

School of Politics, Economics and International Relations

Race Equality Review Report

October 2023

SPEIR Race Equality Review

Contents

Introduction and Context	3
Methodology.....	4
Data Analysis	4
Survey Analysis.....	4
Staff Representation, Recruitment, and Progression	6
Representation and recruitment.....	6
How does representation compare with the university and within discipline across the university sector?	6
The staff and student view	7
Progression.....	9
Student Representation, Recruitment, and Attainment	12
Student Representation	12
UG Student Representation.....	12
PGT and PGT Representation.....	16
Student recruitment.....	19
Teaching and Learning.....	20
The UG Awarding Gap.....	20
Teaching and race	23
Culture.....	26
Experiences of Racial (In)Equality in SPEIR.....	26
Celebrating Diversity	29
Communication and Training	30
Intersectionality	32
Action Plan	33
Bibliography.....	35

Introduction and Context

In 2020, the University of Reading conducted an internal Race Equality Review (RER) and issued [a report of its findings](#) in May 2021, along with a commitment to continue to work on issues of race equality within the University and in higher education more generally.

As part of this, Schools and Departments were expected to undertake their own work in this area. To that end the School of Politics, Economics, and International Relations (SPEIR) put together a team tasked with undertaking a School-level RER in 2021. The team included academic and administrative staff and students from both departments within the School. Our aims were to understand perspectives on race (in)equality among staff and students relating to representation, recruitment, progression, attainment, teaching and learning, and School culture, and to create an action plan to address issues raised where necessary. The SPEIR RER team was organised into two groups – a data analysis group and a survey analysis group – and included the following members:

Professor Sarah von Billerbeck (PIR, School D&I Lead)

Dr Sam Rawlings (Economics, D&I Lead for Economics)

Dr Brandon Beomseob Park (PIR)

Dr Kerry Goettlich (PIR)

Dr Amanda Hall (PIR)

Professor Sarah Jewell (Economics)

Dr Rob Jubb (PIR)

Professor Simonetta Longhi (Economics)

Mrs Vicki Matthews (SPEIR)

Dr Vladimir Rauta (PIR)

Dr Mark Shanahan (PIR)

Dr Carl Singleton (Economics)

Ms Shannon Carter (student rep, PIR)

Uyi Erhabor (student rep, Economics)

Robert Hogge (student rep, PIR)

Ketsia Mungongo (student rep, PIR)

**Please note that some members of the team left the University, went on leave, or graduated and so only took part for a limited period of time.*

SPEIR Race Equality Review

This report represents the outcome of our three-pronged approach to our School RER: gathering and analysing data held by the University on staff and student demographics and outcomes, staff and student surveys, and student focus groups (please see the next section for further details). In particular, student members of the team led the analysis of the student survey and designed, ran, and analysed focus groups. Importantly, we consider this report not the end of our work on race (in)equality in SPEIR, but rather the beginning. We have outlined a set of actions that respond directly to issues and concerns that emerged in our analysis and/or that were raised by SPEIR students and staff, but issues around race and ethnicity are complex, emotive, and evolving, and deserve concerted attention at all times. We hope that the actions we recommend in this report therefore jumpstart a process whereby all members of SPEIR reflect regularly on them and seek to continually discuss and address them.

Methodology

Data Analysis

To investigate BAME representation in the department, we obtained data from the Planning and Strategy Office (PSO) on student demographics and admissions, and staff demographics. There are some caveats to this data. Due to small numbers of students and staff, in general, statistics are reported only for the broad category of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, with the inherent issues lying in such aggregation.

The student data are not a complete picture of all students taking Economics or Politics and International Relations (PIR) degrees since it includes only “owned” students; joints students where the home department is not Economics or PIR are not included in these statistics. Finally, an added complication when interpreting the student UG statistics for Economics is that the significant rise in NUIST students over the period distorts the headline statistics. It is not possible to explicitly exclude NUIST students themselves, so we report Economics UG figures both including and excluding students whose ethnic background is recorded as Chinese.

Survey Analysis

To investigate staff and student views on a range of issues relating to race equality, we ran two surveys: one for staff and one for students. The staff survey consisted of 25 multiple choice and free-text questions covering representation, recruitment, progression, teaching and learning, discrimination, and culture, and it was jointly designed by members of the RER team. The student survey consisted of 38 multiple choice and free-text questions covering representation, recruitment, attainment, teaching and learning, discrimination and support, and culture, and it was designed primarily by student members

SPEIR Race Equality Review

of the team, with input from staff team members. The staff survey ran from 22 November-10 December 2021 and the student survey ran from 12-30 January 2022. These were timed to avoid overlap with other surveys (e.g. NSS), assessment periods, and holidays.

The staff survey consisted of 30 respondents, of whom 22 were White, 4 were BAME and 4 preferred not to say. Responses and analysis of the survey results presented here should be treated with some caution, as small staff numbers mean that slight differences can skew results. The small sample sizes, particularly of BAME staff mean it is not possible to make inferences from the results. Any findings are thus indicative and only provide suggestions for areas to address. Due to the small sample size and large number of non-responses for the demographic questions, it is also not possible to break responses down by any demographic groups, nor are we able to report any demographics, as it may be possible to identify individuals. It should also be recognised that ethnicity and race inequality is a complex issue with heterogeneity across ethnic groups, and therefore one size will not fit all. However, due to the small sample size it is not possible to consider any heterogeneity and responses by different ethnic groups. Individuals may also feel their responses to some questions may vary across and within different ethnic groups.

The student survey consisted of 106 respondents, 71 were White, 29 were BAME and 6 preferred not to say. In addition, the student members of the RER team attempted to organise student focus groups, but struggled with recruitment of volunteers. Just two students attended the RER focus groups so that we use their comments sparingly throughout the report since they may not be representative of the views of the student body as a whole, but may be useful for flagging issues to monitor going forwards.

Staff Representation, Recruitment, and Progression

Representation and recruitment

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1. In the most recently available year of data (2021):
 - a. 33.3% of staff in Economics department declared they were BAME.
 - b. 0% of staff in PIR declared they were BAME.
2. Levels of staff diversity in the department of Economics are slightly higher than at the sector level; levels of staff diversity in the department of PIR are slightly lower than at sector level.
3. Results from the RER staff and student survey suggested fairly polarised views on representation:
 - a. 43.3% and 29.3 % of staff and students, respectively, felt there were *sufficient* BAME role models within the School.
 - b. 40.0% and 21.7% of staff and students, respectively, felt there were *insufficient* BAME role models within the School.

As a school, SPEIR has become more diverse over time, with a rise in staff declaring their ethnicity as BAME from 9.0% in 2017 to 17.7% in 2021.¹ However, there are significant differences across department, with 0% of PIR staff declaring their ethnicity as BAME. In Economics, rates of BAME staff have risen from 17.65% to 33.3% in 2021. Despite the increased diversity in Economics staff over time, there is still much room for improvement: until 2020/21 there were no Black members of staff. This has improved with recent recruitment, but there are still no Black voices at senior levels within the department, and a lack of role models for the UG student body who are Black (as well as lack of representation for potential applicants) is a concern.

How does representation compare with the university and within discipline across the university sector?

The university-wide RER cited that in 2014/15, almost 13% of staff identified as BAME. Therefore, as with student representation, Economics is relatively more diverse than the wider university staff and Politics is less diverse.

¹ One drawback to the figures made available by the PSO is that ethnicity is not declared (i.e. unknown) for a significant proportion of staff (16% in 2020/21, with similar rates across Economics and PIR).

SPEIR Race Equality Review

Relative to the sector, the most recent data suggest that 24% of academic economists are BAME, with BAME staff more likely to be represented on Teaching (T) only contracts, and slightly less represented on Research only (R) or T&R contracts (Advani et al. 2020). While we cannot split across these categories, a consideration of the headline figure suggests that rates within the Department of Economics are broadly similar to external. This does not mean that there are no problems in the discipline, but that the Department of Economics at Reading, at best, does not seem to be any worse than the rest of the sector. A significant caveat is that we are unable to consider issues such as progression rates across grades due to small numbers, and it is well known that there are significant problems within both the discipline and the wider university sector regarding representation of BAME staff at higher grades.

The statistics for PIR are less ambiguous. The rate of 0% BAME staff is a concern, and there is a significant need for BAME representation amongst staff, for a variety of reasons, not least to serve as role models for both potential and current students. It is also important to note that within the PIR discipline, there are typically low rates of representation of BAME amongst staff, though not quite so low as in the department at Reading. A 2021 report for the British International Studies Association (BISA) and the Political Studies Association (PSA) on career trajectories of the workforce in Politics and International Relations noted that, UK-wide, 13% of staff are BAME, with 9% of staff at Senior Lecturer/Reader/Professor level (Hanretty, 2021). Nonetheless, the lack of representation amongst PIR staff in the Department, alongside the low levels of diversity of the PGR body (discussed in section 5.1.2 below) may result in a lack of diversity of perspective amongst producers of research in the Department, which may have negatively affect inclusivity of research and may lead to some groups being unlikely to pursue further study at Reading (Advani et al. 2020), compounding the problem.

