Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History

An Update to the Royal Historical Society’s 2018 Report on Race and Ethnic Equality

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JUNE 2024
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Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History

An Update to the Royal Historical Society’s 2018 Report on Race and Ethnic Equality

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
JUNE 2024
In October 2018 the Royal Historical Society (RHS) published its second in a series of reports on equality in the UK historical profession: *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History. A Report and Resource for Change*. The work of a team of historians led by members of the Society’s governing Council, the Report presented a deeply troubling picture of the underrepresentation and experience of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) History students and academic staff in UK Higher Education. These findings, together with the Report’s accompanying ‘Roadmaps for Change’, were circulated widely and discussed at RHS-led and other forums. We are very grateful to all those responsible for creating, disseminating and engaging with the Report.

Many positive initiatives have emerged since the publication of *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*. But as the Report made clear, historians across the four nations were starting from a very low point regarding the enrolment and employment of BME students and academic staff, their experiences in History departments, and the curriculum provision for Black, Asian and other ethnic minority histories.

This prompts the question: what is the situation now? Here, we provide an update to sections of *Race, Ethnicity & Equality* to trace developments over five additional years of statistics relating to BME representation and attainment for History within UK Higher Education. The original Report drew on data for the academic year 2016/17 and below we extend this to 2021/22, which is the latest year available, following the annual release of ethnicity profiles for students and staff in UK Higher Education in November 2023.

The 2018 Report was a wide-ranging and rich commentary on the profile, causes, experience and steps required to address the racial discrimination and inequality that permeate History in UK Higher Education. The focus of this Update is more limited: we look primarily at student and staff data that provides one illustration of these inequalities. With five years’ additional data now available, it is appropriate for the Society, here, to revisit this specific aspect of *Race, Ethnicity & Equality*. Reflecting on data will, in turn, prompt further consideration of how the Society acts to address ongoing inequalities.

The picture that emerges is mixed. Welcome is an increase, year-on-year, in the number and percentage share of BME student enrolments for History undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Also welcome is a decrease in the BME awarding gap for First-Class degrees in Historical and Philosophical Studies. As regards staffing, the past five years have seen an increase in the number and percentage share of BME historians employed in UK Higher Education, alongside initiatives by selected UK departments. These include the creation of a number of dedicated and permanent, full-time lectureships in Black British and/or British Asian History, with a further broadening of the curriculum, undertaken by historians across the sector, which builds on positive work identified in the 2018 Report.
At the same time, there remain areas of concern and much more work to do. Absolute numbers of BME History students and staff continue to be extremely low. New lectureships are a feature of wealthier, Russell Group institutions that have been less severely affected by the cuts and closures against which the Society campaigns in other areas of its advocacy work. The BME academic pipeline – from GCSE and A-Level to undergraduate study and doctoral research – remains underpopulated and precarious in an environment that, at the University of Chichester in 2023, saw the closure of a pioneering MRes degree and its founding director – a prominent Black scholar of Black British history – being made redundant. While we hope for change, thanks in part to the creation of dedicated lectureships, the current number of UK-trained BME historians remains very low indeed. Numerical increases in BME academic staff between 2016/17 and 2021/22 owe more to recruitment of staff from overseas than they do Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority historians who are UK nationals.

In 2018, the message from Race, Ethnicity & Equality was one of shock and the need for action. Many have since responded and the situation regarding levels of underrepresentation and the awarding gap in UK History is showing some signs of improvement. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to be complacent. This Update highlights the ongoing presence of ethnic inequality in UK History. We therefore encourage readers not just to consider current trends in ethnic diversity, but also to revisit and reapply the recommendations that defined Race, Ethnicity & Equality as a ‘Resource for Change’.

Where the 2018 Report was so powerful was in recording the extent and forms of racial discrimination experienced by BME History students and staff. We appreciate that these experiences cannot be adequately captured in a macro-level review such as this, and wholeheartedly support others in the profession who continue to write on the experience of being a student or historian of colour in UK Higher Education. These accounts highlight the sense of disillusionment that many BME historians feel in 2024.

