ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN COMMITMENT AND PRACTICE

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A report by the

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Executive Summary

This report examines the experiences of racially minoritised early-career researchers (ECRs) in Development Studies through seven participatory workshops with over 60 researchers across the UK, alongside institutional interviews and policy analysis. It reveals persistent gaps between institutional EDI commitments and lived realities.

The workshops—consistently described by participants as the first 'genuinely safe academic spaces' participants had encountered in UK academia—generated rich evidence about structural barriers, emotional costs, and the scarcity of relational support in institutional settings.

Key Findings

Precarity is racialised and systemic, functioning as a sorting mechanism that disproportionately pushes minoritised and international scholars out of academia. Visa insecurity, short-term contracts, and opaque career pathways create compounded vulnerability.

Mentorship and sponsorship are structurally absent. ECRs lack access to the 'hidden curriculum,' relatable mentors, and senior advocates who can enable progression. Institutional schemes exist on paper but are patchy and disconnected from ECR realities.

Decolonisation is curriculum- rather than research-focused, leading to epistemic exclusion. Reading lists are diversifying, however, financial barriers to publishing such as Article Processing Charges (APCs), alongside English-language dominance, and entrenched epistemic hierarchies, continue to shape whose knowledge is valued and published. Decolonisation has not reached research cultures.

Safe spaces for staff are absent, creating isolation. Participants used language like 'transformative,' 'healing,' and 'blessed' to describe the workshops, revealing profound emotional scarcity in institutional environments. Universities provide safe spaces for students but not for minoritised staff.

EDI is activity-heavy but outcome-light. Long lists of initiatives (Athena Swan, Race Equality Charters, diversity training) do not translate into cultural change. ECRs experience EDI as 'existing on paper,' dependent on individual champions rather than systemic accountability.

What This Report Does

The report synthesises ECR voices, institutional evidence, and sector research to provide:

- Detailed analysis of four interconnected barriers: precarity, mentorship gaps, epistemic exclusion, and isolation
- Evidence-based recommendations distinguishing centre-level, institutional, and cross-institutional actions
- Examples of promising practice that can be adapted or scaled
- A framework for moving from EDI activity to structural and relational accountability

Core Argument

Meaningful change requires both structural transformation; EDI cannot function alongside precarity *and* relational infrastructure; belonging cannot be created through procedures. This means embedding racial equality into decision-making systems such as promotion criteria, workload models, contract practices, research funding - while creating conditions for community, care, and epistemic recognition.

As participants emphasised: 'We need EDI in the DNA - not just activities.'

1. Introduction

This report is part of the Development Studies Association's (DSA) ongoing commitment to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across the discipline. Supported by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the project seeks to understand and address the specific barriers facing racially minoritised early-career researchers (ECRs) in Development Studies and related fields. It also forms part of the DSA's broader aspiration not simply to "do" EDI, but to make equity, care, and inclusion the DNA of the organisation—embedded in practice, not only referenced in policy.

1.1 Project Background and Methodology

The project originally began with an institutional lens. Publicly available EDI information from DSA member institutions, written submissions from six centres, and four semi-structured interviews with EDI teams (see Appendix I for an overview of anonymised respondents) revealed a strong culture of EDI language—strategies, training offers, decolonisation statements, commitments to inclusive practice—yet relatively little evidence of how these translated into the everyday realities of staff and ECRs. Many institutional websites displayed well-intentioned statements, but these often gave limited insight into whether meaningful, race-specific change was taking place. Feedback from institutional respondents themselves highlighted gaps between stated commitments and lived experiences, with progress frequently dependent on individual champions rather than systematic investment.

These early findings pointed clearly to the need for an approach centred on lived experience. As a result, the project shifted its emphasis toward building a deeper, grounded understanding of the challenges, supports, and aspirations of racially minoritised ECRs. This led to the development of a nationwide participatory workshop series that ultimately became the central evidence base of this report.

Seven in-person workshops were held in London, Birmingham and Edinburgh, selected on the basis of where applicants were based – no-one should have to travel more than two hours to a workshop - and to ensure geographical diversity. Each workshop ran as a half-day session beginning with a shared

lunch to generate a sense of community. Participants included final-year doctoral researchers, postdoctoral researchers, teaching fellows, and staff on fixed-term, hourly-paid or otherwise precarious contracts. Across the series, more than sixty racially minoritised ECRs took part, with around half attending multiple sessions and new participants joining at each location. Scholars represented over 35 UK institutions and a wide mix of identities, including Black, South Asian, East Asian, mixed-race, caste-oppressed, migrant, diaspora, international, and non-binary participants. Two-thirds identified as women, reflecting persistent gendered patterns within the discipline (see Appendix II for analysis showing women predominate in part time work).

Each workshop combined two mutually reinforcing components: a participatory session and a guest speaker session. The participatory activities—post-it reflections, small-group conversations, collective mapping, and anonymous prompts—were designed to create safe and trusting spaces where participants could speak openly about racism, precarity, epistemic exclusion, visa insecurity, and institutional challenges. Guest speakers, all established scholars from racially minoritised backgrounds, led discussions on career transitions, funding, publishing, visibility and navigating structural inequality in academia (see Appendix III for workshop dates and speakers).The sessions built on one another: the first focusing on challenges, joys and support needs; the second on career transitions and research funding; the third on publishing and visibility. Edinburgh hosted a one-off session as a part of the DSA Scotland study group annual meeting.

Across all locations, participants consistently described the workshops as the first “genuinely safe academic spaces” they had encountered in the UK—spaces where they did not have to dilute their experiences, code-switch, or manage the emotional demands of explaining racism to others. These sessions generated exceptionally rich qualitative material, becoming the strongest and most detailed dataset in the project.

While the workshops form the heart of the evidence base, institutional submissions, interviews, and public materials were also analysed to contextualise these findings (these are discussed in more detail in Appendix IV Good Practices Summary). Together, they reveal a clear structural pattern: EDI is widely articulated but unevenly enacted, with significant gaps between rhetoric and practice. This disconnect intensifies the challenges experienced by

racially minoritised ECRs, who encounter precarity at the precise moment they are attempting to establish academic careers.

A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted across workshop material, institutional responses and interviews. Descriptive codes—for example, "visa precarity", "racialised isolation", "supervisory tensions", "lack of mentorship", "publishers' gatekeeping", "white saviourism", "epistemic hierarchy"—were refined into broader themes through iterative comparison across sites. These were triangulated with national research such as the UKRI EDI review (Guyan & Douglas Oloyede, 2019), work on decolonisation (Mbembe, 2016; Arday and Mirza, 2018), and scholarship on the "leaky pipeline" for racially minoritised academics (Mirza, 2018; Rollock, 2019; Baltaru, 2024). This ensured analytical rigour while allowing the depth and nuance of participants' voices to guide interpretation.

1.2 Research Ethics and Positionality

The project was facilitated by the author of this report, a racially minoritised early-career researcher who is Dalit (formerly "Untouchables"), a first-generation learner, and a migrant. This positionality shaped both the methodological approach and the atmosphere of the workshops. Many participants noted that they felt able to speak openly because the facilitator "understood without needing explanation." Care, relationality, and trust therefore guided every stage of design and delivery. Inclusion was enacted through practice—selecting accessible venues; offering childcare reimbursement; enabling attendance with partners or children (including those with additional needs) and arranging private rooms where required; and ensuring that catering met cultural, dietary, and religious needs.

Organising the workshops required substantial coordination, including managing applications, liaising with participants, booking travel, scheduling guest speakers, arranging materials, processing expenses, disseminating feedback forms, and maintaining ongoing communication through a dedicated post-workshop network via LinkedIn. While this work is often invisible in institutional settings, it was essential to creating an environment where racially minoritised researchers could participate fully and safely.

Thanks are extended to the host universities, Birmingham, Edinburgh and King's College, London, for providing venues and catering support, and to the guest speakers for their time and insight. Deep gratitude is also owed to the participants, whose reflections, honesty, and generosity made the workshops both intellectually rich and emotionally grounded.

This labour, both relational and logistical, underscores a central principle of this project: meaningful inclusion is not rhetorical but practical, requiring intention, care, and sustained commitment, including financial support. All participants provided informed consent, and all data were anonymised. Given the prevalence of visa insecurity, supervisory concerns and fears of institutional retaliation, anonymity was essential to enabling open discussion.

