

BME academic flight from UK to overseas higher education: aspects of marginalisation and exclusion

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Abstract

This paper describes the experiences of BME academics who consider moving overseas for career opportunities. It explores the barriers that BME academics report in UK higher education, which affects their decisions for overseas higher education migration. Our findings suggest that BME academics were significantly more likely than White academics to have ever considered moving overseas to work, although reasons such as family commitments led to many remaining in the UK. However, those BME academics who eventually move overseas report positive experiences. In contrast those who stay in the UK report various barriers to career progression. We suggest significant change is needed in the UK higher education sector in order to retain BME academics who consider moving overseas.

Introduction

Despite a plethora of research exploring equality in the higher education (HE) sector; such as the experiences of women (Morley, 2013), the effects of social class (Reay *et al*, 2010) and the more recent focus on Black and minority ethnic (BME) student access to different types of universities and degree attainment (Boliver, 2013), there is little research which focuses on the experiences of BME academics in HE and the barriers they face for promotion and career progression (Author refs, 2013). This article focuses on the reasons why BME academics chose to leave HE (exploring both positive and negative experiences) and examines aspects which may attract BME academics to stay in UK HE. The article is based on data from 1201 survey questionnaires carried out with respondents working in UK HE and 41 in-depth interviews .

BME representation in higher education

There has been a great deal of research that has explored the existence of institutional racism in higher education (Law, Phillips and Turney, 2004; Modood and Shiner, 2002; Pilkington, 2013). Much of the research outlines the racism and discrimination faced by students in higher education and the inequalities that they continue to face. However, recent research suggests that such inequalities continue after graduation, with BME students more likely to be unemployed and earn less compared to their White counterparts (National Equality Panel, 2010). However, whilst increasing numbers of students from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds continue to enter higher education (ECU, 2013, p60), inequalities continue to persist. Lymperopoulou and Parameshwaran (2014) in their analysis of census data suggest that those from BME backgrounds were more likely than their White counterparts to have a degree level qualification or equivalent. However this varies by ethnic group and, in using

data from the 2011 census, they suggest that White Gypsy/Irish Traveller, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and White and Black Caribbean groups were less likely to have degree level qualifications compared to those from Chinese, Indian and Black African backgrounds. Research suggests that inequalities persist for BME students, particularly in relation to degree classification (Boliver, 2013; ECU, 2011).

Despite significant increases in the numbers of BME groups attending and achieving degrees at universities, evidence suggests that this participation is not reflected in the representation of UK BME academic staff in higher education institutions. Currently BME academics make up 7.8% of the total population (ECU, 2014). The table below shows that the largest minority ethnic group is Chinese, followed by Asian and Black.

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Table 1 Minority ethnic academic staff, 2012/13 (HESA)

Ethnicity	%
Other (including mixed)	24.4%
Chinese	23.4%
Asian or Asian British - Indian	19.2%
Other Asian background	13.9%
Black or Black British - African	7.9%
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	4.8%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	3.4%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	1.9%
Other Black background	1.2%

Source: HESA Statistics, Ethnic minority staff by ethnicity and standard occupational classification group 2012/13

The numbers of BME staff in senior management or heads of schools roles in 2012/13 was also low compared to their White counterparts with 30 from Black backgrounds; 170 Asian, and an overwhelming 5135 from White backgrounds (HESA 2014). Furthermore, the number of professors from BME backgrounds is low compared to their White counterparts; with 85 from Black backgrounds (60 UK BME); 950 Asian (390 UK Asian); 365 Other (including mixed) (240 UK other and mixed) and 15200 (13,370 UK White) from White backgrounds (HESA, 2014).

Table 2 Census 2011 (England and Wales) and UK BME Professors, 2012/13

Ethnicity	Census 2011 %	Professors %
Asian	7.5	4.1
Black	3.3	0.4
Mixed	2.2	0.7
Other	1.0	1.0
White	86	93.7

Recent research carried out by the UCU suggests that inequalities in promotion processes exist in higher education. When BME applicants apply for professorial grades they are less likely to be successful compared to their White counterparts (UCU, 2012). They found that White applicants were three times more likely to be promoted to professorial grades compared to their White colleagues and they suggest that greater transparency is needed in the promotion process, particularly in the collection of data. ‘Collating and retaining equality data in relation to recruitment and promotion exercises is essential and can help an institution to see whether problems are being caused by lack of applications or lack of success in recruitment or promotion exercises’ (UCU, 2012: 19).

