

## **'Race': the Missing Dimension in Social Policy Higher Education?**

COLE, Bankole <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6741-0467>>, CRAIG, Gary and ALI, Nasreen

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/25934/>

---

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

### **Published version**

COLE, Bankole, CRAIG, Gary and ALI, Nasreen (2020). 'Race': the Missing Dimension in Social Policy Higher Education? In: REES, James, POMATI, Marco and HEINS, Elke, (eds.) Social Policy Review 32 Analysis and Debate in Social Policy 2020. Policy Press.

---

### **Copyright and re-use policy**

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

<1>2

## <1>'Race': the missing dimension in Social Policy higher education?

<author>*Bankole Cole, Gary Craig and Nasreen Ali*

### <2>Introduction

The discipline of Social Policy within university teaching provision is closely linked to key questions addressed by public policy, particularly those concerned with the welfare of the population, such as poverty, gender and disability, as well as the well-established divisions of welfare, such as housing, health, education, the labour market, social assistance and social care. Over the past hundred years or so, the work of individual academics and researchers in the fields of Social Administration and Social Policy, and, more recently, the work of the Social Policy Association (SPA) and its predecessor the Social Administration Association, has been at the forefront of critiques of public welfare provision, seeking and often achieving significant improvements in aspects of welfare.

However, it has been noticeable that public policy has failed to address the issue of 'race', or, more precisely, racism, to any significant degree, despite the slow emergence of anti-discriminatory legislation since the 1960s (Craig, 2007). Furthermore, over the last ten years, the state, as legitimised by public comments by both major parliamentary parties, has steadily rendered invisible the dimension of 'race' within public policy, both directly and indirectly, through, for example, targeted cuts to equality machinery and public pronouncements that 'race' is no longer a key policy issue despite massive evidence to the contrary, including reports commissioned by the government itself (Craig, 2013). These signals were picked up by a range of organisations, including many local authorities, which set about reducing their commitment to anti-discriminatory practice and cutting services and funding targeted towards black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) populations (Craig, 2011). The failure to act on the findings of a long series of reports and some, albeit limited, academic literature (see later) detailing the ways in which members of BAME groups were disadvantaged is, in reality, a national and continuing scandal that is largely ignored in policy discussions.

More than ten years ago, Craig (2007: 610–11) commented: 'It is important to acknowledge that neglect of the issue of "race" is not confined to social policy as *political practice*; it is shared by the *academic discipline* of social policy.' It is still not uncommon for mainstream Social Policy texts to treat debates on 'race' and racism as marginal. This is striking considering that the Social Policy discipline is centrally concerned with issues of citizenship rights, welfare, equality, poverty alleviation and social engineering. This lacuna extends to

the practice of social research, where many proposals, proposers, funders or commissioners still treat the dimension of ethnicity as too complex, too expensive or too marginal to be worthy of serious attention (Craig and Katbamna, 2004), and where it remains difficult to find groups of researchers, particularly minority ethnic researchers, and most of all minority ethnic researchers with permanent contracts and high-status roles, focused on issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity. Some of the reviews that I have examined or had returned to me for proposals for projects to be funded by significant research funders would have been risible were they not so serious in their failure to address the central issues of ‘race’. One proposal submitted to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to look at the health needs of minority ethnic groups in rural areas generated a review that preferred to argue about the precise definitions of rurality than to think about the issues facing rural minority ethnic groups: of isolation, of difficulties in accessing services or of the failure of health organisations to provide culturally sensitive services. This failure of the Social Policy community also extends to Social Policy teaching and to the high-profile Social Policy journals: a review of the last five years’ contents of *Social policy review (SPR)* and of *Policy and Politics*, the *British Journal of Social Work* and *Social Policy and Administration* shows a striking absence of the dimension of ‘race’ in their tables of contents. Until very recently, when a few articles have appeared in print, the only slightly honourable exception to this criticism was *Critical Social Policy (CSP)*. In this unhelpful context, this chapter examines the question of how ‘race’ is currently placed within the teaching and learning of Social Policy in UK higher education institutions (HEIs).

## **<2>The study**

This chapter is based on the findings of an audit of Social Policy teaching and learning in UK HEIs, and of the dimension of ‘race’ and ethnicity within the Social Policy curriculum, student bodies and staffing. The audit was commissioned by the SPA and carried out from the autumn of 2018 through the spring of 2019 by the current authors. The brief was to explore the extent to which ‘race’ and ethnicity are appropriately placed dimensions within Social Policy and related curricula, or are significant factors in shaping access to courses or employment within Social Policy and other departments and schools offering some involvement in Social Policy and related subjects. The SPA commissioned the work in order to have independent research to inform the development of an action plan and its future work, both independently and with other parties. In line with the requirements of the call, the audit consisted of the following:

<start NL>

1. A brief contextual review of the presence of ‘race’ and ethnicity within the curricula of Social Policy courses or those courses with Social Policy named in their title. This was done by means of a questionnaire survey of all those 65 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK identified as offering some form of Social Policy teaching.
2. A descriptive secondary analysis of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data sets. This provided the proportion of domestic BAME students studying undergraduate and postgraduate Social Policy or related courses at UK HEIs.
3. The questionnaire survey also provided some information on BAME staffing in Social Policy that was then supplemented with statistics obtained from the literature review.
4. A literature review of BAME students’ experiences of higher education in general and of Social Policy in particular.
5. One-to-one telephone interviews conducted with some experienced Social Policy academics (‘experts’) selected on the basis of their ability to provide the researchers with valuable additional information about the teaching of ‘race’ in Social Policy and other related academic issues.
6. Reflections on the ways in which ‘race’/ethnicity has featured in the SPA’s annual conferences and publications.

