Received: 4 March 2024 | Accepted: 25 June 2024

DOI: 10.1002/berj.4047

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

BERJ BERA

Data snapshots of the access and participation of 'women' academics in UK universities: Questioning continued gendered, racialised and geopolitical inequalities

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Abstract

Replete with espoused discourses of equality, diversity and inclusion within public bodies, is the UK, wherein lauded initiatives reward its universities' commitments to increasing the access and positioning of 'women' in higher education. This paper contributes a critical quantitative analysis of the state of representation and participation of academic staff within these universities generally, and the majority-female discipline of education particularly. Education is important because it has a direct relation to social change and ethicality. It may maintain or reproduce the status quo; however, exercising its transformative potential is essential for the success of various international frameworks aiming to address global inequality, including most recently the Sustainable Development Goals. Sensitised by QuantCrit principles, a descriptive statistical exploration was undertaken of the staff composition and employment conditions captured within the administrative datasets reported on academic staff by all the public universities in the devolved nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales from 2015 to 2020. The findings of this study confirmed: (i) the continuation of gendered inequalities across the academic hierarchy, particularly as the pyramid narrows to the assigned intellectual leadership position of 'professor'; (ii) racialised, gendered inequalities in access to employment, and in positioning once employed; and

(iii) more adverse conditions where gendered, racialised and geopolitical inequalities intersect, most extremely for Black African female academics. The study demonstrates that the centring of 'race' and consideration of nationality are required to challenge coloniality, and to bring to the fore the differential impacts of systems of discrimination within this globally influential sector.

KEYWORDS
equality, gender, geopolitics, race, representation

Key insights

What Is the Main Issue that the Paper Addresses?

The paper contributes a critical quantitative analysis of administrative datasets to identify inequalities in the academic staff composition and employment conditions in universities in the UK, and the majority-female discipline of education.

What Are the Main Insights that the Paper Provides?

Descriptive statistical snapshots reveal: (i) gendered inequalities across the academic hierarchy, particularly in positions of seniority; (ii) racialised, gendered inequalities in access to employment and in positioning once employed; and (iii) more adverse conditions where gendered, racialised and geopolitical inequalities intersect, particularly for academics from the Global South.

INTRODUCTION

British higher education features in global scholarship about 'the university' because of the continued reach, impact, influence and prestige of its universities, from colonialism through to the present day of 'internationalisation', 'globalisation' and 'knowledge diplomacy'. Various political commitments have been proposed and adopted by a range of actors and institutions to regulate, monitor and address inequalities within societies and public institutions, including human rights for which states bear responsibility, and more recent systemic approaches, such as those recognising human exploitation and environmental extraction at the global scale, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have inter/national monitoring and evaluation dimensions. Towards these, universities and the intellectuals they employ are positioned as playing important agential roles. This study inverts the gaze by looking at an aspect of the state of inequality within these universities, by analysing administrative data held on academic staff employed in public universities *within the borders* that delineate the current 'United Kingdom' (UK).

As a social institution, it is to be anticipated that aspects of the university will also be formed and will inform social formation and representation of its context, and that this will shift in time in response to external and internal influence. Thus, the paper begins with a

brief introductory narrative to historicise the *regulation* of social change which claimed to address gendered and, at a far later point, racialised inequalities within UK public universities, including the foci of contemporary interventions. This brief chronological overview of policy and practice makes apparent the problematic decontextualisation and essentialising of 'women' by binaries of 'sex', implicitly as 'white' and UK born, with the effect of marginalising and invisibilising nuanced and subordinate identities, and minimising attention, monitoring and action to address systems of discrimination and oppression. Neoliberal discourses of individualism and responsibilitisation have contributed to depoliticising social inequality in contemporary Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Crimmins, 2021), with discourses of deficit placing the burden to assimilate, prove excellence and raise critiques on those encountering social discrimination. However, scholars have problematised the trajectories of inequality in the UK academy, and advocated for them to be addressed. This has included insights into the qualitative experiences of framings and initiatives for the 'success' for women in general; access and participation for those racially minoritised; class-related inequalities; and geopolitical inequalities and exclusions.

The contextualisation of policy, practice and insider scholarship of our introduction sets the scene for a discussion of our methodological engagement with the administrative dataset collected and curated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which is espoused to allow for the monitoring of the state of equality in the staff composition and employment conditions of all those who work for UK universities. As a quantitative source produced by a public body, it cannot evoke the metaphysics of intersectionality (Bernstein, 2020) nor reflect experiences of those at the intersections of systems of discrimination or oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Rather, the dataset allowed for exploration of the inequalities known from the reporting of outcomes within the majority-female discipline of education, in particular, in comparison with all of the disciplines (combined) of UK universities (Belluigi et al., 2023). This paper focuses on the observed gendered inequalities in access and positioning of academics employed during the period 2015–2020, through intra- and inter-categorical analysis of the known data reported on 'sex', 'race', nationality, age and dis/ability.

HISTORICISING INEQUALITY WITHIN THE UK'S BORDERS

Higher education policies across the UK have long been constrained by their systemic interdependence (Raffe, 2013, p. 11) and social regulation, such as through Equality Acts. However, when considered from the departure point of inequalities within universities, significant differences have emerged, distinguishing devolved nations' histories of interventions and targets of social regulation to address inequalities, particularly since devolution in 1998–1999 (Shattock and Horvath, 2020).

It bares remembering although that it was almost a century ago, in 1928, when women in England, Scotland and Wales were awarded the same terms as male voters, which Northern Ireland was legislated later in 1968–1969 and enacted in 1973. Access to sit examinations at universities for women students in England, Scotland and Wales had been formalised earlier than that, during the late colonial period through the 1867 Royal Charter ('Special Examination for Women'), and in Ireland (prior to the partition between the Republic and Northern Ireland) in the 1878 Intermediate Education Act. However, owing to the nature of institutional autonomy, the granting of degrees varied considerably by institution. For instance, the University of London granted degrees to women from 1878, Oxford from 1920 and Cambridge as late as 1948. Rights to vote and to gain access to higher education are assumed to impact the pipeline to employment in 'the professoriate' (which in the UK was increasingly stratified across various professional positions after the Second World War). Yet these are not matters of linear progress: the first academic woman's appointment to the assigned

intellectual leadership position of 'professor' is claimed by a Scottish institution to be 1892 (BBC Scotland, 2017), by an English institution to be 1904 (University of Reading Special Collections, n.d.), and in Northern Ireland to be 1916 (Queen's University Belfast, 2020). 'Equality' and 'women's empowerment' have been a feature of UK universities' domestic and international promotional discourses, particularly within the Commonwealth (see for instance the discourse of the first woman Vice-Chancelor in the UK and the Commonwealth in 1948 by the University of London, 2023). Copious performative statements, scholarship and public pedagogy have commemorated such 'firsts' as if representation of all women. Institutions' public declarations of the success of women academics with intersecting identities have been less prevalent and less lauded.[1] Recently, with public interest in decolonisation, Black Lives Matter, and 'equality, diversity and inclusion' discourses, such celebrations of 'firsts' have widened to women with non-dominantly placed social identities. In so doing, this exposed the marginalisation of Black academic women from intellectual and administrative leadership in particular (see reporting on Olivette Otele as the 'first' Black woman to be a British professor of History in 2018, Bennett, 2023; and Valerie Amos' appointment as the 'first' Black woman Vice-Chancellor in 2015, Wynne-Jones, 2015). The dominant equality discourse, about women, espoused by universities, was found wanting and increasingly challenged after the cessation of the Cold War. Heward and Taylor (1992, p. 111) argued that 'progression in the implementation of equal opportunities in British higher education (HE) is unimpressive, foundering at the stage of monitoring recruitment practices'. Such scholars utilised their academic resources to demonstrate, through quantitative analysis of the marginal effect of the supply side of senior staff, the contradictions between rhetoric and reality when it came to the colour-blind, essentialised gender binary of the time. Social regulation of inequality had been introduced ineffectually, as compliance lacking a firm legislative framework and accountability (Heward & Taylor, 1993).