The Royal Historical Society is alert to and concerned by the findings of these commentaries. Equally, we are aware of our several roles in this sphere, both in relation to reporting on data and trends and as an agent for reform, with obligations to effect positive change at the levels of the individual, department and sector. Confronting racial and ethnic inequality in the historical profession is integral to all aspects of the Society’s work. As later sections of this Update set out, the Society seeks to effect change through a range of approaches that see race and equalities work embedded in the RHS’s governance structures and activities as a learned society. We remain alert to what we do, how we work, and to our obligations. Likewise, we are aware of the need to listen to, draw on, and learn from the advice and experience of others, within and beyond Higher Education. We are fully aware this will always be work in progress, and it is work to which we are committed.

Professor Emma Griffin
President of the Royal Historical Society, June 2024
1. Introduction

In October 2018 the Royal Historical Society published *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History. A Report and Resource for Change* to highlight racial and ethnic inequalities in the teaching and practice of History in the UK. Sections of the Report in turn identified three key findings: the underrepresentation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students and staff in university History programmes; substantial levels of discrimination experienced by such historians in UK universities; and the negative impact of overly narrow school and university curricula on diversity and inclusion. In addition, the Report provided recommendations and advice for university History staff and students to begin the work of achieving a more racially equitable profession.

Since 2018 the Report has been widely disseminated and discussed at meetings organised by the Society and by academics within departments across the UK. Aspects of these discussions, along with further practical advice and guidance for academic historians, were provided in two follow-up Roadmap statements in 2019 and 2020.

The key findings of the 2018 Report, which drew on public data and an RHS-commissioned survey of historians, remain alarming and of great concern to all who seek an environment and curriculum that reflects the UK’s ethnic diversity. The Report is available [online](#) and we take this opportunity to encourage you to consult it. Its findings and recommendations remain necessary reading for university History staff and students.

In addition, data used in the original Report has continued to be gathered and made available by government and education organisations. The findings of the 2018 Report concerning numbers of BME History students and staff drew on figures for the academic year 2016/17. A principal purpose of this present document is to extend the reporting of the information on representation of ethnic groups for History in UK Higher Education.

This updating adds content for the additional five years, covering the academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22, the latest for which figures are currently available. In line with the Society’s commitment to providing information on the historical profession, this updating marks the start of ongoing provision by the RHS of key statistics relating to ethnic diversity for History in UK Higher Education. Further content will be added when this is released by external providers, with future updates communicated through the Society. We expect the next update, for the academic year 2022/23, to be released – by AdvanceHE – in late 2024.
The 2018 Report provided data on underrepresentation for BME students and staff across three broad categories:

- attainment levels for all students at Key Stages 4 (GCSE) and 5 (A-Level) – pp. 30-33 of the 2018 Report;
- undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolments and attainment for students engaged in the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s (HESA) classification of ‘Historical & Philosophical Studies’ – pp. 35-40 of the 2018 Report;

Since the Royal Historical Society’s primary concern lies with History in UK Higher Education, the following updates focus on undergraduate and postgraduate students (in Historical & Philosophical Studies) and academic staff in History. Updates are not provided here on attainment by ethnicity for pupils at GCSE and A-Level.
2. Data on BME History student enrolments and academic staffing, 2016-22

Developments in representation of BME students and staff in UK History departments are considered in greater detail below. Headline conclusions from a review of data between the academic years 2016/17 and 2021/22 are as follows:

- an increase in the percentage share of enrolments – undergraduate and postgraduate – for BME UK-domiciled students in the HESA category of Historical & Philosophical Studies;
- a decline in the awarding gap between white and BME students gaining a First-Class degree in Historical & Philosophical Studies;
- an increase in the percentage share of BME academic History staff teaching at UK universities;
- recruitment of BME academic staff who are not UK nationals has become a significant element of overall increases in BME History academic staff representation in UK Higher Education.

2.1. UK domiciled Historical & Philosophical students by ethnic group, 2016-2

The following section updates Figure 2.a.5.1 in the Society’s Race, Ethnicity & Equality (2018, p. 37). The source is the annual Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report: Students (a combination of tables 3.7, 3.7a, 3.9 and 3.10 in that document) published by AdvanceHE. The latest available report from AdvanceHE (published in November 2023) covers the academic year 2021/22.

