

# The experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in further and higher education

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*An overwhelming majority of survey respondents reported that they had faced barriers to promotion, with nine out of ten across further and higher education reporting that this had often or sometimes been the case for them.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2015, UCU surveyed its black<sup>1</sup> members to chronicle their lived experiences of working in post-school education. UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.

Respondents were asked to think about scenarios at work and rate associated statements in accordance with their own experiences. Those scenarios and statements related to their personal experiences of progression and promotion, if they perceived they had been on the receiving end of bullying, their sense of inclusion or exclusion in decision-making processes and whether they had been subject to cultural insensitivity.

Finally, they were asked what they thought would be the most effective measures to combat racism in the workplace.

## KEY FINDINGS

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents reported that they had faced barriers to promotion, with nine out of ten (90%) across further and higher education reporting that this had often or sometimes been the case for them.

In related questions, half (50%) of the respondents across both sectors did not agree they had been fully informed of the process of applying for promotion. That figure was marginally higher in further education (52%) than in higher education (47%). Three-fifths (59%) across both sectors reported that senior colleagues and managers had not supported them in seeking to progress their career. Just over half of respondents (52%) across both sectors did not see a positive future for their career with their current employer.

Another stark result to emerge from this survey was that seven out of ten respondents (71%) in post-16 education said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers. The percentage was slightly larger in higher education (72%) than in further education (68%).

*This survey's findings about barriers to progression for black employees correspond with findings from previous UCU research which showed that black staff continue to be concentrated in lower grades within the profession.*

Two-thirds (68%) of respondents said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues. Again the percentage was slightly larger in higher education (69%) than in further education (66%).

Nearly four-fifths (78%) of respondents across post-16 education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making. That figure was slightly greater in higher education (79%) than further education (75%).

Four-fifths (82%) of respondents across both sectors said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity but that percentage was markedly higher in higher education (86%) than further education (73%).

## BACKGROUND

This survey's findings about barriers to progression for black employees correspond with findings from previous UCU research<sup>2</sup> which showed that black staff continue to be concentrated in lower grades within the profession. It found that black academic staff make up 13% of non-professorial academic posts, yet only 7% of professorial roles.

According to the Equality Challenge Unit's latest report on equality in higher education,<sup>3</sup> there are just 20 UK-born black and minority ethnic (BME) deputy or pro vice-chancellors, compared with 530 white ones. There are fewer black academics than there are white ones at all levels. The ECU report notes that BME staff are half as likely as white staff to hold senior roles. Overall, a higher proportion of white university staff (9%) than BME staff (6%) are in senior roles. Among academics, the proportions in senior roles were 16% for whites and 13% for minorities.

A previous (2014) Leadership Foundation for Higher Education-commissioned paper, *The experience of BME academics in higher education: aspirations in the face of inequality*,<sup>4</sup> had found that greater change is needed in academia for the inclusion of BME academics, particularly in relation to the issues of promotion and progression.

In England's further education colleges in the academic year 2013-14, the proportion of teaching staff who identified themselves as non-white was 10.2% but the proportion of senior managers who identified themselves as non-white was just 5.1%,<sup>5</sup>

A UCU survey in 2008 which questioned a representative sample of its membership, found that 41% of respondents in further education, and 34% in higher education, reported having been bullied at work in the preceding six months. 52% of further education respondents, and 54% of higher education respondents reported having been bullied at work in the preceding five years. 73% of respondents in further education and 67% in higher education reported seeing bullying at work within the preceding five years.

## METHODOLOGY

UCU sent the survey to 7003 black members (they had identified themselves as Asian, Black, Chinese, Mixed or in the category of Other Ethnic Groups). A total of 631 UCU black members completed the survey between Tuesday 31 March 2015 and Friday 31 May 2015. A total of 446 respondents identified themselves as working in higher education. A total of 185 respondents identified themselves as working in

*Respondents were invited to write comments describing their real-life experiences of racism in the workplace. Some of those comments have been used to illustrate the findings of the report.*

further education. As well as working in general and specialist further education colleges, respondents under the banner of further education also worked in adult and community education, prison education, and work-based learning.

