and I mean I've also often pondered that question that, you know, where do you see yourself in five years? Well it's nice to have a general plan but your general plan doesn't take in opportunities that that might come your

way so I think it's fascinating, it's so interesting to hear how you got to where you are. Have you had any career highlights? You must have, I mean you've had quite the career so could you maybe give us an example of some of the career highlights that you've had since working in higher education?

Kiran: So my first career highlight was getting my PhD, I mean that has to be the most important moment for me, why was that? Well because, you know, years of self-doubt a sense of not believing a sense of not belonging and in the moment of getting that, I kind of remember thinking I'm not going to get this, this is years of hard work, because for most of my life, nothing has ever kind of come easy, so this sense of, um, failing you know, stays with you and it stays with you because of who you are and where you've come from and people not believing, so that was a really important moment for me, you know it put some of those goals to rest, it showed that people like me people who have had a very diverse background you know can make it, and I got my PhD from one of the best universities there is which was Lancaster, and that meant something because it showed that very often, people that come from working-class backgrounds wouldn't think about Russell Group universities, or universities of that kind of standing, so that was a real highlight for me.

I guess the second career highlight for me has been becoming Pro-Vice Chancellor. I said very early on that I didn't have aspirations to be, you know, a PVC, if anything I always said I would never want to be a PVC, so it's kind of kind of ironic, and again, it goes back to our roots and who we are. But those things don't just happen, those highlights come through learning your instrument, learning your craft, learning your art and putting the kind of hard work in that goes to them, so learning to lead, learning to be a researcher, being reflective of those processes and then none of those things happen because of who I am, they happen because you have people behind you that support you, that encourage you, to provide some of those opportunities and it's what you do with those opportunities along the way.

A good friend and colleague of mine of many years when I said I can't do the PVC job that's just a step too far for me, and she held a really good mirror up and said what have you got to lose by applying? The experience will do you good! But there's always this sense of failure, so we don't always do things because we don't think we're ready, and I've learned along the way, in terms of my career highlights, I'm never going to be ready, you know, and actually there is something quite exciting

about not being ready, so if you can lose this feeling of not being ready, it suddenly frees you, and opens up other doors for you, so those were really two really important and critical moments for me and then the third, which isn't about me in terms of you know, it's about working and developing a department that went from a position of challenging conflict to being inclusive and collaborative, you know, and really taking its work both in terms of its education programmes and its research to another level in a couple of years, and so bringing teams together, bringing those different voices, bringing those challenging voices, and working with difference rather than trying to pretend difference doesn't happen, and that for me was again, you know, really special, to watch others grow and to watch others lead and find their voice and their confidence.

JEN: That's brilliant, thank you very much, yeah that's actually a really interesting point that you make about, you know, everything that's being done within the university to encourage diversity and inclusivity and you know this hasn't always been the case so where are, what are universities doing now? Where are they at? Where are they going? What are the next steps in terms of diversity and equality and inclusivity?

KIRAN: I think that's a great question, and a very pertinent question you know, to be discussing. EDI, race and inequality have to be at the heart of every university's mission, their vision, their strategies and their policies, and not because it's simply the right thing to do, but all the research shows us that it just makes great business sense. It also addresses our civic mission as universities and so, you know, why am I so proud to be at the University of York? Because at the University of York we're putting race and EDI at the heart of our strategic plans over the next 10 years. There's a real commitment to embed this engender, not as a side-line, but throughout our operations throughout our policies throughout our procedures, but most of all, in our actions, and how are we addressing that, so let me give you some concrete examples. So, we're addressing systemic race inequalities in a number of ways, we've done that by listening, and organising a listening campaign, but to do that thoughtfully and reflectively, and out of that has come a race equality coordination group, you know, and this group has provided both the vision and the strategic direction in relation to anti-racism. It's helped to champion and oversee the progress of the race equality focus areas our staff our students inclusive support but also about our values as a university for public good so we've done that by actively engaging listening and communicating the work both internally and externally and some of the comments that have come back because I think they're really powerful is let me just give you an example this was such an