AdvanceHE’s Statistical Report: Students draws on annual returns for student enrolments compiled by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). For student ethnicity, HESA measures enrolments by the category labelled as Historical & Philosophical Studies (to 2018/19) and Historical, Philosophical & Religious Studies (since 2019/20). Both categories combine data for History alongside other subjects including Archaeology, Heritage Studies, Philosophy and Theology & Religious Studies.

The following two tables update total numbers and percentage share by ethnic group for: i. first-year, first degree undergraduate enrolments, and ii. all first-degree undergraduates studying subjects within Historical & Philosophical Studies (HPS) between 2016/17 and 2021/22.

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1 Advance HE was formed in March 2018 from a merger of the Equality Challenge Unit, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Academy for Higher Education. Data for the Society’s 2018 Report, Race, Ethnicity & Equality, was provided by the Equality Challenge Unit.
2 All data in the tables below is derived from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) under a CC BY 4.0 International license, the terms of which are available here.
3 For simplicity, this document refers to these categories (2016–22) as Historical & Philosophical Studies (HPS) throughout.
2.1.1. Enrolments for first-year HPS undergraduates, % by ethnic group, 2016-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>BME*</th>
<th>ASIAN</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>MIXED</th>
<th>CHINESE</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>19,225</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 17-18</td>
<td>18,635</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 18-19</td>
<td>17,385</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>14.3</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 20-21</td>
<td>17,880</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 21-22</td>
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<td>84.1</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*BME is the sum of the 5 ethnic groups to the right of the table. Granular data provided is rounded as per source data. Data for Chinese students was not available for 2016/17.

2.1.2. Enrolments for all HPS undergraduates, % by ethnic group, 2016-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>BME</th>
<th>ASIAN</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>MIXED</th>
<th>CHINESE</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>AY 16-17</td>
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<td>11.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 17-18</td>
<td>58,790</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>AY 18-19</td>
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<td>87.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 19-20</td>
<td>52,090</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 20-21</td>
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<td>14.1</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>AY 21-22</td>
<td>53,815</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next two tables provide updates of total numbers and percentage share by ethnic group for: i. postgraduate (taught), and ii. postgraduate (research) student enrolments in subjects within Historical & Philosophical Studies between 2016/17 and 2021/22.

2.1.3. Enrolments for postgraduate (taught) HPS students, % by ethnic group, 2016-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>BME</th>
<th>ASIAN</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>MIXED</th>
<th>CHINESE</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AY 16-17</td>
<td>6,996</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 17-18</td>
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<td>90.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 18-19</td>
<td>7,130</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 19-20</td>
<td>7,120</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 20-21</td>
<td>9,075</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 21-22</td>
<td>8,930</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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</table>
2.1.4. Enrolments for postgraduate (research) HPS students, % by ethnic group, 2016-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
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<th>ASIAN</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>MIXED</th>
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<th>OTHER</th>
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<td>4,670</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 17-18</td>
<td>4,435</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 18-19</td>
<td>4,360</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 19-20</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 20-21</td>
<td>4,490</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 21-22</td>
<td>4,470</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Updates of data to 2021/22 allow the following observations to be made on recent developments regarding ethnicity for those studying or researching in subjects within Historical & Philosophical Studies:

i. For all students (undergraduate and postgraduate combined), between 2016 and 2022

- the percentage share of BME students enrolled to study Historical & Philosophical Studies has increased year-on-year, for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (taught and research);
- the percentage share of BME students enrolled in all undergraduate and postgraduate degree categories for Historical & Philosophical Studies rose from 10.9% to 14.1% of total students;
- the number of BME students enrolled in all undergraduate and postgraduate degree categories, for Historical & Philosophical Studies, rose by 20.1% while that by students who are white fell by 10.3%. The number of all student enrolments for these degree categories fell by 7.0% in this period;
- the percentage share of BME students remains consistently higher at undergraduate compared to postgraduate levels. The percentage share of BME students is lowest for postgraduate research degrees in Historical & Philosophical Studies.

ii. For undergraduate students, between 2016 and 2022

- the number of BME first-year undergraduates for Historical & Philosophical Studies rose by 8.4% while those who are white fell by 15.8%. The number of all student enrolments for this category fell by 12.7% in this period.

iii. For postgraduate (taught) students, between 2016 and 2022

- the number of BME postgraduate (taught) students for Historical & Philosophical Studies rose by 74.0% while those who are white rose by 15.2%. The number of all student enrolments for this category rose by 27.0% in this period.
iv. For postgraduate (research) student, between 2016 and 2022

- the number of BME postgraduate (research) students for Historical & Philosophical Studies rose by 26.8% while those who are white fell by 7.2%. The number of all student enrolments for this category fell by 4.2% in this period.

