How can and should University leadership deliver greater inclusion?

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Race, Ethnicity, Equality and Inclusion in Higher Education in Ireland and the UK

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A Thought…

- Universities are often regarded as a site for embracing multiculturalism, inclusivity and diversity; **however, historically this has often conflicted with an enduring legacy of racial inequality and discrimination…**

(Alexander and Arday, 2015).

The Context…

- The universities minister has criticised UK higher education institutions for their failure to recruit and promote **Black and minority ethnic academics, after figures showed that no black staff were employed at the most senior levels…**

- Chris Skidmore, Higher Education Minister for England, has suggested that the unacceptable number of black academics in the **most senior leadership roles had fallen from an estimated five in 2017-18 to possibly zero in the last academic year…**

(The Guardian, 2020).

Painting a picture…

- According to figures published by the **Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA):**

- In 2018-19, there were **535 staff employed as 'managers, directors or senior officials' across British universities…**

- Of the number identified… **475 identified as white, 25 as Asian, Mixed or Other ethnicity, and none as Black.** The ethnicity of the remaining 35 was not known…

(HESA, 2019).

Portraying the false narrative…

- **The HESA employment statistics are rounded to the nearest five,** meaning that one or two Black senior staff would be rounded down to nil…

- HESA's workforce figures showed that **16% of the total UK academic staff identified as Black…**

- This figure (16%) is misleading because this does not disclose the types of contracts these staff hold and what **capacity this breaks down within whether professional, senior leadership or academic…**

- The majority of precarious contracts awarded in **higher education have historically been provided to Black and ethnic minority staff… (Arday, 2018).**

The Soundbite… Penetrative Action?!!

In the recent Guardian (2020) article Skidmore stated:

- 'It is unacceptable that the number of **Black academic staff in senior positions has fallen, as this does not represent our British society…'**

Further he states:

- 'Universities need to make more progress and I **urge all vice-chancellors to address the barriers that are holding back black and ethnic minority staff from senior positions…'**

He concludes by summarising that:

- 'A true representation of Britain at the **top levels of our universities will support the progression of [Black and minority ethnic] staff,** as well as improving students' experience…'

Poultry Numbers…

Figures also demonstrate the paucity of Black Academic Leaders:

- With only **185 out of 11,860 non-academic managerial roles** within higher education being filled by Black staff, **compared with 10,510 who identified as White, 410 as Asian and 165** from a mixed background…

(HESA, 2019).

The Sad Reality…

- In 2018, the BBC undertook a **Freedom of Information request to all 24 universities in the Russell Group** of highly selective, research-based universities, and 22 responded…

- At these universities, **the data showed average salaries of:**

- **£52,000 for white academics**
- **£38,000 for black academics**
- **£37,000 for academics from an Arab background**

- This means that Black and Arab academics at the **UK's top universities earn an average 26% less than White colleagues…**

- And BAME Female academics fare even worse, **with an ethnicity pay gap on top of the gender pay gap…**

The Importance of Diverse Leadership…

- **'The types of leadership that students and staff within higher education are exposed to have a significant bearing on their constructions of leadership,** particularly when this is not reflective of the values embodying social and cultural pluralism and equity…'

(Adams, 2017; Aguirre and Martinez, 2006; Chun and Evans, 2009; Williams, 2013).

Structural inequality in the Academy…

- While university institutions concern themselves with developing **tokenistic equality and diversity widening participation interventions…**

- The spiral of inequality which pervades continues to disadvantage potential BME leaders, **who continue to experience a paucity of leadership opportunities available to them…**

(Miller, 2018; Mirza, 2017; Rollock, 2016).

Capturing the lived experience…

- It has been very difficult. . . **you actually become paranoid because you realize that everything you do is unfairly scrutinized** and your authority is constantly undermined by people around you…

- This becomes so disheartening, particularly **in a so-called position of leadership…** Higher education is racist, and the type of racism it uses is so insidious and intelligent . . . **The sophistication of racism in the sector now makes it harder to quantify to someone. . . in particular White people who can sometimes trivialize racism.** It sometimes benefits Whites for there to continue to be a lack of BME leaders within the sector…

(Female, Black, University Senior Leader).

Recommendations…

- Strategic agency as well as policy-driven intervention is required if BME academics are to gain access and **opportunity to senior leadership hierarchies (Shepherd, 2017).**

- University diversity agendas and interventions must endeavour to **change organizational cultures** which exclude BME academics from leadership hierarchies.

- Support mechanisms for BME academics wishing to pursue **leadership trajectories must be focused on developing mentoring interventions** situated within formal and informal capacities at institutional and departmental levels.

- This type of mentoring must have targeted focus on **equipping BME academics with the necessary tools to navigate senior leadership.**

Recommendations…

- For better representation to be achieved, particularly at senior leadership levels, affirmative action is required which guarantees a set quota of **BME applicants proceeding to shortlisting to ensure that applicants are being selected from a diverse applicant pool.**

- For this process to be effective, universities must ensure that BME academics are involved in selection and recruitment processes. **It is essential for universities to actively disrupt cycles of unconscious bias that reinforce cloning and perpetuating unequal representation (Gronn and Lacey, 2006).**

- Targeted programmes must provide BME applicants with access to relevant training, which focuses on developing leadership capabilities, **extending academic networks, and engaging in communities of practice with other BME senior leaders within the Academy.**

Concluding Thought…

- '**Are you gonna try to make this work…** Or spend your days down in the dirt… You see things can change…**Yes and walls can come tumbling down…**'

(The Style Council, Paul Weller).