Breaking Barriers to Black Academia: Understanding Racialised Barriers to Equitable Research Funding

Dr Susanne Quadflieg
Professor Stephen Eichhorn
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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

Topics

1. Project Background

2. Survey Objective

3. Survey Design

4. Survey Distribution

5. Preliminary Survey Findings
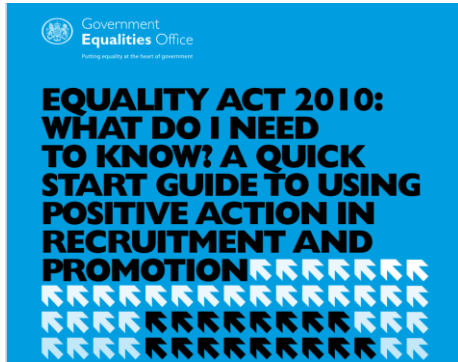
6. From Survey To Action

7. Workshops and Next Steps

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Government Equalities Office
Putting equality at the heart of government

EQUALITY ACT 2010: WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW? A QUICK START GUIDE TO USING POSITIVE ACTION IN RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

University of BRISTOL

Decolonising Education: From Theory to Practice

Get to grips with the nature of the colonial legacy on our current state of knowledge and learning practices.
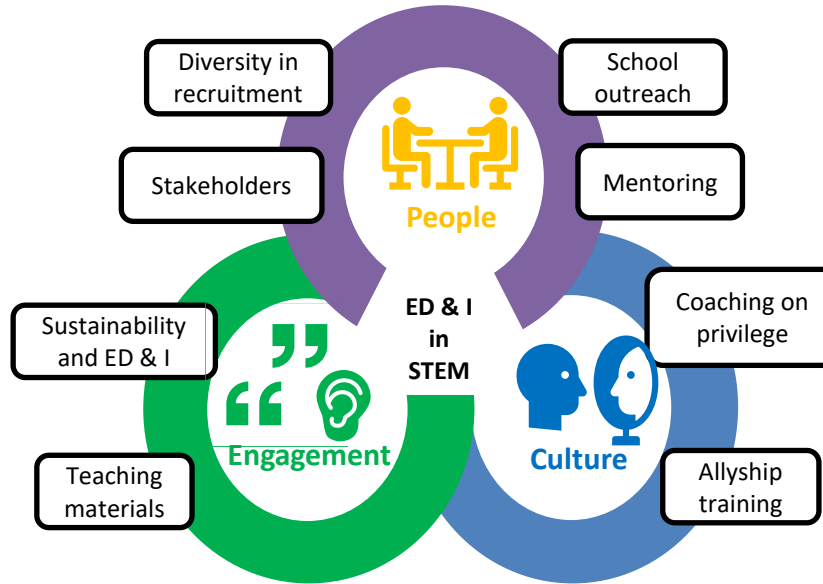
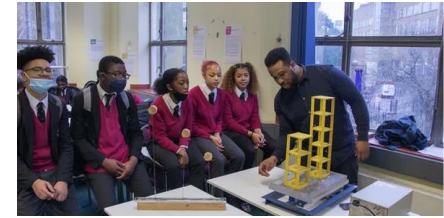★★★★½ 4.4 (61 reviews) 5,320 enrolled on this course

Can Higher Education be Decolonised? A Situated Case Study of an Elite University in the Global North

The Bristol University Decolonial Collective

Book to be published!

People
- Diversity in recruitment
- Stakeholders
- School outreach
- Mentoring

Engagement
- Sustainability and ED & I
- Teaching materials

Culture
- Coaching on privilege
- Allyship training

ED & I in STEM

Find out more at https://celbiocompedi.com/

School Outreach/Mentoring

Matt Jacobs (Wide Open Voices)

Louise Boston-Mammah/Louisa Adjoa Parker (TIA)

https://cargomovement.org/Lonnie_Lesson/

Natalie Cozier

Susanne Quadiflieg

Anita Etale

Amaka Onyianta

Phil Taylor

Malik Al Nasir

L'Myah Sherae

https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/supergenenhub/2022/05/30/barriers-to-black-academia-roundtable-workshop/

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND – EPSRC

- The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) currently has an active portfolio of funded grants of ~£5bn (3,852 grants)

- 78% of this funding resides in the top 20 institutions

- 54% in the top 10

- One-third of the funding in the top 5 (Bristol 'ranks' 5th in this list)

- The EPSRC has also recently published its report, and data, entitled "Ethnicity and race equality in our portfolio"

- An analysis of their own racialised category 'Black', shows that for all years covered - 0% grants have been applied for and funded; these data could reflect the low numbers in each case, but present a stark contrast to white academics

EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/epsrc/ethnicity-and-race-equality-in-our-portfolio/

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND – REPRESENTATION

- Again, on a national level, HESA data and statistics (2022/23) on 'academic role and employment function' show that ~70% of academic staff in 'teaching and research roles' (those typically associated with having access to grant funding) are 'white'.