Increases in the numbers and percentage share of BME students enrolled at all degree levels between 2016 and 2022 for Historical & Philosophical Studies are welcome. At the same time it remains the case, as stated in the Society’s 2018 Report, that students in this disciplinary category (HPS) ‘are more likely to be White than UK university student cohorts over-all, and indeed more likely to be White than students in most other subject groups’ (p. 35).

There remains a clear gap between the percentage share of BME students enrolled in Historical & Philosophical Studies at all degree levels (14.1% in 2021/22) and the 24% of 18 to 24 year-olds who identified as BME in the 2021 UK Census. Historical & Philosophical Studies also fall below the percentage of BME enrolments for all Arts, Humanities and Social Science degrees as a whole (23.3% in 2021/22).

2.2. BME student attainment, 2016-22

This section updates Figure 2.a.6.1 in the 2018 Report (p. 40). The source is again the annual *Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report: Students* (table 3.17 in that document) published by AdvanceHE. The latest available report (released in November 2023) covers the academic year 2021/22. The category of assessment is once more Historical & Philosophical Studies.

The following table shows the percentage of white and BME students who achieved a First-Class Degree in a subject within Historical & Philosophical Studies between 2016/17 and 2021/22, and the resulting BME awarding gap.

**2.2.1. UK domiciled HPS undergraduate first-class degrees, % by ethnic group, 2016-22**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>BME</th>
<th>GAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AY 16-17</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>-8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 17-18</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 18-19</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>-7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 19-20</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 20-21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 21-22</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Updates of data to 2021/22 show a narrowing of the BME awarding gap for First-Class degrees in Historical & Philosophical Studies from -8.6% (2016/17) to -6.6% (2021/22).

Between 2016/17 and 2021/22 the percentage share of BME undergraduates in HPS gaining 2:2, Third or Pass degrees declined from 20.0% to 15.5% of all graduating students. Over the same period the percentage share of white students in HPS receiving a 2:2, Third or Pass degree declined from 12.7% to 11.6% of all students.

2.3 University staffing

This section updates Figure 2.b.1.1 in the 2018 Report (p. 41). The source is the annual Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report: Staff (a combination of tables 3.17a and 3.19a in that document) published by AdvanceHE. The latest available report (published in November 2023) covers the academic year 2021/22. For staff ethnicity, HESA measures academic staff by the category of ‘History’ rather than the broader category of Historical & Philosophical Studies.

The following table provides updates of total numbers and percentage share by ethnic group, for All History academic staff (i.e. both UK nationals and non-UK nationals) employed in UK Higher Education between 2016/17 and 2021/22.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>BME</th>
<th>ASIAN</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>MIXED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AY 16-17</td>
<td>3,160</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<td>AY 17-18</td>
<td>3,235</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<td>AY 19-20</td>
<td>3,405</td>
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<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 20-21</td>
<td>3,290</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AY 21-22</td>
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<td>90.6</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shows an increase in the percentage share of BME History academic staff from 6.3% of total staff to 9.4% of total staff between 2016 and 2022.

Table 2.3.1., above, is a composite of two tables provided by AdvanceHE. The first of these two tables, below, provides updates of total numbers and percentage share by ethnic group, for History academic staff who are non-UK nationals employed in UK Higher Education between 2016/17 and 2021/22.
The data shows an increase in the percentage share of BME History academic staff from 12.8% of total staff who are non-UK nationals to 17.7% of total staff who are non-UK nationals between 2016 and 2022.

