

The Race and Ethnicity Hub

BHM Event - Black Students and Staff in STEM - Examining the data

Diane Butler, Andrew Potter, John, Catherine, Billy, Joseph:

DIANE BUTLER: Ask you some questions and try and gain some insights and find out what we can do about these issues. And if we particularly need to recognize specific issues and put specific solutions into place. OK, so I'm going to start and then about halfway through I'm going to hand over to Andrew. But there's going to be spaces where we're just going to have a discussion in between when we've looked at some of the data. OK, so Katrina started the recording, so off we go.

OK, so first thing that we're going to look at just as a sort of overall data is a little bit about the ethnicity of the UK population, the OU population of students with regards to ethnicity, and the STEM population in particular. So, we drill down a little bit. And Katrina has just put a little poll in the chat area for people to have an estimation of what they think, in the adult population of England and Wales, is the proportion of Black students. If you'd like to have a little go responding-- sorry, the number of Black people in the population, have a go at that little poll.

Some people might not be able to see the poll because of the difficulties of Teams, so Katrina has already also posted that into the chat box so you can just type your answer into the chat.

So, the options that I'm giving you because it's a multiple choice, 10%, 5%, 4%, 3%. And this is Black students, not BAME students.

Now all the way through this talk, we're going to get hung up on this terminology about what words do we use to describe ethnicity. And this is just such a big problematic area. The University and other institutions and other governmental institutions use BAME, which is Black, Asian, minority, ethnic. Those are the acronym it stands for. So that lumps together students from all non-white categories, which obviously is problematic. We recognize it's problematic because in doing that it destroys difference, the race, and it makes people into this binary system of white and non-white. But we're stuck with it at the moment, and I do apologize if people, when we use that term, don't like it. I don't like it either but—

ANDREW POTTER: Right. Yeah.

DIANE BUTLER: It's really problematic anyway so we're just talking here about Black students in the UK, in the England and Wales population. So, let's have a look. So according to that little straw poll that we've taken, we've got a third of people think it's about 10%, around a fifth of people think it's around 3%, with nearly half people thinking it's 5%. That's interesting. It's actually 3%. OK. That's the actual number, 3%.

So, let's have a look at some statistics from census data to have a little bit more of information about this and look at the OU population. This is across all faculties and how it compares. So there at the top we've got the result that we've just talked about. The pink figures are the census data for the last census in England and Wales, which is 2011. So, 3% of students identifying as Black ethnicity. The Open University actually has 4.3% of its intake, and this was '18, '19 data in England and Wales identify the Black ethnicity, so higher than the UK population as a whole.

For Asian students, and it's worth-- I know we're concentrating primarily on Black students here, but it's worth putting this one in. It's the reverse situation. There are fewer students in the Open University than we would expect, given the population as a whole, who are from an Asian ethnicity. Mixed race, we do better than in the general population. And other BAME is around the same. Again, apologies for these acronyms.

So, it's interesting. There's something interesting here around ethnicity and the population of undergraduate students as a whole, but there's something even more interesting when we start to look down at our STEM students, in particular. Because for the STEM faculty, we're really interested in if there's a subject, is there discipline dimension to the way we recruit students into the university. So, the next slide is going to have a lot of information on and time to absorb that and have a look.

Now before you look at the data, there's another little question in the poll and I'll just explain what it is. I'd like you to guess which of the schools, the six STEM schools, recruits the fewest Black students. And those are the truncated names of our six schools. We've got Computing and Communications, Life, Health, and Chemical Sciences, Maths and Stats, Physical Sciences, Engineering and Innovation, and Earth and Environment and Ecosystem Science. So just have a guess, which do you think has the fewest Black students?

ANDREW POTTER: It's maybe worth saying here, Diane, that it doesn't necessarily matter the size of the school here. It's the smallest percentage as well. It happens to be the same answer—

DIANE BUTLER: Absolutely.

ANDREW POTTER: --almost percentage of Black students.