- Those racialised 'Black' ('Black or Black British Caribbean, 'Black or Black British – African', or 'Other Black Background') are all ~3%. Moreover, within each category, it is found that for academics in 'teaching only' roles, where typically academic staff do not apply for research funding, the percentages are as follows: As a percentage of total staff in each racialised category.

Racialised category	Percentage of Staff in 'Teaching Only' roles	Percentage of Staff in 'Teaching Only' roles (2018/19 data)
White	35%	31%
BAME	18%	26%
'Black'	35%	37%
'Black or Black British – Caribbean'	53%	47%
'Black or Black – African'	42%	35%
Chinese	25%	17%
Bangladeshi	42%	30%
Indian	30%	24%
Pakistani	41%	30%

Prof Winston Morgan

Toxicology, Equity and Inclusive Practice, University of East London

w.a.morgan@uel.ac.uk

How extensive is the challenge?

- **The Nobel Prize (up to 2022)!**

- After over 100 years, <u>not a single Black Nobel Laureate in science</u> (616/950).

- **People describes as Black are about 15% of the world population (90/616).**

"This concept of 'talent only' is not helped by the fact that there have been no Fields Medal winners from mathematicians of Black African descent, and only a handful from those of Asian heritage, and just one South American winner (out of a total of 60 winners since the medal was started)." – Futurelearn course on Decolonisation **"Decolonising Education: From Theory to Practice"**

https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/decolonising-education-from-theory-to-practice
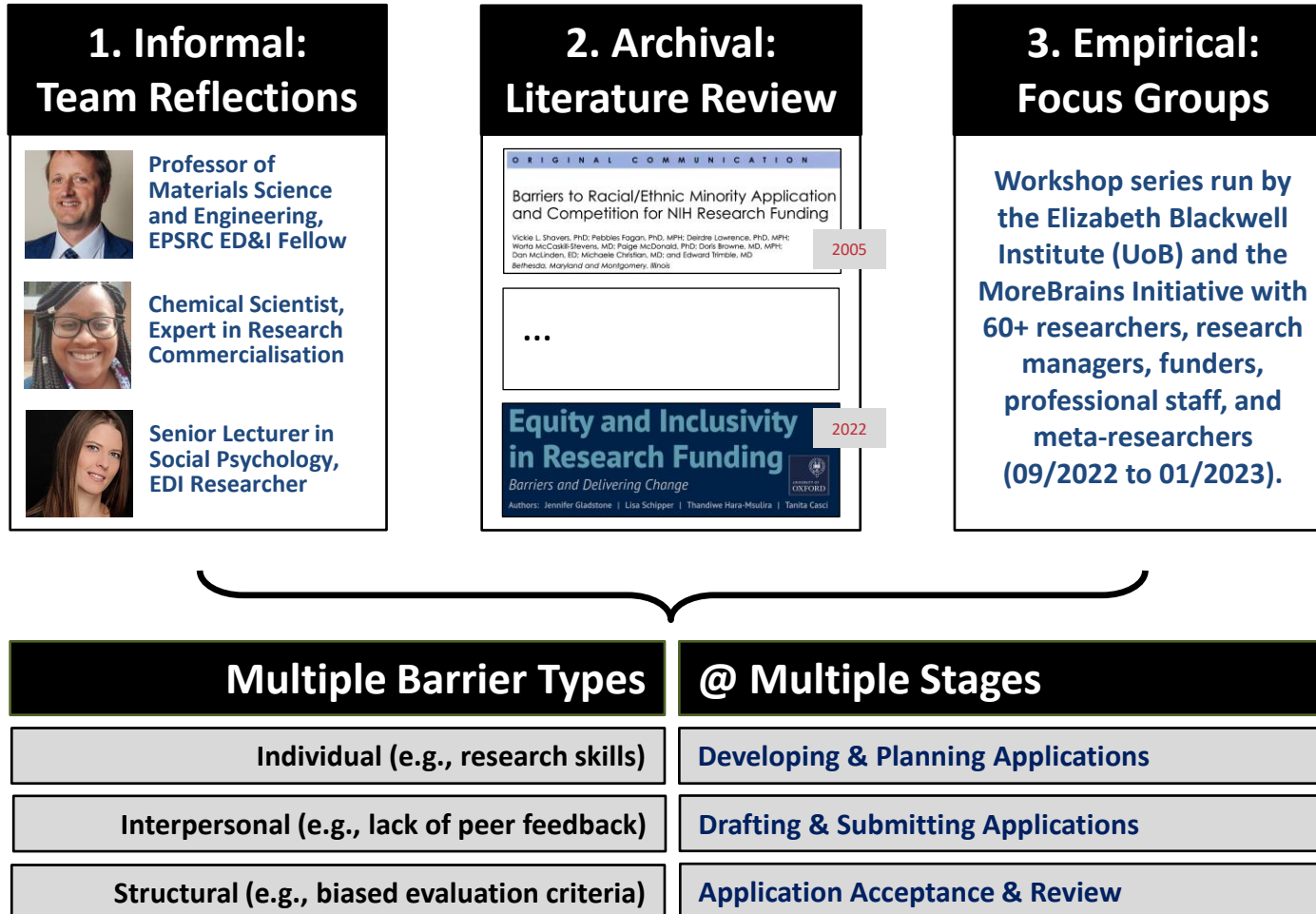
2. SURVEY OBJECTIVE