<end NL>

## <2>The survey

In order to understand how the issue of ‘race’ was dealt with within HEIs currently offering some form of Social Policy teaching, a questionnaire was sent to all HEIs identified as providing Social Policy courses. These courses ranged from occasional modules as part of degrees titled in some other way (typically Sociology or Criminology) through to single honours Social Policy degrees. From publicly available information, the SPA and our own research, we identified 65 UK HEIs where Social Policy was offered in some form. These were distributed in terms of the period of establishment into the indicative categories listed in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Type of university offering some form of Social Policy course**

‘Old’ universities (that is, pre-20th century)	5 (1)
Civic universities (early 20th century)	15 (3)
‘Robbins’ universities (1960s)	6(2)
Former polytechnics (1992 universities)	20 (4)
Others	19 (6)

*Note:* The first figure is the number of HEIs in each category; the second (in brackets) is the number of responses received in that category.

The questionnaire included questions on the numbers of courses, the ethnicity of teaching staff by rank, student numbers and ethnicity, and arrangements in place for recruiting and supporting BAME students. The survey was first distributed by email to identified course leaders or, where that person was not clearly identifiable, to the appropriate head of department/school at the beginning of November 2018. Two reminders were sent in the following month, followed by a further reminder sent in the name of the SPA because of the low response rate. By mid-January 2019, when we decided to close the survey, 18 responses had been returned, of which two indicated that they would not be able to provide a response. The useable responses thus constituted 16 (24 per cent) of the HEIs surveyed.

The comments of those who gave nil returns, plus several other comments sent to us, implied that it was regarded as too much work to complete the survey due to the difficulties of retrieving the data from the relevant university administrative/student records departments. Most of those contacted simply did not reply. This was a very disappointing return by any standard, though it is not uncommon for national surveys to have low returns. The poor response could also have been the result of the time of year when the questionnaires were sent out and how long the course leaders/head of departments had to obtain the required data. The data provided by the usable returns are summarised in the following:

<start BL>

- *Numbers of courses offered with Social Policy content:* typically, these HEIs offered between two and four full courses, some of which were honours degrees; some HEIs specified the number of modules offered across a typical three-year undergraduate period. The number of these modules ranged from 12 to 65.
- *Senior teaching staff:* in terms of ethnicity, the proportion of senior teaching staff (that is, Senior Lecturer (SL) and above, including part-time and casual staff) of BAME origin was between 5 per cent and 25 per cent in five HEIs; in the remaining 11, there were no teaching staff of BAME ethnicities. Where there were BAME teaching staff, they were all full-time staff members. No HEI recorded employing BAME part-time or casual staff. The gender split indicated a slight majority of female staff teaching Social Policy in most HEIs.
- *Professors:* one HEI, with a medium-sized staff group, indicated that it had three full-time BAME professors in its staff group; no other HEI had any full-time BAME professors.

- *Junior teaching staff*: a few HEIs had substantial numbers of junior teaching staff, including, in one case, almost 40 teaching assistants in the Social Policy field. Several others had up to 20 but the number of junior teaching staff in the Social Policy field was typically around six. In relation to the junior staff identified, two HEIs had BAME staff, accounting for 4 per cent and 5 per cent of total junior teaching staff, respectively, with all being full-time staff. The remaining 14 HEIs had no BAME junior teaching staff at all.

- *Numbers of students taking Social Policy courses*: this showed considerable variation, largely accounted for by the mode of course. Five HEIs indicated that there were hundreds of students (one having 580) undertaking Social Policy courses or modules but the average for the remainder was around 20 students. Those HEIs with higher numbers taking Social Policy courses were generally situated in neighbourhoods where the local BAME population as a proportion of the population as a whole was significantly higher than the national picture. This may indicate that these universities recruited a significant number of locally based BAME students, though these figures have to be treated with caution: they may overstate the proportion of BAME students as some student records simply note ethnicity as ‘non-white’ regardless of national origin, thus including overseas students.

- *Special arrangements for recruiting BAME students or supporting them once recruited*: three HEIs indicated that they had special arrangements for recruiting BAME students. One, based on its own research with its students, talked about BAME ambassadors and peer support schemes, as well as addressing important BAME needs such as accommodation arrangements and catering on campus. A second referred to positive action measures without specifying what these were; a third indicated that it did particular work targeting BAME school students.

<end BL>

In summary, despite the very poor response rate, the survey very strongly suggests that in terms of both the numbers and the proportions of BAME students and teaching staff, BAME representation is very low within the Social Policy area. In general, the list of courses and modules reported to us does not indicate a particular emphasis on issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity, except in the very few cases where modules might be thought to address issues of particular relevance to BAME students, such as migration or citizenship, or where ‘race’ is implicit in module coverage, such as those addressing issues of inequality and disadvantage, alongside other forms of discrimination. The only exceptions to this pattern were two HEIs that offered optional modules in racism and xenophobia, and ‘race’ and racism, respectively.

## <2>What do published data say?

In addition to the survey, we undertook a secondary review of UCAS and HESA data sets in order to have a clearer picture of the ethnicities of BAME students studying undergraduate and postgraduate Social Policy courses, including those with Social Policy in the title, at UK HEIs. Undergraduate data were obtained from UCAS while postgraduate data were obtained from HESA. Postgraduate data from HESA were only available for the past six years and were obtained for the research team by the University of Bedfordshire via the Higher Education Interactive Dash Board Information (HEIDI Plus) business intelligence tool. Ethnic group was recorded as declared by the applicant under ‘White’, ‘Black’ (including ‘Black – Caribbean’, ‘Black – African’, ‘Black – Other Black background’), ‘Asian’ (including ‘Asian – Indian’, ‘Asian – Pakistani’, ‘Asian – Bangladeshi’, ‘Asian – Chinese’, ‘Asian – Other Asian background’), ‘Mixed’ (including ‘Mixed – White and Black Caribbean’, ‘Mixed – White and Black African’, ‘Mixed – White and Asian’, ‘Mixed – Other mixed background’), ‘Other’ and ‘Unknown’. All data were rounded to the nearest five for data confidentiality purposes in line with UCAS/HESA policies. Subject categories were identified using the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) codes. ‘Social Policy’ courses were listed under L4; all relevant courses were included using this categorisation. Table 2.2 shows the results of the analysis of undergraduate acceptances for all Social Policy-related courses in the UK by ethnicity between 2008 and 2017.

