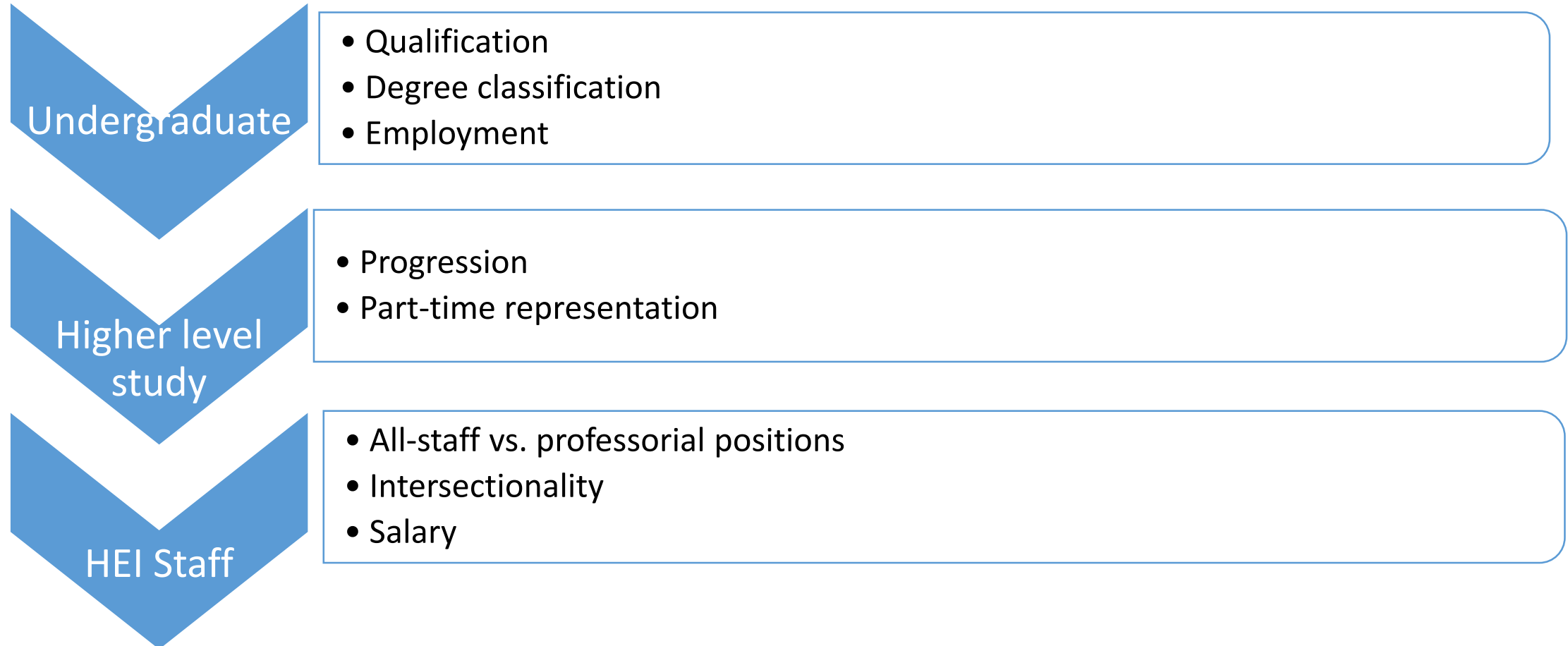


Addressing differential outcomes for BME learners

BME PhD students' perceptions of an academic career

BME representation in higher education



Methodology

- 20 BME doctoral students
- Semi structured questionnaire and interview
- Studying at 16 different institutions (predominantly arts and humanities)
- Research undertaken between January and March 2016

Appetite for an academic career

- *‘My enjoyment of research and writing hasn’t faded, despite having undergone quite a long and drawn out PhD experience (I’ve been a part time student, self-financing and working alongside my PhD), and I feel I still have a contribution to make to my field.’ (Respondent, questionnaire)*
- *‘I want to further my understanding of my topic area through rigorous research and share this knowledge with undergraduate students through teaching. Importantly I would also like to pursue [an] academic career in order to use my expertise and knowledge collaboratively.’ (Respondent, questionnaire)*

- *‘The paucity of BME academics in my subject fields means that I bring the voice from the margin to these areas, and in the same way that my black supervisors have inspired me, it would be nice to think that I could do that for others.’ (Respondent, questionnaire)*
- *‘I think that as an international student... it would be very hard to get a job with the new government regulations with regards to having to earn over £35,000 a year, so this makes it very difficult... So if even you are the best candidate, it means that you will not be given the opportunity and universities would not risk this’ (Female, Other, interview)*