The staff and student view

In line with the data analysis, responses from the staff survey suggests concerns around a lack of representation (Table 1). A large proportion of staff within SPEIR felt that there are insufficient BAME role models within the school (40%). An even higher proportion felt that there is insufficient BAME representation in SPEIR events (46.7%), suggesting that staff may feel there is more scope to address this than there is to increase diversity among staff. Nevertheless, there is a relatively large group (26.7%) that are unsure – that is, who either do not pay attention to the race or ethnicity of invited speakers or do not feel that it is an issue of concern.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Do you feel that there are sufficient BAME role models within the School, including at senior levels?	43.3	40	16.7
Is there sufficient BAME representation in SPEIR events (seminar series, speakers, etc.)?	26.7	46.7	26.7
Is there sufficient BAME representation in outward-facing SPEIR events (open days, recruitment events, etc.)?	40	20	40

Table 1: Staff survey: Role Models and Representation (%)

The student surveys suggested a high degree of uncertainty amongst students around representation, with 49.6% of students being unsure about whether there were sufficient BAME role models within the School (Table 2). Just under a third of students felt there were sufficient BAME role models within the School.

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Do you feel that there are sufficient BAME role models within the School, including at senior levels?	29.25	21.7	49.6
Is there sufficient BAME representation in SPEIR events (seminar series, speakers, etc.)?	29.25	21.7	49.6
Is there sufficient BAME representation in outward-facing SPEIR events (open days, recruitment events, etc.)?	38.68	16.98	44.34

Table 2: Student survey: Role Models and Representation (%)

Importantly, when broken down by department, a significantly larger proportion of respondents from the Politics and International Relations department thought there are not enough BAME role models, at 27%, compared to Economics at 10%; for those in both departments the rate was 18%. Fewer thought there are enough BAME role models in Politics and International Relations at 19% compared to Economics at 50%, and 45% of those in both departments.

In terms of recruitment, the staff survey indicated a high degree of uncertainty among staff, with 50% responding 'unsure' or 'don't know' about whether SPEIR takes sufficient consideration of race and ethnicity in long-listing, short-listing, and selection. This may be

SPEIR Race Equality Review

because staff are familiar with constraints within the recruitment process in this regard (race and ethnicity are not included in candidate information), and specifically that if a particular job advertisement doesn't attract a diverse pool of candidates, Departments' ability to appoint a more diverse range of staff is limited. It may also reflect staff members' awareness of potential differences between the Departments and therefore their unwillingness to comment at School level. At the same time, in the free text responses, staff did urge continued efforts to diversify the staff of the School. One suggested that this should entail not just 'hiring more BAME and women academics, but also...hiring individuals who may not have got their PhDs in European or American universities.' Another suggested 'a review of hiring practices.'

ACTION:

Continue efforts to attract a diverse range of applicants for staff posts, taking into consideration the limited freedom of action of the School in this regard. This may include wording in advertisements, active recruitment among staff networks, and consulting with other departments and HR about best practice.

Interestingly, there was more satisfaction regarding BAME representation in outward-facing SPEIR events (open days, recruitment events, etc.), with only 20% of staff saying there is not enough; at the same time however, 40% said 'don't know,' (Table 1). This again suggests either a high degree of ambivalence on this point or a recognition that asking BAME staff to attend more such events will, because of their low numbers in SPEIR, necessarily entail a relatively greater burden on them than on White staff (according to HESA, in 2019-20 18% of all academic staff in the UK were BAME (HESA 2021)). Just under a third of students felt there was sufficient BAME representation at SPEIR events, and just over a third felt there were sufficient representation at outward-facing events (Table 2).

ACTION:

Ensure greater diversity among invited speakers to department seminars, workshops, and other events, with a target of 15% BAME invited speakers.

Progression

No information was available from PSO on BAME rates across grade or on progression across grades. However, the staff survey asked for views regarding promotion and progression, and responses are summarised in Table 3.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

	YES	NO	SOMETIMES	NOT SURE/ DON'T KNOW
SPEIR takes sufficient consideration of race and ethnicity in long-listing, short-listing, and selection?	13.3	23.3	13.3	50
SPEIR takes sufficient consideration of race and ethnicity in promotion and progression.	13.3	13.3	6.7	66.7
I believe I am treated equally by my colleagues and students, irrespective of my ethnicity or race.	66.7	13.3	3.3	16.7
I am actively encouraged to take up career development opportunities, irrespective of my ethnicity or race	40	30	6.7	23.3

Table 3: Staff survey: Recruitment, progression and equality (%)

Here again, we see a large degree of ambivalence, with 66.7% responding 'unsure' or 'don't know' about whether race and ethnicity are sufficiently accounted for in promotion and progression. While this may reflect the demographics of the School and staff members' inability to speak to such experiences, the number of responses was too small to make any inferences about whether BAME respondents felt differently here, and as such, these responses may indicate that promotion applications are viewed as individual and confidential, that staff don't consult one another regularly on them, and that they are therefore not a point upon which staff can compare and contrast experiences. At the same time, in free-text responses, one respondent described what they view as a lack of transparency around who is invited to sit on recruitment panels and on appointment panels for leadership and administrative roles within the School, 'lead[ing] to potential problems of unconscious bias in selection of who has these opportunities.' It should be noted that this perception persists despite the requirement for all staff serving on recruitment panels to complete unconscious bias training beforehand.

ACTION:

Extend the School's Athena SWAN pledge to advertise all School and Department leadership roles. Provide opportunities for more staff members to sit on recruitment and appointment panels and enhance transparency of selection process for panel membership by reporting on this in School communications. Consider requiring refresher trainings on unconscious bias for staff serving on recruitment panels.

Student Representation, Recruitment, and Attainment

Student Representation

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1. Over the period 2016/17 – 2020/21:
 - a. 43.4% (72.3%) of UG (PGT) students in the department of Economics declared they were BAME. Excluding potential NUIST students, 34.7% of Economics students were BAME.
 - b. 25.9% (43.1%) of UG (PGT) students in the department of Politics and International Relations (PIR) declared they were BAME.
 - c. The offer rate gap between White and BAME students was lower than the University average, but has been worsening in both departments in SPEIR.
2. The majority of PGR students in Economics are BAME and this has been rising over time: from 63.5% in 2016/17 to 80% of students in 2020/21.
3. The percentage of BAME PGR students in PIR has fallen over time: from 35.6% in 2016/17 to 16.0% in 2021
4. Representation in Economics is broadly similar to sector levels at UG level, and the PGT and PGR student body of the department is relatively more diverse than the discipline elsewhere. There is a lack of data on PIR student ethnicity in the wider sector, so comparisons within discipline are not possible.

UG Student Representation

Data on student representation within the School is available for the academic years 2016/17 to 2020/21. Over the entire period, the majority of UG students in SPEIR were White, with students from BAME backgrounds making up 43.5% (34.7%, excluding Chinese students) of the Economics student body and 25.9% of the PIR UG student body. The performance of the two departments over time in diversifying the UG cohorts has varied.

In Economics, the share of UG students who are BAME has risen from 23.4% to 45.5% (Figure 1). This has in part been due to rising numbers of NUIST students, but not fully: excluding students of Chinese background from the analysis, the proportion of BAME students has risen from 21.3% to 39.5% (Figure 2). Analysis of splits by Home and

SPEIR Race Equality Review

International students suggest that (excluding Chinese students) the rise in BAME students over time has been driven equally by increases in both Home and International BAME students.

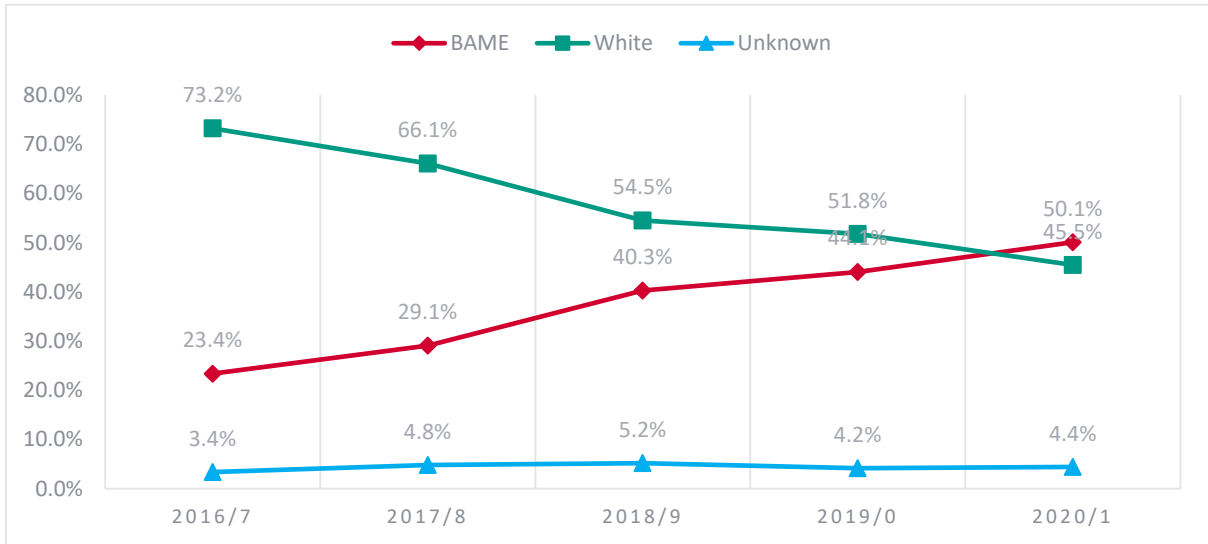


Figure 1: Economics: UG student demographics over time, including Chinese students