1.3 Overview of This Report

This report brings together the layered insights emerging from this process. While institutional materials and interviews provide important contextual understanding, the workshop series offers the clearest, most honest account of what racially minoritised ECRs experience within Development Studies today. These insights reveal both the persistence of systemic barriers and the possibilities opened by collective, community-centred spaces. The following sections present the thematic analysis, case examples, and a set of practical recommendations for institutions, centres and disciplinary leaders committed to driving transformative change.

2. Key Research Findings

2.1 Theme 1: Precarity and Career Pathways

Precarity emerged across all workshops as a deeply embedded structural condition shaping the lives and futures of racially minoritised and international ECRs (see for example, analyses within a single London institution by LSE UCU, 2023 and Suzuki, 2025). Participants repeatedly described academia as a *"competitive and individualised culture"* (London Workshop 1), one that lacks compassion and operates through silence, opacity, and exclusion. For many, precarity was not an isolated employment experience but a racialised and migration-mediated system that unevenly distributes insecurity across race,

nationality, class, gender, and citizenship. As one group in Birmingham put it, what universities portray as a *"pipeline"* feels more like a *"racialised leaking pipeline"* (Birmingham Workshop 2).

Visa precarity was described as the most visceral embodiment of this system. In London Workshop 2, two participants shared that they *"had to leave the country as they could [not] secure a job and work visa."* (see Figure 1 below) Another ECR in the Edinburgh workshop articulated the precariousness starkly:

> "Fixed term and precarity of visas - if you lose the job, you lose the visa. People go back home, and it is really hard to stay back when you are not given something promising."
>
> *Reflection of an ECR in Edinburgh workshop*

Figure 1: Post-its from Participatory workshops

This sense of conditional belonging, of being allowed to stay only as long as a temporary contract permits, created deep uncertainty and emotional strain. For many, research projects, collaborations, and intellectual labour became vulnerable not to academic failure, but to immigration rules.

Institutional data directly corroborate this. A large university in Southeast England (University A – written response) notes that colleagues on insecure contracts are *"disproportionately non-white and most often women of colour"*. Interview evidence from the same university indicates that they have actively challenged HR practices where fractional contracts fell below visa eligibility

thresholds, including pushing for increased FTE or contract adjustments to ensure staff could meet immigration requirements (University A - interview). A Russell Group University in London (University C – written response) similarly states that there is "*no global mobility infrastructure*" for staff, leaving international academics to navigate immigration systems entirely alone. Together, this confirms that visa precarity is not anecdotal; it is structurally produced.

Class and migration status intensified this vulnerability. Many ECRs described the compounded insecurity created by financial constraints, lack of family safety nets, and the impossibility of long-term planning. A Birmingham participant explained:

> "My visa status creates instability... limiting my ability to apply for permanent positions or large grants requiring institutional commitment."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 1*

Another offered a full, emotionally charged reflection:

> "As a racially minoritised PhD student, I encounter financial, visa-related, emotional, social, and professional uncertainty... The lack of long-term security weighs heavily on my future planning."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 2*

Others described the material consequences of precarity with painful clarity:

> "The short-term contracts common in academia are especially risky for me. Without family in the UK or any savings at all, taking a 9-month position means worrying about what happens after."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 1*

Career progression was widely described as opaque, inconsistent, and often racialised. A Birmingham ECR shared that they had been:

> "applying for so many jobs and being unsuccessful and no proper feedback"
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 1*

An ECR from London Workshop 1 reflected on being shortlisted for roles and evaluated during recruitment, describing being positioned as symbolic rather than substantive:

"Tokenism, where my presence served a diversity checkbox rather than being valued... I submitted a grant independently and secured it - proof of my capability."

London Workshop 1

Others spoke of the emotional exhaustion embedded in this uncertainty:

"Every application feels like shouting into the void. No feedback, no explanation - just silence."

London Workshop 2

Institutional responses mirror these concerns which also apply to promotion processes. University C reports that leaders are *"not giving honest feedback,"* with staff *"leaving due to no feedback,"* and survey results showing low trust in promotion fairness (University C - written response). A large University in the East of England (University B - interview), acknowledges that staff described institutionally as "BAME" face unclear promotion routes and that mentoring programmes remain *"in early stages"*. A Russell Group University in the Midlands (University D – written response) also referenced ongoing attempts to develop more equitable promotion processes. The alignment between workshop narratives and institutional self-assessment reveals widespread acknowledgement of concerns around support and progression but limited structural correction.

Participants also detailed racialised gatekeeping and unequal work allocation. In London Workshop 1, one ECR observed *"white postdocs getting promotions, but this Black ECR was not,"* a pattern echoed across groups. Black women frequently reported carrying disproportionately heavy teaching loads, which constrained time for research and publication - the very outputs required for career progression. As one participant summarised:

"Securing funding is so hard... academia is generally not looking good in this state."

London Workshop 1

International participants further described a global dimension to their insecurity. One ECR in London Workshop 2 articulated the "weak passport penalty":

> "Coming from a country with a 'weak passport' means I need visas for everything... I often don't apply for jobs I'm qualified for because I can't afford the risk or cost."
>
> *London Workshop 2*

This comment captures how global inequalities shape academic mobility and restrict access to career-defining opportunities. University A explicitly recognises that international staff encounter additional structural barriers embedded in visa rules, while University C acknowledges the absence of any visa support.

Across the workshops, early-career researchers articulated the kinds of support they needed to remain in academia: transparent hiring processes, visa-aware contract planning, funding to cover gaps between fixed-term contracts or grant cycles, and structured, honest feedback. This was both in general and in specific situations such as promotions or grant applications, provided by line managers and senior mentors. Mentoring and clearly defined pathways to progression were also highlighted as essential.

As one concrete example, the Postdoctoral Bridge Grants | EISA support recently graduated or final-year PhD students who have not yet secured an academic contract or fellowship, providing up to €3,500 to bridge the gap between doctoral research and postdoctoral employment. The scheme allows early-career researchers additional time and resources to finalise publications or develop postdoctoral funding proposals, illustrating a practical model of how targeted bridge funding can support career continuity and reduce attrition at critical transition points.

This might have benefitted the one Birmingham participant who explained:

> "I hope to gain practical skills in leadership, grant writing, and planning my career... I'm looking for guidance on how to find postdoc opportunities and build a longer-term academic career."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 1*

Taken together, these data portray *precarity not as an inevitable phase of academic life, but as a structural sorting mechanism that disproportionately*

pushes racially minoritised and international ECRs out of the academy. Institutional responses reveal high levels of EDI activity but partial implementation and limited race-conscious monitoring. Recent research similarly shows that racially minoritised academics remain under-promoted, overburdened, and overrepresented in insecure roles (Guyan & Douglas Oloyede, 2019; Baltaru, 2024; Obasi, 2024).

Precarity emerges as a racialised, intersectional system shaped by visa regimes, workload inequities, opaque progression routes, and institutional cultures. This is a feature of UK higher education more broadly, rather than a problem unique to any one discipline, though departments reliant on international student recruitment or fluctuating research income may experience these pressures more acutely. It is not simply an employment issue: it determines who can remain, progress, and be recognised across the academic sector.

2.2 Theme 2: Mentorship, Representation, and the Hidden Curriculum

Across the workshops, interviews, and written reflections, the absence of mentorship emerged not simply as a theme but as a defining condition shaping the everyday realities of racially minoritised ECRs. Participants repeatedly described a profound absence of guidance, a lack of relatable senior figures, and an environment in which vital knowledge about academic progression remained tightly held within privileged networks. While institutions often articulated mentorship as an established or emerging strength, the lived experiences of participants told a very different story—one marked by isolation, disorientation, and the continuous sense of having to navigate an already unequal terrain without a map.

A central frustration among participants was the stark disjuncture between institutional claims and what they themselves encountered. Several institutions suggested that "all new staff are allocated a mentor" or that mentoring programmes for racially minoritised staff were "planned" or "in development." Yet participants across every site described the opposite: a landscape in which mentorship was either absent, ineffective, or entirely misaligned with their specific realities. As one participant put it bluntly during London Workshop 1, *"Lack of mentorship, especially from racially minoritised scholars."*

This sentiment was echoed again in Birmingham Workshop 2, and London Workshop 3 where ECRs reflected on navigating their department without any structured support:

"I didn't have any mentor yet... navigating a predominantly white academic landscape has often left me feeling isolated."