Whilst there has been a great deal of research which has examined the student experience in higher education, there has been little research which has explored the experiences of BME staff in higher education. Recent research (author ref, 2013) suggests that inequalities continue to exist for BME academics in higher education. Author ref (2013) in their research found that BME academics reported experiencing overt and subtle forms of racism from colleagues (sometimes in junior positions to themselves). They also found that the value of having BME staff in institutions is often unrecognised by senior managers leading to the work of White academics being profiled and celebrated and, furthermore, BME staff remain underrepresented at the most senior decision-making levels. Findings also suggest that BME academics report an over scrutiny of their work, lack of trust by their White colleagues and having to reach higher standards compared to their White colleagues (such as a greater number of publications and higher amounts of funding). The research also found that some BME academics welcomed the REF¹ and defined it as ‘neutralising ethnicity’, indicating that ethnicity did not determine individual success in the REF. They noted that the requirement for the REF was that one could publish four articles in peer reviewed international journals and that the REF was based on clear objective criteria. Others, however, suggested that far from being objective, the REF was a subjective process in which certain articles published in non-Western countries such as Africa and the Indian sub-continent would be scored lower compared to those published in the West.

Equality Policies

¹ The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions and usually takes place every four years. It is the system by which higher education institutions are graded according to their research outputs which determines funding from HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England).

The Equality Act introduced in 2010 protects individuals from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with one single Act and introduced 'protected characteristics' such as race, religion, gender reassignment and sexual orientation (as well as others). This was followed by the Public Sector Equality Duty, introduced in April 2011, which aims to meet the needs of those who are from protected groups for example to ensure greater participation in employment. In relation to HE, the Athena SWAN charter was introduced by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) in 2005 and has shown significant advances in the progression of women in Science, Engineering and Technology, Medicine and Mathematics subjects (STEMM). Universities must demonstrate their commitment to advancing equality in these areas and consequently are awarded a gold, silver or bronze award. The ECU have recently indicated that in order for universities to receive funding in these areas, they must demonstrate they have signed up to the Athena SWAN charter and are making advances in gender equality in these areas. Whilst there have been such advances in gender, there has been little in relation to race equality.

The Gender Equality Charter Mark has also been recently introduced by the ECU. Its aims are to address inequalities in the workplace in a similar way to Athena SWAN, but in relation to the arts, humanities and social sciences. Its main aim is to challenge the numbers of women in senior managerial positions in these disciplines. The Gender Equality Charter Mark is an extension of the Athena SWAN charter. 'The model encourages change at department, school and institutional levels. It is concerned with long-term culture change which will benefit all staff and students. The framework will be developed to take into account the context of non-STEMM disciplines' (ECU Consultation Document, 2013: 2).

During the writing of this article, the ECU is in the process of developing the Race Equality Charter which is currently being piloted in several higher education institutions. The Race Equality Charter Mark will introduce a framework to specifically address race equality in higher education. Institutions will be asked to outline how they have addressed race equality in their organisations in similar ways to which gender inequalities have been addressed under the Athena SWAN charter. Whilst in some sense aspects of gender inequality are being addressed, the Race Equality Charter Mark is to be welcomed as it will force institutions to think about race in ways in which they may not have done so previously, for example adhering to legislation and policy. It must also lead to some institutional change in which organisations directly address inequalities (particularly at senior levels) for BME staff (see author1 ref, 2014). The Race Equality Charter is due to be introduced in 2015, and it is too early to tell the impact it will have on inclusive practices in higher education.

Whilst the existence of equality and diversity policies outlined above suggest some progress, there is evidence to suggest that senior managers do not understand how diversity works in practice in organisations and there are discrepancies between the views of individual staff and senior managers (Crofts and Pilkington, 2012). Furthermore, Ahmed (2007) suggests that the mere existence of policy documents may in fact conceal the real racism that takes place in institutions. The existence of such documents is not necessarily an indication that race inequality is being dealt with. Ahmed suggests that, 'The politics of diversity has become what we call 'image management'; diversity work is about generating the 'right image' and correcting the wrong one' (2007: 605). Ahmed suggests that universities are male and White and that diversity policies might help to change the perceived image of 'Whiteness' without actually changing the diversity of staff.

Theoretical Focus

Recent research suggests that many academics report dissatisfaction with their careers in the UK, particularly in relation to inequalities in academic structures and processes (ECU, 2011; Pilkington, 2013) comparing them to those offered in the USA as being more supportive of career progression and promotion (Author ref, 2013). There is evidence to suggest that some academics are leaving UK higher education institutions for overseas institutions, particularly to the USA as a major competitor (THE, 2014). A report commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute in 2005 (Bekhradnia and Sastry, 2005) found that international academic mobility takes place for staff at different points in their careers. The result of this international mobility poses specific challenges for academic research in the UK; such as the threat to research performance and reputation and the loss of valued talent overseas when leading researchers emigrate.

There has been little research which has explored the study of academic careers in higher education (Cuthbert, 1996), however recent research suggests that academic careers have a specific uniqueness which makes them different to conventional hierarchical models of employment (Baruch and Hall, 2004). Traditional academic careers have distinct features similar to traditional career models which include the acquisition of tenure and a rigid career history (Richardson and McKenna, 2002), but at the same time academic careers have been identified as 'boundaryless' (Chait, 2002). The boundaryless nature of careers is identified by changes in academic structures such as an increase in part-time and fixed contracts (Chait, 2002) and a move from collegial models of working to those which are based on a management model focussing on the needs of the organisation rather than individuals (Enders, 2001). Research also suggests that academic careers are becoming increasingly attached to their organisations due to changes in university policies, structures and practices (Baruch and Hall, 2004).