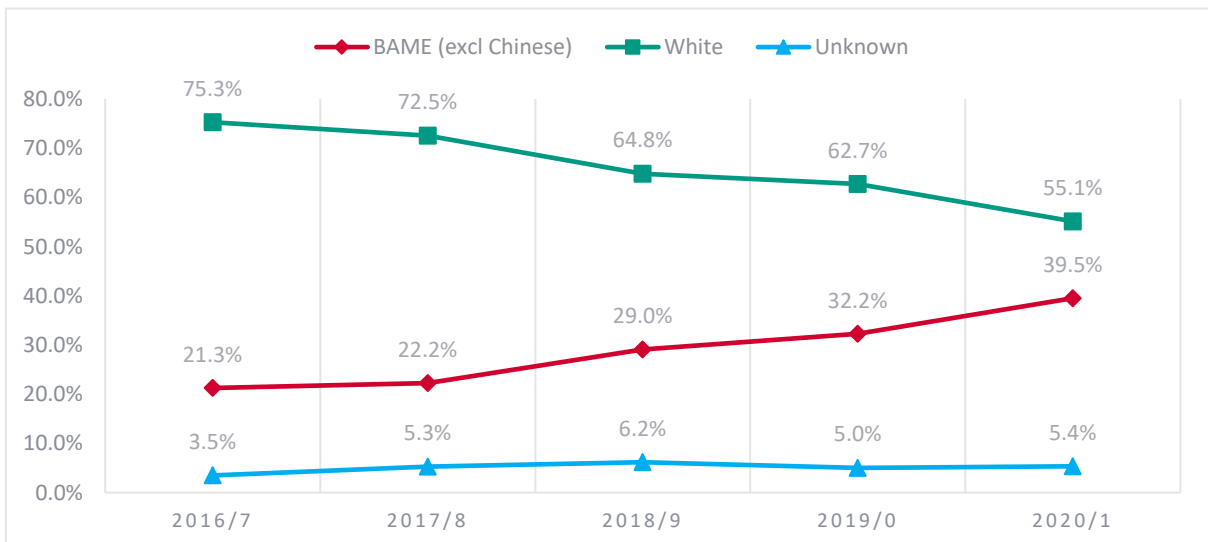


Figure 2: Economics: UG student demographics over time, excluding Chinese students

In PIR, the proportion of UG students who are BAME has remained relatively stable, rising only slightly from 18.9% in 2016/17 to 19.5% in 2020/21 (Figure 3).

SPEIR Race Equality Review

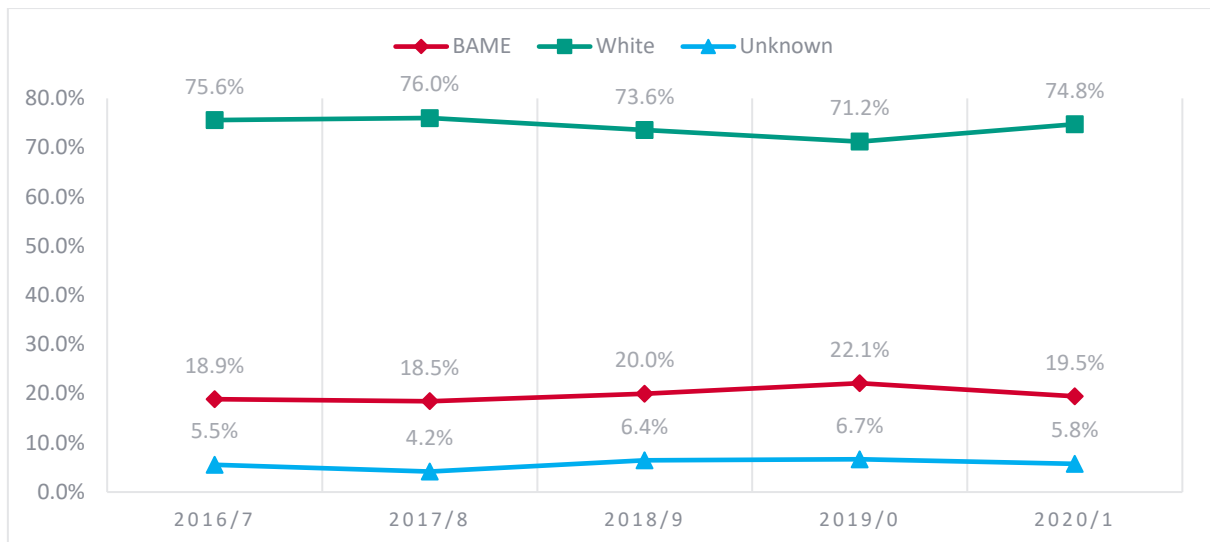


Figure 3: Politics & International Relations: UG student demographics over time

Within the sub-categories of ethnicities, we can see that in Economics, there has been a rise in Asian students (both Chinese and non-Chinese) and students identifying as Mixed ethnicity (Figure 4). In PIR we observe a slight increase in Black students and students identifying as Mixed (Figure 5), though caution needs to be born in mind particularly with PIR as absolute numbers are low.

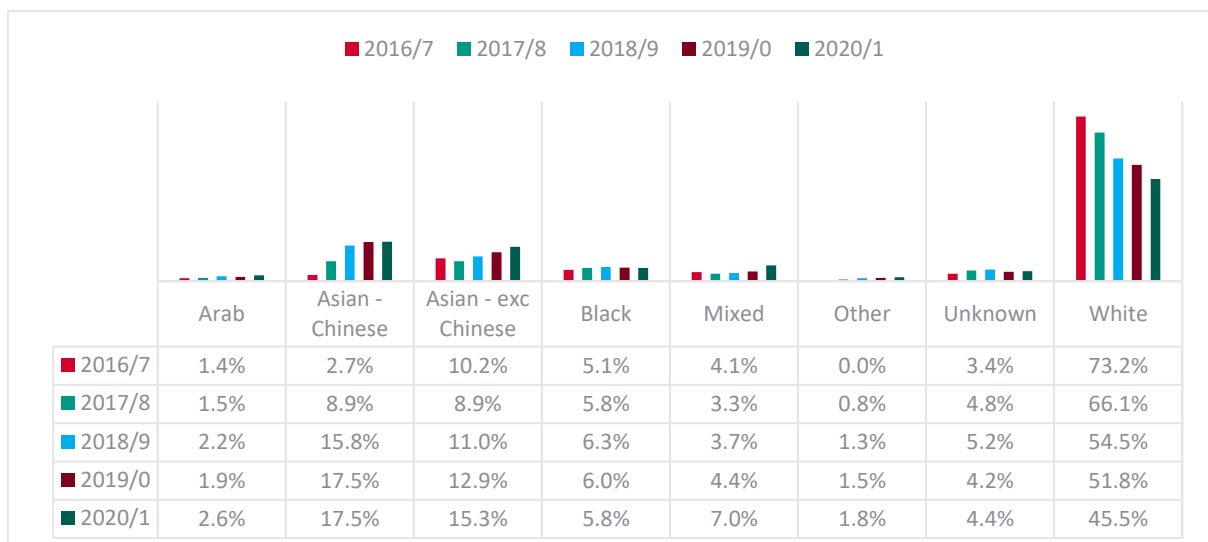


Figure 4: Economics: UG Demographics over time, sub-categories of ethnicity

SPEIR Race Equality Review

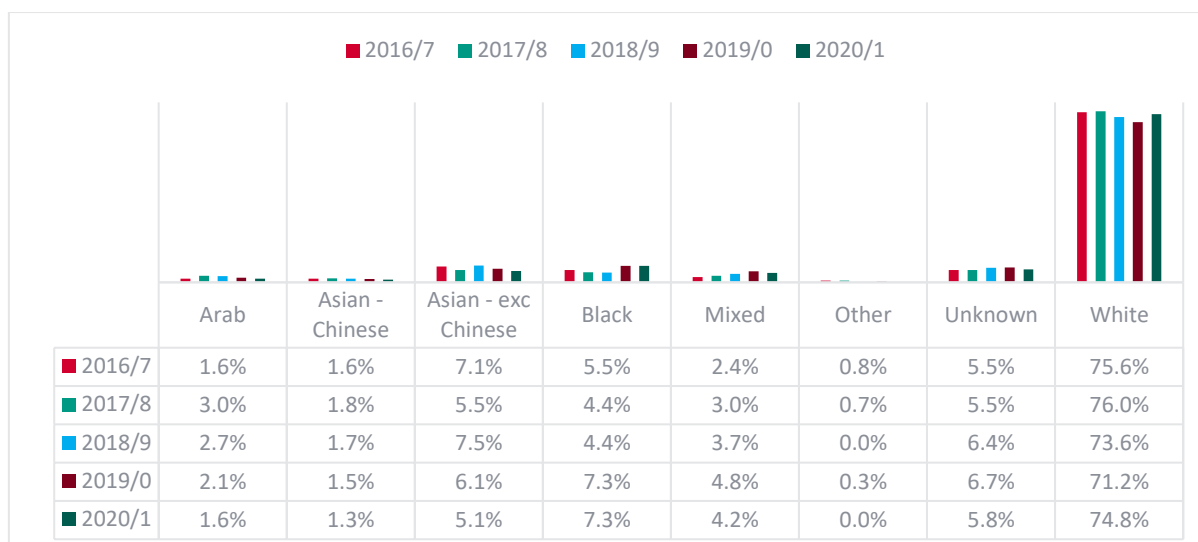


Figure 5: Politics & International Relations: UG demographics over time, sub-categories of ethnicity

How do these figures compare to the wider context?