What Concerned Us?

❑ In 2020, UKRI published research funding application and award data disaggregated by the applicants' ethnic background.

❑ When the EPSRC analysed these data with a focus on applications in engineering and the physical sciences, they noticed a severe underrepresentation in applicants and awardees racialised as Black.

❑ The EPSRC then tried to follow up on this observation by conducting three community surveys (to better understand common barriers to funding success), but survey uptake among academics racialised as Black was extremely low at Post-PhD level (n < 10).

We set out to revisit the question how scholars racialised as Black experience the UK research funding landscape (with a focus on typical barriers they may face).

Identification of Common Barriers

1. Informal: Team Reflections

Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, EPSRC ED&I Fellow

Chemical Scientist, Expert in Research Commercialisation

Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology, EDI Researcher

2. Archival: Literature Review

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATION

Barriers to Racial/Ethnic Minority Application and Competition for NIH Research Funding

Vickie L. Shavers, PhD; Pebbles Fagan, PhD, MPH; Deirdre Lawrence, PhD, MPH; Worta McCaskill-Stevens, MD; Paige McDonald, PhD; Doris Browne, MD, MPH; Dan McLinden, ED; Michaele Christian, MD; and Edward Trimble, MD
Bethesda, Maryland and Montgomery, Illinois

2005

…

Equity and Inclusivity in Research Funding

2022

Barriers and Delivering Change

Authors: Jennifer Gladstone | Lisa Schipper | Thandiwe Hara-Msulira | Tanita Casci

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

3. Empirical: Focus Groups

Workshop series run by the Elizabeth Blackwell Institute (UoB) and the MoreBrains Initiative with 60+ researchers, research managers, funders, professional staff, and meta-researchers (09/2022 to 01/2023).

Multiple Barrier Types	@ Multiple Stages
Individual (e.g., research skills)	Developing & Planning Applications
Interpersonal (e.g., lack of peer feedback)	Drafting & Submitting Applications
Structural (e.g., biased evaluation criteria)	Application Acceptance & Review

3. SURVEY DESIGN

Design Constraints

Design Priorities
Recruitment of Non-Trivial Sample Size (i.e., n > 30)
Efficient Study Implementation (i.e., limited by pilot funding!)

Design Goals
Nationwide Accessibility (➲ online survey)
Cross-Disciplinary Relevance (➲ inclusive questions)
Quick Completion Time < 15 minutes (➲ selection of topics)

Target Audience
Post-PhD Academics in the United Kingdom (UK)
With EPSRC-compatible disciplinary backgrounds (in STEM/MINT)
From pre-1960 and post-1960 institutions

Funding Type
External (non-university) research funds by UK funders
Applications with a budget or over (i.e., > £75,000)
Applicant's Role: Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Investigator (CO-I)

Contextualisation
Applicant's Socio-Demographic Background (e.g., age, gender)
Applicant's Employment Situation (e.g., contract, position)
Applicant's Academic Trajectory (e.g., career plans, career track)
Applicant's Prior Fuding-Related Experiences (e.g., funders, bias)

3. SURVEY DESIGN

Survey Content*

1. SURVEY OPENING	2. PROFESSIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES	3. BARRIER TASKS	4. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS	5. SURVEY END
Study Information Eligibility Checks Active Consent	Institutional Affiliation Employment Situation Academic Trajectory (Funding Experiences)	**Application Planning Application Drafting Application Review** **Quantitative: Ratings** Qualitative: Open	Age + Gender/Sex Racial Self-Identification Domestic Constraints Intersectional Minority Status	Study Debriefing Support Contacts Post-Study Consent

If you were to apply as a Principal Investigator for a grant that requests external funding from a UK organisation with a budget that exceeds £75,000, which of the following barriers would you expect to encounter whilst planning your application?

