



Race in the Academy

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Executive Summary

This study explored the particular circumstances and experiences of black and ethnic minority academic staff and postgraduate students both formerly and currently from the London School of Economics and Political Science. The sample also included a small number of black and ethnic minority academic staff from other institutions in England.

The research methods involved:

- Focus group with black and ethnic minority postgraduate students
- Photovoice with black and ethnic minority postgraduate students
- Semi-structured interviews with black and ethnic minority academic staff
- Semi-structured interviews with white academic staff
- 23 participants were involved in this study

Findings

The results of the study indicate that a number of factors have an impact on the experiences of both black and ethnic minority academic staff and postgraduate students. In particular, the main message from the research is that a number of covert processes interact to shape the overall learning and working experience in the institution, which then have a direct impact on the progression and retention of black and ethnic minority academic staff and students. The study highlighted interconnected situational and institutional factors that had an effect on staff and student engagement.

Collectively both staff and students spoke of the absence of black intellectual scholarship both through the obvious lack of black and ethnic minority academic staff and also through the lack of race scholarship at the institution. An example of this given by participants was that racialized PhD students at the LSE were generally not offered teaching opportunities.

Learning and working environment

Participants spoke of what could be termed the 'institutional effect' (see also Bernard et al, 2011) of the absence of black and ethnic minority staff and black intellectual scholarship. Academic staff believed and had examples that their contributions were not seen as important as others, and that research around race was not 'mainstream enough' for major journals and this impacted on their standing and progression, particularly with regard to critical institutional assessment criteria such as the REF. Staff said how stressful they found this – how "it eats you up from the inside and makes you very ill". They felt excluded from the life of the department, without a voice and 'pretty much ignored'.

Worryingly, experiences of stress and diminution were echoed by the students interviewed. They spoke about their disappointment with the lack of diversity at the student and staff levels and the lack of knowledge in their departments on race scholarship. Some of them were writing theses on topics related to race and found this lack of academic support troubling. Other students spoke of the experience of being 'taught' about their home countries by someone with less first-hand knowledge and having their own knowledge of their home countries discounted. They also disclosed experiences of racializing comments from other students and also from academic staff.

Promotion and Retention

The cumulative effect of the working and learning environment had a detrimental effect on the promotion and retention of academic staff as well as there being no ‘pipeline’ for PhD students. Staff spoke of the fact that academic staff are only promoted ‘when your face fits’ and felt that many black and ethnic minority staff had not been promoted when they met promotion criteria. Even when they were promoted, this was often not evidenced in how they were treated generally, such as in departmental decision making.

This leads to a general feeling of being demoralised, discouraged and not being valued. Participants analyse their experiences “they have exploited me to the core” – being passed over for promotion but weighed down with heavy teaching and administrative loads. Staff also highlighted the lack of support and mentoring – a number disclosing that they had never had a mentor over the many years they have been here.

Given this, it is not surprising that many high profile black and ethnic minority staff have left the LSE after a relatively short time. It is evident that the failure to address many of the issues discussed above influenced their decisions to leave. And some current staff admitted that they “consider leaving regularly” because of these issues. Staff were aware that many colleagues experienced some form of implicit or explicit discrimination at LSE in relation to promotion and general interactions – related to class, gender and sexuality as well as race.

Key recommendations:

The institution has to remove the idea that it is resistant to meaningful change (many of our participants felt that there were ongoing claims of change in this field, with no evidence of real change). It therefore needs to address key areas of recruitment, retention and the institutional learning and working environment:

- Encourage black and ethnic minority applications for all posts, including PhD studentships and advertise more widely. More involvement of black and ethnic minority PhD students with teaching and delivery of courses – to create a ‘**pipeline**’ of PhD students who are able to apply to LSE and other elite universities;
- **Ensure interview and promotion** panels are more diverse (the academics we interviewed were generally not part of interview panels) and develop initiatives with Human Resources to ‘diversify’ recruitment and retention;
- **Examine the career histories** of all current black and ethnic minority academics with a view to promote where possible or give support where necessary (this could be in the form of research leave, as a way to compensate for years of inadequate mentoring and discrimination);
- A ‘**diversity**’ fund for departments to bid for – for teaching fellowships or lectureships to implement more inclusive curricula, teaching styles and mentoring;
- Employing a dedicated academic in each department whose focus is **inclusive pedagogy** and **curriculum design**

- Create 'Anti -Racism' forum for all staff and students, and collaboration with Embrace to ensure black and ethnic minority academic staff have safe spaces to speak about their experiences;
- A full-time teaching expert on inclusivity, decolonisation and anti-racism to be based in the **Teaching and Learning Centre** to work with all departments;
- Further research is needed on the **curriculum** and the **design** and **delivery** across the school;
- The **visible involvement** and commitment of the Director and senior management staff in these initiatives;
- **Avoid claims of progress with regard to Equality and Diversity issues until there is real evidence of change.**

Targets

In order to facilitate the above changes dates and targets need to be identified. It would be useful for the institution to take examples from the following initiatives:

- The Equality Challenge Unit has an abundance of information and practical guides to help support LSE with their planned initiatives: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/employment-and-careers/>
- <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/13724/>
- The University of Kent has a developed student success project: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/studentsuccess/2016-conference.html>
- Kingston University, University College London and Kings College, London are leading in terms of the Race Equality Charter Mark initiatives: <http://www.kingston.ac.uk/aboutkingstonuniversity/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

We would like to thank all of our participants for speaking with us. This research would not have been possible without your support.

For more information about the project visit our website: <https://raceintheacademy.com/>
Or please get in touch with Akile Ahmet a.ahmet@lse.ac.uk or Caroline Howarth c.s.howarth@lse.ac.uk

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