The University’s RER states that between 2014-15 and 2019-20 the proportion of the UG population that was BAME rose from 24.1% to 33.1%. Thus, Economics has become more diverse at a faster rate than in the University as a whole, while rises in representation in Politics have been at a slower rate than in the University as a whole.

One might argue that a fairer comparison would be to compare with sector wide comparisons within discipline. Comparisons to the sector are possible within Economics, due to a 2020 report on ethnic diversity in UK Economics produced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) in conjunction with the Royal Economic Society (RES). This report states that over the period 2012/13 and 2018/19, 37.2% of UG Economics students in the UK were BAME (Advani et al. 2020), suggesting that the Economics Department is broadly in line with the existing sector levels of representation.² Unfortunately, for PIR it is not possible to compare student populations with the wider sector, since this data is not (freely) available.³

² The headline figure for UK-wide statistics for Economics itself masks considerable variation within the discipline across institutions: for example, BAME students are much less likely to study at Russell Group universities (Advani et al. 2020).

³ HESA data on the ethnicity of students is publicly available only at the broad level of ‘Social Sciences,’ which includes: Anthropology, Geography, Psychology, Politics, Social Policy and Administration, Social Work, and Sociology.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

PGT and PGT Representation

Numbers of students on PGT and PGR programmes in SPEIR are low (and have fallen considerably in recent years as a consequence of pandemic-related restrictions in international travel, Brexit, and other structural and market factors), and the students on these programmes are much more likely to be International students, who are more diverse (particularly in Economics), so that some caution needs to be taken in interpreting statistics on PGT and PGR.⁴

Nonetheless, we observed that the proportion of BAME students at PGT level was 72.3% and 43.1% in Economics and PIR, respectively. These proportions have been broadly stable over time (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

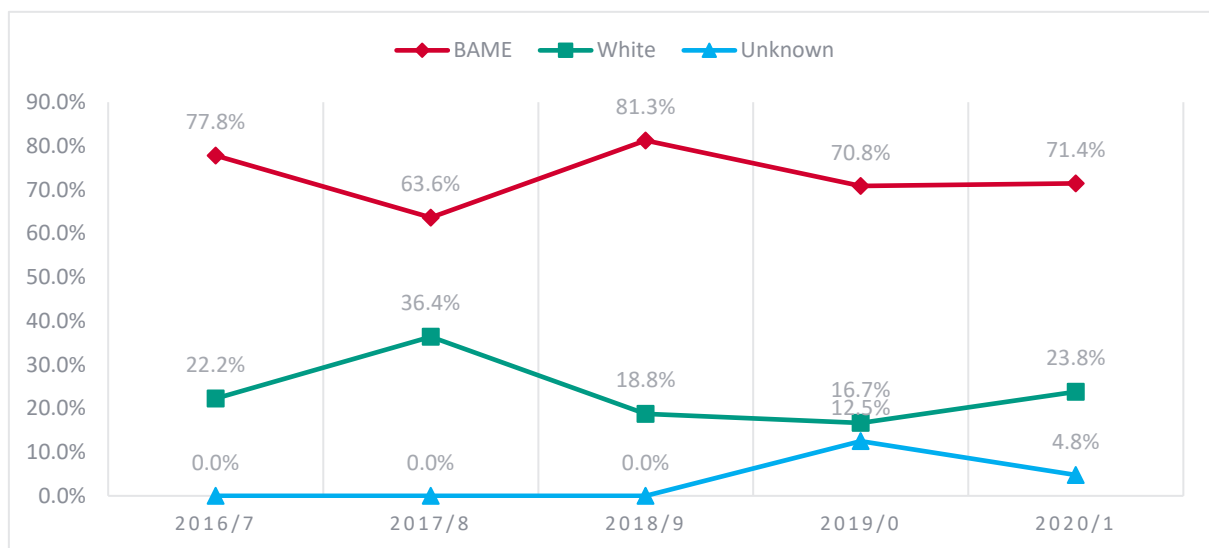


Figure 6: Economics: PGT demographics over time

⁴ Within SPEIR over the period, 48.6% (58.9%) of PGT (PGR) students were International. Within Economics the rates were 66.3% (77.8%) and within Politics they were 41.9% (40.0%).

SPEIR Race Equality Review

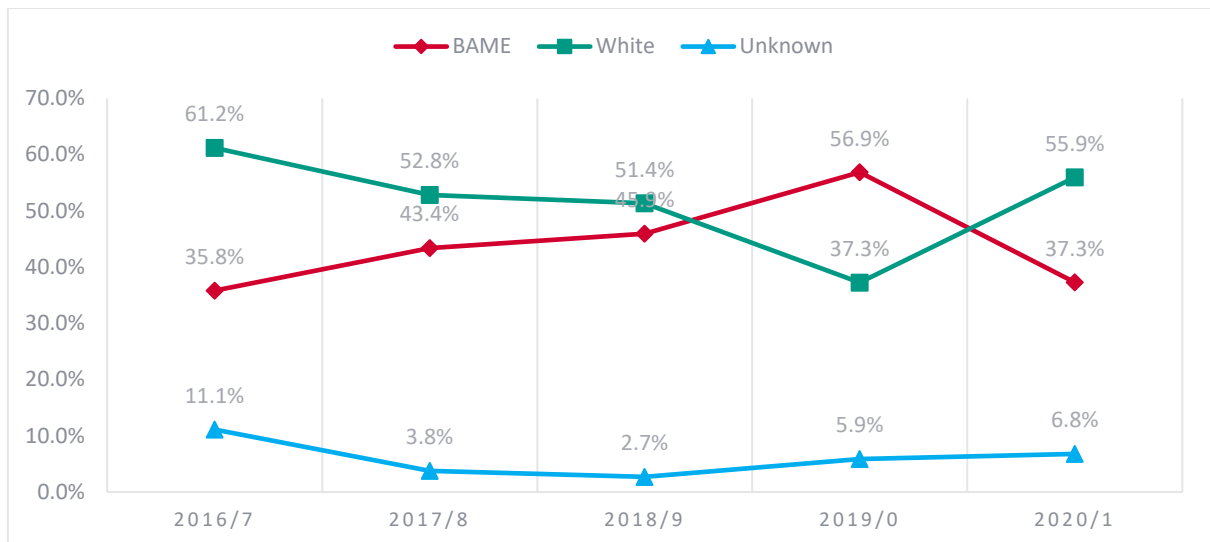


Figure 7: Politics & International Relations: PGT demographics over time

In PGR, the proportion of students who were BAME over the period under study was 73.3% in Economics and 31.0% in PIR. This has been relatively stable in Economics (Figure 8), but has fallen in PIR from 35.6% in 2016/17 to 16.0% in 2020/21, and this is most apparent in 2019/20 and 2020/21 (Figure 9).⁵

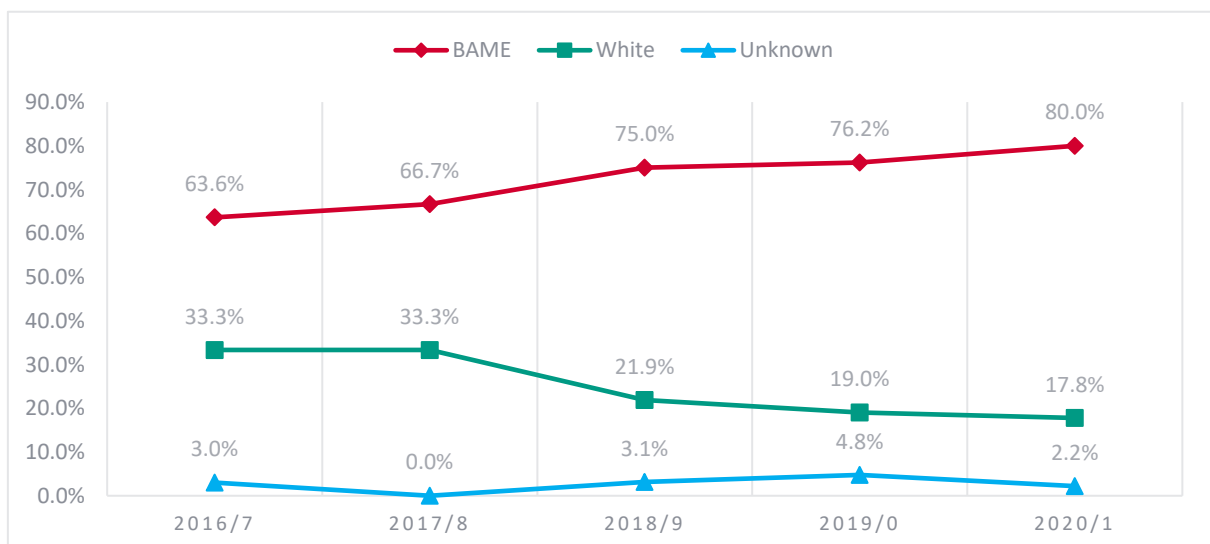


Figure 8: Economics: PGR demographics over time

⁵ Analysis by International vs. Home student classification suggests that International students were declining on PGR degrees in Politics over the whole period, but this was particularly apparent in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