Despite its history of Empire and colonialism, the UK's acknowledgement of racism and racial inequalities has been characterised by considerable delays and deprioritisation, even more so their intersections with other systems of discrimination and oppression, including patriarchy. Formalised with decolonisation since the 1960s has been the governments' desire to distinguish those racialised as 'white' from those racialised as 'other-than-white' (the terminology encouraged by the UK governance, GOV.UK, 2021) through its monitoring of migration, residency and employment (Laux, 2019; Patel, 2022). Despite its international legacy of structural racism, subjugation and coloniality, recognition of the practices of racism in public institutions within its borders was only introduced to the public lexicon in 1999 in England (HMSO, 1999) and in 2005 in Northern Ireland (McVeigh & Duchan, 2005), a context that continues to be resistant to anti-racism as an unaccountable outlier of UK legislation (Gilligan, 2018). Interventions of universities are discussed in the section below; however, it bares noting here that the salience of 'race' in UK policy in general has lessened in the past decade, including in education (Gillborn et al., 2016) and higher education (Pilkington, 2018). Universities' self-conceptions as liberal institutions with fair policies have meant that they 'ignore adverse outcomes and do not see combating racial inequalities as a priority' (Pilkington, 2020, p. 29). Authoritative influences of such dysconscious racism include the Race Disparity Audit published in 2017 by the English government, which Smith (2023, p. 1) described as 'a pernicious form of political doublespeak which effects a maintenance of the status quo. In excluding racism as a cause of disparities, the audit acts to de-legitimise anti-racism as part of the solution, thereby preventing actions with the potential to end racial injustices'. Similarly, the 2020 report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (known colloquially as the Sewell Report) obfuscated the state of racial equality in the UK on which it was intended to report, receiving widespread critique (Gopal & Rao, 2021).

Policy and practice interventions for 'equality' in the UK university

'A relative depoliticisation of the staff equality agenda in higher education' (Deem & Morley, 2006, p. 185) was noted in the early twenty-first century, informed by a study with participating academic staff based in England, Scotland and Wales. While there may be institutional variations, in this section we discuss how the UK university sector prioritised the inequalities faced by 'women' as a unitary category, with less uptake of the more recent sectoral considerations of structural and institutional racism on staff, and the continued misrecognition of structured intersectionality and carelessness about discriminatory experiences of those at the intersection of socially oppressive categories. Data about the 'protected characteristics' under Equality Acts are collected from staff and reported by public universities to HESA, with limited public access presented online (see https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff). However, legislation continues only to be firmly applied, in recognition of patriarchy, to the reporting of statistics about 'sex' of employees by public authorities in all the devolved nations, and to 'religious background' in Northern Ireland in particular in recognition of sectarianism.

As with many international sectors, the UK sector has seen the creation and success of feminist movements and institutionalised practice-based initiatives to address inequalities for 'women'. Gender mainstreaming has been adopted elsewhere, such as within the Indian university sector since 1986 (Banerjee et al., 2011), an approach that mitigates the risk of marginalisation on those tasked with undertaking critical work as 'gender persons' in disciplinary or administrative homes (Henderson, 2019). UK sectoral investment since 2005 has included Athena SWAN's (Scientific Women's Academic Network) self-reported institutional audits, which are well documented and probed in scholarship (Rosser et al., 2019). That particular intervention has, however, been the subject of much critique. One is that the feminist impetus was co-opted and then mobilised as an effective neoliberal tool for the purposes of institutional reputation gains rather than systemic transformation (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019; Yarrow & Johnston, 2023). Gains have been of less benefit to women of social groups minoritised due to racialisation, into what is currently termed 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic' ('BAME'),[2] classism (Bhopal & Henderson, 2021) and gender marginality. Flattened constructs of 'women' mask power and privilege, suturing the politics of institutional change. The efficacy of such Gender Equality Plans faced critique in the European Union too (Rosa & Clavero, 2022). Regardless, the UK's initiative was lauded a success by the sector, and adopted in other contexts, including the Republic of Ireland (Drew, 2022), which too has gendered pathways to professorship (Harford, 2020), weak legislative framing on the reporting of 'race', and passport privilege impacting academic employment (Sequiera, 2021).

In 2014, an additional charter mark was established in the UK sector, the Race Equality Charter. Scholars considered the experience and expertise of those implementing such processes (Henderson & Bhopal, 2022), with both appreciation of its potential at the institutional level and concern about perverse incentives and gaming (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2018). Gains in terms of the staff composition and belonging are yet to be seen (Campion & Clark, 2022). Elite institutions were exposed as particularly problematic, when analysis of a longitudinal dataset of 120 UK universities, that had espoused organisational commitments, showed negligible changes to their appointment of 'BAME' staff (Baltaru, 2023). Those with insider insights hold that 'institutional directives to address race inequalities often fail to engage seriously with the fundamental aspects of race and racism' (Rollock, 2018, p. 313), which is why calls have been made for scholarship which looks beyond the veil of the 'organisational display of inclusion' (Baltaru, 2022, p. 229).

Despite the routine collection of so-called 'equality data' in the resource-rich context, there is rarely demonstration of transparency by public authorities about the systemic advantage for dominantly-placed ethnicities, and even rarer exploration of structural intersectional

inequalities. For instance, 'sex' and 'race' were only recently explored as discrete categories (intercategorical analysis) in relation to award applications, rates and amounts by UK research funders (UKRI, 2024) and by those in the USA (Chen et al., 2022). The limited intracategorical analysis of 'sex' and 'race' published in the past year by UK's public research funding bodies (UKRI, 2024) revealed the dismal 3% award rate of all applications made by the combined group of 'female ethnic minority' primary investigators. Such delays could be read as symptomatic of the lack of institutional accountability for recognising and, moreover, addressing the effects of intersectional inequalities on women, which Crenshaw (1991, p. 1245) describes as representational intersectionality. Racial orthodoxy has seemingly, as articulated about the USA, 'advanced the goal of racial minority inclusion, but at the cost of downplaying problems of racial inequality and misrepresenting racial minorities' campus experiences' (Berrey, 2011, p. 573). The problematic ethical stance (Aiston, 2011) of the neoliberal ethos of prestige and rankings has increasingly sidelined 'equality', and replaced it with discourses of 'diversity' and 'inclusion' (Bowl, 2018), which are 'more compatible with elitism than with social justice' in the UK (Bowl, 2018, p. 671) and elsewhere (Smidt et al., 2021).

Categorial separations between discriminatory systems are not only maintained, but inequalities in access and participation for many excluded and marginalised groups are made invisible. At the time of writing there are as yet no formal UK-wide, university-facing acknowledgements of nor interventions to address what has been described as the coloniality of 'gender' (Lugones, 2016). The lack of a formal mechanism to recognise geopolitical inequalities in UK equality law has seemingly effected an epistemological blinkeredness of fellow academics to inequalities that impact many migrant academics, including the adverse conditions experienced by those from the Global South/Majority World. Some argue that this lack of collegial critical consciousness of academic peers 'fits an established pattern of harm to Black women and other marginalised groups getting less attention until the problem begins to affect people from dominant groups directly' (Blell et al., 2022, p. 1824). However, scholars continue to emphasise the agency of practitioners to call attention to policy-implementation and principle-implementation gaps (Ahmed, 2007), and to structural and representational intersectionality, undertaken in scholarship about universities, to which this paper now briefly turns.

Scholarship on inequality in the UK academy

The question of the access, positioning and flourishing of 'women' in UK higher education has produced considerable scholarship, much of which recognises plural, fluid identities, and the differences among ('intracategorical') and between ('intercategorical') how people group themselves (in terms of self-identification and as coalitions of solidarity), and the contrast to how people are grouped institutionally and structurally (which in the UK are aligned). This section, for ease of reading, is organised into topics and social structures that relate to women in UK universities, although not exhaustive.

