

Minority staff improve the academic outcomes of minority students at UK universities

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Minority and own-race staff improve the academic outcomes of minority students including the probability of graduating at all, on time, and with a good degree, and for progression into post-graduate study.

The research

Racial minority students at UK universities are less likely to complete their degree on time or at all, to get a good degree class, and to be employed soon after graduation than White students. Minorities are also considerably underrepresented among university academic staff, relative to their share among students. We investigated whether minority students exposed to more minority staff, do better at and after university than they would otherwise.

Data

We linked the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)'s Student Records and Staff Records, with HESA's Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The Records are administrative datasets including information about the whole population of students and staff registered with UK universities. We used information on all students enrolling in undergraduate courses between 2012 and 2014, and follow them until they drop out, complete their studies, or until the academic-year-beginning 2017. DLHE is a survey that was sent to all graduates from UK universities, approximately six months after completion, to collect information about their further education activities, whether they were in employment, and if so, details about their job.

We keep all universities except the Open University, and all subjects except Medicine and Dentistry. Our final population for analysis includes over 640,000 entering students, of whom over 428,000 complete their degree.

Methods

We calculate the share of academic staff who are from any minority group, or who are Black, non-Chinese Asian, and of

Other racial groups, in each university department and each academic year. We measure each student's 'exposure' to minority or to same-race academic staff using their department of study in their first academic year at university.

We then compare the educational and labour market outcomes of students on otherwise-similar courses at similar universities (in terms of UCAS tariff score typically required for entry), who are exposed to different proportions of minority or same-race staff. We control for a rich set of other student and staff characteristics, as well as permanent differences between subjects, and universities, and cohorts. This removes the potential for our findings to be driven by factors other than staff ethnicity.

We also carry out several checks in order to rule out our results being driven by (for example) the students we would expect to have better outcomes anyway, self-selecting onto courses with more minority or same-race staff.

Findings

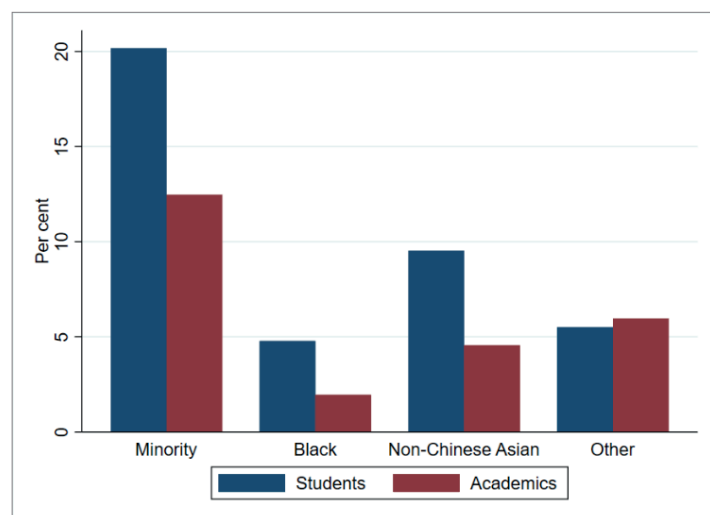
A 10 percentage point (pp) increase in the share of minority academic staff increases the probability that a minority student will:

- graduate with a good degree (upper-second or first-class) by 1pp
- graduate on time, or graduate at all, by 0.9pp.
- once graduated, progress into any further study by 1.4pp and postgraduate study by 1.1pp

However, 10pp increase in the share of minority staff reduces the probability that a minority student will be employed six months after graduation by 1.7pp. For those who are employed, there is no significant impact on whether their job is a graduate-level or high socio-economic status job. We find similar benefits of same-race representation for Black and non-Chinese Asian students.

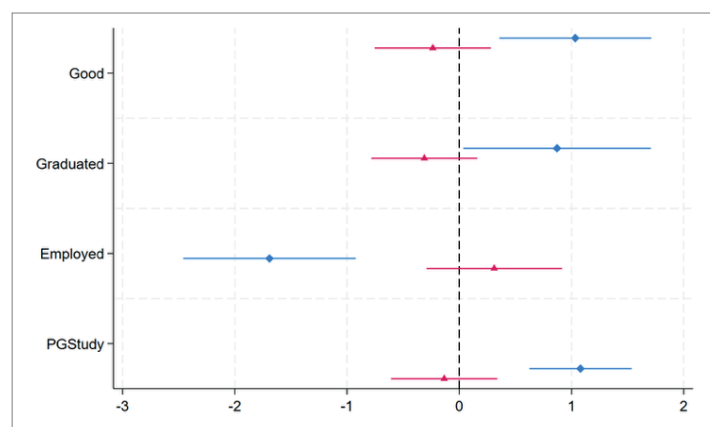
We find no evidence of minority staff representation significantly impacting the academic outcomes of White students, but for those who graduate and find employment, has a significant positive impact on securing a graduate-level job.

Figure 1 Share of minority staff and students at UK universities, 2012–2017



Notes See Table A1 at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2025.102745> for data source and sample details.

Figure 2 Impact of 10pp increase in minority staff on education and labour market outcomes of minority (blue diamonds) and White (red triangles) students, pp



Notes See Tables 3 and 4 at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2025.102745> for data source and sample details.

What does this mean for policy makers?

Minority and own-race staff improve the academic outcomes of minority students including probability of graduating at all, on time, and with a good degree, and for progression into post-graduate study.

Increased minority progression to academic careers may feed through to a virtuous cycle of relative improvements in minority students' degree completion and degree class. If this increases diversity in research and development industries, this may increase innovation in non-academic settings (Parrotta et al., 2014).

We find no detrimental effects, and benefits to job attributes, of exposure to minority staff for White students. This is consistent with the more diverse environment inculcating prosocial attitudes that are perceived favourably during students' job search (Bartenen & Grissom, 2023; Wells et al., 2016).

However, on average, for those students who do graduate, there are no beneficial effects of minority and own-race staff on the early labour market outcomes of ethnic minority students. This suggests the benefits of same-race representation among

academic staff for minority students in UK universities, result from these staff acting as role models and providing advice and guidance that are all specific to academic contexts. This may not reflect the full spectrum of viable career options for these students, and may steer them into courses and a delayed labour market entry that does not pay off.

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Further information

Full paper

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Further information

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