Respondents were asked to think about scenarios at work and rate associated statements in accordance with their own experiences. Those scenarios and statements related to their personal experiences of progression and promotion, if they perceived they had been on the receiving end of bullying, their sense of inclusion or exclusion in decision-making processes and whether they had been subject to cultural insensitivity.

Finally, they were asked what they thought would be the most effective measures to combat racism in the workplace.

Respondents were also invited to write comments describing their real-life experiences of racism in the workplace. Some of those comments have been used to illustrate the findings of the report.

The survey asked respondents to grade a series of statements about scenarios in accordance with their own experiences.

There were two grading systems used to rate the statements:

**1** *Agree strongly/Agree somewhat/Disagree strongly/Disagree somewhat/No opinion*

**2** *Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never*

**The scenarios/statements were as follows:**

#### **Promotion and progress**

I have faced barriers when seeking promotion

*Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never*

I have been fully informed of the process of applying for promotion

*Agree strongly/Agree somewhat/Disagree strongly/Disagree somewhat/No opinion*

I have been supported in seeking progression and promotion in my career by my senior colleagues

*Agree strongly/Agree somewhat/Disagree strongly/Disagree somewhat/No opinion*

It is likely that my career will develop positively in my current employment

*Agree strongly/Agree somewhat/Disagree strongly/Disagree somewhat/No opinion*

#### **Bullying and harassment**

Bullying and harassment from managers

*Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never*

Bullying and harassment from colleagues

*Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never*

#### **Exclusion from decision-making**

I have been excluded from decision-making

*Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never*

#### **Cultural insensitivity**

*Often/Sometimes/Rarely/Never*

*Nine out of ten respondents from higher education said they had 'often' or 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion*

Finally, respondents were asked what measures would help to challenge racism in their workplaces. They were given seven suggested measures and asked to rate them in effectiveness with 5 being very effective and 1 not effective at all.

**The seven suggested measures were:**

- Improved policies
- Greater education about racism and its impact
- Training for senior staff
- Effective sanctions against perpetrators of racism
- Improved support for BME staff
- Mentoring schemes
- BME staff group

While the total number of responses was 631, the number of responses to each individual question varies because some respondents did not answer all questions. All questions have between 621 and 558 responses.

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

### BARRIERS TO PROMOTION

*I believe the university to which I belong is institutionally racist in that there are virtually no black people in senior management roles.* Lecturer in higher education (25+ years)

*Glass ceiling springs to mind – BME staff who are often more qualified than their counterparts are often by passed through indirect action or behaviours.*

Teacher in further education (20-25 years)

### *I have faced barriers when seeking promotion*

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Often	52.01%	298	54.09%	205	48.19%	93
Sometimes	37.52%	215	36.41%	138	40.00%	77
Rarely	7.33%	42	6.86%	26	8.21%	16
Never	3.14%	18	2.64%	10	3.59%	8

### Post-16 education

- Nine out of ten (89.53%) respondents across post-16 education said they had 'often' or 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion.
- 52.01% reported they had 'often' faced barriers when seeking promotion
- 37.52% reported they had 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion
- Just 3.14% reported they had 'never' faced barriers when seeking promotion

Just 3.59% of further education respondents reported they had 'never' faced barriers when seeking promotion.

### Higher education

- Nine out of ten (90.5%) respondents from higher education said they had 'often' or 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion.
- 54.09% reported they had 'often' faced barriers when seeking promotion.
- 36.41% reported they had 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion.
- Just 2.64% reported they had 'never' faced barriers when seeking promotion.

### Further education

- Nearly nine out of ten (88.19%) respondents from further education said they had 'often' or 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion.
- 48.19% reported they had 'often' faced barriers when seeking promotion.
- A further 40% reported they had 'sometimes' faced barriers when seeking promotion
- Just 3.59% reported they had 'never' faced barriers when seeking promotion.