DIANE BUTLER: OK. Still some responses coming in. OK, that seems to have stabilized now in 19 responses. Well if you look at the graphic, the chart on the bottom left of this particular slide, you'll get your answer to this question. OK. And in fact, it's Earth, Environment, and Ecosystem Sciences, which recruits the smallest proportion of Black students of the six STEM schools. Followed quite closely by the School of Physical Sciences, and then the next is engineering innovation.

What I was trying to point out here, and I agree I've been confusing the BAME and Black issue in the question in the chat box, is that there's a differential. There are some of the schools and therefore some of the programs and the qualifications are attracting different proportions of students. It's not one sort of simple picture that we are not recruiting significant numbers of students of Black origin, but we are-- there's something going on in the schools at different levels. Different parts of the curriculum are more attractive to different groups of students. And that's an interesting reflection of the qualifications that we're offering across the STEM faculty.

If we look at the BAME categories broken down in the right hand graphic, you'll notice that there is something interesting going on between students at the beginning, when they very first sign up for their module, the registration level, and at the time that we call the Reg25 level, which is the point where a fee liability kicks in for students in certain jurisdictions, fee jurisdictions. So, we seem to be losing Black students, the numbers drop down very early on in the module.

And so, they registered for their module and then there seems to be a loss of those students at a very early stage, which is greater than the loss, in proportion, greater than the loss that we see in other areas. And the top graphic on the slide is the proportion of BAME students across the university, which is around 10% to 11%. It's improving slightly, it's increasing slightly, but it's still not reflective of the BAME proportions, which is 12% across the whole country. Could you move onto the next slide because I don't seem to have the slide sorter. So, thank you.

So, let's just open up to the floor. Do any of those figures that I've presented surprise you, puzzle you? Is there anything else that we need to know? John's making a really interesting comment. John, do you want to come in and tell us that?

JOHN: Yeah, I was at a presentation in one of the many working groups I'm on, I forget which one. And they did an inside fact base into BAME that came from marketing. And they said that the Black and Asian groups are, on average, far younger than white groups.

So, the new undergraduate portion of BAME students, which is about 11%, which sounds quite good, actually should be around 20%. Because as a proportion of the population, which - I don't know the gritty detail. It may be different in different groups. But in the 25 to 29 age group, 20% of the population comes from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups.

So, our target should not be 12%. It should be 20%. And so, we actually look much worse than we are.

DIANE BUTLER: OK, so when we start factoring in things like age, Billy's making a point that when we factor in gender, we've got other issues. It's much more complicated than just looking at one characteristic. We have to look at age, we have to look at gender. Does anybody else want to come in? There were some hands up. Catherine?

CATHERINE: Hi, yes. Thanks, Diane. The figures don't surprise me because I've just done some research because we've just started a brand-new module [AUDIO OUT] with a high population of students. So, I knew what we had. And the percentage we've got on that module reflects, more or less, what you've presented for LHCS. But just to say, following on from John's point, I think we have to consider occupation.

So, whereas on our module, we've got 13% BAME students, which reflects the population of the UK quite accurately. It doesn't reflect the numbers of students that we would expect to work in the sorts of professions that would come into that module. It's a health science module and we've got about 18% BAME workers in the NHS, for example. And I suspect it's probably the same in other kind of health-related professions. So, although we've got 13%, it should actually be a lot higher on that module. So just wanted to make that point, really.

DIANE BUTLER: That's a really good point that there are areas of the curriculum that if it reflects the proportion of BAME students in those professions that they go into, it should be higher. We're not doing as well as we think. So often we can look at these figures and think, well, that looks OK, but digging down further shows that there's an issue. Thank you for that. Any other points that anyone would like to make before we move on?

OK, well we've got another little question in the chat box before we move on, which is the attainment gaps. So now we're going to focus on, once we've recruited the students, what happens to them next? How do they do? So, could you predict the size of the good pass attainment gap? And by good pass, I mean students graduating with a first or two one or achieving that level of pass in their module. For Black students compared to white students, what's the gap between the two? Because there is a gap, but what's the size of the gap? And this is students pass one or pass two.

