

Black PhD students' perceptions of an academic career

Aim

- 1 A research project to explore black PhD students' perceptions of a career in academia

Background

- 2 The Education Committee has agreed a workplan to support widening participation. Application and admission reform, and black and minority access to higher education have been identified as priority areas for this work. In addition one of the wider recommendations includes a call for greater access to the professions.
- 3 There are a number of trends that point to the value in gaining an understanding of black students' perceptions about academic careers. HEFCE data has shown that there are significant variances in outcomes for students by ethnicity. These variances persist across percentage degree-qualified, first or upper second classification, degree & employed or studying, and degree & graduate job or study. Black academic staff make up 13% of non-professorial academic posts, yet only 7.3% of professorial roles. HESA data has also highlighted that in the state sector, 62% of black students went on to higher education in 2012-13, compared with 45% of white students, the respective population sizes do, however, vary significantly.
- 4 Furthermore, the Black Members' Standing Committee has led the work to produce *Witness*, a forthcoming publication that chronicles the lived experiences of black members working in post-school education. It is felt that the proposed piece of research could complement the *Witness* publication and afford the higher education sector and UCU a greater understanding of some of the issues that impact recruitment to the profession.
- 5 UCU uses the term 'black' in a political sense to refer to people who are descended, through one or both parents, from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia (the Middle-East to China) and Latin America.

Research proposal

- 6 UCU will work with Jason Arday to publish a qualitative snapshot of black PhD students' perceptions of a career in academia. It is envisaged that this work could contribute greater insight into participation in further and higher education and also support a greater understanding of issues around access to the profession.

Methodology

- 7 Interview 15-20 PhD students of black and minority ethnic origin from a range of subject areas to identify perceptions about an academic career. The research piece will aim to:
- explore perceptions of an academic career and if an academic career is attractive to students
 - ascertain the forms of information, advice or guidance about pursuing an academic career received
 - learn about students' own academic and professional experiences and if these have shaped their thinking about an academic career
 - explore the interplay of personal and social factors including ethnicity, class and gender in the decision-making process