**Table 2.2: Breakdown of students by ethnicity for all courses listed under ‘Social Policy’ in UK universities (2008–17)**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>Asian</b>	55	80	95	105	90	125	100	130	110	90
<b>Black</b>	75	95	120	205	145	160	135	175	170	135
<b>Mixed</b>	20	45	35	50	50	50	45	40	55	40
<b>White</b>	880	1010	1160	1305	1160	1175	1040	1040	1085	1220

<b>Other</b>	10	5	10	5	5	5	10	35	25	30
<b>Unknown</b>	11 5	145	15	15	25	25	15	40	30	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>1,380</b>	<b>1,435</b>	<b>1,685</b>	<b>1,475</b>	<b>1,540</b>	<b>1,345</b>	<b>1,460</b>	<b>1,475</b>	<b>1,545</b>
<b>BAME (%)</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>White (%)</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>79</b>

The data from Table 2.2 show that:

<start BL>

- Over a ten-year period, on average, 76 per cent of Social Policy students were ‘White’ and 19 per cent were of BAME background (including ‘Other’ as part of the BAME group; 13 per cent if ‘Other’ is not included).
- Within BAME groups, ‘Black’ students were most likely to study Social Policy courses, followed by Asians.
- All ethnic groups followed a relatively stable pattern of course uptake in line with total course uptake across the period.

<end BL>

The results in terms of yearly percentages between BAME and ‘White’ students are shown in Figure 1.

<insert Figure 2.1 about here>

Although these figures are interesting, they do not reflect the entire picture. The data did not include BAME students who applied to study Social Policy but declined an offer, as well as those who changed their minds and took other courses. It would have been useful to compare the Social Policy data with those of other disciplines. However, the aim of this audit is not to compare Social Policy with other HEI disciplines, but to explain the disproportionately low numbers of BAME students taking Social Policy courses and the challenges that need to be addressed in order to tackle this problem. A key question is how can the disproportionately low numbers of BAME students on Social Policy courses be explained and how much of this situation can be explained by how Social Policy is taught in UK HEIs?

## <2>The literature review

The review of the literature was focused on three key issues, namely:



<start BL>

- the experiences of BAME students in UK HEIs in the areas of admissions, progression, retention and achievement;
- the impact of the teaching environment, content and teaching approaches on BAME students' choices and experiences of higher education; and
- BAME staff ratios in UK HEIs and the impact, if any, on the first two issues.

<end BL>

In all three areas, we found limited literature specifically related to Social Policy. Although it is essential that these issues are addressed within subject areas, studies show that this has been difficult with Social Policy. According to Senior (2012: 4), this was partly due to the fact that data and evidence from Social Policy departments have not been forthcoming. However, an in-depth analysis of BAME students' experiences in UK HEIs (Fielding et al, 2008) revealed that although there are variations by subject, none were statistically significant (cf Senior, 2012: 9). Senior (2012: 10) concluded that while Social Policy would benefit from researching within its own discipline for answers, it could also learn by examining the broader perspectives of others. This review provides much of the 'broader perspective', being fully aware of the fact that the variations between subjects and institutions are most likely negligible.

### <3>*Admissions, retention and achievement of BAME students*

Studies report that minority ethnic groups are, on average, more likely to gain admission into UK universities than their white UK counterparts (ECU, 2011). This is believed to be so even among groups who, until recently, were under-represented in higher education, such as those of Black Caribbean ethnic origin (Crawford and Greaves, 2015). This difference is also reflected in applicants' socio-economic backgrounds. BAME students from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend HEIs than comparable white UK students, where the lowest socio-economic quintile group have participation rates more than ten percentage points lower than those of any other ethnic group. The National Education Opportunity Network reported that in 2019, more than half of UK HEIs had fewer than 5 per cent of white working-class students in their intakes. Some of the differences are more substantial. For example, Indian and Chinese pupils are, on average, twice as likely to go to university as their white UK counterparts (BIS, 2015; Crawford and Greaves, 2015) (see Figure 2.2).

<insert Figure 2.2 about here>

These figures exist despite records of prior attainment that show pupils of black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic origin performing worse, on average, in national school tests and exams, and as more likely to have lower prior attainment points than their white peers. The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2015) report also showed that most minority ethnic groups are, on average, more likely to attend one of the 52 selective or ‘high-tariff’ institutions than their white UK counterparts, though the differences are smaller than those found in participation in other (post-1992) universities (see Figure 2.3).

<insert Figure 2.3 about here>

However, the BIS study acknowledged the findings from studies which have shown that minority ethnic groups are less likely to receive offers from allegedly ‘prestigious’ Russell Group UK universities than their equivalently qualified white UK counterparts (Boliver, 2013, 2015, 2016), but it argued that despite what appears like selective admissions on the part of these institutions, BAME admissions at these institutions were still, on average, higher than those of British white students. This contradicts UCAS figures (UCAS, 2015) showing that among young English applicants applying to higher-tariff providers, the offer rate to the ‘White’ ethnic group is higher than to the ‘Asian’, ‘Black’, ‘Mixed’ and ‘Other’ ethnic groups in every subject area. Runnymede’s (2010) report confirms that in terms of actual size and numbers, most BAME students are more likely to attend post-1992 universities.

