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new vistas

Policy, Practice and Scholarship in Higher Education

New Vistas | Policy, Practice and Scholarship in Higher Education

Editor's Note

Volume 10 | Issue 1 | ***Inequality***

This latest update edition of *New Vistas* focuses on inequality: one of the abiding challenges that higher education and the world in which it sits faces in the early twenty first century. Inequality within higher education takes a range of forms and affects all who work in academia. The UK is one of the most economically unequal of the richer countries in the world and successive governments have had little success in shifting the dial on this issue. UWL is proud to be one of the most diverse universities in the country and was recently named the University of the Year for Social Inclusion. Being a diverse institution though does not mean just striving to provide opportunities to enter and succeed for students/staff from all backgrounds. It comes with a responsibility to focus through avenues such as new vistas on inequality - both within and outside the walls of the university.

The 'Inequality Edition' of *New Vistas* begins with an article from **Tatsi** and **Raybould** looking at what university is doing via it's Access and Participation Plan (APP) to address inequalities in entry, attainment and progression between different groups. As the university prepares to submit a new APP to the Office for Students to take effect from 2026-27 onwards this article gives some important insights into the challenges the university is facing and how it plans to tackle them.

After the Tatsi and Raybould article, the focus turns to different aspects of the inequality within higher education starting with Professor of Literature and Film at London School of Film, Media & Design, **Jeremy Strong** interviews Senior Lecturer in Radio & Sound Design, **Sue Bowerman**. Jeremy speaks to Sue about her career in radio and broadcasting as well as teaching people how to listen. Sue also talks about how being diagnosed with Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has shaped her experiences as a learner and a teacher. The next article by **Caroline Lafarge**, **Raffaella Milani** and **Siobhan Lynam** is the first of two article to focus on inequalities related to race and ethnic background. Looking the experiences of minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers in British Higher Education (HE) institutions the article draws on interviews with postgraduate researchers and points to the layers of discrimination and disempowerment the students have had to contend with in pursuing their studies. It illustrates the distance that the higher education system has to travel in order to become a truly inclusive space for students from all ethnic backgrounds.

The next article sees **Jeremy Strong** again in interview mode, this time speaking to PhD candidate **Natasha Hendry** about her work on music education in the UK. As with the previous article she describes some of the challenges associated with whiteness and inclusivity. Her work looks at the experience of black pupils in the content of music education in the UK and she argues for an approach built on 'racial literacy' to address the culture of whiteness in music education.

The final two chapters take a wider view of the inequality question. The penultimate contribution comes from **Frances Sit** who is the Policy and Communications Officer at National Education Opportunities Network (NEON). Based at the University of West London, NEON is the professional

Continued ›

Misson Statement

New Vistas **is published by the University of West London (UWL) and provides a forum to disseminate research, commentary, and scholarly work that engages with the complex agenda of higher education in its local, national and global context.**

Published for a broad (academic, international and professional) audience, the journal will feature research and scholarly analysis on higher education policy; current issues in higher education; higher education pedagogy; professional practice; the relation of higher education to work and the economy; and discipline-specific research.

We welcome thought-provoking scholarly contributions from external and internal authors, with the explicit intention to give a voice to early-career researchers and scholars.

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This diverse collection of articles takes a critical look at both what higher education and policymakers are doing to try and reduce different aspects of inequality. A short collection such as this cannot look at the myriad of ways in which inequality manifests itself and future editions of New Vistas will pick up the baton...

organisation for those working on access and participation in higher education in the UK. This article offers a comprehensive review of the available evidence where global inequalities in higher education are concerned. Examining as previous authors in this edition have done, intersectionality between different identities Frances shows that inequality in who participates in higher education is pervasive across the world and the responses of policymakers to these inequalities uneven.

The final contribution to this edition of *New Vistas* steps away from higher education and education altogether to consider regional dimensions of inequality. **Marc Le Chevallier** is the Research and Policy Officer at the Centre for Inequality and Levelling Up (CIELUP) here at University of West London. He focuses on the issue of 'pride of place' and whether bolstering it can help areas that have suffered from economic decline in recent decades in the UK. Looking at the difficulties in defining the term, Marc argues though that giving agency back to places is crucial if they are to navigate a way through the challenges of the early 21st century.

This diverse collection of articles takes a critical look at both what higher education and policymakers are doing to try and reduce different aspects of inequality. A short collection such as this cannot look at the myriad of ways in which inequality manifests itself and future editions of *New Vistas* will pick up the baton and probe in detail to how the divisions in society shape the lives of us all and they can be overcome. But the Inequality Edition of *New Vistas* does ask some challenging questions that we cannot ignore.

Professor Graeme Atherton
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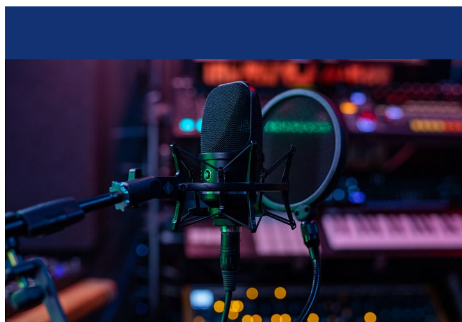

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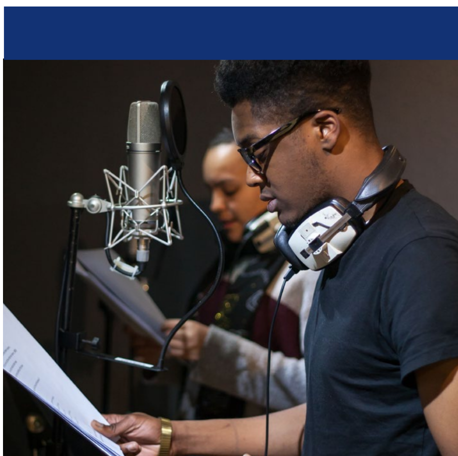

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Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Bridging gaps in Access and Participation

The HE sector in England is trying to address gaps and risks around the equality of opportunity between certain groups of students, and to widen access and participation through strategies and policies

Abstract:

There is growing recognition of the importance of equity/equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in higher education (HE). Sector-wide there are significant gaps between certain groups of students due to inequalities, and in ome cases, these are growing year on year. To tackle these challenges, the HE sector in England is trying to embrace EDI and to widen access and participation through Access and Participation Plans (APPs). This article outlines how one university in England, the University of West London, uses its APP to create opportunities to inspire potential and current students to achieve their goals regardless of their background, identity, and/or lived experiences by ensuring cultural harmony across the student lifecycle where equality and equity co-exists. Through developing its APP in partnership with students, known as Equality Champions, the university seeks assure a diversity of thoughts and voice foster a sense of belonging, promote collaboration and innovation and enhance diverse learning and education.

Over the last few decades there has been a growing recognition of the importance of equity/equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the context of higher education (HE) (Ainscow 2020; Moreu, Isenberg and Brauer 2021; Pickering 2021; Smith 2014; Wang 2023; Wolbring and Lillywhite 2021; Zhao et al. 2024). A growing body of research has identified several factors as barriers in ensuring a greater equality in HE for students coming from underrepresented backgrounds[1]. Such barriers, like financial pressures, loneliness, mental health and wellbeing issues, low prior attainment of students, insufficient advice and support across the student lifecycleand the prevalence of sexual and racial harassment on campus have affected certain groups of students in accessing and succeeding in HE, as well as progressing to employment or further study (Banerjee 2016; McCabe, Keast, and Kaya 2022; Newman-Ford, Lioyod and Thomas 2009; Poortvliet 2024). Students affected include but are not limited to students from a minoritised ethnic background[2], students with low socio-economic status and students with disabilities.

The evidence shows clearly the challenges in terms of access and outcomes in HE for students from underrepresented groups (Bolton and Lewis 2023). For instance, students from a minoritised ethnic background are less likely to achieve a good degree and have lower employment rates in comparison to students from a White background. Nationally, the ethnicity degree awarding gap (EDAG) is 11%, with a significantly higher gap between Black and White graduates. In academic year 2021/22, only 63% of graduates from a Black background achieved a good degree in comparison to 83% of graduates from a White background (Office for Students 2023). The 20% EDAG between Black and White graduates provides further evidence that inequalities exist in the learning opportunities students from a Black background receive during their studies, which consequently affects their future career.

The HE sector in England is, therefore, trying to address gaps and risks around the equality of opportunity between certain groups of students, and to widen access and participation through strategies and policies. A major policy initiative is the requirement on HE providers to produce and submit Access and Participation Plans (APPs) should they want to charge above the basic tuition fee cap. In these plans, HE providers must set out how they will improve equality of opportunity for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access, succeed in and progress from higher education (Office for Students 2018). This article will outline how one university, the University of West London (UWL), develops its APP and associated interventions with a student-informed and student-centred approach in mind, hence creating an environment that enables all students to thrive and succeed.

Embracing Equity/Equality: Fostering Diversity and Inclusion through an ambitious and student-centred APP

UWL's APP[3] aims to create the opportunities to inspire potential and current students to achieve their goals regardless of their background, identity and/or lived experiences. Social belonging is a key predictor of positive student experience that leads to academic and personal achievement (Allen et al. 2022; Allen et al. 2021; Dost and Mazzoli Smith 2023; Walton and Cohen 2007). UWL's APP has been developed in consultation with students, known as Equality Champions[4], to assure diversity of voice, inclusion and a sense of acceptance and identity. Equality Champions are students from diverse backgrounds with a range of lived experiences, which is an important factor in fulfilling the APP's mission. They act as critical friends who are actively consulted in the creation, implementation and evaluation of APP-related work. By working with stakeholders, Equality Champions shape the direction of the university's APP and make an important contribution to its whole-provider approach.

As part of the whole provider approach, UWL's APP is in line with the university's mission to *"nurture talent in all its forms, regardless of social background, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity; and empower its graduates to be confident, healthy, leading career professionals"* (University of West London 2024). Equity is a principle embedded in UWL's APP acknowledging the historical, societal and personal challenges that several cultural and social groups face.