Table 2.3.3, below, provides updates of total numbers and percentage share by ethnic group, for History academic staff who are UK nationals employed in UK Higher Education between 2016/17 and 2021/22.

The data shows an increase in the percentage share of BME History academic staff who are UK nationals from 3.9% to 6.0% between 2016 and 2022.

Likewise, increases in the overall number of BME History academic staff is as much, indeed marginally more, the result of hiring non-UK national members of staff as it is the recruitment of BME staff who are UK-national. Of those additional members of All BME History academic staff in 2021/22, compared with 2016/17, 53% (57 more members of staff) are non-UK-nationals while 47% (51 more members of staff) are UK nationals.
3. Race, ethnicity & equality in UK History, 2024

The very low number of additional UK-national BME History academic staff (2016-22) is a consequence of ongoing disparities in BME student enrolments, especially among postgraduate research students. As stated in *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History* (2018), existence of an awarding gap for BME History students at undergraduate level (and especially for those gaining First-Class degrees) ‘may have a significant dampening effect on BME postgraduate study, in terms of applications, acceptances, funding and completions’ (p. 39).

At the same time, and as noted above, the percentage share of BME student enrolments for Historical & Philosophical Studies has increased year-on-year, since 2016/17, across all categories of undergraduate and postgraduate study. The BME awarding gap, for First-Class degrees, is also decreasing, as is that for those attaining either a First or 2:1 degree in Historical & Philosophical Studies.

3.1. Provision for teaching and research

Recent years have seen a number of initiatives at the level of individual departments to address infrastructural deficiencies identified in the Society’s *Race, Ethnicity & Equality* Report of 2018.

These actions were in part motivated by the findings and recommendations of 2018, and from the Society’s follow-up programme of departmental engagement documented in its two ‘Roadmaps for Change’ reports. The extent of this engagement proved varied and extensive. Thirty-six UK departments reported on initiatives begun in 2019-20 while responses made frequent reference to the galvanising and positive effects of the 2018 Report on their work. A primary outcome was the creation of dedicated lectureships in Black British and British Asian History which are discussed below. Further activities included the establishment of funded PhD and Masters’ Studentships for BME students (at Cambridge, Glasgow, Open and Oxford). At this time, the Society also worked with other subject specialist organisations to establish and support ongoing grant schemes for BME historians. The Society’s *Roadmaps for Change* remain available and offer relevant, practical advice and guidance for academic historians on taking positive action to address and diminish barriers to equality in the discipline.

One leading example of positive change since 2018 has been the creation and recruitment of named academic posts dedicated to the teaching and research of Black and Asian History in UK and global contexts. Identifying the extent of these appointments, and the resulting focus on curriculum development and the teaching of BME histories, is difficult. Much important new research and curriculum work
is the result of actions by academic historians who are not identified, for example on departmental websites, as dedicated postholders in BME histories.

At the same time, a growing number of UK departments now do include one, and sometimes two, dedicated appointments in Black British and/or Asian British History. Posts of this kind created since 2018 include those at, among other institutions: Birmingham, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Goldsmiths, King’s College London, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle and Oxford. In addition, some of these and other UK departments now include named lectureships in, among other areas, the histories of Africa and its diaspora, South Asia, and slavery. Such appointments are building capacity for PhD research by BME (and other) graduate students who, in turn, it’s hoped will progress to academic jobs. This shift is still in its infancy. However, we hope such graduates will over time increase the share of UK-national BME academic historians.

While these developments are welcome, it remains the case that the majority of dedicated posts have been created at Russell Group institutions less severely affected by the cuts and closures that are now being experienced by historians at a growing number of UK universities. In the latter, opportunities to create new posts in, for example, Black or British Asian History have proved far more limited. Worse still have been recent reversals, most notably at Chichester, where in 2023 the university’s pioneering and popular MRes in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora was closed, along with the redundancy of its programme director, a prominent UK professor of Black British History. At the time of writing, extensive planned cuts at Goldsmiths, University of London, place its pioneering MA in Black British History, and dedicated lecturers, at risk. This follows a previous challenge, in 2022, to what is now the UK’s sole Masters’ option in Black British History in a department that has high BME student intake from, and engagement with, its immediate community. This is exactly the profile of degree course, student body and department that UK Higher Education needs to exist and to champion. Sadly, this one example is now again under threat of closure. Such actions show that the current environment in Higher Education management and financing is one in which dedicated appointments in Black and Asian History remain uncertain.