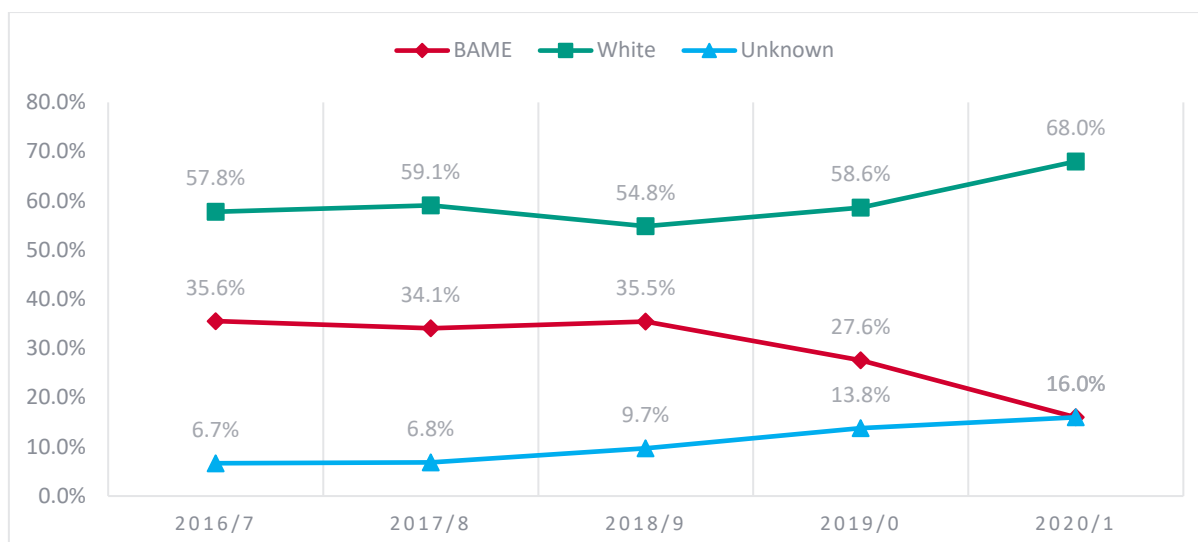


Figure 9: Politics & International Relations: PGR demographics over time

Comparisons with the University and discipline-specific sector

The University's RER noted that 38.2% and 55.4% of PGT and PGR was made up of BAME students, so that, as with the UG student body, Economics is relatively more diverse while Politics is relatively less diverse.

Across the UK, 33.5% of Economics PGT students are BAME, and 28.4% of PhD students are BAME (Advani et al. 2020). The Economics Department is therefore more diverse than the wider discipline in the UK (with the caveat that numbers, particularly for PGT, are small). This in part reflects the international profile of the PGR cohort: over the period, 77.8% of students were International students. In future, it might be worth examining the push and pull factors that have attracted or deterred BAME students, particularly at PGR level, to the Economics Department. Possible explanators could be, for example, the relatively diverse staff profile of the department (see Section 1.2), and/or the research strengths within the department, though further investigation is required to go beyond speculation.

As with UG representation, there is an absence of data on representation within PIR across the UK higher education sector. This lack of information unfortunately means that like-for-like comparisons within the discipline are not possible. However, the low rates of representation with the department are of concern.

Student recruitment

Data on student representation suggests BAME students are underrepresented in SPEIR. Responses to the student survey suggested a high degree of uncertainty regarding race and ethnicity in student applications to SPEIR: 52.8% of students were unsure whether SPEIR takes sufficient consideration of race and ethnicity in UCAS and postgraduate applications (Table 4).

	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NOT SURE
Do you feel SPEIR takes sufficient consideration of race and ethnicity in UCAS and postgraduate applications?	30.2	11.3	5.7	52.8

Table 4: Student survey: student recruitment (%)

We considered PSO data on offers and enrolments, broken down by ethnicity. We consider the offer rate gap: the difference between the rates at which White and non-White student applicants are offered a place at the university. Within both Economics and PIR, the offer rate gap is low (and in particular, lower than at the university level, which was reported as 12% in 2015), but it has worsened over time. In Economics, it was 5.7% in the 2017/18 cycle (2016/17 academic year) (5.8% excluding Chinese students), but has risen to 6.4% (7.1% excluding Chinese students) in the 2021/22 cycle (academic year 2020/21). In PIR, the offer rate gap was 2.8% in the 2017/18 cycle and has risen to 4.0% in the 2021/22 recruitment cycle. It would be pertinent to keep an eye on future admissions cycles to ensure that the offer rate gap remains low and/or improves. Both departments should also consider outreach activities that target BAME students, bearing in mind the limited ability they have to influence recruitment processes.

Action Point:

Actively seek to recruit a more diverse range of students, through better showcasing of BAME staff at Open and Visit Days, better showcasing of diverse curriculum at open and visit days, targeted outreach activities through the SDRA, and coordination with central Admissions about marketing and recruitment.

Teaching and Learning

The UG Awarding Gap

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1. We focus our attention on the awarding gap – the difference across groups in percentage of students achieving a ‘good degree’ (1st or 2:1).
2. Within Economics, the awarding gap is 4.1 percentage points (pp) (9.7pp when excluding Chinese students who are more likely to be NUIST students, a selective group of students who are not comparable to the wider UG Economics student body).
3. Within PIR, the awarding gap is 19.6pp.
4. Considering just Home students, the awarding gaps for Economics and PIR are 10.62pp and 14.56pp, respectively.
5. Further investigation is necessary to determine underlying issues that drive the large awarding gaps observed within SPEIR.

To investigate data on student attainment, data on undergraduate attainment and progression was obtained from PSO. Unfortunately, small absolute numbers meant that we were unable to investigate differences in progression across White and BAME students. We therefore focus our attention on the awarding gap – the difference in percentage of groups achieving a “good degree” (1st or 2:1). On average, across the University, the awarding gap was in the RER report was listed as 8.4pp.

Across SPEIR as a whole, the awarding gap over the period was 5.4pp. However, an aggregate statistic is not that informative for two reasons: it masks differences across departments within the School, and it does not account for the fact that a (fluctuating) proportion of Chinese students in the Department of Economics are NUIST students, of whom those who transfer to Reading tend to be a selective sample of high-achieving students who are not comparable to the distribution of the wider student body.

Figure 10 shows the percentage of students awarded a first or 2:1 for Economics (all BAME students, and BAME excluding Chinese) and PIR, and Figure 11 shows the corresponding awarding gaps. In Economics, the awarding gap comparing White vs. all BAME students is 4.1pp; when removing Chinese students, the awarding gap is 9.7pp. This is relatively

SPEIR Race Equality Review

worse than the University average. For PIR, the awarding gap was 19.6pp, which is also worse than the University average.