UWL's APP's portfolio takes a broad view of widening participation (WP) which encompasses a student's lifecycle, as seen in Chart 1, on the next page

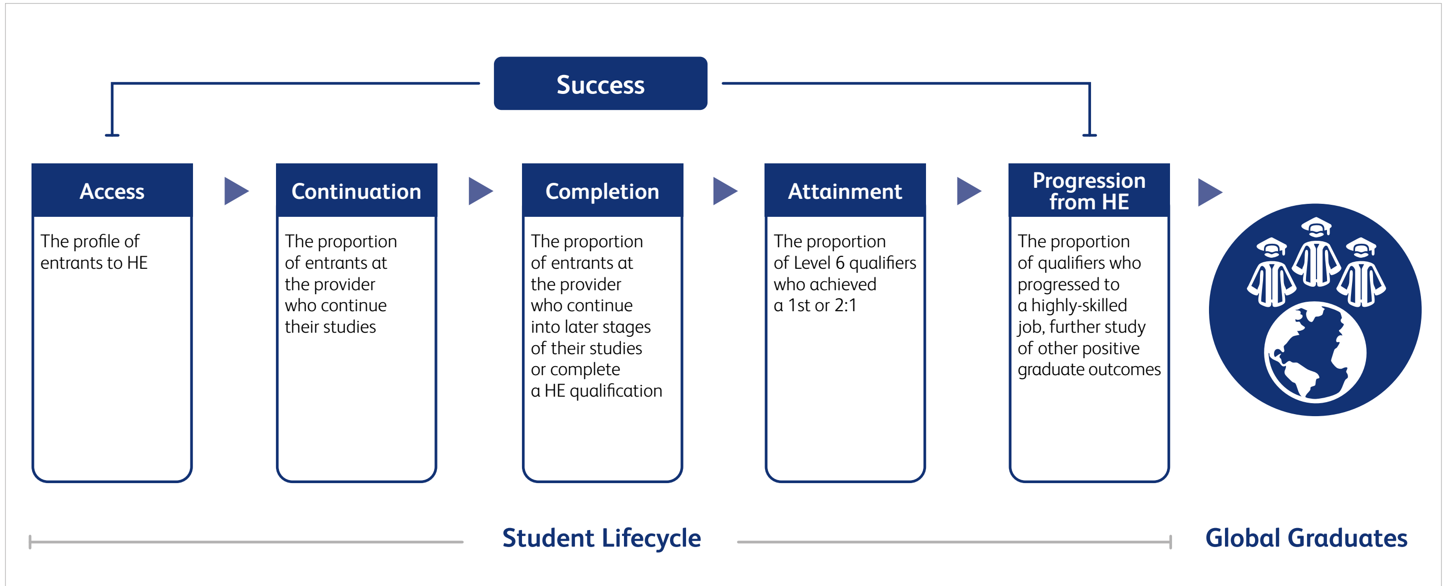

CHART 1: Student Lifecycle

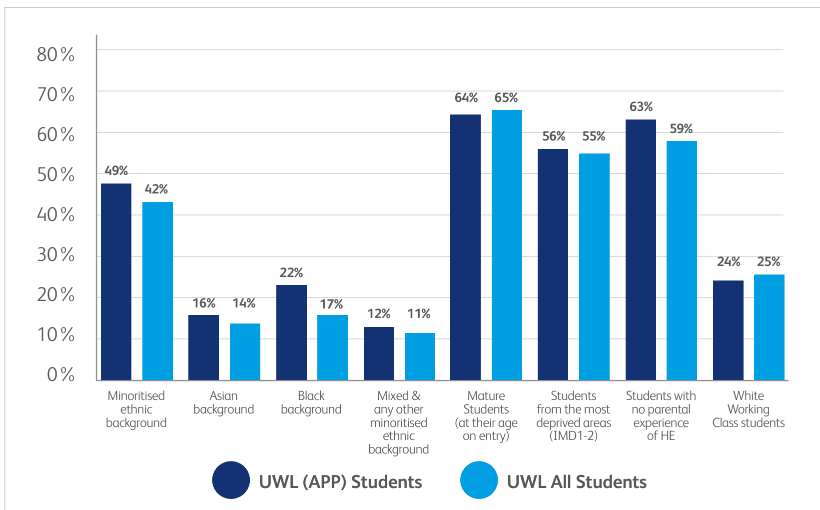

FIGURE 1[6]**:** UWL student population (2022/23 academic year)

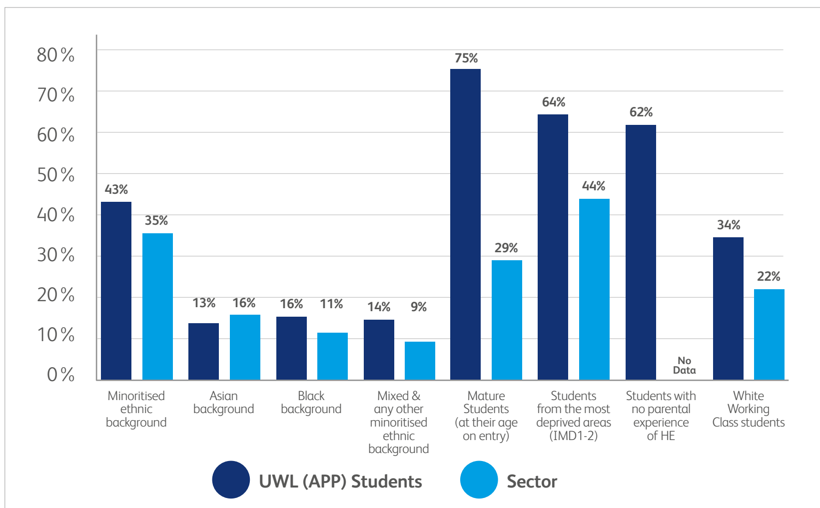

FIGURE 2[7]**:** Data on the UWL student body and that of the Higher Education Sector in England in 2021-22

Success

UWL's student population is very diverse. In the 2022/23 academic year, approximately 49% of students came from a minoritised ethnic background, 56% from the most deprived areas as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and 63% did not have parental experience of HE. Looking at the APP population of UWL[5], as seen in Figure 1, evidence on the diversity of UWL students is clear.

In relation to the broader sector, UWL has a diverse student population as Figure 2 below shows. In the 2021/22 academic year, 43% of the student population came from a minoritised ethnic background which is 8% above the representation in the sector. In addition, 64% of the student body came from the most deprived areas and 34% from a White working-class background.

However, while UWL compares well to the sector in terms of the diversity of its student body, there are challenges where the attainment of certain groups of students is concerned. Sector-wide, the data indicates that students from an underrepresented background are more likely to drop out from their course and less likely to achieve a good degree (Advance HE 2023; Bolton and Lewis 2023; Office for Students 2023). At UWL, such gaps also exist. However, it is encouraging that for some groups of students gaps in attainment at UWL are lower than the sector average. For instance, the EDAG[8] between students from a minoritised ethnic background and those from a White background is 8%, which is 3% below the sector average and the EDAG between Black and White graduates is 2% which is 8% below the sector average.

The university has developed a suite of interventions that target risks that exist prior to and from enrolment, through heir studies at UWL and beyond graduation. Chart 2 provides a visualisation of the approach that UWL is taking to address OfS priorities (Office for Students 2023).

One of the initiatives undertaken is the Inclusive Reading List (IRL), which aims to diversify reading lists by developing library resources and course materials that are more inclusive and representative of UWL's students' diverse identities

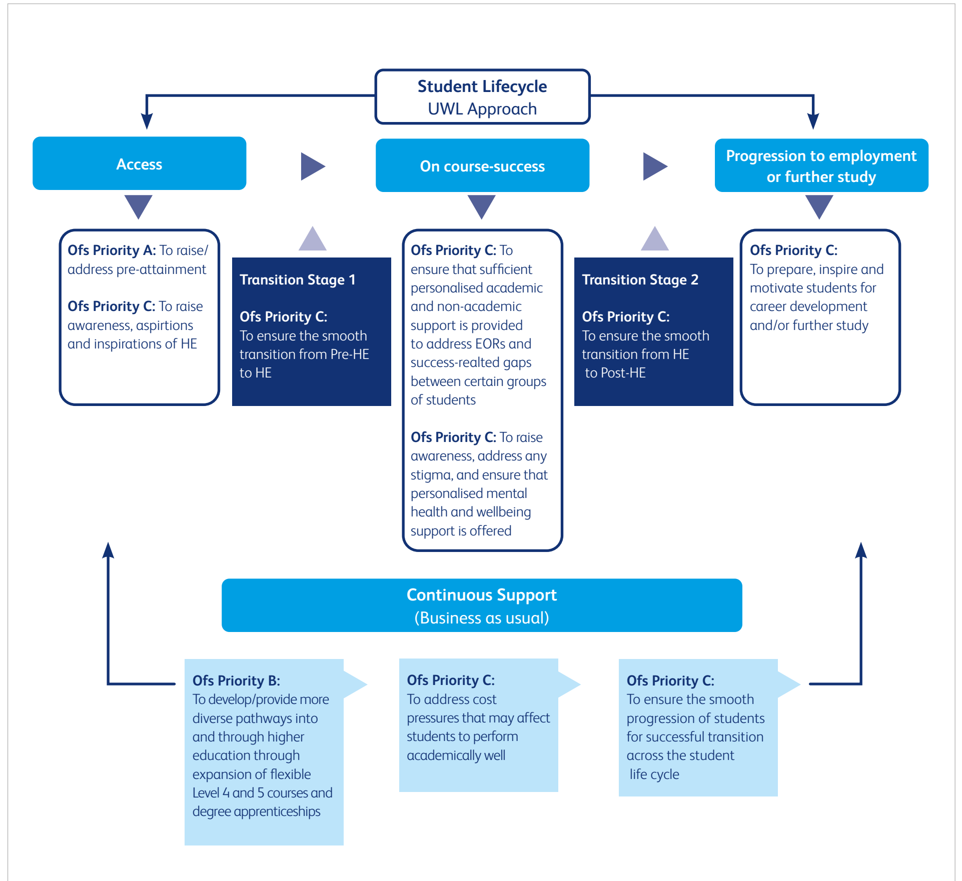

CHART 2: The UWL APP Student Lifecycle Model

For instance, one of the university's interventions aims to ensure that sufficient personalised academic and non-academic support is available so that students from underrepresented backgrounds are empowered to continue and complete their studies with a good degree. One of the initiatives undertaken to achieve this goal is the Inclusive Reading List (IRL), which aims to diversify reading lists by developing library resources and course materials that are more inclusive and representative of UWL's students' diverse identities. Evidence collected within the university indicates that the initiative contributes to the decrease in the degree awarding gap between minoritized ethnic and White students. Students from a minoritised ethnic background are now more likely to achieve higher grades on modules with high levels of inclusivity in their reading lists.

Another initiative which addresses inequalities and gaps is guides that have been developed throughout the delivery of the Student Attainment Project, a project funded by the Office for Students and delivered by UWL in collaboration with University of Derby and Solent University. Qualitative feedback from academics indicated that the project made a positive contribution to addressing the degree awarding gap between certain groups of students (Tatsi and Darby 2018). Furthermore, students' feedback showed that the initiative helped provide them with personalised advice and guidance on tackling academic issues in practice, and therefore, helped them perform better academically (Student Attainment Project 2019).

Reflections and APP Commitments

The sustainability of UWL's APP is achieved via an ongoing cycle of review, consideration and revision of its Theory of Change.

UWL's APP will continue to guide the university's work in creating equal opportunities to all potential and current students to access, succeed in and progress from HE. It aims to:

Foster a sense of belonging
where all students feel part of UWL community regardless of their background, identity, and/or lived experiences, which is essential for student retention, academic success and overall wellbeing.

Promote collaboration and innovation
by creating specific opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to feel respected and included. The university's strategic collaboration with UWLSU and Equality Champions is vital in ensuring a diversity of thought and experience that fosters innovation and creativity.

Enhancing learning and education
where students will continue to have the chance to engage with students and staff from diverse backgrounds, learn from different perspectives and develop cultural competences.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this paper would like to express gratitude to the members of the APP Group, UWLSU and Equality Champions for their invaluable contributions to the APP. Their commitment in ensuring EDI via this work reassures that all potential and existing students can flourish and achieve their goals.

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Footnotes

1 / For definition, please refer to the Access and Participation Glossary (Office for Students 2020).

2 / The authors of this paper understand that some of the readers may not agree with this terminology. The authors are using this term, as in accordance with the Social Inclusion Model it recognises the fact that everyone has an ethnicity, but some people are minoritised by society or systems.

3 / APP and its summary can be accessed via the UWL Policies and Regulations website (University of West London 2024)

4 / Previously known as APP Champions.

5 / As per guidelnes from the OfS, APP population is consisted of UK domicile students studying a full-time first degree.

6 / The data on 'UWL all students' includes all UWL students that the University returned to HESA for 2022/23 academic year. The data on age on entry (i.e., mature data) represents UGFT students.

7 / Statistics represent OfS data from 2021/22 academic year. This is the official data to evaluate and monitor rates both sector-wide and at an institutional level. The data also represents APP population. To access the APP Dashboard, please refer to Data dashboard - Office for Students (Office for Students 2023).