	Not at All Likely	Slightly Likely	Somewhat Likely	Quite Likely	Very Likely
Lacking effective ways to identify relevant funding calls?	①	②	③	④	⑤
….	①	②	③	④	⑤

Recruitment Strategy

❑ Recruitment Period: ≈ 2 months (18. August 2023 to 27. October 2023)

❑ Official Press Release* with supporting quotes by relevant champions:

> **"Work such as the Breaking Barriers project is essential in throwing light on what needs to be done to address the under-representation of Black academics in the UK research ecosystem."**
>
> Professor Robert Mokaya, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Nottingham

❑ Mass invitations: included in newsletters across the country, including university alliances (e.g., GW4, Midlands Innovation), diversity networks (e.g., Leading Routes, BBSTEM, AFBE), funders (e.g., Wellcome, RSC), professional society's (e.g. RAE)

❑ Personalised invitations: 500+ emails sent to scholars presumed to be eligible at 80+ UK universities (including pre- and post-1960 institutions) ➲ ethical challenge (how to predict eligibility?)

Final Sample

78 valid responses with post-study consent, including:

- o **39x scholars reported an affiliation with a pre-1960 institution**

- o **39x scholars reported an affiliation with a post-1960** (including 20x post-1992 and 19x post-1960 but pre-1992)

5. PRELIMINARY SURVEY FINDINGS

5.1 Socio-Demographic Composition

↻ *optional replies, resulting in some incomplete disclosure*

❑ **Age Distribution:** majority of valid respondents between 30-49 years old (53x), but a few 50 years or older (21x), very few < 30 years (2x)

❑ **Gender Distribution:** majority of valid respondents identify as cisgender individuals (comprising 53 men, 19 women, and 2 unspecified)

❑ **Domestic Constraints:** typically between 11 to 30 hours/week (39x), but a few with less (8x) and many with more (27x)

❑ **Intersectional Minority Status:** majority reported at least one additional minority attribute (72x), over half reported three or more (41x) (list provided: disability, nationality, first/native language, neurodivergence, mental health, disability, physical health, sexual orientation, parental socioeconomic status, religious/spiritual beliefs, political attitudes)

Similar socio-demographic composition for pre-1960 and post-1960 respondents in our sample.

5.2 Employment Situation

➲ *optional replies, resulting in some incomplete disclosure*

❑ **Primary Academic Position:** majority in mid-career positions (42x), but a few in early-career positions (18x) and a few in senior-career positions (18x)

❑ **Primary Type of Contract:** majority on full-time permanent contracts (62x) but some on full-time fixed contracts (13x) and very few on other types (e.g., casual/part-time; 3x)

❑ **Primary Area of Work/Discipline:** Sciences (Medical/Natural, 36x), Engineering & Technology (25x), Mathematics & Informatics (13x), and very few other (4x)

Similar employment situations for pre-1960 and post-1960 respondents in our sample.

5.3 Academic Trajectory

↩ *optional replies, resulting in some incomplete disclosure*

❑ **Academic Tenure:** less than 5 years (27x), 5 years or more but less than 10 years (23x) and 10 years or more (28x)

❑ **Career Plans:** majority intends to stay in academia (62x) but a few are set on leaving (5x) and several remain undecided (15x)

❑ **Career Tracks:** majority on tracks that involved research, either hybrid (35x) or research-focused (29x), only some on other tracks (admin/teaching, 14x)

❑ **Career Priorities** (captured on 5-point scale with 5 = very important): 'successful career in academic research' with average rating of 4.69, 'obtaining external research funding' with average rating of 4.49

Similar academic trajectories for pre-1960 and post-1960 respondents in our sample, with one noteworthy exception:

Pre-1960: research-focused track (18x) > hybrid track (12x)

Post-1960: hybrid track (23x) > research-focused track (11x)

5.4 Barrier Rating Task

Ratings for all barriers varied drastically across participants.

For each of our 53 barriers included in our survey we saw at least one participant who gave the lowest rating ('1') and one participant who gave the highest rating ('5').

Barriers: Planning Applications

FULL SAMPLE

20 barriers proposed > 8 received average rating above 3 (labelled as 'somewhat likely' in the survey)

Highest rated barriers:

Lacking pre-existing relationships with relevant funders (M = 3.94)

Lacking resources (e.g., funds, time, contacts) to build grant-relevant networks with non-academic collaborators (e.g., stakeholders) (M = 3.76)