3.2. Current and future work by the Royal Historical Society

There is also an important role here for the Royal Historical Society. In the period immediately following the 2018 Report, attention focused on demonstrating and communicating the scale of problems faced and the need for action across the sector. Between 2019 and 2022, much of this work was co-ordinated by Dr Shahmima Akhtar and Dr Diya Gupta, the two holders of a Past & Present Fellowship: Race, Ethnicity and Equality in History, held jointly at the Royal Historical Society and the Institute of Historical Research.

In tandem, the Society’s Council reviewed how its commitment to racial equality could be applied to its own systems and processes.
The result has seen the integration of race equalities work as a core consideration across the range of activities the Society undertakes. Questions and concerns relating to race and equality are now central to RHS governance and planning in education and research policy, events, publishing, membership and grants – to name several areas of activity. On each occasion, members of the Society’s governing Council seek to address the conditions and experiences elaborated in 2018 through pragmatic and sustainable interventions inside our own organisation. In deciding how to act, the Society has kept in mind the challenges and requirements set out in the Report and has mapped these to key areas of its work as a learned society.

As a platform to promote new research, the Society’s lectures and events serve to communicate the work of BME historians as well as new histories of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority life within and beyond the UK. In the past two years, the Society has hosted lectures and panels on a wide range of topics. These include studies of early modern Black London; British Asians following Indian partition; the Trinidadian and Tobagonian historian Eric Williams; histories of internationalism from the perspective of the Global South; race and marriage in the nineteenth-century United States; and the present state and future of Black British History in UK Higher Education. The giving of an RHS lecture often marks the culmination of a research project. But the Society also facilitates new work. Since 2023, a programme of Workshop Grants has supported pilot histories of Black and Minority Ethnic communities in the UK and worldwide. Among recent recipients are historians who study the legacies of the Bengal Famine (1943), women’s historical contribution to constitutional reform in Pakistan, and Black histories of London.

Publications are another means by which the Society gives voice to BME historians and scholars whose work reflects the diversity of our past, in national and global perspective. Published versions of several of the events listed above have appeared in the Society’s journal *Transactions*, with others in production. The decision, in 2021, to ‘open up’ the journal to submissions from all historians has seen a very welcome increase in the range of authors publishing in *Transactions*, as well as a growing body of work on subaltern conceptions and experiences of empire. Likewise, a broadening of the journal’s remit to carry articles on research methods and historiography is generating new content. This includes a commissioned roundtable – from early career historians – on new perspectives on Black British History, to appear in summer 2024.

To encourage further work of this kind, the Society has a role in supporting BME historians at the start of their careers. One of the most striking features of the data presented in this Update is the very significant disparity in the profile of the historical profession and the very slow rate of change seen since 2016/17, especially with regard to the recruitment of BME historians educated and trained at UK universities. In response, the Society has introduced, and continues to develop, activities that engage with the challenges of staffing identified in this Update.

One action focuses on mentoring and support for BME historians. In 2021, the Society introduced an annual programme of training and mentoring for early career BME historians which has now been attended by 75 PhD and post-doctoral
researchers, providing one-to-one sessions on CV writing and academic career development. In 2024 we add a second strand of mentoring and training, offering guidance to early career historians of colour on publishing their first academic articles. These mentoring programmes are currently led by two members of the Society’s Council, Dr Adam Budd and Dr Rebekah Lee.

The Society’s role as the giver of grants and funding is also important in this context. Discussions within the Society on how to allocate resources are shaped by the circumstances and challenges currently facing the discipline. There are, of course, many competing needs and limited resources. Nonetheless, addressing the very significant ‘pipeline’ problem facing the provision and training of BME historians has become a key focus of the Society. In part, we do this by supporting other organisations who share these concerns – including funding for the Social History Society’s BME Small Grants programme and the Harriet Tubman Essay Prize, awarded by the British Association for Nineteenth-Century American Historians for work by BME historians.