8 / Statistics represent OfS data from 2021/22 academic year. This is the official data to evaluate and monitor gaps both sector-wide and at an institutional level. The data also represents APP population. To access the APP Dashboard, please refer to Data dashboard - Office for Students (Office for Students 2023).

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Keywords

Equality, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Access and Participation Plan (APP), Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education

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Jeremy Strong | University of West London, UK

Audio, Empathy and Neurodiversity
An interview with Sue Bowerman

Abstract:

Jeremy Strong talks audio, empathy, and neurodiversity with LSFMD colleague and Senior Lecturer in Radio & Sound Design, Sue Bowerman, winner of UWL's 2023 Teaching Excellence Awards for Best Lecturer & Inclusive Education – Academic Staff.

Within the year, I became one of the founding team producing Gilles' show for the BBC and fourteen countries worldwide. And it was within this show that I really found my love of making features, finding curiosity in the art of 'telling true stories in sound', as I prefer to call them

You started teaching at UWL in 2014 but let's begin rather earlier than that. Could you tell the readers of *New Vistas* how you got into radio?

First let's start with what I mean by 'radio'. Maniewicz contends that "Radio is a powerful medium for celebrating humanity in all its diversity and constitutes a platform for democratic discourse." (2022). I agree. When I speak of radio, I refer to a model that facilitates communication through sound and listening. This might be via terrestrial broadcast, listen again, podcasts, or even within physical spaces such as galleries or theatres. To me, 'radio' is a medium designed especially for the spoken word to ignite imagination and refers to a whole spectrum of meaning.

Growing up, mum and dad always had the radio on – Radio 4 and 3, predominantly. The Archers theme tune was a daily soundtrack. I think home is where I began to develop my sense of its power to connect people, as well as learning the devices of spoken word and sound design. Through the radio I was surrounded by music – it gave me a sense of self. From a young age I studied the clarinet and saxophone classically, as well as singing in the church choir. By my mid-teens I had attained grade eight on both instruments. The performance-based exams suited my learning style and I always scored highly. Equally, when I had reached grade eight I was persuaded that performing music wasn't a stable career, so I didn't continue to a conservatoire or related university course. You could say that performing music transitioned into the art of listening critically. By my late teens, I began fastidiously listening to pirate radio, in particular to a presenter called, Gilles Peterson whose show was the only way to discover new music. This, alongside hanging out in record shops and sifting through jazz records in the local library. Many years later I worked with him on his BBC Radio 1 show, *Gilles Peterson Worldwide*.

How did I get my first job in radio? I was an avid collector of a specialist music magazine, *Straight No Chaser*. In my final year at Middlesex University, (graduating in 1996 in Media Studies with Writing and Publishing), it was suggested we find a placement. This beloved magazine was the only place I wanted to work. Those first two weeks grew into a decade long contribution as a features writer, reviewing records, events, and festivals around the world until the magazine's untimely demise. In the January of 1998 I was contacted by Radio Producer, Lyn Champion. She had successfully commissioned a new specialist music jazz show on BBC Radio 3 for the production company, Somethin' Else (now owned by Sony Music). She had heard I knew a lot about jazz and might be just the person she was looking for. Within the year, I became one of the founding team producing Gilles' show for the BBC and fourteen countries worldwide. And it was within this show that I really found my love of making features, finding curiosity in the art of 'telling true stories in sound', as I prefer to call them. There also happens to be a brilliant book edited by John Biewen and Alexa Dilworth of the same name.

And you are still active in audio production today, combining your work at UWL with a career in the industry?

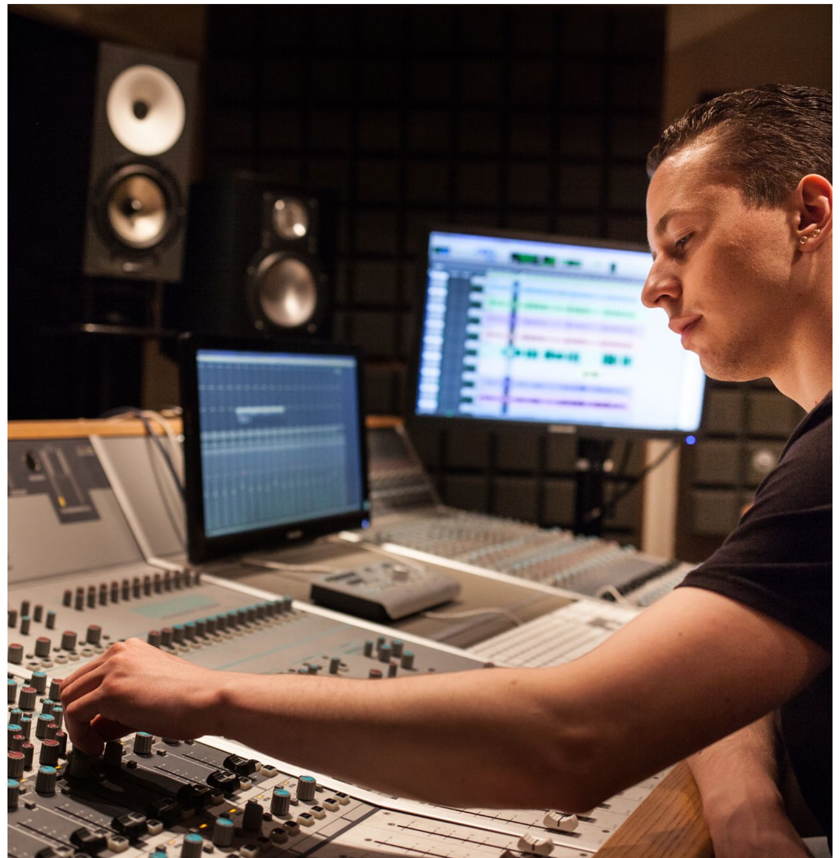
Yes, absolutely. I've never stopped. For me it's crucial to be fully immersed in both worlds. Although long form documentaries are no longer practical due to the time they take, I continue to create short form stories and quicker turnaround works across BBC, commercial and independent spaces. This is where my passion lies. Presently, I am series producer for the 'Mojo Record Club', a specialist music podcast which is an offshoot of the legacy music brand, *MOJO* magazine - and part of the Bauer Media catalogue. Recent projects have included collaborating with BBC New Creatives, and Screen South, where I have been able to create a space to continue producing stories, in partnership with early career audio creatives. I provide a space for inquiry and learning, o guide fledgling producers towards getting their work commissioned and, most importantly, to facilitate their ideas through to completion. Their works are then heard on BBC radio, archived on BBC Sounds and, in some cases, exhibited in public spaces. At the heart of projects like this is mentoring - one of my favourite roles. Currently I'm doing my annual stint of judging for The ARIAS (Audio and Radio Industry Awards, something it's a wonderful privilege to be involved in.

When did you start to combine 'doing' radio with teaching radio?

That would be 2005, at the Roundhouse in Camden. Although most people know the Roundhouse as a famous music venue, I was involved in the launch of a new youth focused station, Roundhouse Radio (now, Transmission), led by Karen Pearson (founder of Folded Wing). Aimed at the under-twenty-fives, we had a particular emphasis on inclusivity. Our mission was to use the vehicle of radio so that young people could discover their voice, their ideas, their leadership, and of course, their creativity. It was a nurturing environment. Mentorship was an important aspect of the work, and as it evolved we also spent time one-on-one with students who were then keen to get into the industry. Many did.

In 2014 you came to the University of West London as a Lecturer, and were later promoted to Senior Lecturer, in Radio & Sound Design. What does that work involve?

I teach audio production. When people ask me what that means I always say that 'I teach people how to listen.' As strange as it may sound, we are generally not taught 'how' to listen. Most of us are really bad at it! When I start working with students, one of the first things that we do is to explore the qualities and nuances of sound. We pay close attention to how sound works, the fundamentals of listening practice and explore how sonic experiences can make us feel. This might involve using a Tibetan singing bowl, experiencing the harmonic overtones, the physical resonance felt in the body. The notion that we listen not only with our ears, but our entire body. We study the science of soundwaves, acoustic environments and the technology available to capture and reproduce sound. Then we move on to how acoustics work with the aim of taking listeners on a journey of discovery, of wonder even. For me, radio and auditory storytelling is first and foremost about the imagination. That's why I'm so fascinated by the documentary format and associated sound design, its capacity to help people imagine lives utterly different to their own. For me the most valuable listening experiences are those where the subjects and the audience may be separated by cultural, geographical, or economic divides, but where a skilled producer (who must above all be a 'deep' listener) can cultivate empathy and understanding.



Exploring the technology to capture sound is a huge part of the learning environment but it's nothing without the ability to truly listen.

I am always hungry to discover new possibilities in the fields of sound production, listening practices and knowledge exchange - with likeminded people. One of the fundamental pedagogies I adopted circa 2015 is that of Deep Listening™ (Pauline Oliveros). Her ideas about the holistic space in which human beings can be connected through sound practices has shifted my way of being with students and the way I create learning environments. Lifting of judgement is one of the foundations of Deep Listening and this is the ethos I bring to my students. I hold the space for them to 'see' their potential and then become it. I think Pauline's words beautifully sums this up. "Deep listening is a foundation for a radically transformed social matrix in which compassion and love are the core motivating principles guiding creative decision making and our actions in the world." (2022. p23).

LISTEN HERE

BBC Sounds
bbc.co.uk/sounds

The MOJO Record Club Podcast
mojo4music.com/podcast/

Part of the teaching journey is covering how there is much to be gained from close attention to sound alone. One of the things I always point out is how, if you want to elicit something from someone – their story, a difficult truth perhaps – the microphone canbring out what a camera might close down

What sort of expectations do students first bring to the classes in terms of their own listening habits and preferences?

Several years ago, I asked a group of students to choose an audio documentary to listen to. I thought it was a simple task. But their response indicated otherwise. "Why would we want to *listen* to a documentary? We just want to watch stuff." This experience fundamentally changed me as an educator and a producer. I have talked about this moment at conferences (most recently ECREA 2023) and within industry, ever since. If we don't understand who our students and audiences are – how they live, how they ingest content, and their 'why' then we are failing them. That's not to say that we can't challenge them, but we need to meet them from a place of curiosity. If their view is that there is no value in listening, then it's our job to bring that world to them until they experience it with wonder. Then, there is no stopping them. Avid listeners become avid audiences who in turn become brilliant auditory content creators. The discovery and wonder of listening is the catalyst.

This also formed the basis of the way I now produce stories in sound, by utilising binaural technology (reproducing the real-life experience of hearing sound). This places the audience inside the world of the storyteller and subsequently, the ability to empathise with them is phenomenally successful. One 'feels' the actuality when it is recorded in this way. This cyclical discovery of what sonic tools can create for audiences – along with the human approach to storytelling - exponentially shifted what I brought into learning environments and was able to replicate in my own productions.

Part of the teaching journey is covering how there is much to be gained from close attention to sound alone. One of the things I always point out is how, if you want to elicit something from someone – their story, a difficult truth perhaps – the microphone can bring out what a camera might close down. Inviting people to 'just talk' and having the patience to let them tell their story in their own way and, crucially, in their own time, is something that the unobtrusive technology and techniques of radio do so well. The microphone quickly dissolves when a space is held between two people without judgement and where integrity and mindfulness are front and centre.

You were diagnosed in late adulthood (2016) with Dyslexia and have recently been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and this is a topic you have spoken about with colleagues and students. Can you talk about this in terms of your own experiences as both a learner and a teacher?