### I have been fully informed of the process of applying for promotion

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Agree strongly	16.56%	99	17.35%	68	15.05%	31
Agree somewhat	25.75%	154	27.03%	107	22.82%	47
Disagree strongly	26.25%	157	25.26%	99	28.16%	58
Disagree somewhat	23.08%	138	22.45%	88	24.27%	50
No opinion	8.36%	50	7.64%	30	9.71%	20

### Post-16 education

- Nearly half (49.33%) of respondents across post-16 education 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed somewhat' with the statement, 'I have been fully informed of the process of applying for promotion'.
- 26.25% 'disagreed strongly'.
- 23.08% 'disagreed somewhat.'

### Higher education

- Just under half (47.71%) of respondents from higher education 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed somewhat' with the statement, "I have been fully informed of the process of applying for promotion".
- 25.26% 'disagreed strongly'.
- 22.45% 'disagreed somewhat'.

### Further education

- Just over half (52.43%) of respondents from further education ‘disagreed strongly’ or ‘disagreed somewhat’ with the statement, “I have been fully informed of the process of applying for promotion”.
- 28.16% ‘disagreed strongly’.
- 24.27% ‘disagreed somewhat’.

### *I have been supported in seeking progression and promotion in my career by my senior colleagues*

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Agree strongly	10.07%	60	10.74%	42	8.78%	18
Agree somewhat	18.46%	110	18.67%	73	18.05%	37
Disagree strongly	34.23%	204	34.02%	133	34.63%	71
Disagree somewhat	24.83%	148	24.81%	97	24.88%	51
No opinion	12.42%	74	11.76%	46	13.66%	28

### Post-16 education

- More than half (59.06%) of respondents across post-16 education ‘disagreed strongly’ or ‘disagreed somewhat’ with the statement, “I have been supported in seeking progression and promotion in my career by my senior colleagues”.
- 34.23% ‘disagreed strongly’
- 24.83% ‘disagreed somewhat’

### Higher education

- More than half (58.83%) of respondents from higher education ‘disagreed strongly’ or ‘disagreed somewhat’ with the statement, “I have been supported in seeking progression and promotion in my career by my senior colleagues”.
- 34.02% ‘disagreed strongly’
- 24.81% ‘disagreed somewhat’

### Further education

- Six out of ten (59.51%) of respondents from further education ‘disagreed strongly’ or ‘disagreed somewhat’ with the statement, “I have been supported in seeking progression and promotion in my career by my senior colleagues”.
- 34.63% ‘disagreed strongly’
- 24.88% ‘disagreed somewhat’

***It is likely that my career will develop positively in my current employment***

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Agree strongly	3.83%	23	4.03%	16	3.43%	7
Agree somewhat	22.30%	134	23.93%	95	19.12%	39
Disagree strongly	31.11%	187	29.47%	117	34.31%	70
Disagree somewhat	21.30%	128	22.42%	89	19.12%	39
No opinion	21.46%	129	20.15%	80	24.02%	49

**Post-16 education**

- More than half (52.41%) of respondents across post-16 education 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed somewhat' with the statement, "It is likely that my career will develop positively in my current employment".
- 31.11% 'disagreed strongly'.
- 21.3% 'disagreed somewhat'.

**Higher education**

- More than half (51.89%) of respondents from higher education 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed somewhat' with the statement, "It is likely that my career will develop positively in my current employment".
- 29.47% 'disagreed strongly'.
- 22.42% 'disagreed somewhat'.

**Further education**

- More than half (53.43%) of respondents from further education 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed somewhat' with the statement, "It is likely that my career will develop positively in my current employment".
- 34.31% 'disagreed strongly'
- 19.12% 'disagreed somewhat'

## BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

*In the past 15 months my line manager has threatened me with disciplinary action on four separate occasions and started a grievance against me once. None of his threats have been taken up by the institution which also refused the grievance. At our last staff meeting he referred to me as 'unprofessional'.*

*The senior managers (his line managers-Dean, HR, Pro Director and Director), have after my express request for assistance or for the matter to be heard, always refused to support his threats and grievance. However, that this continues to happen to me, supposedly a senior member of staff (professor) and other junior staff (invariably foreign) suggests to me a lack of collective will to take the duty of care towards us seriously.*