Birmingham Workshop 2

"Feeling lost (and a bit hopeless) without a role model who has gone through this path before me." (see figure 2)

London Workshop 3

Figure 2: Post-its from participatory workshops

It was not simply that mentors were absent; it was that those who were available often appeared disconnected from the lived realities of those seeking support. Participants emphasised that race alone did not guarantee shared experience. A Dalit scholar in London Workshop 3 captured this complexity powerfully:

> "As a lower caste first-generation learner abroad... the people of colour who 'made it' are mostly upper class and upper caste. They don't represent us."
>
> *London Workshop 3*

This observation underscored a wider point emerging across the dataset: representation is not merely about visible diversity but about social and experiential proximity. Another ECR from Edinburgh drew attention to tensions within minority groups themselves, noting, "*There is hostility among people of colour in higher positions... they need to support us more.*" These reflections challenged simplistic narratives of solidarity and highlighted the layered nature of exclusion within academia.

The consequences of these mentorship gaps were described as both practical and psychological. Participants repeatedly spoke of how the absence of relatable senior scholars undermined their confidence, limited their access to opportunities, and amplified feelings of illegitimacy. One participant in Birmingham Workshop 1 expressed how this dynamic infiltrates daily academic life:

> "Implicit bias and stereotyping affect my confidence and opportunities. Without relatable mentors, you constantly doubt yourself."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 1*

Across the various forms of data collected, the lack of mentorship was consistently represented not as a personal failure but as a structural absence produced by the very design of academic cultures. This structural gap arises from several interrelated factors: reliance on informal networks to access opportunities, scarcity of relatable senior role models for racially minoritised and international ECRs, and limited institutional recognition or resourcing for mentoring as a formal, accountable role. Participants reported that mentoring was often left to individual initiative, meaning that those without existing connections or awareness of unwritten pathways were systematically excluded from guidance and support.

The consequences of this absence extended beyond practical challenges, feeding into what participants referred to as the *"hidden curriculum"* of academia: the unwritten rules, tacit expectations, and informal networks that shape success. A participant in Birmingham Workshop 1 captured this succinctly: *"Academia is like a bubble. It's who you know"* (see Figure 3 below).

Without mentors to decode these norms, they were left guessing, improvising, and often discovering critical expectations too late. For example, navigating competitive processes such as fellowships or grant applications was significantly harder without guidance. As an ECR in Edinburgh Workshop 1 explained:

> "Getting references is so hard... applying for fellowships is much harder when you don't know how to find a host or mentor. This situation gets even harder when you don't have supportive supervisors."
>
> *Edinburgh Workshop 1*

Figure 3: Post-its from participatory workshops

Interviews with institutional leads confirmed that these informal networks do not operate evenly. One EDI lead acknowledged that *"staff from minority backgrounds have weaker pipelines into opportunities"* (University D -interview). These statements aligned closely with participant testimonies and underscored that the challenges they described were not isolated incidents but embedded within the organisational fabric of academia.

Institutions often presented mentorship as widely available, but these claims sat uneasily alongside participant accounts and even their own admissions of shortcomings. While documents referenced mentoring schemes, coaching programmes, or promotion-readiness initiatives for Black and minority staff, they also acknowledged that mentoring remained "*underdeveloped and inconsistent*" and that trust in fairness across the system was low. Participants consistently described a gap between what exists "on paper" and what is felt in practice. As one ECR noted in London Workshop 1, *"Institutions claim mentoring exists… but in reality people of colour in higher positions are not helping early-career people of colour."* Another reflected that *"schemes exist on paper, not in lived reality,"* articulating a broader frustration with what some described as performative institutional commitments.

Interviews with senior staff revealed further barriers to meaningful enactment. A representative from University B explained that "*engagement in our mentoring schemes is patchy*" and suggested that senior academics often lacked either the time or the confidence to mentor across racial or experiential difference. The pattern that emerges is one in which mentorship is institutionally endorsed but structurally unsupported, producing a gap between intention and impact that racially minoritised ECRs experience as acute and enduring.

Yet amidst these challenges, participants consistently spoke about the workshops within this project as rare moments of genuine mentorship. They described the invited speakers as providing the type of candid, grounded, and practical support they had long been lacking. In Birmingham Workshop 3, one participant commented, *"They gave us concrete tips on funding, publishing, and acing the game of academia,"* while another in Birmingham Workshop 2 reflected, *"The speakers gave actionable advice. It was the first time I felt genuinely mentored."* For many, the power of these interactions lay in the honesty of the speakers' stories—narratives of dealing with visas, failures, racism, and institutional barriers. As one participant in London Workshop 2 noted, *"Hearing how they navigated visas, rejections, racism… it was so human and so helpful."* These sessions offered a glimpse into what mentorship could be: relational, generous, grounded in lived experience, and emotionally resonant.

Participants also articulated clearly what they needed but were not receiving: mentorship that is structured, formally accountable, and designed to be meaningful. This should provide access to senior scholars of colour who hold

real institutional influence; guidance on writing grants, preparing publications, managing rejection, navigating departmental politics, and building networks; and support in learning the unwritten norms that shape academic careers. One participant in Birmingham Workshop 2 described this succinctly:

> "I need structured guidance on finding postdocs, applying for funding, and building networks. These things are opaque, especially for scholars of colour.
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 2*

Another, from London Workshop 2, underscored the importance of representation itself:

> "I need to see someone who looks like me and has navigated what I'm navigating."
>
> *London Workshop 2*

What becomes clear from the data is that mentorship functions not as an optional enhancement but as an essential structural resource that shapes academic possibility. Its absence reproduces inequalities in patterned ways, influencing who accesses opportunities, who accumulates social capital, and who is able to progress. These findings align with wider sector research (O'Connor, 2019; Bhopal and Henderson, 2019; Bhopal, 2020; Advance HE, 2021) showing that racially minoritised academics—particularly women—face slower progression, weaker networks, and profound underrepresentation at senior levels. Within this context, the mentorship gap is not incidental but reflects deeply embedded racialised dynamics within academic cultures.

In short, mentorship in its current form is not failing by chance but through predictable and racialised patterns—patterns that participants have learned to navigate alone, despite institutional narratives that suggest they should not have to.

2.3 Theme 3: Decolonisation, Curriculum Reform, and Inclusion in Knowledge Production

Across workshops, interviews, and institutional submissions, participants described a significant disjuncture between universities' public commitments to "decolonisation" and their own lived experiences within research cultures. These cultures continue to privilege Eurocentric knowledge, English-language

dominance, and methodological norms rooted in Western research traditions—such as preferences for particular theoretical frameworks, approaches, or conventional publishing outlets. While institutions often highlight curriculum-level initiatives as evidence of progress, ECRs' accounts reveal ongoing epistemic exclusion, racialised barriers to publication, and supervisory practices that marginalise Global South perspectives. This gap between institutional narratives and researcher realities is experienced as structural rather than incidental.

Participants across sites repeatedly emphasised that, while valuable decolonisation efforts exist—particularly revised reading lists and undergraduate modules—these initiatives often remain surface-level in the absence of deeper structural change. Many felt that decolonisation had become a symbolic gesture rather than a transformative process. In London Workshop 2, one participant captured this disconnect clearly: *"Decolonising and writing in our own languages is still challenging... knowledge reproduction remains controlled."* Another ECR, reflecting on the linguistic hierarchies embedded in academic life, observed that *"language barriers have affected my confidence. Writing in English means my ideas feel flattened."* These reflections illustrate how English-language dominance operates not simply as a practical barrier but as a form of epistemic violence that constrains what kinds of knowledge are legible and valued.

Participants also highlighted the difficulty of bringing non-Western epistemologies into spaces still organised around white, Eurocentric assumptions. During London Workshop 1, an ECR explained that:

> "Convincing Global North teams that my lived experience is as valuable as a literature review — that is epistemic justice."
>
> *London Workshop 1*

Others framed this as an internal, ongoing struggle as well as an institutional one. One participant described their PhD journey as *"a process of self-decolonisation... I am still walking towards redemption,"* emphasising that decolonisation is lived and embodied rather than merely curricular. This point is emphasised in Kamwengo and Radley's (2025) review of perceptions of African among UK development studies students.