Scholarship on success for women

Insights into the circumstances and subjectivities of being the 'first' woman to gain access and positions of leadership within institutions emerge empirically from scholarship (Cownie, 2015) in contrast to the celebratory promotional narratives alluded to in the section above. Westoby et al. (2021) mapped the findings of 32 papers which contributed insights into the constraints to and enablements for women academics' success in UK HE.

UK scholarship on academic women spans the main academic functions (education, research, third mission). A particular concern is the persistent inequalities in conditions to undertake research, enacted through gatekeeping of peer review (Sato et al., 2021), funding for disciplines (Boyle et al., 2015) and funding bodies (Bedi et al., 2012), and through informal relations such as in conferences (Burford et al., 2020; Henderson, 2021), mentorship (Davies & Healey, 2019) and networks. The social stratifications of institutions play a role too (Boliver, 2015). In addition, scholarship has probed positions, including mid-career (Kandiko Howson et al., 2018), full professors or 'chairs' (Macfarlane & Burg, 2019) and university governance councils (Sherer & Zakaria, 2018). Employment conditions have been studied too, including promotion, to determine patterns of bias and dis/advantage related to gender and race, including for instance case study interviews of women's experiences (Bhopal, 2020); how educators across the life-course in England experience the power of white sanction within promotion and progression challenges (Miller, 2016); and institutional case studies (Sadiq et al., 2019).

Ruptures have at times enabled scholarship into the dark spaces of universities. For instance, the salience of the #MeToo moment was seized (Chandrashekar & Siddiqui, 2018) to point to how less scholarly and practitioner attention has been paid in the UK to sexual and gender violence experienced by academic staff (Jones et al., 2021), with arguments that the 'invidious circle of gender inequality and sexual harassment is mutually supportive and sustaining' (from a case study of a Scottish university by McCarry & Jones, 2021, p. 928).

Scholarship on access and participation for racially minoritised women

Calls have long been made to explicate processes that 'eliminated' racialised minorities from academic professions—described almost 30 years ago as 'a most important and intractable problem in need of urgent theorising and investigation' by scholars of the UK academy (Heward et al., 1995, p. 149). Despite under-representation and constrained positioning to junior levels (Wright et al., 2007), UK Black Feminist academics have authored texts centring the experiences of those marginalised and minoritised in the UK academy. Attention has been drawn to the oppressive systems of whiteness and misogynoir (recently, Arday & Mirza, 2018; Gabriel & Tate, 2017; and the special issue in *Race, Ethnicity and Education* by Tate & Bagguley, 2017), and on being within elite institutions as the 'minority-of-minorities' (Stockfelt, 2018). Experiences of shaming (Dar & Ibrahim, 2019), discrimination and exclusion highlight injustice, bullying and racism (Mahony & Weiner, 2020).

Yet Nichols and Stahl's (2019) systematic review of 50 papers on the intersections of staff inequality found that 'sex' continues to be the central concern of scholarship, which some argue is symptomatic of the dismissal of Black feminist theory and women from contemporary academe (Bilge, 2020). Counter-narratives of agency have included navigating academia as Black female professors (Rollock, 2021).

Scholarship on class-related inequalities

Socio-economic stratification in the UK has seen the intersections of 'sex' and 'class' feature in scholarship about the politics of belonging (Davis, 2022) and the costs of success for working class women, particularly in positions of seniority (Hoskins, 2010). An argument is that working class academics face the threat of loss of identity to succeed within the rigours and requirements to have legitimacy within UK academia, in ways not negotiated by those with visual markers of difference (Lynch & O'Neill, 1994). Class and race seemingly compete for recognition of systemic victimhood in the UK (Crawford, 2019), at times segregated to

the detriment of solidarities. The continuation of classism has relegated the Black and white working classes to less prestigious HE institutions, with high achievers facing barriers to access elite institutions such as Oxbridge (Reay, 2018), exposing how such eliteness continues to undermine meritocracy and reproduce privilege (Bhopal & Myers, 2023).

Scholarship on geopolitical inequalities

Studies of academic migration and staff (im)mobility have seen some recent interest in UK-based research on higher education, as indicated by a recent special issue of *Higher Education* (Tzanakou & Henderson, 2021). However, geopolitical inequality and coloniality are not centred (Belluigi & Chiappa, 2022). Extending beyond blinkered methodological nationalism of the UK's regulatory 'equality' regimes requires consideration of the entangled relations between academic im/mobility, access and positioning to human and physical geography, which involve power dynamics between groups, institutions, regions, states and inter-national relations.

The dynamics of state regulation—including equality legislation, securitisation, the hostile environment and recent visa schemes—have been raised by scholars affected by barriers to access from beyond the Kingdom's borders (such as the immobility of African academics in Langa et al., 2019). Stark are the pressures felt on those from the Global South (Majority World) to pass the 'whiteness threshold', which continues to have considerable racial capital in the UK academy (Durak, 2022). The impact on the ways of being of those employed who present as 'foreign', newly migrated and with non-English linguistic repertoires and accents has been studied (Luxon & Peelo, 2009; Tebbett et al., 2021), with insight into how migrant academics adopt fluid academic identities to fit host institutional environments (Clifford & Henderson, 2011). Migrant academics' epistemic in/exclusion in the UK academic labour market is based on the country of PhD award (Pustelnikovaite & Chillas, 2022), known as 'academic nationality' (Rostan & Höhle, 2014), data that is unfortunately not collected for so-called equality reporting.

To study geopolitical *inequality* is to explore in what ways such dynamics are asymmetrical, and constitutive of past legacies and current stratifications to create and/or maintain inequalities. Prevalent categorisations consider blocs of nations grouped economically, such as the Global North (Minority world) and Global South (Majority world), between which inequalities have worsened since 1950s (see Freeman, 2024). Despite not reckoning directly with the roots causes of such geopolitical inequality (including colonialism, the Cold War and neoliberalism), recognition of the unsustainability of such 'development' underpins international commitments to the SDGs, and the annual monitored mapping by World Bank Country Income Categories. The SDGs include targets directly related to access to the human right to higher education, gender equality in education, global development education, scholarships for developing countries, and university partnerships (for more, consider the special issue of *Higher Education* edited by Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021).

The contrasts between policy, interventions in practice and the concerns of scholarship set the scene of our discussions of the methodological approach and limitations of this study, discussed in the next section.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

This paper is informed by a study of staff inequality in the discipline of education, which was supported by the British Educational Research Association, for which the full report (including a study description and replication checklist) is open access (Belluigi et al., 2023).

A descriptive analysis of administrative data held by public bodies on the academic staff composition and employment conditions in all UK universities between 2015 and 2020[3] is offered, to challenge the complacency of assumptions around the progress of 'equality, diversity and inclusion', and to raise questions for further exploration. Similar approaches have brought attention to inequalities in academia within and beyond the UK, such as the socio-demographics of who authored knowledge (i.e. publications) in the social sciences by analysing 20,000 Web of Science authors from 2016 to 2020 (Lockhart et al., 2024), and the socio-demographics and the careers of university professional staff in the UK and Australia (Gander, 2018).

The processes and design of the larger project were a product of negotiation—between the call for tender for the funders, our intentionality and intellectual commitments as researchers, and anticipated imagined readers— in a milieu of socio-political divisiveness. Two of the authors had considerable experience in qualitative, interpretative, critical and emancipatory research approaches in projects related to universities (in the UK, South Africa and India); another's experience was of quantitative approaches to social justice educational interventions. We had a robust sense of what was already known experientially and represented in research outputs and other media, by minoritised academic citizens in the UK, and how such contributions were received by dominantly-placed majorities and technorational institutions. Public datasets were claimed to be more comprehensive and less affected by biases related to participation and reporting than primary data collected as part of a research study (Connelly et al., 2016), and thus useful for exposing what is 'known' about small sub-groups that may otherwise be difficult or unfeasible to ascertain (Drake & Jonson-Reid, 1999). We embarked on the project in the hopes that it would provide opportunity to 'talk back' with a snapshot of the known existing data about the 'state' of inequality. This was at a point in time when doublespeak performativity (Smith, 2023) and optical allyship (Sobande, 2020) by institutions and funders about 'equality' and 'diversity' were drowning out critique, scholarship and lived experience about discriminatory conditions and unequal outcomes, some of which we cite in the sections above.