Lacking resources (e.g., funds, time, contacts) to conduct relevant pilot work (M = 3.65)
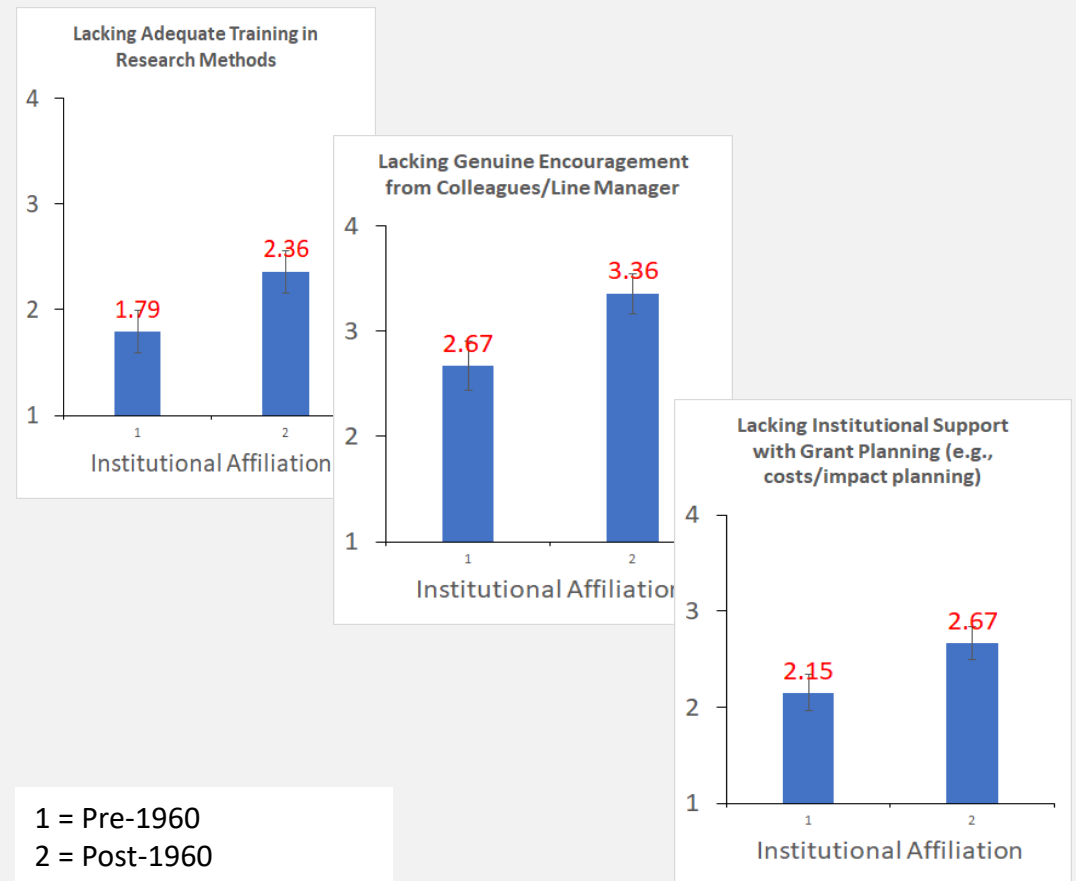
Lowest rated barriers:

Lacking motivation to apply due to other professional preferences/interests (M = 2.05)

Lacking adequate training in research methods (e.g., research design) (M = 2.08)

Lacking understanding of eligibility criteria for relevant funding calls (M = 2.19)

BY INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

Statistically significant differences ($p \leq .005$) for three barriers:

1 = Pre-1960
2 = Post-1960

Barriers: Drafting Applications

FULL SAMPLE

20 barriers proposed > 3 received average rating above 3

Highest rated barriers:

Lacking sufficient time to write the application due to other workload (M = 3.44)

Lacking flexibility to accommodate difficult submission deadlines (e.g., caused by short turnarounds or deadlines coinciding with school holidays))M = 3.76)