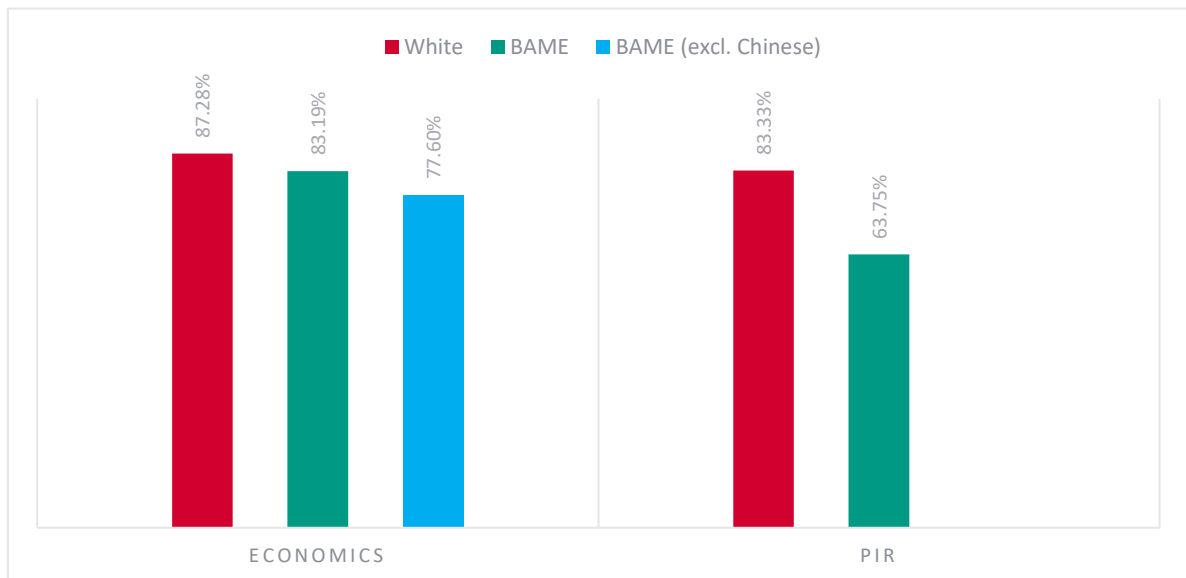


Figure 10: All students: The percentage of students achieving a First or 2:1

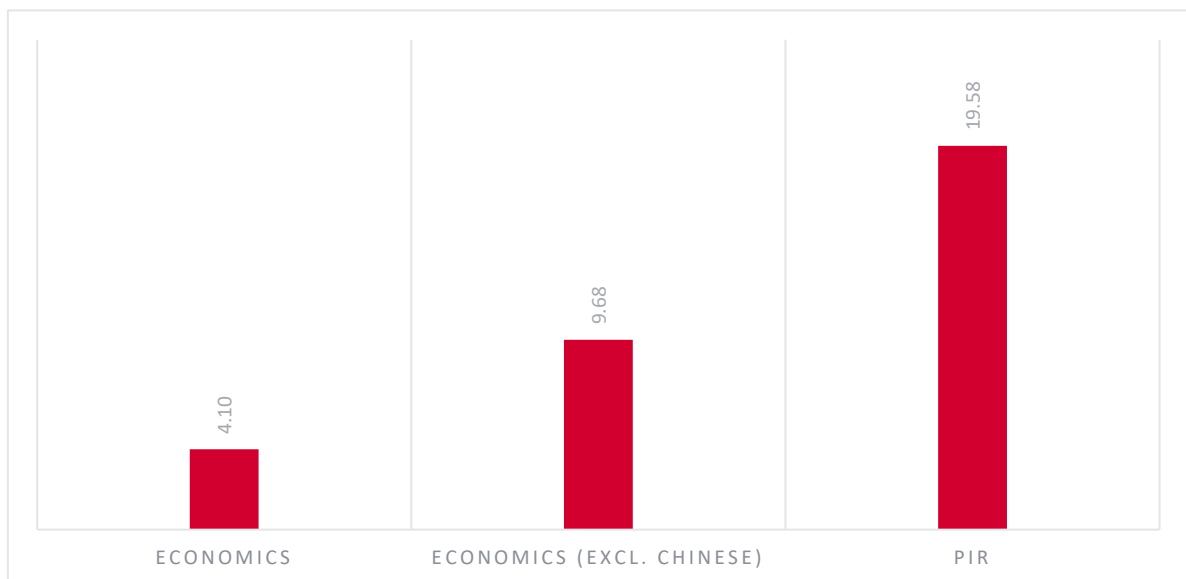


Figure 11: All students: The Awarding Gap

To investigate potential drivers of the awarding gap, we also investigated the awarding gap amongst just Home White vs. BAME students, to see if there was any evidence the awarding gap was driven by BAME students being concentrated amongst International

SPEIR Race Equality Review

students.⁶ The exclusion of International students also removes NUIST students from the analysis while retaining Chinese Home students.

We see that, when considering the awarding gap amongst Home students, it is 10.62pp and 14.56pp percentage points for the Departments of Economics and PIR respectively (Figure 12). Thus, the awarding gap persists when considering Home students only (and worsens for Economics).

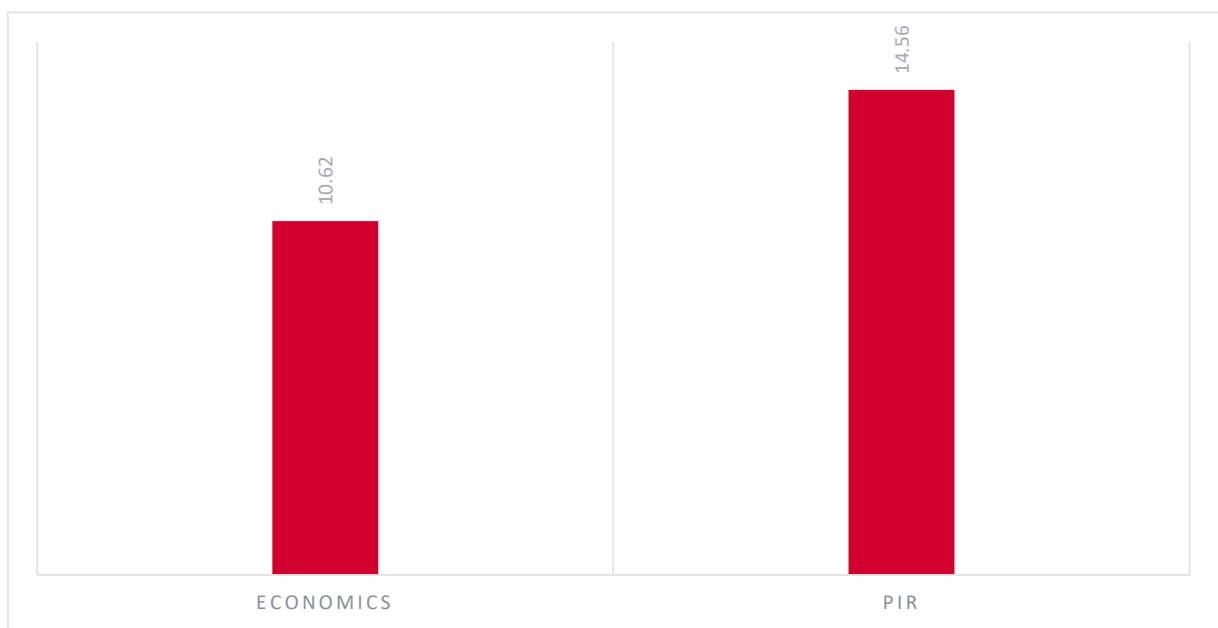


Figure 12: Home students: The Awarding Gap

Clearly, further investigation of factors driving the awarding gap are needed, and the data team noted that gaps in overall degree award is a crude measure which does not tell us much about underlying drivers of the gap. Indeed, a number of staff members in the staff survey highlighted the importance of getting a better understanding of student backgrounds and experiences. One noted the importance of gathering ‘good quality information about awarding gaps and in particular in relation to factors other than race directly – like being the first in family to attend UK higher education, levels of socio-economic deprivation, being an overseas student, having done a Foundation year or commuting to campus rather than living in Reading.’ Another concurred, noting that ‘we need to understand if there are racial differences in things like performance, graduate outcomes, etc. [and] the drivers which may not be down to discrimination but other

⁶ For example, one of the issues raised by a member of the student focus group was that International students are put at a disadvantage as they do not know the English educational system as well, and in some cases are disadvantaged due to the English language not being their first language.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

underlying factors which we can then address.’ Staff in the School are currently conducting research on this.

Additional analysis of gaps in awarding on assignments, in particular by assignment types, could be useful in identifying if there are particular areas in which BAME students are awarded marks more poorly. Future analysis will be performed, to consider whether awarding gaps are larger in particular types of assessment.

Action Point:

Gather additional data from RISIS to facilitate an investigation of whether the awarding gap differs for different types of assignment. Coordinate with researchers examining drivers of the awarding gap at university level.

Teaching and race

66.6% of staff report (sometimes) incorporating race and racial issues into lectures in discussions. Far fewer (33.4%) report (sometimes) designing module reading lists with racial balance and representation where possible or appropriate. This may reflect what staff see as both the need to teach ‘foundational’ texts in their fields, which tend to be nondiverse, and/or the use of textbooks, particularly in Economics.

Staff expressed mixed feelings on reviewing the curriculum to make it more diverse: 46.7% think this is a good idea, 20% do not, and 33.3% are not sure. However, the detailed free text responses here suggested not ambivalence by staff, but instead a need for further discussions within the School about what decolonizing the curriculum is, how this differs from diversifying reading lists, and how these should be done (particularly bearing in mind that the University is eager to see action in this area).

Several staff members urged that issues of race be incorporated into curriculum design and modules from Part 1 and in core modules. One respondent noted that teaching of core subjects tends to ‘make Euro-centric assumptions [and] use Euro-centric institutions as a yardstick,’ and that ‘any modules that talk about race are the optional 3rd year modules’ that then necessarily use Euro-centric standards as a point of comparison. They added that usually ‘any consideration of race/decolonisation is a “periphery” endeavour.’ Another respondent reported discussing decolonizing the curriculum with students in Politics, who had likewise remarked that non-Western politics/authors were usually relegated to Part 3 optional modules and had suggested that making this ‘a part of core modules, early on in the degree programme, would send a stronger message of inclusion and diversity.’ Other respondents concurred, with one noting that both Departments and their module

SPEIR Race Equality Review

conveners should be encouraged ‘to diversify the topics, modules and scholarship they teach,’ and another stressing that ‘non-white, non-western students should feel that the creators of knowledge are people that look like them.’

At the same time, other respondents expressed concern about academic freedom and independence and urged a careful approach to decolonizing the curriculum. One cautioned against ‘reduc[ing] diversity to the identity of the authors of readings,’ and another warned against ‘compromis[ing] academic freedom.’ Another suggested that decolonizing should be undertaken but ‘carefully, and with appropriate regard to academic expertise, freedom and integrity.’