The HESA holds the entire administrative dataset of information self-reported by academic citizens (academic and professional staff and students) of their 'personal characteristics', and employers' reporting of employee's contracts, at all universities in the UK. We purchased data about all academic staff employed (inclusive of contract type, length and position on the academic hierarchy, and all whose practice included undertaking 'teaching only', 'teaching and research' or 'research only'), rather than taking a 'sample' from the population. In December 2020, there were 224,530 academic staff employed ('full person equivalent', FPE) of which 149,085 were on full-time contracts (HESA, 2022). Compliance to HESA reporting requirements means that we cannot report raw numbers nor unrounded percentages, which at times leads to odd totals and threatens to invisibilise extreme minorities. We indicate such rounding through the '>' or '<' signs to the nearest 0.5%. Percentages of data for the category FPE are utilised to analyse social groups represented, which is the equivalent of data on a single person, for an accurate picture of *who* is represented as having gained access to employment within the staff composition. To reveal inequalities in participation, data on 'full time equivalent' was analysed, to reflect the sum of the various contracts and employment conditions, as tabulated in Table 1.

The datasets were synthesised, verified against HESA publicly available datasets and then explored analytically. Descriptive statistics in the form of sorting, grouping through Pivot Tables, frequency distribution tables, and figures in Excel, enabled the researchers' exploration of patterns of the multiple fields to discern relationships and differences between the groupings of variables (Cooksey , 2020), and any emerging inequalities. Informed by ethical principles, including those of balance and justice, the set was approached from the different entry points of the socio-demographic variables. For each variable, percentages

TABLE 1 Full time equivalent data provided about employment conditions and how it was differentiated.

Employment conditions	Differentiated data
'Academic employment function'	Research only/teaching and research/teaching only/other
'Academic contract function'	Junior/senior/professor/senior management
'Mode of employment'	Part-time/full-time
'Terms of employment'	Fixed-term/open-ended
'Starters'	
'Leavers'	
'Attainment' (i.e. promotion to various positions) and progression (i.e. promotion to 'professor')	
'Region of provider' (i.e. devolved nation)	England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales

were calculated and then proportions of known statistics of each variable and intersecting variables considered. Differences and rates of change over the 5 year time frame were also calculated.

In some ways, the approach described above aligns with the 'intersectional invisibility' research model (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), which considers prototypes constructed as the standard persons of social groups, and those who are not ideal-typical within such categories. The assumption of this model is that 'the social invisibility that people with intersecting identities experience by virtue of their non-prototypicality gives them a mix of advantages and disadvantages compared to prototypical members of their groups' (p. 381). The ideological type underpinning dominant ideals of the prototype, such as androcentricism, ethnocentrism or eurocentrism, is analysed not only via patriarchy and racism (intercategorical), but also in terms of responses to prototypical subordinate group members who have characteristics that do not readily fit with the prototypical group member (intracategorical), which may include less/more discrimination, and more/less voice ('political invisibility') and representation ('cultural invisibility'), which are particularly noticeable in 'historic invisibility' in archives, because they do not readily fit the dominant ideological categories. An important contribution of US scholars has continued to be how this plays out as 'legal invisibility' within legal frameworks, the absence of which are present in Equality Acts and related policy in the UK generally, in universities as public bodies particularly, and in turn, the collection, monitoring and action to address inequality. However, this conceptualisation did not inform our explicit intentionality within the research design.

Crimmins et al.'s (2023) insights are more akin to our thinking at the time. Those insights were informed by their analysis of UK institutions awarded formal recognition for supporting gender equity between 2015 and 2020 (the same period as the HESA datasets we purchased), where continued barriers to career opportunities were found. They caution that 'whilst inter-categorical intersectionality is based on the notion that all social categories (such as age, race and gender) are equally salient, the degree of importance of any category will likely depend on *location or context* of the phenomena being examined' (Crimmins et al., 2023, p. 659). Thus, they call for 'iterative and translocational research into the impacts of the intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and religion in spaces of higher education, particularly those with colonial legacies and presence', to which this paper attempts to respond. Our analytical approach suspended assumptions of where forms of inequality would manifest; rather we compared and contrasted proportions intercategorically (sex, race/ethnicity,

nationality, age, disability, religious belief) initially, followed by explorations drilling down into subordinate groups intracategorically (again by sex, race/ethnicity, nationality, age, disability, religious belief), and then looking at employment conditions. In our analysis, social location in addition to disciplinary (of education, compared with all UK disciplines combined) and national contexts were considered.

These laboursome, intensive processes enabled the observation of inequalities which manifested. Insights were limited by the quality of the dataset, which had incomplete and missing data, and problematics with the categories which were predetermined by HESA. We decided against multiple imputation (Rubin, 2018) to avoid distorting the values of the data. Instead, we made the missing/incomplete data of the undifferentiated data of each intercategorical variable (such as 'sex', 'race/ethnicity') apparent at the beginning of our reporting of the percentages of 'access' to employment. This was then followed by proportions of what was 'known' of intracategorical groupings for further exploration and analysis, as is appropriate for descriptive statistics.

In the section below, and those which follow, we attempt to bring to the fore ways in which we negotiated our critical agency, constrained by the conditions of working with sources created and curated by a public authority. Healthy scepticism about the validity of datasets collected by public institutions and through mainstream social science methodologies has been raised by scholars of critical traditions. As indicated in the literature review above, many have instead adopted interpretative or critical approaches to centre the experiences and effects of patriarchy, racism, xenophobia, ableism etc. on qualitative aspects of life. These, in addition to methodological nationalism, are often deeply entrenched in public institutions and governmentality, and in turn such datasets, enacted through the ways in which people are monitored, reported on and constructed through categories not of their making, which in turn dis/allow truth claims (Crawford, 2019). In our attempts to be critical methodologically while working with the HESA dataset, the 'Quantitative Critical Race Theory' (QuantCrit) principles offered by Gillborn et al. (2018) served as a sensitisation device.

The first principle recognises that racism is a complex, fluid and changing characteristic of society that is hard to quantify and measure as an 'object', and is more than an identity and/or a variable. The second point of guidance is cognisance that numbers are not neutral, but constructed and analysed in ways which maintain and protect white-dominated institutions' interests, assumptions and perceptions. We approached the study aware that majoritarian assumptions may have misshaped the collection, curation and prior analyses of such data. Indicators of 'class' for instance are not collected. Gaps in reporting were particularly noticeable in relation to 'ethnicity/race', disability, and religious belief. We have attempted to make omission and missing data a visible presence, to raise awareness of the 'persistent issue [of] the lack of robust data' (Blell et al., 2022, p. 1836), such as in our description of gendered and racialised dimensions of missing data, under Table 3, in the section below. The only firm legislative requirements for 'sex' indicate what is valued for accountability within the UK political economy between those 'male' and 'female'—and also what has been institutionally avoided, such as the dearth of entries in Northern Ireland for the category 'other', legislated across the UK since 2017. Analysis of disclosure, reporting and minority/majority inequalities according to gender identity and sexual orientation of staff requires further exploration when it comes to UK HE (Hastings & Mansell, 2015), with precedent growing in policy studies related to transgenderism (see Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018, about Western Australia).