Lacking tailored support from the funder whilst preparing your application (M = 3.13)
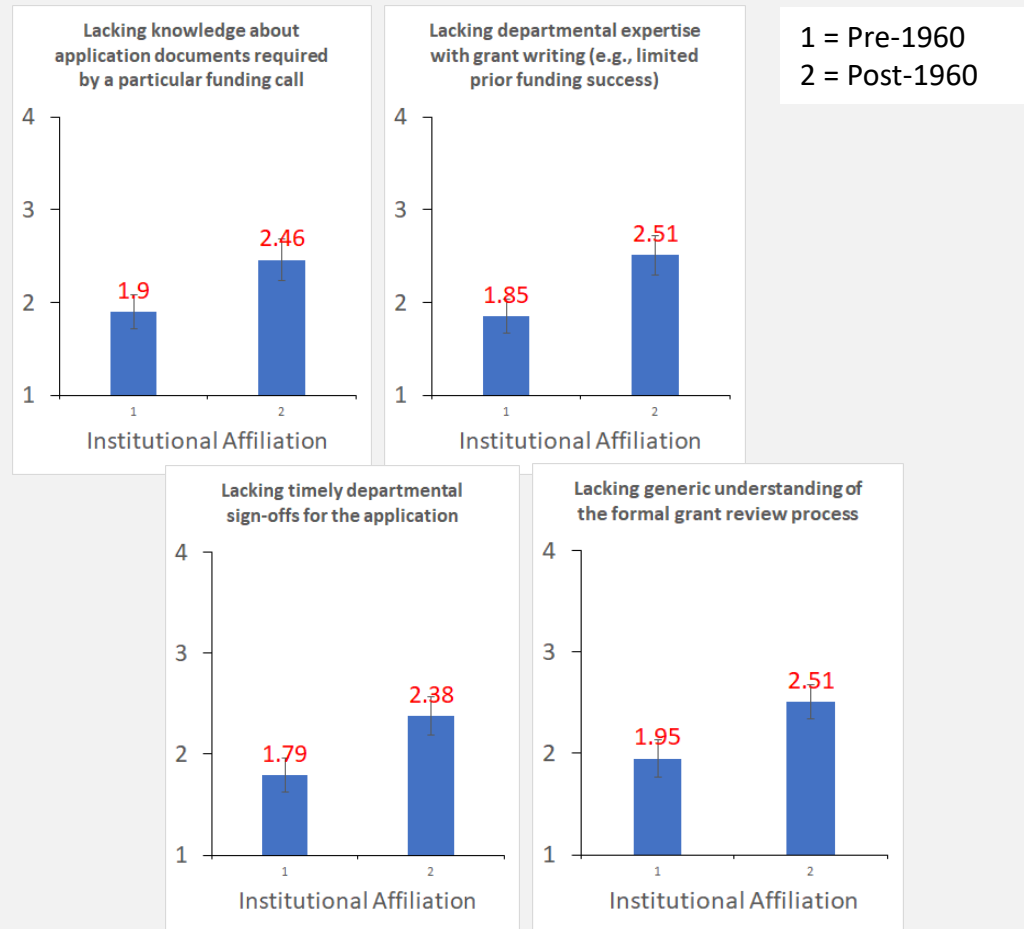
Lowest rated barriers:

Lacking timely departmental sign-offs for the application (e.g., by Head of School) (M = 2.09)

Lacking departmental expertise with grant writing (e.g., limited prior funding success) (M = 2.18)

Lacking generic understanding of the formal grant review process (M = 2.23)

BY INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

Statistically significant differences ($p \leq .005$) for four barriers:

1 = Pre-1960
2 = Post-1960

Lacking knowledge about application documents required by a particular funding call — 1: 1.9, 2: 2.46 (Institutional Affiliation)

Lacking departmental expertise with grant writing (e.g., limited prior funding success) — 1: 1.85, 2: 2.51 (Institutional Affiliation)

Lacking timely departmental sign-offs for the application — 1: 1.79, 2: 2.38 (Institutional Affiliation)

Lacking generic understanding of the formal grant review process — 1: 1.95, 2: 2.51 (Institutional Affiliation)

5. PRELIMINARY SURVEY FINDINGS

Barriers: Applications Review

FULL SAMPLE

13 barriers proposed > 6 received average rating above 3

Highest rated barriers:

Being judged via processes that lack adequate representation of Black scholars (M = 3.94)

Lacking 'networks' (e.g., reviewers, panel members) willing to 'fight' for your application (M = 3.69)

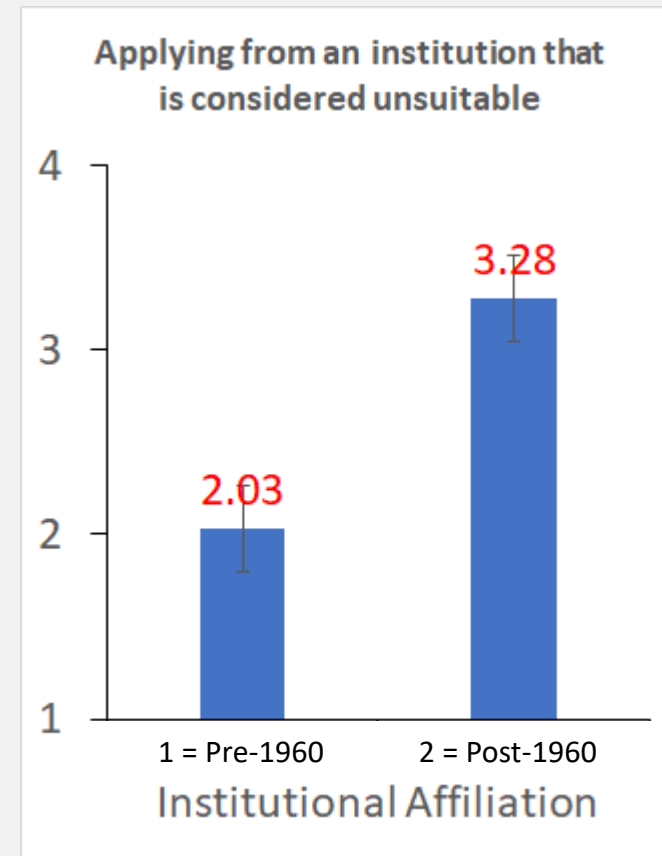*Being judged against non-transparent/ unpredictable review criteria (M = 3.26)*