ANDREW POTTER: Sorry, is that the students that get to the end of the module?

DIANE BUTLER: Yes. It's students who complete the module.

ANDREW POTTER: OK

DIANE BUTLER: So, people have gone for the middle figure, 18.2%. And in fact, according to this graphic, that is the difference between the pass rate. OK? If we want to look at the difference between the good pass rate, we're looking at a figure of 31.3 percentage point. OK? And this, in STEM, is our number one difficulty. This is our highest priority that we are going to try and start addressing, seriously addressing, over the next few years to try and make the APP targets.

I put some other attainment GAAP information in just for sort of context here. I've put mental health issues in. And you'll notice that the pass rate is our next number one target, that's why it's in dark blue on this particular slide. So, we've got a 15.1% difference in mental health issues. Now we also know we have to think about intersectionality here. We have to think about students that are in more than one of these disadvantaged groups and the combined impact that might have on their success rate.

The pass rate gap for students of Asian ethnicity and mixed ethnicity are not as significant as for Black students. And another issue obviously, is physical disability. So that's just a few other off the target areas in the access participation plan that the university is concentrating on. But for STEM, these are the data for STEM, that was a very significant difference between the success outcomes for our Black students and for white students.

OK notice up at the top of my slide I've given the typical pass rate attainment gap for the OU overall is 13.9%. So, in STEM, that gap is significantly worse. So, there's something about the standard curriculum that is not delivering the outcomes that Black students should expect. OK next slide, please. OK.

So lots more data here. Just give you a second to absorb that. The main graph in the middle is percentage of students, and looking at the various points through the module, so three outcomes for students. So, at the start of the module, the first data point. Second data point is the 25% fee liability point, which is where we class students-- start counting them. We say that is our 100% figure. Then we've got TMA 01 submission, the next, usually the next big event that happens in the student journey through a module. Then we have completion and then we have pass. And those are the detail breakdown for white, Asian, mixed, and Black students on STEM modules, all STEM modules.

OK, some sobering statistics there, I think, looking at the differences on where the attrition happens. Just give you a second to absorb that. It backs up the data obviously, that we showed in the previous slide, but it shows more detail of what's going on. It's interesting that there are some additional nuances around TMA 01 submission. But it's interesting that even after successfully submitting an assignment, then there is a big attrition for Black students after that first assignment is submitted.

So, is there something going on around assessment? Is there something going on around feedback, the design of the assessment, the type of feedback received, the way the student feels supported by the university at that point? Does that differ between students from different ethnicities? And what could we do to find out what's going on there? So, some interesting data. OK. We're going to pass over to Andrew now, and then we're going to have a little discussion about these next few slides as well. So over to you, Andrew.

ANDREW POTTER: OK. Hi, everyone. And before we go onto the next slide, I just want you to have a think about where you think that these gaps are coming from. Are they worse in certain schools than in others? So maybe just in the chat box, you might think to yourself, where do you think that the largest gaps would be? Where do you think that the largest gaps might be, in terms of schools? Because we're going to look at the broken down by school data on the next slide.

So have a think to yourself, where do you think that the biggest gaps are likely to be? Are they the same across all schools? Different in different places? Have a think to yourself or put your thoughts in the chat box if you care to, because we're going to be asking you later on to reflect on whether you were surprised or not by the data that we've shown.

BILLY: Andrew. I'm sorry, it's Billy here. Just to be specific, are we looking up BAME across the piece or Black students specifically?

ANDREW POTTER: Black students specifically.

BILLY: All right, OK. Thank you.

ANDREW POTTER: OK, so just have a think about that for just a second or two. And then, Katrina can I ask you to reveal the next slide, please? OK so as you can see by this similar kind of graphic that we had before. The darker the blue, the higher priority and the larger the gap there. So, the largest gaps that we see for between Black and white students is in C&C, that's Computing and Communication, in triple E's, that's Environment, Ecosystems-- Sorry,

other way around. Earth, and Ecosystem Sciences, and Life, Health, and Chemical Sciences. With also significant gaps in Engineering and Innovation, and in Math and Stats.