This sense of misalignment was reinforced by the institutional documents themselves. While University A pointed to new modules on colonialism, and

University B described embedding decolonisation into staff appraisal criteria and reading-list audits, none of the institutions addressed the deeper structures raised by participants. These included calls to decolonise research funding—specifically, challenging funding models that privilege UK-based institutions as primary grant holders, impose restrictive audit and risk-management regimes on Global South partners, and undervalue methodologies rooted in non-Western epistemic traditions. Participants also highlighted the absence of institutional strategies to confront racism in supervision, tackle inequalities in publishing, subside Article Processing Charges (APCs), or address racial biases in peer review.

Evidence from the Generation Delta project similarly points to the limitations of existing institutional approaches, noting that many support mechanisms rely on implicit norms, informal knowledge, and individual discretion. The project recommends integrating structured reflection on admissions, supervision, progression, and complaints processes into core doctoral provision and mandatory staff development, particularly for those with decision-making responsibilities, in order to strengthen institutional accountability.

Institutions could acknowledge these inequalities when evaluating the publication performance of ethnically minoritised scholars. University C emphasised inclusive pedagogy training, while University D referenced "global awareness" and exploratory work on decolonial approaches, yet neither institution engaged with structural barriers within research cultures (Guyan and Douglas Oloyede, 2019). The cumulative impression is that institutional decolonisation remains curriculum-heavy but structurally light, with teaching reforms used as a proxy for deeper epistemic change.

One of the most salient cross-cutting themes was the structural dominance of English as the default language of academic legitimacy. Participants described this not as an explicitly stated requirement in promotion criteria, but as an implicit expectation embedded within publishing norms, research assessment frameworks, and promotion processes that privilege English-language outputs. Several ECRs explained that success in hiring, promotion, and grant applications is effectively contingent on publishing in high-status English-language journals. In London Workshop 2, an ECR reflected: *"We write about untranslatable concepts in English. Something is always lost."* Another participant noted

that their research *"challenges dominant narratives, but its cultural language doesn't fit neatly in English academic writing."* Participants experienced this expectation as a form of colonial continuity, in which intellectual traditions rooted in other languages and epistemologies are marginalised not through overt exclusion, but through evaluative systems that define excellence in narrowly Anglophone terms.

Speakers in the workshops reinforced this perspective, urging ECRs to prioritise knowledge production that serves the communities they study. One speaker advised:

> "Write outputs for the communities you study. They cannot access paywalled English-language journals. Produce knowledge in your mother tongue."
>
> *London workshop 2*

This finding raises difficult questions about what institutions should be doing, as there is no single or straightforward solution to the structural dominance of English within global academia. However, participants did not frame multilingual publishing primarily as a logistical challenge to be solved through full translation, but as an issue of recognition, valuation, and support. Several described multilingual publication as an act of resistance against epistemic erasure, yet none of the institutional documents referenced practical mechanisms for recognising or supporting such work.

Rather than comprehensive translation across all languages, participants pointed to more modest and feasible institutional interventions: recognising non-English outputs within promotion and appraisal frameworks; supporting translated abstracts, summaries, or companion pieces; allowing multilingual outputs to be named and contextualised within research assessment; and providing guidance on how such work can be evaluated fairly. Emerging tools, including AI-assisted translation, may play a limited supporting role, but cannot substitute for institutional shifts in how knowledge, language, and scholarly value are defined.

Publishing emerged as a site of acute inequality. Participants in Birmingham Workshop 2 described *"publishing inequalities — journal rankings and whiteness,"* while others spoke of repeated rejections of journal submissions and limited guidance as to how to improve them. A participant in Birmingham Workshop 1 summarised this bluntly: *"Hard to get published, so many rejections,*

no support." For some, the barriers were both financial and epistemic. An ECR explained:

"Publishing in top journals requires costly APCs. My precarious contracts do not cover this. Pay-to-publish models exclude us."

Birmingham Workshop 1, (see figure 4 below)

Figure 4: Post-its from participatory workshops

Another described how work on race and identity was dismissed within their department as lacking rigour*: "My work on race and identity is seen as niche or unprofessionalised"*. Several participants also reported experiencing supervisory racism. As one ECR in London Workshop 2 explained, *"Racism in supervision affected how my data was interpreted,"* illustrating how epistemic harms occur not only through institutional systems but also in the intimate spaces of supervision and scholarly development.

Institutional responses did not include these issues. Across Universities A–D, discussions of race equity and decolonisation focused primarily on curriculum reform, inclusive pedagogy, and training initiatives. Issues that were repeatedly raised by early-career researchers—such as racialised publishing barriers, APCs, and racial bias in peer review or editorial

decision-making—did not emerge within institutional accounts. Importantly, this cannot be attributed to the wording of the questions: respondents were specifically asked to describe diversity and inclusion initiatives for ECRs and to provide relevant documents. The absence of these topics in institutional accounts is therefore noteworthy and suggests that certain structural barriers highlighted by early-career researchers may not be fully reflected in institutional framings of decolonisation.

Participants also spoke about experiences of epistemic misrecognition, where their methodologies or areas of study were dismissed as less rigorous or less academic. In London Workshop 2, one ECR observed that *"diverse worldviews are sidelined. Our research is undervalued."* An interdisciplinary ECR described struggling to find reviewers, allies, or institutional understanding: their *work "does not fit neatly into categories"* and therefore circulates without the support that more traditional topics receive. Another ECR working on migration noted that *"decolonising development still has a long way to go,"* pointing to the endurance of colonial logics within supposedly global or critical fields. These accounts underscore how epistemic hierarchies persist in shaping whose knowledge is seen as legitimate and whose is marginalised.

Taken together, the institutional submissions show a consistent pattern: universities are investing in decolonisation efforts, particularly through curriculum review, revised reading lists, and more inclusive teaching practices. These initiatives are important and were acknowledged by participants as positive steps. However, they also noted that such reforms remain limited when not accompanied by deeper structural change. Participants' accounts point to forms of epistemic injustice that extend far beyond the classroom—affecting research opportunities, supervision relationships, publishing pathways, and the legitimisation of knowledge itself. In this sense, institutions appear more comfortable shifting curricula than addressing the underlying power relations that shape knowledge production.

Across workshops, participants articulated a need for more systemic forms of support that go beyond symbolic reform of curricula. They emphasised the importance of practical guidance on publishing and grant writing, institutional backing for multilingual and multimodal outputs, recognition of non-Western and community-rooted methodologies, access to decolonial research training, fee waivers for APCs, and supervisor training on racialised epistemic harm. In Birmingham Workshop 2, one participant captured this clearly: *"I need skills to*

navigate academia while overcoming systemic biases specific to racially minoritised academics." Another, in London Workshop 1, highlighted the ethical dimension of decolonial practice: *"We need decolonial approaches that centre marginalised migrants ethically."*

When triangulated with institutional responses, a core analytic finding emerges: while curriculum decolonisation is now widely adopted and institutionally supported, the broader infrastructures of research and knowledge production remain largely unchanged. This mirrors sector-wide evidence (Gladstone et al., 2023; Tate, 2024) showing that racially minoritised researchers face lower grant success rates, disproportionate barriers in publishing, and persistent undervaluation of race-related scholarship. As participants stressed across multiple workshops, genuine decolonisation requires moving beyond reading lists and pedagogical checklists. It demands confronting the deeper question of whose knowledge is legitimised within the academy—and on what terms.

2.4 Theme 4: Safe Spaces, Belonging, and Solidarity

Across all workshops, participants consistently described the sessions as rare and necessary safe spaces—contexts where they could articulate racialised academic experiences without fear of dismissal, misunderstanding, or repercussion. These spaces stood in stark contrast to the isolation, epistemic disrespect, and structural precarity that characterise their day-to-day experiences in UK academia.

Participants frequently emphasised the exceptional scarcity of such forums. As one ECR in London Workshop 2 put it:

> "These kinds of spaces are very rare—there is literally no platform to speak of racially minoritised issues."
>
> *London workshop 2*

The absence of trusted environments for honest discussion heightened feelings of invisibility and fragmentation. For many, the workshops provided a rare moment of collective exhale. An ECR attending the Edinburgh one-off workshop reflected on the pressures of precarity—*"a lot of issues around fixed term and precarity… and how life-figuring-out becomes so hard"*—before describing the unexpected sense of collective grounding they found:

"But here, we all worked together as a community... we even opened a LinkedIn group where we share experiences/opportunities."