The reasons why more BAME young people might aspire to go to university compared to their white counterparts have been explained by several, mainly ‘extra-academic’, factors such as family pressures, which may also include parental choice of study area and future employment. Location of university is another factor. BAME students predominantly attend universities in close proximity to the family home.<sup>1</sup> A 2012 survey showed that there were more black students at the University of East London than in the ‘top’ 20 UK HEIs combined (Elevation Networks Trust, 2012: 16). According to Chowdry et al (2013), evidence unsurprisingly showed that not all university degrees have equal economic value, that is, that the *type* of university that is attended makes a difference to a pupil’s labour market outcomes. In the UK, the wage benefit from a degree varies markedly according to both the degree subject studied and the type of institution attended. Previous research has suggested that low socio-economic status students in the UK are concentrated in ‘post-1992’ universities and that degrees from these institutions attract lower labour market returns (cf Chowdry et al, 2013: 433). The issues mentioned in the previous studies raise important questions for Social Policy in terms of how the institution and perceived employability might have affected its BAME student intakes.

Official statistics also show that there are stark differences between ethnic groups in terms of retention and the degree class they achieve, with non-completion rates highest among Black Caribbean students and the lowest degree outcomes also occurring among black students (ECU, 2011), even after controlling for factors commonly known to affect academic performance, such as prior entry qualifications or points (Connor et al, 2003; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2015) (see Figure 2.4). These differences occur at institutions and on courses of all kinds, even in students taking courses by distance learning with the UK Open University (Richardson, 2009, 2015; Woodfield, 2014).

<insert Figure 2.4 about here>

Several factors have been identified to explain this disparity, many relating to the fact that BAME students' experience of higher education is generally inferior to that of white students. Major factors that have been specifically identified include: discriminatory teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) practices; problems of segregation (for example, subtle exclusionary attitudes and behaviour on the part of teachers or other students); 'inadequate' course content and design; low teacher expectations; undervaluing or under-challenging BAME students; prejudiced attitudes associated with linguistic competence; discriminatory practices inherent in the learning environment; and inadequate student support mechanisms, including inadequate complaints mechanisms and the inadequate inclusion of BAME students in the composition of both informal advisory groups and formal governance committees (Richardson, 2010, 2015; Singh, 2011; Stevenson, 2012).

In relation to Social Policy in particular, the ECU (2011) report revealed that 12.6 per cent of black students and 8.9 per cent of Asian students chose to enrol onto Social Studies courses compared to 8.4 per cent of white students. According to Senior (2012), despite some of the earlier observations, given the fact that this subject area actually appears to attract more BAME students than white students, and in the face of evidence which suggests that an ongoing attainment gap exists between BAME and white students, it is essential that the issue of retention and attainment is addressed within the subject area. As indicated by Senior, data on the progression and retention of BAME students on Social Policy programmes in the UK are relatively very scarce. This means that issues of retention and performance that have been found to be problematic with BAME students are not currently addressed within Social Policy.

### <3>*The teaching environment*

Studies show how BAME students are marginalised on campus ‘through the maintenance of white norms’ (Crozier et al, 2016, cited in Woodfield, 2017: 234). In a comprehensive review of how ‘race’ and racism were presented by higher education researchers in the US, Harper (2012) noted how in several studies where the results showed that BAME students perceived and experienced campus racial climates differently than their white counterparts, few authors considered structural/institutional racism as a logical explanation for such differences. Harper (2012: 17) showed that studies on why BAME students disproportionately ‘drop out’ said:

<start quote>

nothing about how constant interaction with white faculty, peers, and others whom minoritized students view as racist and the existence of racist environmental conditions in the residence halls could have engendered discomfort among minoritized students and consequently dissuaded their out-of-class engagement and might also have compelled them to take time off.

<end quote>

However, instead of viewing racial differences as by-products of institutionalised racism that requires systemic organisational change, these authors routinely suggested approaches that have little to do with investigating and responding to the realities of race on campus (Harper, 2012: 18). Harper noted that few authors actually discussed their findings in ways that engaged racism as a plausible explanation for racial differences or the negative experiences reported by ‘minoritised’ participants. Harper found that instead of calling these outcomes racist, researchers commonly used the following semantic substitutes to describe the campus environments that minoritised students, faculty and administrators often encountered: ‘alienating’, ‘hostile’, ‘marginalizing’, ‘chilly’, ‘harmful’, ‘isolating’, ‘unfriendly’, ‘negative’, ‘antagonistic’, ‘unwelcoming’, ‘prejudicial’, ‘discriminatory’, ‘exclusionary’ and ‘unsupportive’ (Harper, 2012: 20; see also Housee, 2018).

In the UK, the experience of racism by BAME students in UK HEIs is acknowledged (see EHRC, 2019) but the effects on BAME students’ choices and performance are yet to be fully investigated. In a recent survey, UK university staff also dismissed the thought that their institutions might be racist while recognising that some colleagues might be. One lecturer went further and argued that the structures that UK universities operate ‘are hangovers from a prior era; designed for rich white people, they’re not designed to be conducive to the sort of cohorts that we have now’ (cited in Stevenson, 2012: 9). In a survey involving BAME students in a UK HEI, Andall-Stanberry (2011: 9) found that students viewed teaching staff as ignorant of equality and diversity issues; as a result, staff have not been able to educate

white students on how to develop a more balanced non-discriminatory view of their BAME peers. Many of the students in this survey said that they would strongly discourage others from attending their university unless there were changes made in how it treated BAME and international students (Andall-Stanberry, 2011: 10). Inadequate institutional awareness/understanding of the cultural differences and life experiences that impact significantly on BAME integration has been clearly identified as one key institutional barrier to BAME students' participation and achievement in UK HEIs. Some students surveyed were highly critical of institutions presenting an image of diversity in marketing materials, particularly on their websites, which turned out to be unrealistic, leading to a strong sense of 'deception' (Stevenson, 2012: 16).

