

# Research-intensive institutions ‘need to improve’ PhD access

**Universities ‘should address lack of equity and access’ for Black, Asian and minority ethnic students**

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Research-intensive institutions must address a “lack of equity and access” to doctoral positions among Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, a conference has heard.

Speaking at the Vitae Connections Week 2020 conference on 16 September, Michael Sulu, senior teaching fellow at University College London and co-chair of its Race Equality Steering Group, said there was “a lack of diversity within research-intensive institutions”.

Sulu explained that “those institutions have the most doctoral positions, and they also tend to recruit from within themselves”, while many “only really recruit other doctoral students that are from other research-intensive institutions”.

“There may be different reasons across the different disciplines, but the outcome [will] always tend to be the same, which is that there’s a lack of equity and access to doctoral positions [for] students from a BAME background,” he said.

To combat the problem, Sulu said universities and researchers must “have a look at the pre-PhD competencies”.

“Who decides what excellence...or research ability is?” he asked, adding that universities should “question whether or not these are biased in the way many things in society are”.

Sulu also said universities must address the awarding gap at undergraduate level to ensure more BAME students stay in academia. [According to the Office for Students](#), in 2018-19 the gap between white students and BAME students receiving a 2.1 or a first-class degree was 13.3 percentage points.

“If you think about the undergraduates, we have to recognise the effect of the BAME awarding gap on student outcomes and how those outcomes can translate to doctoral positions,” he said.

A spokesperson for the Russell Group of research-intensive universities said: “Russell Group universities are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and have taken a range of steps in recent years to increase diversity among staff, address racial harassment, tackle attainment gaps and remove barriers to university access in BAME groups. These range from advocacy and mentoring schemes to staff training and the creation of taskforces focused on these specific issues.

“More needs to be done and this work remains a priority for our members, who will continue to look at how we can promote equality and diversity at all levels in collaboration with students and staff.”

Elsewhere at the conference, Nicola Byrom, senior lecturer in psychology at King's College London, said widespread homeworking during the Covid-19 pandemic was "not a short-term stop-gap anymore" but many researchers are "still cobbling together working from home set-ups".

"I think it's time universities actually thought about supporting their researchers...and their PhD students to get proper set-ups at home,"

- See more at: <https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/news/uk/charities-and-societies/2020/9/Research-intensive-institutions--need-to-improve--PhD-access.html#sthash.KHlkAXwk.dpuf>