



Consultation Survey Report 2015



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Introduction

As a proactive organisation working on behalf of staff and students of colour in the higher education sector, we believe it is of fundamental importance that we do so from an informed position. To achieve this, we undertake periodic consultations among the academic community. This is the first survey carried out for the Black Sister Network, since it was established in 2014. In 2015, we surveyed 32 women of colour within the Black Sister Network. Of that figure:

- 11 have doctoral degrees
- 14 are currently undertaking doctoral degrees
- 1 is an undergraduate student
- 1 is a masters student
- 1 a lecturer with 10+ years' experience without/not currently undertaking a PhD
- 4 work outside the HE sector

This survey is divided into two sections, representing the two online surveys carried out between July and August 2015. One is targeted solely at PhD students and the other targeted broadly at Black women and women of colour. By gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Black Sister Network members we can develop future activities and resources that will better serve their needs.

“...Black women slip into invisibility in the site that matters most – how they are valued and embraced in everyday practice and the transforming difference that they bring to higher education institutions...” (Mirza, 2006).

Part 1: Postgraduate Research Survey

Key Information

- 50% of respondents are full-time PhD students.
- 50% of respondents are part-time PhD students.
- 50% of respondents are funded by a PhD studentship.
- 50% of respondents are funded by a fee waiver.
- 100% of respondents will be working part-time, alongside their studies.
- 50% of respondents expect to complete their PhD in 1-2 years.
- 50% of respondents expect to complete their PhD in 3-4 years.
- On completion of their doctorates, 100% of respondents will be seeking permanent roles in academia.

Main Factors Impacting Studies

- Lack of specialist knowledge and expertise in the area of study.
- Financial difficulties.

“The lack of specialist knowledge means that my research programme lacks structure and is reliant on my understanding of the issues and how best to research them.”

“My teaching load as a part-time visiting lecturer was very heavy as I needed to work to support myself and my family financially.”

Support That Would Be of Greatest Benefit

- Guidance or mentoring from an academic in the same discipline (33%)
- Training workshops on different types of academic writing (33%)
- Being able to network with other women of colour at various levels (17%)
- Financial assistance/guidance on finding grants and bursaries (17%)

“...mentoring and establishing a support system has been found to be critical to the academic success and personal well-being of graduate women of colour (Brown et al, cited in Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007 p.288).

Discussion

The findings of this survey suggest that the PhD students in this study see a doctorate as a route to a full-time academic career. It is noteworthy that all of the respondents are working part-time alongside their studies, even those that are funded by a studentship. The fact that financial difficulties are one of the main factors impeding studies, suggests that the respondents have existing financial and family commitments that necessitates working. While a PhD may be seen as a route to financial security in the long term, clearly undertaking doctoral study represents a personal sacrifice in terms of a reduced income where a transition is made from full-time to part-time work.

While this study did not solicit specific information about the topic or discipline of research, data from the PhD Network indicates that almost 78% of female members are researching topics linked to race, ethnicity and culture. In our 2014 Race Equality Survey, respondents also raised the issue of difficulties finding supervisors with adequate expertise on issues around race and ethnicity. As the narrative indicates, this means that PhD students of colour fail to receive the full support and expert guidance needed and are forced to muddle through by themselves and spend additional time seeking expertise outside their faculty or outside the institution.

The desired support deemed to be of greatest benefit suggests that the respondents hope the gaps in their current supervision/training will be met outside of their institutions and that networking with other women of colour can help fulfil some of these requirements.

Part 2: Academic Survey

Key Information

- 40% of respondents hold a PhD.
- 40% of respondents are currently undertaking a doctoral degree.
- 20% of respondents don't wish to pursue a PhD right now.
- 80% of respondents work full-time.
- 20% of respondents work part-time.
- 80% are at grade 7.
- 20% are at grade 9 and above.

Progression

- 40% of respondents have been in their current grade for 1-2 years.
- 20% have been in their current grade for 5-6 years.
- 40% have been in their current grade for 7+ years,
- 20% of respondents aspire to be readers.
- 40% of respondents aspire to be professors.
- 20% of respondents aspire to be associate deans.
- 60% of respondents feel there are good opportunities for progression at their institution.
- 40% of respondents do not feel that there are good opportunities for progression at their institution.
- 60% of respondents say there are no women of colour in their faculty at grade 9 and above.

Main Barriers to Progression

- Lack of staff development opportunities (40%)
- Old Boys Network (20%)
- Racial discrimination (20%)

Discussion

The findings of this survey show that the majority of respondents (80%) see a doctoral degree as important in terms of access to an academic career. The fact that 80% of respondents are currently at grade 7 is somewhat surprising, given that 60% of respondents have been at their current grade for 5 years or more. Despite indicators of slow career progress, 60% of respondents feel that there are good opportunities for promotion at their institution, suggesting high levels of ambition.

The telling statistic is that 60% of respondents do not share their faculty with any women of colour at grades 9 and above – a pretty damning statistic that reflects the reality that out of 19,780 UK professors in the 2013-14 academic year (HESA, 2015), only 20 are Black women (see chart below). This means that for most of the respondents, there are virtually no senior role models in their faculties that are women of colour. Yet 40% of respondents aspire to be professors.

The main perceived barriers to progression: lack of staff development opportunities and the old boy's network, can be seen as intersecting factors. If power is concentrated among white males, whom likely come from similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds then women of colour face raced, gendered and class barriers to progression to break into this dominant group and access development opportunities.

'White supremacy as exemplified in the social and economic privilege of the white male academic is demonstrated in the myriad acts which suppress the Black women academics in this study' (Wright, Thompson & Channer, 2007, p 159).

Figures Extracted from HEDI Database at Bournemouth University 2016

Academic Staff by Professorial Status (FPE) 2014/15

Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
White	3895	12455	16,350
Black Caribbean	15	15	30
Black African	10	60	70
Black Other	5	5	10
	30	80	110
Indian	80	305	385
Pakistani	10	55	65
Bangladeshi	5	15	20
Chinese	75	335	410
Other Asian	35	165	200
Other Mixed	120	365	485
Not Known	300	1305	1605
			19630

References

- HESA (2015) Custom data on professors by ethnicity extracted from the HEIDI database.
- Mirza, H. S. (2006). Transcendence over diversity: Black women in the academy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 4(2), 101-113.
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