Yes, I think that that's an interesting point, from John there, saying that different subjects within schools might be quite different. Yeah, this is obviously, there's a level further of granularity. You can go into discipline areas within these schools as well, but that we don't have access to. I should also notice as well that in this table that you can see that there are white spaces, because we've only just given data for the statistically significant attainment gaps here. So, if there's whitespace, it means that the gap exists potentially, but it's just not statistically significant.

You can see as well that there are also attainment gaps between people of mixed ethnicity and white, Asian and white as well, specifically in LHCS and in C&C for gap between Asian. To kind of compare and ethnicity with other attainment gaps that we've got, this is looking at declared disability because there's definitely a question of intersectionality here as well. Just to kind of set the scene of other gaps that exist.

Mental health, this is people who declare a mental health disability versus students who have no declared disability. You can see that the data in the first row there and similarly for other types of declared disability. Catherine is making a very good point that the numbers of students that are possibly too low in SPS and physical sciences, that's quite possibly true as well. All right, can we have the next slide, please? Thanks.

So, this is, again, kind of showing you the timeline, if you like, of how these gaps widen and broken down by school. And there's some really quite interesting stories to be told from there. I know that if you come from a particular school, your eyes have probably gone straight to that one, first of all. But there's some interesting stories here about how the gaps widen. So, for example, in LHCS, this is a particularly interesting story.

There at the bottom this is Life, Health, and Chemical Sciences. TMA submissions higher for Black students, but a steep retention drop of 15.3 percentage points at completion and 13.4 percentage points at pass result, in a pass rate that's much lower overall. So, they're submitting their to TMA 1s, but something is happening between TMA 1 and completion that we don't know necessarily yet. So interesting stories there as well. We're just about to move on to the next slide, but I'll just leave this up for a couple of more minutes. Because the next slide is really another one of our discussion points where we'd like to invite you to think about what surprises you here. Is there isn't anything that you want to-- any comments that anyone would like to make about this data?

DIANE BUTLER: It's a lot to take in all at once, isn't it?

ANDREW POTTER: Yeah.

CATHERINE: Andrew? Can I make a comment about concurrency of study? Would that be appropriate? Because what we found in LHCS, I don't know if other schools are like it, is that a huge number of students are studying three or four modules simultaneously. And my feeling is that they might struggle on until they get to TMA 1 and then after TMA 1, they might decide it's actually too much and drop one or two modules. So, they may not be dropping out of study completely, but just perhaps dropping one or two modules out of the four. So, I don't know if that's something that could be looked at between the different ethnicities to see if perhaps more of them are doing more concurrent study. It might be a factor to consider.

DIANE BUTLER: I think you're right, Catherine. I think there's some evidence, although it's changing very recently, that study intensity-- students studying at full time intensity, Black students tend to be more over-represented in that group than would be expected. So—

CATHERINE: Yeah, that's interesting. I didn't know that. But I just wondered if it had been looked at, so that is interesting. Thank you.

JOHN: There is some overlap here with information about the Open degree. There's more students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds on the Open degree, so they're switching out of named degrees because for whatever reason, they're finding it difficult to meet the requirements of a named degree or they don't want to meet requirements of the named degree. That's one issue. My mind has gone blank since I started. So, it's complicated. I'll come back when I think about the main point I was trying to make. Get It out of my head.

ANDREW POTTER: Yeah, there's an interesting comment from Billy saying that poor housing and other socioeconomic factors. I think I'm right in saying, Diane, aren't I? that even when you control for these other factors, that we know that Black people are more likely to be in poverty or have come from a low socioeconomic background. But even once you have controlled for that, the gap still persists. So, there's obviously something more than just the problems that are associated with low socioeconomic status or the problems that are associated with educational achievement and various other factors. So, there is something more there, I gather.