Lowest rated barriers:

Lacking references/supporting information for your application during the review process that have been lost by the recipient/ funder (M = 2.13)

Experiencing a devaluation of your application due to having challenged discrimination before (M = 2.44)

Receiving sudden requests to provide considerable additional information without explanation (M = 2.53)

BY INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

Statistically significant difference ($p \leq .005$) for one barrier:

Applying from an institution that is considered unsuitable

2.03 — 1 = Pre-1960

3.28 — 2 = Post-1960

Institutional Affiliation

5. PRELIMINARY SURVEY FINDINGS

Qualitative

PLANNING: 19 replies, some overlapping with our task (i.e., lack of experience, networks, time, sponsors) but also…

'Internal grants are essential for developing pilots to support the large external grants. I have experienced several discrimination in obtaining these while my white counterparts with weaker projects were awarded.'

'Finding colleagues who are willing to actively contribute as Co-Is. […] often they want to make their ideas become the main focus. Difficulty of having colleagues in the field inviting you as Co-I on their proposal.'

'[R]esearch on black communities in developed or low-resource countries is dominated by non-black researchers therefore my institution may not think it worthwhile that I try to compete.'

DRAFTING: 8 replies, some overlapping with our task (i.e., excessive workload, lack of timely feedback/support/confidence) but also…

'Constructive criticism [is] welcome. This is different from feeling belittled by others considering their ideas superior to yours, which often results in the failure of establishing the collaboration needed for the proposal to succeed'

'After [my last line manager] reviewed my application, he went to discuss my ideas with another academic suggesting my ideas are similar to his.'

'Need to have someone to teach me who all the relevant institutional contacts and processes are'

'English is not my native language which affects me sometimes.'

REVIEW: 16 replies, some overlapping with our task (i.e., biased reviewers, discriminatory practices, lack of connections/influence) but also...

'Twice I had grant applications […] not progressed due to [odd] reasons. The first involved [my] application being withdrawn due to administrative error by funder who could only apologize for the error. Second involved application being withdrawn with explanation given that this was not in remit, when from guidelines it was clear it was.'

'Big funding tends to go to big groups, people from ethnic minority will struggle to be accepted as leaders or PIs of large collaborative groups.'

'[A]s soon as the grant involves African institutions, […] funding agencies [judge] proposals with the prism of developed countries. Items such as budgeting, […], validation of research tools and methods are often stressed beyond unnecessary reason.'

6. WORKSHOPS

Breaking Barriers to Black Academia

Launch

The Breaking Barriers to Black Academia project has launched a programme designed to support the training and development of scientists from Black backgrounds.

Community, networking, learning and mentorship are built into the heart of this programme that aims to enable early, mid and advanced career scholars of Black or Black heritage to develop their research portfolio, grant success and thrive in STEM.

https://celbiocompedi.com/black-academia

7 workshops have been held – both online and in-person to take Black academics through the whole process of formulating their idea, having the space to speak out and form solidarity with a cohort, and to seek and receive information pertinent to their applications.

The in-person workshops were facilitated by Saskia Walcott (Walcott Communications) who has "deep knowledge of integrating research impact into the research process as well as an understanding of the policy drivers." (LinkedIn)

Saskia Walcott

6. WORKSHOPS

Making Connections:	In Person	Bristol, 24th November 2023
Knowledge Sharing What are the Funding Opportunities?	Online	5th December 2023
Skills Building	Online	24th January 2024
Ideation Sandpit	In Person	29th February 2024
Partnerships and Peer Review	Online	18th April 2024
Impact Planning and Cultivation	Online	16th May 2024
High Quality Research Getting Your Research Proposal Ready for Submission	In Person	23rd May 2024

6. WORKSHOPS

Making Connections:	In Person	Bristol, 24th November 2023

Ideation Sandpit	In Person	29th February 2024

Successes so far

"For a relatively new academic in the UK, in a white-dominant university, the effect of the cultural and background differences should not be underestimated! Breaking Barriers helped me immensely to navigate my way around research and funding...[it has] provided a safe space for me to be vulnerable and ask the basic questions, which is sometimes the key for progression."