Knowing at your core, that you experience the world differently to most people is isolating. Being frequently misunderstood is isolating. However, my ability to solve problems, to see what others can't see, to create solutions fuelled with an abundance of empathy - are all qualities which make me a responsive educator. I embrace these super powers wholeheartedly! Back in school I loved many of my classes and teachers' reports would always say how I contributed so well to sessions and could talk confidently about the topics, but then the exams rarely reflected this. When I could immerse myself in the learning experience and the production of the work, in my own space and in my own time, I thrived. I failed when I was forced to recall information under pressure. I can remember examinations where I sat in the hall, gripped by panic, and couldn't write anything. On other occasions I would write with velocity, but when the script came back it would transpire that I hadn't answered the question. I could articulate things in the spoken word, but I just couldn't get them onto paper in an organized and logical flow. In the years of writing for *Straight No Chaser*, I was in the care of a brilliant editor, Paul Bradshaw, who would lovingly take my ideas and transform them into a cohesive narrative. He saw my potential as a writer. He admired my way with words. And he did the rest. I am forever indebted to his ability to see in me what I did not see myself. This is how I teach and why I teach. To enable people to see their potential and live it.

Even before I had a formal diagnosis, I was always transparent with students about what I found challenging. Being vulnerable and honest means I am perhaps more approachable and 'human' and students who may be neurodiverse, or have other conditions that may impact on their studies, do tend to respond well to my way of being. At UWL we use Individual Support Plans (ISPs) that help staff and students approach study and assessment in an informed and flexible way, but, some students might not have a diagnosis or may be resistant to any suggestion that they are different. I'm careful not to overstep the bounds of my teaching and pastoral role, but I find that being candid about what I struggle with has meant that many students have sought me out after class for a discussion.

Someone with ADHD will likely require significantly more time to produce work. We will want to research exhaustively, write more, say more, and whilst doing this we will likely be more self-critical and progressively self-doubting. We need a space to work, without interruption. All of which takes up time. The end result gets further and further away. And so, the cycle continues. Experiencing this first hand provides an advantage when it comes to teaching and mentoring. I see the needs of my students and I am willing to create the time and space to accommodate them, the two essential factors in having people like me win in life. Sadly, this is in opposition to how most of the world operates. I have to constantly make a stand to create ways of working and learning that support both my needs and the needs of students. In that respect, you could say it has made me a better educator.

The empathy that I'm looking to nurture in students as audio producers and creative practitioners is also relevant to a classroom dynamic where we all listen to each other. A space devoid of hierarchy. When these encounters work well, they are responsive, negotiated. As someone with a background in music, I think of it in terms of the varieties of 'call and response'. We're making something together, something dialogic and democratic.

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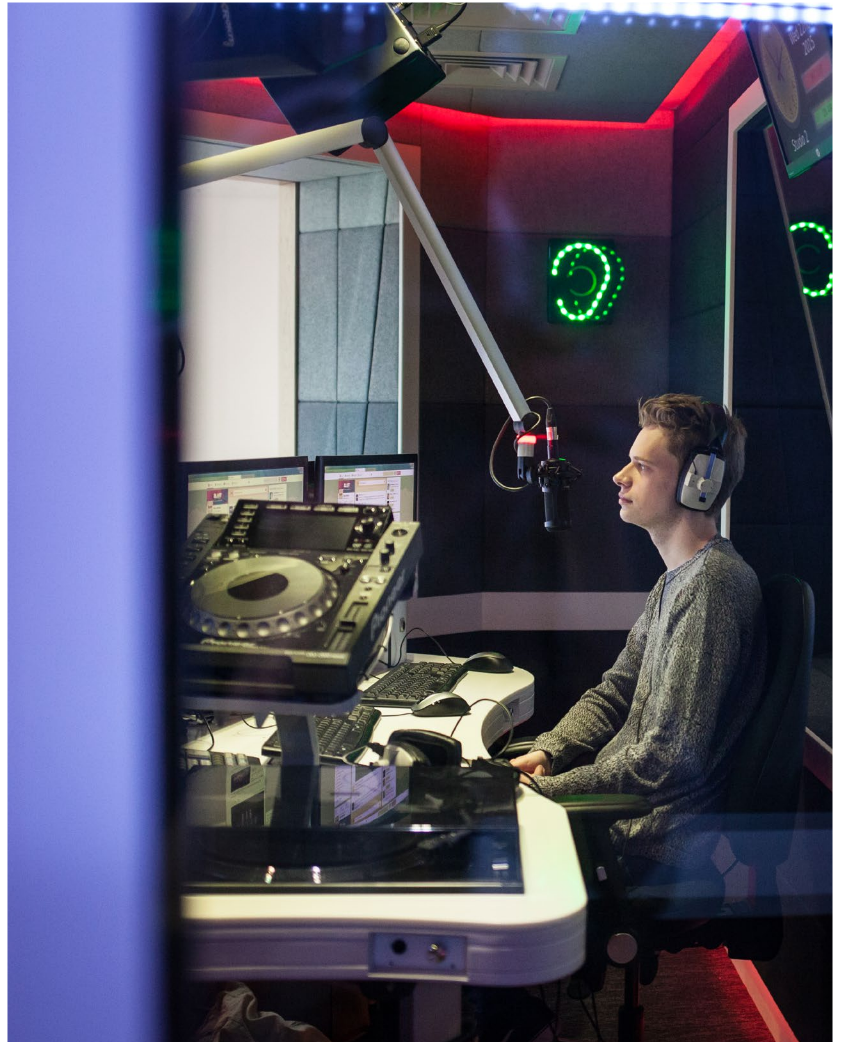

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Listening to the voices of minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers in the UK

This paper presents a summary of a study that has recently been published in Educational Review and which explored the experiences of minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers in British Higher Education (HE) institutions

The link to the full article can be found **here**

Despite recent initiatives aimed at promoting wider access and participation to postgraduate research for minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers (13 UKRI funded projects worth £8 m and "100 Black Women Professors NOW"), inequality in this area of HE remains high

Abstract

Racism and inequity remain high in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), thwarting minoritized ethnic postgraduate researchers' prospects. This study aimed to understand the experiences of this group of students and produce participants-led recommendations. Fifteen participants (home and overseas) were interviewed, and the data were analysed using reflexive inductive thematic analysis. The analysis generated four themes: disempowerment, systemic deficits, weathering and from surviving to thriving. The results suggest that HE environments remain White spaces, dominated by White norms and systems that disempower minoritized ethnic postgraduate researchers. Female and international doctoral students were particularly disadvantaged. Participants' recommendations to HEIs centred on HEIs offering proactive support and creating culturally sensitive environments. The cultural shift within HEIs needs to go beyond superficial policies and tackle racism and forms of oppression if lasting and profound change is to occur. In turn, this will foster a positive experience for all students.

Ethnic-based inequalities remain an issue in UK HE institutions, in particular at postgraduate research level. Indeed, although minoritised ethnic students make up 27% of the undergraduate population (Gov.uk, 2022) and 24% of the postgraduate taught population, they only represent 20% of all postgraduate researchers in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], 2022). The literature identifies several structural barriers that prevent this group of students from fulfilling their potential. This includes a lack of funding, with only 1.2% of PhD scholarships awarded to minoritised ethnic doctoral students between 2016 and 2019 (Smith McGloin & Wynne, 2022), prejudice and discrimination (Leading Routes, 2019) as well as a lack of representation in doctoral and academic populations that emphasises students' feelings of 'otherness' and compromises their sense of belonging (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015; Pitkin, 2021).

Despite recent initiatives aimed at promoting wider access and participation to postgraduate research for minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers (13 UKRI funded projects worth £8 m and "100 Black Women Professors NOW"), inequality in this area of HE remains high. The aim of our study was, therefore, to explore the experiences of minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers in more depth and draw on their experience to devise practical solutions to address these inequalities. Our sample included minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers from both the UK and overseas, given the almost equal representation of these groups in the doctoral population in the UK (58% vs 42%; HESA, 2022).

We conducted 15 semi-structured telephone interviews with eight home and seven overseas participants, covering a range of disciplines and levels of study. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection and research ethical standards were adhered to throughout the study. Data were analysed using reflexive inductive thematic analysis, and Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Theory were used to contextualise the study findings.

Four themes were identified in the data: a sense of *disempowerment*, the experience of *systemic deficits* in HE institutions, a *weathering effect* affecting students' mental health and sense of belonging, and strategies that enabled them to move from *surviving to thriving*. The first theme related to students' feeling of *disempowerment* as HE environments remain largely dominated by White norms and attitudes that disempower minoritised ethnic doctoral students. Female and international students were particularly disadvantaged owing to the intersectionality of their identities. Two main layers of disempowerment were manifest n participants' stories. The first involved subtle and passive occurrences of oppression including micro-aggressions as well as colour-blindness, which denies the reality of the oppressive experiences of minoritised individuals. The second layer involved more deliberate and active acts of oppression that were clearly aimed at discriminating minoritised ethnic students. These included openly racist remarks and discriminatory behaviours such as refusing leave during religious festivities.

The feeling of disempowerment experienced by participants was perpetuated by HE *systemic deficits*. These deficits mainly related to the lack of support provided to minoritised ethnic postgraduate researchers by institutions, in particular, in terms of a clear pathway to report and deal with incidences of racism and discrimination. The fact that these incidents do occur demonstrates that current reporting pathways are inappropriate in deterring perpetrators. This also implies that HE institutions are over-reliant on individuals to disclose these painful incidents in the first place. Support deficits also related to HE institutions' inability to offer culturally sensitive services including counselling and mentoring (e.g., ethically matched support workers). International postgraduate researchers were further disadvantaged from systemic failures in acknowledging and addressing their specific challenges, including financial difficulties and issues surrounding visa applications.

The constant battles that this group of postgraduate researchers faced in fighting discrimination and racism generated a *weathering effect* (Geronimus, 1992). Weathering consists of a slow and consistent depletion of individuals' physiological and psychological resources, which results in negative health outcomes. In the context of our study, the weathering effect had a particularly negative impact on students' *psychological well-being* (e.g., anxiety, stress level, depression) and their *sense of belonging* in HE (feelings of otherness, social isolation).

Yet many participants' stories also illustrate their high levels of resilience as they reported the various strategies they use to help them progress from *surviving to thriving* - the final theme identified in the data. Strategies to overcome the barriers encountered included seeking support from others, including supervisors but also from the broader community of doctoral researchers, as well as cultivating self-reliance.

Participants also offered potential solutions HE institutions could use/develop to address the issues they face. These mainly centred on improving HE institutions' cultural sensitivity, for example through the appointment of culturally sensitive advisors, as well as through running culturally appropriate social events that could foster minoritised ethnic students' sense of belonging. Participants also advocated for university support to be offered proactively, before issues arise, as some doctoral students reported feeling uncomfortable with self-referring.

To conclude, the findings of our study indicate that HE environments in the UK remain 'white spaces' within which minoritised ethnic students face barriers that are not encountered by their White counterparts. The study underlined the specific obstacles these students face with many of these directly or indirectly linked to their ethnicity. Female and international groups were further disadvantaged. Participants were also forthcoming in offering recommendations for change, mainly around the need for HE institutions to offer proactive support as well as more culturally sensitive services. To promote real and lasting change, it is imperative that HE leadership is at the forefront of the fight for equality, and produces policies and systems that are proactive rather than reactive. A cultural shift is needed to change behaviour in a durable way. As predominantly white academics, this research has been a transformative and eye-opening learning experience.

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Jeremy Strong | University of West London, UK

A re-imagined Music Curriculum
An interview with PhD candidate Natasha Hendry

Abstract

Professor Jeremy Strong (University of West London) interviews PhD candidate Natasha Hendry whose research seeks to formulate a framework for more inclusive, diverse, and equitable music education for black pupils in the UK.

Can you tell the readers of *New Vistas* about your career before you set out on a PhD at the University of West London?