JOHN: So, the point I forgot was about concurrent study and flexible study intensity. I think that is an important, a really important issue. It was quite stark yesterday. We were having a discussion, there was a university-wide workshop. We were talking about needing to support

the culture of students that are unrolling with us that want to study full-time, and the proportion of Black and minority ethnic students is higher amongst those.

A lot of our systems seem to discourage that and put blocks on students, so we were having students describing how they would ring up-- repeatedly, at the start of every presentation pattern, they would receive advice about how they were doing the wrong thing, were trying to do too much, and what they were doing was impossible. And it was quite stark that we had this presentation from students and then the tutors came in and said all the things we just described as being a problem. That they saw their role as to talk the student out of inappropriate study patterns. I think we've got a lot of work to do.

It may well be that some students take on too much, but we'd also have to respect students choices and find ways of supporting them rather than seeing them as being a bit daft, doing the wrong thing and needing persuading away from what they're doing. I think when it comes to concurrent study, we've got a lot of work to do for all our students. And hopefully, it will have an impact on the attainment gap as well. But that's perhaps for another time, but I do think it's important.

ANDREW POTTER: That's an interesting point, I think. Thank you, John. Yeah. Pete, I think we-- shall we move on to the next slide, please. OK, so the last section of what we're going to talk about is staff representation. What is the ethnicity of our staff? And that includes our faculty staff in STEM and our associate lecturers. So think to yourselves again, you know I'm inviting you to have a think to yourself about whether you think it's important that students see themselves reflected in the ethnic diversity of their staff, what effect that that might have on the problems that we've identified and other sort of relevant issues. OK, can I have the next slide, please?

So we're going to start and this first slide comes with a big disclaimer that Diane's already said that we-- as you can see here, if you look at our STEM academic and research staff by ethnicity, then actually the figures are not so bad when you look at them in this sort of big picture thing. They don't really look that bad. However, it kind of covers a multitude of sins, in some sense, looking at it at this very high level. Because we've got 84% white, 14% BAME, which we've already said is a problematic use of the term, but this is all that we could get in terms of the data that we were able to acquire for this. And then 5% unknown as well.

But as I say, this covers quite-- there's an issue there with the fact that we only have the data for BAME. We don't have it split down any more granularity there. So that's one issue. The other issue is that this hides the fact that we're not sure what the proportion is across the different levels of the academic hierarchies. So, for example, we don't know necessarily from

this pie chart alone, whether BAME staff are represented at the highest levels as much. But Diane is pointing out that she is working on getting this data, so just pointing that out as well.

And so yes, also there are other things to mention here, is that we know what that we have postgraduate research assistants in certain schools. For example, in the School of Physical Sciences, we know that we have a large proportion of BAME staff in those areas, but that doesn't necessarily translate into our full-time teaching staff as well. So yes, with lots of questions still to be asked in this kind of broader picture here. Yeah, can we have the next slide just before the next poll? Sorry, could you-- Thank you.

I think it was mentioned earlier as well that we-- gender was mentioned earlier, in a different context but just for some extra sort of data on this. Here is our academic staff in STEM that are broken down by gender and ethnicity. Again, with the same caveats about the problems with having white and BAME as categories. But as you can see, the proportion that we have of female BAME staff is very low and that in itself is a problem that we don't fully understand yet as well.

OK, so Nicole was asking about associate lecturer data. So here, I think this is a good point for us to ask the next poll, if we can please, Jeanette? So yeah, the associate lecturers is a very good question because that's of course, where I guess tutors are most likely to have this one-to-one correspondence situation with their students. OK, so the question is, what proportion do you think of Stem associate lecturers, what proportion do you think are Black?

Or rather, I should say who have told us that they identify as Black, have told the university that they've identified as Black. So, we've got three options, about 5%, 3%, or 1%. So I'll just give you just a couple of minutes just to think about it and to respond.