There is growing evidence to suggest an increase in self-initiated expatriation (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010), alongside traditional corporate expatriation. This understanding of migration is based on exploring the process of migration from an individual level which emphasises the supply and demand effects of immigration. For example, positive and negative factors may push and pull migrants towards either type of migration. The push-pull framework has been developed by Bauer and Zimmermann (1990) who emphasise the economic context of the flow of workers and argue that the push-pull factors may affect relational aspects of thinking about migration and how migration flows work. For this article, we will draw on Lee's (1966) theory of migration based on a push-pull framework which has been applied to an analysis of the global moves of the workforce in which certain push and pull factors may encourage or distract individuals from making a global migratory move.

Methodology

This article will report findings from a two stage, descriptive exploratory study. The study employed a mixed methods approach. Letters of invitation were sent to all higher education institutions in the UK and contained a link to the stage one online survey questionnaire.

Invitation letters were distributed via the funder's mailing lists, Vice Chancellor's offices and Diversity Managers and hence to individual academics via institutional email lists. Invitations were also sent to a number of overseas HEIs in Australasia, Asia, Africa, Europe and America via researcher personal contacts and snowball sampling. The participant information included as a preface to the survey stated that data would be analysed in accordance with ethnicity and stated the aims of the study (see below) which also allude to ethnicity. Originally, the working title had included a reference to ethnicity but this was removed as we did not want to discourage white academics from responding to the survey as their views were also valued as a comparator. A total of 1201 academics from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds responded to the survey questionnaire. Respondents were asked in the survey questionnaire whether they would be willing to participate in an in-depth interview. A total of 240 academics volunteered, both white and BME, despite the survey clearly stating that we were interested in interviewing academics who were from a BME background. Of the 240 a total of 41 academics were BME and were invited for interview. Interviews were carried out with fourteen BME academics who had experience of only working in the UK, twelve currently working in the UK but with previous overseas experience and fifteen currently working overseas (twelve with and three without UK higher education work experience). Interviews took place face to face, over the telephone or via Skype. All of the interviews were digitally recorded and the data transcribed. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty ethics committee in line with the British Educational

Research Association's ethical guidelines. The survey questionnaire and interview were both piloted. The aims of the research were to:

- Understand to what extent UK² academics consider moving to work in higher education overseas and determine if there is a difference by ethnicity;
- Examine the reasons (both push and pull factors) which contribute to their actual or potential migration to overseas higher education institutions (HEIs) and whether these factors vary by ethnicity;
- Establish what UK HEIs can do to retain minority ethnic academics, and attract back those who have already left.

The survey was designed by the research team and administered via the University of xxx online survey software tool. The wording of demographic questions was in accordance with phrasing used in the 2011 UK Census and guidance provided by the funders. The survey was organised into three sections. Section one provided an extensive set of demographic questions exploring respondents' ethnicity, gender, university type and geographical regions of abode. Section two referred to UK HE experiences and the third section referred to overseas experiences. One question set specifically addressed experiences of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and another question set specifically addressed the area of promotion within academia. All participants were asked what countries they would consider moving to for work.

The survey collected a mix of categorical and open data. The quantitative data (frequencies) was analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were employed to define the demographics of

² Whilst we realise that international academics also face challenges and barriers within UK HE, this particular research is solely focussed on UK academics that have UK nationality or citizenship.

the participants and non-parametric inferential statistics (chi square test of association) used to analyse associations between ethnicity, gender, type of institution, discipline and motivations to leave the UK to work in HE overseas. In accordance with the funders' guidelines, 18 different categories for ethnic origin were presented to participants. This led to many categories having very small numbers, especially when broken down, for example, by gender or university type. Therefore, the ethnicity data was re-categorised into six categories (White, Black, Asian, mixed race, Arab, and 'other') in order to facilitate statistical analysis, group sizes being too small for inferential statistics. When analysing ethnicity data by sub-categories (e.g. gender) group sizes fell below five making statistical analysis unreliable. In these cases the categories 'White' and 'BME' were used to ensure adequate group sizes for statistical analysis. Whilst this re-categorisation enabled statistical analysis it is acknowledged that this limits the usefulness of the data in examining the findings in terms of the specific situation with Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi academics, and Black African and Black Caribbean academics, for example.

Interview data was digitally recorded (Olympus WS-110 and VN-6800PC) and transcribed. Voice recordings were deleted once transcribed. Transcriptions were transferred to NVivo for analysis along with data from the open questions in the survey. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis and was indexed in relation to particular themes and categorised under topics and headings (Roulston, 2001). Initial coding was carried out by one researcher and crosschecked by the other researchers for reliability. By focussing on the ways in which respondents speak about their experiences in higher education, sense was made of these events in order to analyse the meanings they attribute to their experiences.