As an eighteen-year-old school leaver I went straight into the music business. Mostly I worked as a backing singer, either on recording sessions or touring with bands. After several years I began doing vocal coaching as well, which I absolutely loved. I became particularly interested in the psychology of performance. After the birth of my first child, I realized that the touring aspect of my music career was not compatible with the stability I wanted to provide as a mother, and I was looking for a change. Around this time, I also set up a community choir, which is still going strong, and I wanted to do something that could bring together these interests. So, the day before the UCAS deadline expired I applied and was accepted onto the Psychology degree at UWL, starting the course in 2015.

So, was it at UWL that you began linking psychology and music in terms of research?

Yes. By the third year of my degree, I had realized that I did not want to be a psychotherapist, but I was enthused by the research I did for my undergraduate dissertation on the benefits of group singing. It made me realize that I did not have to choose between psychology and music, that I could combine them, developing new interdisciplinary knowledge. This, in turn, led me to an MA in Music Psychology at Sheffield in 2019. The two years that I was there coincided with the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent explosion of the Black Lives Matter movement and associated discourses. Those events prompted me to see how prevalent issues around 'race', identity, power, and structural inequality really are; that they resonated with my own life experiences, even if I had previously been reluctant to fully accept or express this. Even studying in a friendly music department, I realized that the works and musicians who were held up as exemplars never looked like me. This started me down the path of research into inequalities in music education, interviewing staff and students on their perspectives. It was this MA dissertation that ultimately led me back to UWL to undertake a doctorate.

Can you give us the potted version of your PhD research, perhaps beginning with the 'problem' that you would like your research to fix, through policy and/or practice?

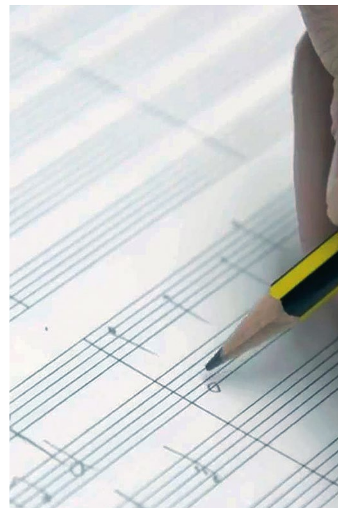
Research from the United States indicates that a culture of whiteness in western music education, which favours Eurocentric ideals, creates barriers for Black students and ill-prepares future music educators to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse studentship (Bradley, 2007). However, research on race and music education in the UK is lacking. My earlier research (Hendry, 2021) revealed that Black music students, music professionals and music educators in the UK experience several adverse psychological consequences arising from barriers in music education and the music industry. These include having to adopt multiple identities, low self-belief, stress and mental pressure and a strong sense of 'not fitting in'. Educators for social justice note that the curriculum has not adapted to the multiculturalism that exists in post-colonial England (Gillborn, 2005, Alexander et al., 2015). Music, like many subjects, excludes the experiences, history and culture of Black Britons, perpetuating systemic racism.

Music education, like the rest of the national curriculum, has some way to go to be considered diverse, inclusive and reflective of today's pupils in the UK

So, in this sense, music education in the UK mirrors the issues that may be affecting outcomes for 'global majority' students within the wider education sector?

Yes. A growing body of research postulates a strong link between classical music and the white, middle-classes (Bull, 2019; Nwanoku, 2019; Ross, 2020). Simultaneously, a domination of classical music in the western music curriculum is widely reported (Bradley, 2007; Westerlund et al., 2017; Warwick, 2020). It seems necessary to contemplate what this may mean for the personal and musical identities of Black students, however, few studies have focused on race issues in music education, highlighting a gap in the literature which my research seeks to address. Music education, like the rest of the national curriculum, has some way to go to be considered diverse, inclusive and reflective of today's pupils in the UK.

Whilst some of these arguments point to issues of intersectionality regarding class and race from a socioeconomic perspective, Scharff (2015) posits that bigger than issues such as not being able to afford musical instrument lessons, is the cultural incongruence that students of colour experience between music education culture and their home cultures. A culture of whiteness in music education may well cause non-white students to either conform to norms incongruent with their own culture or opt out of music altogether (Bradley, 2007) suggesting that personal and musical behaviour can also be affected. Their sense of belonging is challenged, and their mental health and wellbeing impacted by the barriers that a Eurocentric music curriculum presents (Bradley, 2007; Hendry, 2021).



Why study Black children and not all ethnic minority groups?

Black pupils have the lowest pass rate for GCSE English and Maths combined. In 2018/19, across the Black major ethnic groups, 59% of pupils attained a standard pass in these subjects. This is the lowest rate for any major ethnic group (Roberts & Bolton, 2020). Although access to higher education has increased for people from Black ethnic groups, their access to 'prestigious' universities is the lowest of all ethnic groups and Black students are also less likely to stay in higher education (Roberts & Bolton, 2020) or continue to postgraduate level, in particular to PhD (Office for Students, 2020). My previous research (Hendry, 2021) identified that whilst the studied population came under the umbrella term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), the experiences of participants in relation to music education within various categories of BAME were very different. For example, children from an Asian ethnic background tended to sit within a higher social class according to the measure used and have more access to instrumental lessons than those from a Black African or Caribbean background. Results suggested that the needs within BAME groups are different and require individual focused research and subsequent interventions. For this reason, my research has focused on Black secondary school children.

This seems like an opportune juncture to discuss your 'positionality' as a researcher.

In addition to the evidence in the literature, which suggests that Black children's personal and academic development is adversely affected by the status quo, my own personal experiences as a Black mixed-race female who grew up in the UK education system and works professionally in the music industry are relevant. Researchers examining the personal experiences of mixed-race people have shown that they have historically received much of the same type of racial discrimination as Black people, including name-calling, differential treatment and stereotyping in their everyday lives (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). Positionality can both help and hinder research. Obviously, reflexivity has been a necessary process for the duration of the project. Work carried out by interpretive researchers can never be value-neutral, not solely because by its nature the researcher's own interpretations are necessary, but also because qualitative researchers often have personal experience of the area of study and practices being researched. However, this can be of benefit. Being an outsider-insider, that is studying from the outside a context you have inside experience with, can be valuable in that it opens doors and allows greater understanding and empathy (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Racial literacy empowers educatorsand students to recognise and interrupt racism on a personal and systemic level

How do you perceive the best way forward in terms of music education?

I contend that 'racial literacy' is key. Research suggests that proposed solutions for a more diverse and inclusive music curriculum should take a departure from pluralism, widening musical styles to add other genres such as modern pop music (Green, 2002) and multicultural perspectives, which have been criticised as tokenistic attempts at a more inclusive and socially-just music syllabus (Bradley, 2006; 2007). Both strategies buy into a kind of colour-blindness theoretical framework. A colour-blind perspective can cause further damage to diversity practices and the students they seek to serve (Zamudio et al., 2010). Morrison (1992) claimed that though often thought of as a gesture of grace and liberalism, leaving race and colour unacknowledged simply discredits difference. Academics in support of promoting social justice in US music education believe an anti-racist stance is necessary. They posit that only then will the door be opened to wider representation in music education pedagogy, content and teacher workforce to reflect and validate the current studentship (Bradley, 2007; Bates, 2019).

Whilst investigating race in Britain, Twine (2004) offered the concept of racial literacy which she determines as a kind of anti-racist language based around direct and open discourse. Racial literacy encourages students and educators to examine their own experiences and beliefs as well as the wider institutions they operate within to identify and explore the existence of racism and to consider the effects of the constructs of race (Sealy-Ruiz, 2021). Racial literacy empowers educators and students to recognise and interrupt racism on a personal and systemic level (Sealey-Ruiz, 2020 as cited in Sealy-Ruiz, 2021). Fundamentally, the concept of racial literacy is to encourage open and direct discourse on race and in doing so promote action that is anti-racist.

My research has sought, firstly, to find out about the experiences of Black pupils in UK music education from the pupils themselves, as well as from music educators and other stakeholders in music education. Secondly, I have analysed the experiences gathered alongside the strengths and pitfalls of previous interventions, to form the basis of a meaningful blueprint of recommended practice for a racially literate and equitable music education system. The primary purpose of this research is to construct a framework informed by pupils, educators and stakeholders, grounded in racial literacy to promote a sense of belonging and identity for Black children in the music classroom, but in actuality is likely to benefit all children. Recent research has shown for example that learning outcomes of all children, not just those from an ethnic minority background, are positively affected by a diverse teacher workforce (White et al., 2020). This study hopes to produce a dynamic and flexible framework that can potentially be used in other educational contexts, though purposed for music education.

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Keywords

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Frances Sit | National Education Opportunities Network

Global Inequalities in Access and Success in Higher Education

Article Global Inequalities in Access and Success in Higher Education
Author Frances Sit

Abstract

Despite its pivotal importance, the fundamental right to higher education remains far from universal, with inequalities in access to and success in higher education observed in almost all countries around the world. This article highlights some of the key inequalities that impede equitable access and success in higher education and outlines the diverse policy initiatives implemented by governments worldwide in their attempt to tackle this global challenge. It underscores the importance of elevating this issue as a global policy priority through collaborative, data-driven, innovative and comprehensive approaches.

The inclusion of higher education in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals target and its emphasis on ensuring equal access to affordable and quality higher education for all by 2030 highlights the importance of higher education to every individual around the world. Yet the right to higher education is still far from universal

The fundamental right to education extends beyond the confines of primary and secondary schooling. Higher education is an integral part of this human right and its ability to advance social mobility and drive economic development has long been documented and discussed (Kimenyi 2011; Cunninghame 2017; Brown, Reay, and Vincent 2013).

The inclusion of higher education in the United Nations' (2015) Sustainable Development Goals target 4.3 and its emphasis on ensuring equal access to affordable and quality higher education for all by 2030 highlights the importance of higher education to every individual around the world. Yet the right to higher education is still far from universal. The evidence available show that inequalities in higher education participation exist in around 90 percent of the countries throughout the world (Atherton, Dumangane, and Whitty 2016). Both access to higher education and the support provided to allow students to benefit from higher education remain profoundly unequal within and across countries.

This article outlines some of the key inequalities felt around the world that hinder equitable access and success in higher education, as well as the diverse policy initiatives implemented by different governments to tackle these challenges. By outlining the magnitude of this global challenge, this article seeks to highlight the urgency for the global higher education sector to work together more closely in more innovative, effective and comprehensive ways to make this issue more of a policy priority worldwide. This will allow the barriers to access to higher education to be systematically dismantled.

The Current Challenges

Inequalities develop throughout one's life and affect individuals not just before higher education, but also during and after. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often face extra challenges not just in their access to higher education, but also at every stage of the student life-course (Crawford et al. 2016). Substantial literature already documents how these educational inequalities are linked to ascribed characteristics of individuals (Alon 2009; Shavit, Arum, and Gamoran 2007), but data on access and success in higher education by background characteristics is far from uniformly available across the world. For instance, less than a third of the 47 European and Asian countries covered in Atherton's (2021) equity policy study was collecting data on the progression into/through higher education from equity target groups. Furthermore, data collected is often incomplete. Of the 37 countries covered in the European Commission's Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in Europe report (2022) as example – only 16 collected data on disability and 14 on low socio-economic status. Still, existing data is enough to reveal certain inequality dynamics that resonate across the world.