The third principle, that categories are not natural nor given in how group boundaries are drawn, is a well-known area of controversy within UK scholarship and public discourse, as indicated in the 'historicising' section above. The normalisation and mobilisation of terms imposed by those in power to label, organise and control persons and groups have been implicated in creating and disguising racial inequality, and furthering social divisions. There is weak public discourse on the relation between democracy and representation, and less

acknowledgement of the value of culturally plural heterogenous identities (such as those readily claimed in the USA; Lugo-Lugo, 2008). We have utilised 'sex' rather than gender, and 'male' and 'female' within the analysis, in recognition of the limits such categories impose. We have utilised 'racialised ethnic minority' and 'white' for the most part, with the specific terminology when relevant. Table 2 indicates how we have adapted the official terms for ease of reading. We were aware of how these approaches were re-inscribed in quantitative measurement, which we attempt to bring to the fore by using the terms 'recorded as' and 'reported as'.

We anticipated, and sought to address transparently, the possible majoritarian assumptions and moves of evasion of imagined readers. Exceptionalist arguments justifying contextual differences of population and histories of inequality in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were addressed by purchasing the combined data of each country to make visible contextual dynamics, the dynamics of all UK academic staff, and the discipline of education by comparing and contrasting at macro (UK) and meso (devolved region) levels.

To extend further than the methodological nationalism prevalent in UK university 'equality' policy, practice and scholarship, we posed questions about geopolitics by exploring data on nationality. The datasets limited this to 'primary nationality'— the single nationality permitted for recording in the order predetermined by HESA as UK, EU, then 'non-UK/EU'; despite double migration and multiple citizenship being a feature of citizens of prior colonial empires. We grouped these to ask questions about nationalities dis/advantaged by immigration policy, such as those with/out access to the 'right to work', which prior to the UK's exit ('Brexit') included those from the EU, and those from beyond such arrangements ('non-UK/EU'). Possible global inequalities were considered by mapping nationalities to World Bank Country Income Categories to distinguish high-income countries, often associated with the 'Global North' or 'Minority World', from those with less national resourcing, distinguishing Upper-Middle, Middle, Low Income countries (LMICs) as part of the 'Global South' or 'Majority World'.

TABLE 2 Tabulating the categorisation of social groups within the first two datasets purchased and our reporting herein.

First dataset	Second dataset	Terms used in this paper
'gender'	'male', 'female', 'other'	Sex, male, female
'ethnicity'		Race or racialised ethnicities
'White', 'BAME', other, unknown		Recorded as 'white' Recorded as 'racialised ethnic minority'
'White'	(No further differentiated data provided)	Recorded as 'white'
'Black'	Black/Black British Caribbean Black/Black African Other Black background	Recorded as 'Black' Caribbean/descent Recorded as 'Black' African/descent Recorded as 'other Black background'
'Asian'	Asian/Asian British Indian Asian/ Asian British Pakistani Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi Chinese Other Asian background	Recorded as Indian/descent Recorded as Pakistani/descent Recorded as Bangladeshi/descent Recorded as Chinese/descent Recorded as 'other Asian background'
'Mixed'	Mixed (no further differentiated data provided)	Recorded as 'mixed'
Other and unknown		Reported initially, after which 'knowns' are analysed

TABLE 3 Rounded proportions of the staff composition in the UK's devolved nations by sex, comparing the discipline of education (left) and all disciplines combined (right).

	Education	UK sector
England	**83.0%**	**83.0%**
Female	69.0%	47.0%
Male	31.0%	53.0%
Northern Ireland	**2.0%**	**2.0%**
Female	64.0%	44.0%
Male	36.0%	56.0%
Scotland	**10.5%**	**11.0%**
Female	68.0%	46.0%
Male	32.0%	54.0%
Wales	**4.0%**	**4.5%**
Female	70.0%	47.0%
Male	30.0%	53.0%

Bold values indicate the proportion of UK academic staff in that devolved nation.

We experienced barriers to accessing the data needed, despite ethical clearance, additional contracts and payments. A second dataset had to be purchased with more valid differentiated data rather than the very broad categories curated by HESA in the first set provided (see Table 2). We were unsuccessful in attaining differentiated data in some categories. For instance, the curation of 'religious belief' made it impossible to raise questions about anti-Semitic discrimination (in terms of both Islamaphobia and anti-Jewish racism).

The fourth principle of 'voice' as an insight to interpretation of statistics was not met through empirical data in this study, which is a major limitation. Within the literature we reviewed (a fraction of which is represented herein, see more in the report and via an open-access resource),[4] we thus prioritised scholarship often positioned as marginalised readings of the university. The questions we asked, the departure points we foregrounded, and the concerns about blind spots and omissions were very much informed by the narratives within such scholarship, and our own prior studies. The authorial team, the data consultant and our critical readers brought scholarly and experiential expertise— inclusive of structures of racism, geopolitics, patriarchy, classism— enacted within universities, as resources to conscietise each other, and to resist assumptions within our processes.[5] We were thus more thorough than perhaps necessary, as outlined in the systematic steps described. This also served as proactive protection in anticipation of accusations of 'bias' which in/validate researchers by those adopting biocentric frames of reference.

The fifth principle of numbers for social justice relates to our commitment to use quantitative data as anti-oppressive praxis to challenge dominant narratives. Because UK universities have not produced benchmarks or targets for representation (thereby protecting the dominant status quo by avoiding accountability and affirmative action), we thus undertook considerably more labour to compare to the discipline of education (termed 'the cost centre 135 Education') with the combined data for all UK disciplines ('cost centres'). The comprehensive nature of the study (beyond what the commission required and renumerated) and of the report, was to fulfil our primary intention for the study to be utilised to trouble the status quo. Findings have been actively communicated through workshops, conferences, and learned society communiques to leadership of education departments across the UK, within various staff-level initiatives in universities, to education staff and researchers within the UK, USA and EU. Visualised data portraits were created within the report (a selection of

which are reproduced herein), inspired by those produced by DuBois (see Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018) to evoke the full impact of such comparisons.

FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF 2015–2020 HESA DATASETS

Staff composition

Across all disciplines in UK universities in 2020, there were slightly lower proportions of female staff (47%) than male staff (53%). Education had a considerably higher percentage of female staff (69%), with slight increases over the period studied in each of the devolved nations. Across disciplines and in education, >0% staff were reported in the 'other' category for 'sex' (an option since 2017). Our analysis is thus limited to the first two categories. Differences between devolved nations are provided in Table 3, showing that the pattern of highest/lowest proportions across disciplines, in those contexts, was consistent with the discipline of education.

The 'ethnic' staff composition of UK universities in 2020 was recorded as 75% 'white', <16.5% 'BAME', 9% 'unknown' (see methodological notes about rounded figures). Education recorded 85% 'white', 8% 'BAME', >6.5% 'unknown'. Gendered and contextual dimensions were present in the latter gap: for instance, education in Wales had the lowest percentage reported 'unknown' for ethnicity (<1% female staff; 3% male staff), and Scotland the highest (>6% female staff; >12% male staff).

The findings hereafter are based on known, rounded reporting. Female staff in education were recorded as <91% 'white' and <9% racialised ethnic minorities. When grouped by male academic staff, a slightly higher proportion of racialised ethnic minorities is observed (>20% all disciplines; <10% education). There were differences per devolved nation. England had the highest percentage of reported racialised ethnic minorities by sex, where 18% of female academics were recorded as racialised ethnic minorities across disciplines, and <10% in education; of male groupings, across all disciplines <21% were recorded as racialised ethnic minorities, and <10.5% in education. The lowest representation was in Northern Ireland, with racialised female staff >8% across all disciplines and <3% in education; and racialised male staff at 15.5% across all disciplines, >0% in education.

The general pattern of more female staff than male staff in education was similar when sex was considered by differentiated 'ethnicity' data, comparing those recorded as 'BAME' to those recorded as 'white', which obscures the differences visualised in Figure 1. Over the 5 year period, the percentage of female staff recorded as Pakistani/descent and Black African/descent to access employment increased to <1%. In all the devolved nations, there was an under-representation in education of male staff recorded as Indian/descent, Pakistani/descent other Black background, Black Caribbean/descent. Northern Ireland had neither male nor female staff (0%) recorded in those ethnic categories in education between 2015 and 2020.