Survey Data

Demographic Details

From a total of 1201 respondents 1020 defined themselves as White and 146 as BME, with 35 opting not to declare their ethnicity (see Table 3). Table 4 provides a breakdown of nationality by ethnicity, and Table 5 addresses gender, as declared by the participants.

Table 3 Ethnic background of respondents

Nationality	All respondents	
	N	%
White	1020	84.9
Mixed race	37	3.1
Black	27	2.2
Asian	65	5.4
Arab	2	0.2
Other	15	1.2
Prefer not to say	35	2.9
TOTAL	1201	100.0

Table 4 Nationality of respondents

Nationality	All respondents		White respondents		BME respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
British	831	69.2	713	70.2	101	69.2
English	110	9.2	*107	10.5	*1	0.7
Northern Irish	31	2.6	29	2.9	1	0.7
Scottish	32	2.7	31	3.1	1	0.7
Welsh	19	1.6	18	1.8	1	0.7
Dual**	125	10.4	*94	9.3	*30	20.5
Prefer not to say	53	4.4	*23	2.3	*11	7.5
TOTAL	1201	100.0	1015	100.0	146	100.0

* Denotes a significant difference between White and BME respondent numbers. More White respondents identify as being English and more BME respondents regard themselves as being of mixed nationality and prefer not to declare their nationality.

**Dual nationality represents a mix of two or more UK nationalities or a mix of UK and non-UK nationalities

Those leaving a question blank have been categorised as ‘Prefer not to say’ along with those who elected the ‘Prefer not to say’ option, which was provided for all questions. The ‘White’ and ‘BME’ categories column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level unless otherwise indicated with an asterisk. Respondents represented academics ranging in age from in their twenties to over the age of 70 from teaching, research and mixed teaching and research contracts. All types of higher education institution were represented as were all salary grades. Table 6 shows the breakdown of respondents by academic subject area.

Table 5 Gender breakdown of respondents

Gender	All respondents		White respondents		BME respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	686	57.1	588	58.6	81	57.4
Female	474	39.5	406	40.4	59	41.8
Prefer not to say	41	3.4	10	1.0	1	0.7
TOTAL	1201	100.0	1004	100.0	141	100.0

Table 3 Represented subject areas

Subject family	All respondents		White respondents		BME respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
STEM subjects	422	35.1	*369	36.2	*39	26.7
Social & Human Sciences	220	18.3	*181	17.7	*36	24.7
Humanities			166	16.3	30	20.5
Medicine and Health	138	11.5	119	11.7	14	9.6
Business & Law	137	11.4	114	11.2	21	14.4
Arts	57	4.7	53	5.2	3	2.1
Professional services and management	5	0.4	4	0.4	1	0.7
Not declared	19	1.6	14	1.4	2	1.4
TOTAL	1201	100.0	1020	100.0	146	100.0

*Denotes a significant difference between White and BME respondent numbers. Significantly more BME respondents work in subjects classified as sitting within the Social and Human Sciences when compared with White respondents. Significantly more White respondents work in the STEM subjects than BME respondents.

Differences by ethnic group

Pearson Chi-Square was used to identify any significant differences by ethnic group. BME academics (83.6%) were significantly more likely than White academics (71.0%) to have ever considered moving overseas to work (chi-square = 5.138, df1, p = 0.023). There was no significant difference between BME groups (Black, Asian, mixed race and 'other') in considering overseas work (chi-square = .877, df3, p = 0.831). The data was further examined to see if a difference existed between ethnic groups in the type of work they would consider moving overseas for. Categories of work included: a permanent or temporary academic post, a temporary secondment, a job outside of academia, or a move overseas to look after family members or to retire (or multiple reasons). No significant differences were found between White and BME academics in type of work required (chi-square 9.314, df6, p = 0.157), or between BME groups (chi-square = 12.020, df15, p = 0.678). Respondents were asked if they were currently considering a move overseas but there was no significant difference between White and BME groups (62.6% of White academics and 65.5% of BME respondents currently considering a move) (chi square = 0.192, df1, p = 0.661). An analysis between BME groups also showed no significant difference in numbers still considering a move overseas (chi square = 6.424, df3, p = .093). This may indicate that whilst more BME academics consider a move overseas more go on to reject the idea.