### **<3>Addressing 'race' issues in TLA**

Stevenson's (2012) comprehensive report on black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment, which included surveys with university lecturers and BAME students in 11 UK HEIs, revealed that focusing on 'race' in HEI TLA strategies is not a straightforward issue. The report recommended various steps that ought to be taken, including: addressing institutional barriers; providing diverse approaches to TLA and support services (including 'safe spaces'); developing anti-racist skills among all staff, particularly personal tutors; strong central leadership; and the regular monitoring and evaluation of anti-racist strategies (Stevenson, 2012: 17–20; for similar suggestions specifically directed at Social Policy, see also Senior, 2012: 11–25). However, although the need to have inclusive TLA practices was acknowledged by most of the staff surveyed by Stevenson (2012), there was a general lack of knowledge of any type of teaching and learning strategies that should be directed specifically at BAME students or whether or not such an intervention would make a difference. In the interviews conducted with university lecturers and BAME students, Stevenson (2012: 15) found that both did not want BAME students to be singled out as a target group, as it 'smacked of inadvertent racism'.

There is no conclusive information on the nature and extent of the coverage of 'race' on all Social Policy courses taught in the UK's HEIs (other than our survey findings). Stevenson found substantial coverage of 'race' in only one of the 11 universities that she surveyed. However, there does appear to be an expectation that 'protected characteristics' (see Equality Act 2010), including 'race', will be covered on most topics as they are often the most vulnerable to welfare inequalities, political powerlessness and most forms of human suffering. There is no doubt that Social Policy as an academic subject has evolved

significantly since it was first taught in 1921. However, this substantial progress has been mainly in terms of the subject matter or content, for example, significant developments have taken place in terms of the internationalisation of the curriculum, leading to new topics such as migration, human trafficking and modern slavery. As Irving and Young (2005) have argued, these developments have led to a teaching problem in terms of attempts to cover what is rapidly becoming a content overload at the expense of the development of transferable skills.

### **<3>BAME staff ratios in UK HEIs**

In 2016/17, there were 419,710 staff at UK HEIs, 49 per cent having an academic employment contract; 12 per cent were from other European Union (EU) countries, while 8 per cent were from outside the EU. In 2016/17, where sex and ethnicity were known, white males accounted for more than two thirds of academic professorial staff (Universities UK, 2018). Most of the studies on the experiences of BAME staff in UK's HEIs tend to agree that these staff are treated less favourably than their white counterparts. Surveys have shown that BAME staff are disproportionately in lower ranks, earn less than white counterparts, are more likely to have experienced discrimination, experience inferior pay and conditions, have their authority questioned, and face disproportionate levels of scrutiny and barriers to career development (see Leathwood et al, 2009). In terms of gender, there is very significant under-representation of BAME women in senior academic posts. Advance HE (formerly the Equality Challenge Unit [ECU]) reported in 2018 that of 4,735 female professors in UK HEIs, only 25 [0.5 per cent] were black and 55 were BAME. There are currently only seven BAME female professors of Social Policy or closely related subjects employed in UK HEIs. The question has been raised as to whether increasing the numbers of BAME academics would have any significant effect on BAME students' enrolment, retention and achievements on courses. It has been suggested that BAME staff representation could be a contributing factor to the problem of BAME retention and performance as BAME staff would serve as role models for BAME students (see Runnymede, 2010; Singh, 2011; Senior, 2012). However, this view has been contested (Stevenson, 2012). There is no evidence on whether having BAME staff teaching 'race'-related topics (or teaching much more) on specific degrees will impact positively on BAME student enrolment and performance. More research is needed on why BAME students choose Social Policy as a degree course and whether having more focus on 'race', as well as having more BAME lecturers teach modules, would

be advantageous to BAME students' admission, progression and completion rates on Social Policy courses.

## <2>The views of 'experts'

We identified 12 people who were geographically representative in terms of their location and had substantial experience in Social Policy teaching, who could together be regarded as an expert 'sounding board' for informing our investigations. Ten took part in short, structured telephone interviews to collect as much contextual information as possible from their own considerable collective experience. Two respondents were BAME academics. Questions asked covered: their knowledge of the literature; the key issues in relation to the coverage of 'race' in Social Policy teaching, including recruitment and enrolment; BAME involvement in courses and teaching; and learning more generally. In summary, the comments gleaned from the remaining ten respondents are summarised thematically as follows.

## <3>The 'whiteness' of Social Policy

As several respondents put it, Social Policy is "a white subject with a white colonial history and taught mainly by white people". One respondent stated that it is about the "dead white men of social policy". Another respondent suggested that Social Policy is increasingly focusing on welfare models but the notions of welfare underpinning this approach are very exclusive and do not focus strongly, if at all, on 'race', ethnicity and inequality. For example, 'race' topics are often covered in Social Policy modules but as subsidiary, not as mainstream. In several cases, lecturers coming new to some HEIs had devised new modules themselves on 'race' and related issues as there had been no full module on the subject previously. This implied that the teaching of 'race' was seen not as necessarily a departmental/school imperative, but as a particular interest of one lecturer.

However, some new subjects/disciplines have emerged that do not necessarily have Social Policy in their titles, but cover welfare topics that are also related to 'race', for example, Migration Studies or, more obliquely, Citizenship. In some cases, lecturers have been asked to make inputs on 'race' to courses other than Social Policy, and 'race' sometimes pops up in other core courses, such as Economics when, for example, the labour market is analysed. In some cases, Social Policy ended up being covered in other cognate courses such as Education, which means that its profile is nowhere near as high as it might be. Several suggested that they try to ensure that the dimension of 'race' is also discussed when dealing with overarching themes such as 'youth' or disability.

One lecturer offering a module on 'race' said that it attracted students from other core disciplines (such as Health or Politics) and excited considerable interest, but that some of the issues raised, such as slavery and colonialism, were experienced by students as shocking, which suggested that they had not been exposed to thinking in this area beforehand. Overall, the picture was that 'race' teaching within Social Policy courses was, as one lecturer put it, "a drop in the ocean", and is not regarded in any sense as a mainstream feature.