Edinburgh workshop

Another participant captured the emotional relief the workshops offered with striking clarity:

"We share the same pain. These safe spaces are super key"

Birmingham workshop 3

For others, the significance of such spaces reached beyond emotional comfort and into the realm of professional survival. One participant described the transformative potential of belonging:

"Being part of a group of racially minoritised ECRs provides a safe and supportive environment where I can share openly and learn from others facing similar struggles... PhD research is isolating, and this is intensified when you leave behind familiar support systems and cultural connections." (see figure 5 below)

London Workshop 3

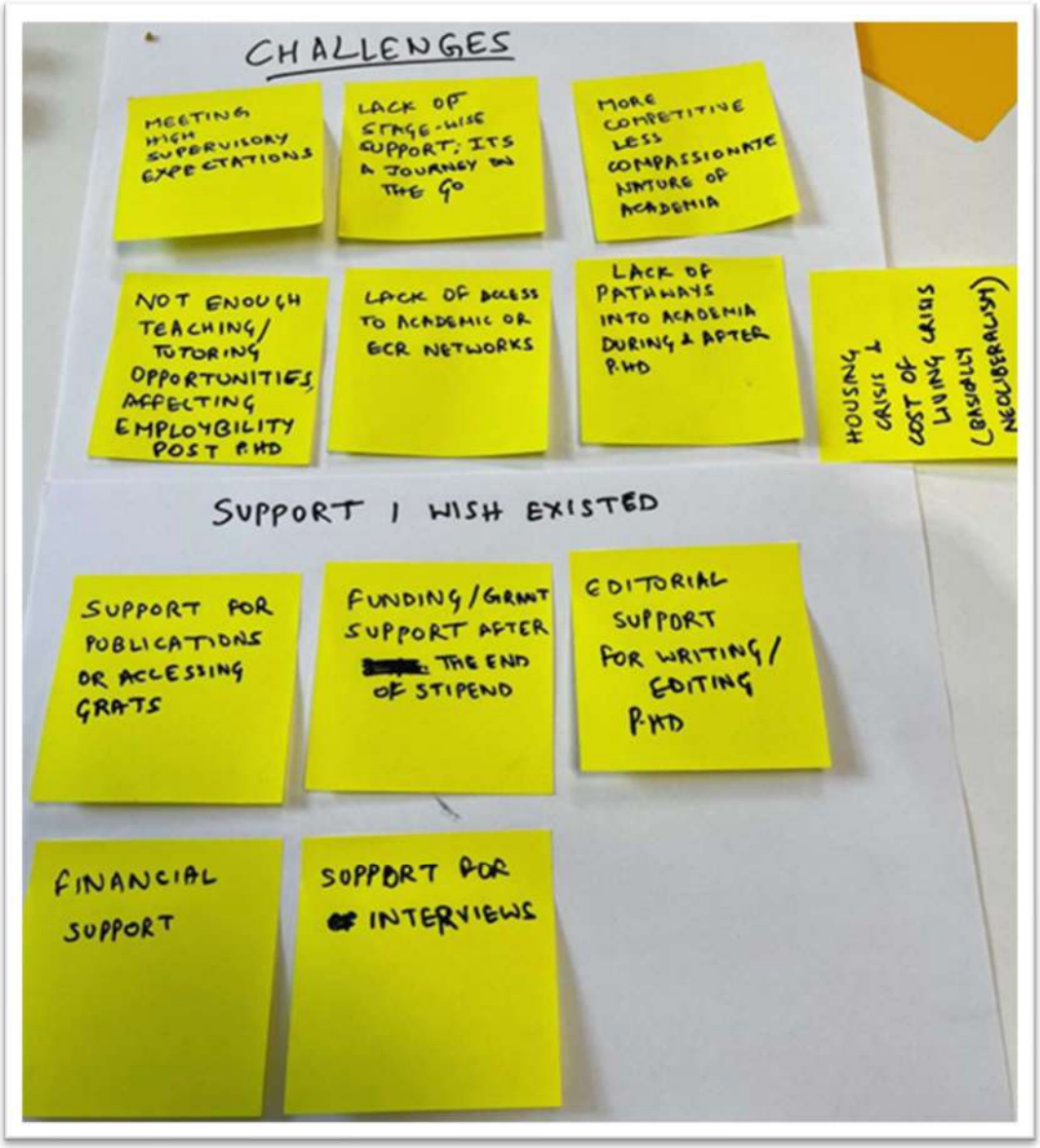

Figure 5: Post-its from participatory workshops

These accounts collectively illustrate that safe spaces are not discretionary extras within academic culture; they function instead as structural correctives to the isolation and marginalisation produced by racialised academic environments.

The emotional labour required of racially minoritised ECRs surfaced as a recurring theme across all data. One ECR articulated this succinctly: *"Lost in the ladder of academia as not having a role model."* Others spoke about how racialisation intersects with nationality and migration histories to create differentiated experiences of marginalisation. As one participant in London Workshop 2 explained, *"Experiences of marginalisation are unique... growing up*

marginalised in the UK versus people of colour who come from abroad and experience marginalisation in ways they have not experienced before."

Another ECR, navigating UK academia for the first time, described the intensifying pressures of financial precarity, stating, *"As a racially minoritised ECR who is new to UK academia, I often feel isolated and uncertain about how to progress… My funding from India is limited, and the UK cost of living makes everything harder."*

Everyday racism appeared repeatedly as part of the ordinary landscape of academic life. One ECR recounted experiences that felt simultaneously personal and systemic:

"There are certain challenges I feel are related to my race—comments about my name, where I'm from. Some colleagues discredit the reality of racial discrimination, then point to EDI initiatives as 'proof' they are inclusive."

Birmingham workshop 2

Together, these reflections reveal the constant emotional negotiation racially minoritised researchers undertake simply to exist within academic institutions—balancing loneliness, marginalisation, and the persistent burden of managing others' disbelief or defensiveness.

Against this backdrop, participants described the workshops as spaces where solidarity emerged through shared stories, mutual recognition, and collective meaning-making. One participant noted simply but powerfully that:

"more shared sense of solidarity and friendship has come out of this."

Birmingham Workshop 3

Others expressed hopes that the workshops might help structure longer-term networks of care, strategy, and political agency. As one participant put it:

"I want a supportive network of peers and mentors who understand these intersectional barriers… building coalitions to amplify collective influence."

London Workshop 3

Several participants linked this sense of community to wider aspirations for cultural transformation within academia. One described hoping the workshops would:

> "open wider conversations about barriers and the strategies we use to sustain ourselves… I'm hoping for community, pragmatic tools, and renewed energy."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 1*

Another emphasised the dual purpose of belonging and empowerment:

> "This workshop series offers a unique opportunity to build a strong network, develop skills, and critically discuss systemic barriers—areas where I can both contribute and learn as a woman academic."
>
> *Birmingham Workshop 3*

Participants consistently used language such as *"blessed," "empowering," "healing," and "transformative"* to describe the workshops—terms that highlight the emotional scarcity of recognition and community within the institutional environments from which they came.

Institutional data across Universities A–D articulate extensive procedural infrastructures—anonymous reporting mechanisms, redesigned complaints procedures, staff surveys, "inclusive culture" frameworks, and Report & Support systems. Yet even within these institutional descriptions, there is recognition of limited impact: University A explicitly notes that "*trust in the fairness of the system has not improved*."

This lack of trust closely mirrors ECRs' lived experiences. As one participant observed, *"People deny racism exists, then point to EDI paperwork as proof they're inclusive."* The formal existence of mechanisms does not translate into felt safety.

Institutions frequently provide safe spaces for students—for example, University B's daily BAME student office hours—but none mention equivalent spaces for staff, early-career researchers, or racially minoritised academics. Participants recognised this absence immediately and repeatedly: "*We have nowhere to talk about these things except these workshops*."

Institutional documents position wellbeing through procedural language—mechanisms, action plans, training schedules—while participants speak in emotional and relational terms: pain, healing, fear, loneliness, solidarity,

survival. The gap between bureaucratic EDI architectures and lived experiences is therefore not merely structural; it is emotional and epistemic.

Across all universities, institutional responses demonstrated enthusiasm but fragmentation. Long lists of initiatives—Athena Swan, Race Equality Charters (RECs), curriculum audits, mentoring schemes—were presented as evidence of progress. Yet these lists rarely captured outcomes, relational impact, or cultural change. Institutions frequently described themselves as being in "early stages," "review phases," or "development cycles," signalling process-heavy but outcome-light approaches.