Academics who had considered a move overseas were asked which country or area of the world they would consider moving to. Respondents were able to identify multiple locations in an open response box. An analysis was carried out between ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, mixed race and 'other') and location (Africa, Australia, Canada, Central and south America, Europe, the Far East, the Middle East, New Zealand, Oceania (excluding Australia and New

Zealand), and the United States of America). Pearson chi-square analysis (chi-square = 58.365, df36, $p = .011$) identified a significant association between ethnic identity and preferred world location. Asian respondents (19% of Asian selections) were significantly more likely to choose to move to the Far East (e.g. China, India, Japan and Singapore) than elsewhere in Europe (9.5% of Asian selections). White respondents were significantly more likely to select to move to Canada (15%) than the Far East (5.8%). Significantly more Asian (19%) than White (5.8%) respondents were likely to select the Far East as a destination to consider moving to. There were no other significant associations revealed by cross-tabulation. The most popular destination for White respondents, those of mixed race, Black and Asian respondents was the United States of America. Those falling into the category of 'other' race (which included Arab, Jewish and Hispanic/Latin) were most likely to seek a move to a European destination.

Academic Discipline

A Pearson chi-square was used to analyse if there was an association between Subject Family (see Table 6) and desire to leave the UK. Whilst there was no significant difference between subject families and no significant difference by reason for leaving the UK (i.e. to seek a new academic post (permanent or secondment), to seek a post outside academia, to look after family, to retire, for a different reason or for multiple reasons), respondents from the Humanities were more likely to be considering a move overseas than others (chi-square = 12.69, df6, $p = 0.048$). When White respondents were removed from the analysis there was no significant association for BME respondents alone, although all 14 respondents from the Humanities subject family had at one time considered a move overseas, and 8 of those 14 were still considering a move overseas. This trend could be due to a self-selecting bias in those that chose to complete the survey; for example the survey topic would be more

appealing and of relevance to those who had and/or who were still considering a move overseas for work.

Gender

A Pearson chi-square demonstrated a significant gender association for considering a move overseas (chi-square = 0.25, df1, $p = 0.025$). Whilst 68.4% of female respondents had considered leaving the UK, 76.1% of male respondents had considered moving overseas. Females were more likely to have multiple reasons for moving overseas and males were more likely than females to be looking for a new academic post overseas (chi-square = 24.036, df7, $p = 0.001$). There were no associations by gender when asked if they were currently still considering leaving the UK. When the data set was split and the same tests run between BME male and female respondents there were no significant associations found.

Reasons for Remaining in the UK and Returning to the UK

Reasons provided for remaining in the UK fell into four categories: 1) Family or personal; 2) Academic/Professional; 3) Lifestyle; and 4) Policy/Political (see Table 7). Personal reasons included such items as the UK being home, owning property, pension and health care. Family reasons included the spouse or partner having a career based in the UK, marriage, and child education. Academic and professional reasons frequently included items linked to research funding, a full-time permanent job, pay and conditions. Lifestyle reasons included the weather, food and life-work balance. Policy and political reasons included items linked to HE funding, workload and equality. A one-sample chi-square revealed a significant difference between stated reasons for remaining in the UK, with 192 academic or professional reasons, 48 policy or political reasons, 46 family or personal reasons, and 33

lifestyle reasons (chi-square 212.323, df3, $p = <0.001$). Males were significantly more likely to state policy and political reasons for remaining in the UK than females (20.7% of male against 8.6% of females; chi-square = 10.032, df3, $p = 0.01$). There were no other significant associations. When the data was split and the same test run between BME male and female respondents there were no significant associations found.

Table 7: Factors that encourage academics to remain in the UK

Factors/Reasons	All respondents		White respondents		BME respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family/Personal	46	14.4	43	15.7	3	8.3
Academic/Professional	192	60.2	158	57.7	25	69.4
Lifestyle	33	10.3	29	10.6	4	11.1
Policy/Political	48	15.0	44	16.1	4	11.1
TOTAL	319	100.0	274	100.0	36	100.0

Respondents who had worked overseas were asked why they returned to the UK. The same four categories were provided as reasons to remain in the UK (see Table 8). A one-sample chi-square revealed a significant difference between stated reasons for returning to the UK with 114 citing academic or professional reasons, 105 family or personal reasons, 13 lifestyle reasons and 4 policy or political reasons. There were no significant associations between gender and reasons for returning to the UK whether analysed as a whole group (White and BME) or with BME academics.

A Pearson chi-square (chi-square = 2.421, df3, $p = 0.490$) showed that there was no significant association between ethnic origin and reasons to remain in the UK. Both BME and White academics shared the same reasons. For those that had worked overseas and now returned (or were considering returning) both White and BME academics were more likely to

cite academic/professional reasons and family/personal reasons than policy or political reasons (chi-square 11.214, df3, p = 0.011).

Table 8: Factors that would encourage academics to return to the UK

Factors/Reasons	All respondents		White respondents		BME respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family/Personal	105	44.5	97	46.4	5	27.8
Academic/Professional	114	48.3	101	48.3	10	55.6
Lifestyle	13	5.5	9	4.3	1	5.6
Policy/Political	4	1.7	*2	1.0	*2	11.1
TOTAL	236	100.0	209	100.0	18	100.0

* Denotes a significant difference between White and BME respondent numbers but interpret with caution due to small respondent numbers.

