

Only 34% of Black academics say that their workplace is inclusive, finds report

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Just 34% of black academics in the UK believe their workplace is inclusive, according to a joint report by the Society of Black Academics, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPi) and GatenbySanderson.

This report title "Unblocking the Pipeline: Supporting the Retention, Progression and Promotion of Black Early-Career Academics" is produced by leading academics and practitioners from the UK higher education sector.

The researchers also found that 32% of the black academics surveyed felt they were not paid fairly for their role, and just 38% believed they received sufficient support, when it came to mental and physical wellbeing.

The report was conducted by the Society of Black Academics members – project manager, Dr Mercy Denedo (Durham University Business School), Dr Opeoluwa Aiyenitaju (Manchester Met University), Dr Bola Babajide (De Montfort University), Dr Ade Oyedijo (University of Leicester) and Steven Kator Iorfa – alongside Dr Becca Franssen, from GantenbySanderson, and Josh Freeman, from the Higher Education Policy Institute.

The researchers wanted to explore the experiences of black early-career academics in higher education, examining the challenges they faced, as well as exploring the effectiveness of various initiatives, programmes and recommendations put in place to overcome these challenges.

To do so, the researchers surveyed almost 100 black early-career academics working in the UK, as well as interviewed 24 university staff working on initiatives focused on supporting black academics.

Academics were questioned about the challenges they had faced so far in their careers, how they'd navigated overcoming them, and the support they'd received from their institutions. University staff were asked about the initiatives they were putting in place, and how successful they'd been – as well as considerations for future initiatives too.

The researchers found a clear lack of inclusivity across the board. Not only did just 34% of participants say that their workplace is inclusive, but not even half (45%) of participants believed that they could be their true self at work. Support was also found to be lacking, as less than half (38%) of participants believed they were supported well when it came to mental and physical wellbeing.

Though 68% of participants stated they had good relationships with their colleagues, this did not necessarily help boost job satisfaction – with only 49% of participants being content with their job role. It is likely here, the researchers say, that pay has an impact, as just 32% of participants believed they received a fair wage.

The greatest challenges that black early-career academics faced were found to be unconscious bias in the workplace, a lack of community for people similar to them, and a lack of clarity around progression and opportunity. About 52% of those surveyed felt there is a lack of clarity around progression opportunity

and criteria.

“81% of black academics who responded to the survey agreed that they face challenges while 10% disagreed.”, says Mercy Denedo. “Despite the plethora of initiatives adopted by Higher Ed institutions, the evidence indicates that navigating the sector as a black academic “feels like flying blind”, without support, conspicuous but invisible for promotion, opportunities and pay.”

The report also sought to identify the most effective initiatives to improve inclusivity and support for black early-career academics within universities.

Amongst those currently being implemented, equality, diversity and inclusion training was found to be the most popular, whilst other initiatives such as efforts to ‘decolonise’ curricula and research, and creating black staff networks were seen to be actively implemented by around a third of UK universities.

In regards to initiatives set to create the most positive impact in the future, the researchers found that actively encouraging applications from black academics was the most effective whilst EDI training and decolonising curricula, had strong effectiveness too.

To help encourage positive change, the report sets out a series of key recommendations for universities, to enable them to improve their inclusivity and support of black academics. These include:

- Creating better open-source diversity data
- Increasing the wider networks of support
- Increased mentoring, sponsorship and explicit conversations
- Better recognition of workload of black academics
- Creation of scholarships and studentships
- Better clarity on promotion criteria
- Sharing of best practice initiatives

The full report – “Unblocking the Pipeline: Supporting the Retention, Progression and Promotion of Black Early-Career Academics”, is available via the The Higher Education Policy Institute website.

If you would like to speak to the researchers, please contact Peter Remon at BlueSky Education PR – peter@bluesky-pr.com +44 (0) 77 235 228 30.