Tertiary Attendance Rate
2-Year Tertiary Completion Rate

High Income
Cross-national Average
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Poorest 20%: 44% / 22%
2: 47% / 29%
3: 51% / 34%
4: 57% / 45%
Richest 20%: 66% / 63%
Wealth Index Quintile

Upper Middle-Income
Cross-national Average
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Poorest 20%: 14% / 8%
2: 21% / 16%
3: 27% / 24%
4: 37% / 35%
Richest 20%: 49% / 53%
Wealth Index Quintile

Lower Middle-Income
Cross-national Average
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Poorest 20%: 4% / 5%
2: 8% / 10%
3: 10% / 13%
4: 16% / 20%
Richest 20%: 29% / 40%
Wealth Index Quintile

Low Income
Cross-national Average
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Poorest 20%: 1% / 2%
2: 1% / 3%
3: 1% / 3%
4: 4% / 6%
Richest 20%: 14% / 22%
Wealth Index Quintile

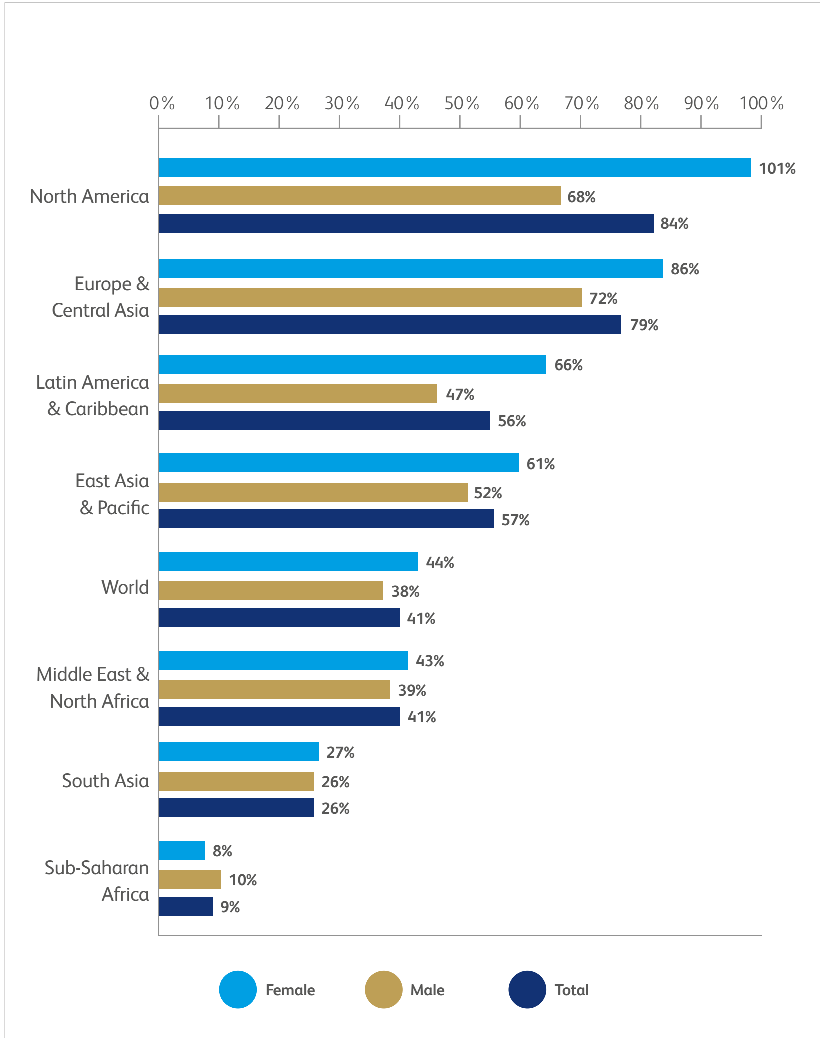
FIGURE 1. Cross-national averages of educational outcomes by country income groups (Buckner and Abdelaziz 2023)

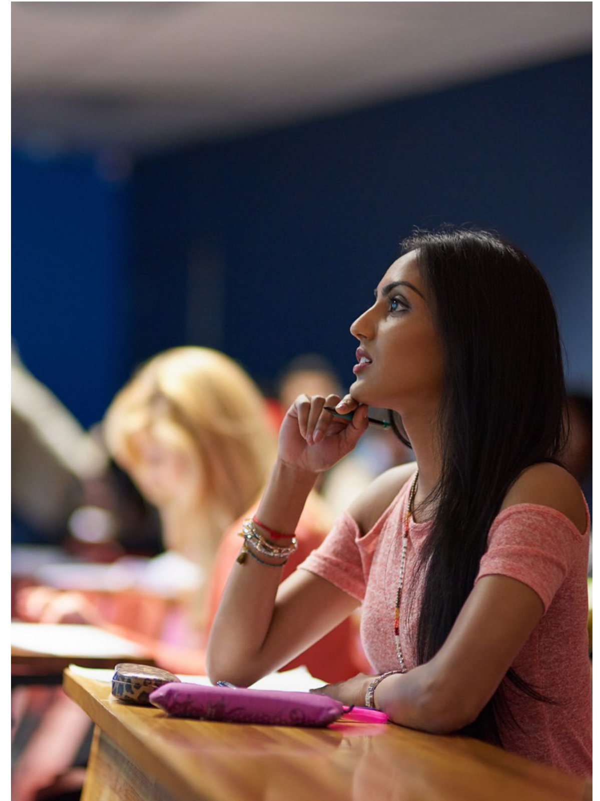
Though this study shows that high-income countries have substantially higher participation and completion rates than middle- and low-income countries, there are signs that progress n some of these countries is slowing, stalling or even reversing

The Wealth-based Divide

Relative to other differences in higher education participation by social/personal characteristics, socio-economic background is one of the variables most often collected at national level across the globe (Atherton, Dumangane, and Whitty 2016). Despite the long-term progress in access and success in higher education made in almost every region in the world (Buckner 2020), huge wealth-based inequalities in access have persisted within and among countries. A study by Buckner and Abdelaziz (2023) clearly highlights the clear relationship between a person's family wealth and their likelihood of attending and completing higher education. The pair drew data from the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE), which extracts data from Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and other nationally representative surveys. Analysing data on educational attainment in 117 countries between 2010 and 2019, they then presented the data according to WIDE's wealth index quintiles and the World Bank's country income group classification in 2023, as seen in Figure 1. The data shows that across the world a gap in access and success in higher education remains between the wealthiest and the poorest populations. Cross-nationally, wealth-based inequalities are more profound in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries, with the richest students from low-income countries 14 times more likely to go to higher education than the poorest students, compared to just 1.4 times in high-income countries. This is primarily driven by the much larger proportion of the poorest students in high-income countries attending higher education. Though this study shows that high-income countries have substantially higher participation and completion rates than middle- and low- income countries, there are signs that progress in some of these countries is slowing, stalling or even reversing. For instance, evidence in the US suggests that the gap between those who complete higher education from higher and lower income quartiles has increased over recent decades (Cahalan et al. 2022). Examples like this are all cause for concern.

An individual's socioeconomic background can greatly impact his or her chance of accessing and succeeding in higher education, but financial resources also play a significant role in student retention and performance. Students from less well-off backgrounds often face the difficulty of securing enough money to live on while studying, and the need to work long hours alongside their studies has been found to restrict students' education capabilities (Letseka and Pitsoe 2014). The financial burden also means that students from poorer backgrounds are more likely to drop out than their peers (Lorenzo-Quiles, Galdón-López, and Lendínez-Turón 2023).





The Gender Gap

The other variable where data is collected frequently where participation in higher education is concerned is gender. At a global level, female students in higher education outnumber male students, with institutions enrolling just 88 men for every 100 women (UNESCO IESALC, 2023a). Significant gender differences however still exist in particular disciplines. The share of female students undertaking science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees (30 percent) is 24 percentage points lower than that of female students undertaking arts, humanities and social sciences degrees (54 percent) (Bothwell et al. 2022). Men on the other hand are underrepresented in health, teaching or social sciences related subjects (Haunberger and Hadjar 2022; Block, Croft, and Schmader 2018). Women's participation also varies significantly by region. As outlined in Figure 2 below, in 2021, the gross tertiary school enrolment for women in Sub-Saharan Africa stood at a mere 8 percent, compared to 44 percent globally and 101 percent in North America (The World Bank 2021.

This data echoes Ilie and Rose (2016)'s analysis on 35 low- middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which finds that young men in those countries are more likely to gain access to higher education than young women, contrary to the global trend. Variations in gender disparities can be attributed to differential cultural norms. For instance, Sánchez and Singh (2018) find that in India, parental and children's aspirations expressed at the age of 12 are important determinants for access, and often show gender biases that negatively affect girls. In Nepal, Witenstein and Palmer (2013) argue that education decisions are usually made by parents or husbands, hence leading to the underrepresentation of women in higher education. Again, the impact of gender goes beyond access. In England, average earnings for male graduates are around 9 percent higher than female earnings one year after graduation, and the earning gap grows substantially over their careers reaching 31 percent ten years after graduation (Bolton and Lewis 2023). The experience for women in developing countries is similar, with female graduates experiencing longer school-to-work transitions and being paid less when finding a job (Nilsson 2019). Research however has also indicated that returns to education for women in low- and middle-income countries are higher than that for men (Peet, Fink, and Fawzi 2015).

It must not be forgotten that learners who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community also face significant barriers in accessing and succeeding in higher education. For instance, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2020), 75 percent of transgender individuals n the region are not able to complete their secondary school studies, which bars them from taking part in higher education. A study in the UK also found that one in seven trans students had to drop out of a course at university or considered doing so because of harassment or discrimination(Bachmann and Gooch 2018).

The Disability Gap

Students with disabilities is one of the most common equity groups targeted by countries around the world (Atherton 2021), and indeed this group of students faces considerable barriers in accessing and succeeding in higher education. Often, their exclusion from higher education is linked to entrenched cultural, societal and/or religious beliefs and stereotypes that assign negative values to persons with disabilities or question their right to and suitability for higher education (UNESCO IESALC, 2023). The lack of social and institutional understanding about the wide spectrum of disabilities also results in inadequate support, making life in higher education more difficult for these students. Leonard Cheshire's Disability Data Review report in 2018 covers 35 countries and finds that average university completion rates for people with disabilities is only 4.5 percent in the age group 25 to 54 years old, compared to 7.9 percent for people without a disability (Simeu et al. 2018). Evidence in individual countries also point to the challenges experienced by these learners in other stages of the student lifecycle. For instance, data from a 2020 Germany-wide student survey reveals that students with disabilities are substantially more likely to intend to drop out of higher education compared to their peers, partly due to their lower academic integration and fewer personal resources (Rußmann, Netz, and Lörz 2023). On student progression, while overall graduate employment rates in the UK had bounced back following the pandemic, the disability employment gap had persisted, with disabled graduates reporting full-time employment levels that were at least five percentage points lower than those for graduates without a disability (Toogood 2024).

Many other social characteristics are also relevant when we consider equitable access to higher education, for instance, ethnicity, religion and age, and in recent years, some countries have gone beyond the traditional definitions of equity groups and identified other target groups to support, including refugees, carers and care experienced students, victims of sexual and gender violence and ex-offenders (Salmi 2018; 2019). The equity groups that are prioritised differ across countries and depend on specific social, economic, political and historical context. Though our discussion above has covered various regional differences, straight comparisons and direct importing of experiences may not be appropriate. A range of factors such as different funding mechanisms and philosophical approaches to higher education, can complicate the picture. Certain regions or countries also experience particular challenges that hinder their efforts in widening access. For instance, low- and middle-income countries are affected by financial and infrastructural constraints and their positioning in the global market of education (Reinders, Dekker, and Falisse 2021), and scholars in Africa and Latin America have mentioned the need to break free from colonial legacies that deepen discrimination, racism, segregation and inequity in their higher education systems (UNESCO IESALC, 2023b, 2023c).

