

## Staff and student voices matter in business of race equality

Deborah Gabriel discusses race equality in higher education

### Written By:

Deborah Gabriel

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FOR THE past few years I have maintained multiple identities as both a student and staff member in higher education. I have been lecturing in journalism since 2008 and have been a PhD student since 2010, passing my viva at the University of Salford earlier this month.

As such, I have first-hand knowledge and experience of some of the issues highlighted in the Race Equality Survey and report, that I undertook and authored for Black British Academics CIC. As the Founder and CEO, I am also in the business of race equality.

It is my view that one of the major drawbacks with regards to race equality in higher education is the exclusion of black and minority ethnic staff and students in policymaking, evaluation and feedback on measures to advance race equality.

This is a serious oversight and missed opportunity to draw on the perspectives and experiences of black and minority ethnic staff and students as a valuable source of knowledge.

In our Race Equality Survey black and minority ethnic staff and students not only define the problems, they also advance solutions. Students in particular, who make up 52 per cent of survey respondents give very powerful testimonies that speak to manifestations of racial discrimination and disadvantage that pervade the higher education sector.

They have spoken, now they must be listened to. They do not want to be marginalised within a public institution funded by the communities in which they live.

They are stakeholders in higher education and universities must start to reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of Britain. They are explicit in their call for more ethnically diverse lecturers and greater cultural diversity within curricula.

The unequal outcomes for black and minority ethnic students suggests that the legal obligation for higher education institutions to ensure “substantive equality” under the Equality Act (2010) is not being given sufficient priority.

Legal obligations aside, the market-isation of the higher education sector is leading to a more student-focused, student-driven business model. That should make the current status quo untenable. Especially given that more young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are attending university than the white population.

In the end, I believe that student power will ultimately force the hand of university leaders to tackle longstanding racial inequalities, to ensure that they continue to attract the student numbers they require to stay in profit.

*Deborah Gabriel is founder and CEO of Black British Academics. She is a lecturer, journalist and social commentator on race equality and social justice issues*

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