Age, participation and intellectual leadership seemed gendered (Figure 2). In education, specific age bands in the older groups showed different proportions to the average pattern of 69% females to 31% males. The impact of the older staff composition generally in education, and the pattern of attrition with age of female staff, suggests that female academics in education had shorter career durations at senior and professorial level than their male counterparts. Moreover, we found that the percentage age of promotion to professor level was from age 41 for female staff and 31 for males.

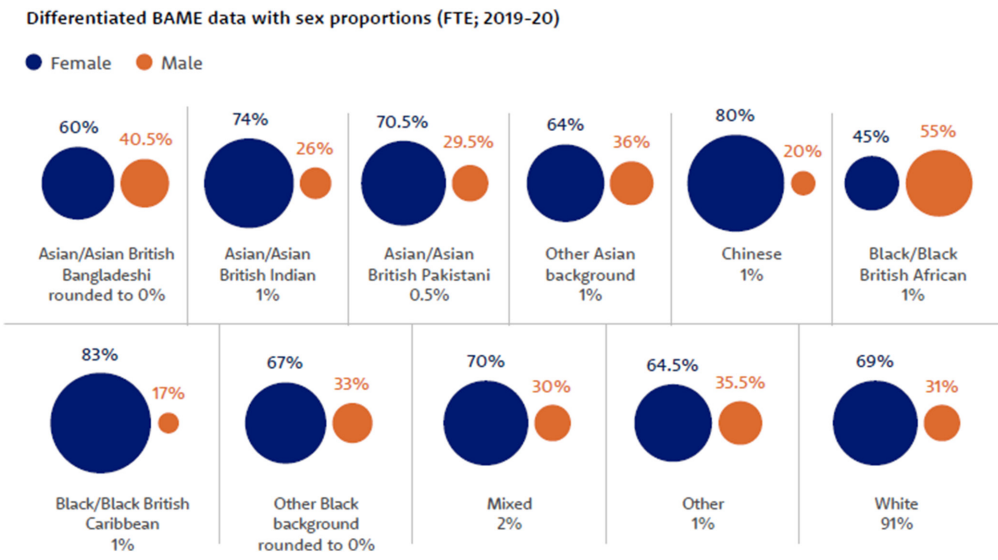

FIGURE 1 Rounded differentiated data of the known reporting of racialised ethnic minorities by sex in education (Belluigi et al., 2023, p. 29).

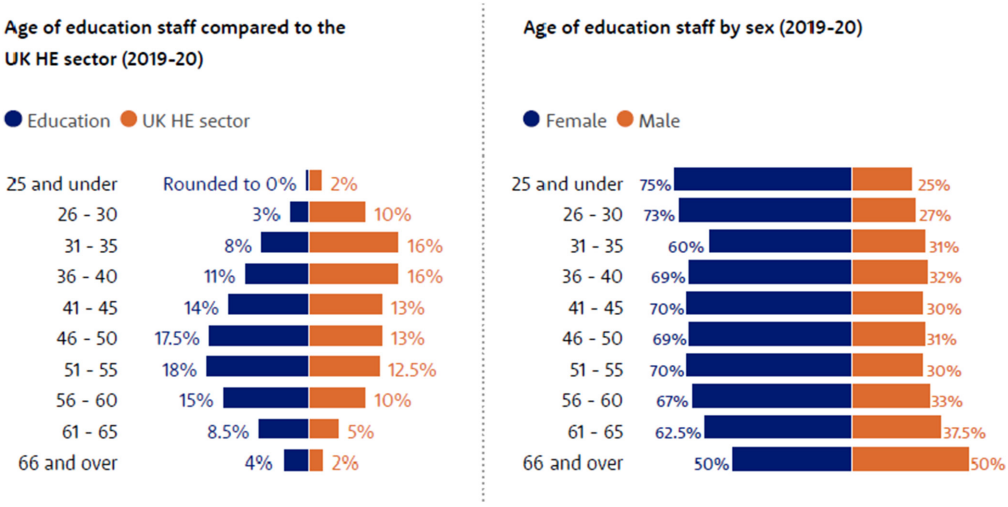

FIGURE 2 Age of UK-based academic staff in education and all disciplines combined (left), and age by sex in education (right) (Belluigi et al., 2023, p. 27).

Disclosure of disability had improved for males, where decreased percentages of 'unknown' were observed over the 5 year period. Outside of this, data on disability across UK disciplines appeared to show no differences in what was known by male and female staff.

Data analysed by grouping 'primary nationality' in the categories UK, EU and non-EU/UK reflected the general pattern of more female to male staff in education. When analysed according to the income status of the country, those from high-income countries, which comprised the bulk of staff (90% in UK universities; <97% in education), also reflected that pattern. This obscured the gendered inequalities acting on those from LMICs, which were marginalised in employment in general (upper middle-income countries at >5%;

<4% lower middle-income; >0% low-income countries in UK universities; in education, 1% upper middle-income countries; <1% lower middle-income; 0% low-income). These indicate geopolitical barriers for intellectuals without passport privilege from the continents of Africa, Asia and South America. The general pattern of more female staff in education was reversed for LMICs, with lower proportions of female staff than male staff employed. The lower the economic status of the country of primary nationality, the higher the proportion of male staff to female. This may be indicative of intersecting systems of gendered, racialised and geopolitical exclusion impacting access to employment in UK universities.

Sex and employment conditions

This section reports on the inequalities observed in the employment conditions for staff in UK universities generally and in the discipline of education.

Tenure ended in UK universities in 1988 (Education Reform Act, 1988). In 2020, male staff had a slightly higher proportion employed in open-ended/permanent contracts (>73%; >70% female). In education, the number of fixed-term contracts decreased between 2015 and 2020, with a slightly higher proportion of female staff employed on fixed-term contracts (<16%) than male staff (14%).

As indicated in Figure 3, male staff in UK universities were predominantly employed in full-time positions, with the proportion of female staff employed full-time showing a difference of 10%. Education had comparatively higher proportions of both groupings employed in part-time contracts.

A lower proportion of female staff in UK universities were employed in positions best placed for intellectual leadership, i.e. 'teaching and research' (>49%) compared with that of male staff (>57%). In education, when considering the participation of each sex relative to 'academic employment functions', male staff were positioned at an advantage despite their numbers being lower, with a higher proportion employed in 'teaching and research' contracts (62%), compared with that function for female staff (58%).

Consistently across the 5 years studied, UK universities positioned higher proportions of males in senior positions (59.5%) than the proportions of attainment for females (<53%). Similarly, despite their low overall numbers, higher proportions of male staff in education attained senior academic positions (>76%) compared with the attainment within the female

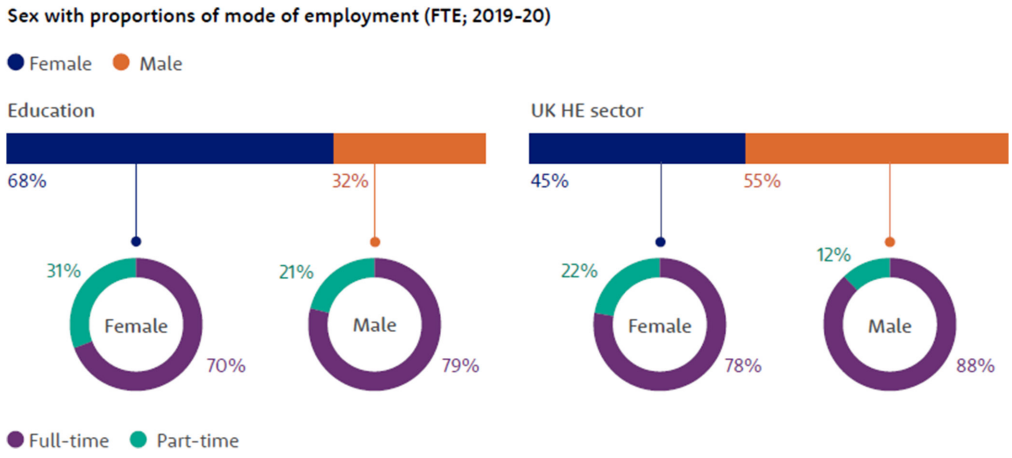

FIGURE 3 A visualisation of 'sex' considered by full- or part-time employment, in education (left) and all disciplines of UK universities (right) (Belluigi et al., 2023, p. 31).

grouping (<71%). These were, in part, impacted by the mode of employment where lower proportions of staff were employed full-time at junior levels, which was inverted at senior levels in education. Of the female staff employed at senior levels, 63% were full-time, while at the same level, the proportion of male staff working full-time was <73%, a difference of 10% between male and female staff. The overall FPE showed smaller gaps in proportions by sex (male proportion at senior academic level, 64.8%; female proportion, 59%).