Interview data

Range of experiences of BME academics

Interviews were carried out with 41 BME respondents. We were particularly interested in the extent to which they had considered moving, or had moved, for positive reasons of being attracted to opportunities overseas, or if there were also reasons which were pushing them away from the UK higher education sector.

BME interviewees reported positive and negative experiences of working in the UK higher education sector. Positive experiences included having access to mentors who could guide them in their careers, particularly at the early stages. A small number indicated that they had not experienced any discrimination in academia. This was particularly expressed by those who were from mixed heritage backgrounds and who considered that they were not visibly identifiable as being from a BME background. Overwhelmingly, however, respondents reported a number of negative experiences which led them to consider moving overseas.

Reasons for BME academics leaving the UK HE sector to work overseas – push factors

There were a number of points in their careers at which BME academics felt they were pushed away from the UK HE sector: entering higher education, seeking a first job in academia, as well as facing barriers during their career development. Several BME academics felt they were not receiving the same access to coaching and mentoring as their White colleagues, with a fifth of interviewees specifically mentioning the need for mentoring of minorities. Lack of mentoring, and investment at an early stage led these BME academics to feel excluded and not being able to build contacts required for career promotion and progression. Consequently, they felt like outsiders in the White space of the academy.

I arrived for the interview and I sat there, waiting and waiting. This man came [professor]. He came in, looked around, looked at me, and walked out. After five minutes he came in, looked around the room, you know, you wait like a waiting room, and then he walked out again. And then I heard him say to the secretary, because at that time I was a Dr, he said: where's Dr [name]? And then I heard her mumble something. And I saw his face turn red. And I thought: that's it. I would have walked out, I had had enough. But I decided, I know it sounds so pathetic, but I thought I wouldn't get my interview expenses! I knew I was a goner, there was no point, the colour of my skin, they had made a decision they were not having me.
Asian, Female, Professor

BME academics reported facing barriers to career progression within the academy. Some specifically said that they felt they had to work twice as hard as their White colleagues, or publish twice as many papers to get the same recognition. Some talked about the goalposts being changed just for them, and that the bar was set higher for them than their White peers. The changing of rules and requirements as described by BME academics reflected differential treatment and the introduction of unnecessary, unfair and unexpected hurdles which they had to overcome, but these did not apply to White colleagues, or at least not to the same extent. There were overt instances of this described as 'very, very subtle racism' and unconscious bias.

...invisibility, lack of acknowledgement...I think there are types of work that black academics often end up doing that in itself has less status. And I know this happens to women academics as well, where you end up doing a lot of the pastoral work and care work...black

academic careers end up being stymied because they end up doing this, rather than advancing their careers. Yes, you can have your white elite academic who does it and gets recognition, and your black member of staff and again it's just, the organisation says: thank you very much for doing that, but there isn't the same kind of recognition.

White and Black Caribbean, Male, Senior Lecturer

And that's the very, very subtle racism that operates here that one is aware of. Because one's antennae are quite powerful in detecting those sorts of attitudes, those kinds of assumptions that certainly one perceives to be very much at play. So it's the kind of almost opposite – almost given sense of superiority without any basis, empirical basis certainly, for that to be there. That certainly you can't get away from. It grates. You feel that this is not rational, or certainly not rational in term of the way that those interactions take place. And so one feels alienated but one also feels frustrated by that. And that can, I think, motivate people to move on.

Asian, Male, Professor

You get people who really don't know anything come and they will be promoted and you are stuck there. And the only explanation in the end is that these people don't want to see you in a position of authority. There is promotion such as taking on positions in the department. I am often bypassed for that. There was one case when I was sitting on a committee, graduate studies committee and they had appointed somebody to chair that committee who was obviously young and naïve. That person had to take some time out, went on leave. And to deputise they appointed somebody who arrived in the department a month before. And I felt like challenging it. It was almost an insult to me. But that's how they operate. That can be racism.

Black Caribbean, Female, Associate Professor

BME academics often found themselves in a small minority, sometimes a minority of one in their department. This lack of a critical mass contrasted with common perceptions and actual experiences overseas. Many did not feel they were allocated senior decision-making roles in their departments or that their work was valued and reported experiencing subtle exclusionary processes and over-scrutiny as unfair and disproportionate to that experienced by their White colleagues.

There is, however, a climate of 'secrecy' with rules and regulations that are not published or explained fully to staff. For example, the promotion regulations are very 'hidden' and not explicitly explained when you ask for clarification. I have seen staff come after me, with far less experience, leadership responsibilities and qualifications, get promoted because someone higher up wanted them to. The system is flawed and so I have now disengaged from the promotion process because I feel that I will never get anywhere with that!

Arab, Female, Senior Lecturer

... you go over there {USA as a black British academic, and especially early on, you are slightly overawed, you are slightly bowled over by just seeing these senior black academics and being able to sit and listen to them and talk to them. Whenever I come back from those kinds of conferences in the States...suddenly you don't have those conversations, you don't have those networks, they are just not here in the same way. And the kind of momentum that you felt, the kind of enthusiasm, momentum that you felt around research around race

equality and so forth, that you felt when you were in the States, and that sense of being a valid field that you have when you talk to people in the States, suddenly you are back here and again you are very marginal again.