engaging group I'm excited to see the impact of the agreed actions for this year this group is a great example of true co-creation and collaboration, this is happening in action, open honest bold discussions addressing a hugely important agenda, most useful item on the agenda today has been the use of language around race, it's so important we have a clear direction on how we identify ourselves every member of the group across the university has something powerful to contribute, so we've been making racial equality everybody's business, both in the city and the region by influencing and shaping national initiatives. How have we done that? So, our priorities have been about normalising the conversations on race and racism, about staff representation and progression and decolonising and diversifying the curriculum, now in themselves, each one of those things doesn't necessarily mean that it's new and distinctive, but when we talk about normalising the conversations on race and racism, what we are doing is ensuring we are providing practical tools to allow us to begin this process, and we're developing a set of tools and resources that's called 'let's talk about race and racism'. We're clear about not just the policies around anti-racism, but the in the actions that will support that, and so we've been thinking about how we use internal and public lectures that take us beyond women's international day, or black history month, how do we embed them so they're part of our infrastructure? We encourage academic colleagues to promote their research around race inequalities and anti-racism agendas, we've been thinking about ensuring the prominence of the guest speakers that we have nationally and internationally, and by doing all of these things we're developing both networks and processes that will allow us to kind of embed and normalise the conversations. We've got staff training resources on anti-racism, blended learning, and by doing that we're moving away from the deficit model i.e the problem lies with the other to ensuring that staff representation and progression is representative so we're taking some really good positive action around recruitment and progression, you know, through positive action in terms of the statements that we make on our job adverts, promotion of BAME staff role models and case studies as part of the recruitment activity. We're working with, you know, the faculty, the department, the management committees, to try and ensure they're representative of the communities and the students that we work with. And in terms of progression, we have been looking at ensuring there's representation on key university committees and decision making groups, so, where appropriate, we've been introducing deputy shadow boards, co mentoring roles, to encourage, you know, colleagues from BAME backgrounds to apply. Why are we doing that? I talked earlier on about you know, never quite feeling that you're ready, so what we're doing is

helping people experience what those roles are like, learning the ropes of what it means to operate at that level but also giving them exposure to the kinds of work that they do. I talked about decolonising and diversifying the curriculum, at York we understand how important that is, but that on its own isn't enough for us we're also developing that by establishing a framework to build both inclusive curriculums, but also to make sure we're creating an inclusive culture that supports that because changing the curriculum in itself doesn't necessarily create the conditions of inclusive cultures, so we're making sure that we have a clear universal understanding amongst our staff and our students, what decolonising the curriculum means, and a clear set of tools and guidelines to help us implement and diversify our teaching practices, but we do that through consultation and engagement at all levels because that's really really important to us. And I want to finish on a quote by Maya Angelou, and she said I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel, and so the work on EDI isn't simply about, you know, systems and processes it's creating a culture where people have a voice, people feel they belong, and so we're re thinking and unpacking what inclusivity means, you know, in in this context so those are some of the kind of examples that we've been working with.

JEN - That's that's really great to hear, I mean I know one of the things I often think about is that it's great that so many universities, institutions, businesses, are all putting in policies and procedures to, you know, help talk about diversity, inclusivity but a policy and a procedure isn't really enough, you're dealing with real people, real people who are being affected on a daily basis by the way that they're being treated, so it's fantastic to hear how York and many other universities are putting so much effort into real solutions for the challenges that we're facing, and one of the things that you mentioned is actually around role models and I had a question for you around that because, you know, working in a university we all have a responsibility to be a role model for all of the students, but research has shown that there's a lack of mentors for underrepresented groups, so my question I guess is, is there a similar challenge in staff in HE? Where there's a lack of role models, and then also where does that responsibility sit? To be a role model?