Professor in higher education (15-20 years)

*Colleagues using racist language and it going unchallenged.*

Senior lecturer in higher education (10-15 years)

### Bullying and harassment from managers

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Often	27%	152	28.34%	106	24.34%	46
Sometimes	43.87%	247	43.85%	164	43.92%	83
Rarely	20.43%	115	20.59%	77	20.11%	38
Never	8.70%	49	7.22%	27	11.64%	22

### Post-16 education

- Seven out of ten respondents (70.87%) said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers
- 27% reported they were 'often' subject to bullying and harassment from managers
- 43.5% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers

### Higher education

- Seven out of ten (72.19%) respondents in higher education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers
- 28.34% reported they were 'often' subject to bullying and harassment from managers
- 43.85% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers



### Further education

- Just over two-thirds (68.26%) said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers.
- 24.34% reported they were 'often' subject to bullying and harassment from managers.
- 43.92% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from managers.

### Bullying and harassment from colleagues

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Often	22.40%	127	22.75%	86	21.69%	41
Sometimes	45.50%	258	46.30%	175	43.92%	83
Rarely	25.04%	142	26.19%	99	22.75%	43
Never	7.05%	40	4.76%	18	11.64%	22

### Post-16 education

- Two-thirds (67.9%) of respondents said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.
- 22.40% reported they were 'often' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.
- 43.5% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.

### Higher education

- Two-thirds (69.05%) of respondents in higher education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.
- 22.75% reported they were 'often' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.
- 46.3% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.

### Further education

- Two-thirds (65.61%) of respondents in further education said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.
- 21.69% reported they were 'often' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.
- 43.92% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to bullying and harassment from colleagues.

**EXCLUSION FROM DECISION-MAKING**

*Being a token person in committees but not enabling you to be part of the leadership.*

*Dismissive attitudes and derisive comments about your leadership or management.*

Reader in higher education (10-15 years)

**Being excluded from decision-making**

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Often	43.55%	243	46.36%	172	37.97%	71
Sometimes	34.23%	191	32.61%	121	37.43%	70
Rarely	13.62%	76	14.56%	54	11.76%	22
Never	8.60%	48	6.47%	24	12.83%	24

**Post-16 education**

- Nearly four-fifths (77.78%) of respondents across post-16 education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making.
- Two out of five (43.55%) of respondents across post-16 education reported they were 'often' excluded from decision-making.
- A further 34.23% were 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making.

**Higher education**

- 78.97% of respondents from higher education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making.
- Two out of five (46.36%) of respondents from higher education reported they were 'often' excluded from decision-making.
- A further 32.61% were 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making.

**Further education**

- 75.4% of respondents from further education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making.
- One third (37.97%) of respondents from further education reported they were 'often' excluded from decision-making.
- A further 37.43% were 'sometimes' excluded from decision-making.

## CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY

*Assuming that a person with a black face is foreign and not British.*

Teaching assistant in higher education (5-10 years)

*Although it seems very minor, consistent and persistent misspelling of my name. If you can learn Dostoyevsky...* Associate tutor in higher education (0-5 years)

*Workers are not aware of the correct language to use to describe people of colour.*

Lecturer in further education (0-5 years)

### Cultural insensitivity

Answer options	Percentage of post-16 respondents	Total number of post-16 respondents	Percentage of higher education respondents	Total number of higher education respondents	Percentage of further education respondents	Total FE number
Often	44.72%	254	49.87%	188	34.55%	66
Sometimes	36.80%	209	35.81%	135	38.74%	74
Rarely	13.03%	74	11.41%	43	16.23%	31
Never	5.46%	31	2.92%	11	10.47%	20

#### Post-16 education

- Four-fifths (81.52%) of respondents said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity.
- 44.72% reported they were 'often' subject to cultural insensitivity.
- 36.8% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity.