White and Black Caribbean, Male, Senior Lecturer

Attractions for BME academics overseas – pull factors

BME academics reported reasons for moving overseas such as academic opportunities and personal lifestyle factors. The academic pull factors included opportunities for employment and the positive messages presented by BME role models in academia in a range of overseas locations. The USA was a strong example of this. Several people knew of BME academics in their field who had successfully attained senior influential positions in the USA HE sector. Others knew of colleagues from a BME background who had moved to the USA and progressed to senior positions such as professor at a quicker pace than their BME colleagues in the UK.

My expectations [of academy in US], I didn't really have too many expectations. But I just knew that there were more people of colour in academia than what I knew in England. And I just wanted to, and I felt that there would be more possibilities for me.

White and Black Caribbean, Female, Associate Professor

[A colleague] had done her PhD in the UK, a black British woman. We would share our lamentable stories about black academics in the UK. She said: come to the USA. She said she had spoken to her head of department. Her head of department said to her, why are you so subdued, I have heard about this English humility, but why are you so reticent? And she said: because of the experience I have had in the UK. He said, well you don't need to worry about that here. And he said to her, tell your black British academics we'll take them, tell them to come to the States. So she was pushing me to apply. She gave me a lot of help with where to look for jobs, guidance. And by this time I had also begun to attend different conferences in the States. And I had a different experience. It was the first time I had encountered people who were interested in my work, who were working on similar topics. I had a community of debate, a community of discussion. And people coming up to me to say they used my articles. I had no feedback in the UK. I thought, whao, I am not working in the dungeon of darkness. And so that again made me think gosh, maybe there is a possibility there.

Black Caribbean, Female, Assistant Professor

A second academic factor which attracted BME academics overseas was the value attached to subjects such as race and ethnicity which were seen as 'credible' disciplines, for example the teaching of Black Studies courses in the USA, mentioned specifically by five interviewees.

many universities would see themselves as lacking if they did not have some kind of programme to support or to show the world what Black faculty were doing. If you do an in-depth search of pretty much any university in the US it will have a kind of Black Studies department. Interestingly, not all Black faculty are affiliated with these departments. Which I think is entirely appropriate.

Black Caribbean, Male, Associate Professor

I want to be in an environment in which I am respected for my area of interest (Black Studies) as much as anything else. I feel like British academia is not yet able to demonstrate a plurality of curriculum interests for their student bodies.

Black Caribbean, Male, Associate Professor

Many respondents also mentioned specific links with countries overseas which included connecting with one's heritage and background and also 'giving something back'.

I wouldn't say it was singularly I saw a ceiling and thought the only way I am going to [progress is to move overseas]. I couldn't say it was as simple as that. It was a much more complicated set of considerations about time of life, the fact that my children are grown up, there is a bit of a family connection [with the country overseas], the fact that I had seen it done [i.e. knew someone who had gone overseas], the timeliness – the right thing at the right time. A mixture of all of those things.

White and Black Caribbean, Female, Professor

And I see the change in the academic world in China. And in particular in the last few years the resources for research in education has rapidly increased. And also China has opened the doors, really wants to catch up with the international academic society in all aspects. And young people really need guidance, need some proper guidance to catch up with the international standards.

Asian Chinese, Female, Professor

Attracting BME academics back to the UK HE sector

Key factors which pulled BME academics overseas included opportunities for permanent contracts, changes in the working environment and a specific recognition of the contribution that BME academics could make to the academy. Many emphasised that it was important that whilst universities had specific policies in place, these needed to create real change in the workplace, such as a significant increase in the numbers of BME academics in senior decision-making roles and a broadening of the curriculum to incorporate the study of race and ethnicity as a valued subject area in the UK HE sector.

A university would have to have the broad enough shoulders to set up a unit. There should be something like 'Centre for Black British Studies'. What's wrong with that? I mean, there is nothing wrong with that. And that could embrace mainstream scholars as well, not black academics only. So, a Centre for Black British Studies. It's like a snowball effect. If there was one Black British Centre there would be others then. It needs the courage of one university to set one up, one in the south, one in the north, one in the midlands. Then they would become

functional, have conferences, and see what happens. And have a network of them across the UK and have scholars of all kinds and all backgrounds that are interested in this subject. Because it needs to be taught to future generations.
White and Black Caribbean, Male, Professor

Such changes would contribute to attracting BME academics back to the UK and retaining those already in the UK.

And so, if I was attracted back to the UK it would be because there is a vision, [the message would be] we want to build this identity for a programme or a School. If someone said: we are fascinated by these questions, we want to support that, then those would be things that I'd take in mind.
White and Black Caribbean, Male, Associate Professor

The thing that I would not go back for would be a sense of being a token hire, filling a need for the bureaucracy rather than having institutional power.
White and Black Caribbean, Male, Associate Professor

Many respondents emphasised the importance of having systems of mentorship; formal or informal, inside or outside of their institution.