KIRAN - I think that's a great that's a great question. Role models are really important, and we know that there is a lack of diversity in universities, you know, so it's important to have that honest and transparent conversation, but I want to shift the debate from what we

don't have to what we do have, because I think that's really important. So for me, it isn't simply a question of role models, we need role models we need sponsors, we need to create spaces and opportunities and those things have to work hand in hand, and when we think about role models we have to say well, but what makes a good role model? You know? Because alongside that you need people that will sponsor you, that will give you those opportunities, that will work with you, that will help you navigate both the opportunities and the challenges and so you're absolutely right we do have to create you know, more role models, but we need to do that in more innovative ways. So, one of the things that I've been working on that I'm really proud of, is an initiative called creating and making space, and so if we think about universities and the buildings that we have in the images that we use, rather than having images that stay static wouldn't it be great if we had images that reflected inspiring students, inspiring academic staff, inspiring professional services staff, regardless of ethnicity you know or race, but we created those so we had, you know, different forms of art galleries across the university to allow us to have those questions, those discussions, and those questions about but what is the role model? What will they do? But if we see it, and we feel it, then we're more likely to kind of come forward, and as we begin to address the pipeline gap, then hopefully more people will want to come forward as role models and as mentors, but I also like this notion of reverse mentoring where we are using colleagues across the piece to mentor senior leaders, so rather than senior leaders doing the mentoring, actually, you know, we're working the other way around. And the second initiative that I hope will help us think differently about role models is an initiative called walking in my shoes, you know I said earlier on that often when we begin to think about our academic careers, you know, from lecturer to senior lecturer to professor, we learn to walk in different shoes, and we're so busy trying to be like our role model, you don't have to be like your role model, you have to learn to walk in your shoes because that's what got you there in the first place, so initiatives like walking in my shoes means that you spend a day walking in the shoes of others, you know and again, it's created, it's not shadowy, you know it is genuinely understanding what it feels like to be in those different roles, so that when you are mentoring or when you're creating role models we get a better appreciation because we're starting from the point of experience rather than through some kind of rational activity.

JEN - That sounds brilliant, I think, yeah, just such an innovative approach to the way things are being done. I mean I've spoken to a lot of people lately who are all talking about the diversity forums and that

kind of thing that they're involved, in but this sounds like such a brilliant proactive yeah innovative approach I think it sounds fascinating still speaking on role models have you had any mentors or any role models who have really stood out for you and helped to shape your academic career?

KIRAN - So for me sponsors have been far more influential and critical in my career and so my first sponsor was my PhD supervisor, Michael Reynolds, at Lancaster University, he was an incredibly inspiring role model but he believed in me, you know if it hadn't been for him writing to me after my master's saying have you thought about doing a PhD and I wouldn't have begun that journey and so i was inspired by the work and his writings, because they were accessible you know, they spoke about difference, they spoke about learning and i guess they inspired me to want to read and that's so so so important. The second person who has been an incredible role model, and again another very quiet but silent sponsor was Professor Saul Becker, who is now the Provost at Sussex University. I met Saul when i was at Birmingham and his passion and his commitment to drive equality and diversity you know and inclusivity as part of the wider agenda, and giving license and freedom to take your research, and help shape the work that we were doing you know across the institution so it's interesting for me how role models and sponsors work hand in hand, and again believing in enough and trusting you enough to give you a space to flourish, and opportunities to experience different things. Don't get me wrong, it was a competitive process, I can remember I applied for a role within the college to lead particular areas of work, but if I hadn't had that that encouragement that support and, along the way, you also have to learn to manage what I call the politics of disappointment. We don't always get what we apply for, but if you learn from that, and I always say to people that I'm mentoring or sponsoring, it's never been about getting the role or the job for me, what it has been about though is leaving a lasting legacy, because if you do that, the next time something comes up that might not have been your moment and of course that's disappointing, and of course we don't want to put ourselves through that, you know kind of every step of the way. And I guess the third person who more recently was so influential to me accepting the job at York is Satani Jeffries, I have never worked for a more inspirational leader who lives by those values, drives those values, but does it in a really inclusive way and so I suppose that's why I have a real optimism about the future and the importance of role models and sponsors kind of working together, they can't give you the job, but what they can do is create the opportunities and then it's up to you, it's up to us what we do with those opportunities so I hope we continue to ensure