This institutional self-presentation strongly resonates with ECR critiques voiced in the workshops: *"EDI exists on paper." "Too many initiatives, no change." "We need EDI in the DNA—not just activities."*

The juxtaposition highlights a fundamental disconnect: while institutions emphasise structures, committees, plans, and audits, ECRs emphasise solidarity, recognition, emotional safety, and community. The workshops, in their relational depth and emotional resonance, reveal what institutional approaches currently miss: belonging cannot be legislated through forms and processes, but must be cultivated through trust, relational commitment, and shared resistance.

Taken together, the data demonstrate that safe spaces for racially minoritised ECRs are not simply supportive environments; they operate as critical sites of epistemic validation, emotional refuge, and political consciousness-building. They counterbalance racialised exclusion, precarity, epistemic invisibility, linguistic marginalisation, interpersonal racism, and supervisory failures—structural dynamics that institutional EDI mechanisms, as currently configured, are ill-equipped to address.

The sharp contrast between bureaucratic institutional EDI and the relational grounding of the workshops underscores a central insight:

Belonging is not built through mechanisms, procedures, or committees. Belonging is built through community, recognition, and shared resistance.

3. Discussion

The findings across the four themes reveal a persistent and widening gap between institutional EDI discourse and the lived realities of racially minoritised ECRs. Across institutions, EDI work remains dominated by procedural mechanisms—forms, committees, charters, reviews—yet the impacts felt by ECRs are shaped instead by relational dynamics, everyday exclusion, and structural conditions such as visa precarity, epistemic marginalisation, unequal workloads, and the emotional burden of isolation. The contrast is substantive: institutions describe systems, while ECRs describe survival.

Precarity emerges as a core structural determinant of racialised inequality. For international and minoritised ECRs, short-term contracts, visa restrictions, and opaque progression pathways produce high levels of vulnerability and silence. These findings echo sector-wide evidence (e.g., Guyan & Douglas Oloyede, 2019; Advance HE, 2021; Baltaru, 2024) demonstrating racial disparities in promotion, workload allocation, and contract security, and the lack of race-sensitive evaluation of interventions. Research also highlights the gendered and intersectional dimensions of this precarity, with Black women and other racially minoritised staff disproportionately affected (Bhambra et al., 2020; Morley, 2013; O'Connor, 2023). The workshops confirm that precarity is not merely a contractual condition but an epistemic one: it undermines confidence, limits risk-taking, silences critique, and exacerbates the "leaky pipeline," reinforcing structural barriers to career progression for racially minoritised and international academics.

Mentorship gaps intensify these dynamics. Participants repeatedly described being excluded from informal networks where opportunities are circulated and careers are accelerated. Institutions often reference mentoring schemes, yet few address the racialised politics of access, trust, and representation. The data show that mentorship is not neutral: minoritised ECRs emphasised the need for senior allies who understand racialised experiences, while also acknowledging intra-community tensions and the importance of intersectional matching. Beyond mentorship, participants highlighted the critical role of sponsorship—senior colleagues actively advocating for them, nominating them for grants or fellowships, including them in research collaborations, and endorsing them for leadership or promotion opportunities (see also Ibarra and von Bernuth, 2022). Without both mentoring and sponsorship, minoritised researchers face

structural barriers to research career progression. This reflects wider UKRI evidence on the importance of sponsorship (Guyan & Douglas Oloyede, 2019) but also exposes a persistent analytical blind spot: many institutional interventions treat mentorship as procedural, rather than relational, trust-building, and advocacy-driven.

In knowledge production, ECRs articulated forms of epistemic exclusion that mirror broader critiques of Eurocentric academic norms. Participants reported that their topics, methodologies, and linguistic repertoires were often treated as peripheral or less "rigorous," reflecting hierarchies long identified within decolonial scholarship. UKRI findings (Guyan & Douglas Oloyede, 2019) similarly highlight racial barriers in grant success, publishing, and research recognition, yet institutional responses remain overly curriculum-focused, treating decolonisation as a pedagogic rather than structural project. The workshops reveal how racialised epistemic labour is routinely absorbed into unpaid workloads, while institutional mechanisms fail to shift the deeper hierarchies that determine whose knowledge counts.

The theme of safe spaces was particularly revealing. Workshop participants used emotionally charged language to describe these sessions—language rarely associated with institutional EDI structures. These workshops functioned as emotional, political, and epistemic sanctuaries in contexts where ECRs otherwise felt isolated, disbelieved, or exposed. The contrast with institutional mechanisms was stark: while universities offer anonymous reporting systems and process-driven EDI pathways—formalised procedures such as complaint mechanisms, equality monitoring, or structured training programmes—few provide relational spaces for staff, and none offer safe spaces specifically for racially minoritised researchers, even though those spaces are available for students. This emotional scarcity illustrates how institutional approaches often neglect the affective dimensions of racialisation—loneliness, fear, invisibility, and the exhaustion of navigating disbelief or microaggressions.

Finally, a cross-cutting insight emerged: institutional EDI overload. Universities presented extensive lists of initiatives—Athena Swan, Race Equality Charters, action plans, surveys, committees—but often acknowledged inconsistent implementation and limited evidence of cultural change. This disconnect underscores a fundamental analytical point: transformative change requires relational practices, structural reforms, and accountability—not proliferating EDI initiatives.

Together, these insights show that racially minoritised ECRs need not only formal protections, but also trust, community, and epistemic recognition. Institutional rhetoric must be matched with substantive action capable of addressing the emotional, structural, and epistemic dimensions of racialised inequity.

4. Recommendations for Action

The preceding analysis demonstrates that meaningful racial equality requires moving beyond procedural compliance to structural and relational transformation. This section translates these findings into recommendations for centres, institutions, and cross-institutional collaboration. These recommendations are grounded in what ECRs articulated as essential support needs (detailed in Themes 1–4) and draws on examples of promising practice across the sector (see also Appendix 4).

Two principles guide these recommendations:

(1) EDI cannot function in conditions of precarity—structural change is foundational;

(2) Formal mechanisms alone are insufficient—relational spaces and community are equally critical. Recommendations emphasise embedding racial equality into core institutional systems while creating conditions for care, solidarity, and epistemic recognition.

4.1 Addressing Precarity and Career Progression

Theme 1 establishes that precarity functions as a racialised sorting mechanism that disproportionately pushes minoritised and international ECRs out of academia (see also Appendix 2). Addressing it requires treating contract type, visa eligibility, and workload equity as central EDI issues, not HR afterthoughts.

Centre and Departmental Actions:

Audit workload annually: by race, gender, and contract type. Address disparities immediately, particularly teaching loads or (often unpointed) pastoral activities that constrain research time. This is where inequity becomes visible.

Design contracts with visa requirements in mind: Challenge HR when fractional contracts fall below visa thresholds. Universities A and B successfully advocated for increased FTE to ensure international staff meet immigration requirements—this must become standard practice, not exceptional.

Make promotion criteria available to all staff and lobby for greater clarity around the norms used to determine, e.g. 'good publications'. Provide structured feedback to applicants: University D analyses EDI data for staff NOT put forward for promotion, identifying invisible exclusion before formal decision-making. Adopt this practice. Also provide honest, developmental feedback on unsuccessful job applications and applications for probation, promotion, and internal roles. Ensure that ECRs are guided to the best schemes for their grant ideas and given critical and supportive feedback on their proposals.

Recognise EDI labour, including committee work, and community-building: These should be treated as substantive contributions in workload models and promotion criteria, not 'service.' This work is essential to institutional function and must be valued accordingly.

Institutional Actions:

Establish bridge funding schemes or use existing grants creatively to cover gaps between contracts or grant cycles.

Pay attention to the experience of recently graduated PhDs (for example, the OU Centre for the Study of Global Development's recent survey) and continue to support their access to institutional resources (emails, e-journals, career services). The EISA Postdoctoral Bridge Grants (up to €3,500) support recently graduated PhD students to finalise publications or develop postdoctoral proposals—this reduces attrition at critical transition points.

Build global mobility infrastructure for visa support: University C acknowledges having 'none'—international academics navigate immigration systems entirely alone. This must be resourced institutionally, in the form of specialised advisors and loan schemes, not treated as individuals' problems.