The lack of focus on 'race' in undergraduate courses was replicated in postgraduate taught courses, which is a finding emphasised by the results of our survey. In some cases, it was noted that white staff found themselves uncomfortable teaching 'race' to a mixed ethnic group and therefore avoided doing so. One respondent also noted that white people need to recognise the standpoint of BAME people, and if they are teaching 'race', they have to be absolutely sure about their own identity while doing so. Against this, multidimensional policy and political issues with high public profiles, such as Windrush and Grenfell, encouraged some staff to pick up these issues.

### ***<3>Low numbers of BAME students on Social Policy courses***

In Northern Ireland in particular, but also in other areas of the UK, the low numbers of BAME students on Social Policy courses was said simply to reflect the demographics of the area. In Northern Ireland, for example, the students are predominantly Irish. This was the only strongly explicit reason given for low numbers of BAME people on Social Policy courses, though it was generally recognised that recruitment was a problematic area. In one university near London where there was relatively high BAME representation, the respondent there felt that the problem for them was not in recruitment – with many BAME students coming through non-traditional routes – but in attainment, in terms of degree class and in general marks, including resubmitted work. In another university, also set in a highly multicultural area, 80 per cent of students were local and 50–60 per cent were from BAME backgrounds. Here, the pairing of Social Policy with Social Care and Sociology worked well for recruitment. In other HEIs, Social Policy seemed to be 'squeezed out' by a focus on Sociology, for example, with Social Policy seen as a minor element of a joint course or in bigger social science schools.

It was also felt that the route into employability is less clear for Social Policy than for Law or Nursing, for example, and that this affects recruitment. Another HEI undertook considerable outreach work into BAME communities, including work with churches and faith groups, and found that many BAME people believed themselves not to be able to work at the higher



education level. They argued that while prospective BAME students may not ‘choose’ to do Social Policy, this can be addressed once students have been engaged with. This HEI used ex-students as role models. However, although recruitment was thus widely said to be problematic, most of the respondents had few suggestions, if any, on how the subject could be made attractive to BAME people. One respondent talked about employability and marketing but not specifically about how these can be targeted at BAME admissions. More widely, yet again, the issue of the alienation of BAME students from the curriculum was raised – that they are disengaged at some stage because it is not seen as relevant to their interests and experience. Some reported that BAME students failed to do as well on Social Policy courses as they had expected.

## <2>The SPA’s profile in relation to ‘race’

The SPA has never made use of ethnic monitoring in membership application forms and it is therefore not possible to identify whether its membership reflects the 15 per cent BAME proportion in the wider UK population.<sup>2</sup> We therefore turned to the public face of the SPA – its publications, conferences and strategic documents – to see to what extent the dimension of ‘race’ was reflected in them. Over the past few years, the two major public reports with which the SPA has been associated are *The current and future state of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs* (Patrick et al, 2017 [2012])<sup>3</sup> and *Social Policy: Subject benchmark statement* (Quality Assurance Agency, 2016). The only salient point made in Patrick et al (2017 [2012]) about the position of ‘race’ within the curriculum came from one interviewee who observed that Social Policy was increasingly being concentrated within Russell Group universities (with their under-representation of BAME students), and that despite the rhetoric of its mission, Social Policy was not available to the most diverse range of potential students. This issue was not significantly addressed in the report’s recommendations. The Quality Assurance Agency’s (2016) *Subject benchmark* document refers to equality and diversity as important issues for discussion, as well as to the dimension of ethnicity in relation to social groups characterised by difference, but the terms ‘race’ and racism do not appear anywhere. We also undertook an analysis of material published in the SPA’s two major journals (*Journal of Social Policy* [JSP] and *Social Policy and Society* [SPS]) and its annual review (*SPR*), as well as the profile of papers and keynote SPA conference speeches. These showed that over the past seven years, only 6–7 per cent of papers published in the *JSP*, the *SPS* and the *SPR* concerned issues of ‘race’ or were written by BAME authors.

Clearly, behind these data are several questions. For example, the *SPR* consists of chapters commissioned to reflect key current debates. It is perhaps surprising that ‘race’, with all the tensions and conflict associated with it in public policy (for example, about police behaviour in relation to minority groups, the exclusion of minority groups from education, housing ghettoisation and disadvantage in the labour market), has not been more strongly represented. As with papers submitted to the two journals of *JSP* and *SPS*, we do not know whether there has been a disproportionate number of papers addressing issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity that have been rejected for whatever reason. We also do not know (and given issues of both confidentiality and competitiveness within higher education publishing circles, we probably never will) whether many papers that might have appeared in the SPA’s outputs have been directed to specialist journals (for example, the *Journal of Migration Studies* or *Ethnic and Racial Studies*) on the assumption that they would have a better fit or a more sympathetic review. We also analysed outputs of the comparable journal *CSP*, which argues that it takes a more radical stance and thus might address some of the gaps identified in relation to ‘race’ and ethnicity. *CSP* had a slightly larger proportion of relevant papers (see Tables 2.3–2.6). The most recent public SPA output is the series of short blogs marking 50 years since the SPA’s founding. Only six had a strong or moderate focus on the dimension of ethnicity. Those submitting blogs were self-selecting.

**Table 2.3: UK BAME representation in *JSP***

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total 5 years	Annual average
Number of papers in volume	38	35	35	37	39	184	37
Number of papers with UK BAME topic	1	2	2	3	2	10	2
Number of BAME authors*	0	1	2	2	3	8	2

*Note:* \* Only one author counted per paper even where multiple authorship.

**Table 2.4: UK BAME representation in *SPS***

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017**	2018	Total 5 years	Annual average
Number of papers in volume	48	51	48	51	45	243	49
Number of papers with UK BAME topic	1	2	3	9	0	15	3
Number of BAME authors*	2	1	2	11	1	17	3

Notes: \* Only one author counted per paper even where multiple authorship. \*\* Including a special themed issue on migration and labour markets.