that we tell more stories about the importance of sponsors and how they have helped us along the way and I often use a phrase and again a colleague has been instrumental in saying stop saying that so I will say how lucky I've been, you know I just happen to be at the right place at the right time, it's a load of nonsense, it isn't about being lucky, it isn't about being in the right place at the right time, it's about the work that you have done, you know, the evidence that you bring, the commitment the hard work, the agility as well as all of those disappointments but learning to never be scared to take that chance because you don't know where that chance might lead you to, so I guess I would say role models, inspirational leaders, but also community groups have been inspirational for me, the work that I've done on the communities, those everyday entrepreneurs, you know, who don't have much to start with, they have been the biggest influence on the work that I do and they have been my most critical and encouraging role models because they challenge you, they challenge academia so I think role models have to be really good critical friends, they don't just come from the academy, they come from the research that you do and the communities and the policy makers that you work with.

JEN - What a fabulous perspective on role models and remembering that a role model isn't just somebody from the top down but finding inspiration in the people around you.

Would you mind just clarifying for me the difference between a sponsor and a mentor or a role model?

KIRAN - Yes of course, so for me you know um a role model is somebody that i might look up to you know and i want to be like so there'll be something about that they you know maybe the way they do things, you know or the reputation that they hold, so you can have lots of role models but maybe never have any interaction with them whatsoever. A mentor is somebody that works with you, to help you grapple through and work through some of the issues, and they're a bit like a critical friend aren't they? They hold up a critical mirror that allows you to make informed choices. A sponsor is somebody that opens up opportunities, they both encourage you but also just push you a little bit to making things happen so for instance, you know I had very little experience of what does it mean to work on a senior leadership team so you might get invited to come and present to a senior leadership team so you begin to become familiar with some of those processes, and so what a sponsor does is a supporter, you know, they're an ambassador of your of your work but they also provide those opportunities that take you

out of your comfort zone, things that you might not ordinarily want to do and feel that you're not ready for but they'll provide those opportunities and to make some of those things happen, and so those are the kind of differences in relation to those.

JEN - Thank you for clearing that up for me. Yeah, I've always kind of looked at the world in terms of role models and you know mentors, some people that I would like to emulate, people that that help to inspire me to go further. I love the topic of a sponsor, having somebody who's really pushing you to succeed and of course, you have to have the desire yourself but like you say, encouraging you to step out of that comfort zone and see those opportunities and take them, that sounds brilliant.

Now the other point from your previous answer that I would like to go into a little bit more detail about is you spoke about everything that that is being done um in terms of EDI, so, now you know we're all aware, you can't have existed in the world in recent years and not recognise that the world is changing for the better when it comes to our global attitude towards equality, but of course there is still a long way to go, and there's a lot of work to be done, but every day we're working towards a true global culture of equality, with this in mind how do you view the future of higher education?

KIRAN - I think I view the future with an optimism, hope, but also, you know, concern. So, let me tell you, let me say why. So, we know that the desire for more inclusive workplaces requires inclusive leadership, the black lives matter movement, Brexit disclosures, in business and public services, all of these things are highlighting the consequences and the impact of a lack of leadership diversity, not just in higher education, in public services in business in almost every aspect of life and picking these reforms, as you quite rightly said, is a desire and an optimism to create more diverse inclusive workplaces which reflect the society that we live in and work in, and let's not forget, young people are demanding this if you think about the future leaders, well they won't be people like me, they'll be the next generation, and they're voting with their feet, about where they want to be educated, which jobs they want to apply for so for me, contrary to the rhetoric about creating diverse leadership teams, it is still a challenge for us, you know, we are not there yet - we want to be - but we're not, and so I think we have to put our research evidence to work and not through governance and compliance, but initiatives that really champion inclusive leadership, you know, that really address the gaps that exist to try and increase the pipelines the second area I think that's really important, that gives me hope and