More significantly, as a grant giver in its own right, the Society seeks to target those individuals and areas of the profession most in need by introducing new schemes to its funding programme. The Society’s annual Masters’ Scholarships scheme, established in 2022, provides financial support to graduate History students, including those from BME backgrounds, and from groups currently underrepresented in History in UK Higher Education. In its first two years, the programme has supported 12 students with awards of £5,000 each – spent in whatever way best enables recipients to gain the most from their degree course. By focusing on Masters’ students, the Scholarships identify a key early stage in the academic training of future researchers. The programme encourages Black and Asian students to consider academic research in History, providing – in addition to financial assistance – year-long academic mentoring with RHS Council members during which options for PhD research, and academic and other History-related careers, are considered. As it enters its third year, the Masters’ Scholarship programme is gaining welcome support. We are delighted that, thanks to donations from the Past & Present Society and Scoloudi Foundation, the Society will make available eight awards to MA History students in each of the academic years 2024/25 and 2025/26.

To this range of activities the Society now adds provision of data relating to enrolment and attainment by BME undergraduate and postgraduate students, and to BME History academic staff in the UK. Oversight of this data gathering, presentation and review is provided by the RHS committee responsible for research policy and advocacy work. Data provision on BME History students and staffing forms one element of the Society’s ongoing work to assemble and publish relevant statistical content relating to the historical profession in the round. Starting with this present updating to 2021/22, the Society will henceforth make available, and review, new data on race and ethnicity for the profession on an annual basis.

In doing so the Society aims to observe and remain alert to developments – positive and negative – as they affect BME students and academic staff, and the provision of
histories of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in the UK and overseas. While the Society looks outwards to the wider profession, it will also continue to look in: to itself and its own ongoing and evolving contribution to this vital area of contemporary society and our national and global past.

The Society does not and cannot undertake this work without the advice and insight of the wider community of historians. With reference to racial inequality in UK History – and the slow pace and current precarity of positive change – this means listening to and working with those who experience and engage with the effects of inequality, and who address these topics in a variety of ways. These actions are integral to the Society. They remain under constant review by the Society’s leadership and governing Council to ensure the next phases of its equalities work are as effective and collaborative as possible.
4. Conclusion: key findings

This Update closes with a summary of the main findings drawn from the AdvanceHE data, and other sources, since the publication of Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History. A Report and Resource for Change. In summary, the period between 2016/17 and 2021/22 has seen:

- an increase in the percentage share of enrolments – both undergraduate and postgraduate – for BME UK-domiciled students studying subjects within the HESA category of Historical & Philosophical Studies;
- a decline in the BME awarding gap for undergraduates gaining a First-Class degree in Historical & Philosophical Studies;
- highest rates of increase for BME student enrolment at first-degree undergraduate level, and the lowest rates of increase at postgraduate (research) degree level. The percentage share of BME students remains lowest for postgraduate research degrees in Historical & Philosophical Studies;
- a modest increase in the percentage share of BME academic History staff teaching at UK universities, and the need to focus on growing the number of BME historians trained at UK universities;
- the continued significance of recruitment of non-UK national historians for changes in the percentage share of All BME academic History staff;
- markedly slow growth in the number of UK-national BME historians achieving academic jobs in higher education;
- creation of new, dedicated lectureships in, among other subject areas, Black British and British Asian History. These new posts are concentrated in Russell Group institutions while other universities, serving diverse communities, have been unable to make appointments or have seen reversals to existing programmes, including at the University of Chichester in 2023. Likewise, other departments – such as Goldsmiths, University of London – that are known for their expertise in Black British History, remain at risk.

In conclusion, these findings draw on recent work by the Society which collates the data, first made available in Race, Ethnicity & Equality, in 2018, for a successive five years. This focus is one element of the Society’s broader concern to provide historians with the fullest possible picture of History in UK Higher Education, at sector-level, through the regular provision of data as generated by external providers. This, certainly, is a necessary perspective. However, it remains just one means to better understand and confront the twin challenges of sustaining advances made since 2018 and facilitating further positive change. These too are priorities for the Society. They are central to our future strategic development and will involve historians who continue to pursue the goals of Race, Ethnicity & Equality.