The importance of support

- *‘Bespoke mentoring is so important, in helping to minimise challenges faced by aspiring BME academics. It is so important for those structures to be there in place because that mentoring helps in navigating career opportunities and avoiding the difficulties that so many BME academics encounter.’* **(Respondent, questionnaire)**

- *'I think that there is a network of a few black academics that do exist in institutions in Britain... and a lot of them know how difficult it is for black PhD students... so I have been quite fortunate to be able to access the few black academics available for guidance and mentoring.'* **(Male, mixed heritage, interview)**
- *'I think the idea that BME academics support one another in the Academy is not always true... personally speaking I have reached out to several prominent senior BME academics and in all honesty they have not always been the most supportive and generous with their time. It is very disappointing especially as you always hear this rhetoric which suggests that as people of colour we need to help each other out in the Academy.'* **(Female, mixed heritage, interview)**

Feelings of marginalisation and isolation

- *'I quite often get mistaken for a student. This has resulted in possible situations of conflict in regards to the access of resources such as classrooms and staff-only areas.'* **(Respondent, questionnaire)**
- *'Continuous micro-aggressions... affect your confidence over time.'* **(Female, mixed heritage, interview)**
- *'As a BME person in academia you do feel isolated and conscious that your experiences are not the kind of thing you can freely articulate... You do worry about making people feel uncomfortable and awkward so you keep it to yourself and this internalisation can really dent your confidence in a big way.'* **(Male, black, interview)**

Membership of 'the club', 'the outsider' 'specialist in race' typecasting

'I'm constantly faced with the kind of bias that is perhaps more insidious than outright, in-your-face, racial slurs - the effect of the subterranean racism, which in some ways is much harder to brush away, is that it chips away at your confidence slowly but surely.'

'Example: I'm a home student, born and raised in the UK, went through the British school system... arrived at my current institution with a Masters with Distinction from a Russell Group University with a certain amount of prestige in my research field.'

Despite this, all of which was information my supervisor had, after reading a short piece of my written work a few months into my degree, he expressed with undisguised surprise that my 'English was actually quite good.' **(Respondent, questionnaire)**

- *'...it is hard to get published particularly in Britain where race is not taken as seriously... Therefore it makes it more difficult to get published... we tend to be pigeon-holed because we talk about race... and so therefore we are not seen as sociologists... or ethnographers we are just seen as 'the race person'... which can be very limiting and narrowing. I think often we are not connected into the wider network of academics... where by proxy we are not invited into editorial boards or become research assistants...'* **(Male, mixed heritage, interview)**

Access to teaching

'I found the opportunity of teaching undergraduates aiming to become future teachers amazing and impactful. The chance to discuss and learn about attitudes and values related to anti-racist education among other contents was important.'

'To develop critical thinking in the tutorials is an enriching opportunity for interaction between a BME tutor as myself, and majority White students. This is very rewarding.'

'That being said... the workload is problematic in terms of managing all the admin responsibilities, and managing my PhD stuff with this as well can be a bit much sometimes.' **(Female, black, interview)**

'If your academic discipline is race-related, it becomes hard to gain employment in academia, that is not a subjective reference... that is fact and we all know that. But if truth be told I think that the employment thing in academia is difficult for everyone.'

'It is becoming harder to gain employment in higher education, everything is fixed-term or temporary contracts, and that is difficult for everyone not just BME people. So naturally you begin to question the process of undertaking a PhD, because you lose a lot personally and hope that the sacrifices will pay off, but the current climate does not look promising for academic jobs.' **(Female, black, interview)**

Similarities and differences

'If your academic discipline is race-related, it becomes hard to gain employment in academia, that is not a subjective reference... that is fact and we all know that. But if truth be told I think that the employment thing in academia is difficult for everyone.'

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(Female, Black, interview)

Recommendations

- Government should commission research to determine the level and stage of attrition at PhD level with detailed ethnicity analysis.
- The sector should collaborate to develop a sector-wide charter setting out what good PhD supervisory and mentoring support looks like.
- HEIs should establish a system of mentoring by senior academics to support PhD students.
- HEIs should seek to develop department managers' skills to address conscious and unconscious bias and recognise and address isolation.

- Institutions must ensure that they adequately support BME networks at institution level.
- HEIs must take steps to ensure transparent access to development opportunities across PhD cohorts.
- Government should establish national funding streams for BME PhD students in all disciplines for institutions that demonstrate good practice.
- Research councils should explore doctoral funding for BME applicants who wish to pursue an academic career in areas where there is poor representation.

BME PhD students' perceptions of an academic career

Dr Jason Arday

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/8822/Black-and-minority-ethnic-doctoral-students-perceptions-of-an-academic-career>

Any questions?

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