optimism, is that we're beginning to move away, and understand that leadership inclusivity is much more than simply increasing you know gender or ethnicity or LGBT representation, it's not just about the protected characteristics, it isn't just about recruiting and retaining the right people from under underrepresented groups for me, and the research that I've been doing, has highlighted this time and time again, we need to move away from changing systems that really focus on what I call isolated or you know these one-off initiatives which are a knee-jerk reaction to whatever is happening in a given moment to much more collective institutional action, and by that I mean we all recognize that diversity is one of our biggest strengths, we have a young and incredibly diverse population of students and staff and our community networks, so we have to provide the opportunities for them to grow and flourish, and so with that hope, of course there's caution because we've seen this time and time again but COVID 19 has taught us valuable lessons, it's shown us what happens when we work together, when we collaborate, when we co-design, when we coalesce, then we can make a measurable difference and so I guess the optimism comes that we don't lose sight of the learning of COVID 19, and we translate that learning into some of the ways that we are trying to address. you know. these inequality gaps. And of course, there are bigger challenges because they're systemic, they're institutional, they've taken years to be embedded, and now we're trying to, you know, dismantle some of these things, but if we work together as higher education institutions with our schools, with our colleges, with our business, with our community leaders, then I think we can make real sustainable change, and we have to do that, this isn't a luxury. If we want to attract the best talent, if we want to attract students that will grow and flourish in those underrepresented communities, then we can't wait for them to come to us, we have to be proactive. Universities are places of research, of curiosity, of innovation, so where better to work on diversity and inclusivity, to be creative to be innovative, and to make a real difference? And so, that's what I mean when I say making, you know, diversity everybody's business.

JEN - That sounds brilliant, and it paints a picture of a really inspiring future, like you say, if we all work together and if we all work at it, from my side that's basically all of the questions that I had so I thought we could move on to closing thoughts. So do you have any tips? Any advice for anybody who's considering moving their career into HE or anybody who wants to pursue a career in academia and, like you say, maybe doesn't think that they're ready for it or doesn't feel like they can for whatever reason?

KIRAN – Yeah, I'd say three things, I'd say present a persuasive story, you know, develop a persuasive narrative. Be persistent, as one door closes I'm a great believer another door opens, and you have to be passionate about the work that you want to do so my three p's persuasiveness, persistence, and passion but they require us to be adventurous, they require us to take risks, they require us to have a go, because we won't know unless we try and I'd say make your own minds up, because there is so much noise at the moment about what's not right in higher education, and you can listen to that noise, but listen to the evidence and work on the evidence, you know, I think we craft and create our own futures, we don't have to walk in anybody's shoes, you just have to learn to have the confidence to walk in your shoes. So it's for anybody who's thinking about joining higher education I'd say do it! Don't let fear be the one thing that stops you, and if equality and diversity and inclusivity is going to be our future, then we need people like you to step up, because without that we won't create the change that we so desperately talk about. So I guess my challenge back is, you know, I'd ask yourself to be really reflective, will you heckle from the sidelines and talk about what's wrong in the system? Will you be that silent voice and just observe what's going on? Or will you be a critical activist? And by that I mean you take that first step to make that difference, you have to be in the system to change the system, so be persuasive, be persistent but most of all follow your dreams, you know, and be passionate in whatever you do.

JEN - Well it's been really fascinating talking to you today, it's really inspiring, so Professor Treyhan, thank you so much for the time that you've taken to chat to us, and everybody who's watching, thank you for watching.