It is also important to consider the multiple and intersectional inequalities affecting certain groups of learners and the compounding effect that may have on their chances of going to and succeeding in university. In England for instance white males eligible for free school meals are less likely to go to higher education than any other groups when analysed by gender, free school meal eligibility and broad ethnic groups (Bolton and Lewis 2023),In iNepal, the effects of gender on higher education participation are stronger for women in marginalised ethnic or caste groups (Reinders, Dekker, and Falisse 2021).

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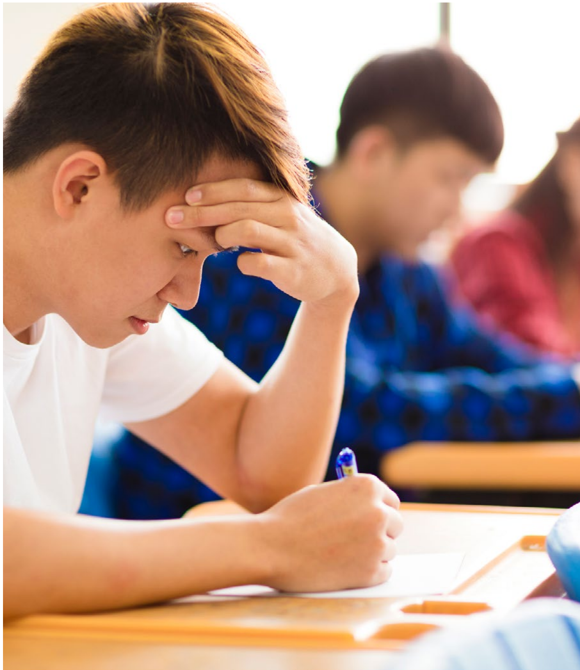

Current Policy Responses

Addressing the inequalities outlined above will require sustained policy commitment at the national, regional and global level. While many governments around the world deem higher education equity as priority (Salmi 2018), the degree of commitment in translating policy principles into concrete actions varies considerably. The All Around the World report in 2018 attempted to classify different levels of commitment into four categories: advanced, established, developing and emerging (Salmi 2018). Only 6 out of the 71 countries included in the study are categorised as having advanced policy commitment, with the consistent implementation of comprehensive equity strategies, policies, goals and targets and high degree of alignment between their equity objectives and policy instruments. Less than a third of the countries have defined concrete participation targets for equity groups, and most have just put in place the foundations of a strategy, implemented a few policies and devoted limited resources in this area. The finding echoes with the ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education Study in 2021 (Atherton 2021). Of the 47 Asian and European countries covered in that study, only a third have a specific strategy spelt out to promote higher education equity. Such widespread absence of strategic planning directly impacts the amount of resources available for equity promotion work, the interventions and programmes that can be put in place and the level of support disadvantaged students can receive.

In terms of actual policies implemented, many countries treat financial aid as the principal instrument in promoting higher education equity. Atherton (2021) and Salmi (2018) identify scholarships, bursaries and grants to be the most commonly used monetary instruments, followed by student loans. But beyond these traditional financial aid mechanisms are other financial instruments that have increasingly been used. Many countries are providing free public higher education, like in Argentina, Cuba and Norway, or are making tuition free for equity groups, like in Colombia (Gómez 2024; Salmi 2019). However, that indirect costs associated with higher education can still pose significant financial barriers for disadvantaged students and free higher education for all does not guarantee improvements in access or success (De Gayardon 2017; 2018). A number of countries have also provided financial incentives for higher education institutions to encourage them to be more proactive in improving access and success opportunities. Some, like India and Ireland, have earmarked grants to support equity promotion efforts undertaken by universities (Salmi 2018), and others, like Australia and South Africa, have included equity elements within the budget allocation formula (Salmi 2019).

Money is not the only barrier hindering access and success in higher education, and a growing number of countries have increased their focus on non-monetary policies to help increase opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The All Around the World report and the ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education Study both find preferential admission arrangements and national outreach programmes to be the most common non-monetary policies. Affirmative action programmes have long been used by countries like the United States and New Zealand to counteract the effects of inequality and discrimination. For instance, Brazil's Law of Social Quotas, which requires federal universities to allocate half of their spots to public high school graduates and vastly increase the number of students of African descent, has led to a fourfold increase in Black university students in just one decade(Meyerfeld 2023). Yet these policies have also been subject to intense criticism and debate, for instance, with the US Supreme Court striking down race-conscious admissions at universities in 2023 (Rios and Stein 2023). Outreach programmes meanwhile aim to bring together higher education institutions, schools at lower levels, employers and local organisations to deliver early intervention, support and information on academic and career opportunities to young students, so they can be informed about higher education early on and encouraged to take part. Evidence from countries like the UK, the US, Australia and Chile have shown that outreach programmes have had positive effects on students' college readiness, educational aspirations and university enrolment (Chorcora, Bray, and Banks 2023; Herbaut and Geven 2019; Savours and Walkden 2024). Other strategies, like government support for retention programmes, the establishment of virtual universities and specialised institutions for minority groups and the creation of alternative pathways to higher education, are also observed around the world (Salmi 2018; Atherton 2021).

Actions to be Taken

As diverse as policy responses to educational disparities have been we are still facing an increasingly uphill battle in combating these inequalities. Widening access and success remains low on the global higher education agenda, as governments and higher education institutions around the world scramble to deal with economic challenges, technological disruptions, war, political instability and more. The sector is still recovering from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing inequalities and led to lower participation, more drop out, poorer degree results and a reduced likelihood of getting a job after graduation for those from equity groups (Atherton 2022). While policymakers play a critical role in advancing equitable access and success in higher education, the responsibility of addressing educational inequalities around the world cannot lie in their hands alone. The concerted efforts of higher education institutions, schools, third sector organisations, employers, researchers and the global community will be needed to make higher education equitable within and among countries. Now, more than ever, it is crucial to underscore the relevance of equitable higher education by demonstrating its intrinsic connection to contemporary policy imperatives like economic and social development. There is also an urgent need for the sector to work in more innovative and effective ways to yield better outcomes in this ever-evolving landscape.

To solve this global equity issue will require better collaboration and knowledge exchange within and among countries. Equitable access and success policies, where they exist, are often formulated in consultation with student and higher education institutions, but without the input of civil society organisations, private sector groups or international associations (Atherton 2021). Engaging these sectors helps introduce ideas and perspectives from alternative angles and may generate comprehensive and effective solutions that better respond to the challenges in hand. Working with these stakeholders can also help place the issue into the public consciousness and raise global awareness around inequalities in access and success in higher education. Needless to say, achieving lasting change will only be possible with the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in the higher education sector, including students and people who work with them on a day-to-day basis. Partnerships and the sharing of important insights, policy developments and best practices within and across borders is also essential for capacity building and the continual improvement and innovation of widening access work. This need for global collaboration and knowledge exchange is precisely why the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) launched the World Access to Higher Education Network (WAHEN) in 2022. Through key events like the World Access to Higher Education Day and our "Addressing the Higher Education Equity Crisis" summit at the University of Oxford in September 2023, we aim to connect key stakeholders from around the world to share knowledge, forge collaborations, galvanise commitment and affect change. Since our first World Access to Higher Education Day in 2018 – held even before WAHEN's launch – we have already engaged over one thousand organisations worldwide.

To ensure the effectiveness of widening access work all policy approaches must be data-driven and evolve with the times. With only a minority of countries collecting equitable access and success data and even fewer setting targets, there is a need to kickstart a culture of data collection, dissemination and analysis, as well as target setting, impact monitoring, measurement and evaluation. Only then is it possible to generate a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date global picture of equitable access and success in higher education. This will allow the systematic assessment of equity indicators and equity promotion policies. The sector also has no choice but to embrace technological advancements like digital learning and artificial intelligence. Making good use of these technologies can offer endless possibilities for equitable access and success in higher education. Recognising this, we at NEON for instance delivered professional training on online outreach to over a hundred practitioners in 69 institutions from 2020 to 2022 to help participants maximise the opportunities online provision presents. Universities like Georgia State University and University of Oklahoma in the US and University of Roehampton, London are already making use of AI in admissions, student engagement and career placement processes to improve access to and success in higher education (Jackson 2019; Cues.ai, n.d.).

To make sure no learners will fall through the cracks, the widening access sector should also better incorporate intersectionality into our research and our work. As Fernandez et al. (2023) noted, most of our current policies and interventions have focused on one isolated identity experience, such as gender, ethnicity and social class, rather than more intersectional approaches to identity. Verma (2023) is right to raise concern that this can lead to policies, programmes and practices that are too narrow in their scope. Using an intersectionality lens can help unveil and address inequalities that will remain hidden if identity aspects are just considered in isolation. Meili, Günther, and Harttgen's (2022) attempt to measure inequalities in education in the US and 39 low- and middle-income countries exploring when gender interplays with ethnicity is a good example of how such work can be conducted. Looking into this under-researched area will allow the sector to better address the contemporary challenges of our complex world. Together, we can move closer to a world where equal access and success to higher education is not just a goal, but the norm.

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Strength in roots: pride in place in left-behind places

Article Strength in roots: pride in place in left-behind places
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Abstract

The political focus on "restoring pride in place" in left-behind areas has increased recently, yet the precise connection between these concepts remains ambiguous. This paper examines existing literature on "left-behind places" and explores various dimensions including economic, social, political, and moral aspects. It also delves into the definitions of pride in place, highlighting its grassroots nature and its reliance on local agency. The paper argues that pride in place cannot be imposed from external interventions but is endogenously grown within communities. It suggests that the core relationship between both pride in place and left-behind areas lies in the moral realm: left-behind areas are embodied communities have less pride due to a lack of local agency and capacity to autonomously improve their area. Therefore, while government-funded initiatives may address certain aspects of pride in place (e.g. regenerating high streets), the most effective method to restore of pride in left-behind places requires empowering communities through bottom-up approaches and direct devolution of power.

Restoring "pride in place" in "left-behind areas" has become an important aspect of the Levelling Up Agenda which has been the Conservative Government's primary policy approach to address regional inequality in the UK since 2019. However, despite the frequent use of the terms 'pride in place' and 'left behind areas' in political speeches and policy documents, the correlation between the terms is not clear. This article will attempt to address this issue by first reviewing the literature on left-behind areas through four different dimensions: economic, social, political, and moral. It will then juxtapose these definitions of left-behind areas with descriptions of pride in place. It will argue that the government is neglecting a central pillar of pride in place i.e. that it is an emotion that emerges from within an area rather than being artificially constructed from outside interventions. This article will argue for a 'moral' understanding of left-behind areas which means the best way to restore pride in place in these areas is to restore their sense of agency and identity.

Understanding left-behind areas

Since 2008, left-behind areas have become a dominant frame to describe geographical inequality in the anglophone world. According to Pike et al., the financial crash, and the political upheaval that followed in the mid-2010s (evident in the rise of right wing and left wing populist parties), brought to the political fore the millions of inhabitants living in post-industrial or disadvantaged areas, that had since the 1980s suffered from "decline and marginalization generated by the uneven effects of processes such as globalization and economic restructuring". (Pike et al. 2023, 10). These areas were viewed by Pike as having been "overlooked by distant self-interested metropolitan elites" (ibid).

From an economic perspective, left-behind areas are generally understood as having lower GDP per capita which is usually caused by lower productivity, low wages, higher unemployment rates or low skills level

The first reference to the term in the UK was in 2014 with the publication of the book "Revolt on The Right: Explaining Support for The Radical Right in Britain" by Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin (2014). In a 2016 piece on the Brexit vote, Goodwin introduces his definition of the left-behind: "social groups that are united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalisation, who do not feel as though elites, whether in Brussels or Westminster, share their values, represent their interests and genuinely empathize with their intense angst about rapid social, economic and cultural change" (Goodwin 2016, 224). The Brexit and Trump vote, he contends, was therefore a protest against the establishment. Entangled together in initial definitions of left behind people and places are economic, social, political and even moral factors. This ambiguity over the term's actual meaning, as well as the location of these left-behind areas, continues today. This article will attempt to overcome this ambiguity by exploring definitions of the term thematically.