Collect and monitor workforce data: disaggregated by race, gender, nationality, contract type, and progression outcomes. Several institutions explicitly recognise that minorities face 'weaker pipelines into opportunities' but without systematic data collection, inequities remain invisible and unaddressed.

Challenge reliance on short-term contracts: Insecure and part-time roles disproportionately affect racially minoritised staff and women of colour and often fail to meet visa requirements. Universities must actively reduce use of precarious contracts, not accept them as inevitable.

4.2. Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Leadership Development

Mentorship schemes often exist 'on paper' but remain under-resourced, poorly matched, and disconnected from ECR realities. Crucially, mentorship must be combined with sponsorship—senior advocacy that actively opens doors to opportunities. The evidence suggests that mentorship is most effective when integrated into formal career and promotion systems, supported by data-driven analysis of progression, and combined with workload recognition and leadership accountability.

Centre and Departmental Actions:

Formalise mentorship with workload allocation: Treat mentoring as substantive academic labor, not volunteerism. Allocate time, provide training, and make it an accountable role (for example, reporting back on your work as a mentor as part of your annual review or promotions application).

Match based on intersectional lived experience: not just visible diversity. As one Dalit scholar noted: 'people of colour who made it are mostly upper class and upper caste—they don't represent us.' Social and experiential proximity matters. Address intra-community tensions honestly.

Combine mentoring with sponsorship: Minoritised ECRs need senior colleagues who actively nominate them for grants, include them in collaborations, endorse them for leadership opportunities, and advocate for their promotion. This sponsorship—not just advice—enables progression.

Create structured pathways to information: on fellowships, postdocs, funding opportunities, and career expectations (for example, circulating regular emails summarising research funding opportunities, drawing colleagues' attention to promotions workshops). Do not rely on informal networks that systematically exclude minoritised researchers. Make the 'hidden curriculum' explicit.

Link academic development to structural inequality and include this in training for mentors: University D's five-year academic development programme

explicitly interrogates institutional conditions: whether competition feels safe, how informal networks shape access, how international staff experience UK norms. Address the environment, not just individual 'deficits.'

Cross-Institutional Initiatives:

When departmental capacity is limited, join or promote proven cross-institutional programmes such as:

B-MEntor: Cross-institutional mentoring for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff. Matches participants with experienced mentors from across institutions, expanding networks and addressing isolation.

StellarHE: Leadership development for Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse staff, focused on addressing underrepresentation in senior roles through structured development and peer support [Russell Group University in London (University E – Written Response)].

100 Black Women Professors NOW: National initiative combining mentoring, sponsorship, leadership development, and institutional accountability. Partner institutions include Birmingham City, Manchester, Bristol, UWE Bristol, Exeter, Open University, Leeds, Westminster, East London.

Additional examples of centre-level, cross-institutional, and pipeline-focused initiatives — including mentoring, sponsorship, leadership development, and early-stage interventions — are provided in Appendix IV.

4.3. Safe Spaces, Belonging, and Wellbeing

Workshop participants used language like 'transformative,' 'blessed,' 'healing,' and 'empowering' to describe these sessions—revealing profound emotional scarcity in institutional environments. Universities provide safe spaces for students but rarely for minoritised staff. Safe spaces must be resourced, formalised where appropriate, and trusted. Critically, institutional spaces are not always trusted—ECR-led peer spaces built on solidarity offer a necessary alternative.

Centre and Departmental Actions:

Create and resource ECR-led peer support networks: These must be ECR-managed, not institutionally controlled. Provide time, modest funding, and

space for community-building. Trust minoritised researchers to define what they need.

Understand that reporting mechanisms are not safe spaces: Anonymous reporting systems, complaints procedures, and Report + Support systems have important roles, but they do not replace relational spaces where staff can speak openly without fear of institutional retaliation. Formal mechanisms address specific incidents; safe spaces address ongoing conditions.

Institutional Actions:

Provide dedicated spaces for minoritised staff: not just students. University A's BAME Student Excellence and Mentoring Programme includes dedicated safe spaces with daily office hours and named staff leads with workload allocation. No equivalent provision exists for staff—this must change.

Address low trust in institutional mechanisms: University A explicitly notes that 'trust in the fairness of the system has not improved' despite extensive procedural reforms. Staff surveys include EDI questions, but results are not always reflective of lived experience. Mentoring, sponsorship, and peer-led spaces built on solidarity address this trust deficit.

Support sector-wide models: RISE Coaching Circle (LSE EmRace Network) provides peer coaching for Black and global majority professional services staff. Bath Spa Empowers supports students from African, Arab, Asian, and Caribbean heritage through community-building, paid internships, and leadership development. They collaborate with local employers and partners like Grit who share this value to provide work experience, expert insights, and practical knowledge. These models can be adapted for staff.

4.4. Knowledge Production, Publishing, and Research Cultures

Curriculum decolonisation is the most developed area of EDI work, with strong examples of embedded practice. However, ECRs emphasised that curriculum reform alone is insufficient. Publishing barriers, English-language dominance, prohibitive APCs, and epistemic hierarchies persist. Genuine decolonisation requires moving beyond reading lists to confront whose knowledge is legitimised and on what terms.

Centre and Departmental Actions:

Provide structured publishing mentorship: Create writing groups, peer review circles, and provide guidance after rejections. ECRs repeatedly described receiving 'no support' and not knowing how to improve their work.

Subsidise or waive Article Processing Charges: Provide bespoke guidance on Open Access publication to ECRs and where the best journals in their field require payments on submission or APCs, ensure they have access to a budget for this; do not expect individuals on precarious contracts to cover costs. The pay-to-publish model systematically excludes researchers without institutional backing.

Recognise multilingual outputs: in promotion and research assessment. Support translation, value non-English publications, and create space for knowledge that serves the communities being researched. As one ECR noted: 'We write about untranslatable concepts in English. Something is always lost.'

Challenge epistemic hierarchies: Work on race, identity, decolonisation, and Global South perspectives is rigorous scholarship, not 'niche' work. These contributions are systematically devalued—actively counter this in shortlisting discussions, promotion decisions and research evaluation.

Institutional and Sectoral Actions:

Address supervisory racism within your institutional training programme: Provide training on racialised epistemic harm. Several ECRs reported supervision that marginalised their methodologies, dismissed their data interpretation, or treated their research as less rigorous. This must be named and addressed.

Embed decolonisation into research governance: University A's Learning and Teaching Inclusivity Checklist (LTIC) and module audit processes demonstrate systematisation through accountability mechanisms. Extend this model to research assessment, grant evaluation, and publishing support—not just curriculum.

Acknowledge racial bias in peer review and editorial processes: Institutions could explicitly recognise these inequalities when evaluating publication performance of minoritised scholars, rather than treating publication disparities as individual failures.

Decolonise research funding models: Challenge structures that privilege UK institutions as primary grant holders, impose restrictive audit and risk-

management regimes on Global South partners, and undervalue methodologies rooted in non-Western traditions. The Perivoli Africa Research Centre's Africa Charter at the University of Bristol provides a model: foregrounding African-led research agendas, equitable partnerships, and ethical knowledge production.

Provide decolonial research training: SOAS's Decolonising Working Group (active since 2016) has developed training materials on ethical hierarchies and power asymmetries in international research, and facilitates dialogue between UK funders, research offices, and decolonial scholars. This work extends beyond curriculum into research governance and institutional cultures.

Learn from strong curriculum decolonisation models: University A has had a school-wide commitment to this since 2018-19 with staff training (Advance HE), structured fora, a Learning and Teaching Inclusivity Checklist, module audits, and inclusion in staff appraisal. University B ran a comprehensive curriculum review resulting in a fully revised first-year curriculum and a new third-year module on decolonial knowledge production. These demonstrate how decolonisation can be scaffolded and systematised.

These recommendations emphasise a fundamental shift: embedding racial equality into core decision-making systems—promotion criteria, workload allocation, contract practices, research funding, publishing support—rather than treating it as supplementary activity. This requires:

- Tracking disaggregated outcomes (progression, promotion, workload, attrition by race, gender, nationality, contract type), not just counting initiatives
- Investing in relational infrastructure (safe spaces, peer networks, community-building), not just training and procedures
- Combining formal accountability mechanisms with ECR-led spaces built on trust and solidarity
- Centering minoritised voices in co-creating institutional change - EDI cannot be 'done to' racially minoritised staff
- Recognising that precarity, workload inequity, and visa insecurity are not separate from EDI work but are a part of EDI work

As workshop participants made clear: they do not need more paperwork, committees, or symbolic gestures. They need structural conditions that make it

possible to remain in academia, progress in their careers, have their knowledge valued, and belong to communities of care and solidarity.