Across UK universities, <80% of professors were employed full-time. Interestingly, the proportion of female staff employed as professors part-time was lower (3.5%; full-time <8%) than the proportion of their male counterparts (part-time 13%; full time 15%). Although fewer men than women were employed in education, a higher proportion of the male group (>10%) than the female (>5%) was working at professor level. A slightly higher proportion of the male group (>5%) than the female (4%) progressed to senior management level in the period studied. Mode of employment seemed to affect this, in ways that differed from what was observed across disciplines. Of full-time female staff, >6% were in professorships, compared with the <11% proportion of male full-time staff. Of part-time female staff in education, <3% were in professorships, compared with 8% of male part-time staff. This indicates that female staff in part-time positions at professorial level in education may be disadvantaged.

In education, there was slightly higher reporting of known disability by female professors (6%) than male professors (<5%), and higher reporting by male staff in senior management positions (>6%) to similarly positioned female staff (>2%). However, the low numbers and lack of detail about 'disability' limit inferences, which would benefit from a purpose-built dataset with oversampling.

When sex was considered relative to differentiated 'race/ethnicity' data and professorial positions in education, certain groups were under-represented. There were no female professors in education recorded as Bangladeshi/descent nor Black African/descent during the period of study. There were <1% male professors in education recorded as Black African/descent. There were <1% male professors in education recorded as Pakistani/descent, and the percentage of female professors recorded as Pakistani/descent was rounded to 0%.

The sex of professorial and senior management positions was explored by income leve of their country of origin. The 90% of academics in UK universities who were from high-income countries had a proportion of <7% female professors and 16% male professors. The >5% of academic staff from upper middle-income countries had >2% female professors and >5% male professors; the <4% of academic staff from lower middle-income countries had 1.5% female professors and >4% male professors; and the >0% of staff from low income countries had >1% females and >2% males. In education, the 97% of staff from high-income countries had a proportion of 5% female professors and <16% male professors; the >1% of staff from upper middle-income countries had >3% female professors and 7.5% male professors; the <1% of staff from lower middle-income countries had >4% female professors to >5% male professors. While the absolute numbers for some of these are low, what is clear is the gendered and geopolitical inequalities.

Recruitment and retention

The low actual amounts and short timescale studied limited surety as to whether the hiring or promotion of staff was addressing inequalities that intersected with gender, with only aging playing a clear role in differences between groupings in education.

The composition of those newly recruited to education was predominately female (>69%), of which the highest proportion was in the 36–40 age group (>77%). The highest proportion for males newly recruited was in the 66+ age group (<58%). In terms of promotion in education, of female staff promoted the highest proportion was in the 51–55 age group (>17%). The

highest proportion of male staff promoted in education in 2020 was in the 41–45 age group (>24%). In terms of attrition, of those female staff leaving education, the highest proportion was in the 56–60 age group (<18%). The highest proportion of male staff leaving education in 2019 was in the 66+ age group (<22%). The 'reasons for leaving' were not recorded for a considerable proportion of staff—21%, generally in UK universities and <36% in education. Slightly higher proportions of female staff (21%) in education recorded the reason for leaving as 'end of fixed-term contract' (the male proportion was at 18%), resignation (21%; male staff 18%), retiring (16%, with the male proportion at 9%) and death (7.5% compared with the male proportion at 1.3%). A higher proportion of the male staff recorded 'other (includes dismissal and ill-health)' (<5%) than the proportion recorded for female staff (<3%).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper exposes how inequalities remain tangible in their effects on academic employment in UK universities, even within a discipline predominantly populated by 'women' such as education. The data snapshots of such inequality describe what is known in officially collected administrative datasets, despite the problematic quality of categorisation, collection and curation of so-called 'equality data'. The intercategorical and intracategorical analysis raises concerns about the conditions for the flourishing of 'women' academic, generally, in their careers; for racially minoritised women particularly; and for the access of migrant woman academics from the Global South most extremely, as we discuss in this section. This challenges decontextualised assumptions that a critical mass (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014) accessing universities can alter discriminatory systems, such as patriarchy. The data snapshots shown herein, however, should not preclude the agency of those operating within such limitations, even those at the margins and extremes of structural control and privileging. For instance, Tate (Forthcoming) and Wright et al. (2018) demonstrate UK-based academics' resistance to aversely racist institutions; however, they also point out the cost and damage this does to individuals, to knowledge and UK universities when practices of anti-racism and decolonisation are structurally limited or marginalised.

Although more female than male staff were employed in the discipline of education, we found that parity in attainment and progression had not been achieved, even at that level of comparison of the variable 'sex'. Indications were that conditions favoured 'white' male staff employed, who were positioned in senior and assigned leadership positions earlier in life, and thus enjoyed longer careers to progress and flourish. Moreover, despite more female staff being in part-time positions than the proportions in UK universities, which could be interpreted positively for those wishing to undertake other roles and/or caring responsibilities, part-time male professors enjoyed higher proportions of progression. As such, the favourable conditions in education for those choosing or requiring part-time work, which was demonstrated in the large proportions of part-time staff particularly at junior levels, seemed to come at the cost of progression to the top for female academics particularly.

This study's findings about the discipline of education confirm the importance of 'race' within analysis of gender inequalities in the UK (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). Extreme racialisation, gendered marginalisation and inequality were found in the access and positioning of academics in the discipline of education, particularly for those categorised as Black African/descent and Bangladeshi/descent. There has been scholarship on students of Bangladeshi descent (Anand & Redclift, 2022; and Scandone, 2023; Takhar, 2016 about female students); however more intracategorical scholarship on and by female Bangladeshi academics is needed. The under-representation of Black academics (inclusive of African, Caribbean and other/descent) was confirmed at all levels of the academic hierarchy in education, but

particularly at the level of assigned intellectual leadership. In 2018, there were only 25 Black female full professors employed in UK universities (Rollock, 2019). Two years after the date range we studied, only 45 female full professors had progressed across all of the UK's public universities, an increase of only 20 individuals over 8 years (Zelzer, 2023), with the number of Black male full professors increasing from 80 in 2014 to 125 in 2022. Despite white females being the group to have most benefited from growth (5865 at professorial level by 2022), they continued to be significantly outnumbered by their male counterparts (13,255).

'Surviving' or 'thriving' within the academy continues to be a struggle within patriarchal systems internal to the university globally. Workplace climate, rather than the oft cited work–life balance of domestic pressures (Reis, 2015), was the reason provided by female academics in the USA for high attrition rates, in a context that also under-represents females in all disciplines and levels of the academic hierarchy (Spoon et al., 2023). Internationally, inequalities that are gendered, racialised and geopolitical emerge in relation to scientific production, including income (Thomson et al., 2021), international collaboration (Callahan, 2019), publication (Bell & Mills, 2020) and Minority World framing of ranking criteria (Estera & Shahjahan, 2019). Such inequalities also frame the push–pull and barriers to mobility of academics, and which countries benefit from the 'brain drain' of academics from the Majority World (Gwaradzimba & Shumba, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2020). The UK's elite institutions, for instance, have been accused of exploiting 'international' staff as replacement labour (Khattab & Fenton, 2016).