Many also had suggestions about actions that could be taken and stressed the importance of asking for help with this process. One proposed that using ‘empirical examples that aren’t just focused on [the] UK and US’ would be a simple step module conveners could easily take across both Departments and in both core and optional modules. Another suggested asking module conveners to document how their modules discuss issues of race or how diverse views and authors have been incorporated in their readings, thus using self-reflection to help enhance diversity, and another suggested encouraging staff ‘to incorporate genuine critical thinking in their teaching on political and economic issues, meaning a fundamental questioning of why things are the way they are, and how these things could or should change..., [which] will necessarily include, in a very general way, discussion of various kinds of injustices, including racial injustices.’ Others recommended peer support for the process, including sharing (best) practices through group discussions about module content, seeking expert input, looking at what other HE institutions have done, involving students in the process, and using curriculum materials from the University and organizations like the Royal Economic Society and Economics Network.

Responses to the student survey suggested that there is much interest amongst students in having a curriculum that not only adds ethnic minority viewpoints, but also exhibits a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. When considering the curriculum, including modules offered, topics covered and reading lists, 46.2% of survey respondents believed that SPEIR should review the curriculum to make it diverse with regards to race and ethnicity, while 34% were unsure and 19.8% disagreed. When asked how this should be achieved, suggestions included having more readings, topics and modules on race and racism and incorporating more diverse modules, material and readings from non-British, non-Eurocentric and non-Western sources. One suggestion amongst the survey responses was to expand political classics modules to include race and ethnicity in the ancient world.

ACTION:

Engage in School- or Department-wide discussions about what decolonizing the curriculum is, how it differs from diversifying reading lists, and what pedagogical value it can bring to teaching and student experience. Consider inviting external experts from the D&I Dean's office or outside the University to provide input and show how staff can utilize the University's recently published Decolonising the Curriculum resources. Map out how other universities have undertaken decolonizing and diversifying activities. Seek student input (perhaps through mid-term evaluation forms) on how to do this. Make guidance and tools about how to decolonize the curriculum and/or diversity reading lists without losing academic independence available to staff. Consider in particular changes that can be made in Part 1 core modules.

Culture

Results of the staff RER survey provide mixed results about the degree to which staff engage with issues of racial (in)equality in the School and in their teaching. While no results suggest that the School has a serious problem of racism or discrimination, many questions suggested a degree of ambivalence on the part of many staff, with a majority of questions returning a large percentage of 'Don't know,' 'Can't remember,' or 'N/A' results. This suggests that either staff have not thought about some of these issues, don't feel they apply to them, or are aware of the differences between the two Departments and therefore don't feel they can speak generally about the School, and it highlights the complexity of these issues.⁷ On the other hand, in the free text questions, many staff wrote thoughtful and detailed responses, suggesting that they are not disengaged on issues of race and ethnicity and suggested a willingness to learn more. In this regard, awareness-raising about BAME experiences and views should underpin the actions that emerge from this report.

Experiences of Racial (In)Equality in SPEIR

20% of SPEIR staff think that race or ethnic inequality is a problem within SPEIR, while 46.7% do not and 33.3% are either undecided or don't know. The numbers of respondents who declared they are from an ethnic minority background is too low to determine whether it is primarily BAME staff who feel that race or ethnic inequality is a problem. The high level of undecided respondents may, as noted, indicate that non-BAME staff don't feel inequality affects them so feel unable to comment. The School fared better on racial or ethnic discrimination, where 70% feel this is not a problem.

Responses to the student survey are broadly in agreement with those of the staff survey. When asked whether racial or ethnic inequality is a problem within SPEIR, 24% of Black and ethnic minority students agreed or strongly agreed, while 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas 15% of White students agreed or strongly agreed, while 45% strongly disagreed. Meanwhile, when asked whether racial or ethnic discrimination is a problem within SPEIR, 24% of Black and ethnic minority students agreed or strongly agreed, while 41% disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas 10% of White students agreed or strongly agreed, while 52% strongly disagreed. Overall therefore, while a higher proportion of respondents including BAME students disagree that there are racial or ethnic problems in SPEIR, BAME students agree more than White students. In response to questions regarding their level of comfort raising issues of race with friends, staff, other students in

⁷ To some extent, the high rate of N/A responses is unsurprising, given the low number of BAME staff in SPEIR and that just 4 members of BAME staff filled out the survey. Non-BAME staff may feel unable to comment on or not directly affected by racial (in)equality. In addition, likely due to the small size of the school overall and concerns about being identified, most respondents also preferred not to say which department they were in, how long they've worked in the school, their rank, and other demographic information.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

class, and students in societies, all responses showed over 50% of respondents felt comfortable in doing so.

The majority of staff (60%) felt the School does well making it clear that unsupportive behaviour and images are not acceptable. However, there is again a large degree of ambivalence here, with 30% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and free text comments reiterated the need for 'clear and consistent messaging regarding expected language and behaviours.' Similarly, 68.9% of students agreed that the School makes clear unsupportive language, behaviour and images are not acceptable, with 23.6% being unsure, or neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Just 20% of staff feel that ethnic/racial diversity in SPEIR impacts on their sense of belonging. A similar proportion of students (20.8%) responded in the same way. No staff reported having witnessed racism or related forms of discrimination among staff in the School. At the same time, 16.7% of staff report having felt uncomfortable because of their race or ethnicity or having experienced racism or discrimination within the School. This included use of discriminatory language in 60% of cases, assumption of stereotypes in all of them, and unfair allocation of work based upon race or ethnicity in a single case. Of these cases, only one was reported. The individual reported that action was taken but the situation was not resolved to their satisfaction. Only one staff member reported not being treated equally by colleagues and students, with another 13.3% reporting sometimes not being treated equally. 66.7% felt they are always treated equally by colleagues and students.

Amongst students, 10.38% report having felt uncomfortable because of their race or ethnicity or having experienced racism or discrimination within the school. Amongst these, 45.5% reported that the incidents involved use of discriminatory language and/or assumptions of racial stereotypes. Free text comments from students included, 'the constant mispronunciation of my name makes me uncomfortable, especially when I tell individuals the correct way to pronounce it' and 'It does not make anyone feel good when performance of a student is polluted by the racial biasness.'

Overall, results from the student and staff surveys suggest that, similarly to the findings in the University's RER, racial inequality manifests primarily as microaggressions rather than overt racism among staff within the School.

By contrast to the findings about discrimination and racism among staff, five respondents reported witnessing racism among students in the School. This involved use of discriminatory language, exclusion from activities, assumption of stereotypes, and unfair

SPEIR Race Equality Review

allocation of work. Four respondents reported students coming to them with complaints about racial or ethnic discrimination. However, of these, only two stated that they knew how to deal with the complaint, and only one that the incident was dealt with appropriately and promptly.

A solution frequently recommended by students in both the focus group and the student surveys is to have a stronger system of support within the SPEIR department, perhaps with a more proactive academic tutor system, and that BAME students need to be made more aware of where to receive help and support. In the survey, 69.8% of respondents said that there should also be a designated member of staff within the department with whom to raise issues of racial inequality and discrimination. However, a concern was raised by a student in the survey that appointing a designated member of staff may lead to students to feel unable to raise issues of race with other members of staff, so a more proactive tutor system will be necessary alongside this to encourage students to raise issues with other members of staff when needed.⁸

ACTION:

Ensure that all staff know how to handle student complaints appropriately through regular advertising and dissemination of this information and inclusion on the WIDE website.

ACTION:

Regularly remind students of existing avenues of support such as the 'Who to Ask for What' document on the WIDE website. Update the 'Who to Ask for What' document to include named individuals and print/post copies in the School.

ACTION:

Discuss the possibility of appointing a BAME focal point for students and the ways in which a more proactive academic tutor system could support BAME students.

though in absolute terms survey results reveal small numbers of incidents (and the survey did not capture the time frame within which they took place), any case of racial discrimination is unacceptable, and it is important to ensure that messaging surrounding

⁸ One issue raised in the focus groups was the need for support in societies; however this is likely an issue for RUSU rather than SPEIR, since issues within societies are unlikely to be addressed by staff within SPEIR.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

use of discriminatory language and racial stereotypes is reiterated on a regular basis, both to staff and students and that staff are encouraged to review teaching materials to ensure that these are removed or addressed.

ACTION:

Raise awareness about microaggressions and ways to avoid them, including through the WIDE website and staff communication. Regular reminders about the zero tolerance policy for use of discriminatory language and racial stereotypes and about the need to review teaching materials in this regard should be made to staff and students.

Celebrating Diversity

One area of weakness was in staff perceptions of whether the School does enough to recognize and celebrate the diversity of ethnicities and cultures of its staff and students, where only 26.6% feel that this is adequately done and 46.7% do not. In the student survey, more students generally agreed or strongly agreed that SPEIR recognises and celebrates diversity (53.7%) than those that disagreed or strongly disagreed (12.5%). However, when talking about specific ways of celebrating diversity, students said that improvements need to be made. In the focus group and comments within the survey, several solutions were put forward to further celebrate diversity.

One student commented that 'having more events which are specifically focused on more diverse topics may encourage for more diverse attendance overall.' This included having more diverse individuals and speakers in social activities within SPEIR. Another solution, related to the action point above, was to raise awareness of BAME-related events occurring outside of the School.⁹ A further solution was to make social media networks more inclusive and to make physical changes to the environment within the School, such as putting art from around the world in classrooms or hallways, as a way of acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of students and staff.