**Table 2.5: UK BAME representation in *SPR***

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017**	2018	Total 5 years	Annual average
Number of chapters in volume	14	12	13	12	13	64	13
Number of chapters with UK BAME topic	0	0	1	3	2	6	1
Number of BAME authors*	0	0	0	1	0	1	1

Notes: \* Only one author counted per paper even where multiple authorship. \*\* Including one themed section on migrants.

**Table 2.6: UK BAME representation in *CSP***

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017**	2018	Total 5 years	Annual average
Number of papers in volume	27	23	31	30	37	148	30
Number of papers with UK BAME topic	4	4	4	8	1	21	4

Number of BAME authors*	3	2	2	6	0	13	3
-------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	----	---

Notes: \* Only one author counted per paper even where multiple authorship. \*\* Including a special issue on radicalisation and terrorism.

In relation to conferences, again, no attempt has been made by the SPA at the ethnic monitoring of attendees, so proportions identified may be subject to slight inaccuracies (Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7: BAME representation at annual SPA conferences**

Year	2013 Sheff eld	2014 Sheff eld	2015 Ulst er	2016 Belfa st	2017 Durh am	2018 Yor k	Tot al 6 ye ars	Annu al avera ge
Total number of papers	203	159	208	165	162	202	1099	183
Number of plenaries	4	4	4	3	3	3	21	3
Number of plenaries with UK 'race'-related topics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of plenaries with BAME presenters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of papers with UK 'race'-	9	6	4	5	0	3	27	4

related topics								
Number of papers with UK BAME presenters	8	6	3	5	1	8	31	5
Number of papers with non-UK topics	36	42	23	38	38	45	216	36
Number of papers with non-UK presenters	41	46	21	34	36	47	226	38

Although it might be regarded as inappropriate to talk about quotas for the representation of the issue of ‘race’, it is clear that the SPA’s outputs (and, largely, the outputs of *CSP*, the nearest comparatpor to the SPA’s house journals,) nowhere near reflect the UK’s demography. What they do reflect, however, is the wide-ranging ways (comprising the various elements and stages detailed earlier) in which both BAME authors and discussion of ‘race’ and racism (whether by BAME authors or others) remain marginal to Social Policy’s published face.

## <2>Conclusion

It is clear from this analysis that the SPA has a considerable way to go to persuade Social Policy academics to take the issue of ‘race’ seriously. As one senior academic put it, “we are the problem, not the solution”. Despite some hopeful initiatives, we argue that this task cannot be achieved from the current base of Social Policy teaching in higher education: the staff profile in most Social Policy departments is almost entirely white, providing little impetus for the development of courses that address issues of ‘race’, colonialism, slavery and the black experience of welfare; promotion for BAME staff is problematic; achievement

levels for BAME students are generally poor in the absence of appropriate support; drop-out rates are higher than average; and the ingredients for a supportive environment for BAME students are usually missing. On the basis of our survey, most HEIs surveyed were disinterested in the audit at best. Responses were incomplete and we were often referred to university administrative sections for data on staffing and student numbers, which should have been a matter of core concern for teaching staff. Russell Group universities showed up particularly poorly. Few HEIs had any provisions in place to promote the recruitment of BAME applicants, or to provide support. Interestingly, in the few HEIs where there had been initiatives to address racism, these tended to be prompted by student action rather than from staff groups.

This all suggests that institutions and the academics within them that make and implement policy and practice have to take responsibility for the present situation and not, as some still do, try to shift responsibility onto BAME students and prospective students. To change this requires a major cultural shift within the organisation and the discipline, which the SPA has to lead. Our full report<sup>4</sup> provides an agenda for change, which, as noted, the SPA executive has enthusiastically taken up. We hope that this energy will drive change effectively in the interests of present and future students, as well as of the subject itself, which needs to be made much more relevant to a multicultural and diverse society in which ‘race’ currently features most strongly as a tool to oppress minority groups. The SPA’s response commits it to a programme of action. However, we would argue that it is clearly not its problem alone. It cannot do this without the support of the wider Social Policy community; it is a problem facing every HEI and every Social Policy academic. Furthermore, this struggle can draw on concern beyond the Social Policy community. The British Sociological Association is conducting a similar enquiry and the Royal Historical Society has recently examined the teaching of ‘race’ in History departments, coming to parallel, dismal, conclusions.<sup>5</sup>

### **<EH>Acknowledgement**

The authors acknowledge considerable research help from Irtiza Qureshi.

### **<EH>Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This was identified as an issue in the early days of the Hull York Medical School, with a split campus, where Pakistani-British applicants were found to favour studying at York rather than at Hull because of the former’s closer location to the city of origin (Bradford) of many of them.

<sup>2</sup> We understand that the SPA is now including ethnic monitoring in its membership procedures.

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.social-policy.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Teaching-Learning-Report2c-2017.pdf](http://www.social-policy.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Teaching-Learning-Report2c-2017.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See: [www.social-policy.org.uk/uncategorized/the-missing-dimension-where-is-race-in-social-policy-teaching-and-learning/](http://www.social-policy.org.uk/uncategorized/the-missing-dimension-where-is-race-in-social-policy-teaching-and-learning/)

<sup>5</sup> See: [https://5hm1h4aktue2uejbs1hsqt31-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/RHS\\_race\\_report\\_EMBARGO\\_0001\\_18Oct.pdf](https://5hm1h4aktue2uejbs1hsqt31-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/RHS_race_report_EMBARGO_0001_18Oct.pdf)

## <EH>References

Andall-Stanberry, M. (2011) “‘Widening participation’: retention, achievement, and support for BAME students’, paper presented at the RANHLE Project conference, University of Seville, Spain, April, [www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/files/Andall-Stanberry.pdf](http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/files/Andall-Stanberry.pdf)

BIS (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills) (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*, BIS Research Paper No 186, London: BIS.