There's a question here that has asked, has anyone looked at the issue of unconscious bias as having an influence in how white teachers view the alleged problems associated with Black students? Certainly, I can speak from my own experience as a staff tutor that we have offered them unconscious bias training. At the staff development events in Scotland, that we did some as well, which had some very interesting results. So, we certainly have done unconscious bias training, I'm not sure whether anyone has done any work on the impact of that.

CATHERINE: Sorry, Billy. Go ahead.

BILLY: Sorry, I was going to say, Andrew, wasn't there some work going on with the quality objective too, which looked at working with associate lecturers and reducing the attainment gap between Black and white students. And I think it was a specific discrete piece of work,

that I think, from my remember, David Knight was leading on that a while back. Maybe one of our colleagues here could remember that and say a bit more about it. That was a specific around supporting ALs to support that differentiation. Thank you.

ANDREW POTTER: Thanks. Jeanette, can we have the next slide, please? So yes, the polls are in and I think that most people got this correct. That yes, it is only about 1% of our STEM ALs identify as Black. If you compare that to the other BAME categories, that's 5%. And the ALs who identify as white of any category are 91%. So, we are certainly Black-- Black ALs are significantly underrepresented certainly, in our AL population. And more generally, the proportion of BAME AL is also underrepresented, in the BAME student in general population.

And I've given you the figures by headcounts, or number of ALs, but you might be asking as well, is the picture the same across a number of appointments? So not all ALs have the same work intensity. So, if you look at appointment counts, then it's the same picture. You get the identical proportions split in the same way as well.

I should also say that this is quite a very, this is recent data as well. Just something that I managed to get from our AL services colleagues just on the 1st of October. So, this takes into account recent AL voluntary severance, for example, as well. Yes, that's right. We do ask-- Nichols is asking that I thought that ethnicity was requested in all the application forms. That's true. And there's actually some interesting work here that you can then see about why there is a quite significant number of our ALs are either saying unknown or prefer not to say as well. So that there's obviously an interesting sea of questions there as well.

OK I think that last slide that I'm going to show you, last sort of data slide, is you might ask, what's the picture by school. And as you can see here, this is the same colour code here of associate lecturers in STEM, by school. And I'll just let you absorb this as well, but it's not looking like a good picture across the board generally, but it's especially not great in Maths and Stats, Physical Sciences, and Life, Health, and Chemical Sciences particularly. I should make the usual caveat here that these percentages should be taken with a pinch of salt because the numbers are so small that there's quite a bit of rounding up and down.

And so yes, there's obviously some, as Katherine says, there's some quite shocking data here and it would be interesting to hear what people have to say about it. So, I guess, well let me maybe leave this slide up just so that we've got something to frame the discussion. But does anyone have any comments, or does anyone want to say anything? John?

JOHN: Finding the microphone. Sorry. Yeah, this is something we've been discussing in the staff tutor group a little bit. I mean, I'm really concerned that we've had 10 years or more of very, very low turnover of AL staff because understandably, the university and the trade union

have worked to protect our colleagues, but we've remained at the age group, the age band. It relates to what the point I made earlier, what's the age profile of our tutors? I think it's very old. The age profile of our students is very young, and that leads to even more of a discrepancy as I said earlier.

But I do think recently, some colleagues have been able to persuade the powers that be to use ethnicity within appointment processes when they're able to demonstrate that the need for a diverse population is appropriate for the tutors. And they've got two candidates that are the same who've been allowed to appoint, which is not something I think that's ever happened before. But I'm still really-- I find it difficult to see how we can really tackle this in any meaningful way when we are so-- all our systems are created to find more work for the people that already work for us and not looking outwards to create opportunities for new people.

ANDREW POTTER: Yes. Yeah, there's a couple of comments in the chat that are saying similar things and agreeing with you. Wendy says those internal recruitment requirements in recent years haven't helped. Louise is asking the question of whether this is due to low applicants from BAME people. But Diane, did you want to say something about that? I see that you've commented that you recognize--

DIANE BUTLER: I think, I mean this is one area that we need to do work on, not just for associate lecturers, but for all our staff. We need to have a real interrogation of the number of applicants we have and the success rate of individuals from different ethnicities. Well I think, for the associate lecturer poll, in particular, I think it's down to low applications.