Dr Taghried Abdelmagid

"As a black academic in the UK Breaking Barriers has helped me to create networks and identify collaborations as well as identifying mentees"

Associate Prof Faatihah Niyi-Odumosu

"This project has provided me with detailed information required for the UK's grant application process and has boosted my confidence in applying for research funds [and] enables easy collaboration with fellow Black Academics..."

Dr Onajite T. Abafe Diejomaoh

80 academics have attended our online and in person workshops.

72 members of social networks regularly share information on funding and job opportunities.

WhatsApp group formed to share information and provide support

6. WORKSHOPS – REFLECTIONS/FEEDBACK

- The social media network and in-person events fulfilled a significant unmet need among black ECR and MCRs to network with people who understood their specific experiences of academia.

- Surprised how far people were prepared to travel for this experience. The reach ended up being across three of the four nations of the UK.

- Senior speakers are a draw to get people to events. The workshop-style learning events struggled with numbers possibly due to the timing of the events. *Many of the academics stated to have teaching and research contracts so couldn't spare the time*.

- The quality of training, expertise and insights offered to participants online and in-person was considered excellent.

- Any free events experienced a really high attrition.

- Events could be held at locations around the UK to make them more accessible - and near to transport.

- Have received a number of surveys from the various events – currently going through data from those.

6. WORKSHOPS

| High Quality Research Getting Your Research Proposal Ready for Submission | In Person | 23rd May, 2024 |

- About 25-30 academics joined throughout the day.
- Held in Engineers House in Bristol.
- We had a panel Q& A session with Professor Winston Morgan (UEL) and Professor Phil Taylor (PVC for Research*).
- Professor Evelyn Welch, VC and President of UoB attended as well as several members of the Research Office Team (DREI).
- We had a lot of interaction with the research office team members were they could ask questions, and plenty of time to discuss the formulation of ideas for research.
- Several follow-up sessions have resulted in tangible outcomes now.


* Soon to be VC at Bath University

- A clear need for this specific intervention has been identified.
- When interventions like this happen, they only open-up the issues, in a much wider sense, that need to be addressed in our HE system with respect to the EDI of Black and Black heritage staff and students.
- *Equity* is required. Not equality.
- Don't fix the academics, it's the system(s) that need changing.
- There is a need for anti-racism training for teams of people to engage with this.
- There are many interested stakeholders in the outcomes of the work that has been done.
- **BUT**
- Who is going to take ownership of the activity? and more importantly….
- Who will fund it?

"Our presence symbolizes visual diversity, often taken as a sign of progress, since diversity is frequently approached through higher education policy as a numbers game, where the aim is to add colour to the sea of White faces. Such approaches promote a conceptualization of Black people as additives to the existing structures and systems, which means that the institutional culture – which is the problem – remains unchanged while we get added to a system that was not created for us."

Deborah Gabriel ("Inside the Ivory Tower")

EQUALITY   EQUITY
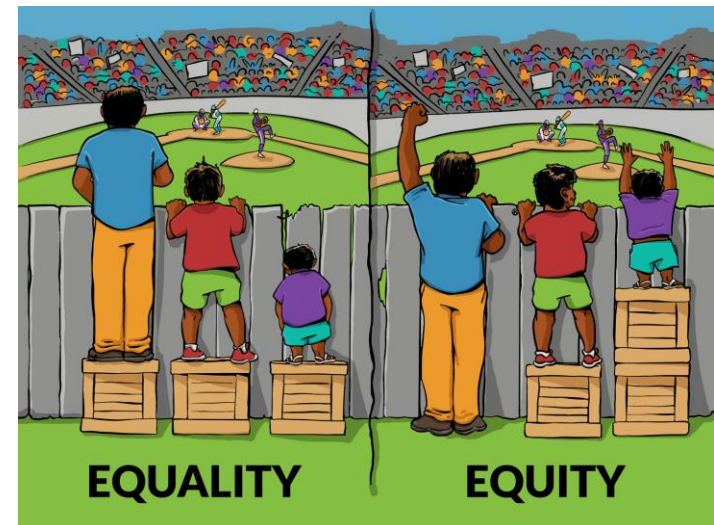
6. WORKSHOPS AND NEXT STEPS

- Continue with the contacts and have an online get-together of all the people that took part in this exercise.
- Publish the results of the survey in an Open Access journal.
- Produce a report that galvanizes all the results of the workshops and interventions with data from post-workshop evaluations.
- Make case(s) for funding from various bodies (UKRI, University, GW4).
- Continue to press on with other initiatives in EDI of Black and Black heritage staff and students.
- Encourage others to emulate this programme in other parts of the country.
- Press the funding councils to do more to leverage their power in making change.

ANY QUESTIONS