Undertaking activities such as events would require funds, but one staff respondent noted that 'funds to put on cultural events or talks could be easily done.' Another staff respondent suggested that the WIDE website could 'be a platform where we can showcase our BAME colleagues and highlight our continuous work for the BAME society within our School.' Another recommended that the School should have 'more events celebrating our different

⁹ For example, a student in the focus group commented that during the Black Lives Matter protests, they were aware of only one email sent by the department to students about the protests that included information about resources for BAME students.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

cultures,' adding that 'some racial/ethnic backgrounds aren't "visible"' and so a range of cultures should be addressed.

While many of these actions could easily be taken, it is important to bear in mind that there is limited foot traffic through the School, and both student and staff attendance at optional events has historically been low. Staff, with limited time, may be reluctant to dedicate efforts to this, so it is advisable to start with a limited number of events and gauge uptake and interest.

ACTION:

Allocate funding to undertake events, displays, and activities to celebrate diversity within the School, including using the WIDE website; this could include events for, for example, Black History Month. Consult and work together with D&I Committee Student Reps about how best to do this in ways that reach students and take measures to ensure that this does not unduly burden BAME staff. Ensure that staff time to undertake such activities is workloaded and recognized.

Communication and Training

The survey revealed that staff feel more comfortable raising issues of race or racial and ethnic inequality with each other than with students (56.7% vs. 30%). Half of respondents felt that SPEIR offers the right channels for doing so, while half responded 'unsure.' The latter group may indicate a level of general ambivalence – that is, staff may simply feel that this is not something they need to, want to, or should raise.

Either way, the relative discomfort that many staff feel in discussing race with students may indicate concern about reactions they may encounter or about a lack of knowledge of the experiences and views of students. Giving staff the confidence to raise these issues with students, where appropriate, or answer student questions about race is thus an important action.

Communication more broadly appears to be an issue. In line with the findings about reporting incidents of discrimination or racism, 33.3% of respondents reported that SPEIR has not made its policies around racial equality clear. In addition, a high number (53.5%) responded N/A or don't know regarding whether such policies are neutrally and consistently implemented in the school.

SPEIR Race Equality Review

Students seemed unsure about communication of race and racial issues, with 34% answering 'don't know' about whether SPEIR raised issues of race and racial issues in emails and 13.2% stating they neither agreed nor disagreed. Just 10.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 42.4% agreed or strongly agreed. This may be partly due to student's not regularly reading emails due to an overload of communication from the University.

ACTION:

Better advertise policies surrounding race and ethnicity to staff and students, including a zero tolerance of racism and discrimination, through regular reminders and inclusion on the WIDE webpages.

Only 50% of staff reported having taken EDI training, with again a large percentage not knowing or not remembering (26.7%). Slightly more staff reported having taken unconscious bias training, but still 20% reporting not knowing or not remembering. These results suggest that not only do some gaps exist in the provision of training, but also that the training is not particularly useful, memorable, or stimulating. Staff may complete some of these trainings as a 'tick box' exercise, rather than engaging with the substance, and different ways of providing training to staff should be considered. One respondent noted that there should be 'more training in equality issues for staff – currently you do it when you first arrive at Reading and then never again.'

ACTION:

Renew trainings periodically and/or consult with People Development and the University D&I team about different formats and types of training that may be more effective and useful, such as periodic School-wide discussions on these topics.

Students reported a lack of understanding and awareness of racial issues among students. One solution put forward is to provide students with training, similar to that received by staff within SPEIR; 73.6% of students in the student survey said that students should receive training on understanding unconscious bias, while 65% said that training should be provided about equality and diversity.

Caution needs to be taken in how such training, if undertaken, is framed to students, as some resistance to initiatives was apparent in the survey. In the student survey, a small group of students were opposed to initiatives such as these and considered them to be a form of 'reverse racism.' This included both BAME and White students. An example of this issue is illustrated by a comment from a White student that 'SPEIR should drop any consideration of "unconscious bias training" for students as that sounds probably

SPEIR Race Equality Review

alienating, essentially accusing students of subconscious racism,' and a Black student commenting, 'stop focusing on race so much... we should be measured by our merits, not our skin colour.' While it is necessary to make raising awareness a core part of what we do, measures intended to achieve this goal will need to be incremental to prevent students from feeling alienated. In this case, any unconscious bias training considered could be incorporated into relevant Part 1 models to make it an integrated part of how the SPEIR department prepares students for university. At the same time, we should actively consider the possibility of backlash against our race equality efforts and seek guidance on how to address this.

Action Point:

Seek guidance from D&I Dean on appropriate unconscious bias training for students, if any and incorporate this alongside awareness of diversity and inclusion issues into academic skills training (Part 1), and/or hold regular discussions with students to raise awareness of these topics. Seek guidance from D&I Dean on how to manage backlash against diversity initiatives.

Intersectionality

While the RER survey did not explicitly seek views on other aspects of diversity or on intersectionality, some staff stressed the importance of avoiding silos in the School's approach to diversity. One cautioned against 'concentrat[ing] narrowly on the issue of race, separately from the ongoing Athena SWAN project, and separately from any other issues of just allocation of resources among staff and students, and from more general questions we are always bound to be asking about whether we are providing our students with the right kind of education.' Another noted that 'gender and to a lesser extent issue[s] of sexuality have taken over the discourse,' partly due to the Athena SWAN focus, but emphasized that 'there needs to be space created to address issues of ethnicity.' Such comments suggest that it is important to recognize, discuss, and address these issues both individually as well as together.

Action Plan

The below list of action points summarizes those identified in the previous sections. Where action points are similar or related, they have been combined into a single point to facilitate implementation and monitoring and to ensure clarity in what staff are expected to do.

The SPEIR Diversity & Inclusion Committee, in conjunction with the School Management Board, will review progress on these action points in three years – i.e. at the end of academic year 2025-26. Where actions are completed before that, they will be renewed or updated earlier. Finally, these action points will be undertaken where possible in conjunction and coordination with the School's Athena SWAN Action Plan, which also runs until 2026, to ensure an intersectional approach to D&I issues more generally.

1. Continue efforts to attract a diverse range of applicants for staff posts, taking into consideration the limited freedom of action of the School in this regard. This may include wording in advertisements, active recruitment among staff networks, and consulting with other departments and HR about best practice.
2. Ensure greater diversity among invited speakers to department seminars, workshops, and other events, with a target of 15% BAME invited speakers.
3. Extend the School's Athena SWAN pledge to advertise all School and Department leadership roles. Provide opportunities for more staff members to sit on recruitment and appointment panels as appropriate and enhance transparency of selection process for panel membership by reporting on this in School communications. Consider requiring refresher trainings on unconscious bias for staff serving on recruitment panels.
4. Actively seek to recruit a more diverse range of students, through better showcasing of BAME staff at Open and Visit Days, better showcasing of diverse curriculum at open and visit days, targeted outreach activities through the SDRA, and coordination with central Admissions about marketing and recruitment.
5. Gather additional data from RISIS to facilitate an investigation of whether the awarding gap differs for different types of assignment. Coordinate with researchers examining drivers of the awarding gap at university level.
6. Engage in School- or Department-wide discussions about what decolonizing the curriculum is, how it differs from diversifying reading lists, and what pedagogical value it can bring to teaching and student experience. Consider inviting external experts from the D&I Dean's office or outside the University to provide input and show how staff can utilize the University's recently published Decolonising the Curriculum resources. Map out how other universities have undertaken decolonizing and diversifying activities. Seek student input (perhaps through mid-

SPEIR Race Equality Review

term evaluation forms) on how to do this. Make guidance and tools about how to decolonize the curriculum and/or diversity reading lists without losing academic independence available to staff. Consider in particular changes that can be made in Part 1 core modules.

7. Better advertise policies surrounding race and ethnicity to staff and students, including a zero tolerance of racism and discrimination; ensure that all staff know how to handle student complaints appropriately; and regularly remind students of existing avenues of support and the 'Who to Ask for What' document (updated to include named individuals), through periodic dissemination, inclusion on the WIDE website, printed/posted copies in the School, and reminders delivered during events and in student communications.
8. Discuss the possibility of appointing a BAME focal point for students and the ways in which a more proactive academic tutor system could support BAME students.
9. Raise awareness about microaggressions and ways to avoid them, including through the WIDE website and staff communication. Regular reminders about the zero-tolerance policy for use of discriminatory language and racial stereotypes and about the need to review teaching materials in this regard should be made to staff and students.
10. Allocate funding to undertake events, displays, and activities to celebrate diversity within the School, including using the WIDE website; this could include events for, for example, Black History Month. Consult and work together with D&I Committee Student Reps about how best to do this in ways that reach students and take measures to ensure that this does not unduly burden BAME staff. Ensure that staff time to undertake such activities is workloaded and recognized.
11. Renew trainings periodically and/or consult with People Development and the University D&I team about different formats and types of training that may be more effective and useful, such as periodic School-wide discussions on these topics.
12. Seek guidance from D&I Dean on appropriate unconscious bias training for students if any and incorporate this alongside awareness of diversity and inclusion issues into academic skills training (Part 1), and/or hold regular discussions with students to raise awareness of these topics. Seek guidance from D&I Dean on how to manage backlash against diversity initiatives.

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