And I wonder if it's something about the Open University, something about the nature of the organization and the image and the brand that we reflect. That we project ourselves as a certain type of university, not necessarily a modern institution. We haven't moved or we're our brand hasn't moved with the times. When you look at some other universities who have-- we have lots of partnerships with Kingston University, for example, in STEM.

There's a university that has worked incredibly hard to make sure that its staff reflect the population it draws its students from, which is very heavily BAME concentrated university. And that has made a tremendous difference to the whole ethos of the university with regards to diversity. My personal view is that we do not project ourselves as that sort of institution and therefore, people from particular groups aren't interested in working for us, which is a great shame.

ANDREW POTTER: Yes, I think you're right. I should have also mentioned that the data that you see on screen at the moment is, again, AL headcount. And if you look at it by appointment count instead, you'll see that in most schools, I think all except for Engineering and Innovation, that picture is in some sense, worse. It seems that our white ALs are more

likely to take on more appointments with us as well, except in Engineering and Innovation is kind of the exception. As you can see in headcount as well, Engineering and Innovation is somewhat different to the rest of the schools. Sorry, go on, Diane.

DIANE BUTLER: Sorry, Andrew, just sent us a really interesting question in the chat. Is the alleged low achievement of Black people more in tune with sociological issues than academic inabilities? I mean this is just such a big question. Is it something about our university that's reinforcing inequalities that already exist in society or are we not allowing people to step out? We're not giving them the opportunity to step away from those inequalities.

When we looked at our-- I didn't show some of the data here, but I've got some data looking at low socioeconomic background, an index of multiple deprivation. And people falling into those categories do show an attainment gap, but it's nowhere near as large as the attainment gap for Black students. So, it's much more complicated, sad to say. It's much more complicated than deprivation, much more complicated. That's an issue, I believe, and we need to do so much more work on this, but that's an issue.

But there's another massive source of it, that inequality, other than just that. Andrew and I were talking yesterday about some work done by Bart Rienties in IET, looking up the amount of time that students from different ethnicities. It's an amazing piece of work this. Well worth looking up, I haven't got the link to hand, but the amount of time that people spent on the VLE. So, if that's a proxy for how hard people are working, the amount of time.

And the amount of time that Black students spend on the VLE, working on their modules, is significantly greater than any other group, than any other group in the Open University. And that's an enormous data set, a huge amount of data. I thought that was really interesting in itself. So, our Black students are not doing as well as they should and they're working harder, if that is a proxy for hard work and I'm sure it's a pretty good one.

So, there's something more to it. I think we ought to get Bart to talk about that because I think it's a really interesting issue. Given that all our modules are very online, very, very online. Unlike other faculties, which still use current STEM, does use print but a larger proportion of these modules are online. So, it's a very good proxy to send students. We've got another hand up somewhere.

JOHN: It's me again. Sorry, I do talk more than I should. I find typing very difficult.

DIANE BUTLER: It's fine, John.

JOHN: So, I like engaging with the conversation. I just wanted to agree with Jemima that said that the issue of branding is not straightforward. I mean, I'm aware that there have been complaints from colleagues, I think justified complaints, that the recent advertising campaign for the Open University, which was predominantly featuring Black people, is really good but it's also problematic. Because it sort of presents us as just an unproblematic institution that supports Black people. And yet look at all the data we're looking at, it's not straightforward for Black people to engage with the Open University. And in a sense, rebranding. Our rebranding is a bit dishonest; I think.

DIANE BUTLER: Yeah, thanks. Joseph, did you want to come in?

JOSEPH: Sorry, yeah. No, but basically, I was just going to make the comment that actually the thing that's possibly missing from this picture is the attainment and access to PhDs and PhD studentships for Black students. So there's a good report, which I'm sure you're aware of, which was The Broken Pipeline's report-- I can post the link to it-- which looks at why Black students potentially don't take up PhD offers or they don't move on to PhDs after doing an initial degree.