Boliver, V. (2013) ‘How fair is access to more prestigious UK universities?’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 64(2): 345–64.

Boliver, V. (2015) ‘Lies, damned lies and statistics on widening access to Russell Group universities’, *Radical Statistics*, 113: 29–38.

Boliver, V. (2016) ‘Exploring ethnic inequalities in admission to Russell Group universities’, *Sociology*, 50(2): 247–66.

Broecke, S. and Nicholls, T. (2007) *Ethnicity and degree attainment*, DfES Research Report RW92, London: Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

Chattoo, S., Atkin, K., Craig, G. and Flynn, R. (2019) *Understanding ‘race’ and ethnicity. Theory, history, policy, practice* (2nd edn), Bristol: Policy Press.

Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A. and Vignoles, A. (2013) ‘Widening participation in higher education: analysis using linked administrative data’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A*, 176(2): 431–57.

Connor, H., Tyers, C., Davis, S. and Tackey, N.D. (2003) *Minority ethnic students in higher education: Interim report*, Institute for Employment Studies, DfES Report RR448, London: Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

Craig, G. (2007) “‘Cunning, unprincipled, loathsome’”: the racist tail wags the welfare dog’, *Journal of Social Policy*, 36(4): 605–23.

- Craig, G. (2011) 'Forward to the past: does the BAME third sector have a future?', *Voluntary Sector Review*, 2(3): 367–89.
- Craig, G. (2013) 'Invisibilising "race" in public policy', *Critical Social Policy*, 33(4): 712–20.
- Craig, G. and Katbamna, S. (2004) "'Race" and social policy research' in S. Becker and A. Bryman, (eds) *Understanding research for Social Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press: 158-164.
- Craig, G. and O'Neill, M. (2013) 'It's time to move on from "race"?' , in G.Ramia, K. Farnsworth and Z. Irving (eds.), *Social policy review 25*, Sheffield: Social Policy Association:93-112.
- Crawford, C. and Greaves, E. (2015) *Ethnic minorities substantially more likely to go to university than their white British peers*, London: Institute for Fiscal Studies and ESRC, [www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8042](http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8042)
- Crozier, G., Burke, P.-J. and Archer, L. (2016) 'Peer relations in higher education: raced, classed and gendered constructions and Othering', *Whiteness and Education*, 1(1): 39–53.
- Department for Education (2012) *A profile of pupil exclusions in England*, Education Standards Analysis and Research Division, Research Report DFE-RR190, London: Department for Education.
- ECU (Equality Challenge Unit) (2011) *Equality in higher education: Statistical report 2011*, London: ECU.
- EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) (2015) *Is Britain fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2015*, London: EHRC.
- EHRC (2019) *Tackling racial harassment: Universities challenged*, London: EHRC.
- Elevation Networks Trust (2012) *Race to the top: The experience of black students in higher education*, London: The Bow Group.
- Fielding, A., Charlton, C., Kounali, D. and Leckie, G. (2008) *Degree attainment, ethnicity and gender: Interactions and the modification of effects. A quantitative analysis*, York: Higher Education Academy.
- Harper, S.R. (2012) 'Race without racism: how higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms', *The Review of Higher Education*, 36(1, Supplement): 9–29.
- Higher Education Policy Institute (2017) *Where next for widening participation and fair access? New insights from leading thinkers*, HEPI Report 98, London: HEPI.
- Housee, S. (2018) *Speaking out against racism in the university space*, London: UCL Press.



Irving, Z. and Young, P. (2005) 'When less is more: the dominance of subject-content in the teaching of undergraduate Social Policy', *Social Policy & Society*, 4(1): 1–9.

Leathwood, C., Maylor, U. and Moreau, M. (2009) *The experience of black and minority ethnic staff working in higher education. Literature review*, London: Equality Challenge Unit.

Office for Students (no date) 'Topic briefing: black and minority ethnic (BME) students', p 3, [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/145556db-8183-40b8-b7af-741bf2b55d79/topic-briefing\\_bme-students.pdf](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/145556db-8183-40b8-b7af-741bf2b55d79/topic-briefing_bme-students.pdf)

Patrick, R., Brown, K. and Drever, E. (2017 [2012]) *The current and future state of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs*, Manchester: Social Policy Association.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2016) *Subject Benchmark Statement, Social Policy*, Gloucester: QAA.

RHS (Royal Historical Society) (2018) *Race, ethnicity and equality in UK history*, London: Royal Historical Society.

Richardson, J.T.E. (2009) 'The role of ethnicity in the attainment and experiences of graduates in distance education', *Higher Education*, 58: 321–38.

Richardson, J.T.E. (2010) 'Conceptions of learning and approaches to studying among white and ethnic minority students in distance education', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80: 535–56.

Richardson, J.T.E. (2015) 'The under-attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education: what we know and what we don't know', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39(2): 278–91.

Runnymede (2010) *Ethnicity and participation in higher education*, London: Runnymede.

Senior, N. (2012) *Exploring the retention and attainment of black and minority ethnic (BAME) students on Social Policy pathways in higher education*, York: The Higher Education Academy.

Singh, G. (2011) *Black and minority ethnic (BAME) students' participation in higher education: Improving retention and success. A synthesis of research evidence*, York: Higher Education Academy.

Stevenson, J. (2012) *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*, York: Higher Education Academy.

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) (2015) *Analysis note 2015/05*, 18 September, London: UCAS Analysis and Research, [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

Universities UK (2018) *Higher education in facts and figures 2018*, London: Universities UK.

Woodfield, R. (2014) *Undergraduate retention and attainment across the disciplines*, York: Higher Education Academy.

Woodfield, R. (2017) 'Undergraduate students who are required to withdraw from university: the role of ethnicity', *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(2): 230–52.