Despite such international scholarship, conditions of in/equality experienced by migrant academics based in the UK are invisibilised in current 'equality' reporting and much higher education studies scholarship, perhaps symptomatic of continued white framing and coloniality. This is despite such academic citizens being made hypervisible as marketing capital for the 'international' institution and sector, and their data being captured for monitoring within the 'hostile environment' regime of UK immigration (Andrews, 2019). The intersectional impacts of systems of racism, patriarchy, classism, ableism and geopolitics are obscured from view, although as our data snapshots indicate, administrative data can be read 'diagonally, from the bias' (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 153). The agency of universities to engage with government agencies to unsettle equality frames (Webb et al., 2019) on such matters (a relation which is said to be strained, see Nicol, 2023) is an area in need of study. The social ethics of the global common good of intellectual leadership should become a demonstrated concern, or institutions' sustainable development commitments will be rightly exposed to accusations of double-speak.

This paper's data snapshots indicate the outcomes of selection processes which involve *internal* academic agents. Critiques of discrimination and delegitimation experienced by racially minoritised migrant female academics have long been a feature of global scholarship about the university in the Minority World (Spivak, 1988, 2008). Disquiet about how academic belonging is impacted by the politics of group membership in contexts with legacies of British colonialism has been expressed in studies on race and gender in 'historically white' institutions in South Africa (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2020), and race, gender and class in the Caribbean (Gregory, 2006) and in midwest USA (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). This has included adverse constraints on indigeneity, such as about Native American women in the USA (Dixon, 2008) and Maori women in New Zealand (McKinley, 2005). What many international studies of universities and academic peer review systems demonstrate is that even where there is transparency of structural inequalities, institutions often fail to address the wilful dysconsciousness of in-groups to discriminatory systems. Recent examples include caste-blind perceptions of 'General Category' female staff in Indian universities (Dhawan et al., 2023) and gender-blind perspectives of male academics in China (Horta & Tang, 2023). Thus, the ways in which social regulation and social formation interact should be a continued concern for scholarship and practice for transformative change within institutions.

CONCLUSION

The inequalities revealed in this study jar with espoused national commitments to equality of public universities in the UK, that are regulated through labour legislation and involve compliant collection of data supposedly for the purposes of meeting equality duties. This paper's findings about the multiple, intersecting inequalities in access to academic employment and in positioning for academic participation, even in a predominantly female discipline such as education, raise questions about the conditions for academic freedom, participation and flourishing that UK universities should be providing for *all* of its academics.

Studies that report on statistics about inequality have been critiqued for ineffectually participating in the statistical groundhog day of UK policy craft which calls for, and then ignores, quantitative evidence of inequality of outcomes (Loke, 2015). Echoing scholars well versed in this macabre dance, we assert that the onus should not be on scholars nor on those disadvantaged within universities to continually challenge the veracity of promotional discourses of equality, diversity and inclusion. Rather than rewarding the double-speak of commitments so late in an historical narrative of inequality, accountability requires that 'clearer evidence is needed by universities to demonstrate how they are meeting their legal equality requirements as specified by the Equality Act (2010)' (Bhopal, 2020, p. 706). Firmly monitored employment equity legislation and political will have been found to be successful elsewhere despite economic challenges—such as increases reported in the representation of female researchers of the G20 (53.5% in Argentina and 46.2% in South Africa compared with 38.7% in the UK, according to the Institute for Scientific Information, 2023) and female academics' perceptions, in eastern and southern African countries, of being more successful in gaining research grants than their male counterparts (Prozesky & Mouton, 2019). The limited gains of UK universities' sectoral initiatives, such as Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter, have led scholars to advocate for state pressure, because the complacency and inertia of universities about racialised and gendered outcomes may 'remain intact unless significant pressure is placed on universities to change' (Pilkington, 2020, p. 29). We concur, while also calling for international attention to the reproduction of gendered, racialised and geopolitical inequalities in academic staffing in high-income countries, such the UK, because of the impact such influential sectors has the global common good of (higher) education and knowledge.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Funding was competitively awarded for the purchase of datasets, their initial analysis and representation in a study report by the British Educational Research Association (ref. BERAStEdu3).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under licence for this study. Much of the tables related to the findings are available open access published by the British Educational Research Association at https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/education-the-state-of-the-discipline-staff-equality, in addition to being archived in the first author's institutional repository at https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/projects/education-the-state-of-discipline/datasets/.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical clearance was awarded by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Science, Education and Social Work of Queen's University Belfast (Ref. 036_2122). Data handling and presentation adhered to the 'Five Safes' framework of the Secure Research Service. The dataset was acquired through the formal process of requirements of 'information security' stipulated in a contract set by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, which impacted data transfer (supported by the Queen's University Belfast Data Compliance Unit) and data reporting herein.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE MATERIAL FROM OTHER SOURCES

Aspects of the original study report have been included herein. That report is authored by the same authors as this text, and published under the creative commons licence by the British Educational Research Association. It has been referenced actively within the text, including figures taken from the report. However, the argument presented herein is an original contribution.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Our concern here is with the historic representational invisibility in the dominant public socio-cultural imagination (concerns raised by theorists of intersectionality, such as Crenshaw, 1991; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Against this has been the production of counter-narratives and counter-archives curated by marginalised individuals, collectives, social movements and scholarship, including by Black women academic citizens in the UK (see for instance the evocative text by Longley, 2021).

[2] The language of 'ethnicity' which is utilised in modern UK bureaucratic governance can be seen to obscure its racialisation, and to group heterogenous peoples in ways misrepresentative of (distinct and shared) histories and ethnicities. Terminology and related categories have altered over time, and thus differ in some of the studies cited herein. In addition, they are inconsistently applied in the four devolved regions. For more, see Aspinall's (2020) mapping of the contrasting purposes of such changes, including the influence of political coalitions for advocacy. For considerations in relation to the methodology of this study, please refer to that section herein.

[3] For feasibility, the set included a 5 year range. The end date was set before the Covid-19 pandemic, with the assumption that it may have impacted 'usual' employment dynamics and/or limited institutions' actions to shape change during times of 'crisis'. The 5 year range provided some indications of stasis/change, although the duration was insufficient for further statistical analysis and inferences to be made with confidence. Longitudinal administrative data linked across different domains are particularly powerful as a research resource as they allow pathways throughout the life course to be examined and provide insights into how circumstances, experiences and opportunities are inter-related (Denaxas, 2015). In this case, the low actual numbers of female academic staff not racialised as white/not of UK nationality/reporting disabilities who were employed in universities, compounded the issue.

[4] https://www.zotero.org/groups/4566021/edi_in_uk_he.

[5] We include this insight cautiously, aware of the temptations of cultivating authority through associations of authenticity that depend on reified markers of identity and experience, prevalent in the current habitus of 'positionality statements' (Zembylas, 2024) that paradoxically ignore, and thus reinscribe, the coloniality of historical assumptions of self–other relations from which they emerged (Gani & Khan, 2024). We have, in good faith, narrativised ourselves in other texts in the public domain— there articulating relations to participants, social groups and source material in acknowledgement of the power of the researcher when generating data and in interpretation. In this study of an existing dataset, our choice has been to practise refusal, with humility, of reviewers' insistence on such declarations. Rather our way of holding ourselves to account has been to make apparent the power structures that shaped the production of this work and the imperfections of our negotiations, in both this section and (through hedging and other devices) throughout the paper, and in the report of the larger study.

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How to cite this article: Belluigi, D. Z., Arday, J. & O'Keeffe, J. (2024). Data snapshots of the access and participation of 'women' academics in UK universities: Questioning continued gendered, racialised and geopolitical inequalities. *British Educational Research Journal*, *00*, 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4047