

REFLECTIONS ON EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ARE WE TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS?*

Adelle Blackett**

ABSTRACT

This essay—originally delivered to the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education—reflects on the ambivalent relationship between equity, diversity, and inclusion, and employment equity, canvassing both the existing literature on effectiveness and the normative imperative of achieving substantive

* Keynote lecture delivered at the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education 2023 Conference: The Long Road to Equity in Higher Education: Hope, Challenges, and Action, University of Calgary, 13 October 2023. The presentation was based on Adelle Blackett, *Report of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force: A Transformative Framework to Achieve and Sustain Employment Equity* (Gatineau: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023), online: <canada.ca> [perma.cc/LR2D-PMKY] [Blackett, *Report*]. For its executive summary, see Adelle Blackett, *Report of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force, Executive Summary: A Transformative Framework to Achieve and Sustain Employment Equity* (Gatineau: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023), online: <canada.ca> [perma.cc/VL3W-LE26]. I am grateful to the *McGill Law Journal*'s volume 70 editor in chief, Pascale Malenfant, and her team, as well as to Labour Law and Development Research Laboratory research assistant, BCL & JD candidate Navya Baradi, for their support in finalizing this speech for publication.

** Chair of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force Report. Professor of Law and Canada Research Chair in Transnational Labour Law, McGill University. Fall 2024 William Hughes Mulligan Distinguished Visiting Professor, Fordham Law School.

© Adelle Blackett 2025

Citation: (2025) 70:2 McGill LJ 173 — Référence : (2025) 70:2 RD McGill 173

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons License CC-BY-ND (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>).

equality. It also critically considers the vision embodied in one recent sector-specific initiative, the *Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education*. It asks what frameworks enable us to prioritize the work of transforming relationships in higher education in Canada, and beyond.

* * *

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai, initialement présenté à l'Association canadienne pour la prévention de la discrimination et du harcèlement en milieu d'enseignement supérieur, explore la relation ambivalente qui existe entre l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion, et l'équité en matière d'emploi. Le texte passe en revue la littérature existante sur l'efficacité de ces approches et sur l'impératif normatif d'atteindre l'égalité réelle. Également, il examine d'un œil critique la perspective incarnée par une initiative récente : celle de la *Charte de Scarborough s'engageant à faire échec au racisme anti-Noir et à favoriser l'inclusion des Noirs dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur canadiens*. L'essai s'interroge finalement sur les cadres qui nous permettent de prioriser la transformation des relations au sein des établissements d'enseignement supérieur du Canada et d'ailleurs.