It really starts as a junior lecturer. Because you can see the way that the ethnic minority person is treated, as a junior lecturer. You find that the white lecturers are groomed, mentored more, and enabled. And I found that. The white lecturers were groomed and helped, and I just did everything on my own. I didn't get any mentoring, and I think that would help.
Asian, Female, Professor

My institution seems reluctant to promote and nurture staff from within. Its record of employing, retaining and promoting BME staff is very poor. Lack of support, mentoring, encouragement and communication has affected my health and morale adversely.
White and Black Caribbean, Male, Senior Lecturer

Many respondents said that diversity in universities benefitted staff and student communities and this was something that many universities needed to recognise.

And the very odd thing is that Britain doesn't seem to realise that actually its diversity is one of its most marketable attributes. And I began to see that only when I came to the States, where I saw how in the US the perception that was held of British academics of colour and the perspective we bring to a whole range of debates, particularly debates around race, ethnicity, coloniality, which is, in some ways, quite a British perspective and comes out of the complexity of the British Empire and what that has produced in terms of British race relations. We bring this much more global perspective and they really value it here. And so

it's very bizarre that in the UK it's just not valued and just not seen as something both in terms of the knowledge that is being produced around that, the presence of a diverse academy, and not just academic staff – in some London universities they have very diverse support staff, those things are attractive to students in China, Nigeria, Ghana, those places that are up and coming economies.

Black Caribbean, Female, Associate Professor

Discussion and conclusions

This article has explored the reasons why BME academics decide to leave the UK to work in overseas higher education institutions. The findings suggest that academic migration is complex and is likely to take place for various reasons based on individual decisions such as the potential for career progression. Using the pull-push framework, Lee (1966) has argued that the decision to migrate is determined by several factors such as area of origin, area of destination, issues such as distance, physical barriers and immigration laws. Personal factors also contribute in which migration takes place within defined 'streams' from specific places to specific destinations. We suggest that migration can be selective due to the individual characteristics of the populations in question (such as BME academics), as individuals will respond differently to 'push' and 'pull' factors. These may include the impact of direct and indirect discrimination for BME academics regarding promotion and career progression (author ref, 2013, Pilkington, 2013; UCU, 2012). We argue that those who had moved overseas generally reflect a more straightforward

acceptance into academia, with those in the USA in particular stressing the value that universities placed on their contribution, on the benefits of diversity amongst academic staff, and highlighting the range of opportunities for career development and progression. It was clear that there was a strong perception that such opportunities were rarely available to BME academics in the UK. Respondents regularly reported being treated differently compared to their White colleagues, that they were constantly positioned as 'outsiders' in the academy.

Their sense of belonging did not equate with that of their White colleagues. Many suggested that double standards existed in academic departments which led to higher thresholds of achievement for BME staff. This was particularly the case when respondents were a particularly small minority in their departments. Consequently many considered moving overseas, particularly in relation to greater inclusion and acceptance, particularly in relation to the USA HE sector.

In this article, we suggest that the equality initiatives to date have not served BME academics well. Traditionally, there has been a focus on gender equality, where there has been some progress initially through the Athena SWAN programme, now merging with the Gender Equality Charter mMark run by the Equality Challenge Unit, and the Aurora women-only leadership programme, launched in 2013 by the Leadership Foundation in Higher Education (LFHE). The forthcoming Race Equality Charter Mark, which is being piloted at the time of writing, is an acknowledgement within the sector of the existence of racial inequalities in higher education and aims to make a difference to the experiences of minority ethnic staff and students as well as benefitting the whole sector. It is too early to tell how HE will address the introduction of the Race Equality Charter and tackle the inequalities BME academics continue to face in HE. More research is needed on whether there are particular points in BME career trajectories which influence their decision to move overseas, and how universities can provide specific support to retain BME academics as well as attract those who have already left to work overseas. There is a need to explore how specific support strategies and networks can be used to facilitate our understanding of success in HE, and how these can be used to retain BME staff in the UK HE sector.

Our findings point to the need for significant change in the HE sector, particularly in relation to addressing the lack of BME academics in senior decision making roles. In order to support BME academics in their career trajectories in HE there is a need for strategic change in the HE sector. This may include active initiatives to provide mentoring and coaching for BME academics particularly at early career stages, a greater emphasis on the value of diversity to the sector which would include funding for research specifically in areas that many BME academics are working in (such as race, ethnicity and inequality). There also needs to be greater transparent monitoring of data which outlines the progression of BME academics to senior posts such as Heads of Department/Principal/Vice-Chancellor. Only by seeing evidence of a change in the sector, with a critical mass of BME academics visible in senior and high profile roles, will significant change be recognised.

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