

'We need to speak about race': Examining the barriers to full and equal participation in university life

Looking to examine and address the barriers facing black and minority ethnic academic staff, the LSE is funding a project entitled 'Race in the Academy' investigating why so few black and ethnic minority academics are attracted to the LSE and why it struggles to retain black and ethnic minority academic staff. The project is led by [Caroline Howarth](#) and [Akile Ahmet](#). Here they present a breakdown of the figures of academic staff from 2012-2016. Universities should approach these barriers as needing to be dismantled rather than overcome.



Universities are sites of power. The knowledge produced and reproduced in universities is textured by inequalities because knowledge itself is highly racialized, gendered and classed. Sociologists [Karim Murji](#) and [John Solomos](#) have argued that universities like all other major institutions, are sites where social order, including whiteness and white privilege, is reproduced' (2016:408). Similarly, [Nicola Rollock](#) has recently argued 'Our universities – despite rigorous equalities legislation – continue to be led mainly by powerful, white men. We need to speak about race at universities'. This conversation needs to begin by asking why there are so few black and ethnic minority academics at the LSE and other UK universities.

The under representation of diversity in academia

Statistically the number of black and ethnic minority students at undergraduate level has risen across all universities; however the representation at staff level is shockingly low. At the LSE there is just one black professor; in the UK as a whole, there are only 85. According to the [Equality Challenge Unit's](#) report (2014/2015) there are just 20 UK born black and ethnic minority deputy or pro vice-chancellors, compared with 530 white ones.

[Exploring data compiled by the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#) office at the LSE we see very similar patterns. Table one shows the total percentage of staff from each ethnic group between 2012-2016:

Ethnic Group	2012 % staff	2013 % staff	2014 % staff	2015 % staff	2016 % staff
Asian	8.0	8.0	7.5	8.09	8.79
Black	4.0	4.1	4.8	4.85	4.97
Chinese	3.0	3.2	3.6	3.33	4.16
Mixed	3.0	3.0	2.40	3.20	3.38
Other	2.0	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.76
White	72.0	72.1	71.5	70.46	67.72
Not known	4.0	4.4	4.4	8.27 (merged data with info refused)	9.21
Info refused	4.0	4.3	3.7		
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Examining more specifically the data for academic staff, table two shows the number of Black, Asian, Chinese and White academic staff. The number of Black professors has remained at 1 between 2012-2015. However, the number of White professors has risen from 157 in 2012 to 214 in 2014-2015.

Job type	Asian					Black				
	Year: 2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Year: 2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Lecturer/Assistant Professor	18	14	12	12	12	2	1	0	0	0
Senior Lecturer/Associate prof	2	3	10 (merged into one category)	11	12	1	1	1	1	1
Reader/Associate prof	6	5				0	0			
Professor	6	7	10	10	10	1	1	1	1	1
LSE Fellows	10	10	5	5	10	1	2	2	4	6
Research	17	11	11	13	16	4	1	2	3	5
Teaching only	36	39	32	40	35	2	7	6	5	3
Hourly paid Research	10	10	10	9	8	0	0	1	0	1

Job type	Chinese					Mixed				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Lecturer/Assistant Professor	10	9	7	6	8	8	8	8	10	11
Senior Lecturer/Associate prof	2	2	7 (merged with reader)	7	7	3	3	7	7	7
Reader/Associate prof	1	2				3	1			
Professor	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	2	2
LSE Fellows	6	4	8	5	4	9	9	5	3	3
Research	9	7	4	3	5	10	3	5	4	3
Teaching only	29	31	35	33	30	10	8	22	15	17
Hourly paid Research		2	4	8	10	4	4	7	5	8

Job type	Other					White				
	Year: 2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Year: 2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Lecturer/Assistant Professor	2	2	2	2	1	157	148	127	121	121
Senior Lecturer/Associate prof	1	2	6	6	5	68	70	176	166	165
Reader/Associate prof	3	3				61	67			
Professor	1	1	1	1	1	157	170	212	216	214
LSE Fellows	2	3	4	4	5	88	85	90	106	104
Research	5	5	4	9	6	226	140	156	170	174
Teaching only	18	10	10	11	8	349	306	334	336	289
Hourly paid Research		2	2	2	4		76	83	78	56

The LSE has committed to examine and change this by funding a project entitled ‘Race in the Academy’ investigating why so few black and ethnic minority academics are attracted to the LSE and why it struggles to retain black and ethnic minority academic staff. The project is led by ourselves: [Caroline Howarth](#) (Associate Professor in the Department of Social Psychology at the LSE) and Akile Ahmet (lead researcher in the ‘Race in the Academy’ project). The project has 5 key research aims:

1. Consider ways in which race is experienced by staff and PhD students and examine racialised barriers to inclusion across the staff journey, as well as possibilities to contest and challenge these;
2. Explore institutional dynamics and micro-aggressions within the current School environment from the perspective of black and ethnic minority PhD students
3. Promote awareness amongst the academic community and key stakeholders on the experiences of black and ethnic minority faculty and students in higher education and consider parallels and insights from comparative institutions
4. Provide an insight into the affective experience of institutional racism and highlight the contributions of black and ethnic scholarship in the academy
5. Develop an advisory committee at the LSE focussing on the issue of race and ethnicity for staff and students

How will we do this?

All academic staff currently at the LSE (black and ethnic minority and white staff) will be invited to take part in in-depth interviews; we shall also include black and ethnic minority academic staff that have left the LSE.

Current black and ethnic minority PhD students and black and ethnic minority PhD students who have left the LSE will be invited to take part in a photovoice project. [Photovoice](#) is a research tool that uses participatory photography to enable participants to represent themselves through digital story telling and deliver social change. The photovoice component of the project will be led [Shose Kessi](#), LSE alumna and senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town.

The aim of our project and similar campaigns happening across the country such as “[why isn’t my professor Black?](#)” and “[Liberate my curriculum](#)” is the need for collective reflection and collective change. Universities should see the barriers to full and equal participation in university life as needing to be dismantled rather than overcome in making universities more liberal spaces. This should provoke critical thought and debate on all manner of things, including the racialisation of knowledge in university contexts.

Follow us on twitter: [@raceinacademy](#)

Website: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/socialPsychology/research/race-in-the-academy/Home.aspx>

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Authors

Akile Ahmet is currently a researcher at the LSE in the department of Social Psychology. She has previously worked at Brunel University and Goldsmiths University. Her research focuses on issues of race, racism, education and family as well as race and ethnicity across the lifecourse.

Caroline Howarth is an associate professor at the LSE in the department of Social Psychology. In her research she examines the processes of institutionalisation and contestation that work to uphold and subvert racism in school and community contexts, as well as exploring everyday knowledge about multiculturalism, nationalism and processes of inclusion, exclusion and resistance.

- Copyright 2015 LSE Impact of Social Sciences - Unless otherwise stated, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Unported 3.0 License.