From an economic perspective, left-behind areas are generally understood as having lower GDP per capita which is usually caused by lower productivity, low wages, higher unemployment rates or low skills level (Martin et al. 2022; Sandbu 2020). For instance, an OECD report from 2016 found that "within their own borders, OECD countries are witnessing increasing gaps in GDP per capita between higher performing and lower performing regions (...) The gaps within countries between the top 10% regions with the highest productivity and the bottom seventy-five percent has grown by about sixty percent over the last two decades" (OECD 2016). (Secretary of State for Levelling Up 2022).

Other research, however, emphasises social factors when defining left behind places such as housing conditions, health outcomes, or educational attainment. Health outcomes are a particular issue as highlighted by work in the US (Case, Deaton 2020) and the UK (Cavallaro et al. 2024). Another social factor which has gained traction in the UK is social capital or infrastructure. The All-Party Parliamentary Group[1] for Left-Behind Neighbourhoods define left-behind areas as having both high levels of poverty and low levels of social infrastructure (places to meet, community engagement, and connectivity) which then fuels other elements of social and economic decline (APPG for Left-Behind Neighbourhoods 2023).

Left-behind areas have also been described as areas that have felt politically neglected and disenfranchised. It has been argued that while going through massive economic and social changes, residents of these places felt that their voices and plight remained unheard by the political class (Goodwin 2016). It is Goodwin's view that the residents of these 'left behind' places therefore blame the mainstream political class for many of their challenges, turning to populist parties as a form of protest (Ibid.).

Another definition of left-behind areas focuses on their 'moral' dimension. According to Tomaney et al (2024) left-behind areas are "moral communities" that embody distinctive values which produce a strong emotional attachment. These distinctive values and attachment to place are *endogenously* developed over long-term historical periods. Left-behind areas have suffered an abrupt devaluation of their moral and emotional ecosystem – what these authors call "radical shock" – through the closure and decline of buildings or historical social infrastructure that embodied these values and fostered local identity and attachment. Importantly, sources of the radical shock are external to the community in question. Tomaney et al argue that their lack of success in trying to resist these externally imposed changes, of having agency in that matter, caused a sense of humiliation and despair in this population (ibid.).

All these definitions reveal the ambiguity of the term left-behind areas. However, such ambiguity does not mean that the concept itself is meaningless or that these places do not exist. Geography is by nature diverse, – local areas each have their unique particularities – so it is not surprising that the term cannot be defined by an essential property. Instead, one could define left-behind areas by subscribing to a "family resemblance" definition. Such an approach suggests that there is an array of interrelated aspects that certain areas share to varying degrees depending on their history, population, geographical location and so on including low productivity, low educational attainment, low social capital, disenfranchisement, lack of moral agency.

Understanding pride in place

Since 2019, pride in place has been a regular feature of the political discourse of both the Conservatives and Labour. Boris Johnson's promised in 2021 to restore "people's sense of pride in their community" (Johnson 2021). Similarly, Keir Starmer, the leader of the Labour Party, echoed his point in 2023 when he promised that his "Take Back Control Bill" would unlock the "pride and purpose of British communities" (Neame 2023).

From political rhetoric it has transitioned into an official policy term, featuring in government documents and associated with newly created metrics. The Levelling Up White Paper published in 2022 was an ambitious 300 page plus document that aimed to transform regional inequality in the UK. It was built around 12 missions, described as "medium-term targets" which "provide targeted, measurable and time-bound objective, or set of objectives, from which a programme of change can then be constructed or catalysed" (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, 2022). Mission 9 stated that "By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK" (Secretary of State 2022). The government has directly connected several regeneration funds which it has distributed to some degree to the pride in place mission i.e. the Levelling Up Fund (LUF),[2] UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)[3], and Community Ownership Fund.[4]

However, as the government conceded in a technical annex[5] to the Levelling Up White Paper published in 2022, it is unable at present to accurately assess what progress in this mission means and saw the mission as "explanatory" (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). However, though it remained unclear what pride in place was, the government's initial assumptions about its meaning were related to the economic context of the area. Poorer places were the ones with low pride in place. However, as is explained in one of the few articles that address on pride in place in the UK directly, "Townscapes - Pride In Place" by Shaw, Garling, Kenny (2022), "there is a good deal of evidence which indicates that some of the places with high levels of local pride are among the more deprived areas in the country, while others are located in localities where economic conditions are improving" (Shaw, Garling, Kenny 2022, 7). The government did produce a long-awaited metric to try and measure progress related to the pride in place mission in early 2024. As can be seen below no economic factors have been mentioned.

> *"Pride in Place is an emotion people feel towards the physical community that they identify with and feel a sense of attachment, belonging and deep-rooted contentedness towards. It is underpinned by their sense of safety and security, their participation and connections within the community, their engagement with local culture, heritage and sport and their satisfaction with local high streets, green and blue spaces and physical infrastructure."*

This metric identifies four key pillars where pride in place is concerned: safety & security (tackling anti-social behaviour), high streets & regeneration, community engagement, and engagement with culture, heritage and sport. There is evidence to support the inclusion of these four drivers. Looking firstly at safety and security, a nationally representative poll of two thousand British citizens conducted by Public First in 2021 showed that the most popular response to the sources of the decline of local pride was a rise in anti-social behaviour with 43% of respondents feeling it was the source of decline (Public First 2021). Redgrave (2022) argues that by eroding neighbourhood trust and acting as a visible emotional reminder that the areais in decline, anti-social behaviour diminishes pride in it.

In terms of the role of the high street, research conducted by UK in a Changing Europe in 2022 found that eighty-two percent of people believe that the high street is crucial to local pride and nighty-four percent of people see local parks and green spaces as most important (Hall et al. 2022).

Community engagement, understood here as volunteering and a sense of belonging, is often seen as essential to increasing the sense of attachment to the place and pride from collective achievements (being part of place-making) (Bonaiuto et al. 2020).

Finally, where culture, heritage and sport are concerned according to a survey done in 2021 of four thousand British citizens by Kantar, forty-two percent of people believe that historic buildings and monuments make them feel proud of their local area (Kantar, 2022).

However, as strong as this evidence is there may be a more fundamental pillar to consider where pride of place is concerned. Agency and control, individually or collectively, could have a crucial role to play here (Banaiuto et al. 2020). One feels pride in their professional accomplishments (getting a work promotion for instance) because they were the ones to achieve it. Likewise, at a local level, people are proud of a place when they associate it with particular accomplishments they identify with (e.g. having participated in the construction or renewal of a place or being the descendants of those that did) (Ibid.). That is why, according to Jack Shaw, communities want to "possess a sense of ownership and agency in those places" (Shaw 2022). The "Community engagement" pillar describe above partially covers that aspect but does not fully capture the importance of local control. In 2020, five European academics conducted an extensive literature review to establish the causes, effects, and relevance of "pride of place". As Banaiuto et al. (2020) argue, local engagement without the actual power to make a difference can actually lead to collective humiliation, not pride. Local narratives and identities are then strengthened when these achievements become part of the makeup and historical folklore, through heritage buildings, improved high streets or the shared personality traits of local people. These unique historical and culture features are what people feel "proud of" (e.g. "our ancestors build this monument or achieved feat X").

It could be argued then that collective agency has primacy over the other aspects of pride in place discussed above. The salience of local agency also means that pride is fostered from within a place and cannot be imposed from outside interventions.

The best approach to restoring pride in these areas involves the government devolving resources and powers directly to these communities, so they can take responsibility for their own area and foster a sense of ownership of their future

Discussion

Both concepts – left-behind areas and pride in place – have become important aspects of Britain's contemporary political arena. There are however two questions: is there an issue of pride in place in left-behind areas, and if so, what is the best approach to restoring it there?

Pride in place as has been described above includes several components such as engagement with heritage, better high streets and local agency. Left-behind areas have been described in a multiplicity of ways, though the one that appears most relevant to the descriptions of pride in place is the moral dimension put forward by Tomaney and others. As moral communities, left-behind areas have undergone changes that have uprooted their local sense of identity and autonomy.

These changes – notably deindustrialisation and austerity – were imposed against their volition and in that sense it could be argued (though not empirically justified due to a lack of concrete evidence at this stage) that their pride in place has declined. In addition, physical representations of past achievements (an industrial building for instance), crucial to their local narratives and identities, were progressively abandoned and left prey to anti-social behaviour. This symbolised and symbolises still today the deterioration of their area and thus of their sense of pride. It does not mean of course that they have lost pride, since for instance memories of past successes remain present in these communities (according to the Public First poll, people in the North East named industrial heritage as one the top 3 things that contributes to their pride in their local area (Public First 2021)) but that they are no longer able to foster pride through local agency.

A good example of the decline of pride in place in a left-behind place would be the extensive case study conducted on Sacriston, a northern mining town in England (Tomaney et al. 2024). Local residents built the place from the bottom up, progressively constructing key social infrastructure such as local churches, football pitches, the Co-op and a flourishing high street. These buildings were expressions of their agency and physical representations of their values, which emphasised "neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment" (Tomaney et al. 2024, 60). The decline of pride, however, commenced when the mining industry declined and the pit closed, and continued when other key buildings became derelict, substantially undermining the local area's sense of collective ownership.

Since 2019 the government has sought to enhance pride in place in left-behind neighbourhoods through regeneration funds. The UKSPF has as its primary goal increasing pride in place and it is one of the key aims of the LUF. While this might cater to other aspects of left-behind areas such as productivity it does not contribute to their local sense of agency. To restore pride in place is not to impose regeneration plans on left-behind areas, or to set abstract targets, but to enable the people in these areas to restore it by themselves. The work therefore of the government should be to "enable communities to help themselves by empowering change-makers, building organisational capacity and furnishing them with the resources they need to meet the needs in their communities" (Tomaney et al., 98).

Left behind places are moral as well as physical or economic communities, hinging on a sense of agency with their local place. While centrally controlled regeneration funding can cater to other aspects of left-behind areas, such as low productivity levels or political neglect, they often fall short of addressing the core moral fabric that underpins these communities. Instead, the best approach to restoring pride in these areas involves the government devolving resources and powers directly to these communities, so they can take responsibility for their own area and foster a sense of ownership of their future.

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Footnotes

1 / An all-party parliamentary group (APPG) is a technical group in the UK Parliament that is composed of MPs and Members of the House of Lords from all political parties but who share a common interest in a particular policy area, region and country.

2 / This is the current's government flagship levelling up fund. It represents £4.8 billion and will be invested in three main areas: town centres and high streets, local transport, and cultural and heritage assets.

3 / This fund was created to replace EU structural Fund – it allocates £2.6 billion to areas across the country through funding formula rather than a competition.

4 / This £150 million fund is meant to support communities across the UK taking over and fostering local facilities, community assets, and important amenities.

5 / The technical annex provided more "detail on the underpinning analytical framework for explaining UK economic geographies in the Levelling Up White Paper". It explains different key structuring pillars of the white paper, including the 12 missions, and their associated metrics.

About the author

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Prior to joining CEILUP, Marc Le Chevallier completed an undergraduate degree in History and Politics at the University of Exeter and an MSc in Political Theory at the LSE. Previously, he has interned at the Thomas More Institute, finding local ways to regenerate left-behind areas in France. He also worked at the Local Trust, focusing on a campaign to create a new independent endowment to support the most left behind neighbourhoods in England

Keywords

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