So, one of the things in there that was really highlighted was having some level of ring fence funding. And I don't think this necessary means having studentships that are specifically Black students in the UK, but it potentially does mean spending some money on recruiting Black students to PhDs. So I was just wondering what the Open University might consider, in terms of funding things like internships, for students to do an internship between their undergraduate and PhD, and giving them some kind of experience of that research life before they commit to a PhD.

DIANE BUTLER: Thanks, Joseph. Those are really good points. Yeah, that pipeline through to postgraduate study is really, really important. So, I mean, I can mention a couple of things that we are doing. We are trying to embrace the virtual internship scheme that's now come out of pilot and running as business as usual in the university. So, we're investigating ways in which we could really creatively advertise those STEM virtual internship opportunities to Black students, in particular. So, some positive action there to try and do that.

We're looking at running some sort of placements for Black students within the university to come. The first one has run in KMI. There's going to be a talk about that sometime during the month. I think it's next week.

And then we're going to hopefully open that up to other schools, so we can fund people to come in, for Black students to come and have a placement with us, and take an interest, and follow up their progress. I know this is small scale. It's a drop in the ocean. But it's something in that respect. And I'm going to look at post-graduate recruitment and what the pipeline is in

terms of STEM to see who's coming in, who's applying, who's getting places, and see if we can get some intelligence about that.

And finally, with the STEM faculty, on behalf of the Open University is just about to join BBSTEM, which is the BBSTEM University Alliance, which is the Black British STEM Alliance. And it's a group to support Black students in STEM and there will be things like jobs boards, opportunity for mentorships, opportunity for activity groups where Black students in safe spaces can support one another. And we're hoping to make that available to our students. So that's just a few things that we've got in the pipeline. More about those as they mature, but they're quite early initiatives.

ANDREW POTTER: OK, thanks very much. I just wondered as well, have you considered the Race Equality Charter and signing on to that. Are you already signed up to that?

DIANE BUTLER: No. Well the Open University, I think it's safe to say, did make a submission for the Race Equality Charter last year and we were unsuccessful. So, there's a huge amount of work going on now to make a new submission and to correct-- We were given a lot of feedback by AdvanceHE, who runs the Race Equality Charter. So, we're working on that feedback, collectively as an institution.

We've just appointed a new Equality Diversity Inclusion Dean. So, a very senior level appointment who reports directly to the Vice Chancellor, which you know, she's Professor Marcia Wilkins. She's coming from East London University. She's joining us, I think, at the end of the year. So, she's going to take a lead on putting the university in a position where it can have a successful Race Equality Charter submission.

ANDREW POTTER: That's great. Thanks for the answers. OK, I think that from-- I think I'm conscious of the time now. And I think it's probably time that we wrap things up. But I just wanted to say thank you very much for coming along and for engaging in this very, very interesting discussion. Obviously, we've got a lot of work to do and that work is ongoing but having your feedback and your discussion and your questions really helps us know what we should be looking at. So, thank you very much for that.

DIANE BUTLER: Thanks, Andrew. And just for me to say thank you for coming along. It's been really great to have these discussions. We're aware that were at the start. We shouldn't be at the start, we should be well along with this, but we are at the start in STEM of really exploring these issues. We're going to invest a significant amount of money over the next four years, five years, looking at delving down. This is the quantitative data. There's a huge amount of qualitative data. We need to start talking to our Black students and other students who suffer from structural inequalities in our system.

We're going to start doing that. We're going to start working much more closely with our student groups and try and understand what interventions and what changes we can make to try and reduce these gaps and actually make some inroads into it. This has gone on for too long. So that's me. Thank you so much for coming along and please do contact me or Andrew if you want to follow up anything with us. We'd be delighted to make contact. Reach out, particularly to other people from other faculties and other units. Thanks again, everyone.

ANDREW POTTER: Thank you. Thanks everyone.