#### Higher education

- Four-fifths (85.68%) of respondents in higher education reported they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity.
- 49.87% reported they were 'often' subject to cultural insensitivity.
- 35.81% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity.

#### Further education

- Seven out of ten (73.29%) of respondents in further education said they were 'often' or 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity.
- 34.55% reported they were 'often' subject to cultural insensitivity.
- 38.74% reported they were 'sometimes' subject to cultural insensitivity.

## SOLUTIONS

In your view, what measures would help to challenge racism in your workplaces? How would you rate the impact of the following actions if 5 is very effective and 1 is not effective at all? Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

- *Improved policies*
- *Greater education about racism and its impact*
- *Training for senior staff*
- *Effective sanctions against perpetrators of racism*
- *Improved support for BME staff*
- *Mentoring schemes*
- *BME staff group*

<i>Measure to challenge racism</i>	<i>5 – very effective</i>
Effective sanctions against perpetrators	68.3%
Improved support for BME staff	61%
Training for senior staff	56.3%
Greater education about racism and its impact	50.8%
Mentoring schemes	47%
Improved policies	38.9%
BME staff group	35.2%

## CONCLUSION

UCU's survey suggests that racism is present in our colleges and universities. It warns that there is a persistent glass ceiling for black employees across post-16 education and also that too many have experienced bullying at work. They have also found themselves excluded from decision-making and subject to cultural insensitivity.

According to this survey, the barriers to progression are stronger in higher education than in further education. This is not the first survey to suggest the existence of a glass ceiling for black university employees: others have concluded that black staff are under-represented in UK universities. There has been substantial research carried out to evidence this but a cursory glance at the heads of higher education institutions tells the story more starkly than any study - currently, just three out of 159 are black. They are Professor Rama Thirunamachandran at Canterbury Christ Church University, Gerald Pillay at Liverpool Hope University and Baroness Amos at Soas, University of London.

The survey found that black staff in the post-16 sector continue to complain of bullying and harassment at work. This was slightly more marked in higher education than further education, both in relation to being bullied by senior managers and being bullied by colleagues. Although there have been some recent attempts to raise awareness of

race equality within HEIs, these initiatives have tended to relate primarily to students. Black staff in universities voice a sense of isolation and lack support when facing possible bullying and harassment. UCU has dealt with a number of cases where staff have faced further victimisation in the workplace as a result of raising concerns about racism or other equality-related issues. In some cases this has escalated to attempts to dismiss the member of staff in question.

When asked to grade the most effective measures to challenge racism out of a list of seven, 'effective sanctions against perpetrators' was the one respondents thought would be most effective. Perhaps the existence of clear sanctions would encourage greater initial reporting.

The measure of more effective sanctions was followed by improved support for BME staff and training for senior staff. The measure deemed to be least effective was the formation of a BME staff group.

There is a clear call for racism to be addressed from the top and for leadership to take a more proactive role in creating sanctions for perpetrators, improving support for BME staff and training senior staff. Leadership in colleges and universities must be prepared to radically examine their structures, policies and procedures – in essence, change the organisational structure and stop paying 'lip service' to challenging racism at the expense of black workers.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>UCU uses the term 'black' in a political sense to refer to people who are descended, through one or both parents, from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia (the middle-East to China) and Latin America. It refers to those from a visible minority who have a shared experience of oppression. The word is used to foster a sense of solidarity and empowerment.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/9/6/The\\_position\\_of\\_women\\_and\\_BME\\_staff\\_in\\_professorial\\_roles\\_in\\_UK\\_HEIs.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/9/6/The_position_of_women_and_BME_staff_in_professorial_roles_in_UK_HEIs.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2015/>

<sup>4</sup>The Experience of BME academics in higher education: aspirations in the face of inequality <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/research-resources/published-research/research-by-theme/leading-equality-and-diversity/the-experience-of-bme-academics-in-higher-education-aspirations-in-the-face-of-inequality.cfm>

<sup>5</sup>Further Education Workforce data for England: Analysis of the 2013-14 Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data: <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RPT-SIR22-230415.pdf>