5. Conclusion

This report began with the Development Studies Association's commitment to making equity, care, and inclusion part of the DNA of the organisation—not simply as policy statements, but as embedded practice. The evidence presented demonstrates both how much progress has been made in articulating EDI commitments and how much further institutions must go to translate these commitments into the structural and relational conditions that racially minoritised ECRs need to thrive.

Important work is already underway. Curriculum decolonisation has advanced significantly, with institutions embedding diversity into reading lists, module design, and staff appraisal processes. Mentoring schemes, leadership programmes, and cross-institutional initiatives such as B-MEntor, StellarHE, and the Ebony Initiative demonstrate institutional commitment to supporting minoritised staff. Race Equality Charters and Athena Swan frameworks have created infrastructures for monitoring and accountability. These are not trivial achievements—they represent sustained effort and genuine progress in areas that were previously overlooked or invisible.

Yet the workshops with over 60 racially minoritised ECRs revealed a consistent pattern: these initiatives have not yet translated into the structural security, relational support, and epistemic recognition that ECRs experience in their daily academic lives. The gap between institutional commitments and lived realities is not a matter of intent—it is a matter of implementation, accountability, and the willingness and increasingly resources to address deeper structural conditions.

What the Evidence Shows

Four interconnected challenges emerged consistently across the research:

Precarity remains a defining condition. While institutions acknowledge that racially minoritised staff are disproportionately on insecure contracts, the reliance on short-term, fractional roles continues. Visa precarity forces talented researchers to leave the UK. Workload inequities constrain time for the research

required for progression. Without addressing these employment structures, other EDI efforts cannot achieve their intended impact.

Mentorship exists in policy but not consistently in practice. Many institutions reference mentoring schemes, yet ECRs consistently described isolation, lack of guidance, and exclusion from the informal networks and sponsorship relationships that enable career advancement. Where mentoring is under-resourced, poorly matched, or treated as voluntary rather than accountable work, it cannot function as the structural support ECRs need.

Decolonisation has advanced in teaching but not in research cultures. Reading lists are diversifying and new modules foreground decolonial perspectives—this is meaningful progress. However, the deeper structures of knowledge production remain largely unchanged: publishing hierarchies, English-language dominance, prohibitive Article Processing Charges, and the devaluation of scholarship on race and Global South perspectives. Curriculum reform, while important, is not sufficient on its own.

Safe spaces for minoritised staff are largely absent. While universities provide safe spaces and support structures for students, equivalent provision for racially minoritised staff and ECRs is rare. The workshops in this study became, for many participants, the first genuinely safe academic spaces they had encountered in the UK. This reveals a significant gap in institutional provision and highlights the need for ECR-led, peer-based support networks that complement formal mechanisms.

What Needs to Happen Next

Moving forward requires building on existing progress while addressing the structural conditions that currently limit its impact. The recommendations in this report provide concrete pathways, organised around four key shifts:

From policy articulation to structural implementation. Embed racial equality into core decision-making systems: promotion criteria, workload allocation models, contract practices, research funding support processes, and publishing support. EDI cannot remain supplementary to institutional operations—it must become foundational to how institutions function.

From counting initiatives to tracking outcomes. Collect and monitor disaggregated data on progression, promotion, workload allocation, and attrition by race, gender, nationality, and contract type. Several institutions in

this study have begun this work, but systematic outcome tracking remains inconsistent across the sector. Without data, inequities remain invisible and progress cannot be measured. We also don't know which initiatives are most impactful.

From formal mechanisms to relational infrastructure. Anonymous reporting systems, complaints procedures, and training programmes serve important functions, but they do not create belonging or build community. Safe spaces, peer networks, and mentorship relationships require dedicated resources, workload recognition, and institutional trust in ECR-led initiatives. Both formal structures and relational spaces are necessary.

From individual goodwill to institutional accountability. Progress currently depends heavily on individual champions rather than systematic commitment. Racial equality work must be embedded in governance structures, resourced adequately, and held accountable through tracked outcomes and transparent reporting. This includes recognising and valuing the substantial labor involved in EDI work, mentoring, and community-building.

The Path Forward

The participants in this research demonstrated both the challenges they face and the solutions they envision. They built networks, shared strategies, offered each other support, and articulated with clarity what systemic change requires. They do not lack capability, resilience, or commitment - they need institutions to create the conditions in which they can remain in academia, progress in their careers, and contribute their knowledge and perspectives to the discipline.

Development Studies, as a field centered on questions of inequality, justice, and structural change, has both the analytical tools and the intellectual commitment to address these dynamics within its own institutional structures.

The future of Development Studies depends on making space for racially minoritised scholars not just to survive, but to flourish. This requires building on existing progress while addressing the structural conditions—precarity, mentorship gaps, epistemic exclusion, and isolation—that currently limit that progress. The DSA's aspiration to embed equity, care, and inclusion into the DNA of the organisation is achievable. This report provides both the evidence and the roadmap for making it a reality.

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7. Appendices

Appendix I: Source material for Summary of racial equality and related EDI initiatives (Appendix 4)

Evidence type	Number	Description (anonymised)
Written submissions	6	Submissions from DSA member institutions University A: A large university in South East of England University B: A large university in East of England University C: A Russell Group University in London University D: Russell Group University in Midlands University E: A Russell Group University in London University F: A large university in South East of England
Semi-structured interviews	4	Interviews with EDI leads responsible for race equity work University A: A large university of South East of England University B: A large University in East England University D: A Russell Group University in Midlands University G: A university in South East England

Desk review	-	Review of publicly available EDI strategies, action plans, and webpages across 23 DSA member institutions

Appendix II: Analysis of three rounds of race audit data (DATES)

2.1 Background to data collection

The quantitative work the DSA has done with HEIs arose from a growing interest, including from Heads of Centre, in understanding how diverse we were as a field and how well supported ethnically minoritised colleagues felt within that field. The outgoing and incoming DSA presidents, Sam Hickey and Uma Kambhampati called for volunteers to conduct a 'race audit' (2022) and we debated the scope (for example, should we also look at gender, or was there a danger that we'd get distracted, especially given that development studies was more gender-equal in terms of promotions than other fields, should we include practice, e.g. INGOs, think-tanks, or only look at institutions that taught and researched, and should we reach out to the many non-DSA institutions in that category?)

We were also uncertain about the best data to use and after discussions with the Higher Education Statistics Authority, we realised we'd need to collect our own data. In 2023, we organised a pilot, working with Ignacio Franco Vega, who had previously scoped our data sources. We used this for a first (unsuccessful) bid to the ESRC-funded Academy of Social Sciences EDI scheme. The pilot with two institutions and 25 participants (four were approached, however, only two responded and/or provided usable data), was followed by two rounds of data collection (2024-25, round 1 134, round 373, working with Sam Jones). This gave a total sample of 532, albeit with some missing data. In spring 2024 our second bid to AcSS was successful, centred around workshops with ethnically minoritised ECRs workshops and a best practices report. We held a competitive process and appointed Madhuri Kamtam to lead on it.

2.2 Quantitative data collection, including limitations

Data was collected across three rounds – the pilot plus two others - spanning nearly two years. We decided to use the full dataset for this analysis, recognising the effort that had gone into its collection. There were two institutions who participated twice so we used the most recent dataset for these. We tried three different approaches to getting data – i) asking university HR departments (they were typically unable to share or if they did so, it was not in a usable form, for example, the ethnic breakdown of staff without any intersection with career stage or contract type), ii) asking individuals via a staff survey (response rates were low, ranging from to 11-28% of staff and

respondents were nearly twice as likely to be ethnically minoritised, creating a misleading impression of diversity), and iii) asking the Head of Centre to complete and return a survey. The last approach seemed to work best, so this was used in the two main data collection rounds. Nonetheless, there was inconsistency in the ethnic classifications used across and within rounds where internal systems used different categories. There was also missing data; for example, one institution didn't provide ethnicity, and one only provided ethnicity. The overall data and data from individual rounds look quite different, showing how the presence or absence of particular institutions, e.g. SOAS, which has good representation across career stages, can skew the data. In total we had data from 12 institutions, just under half of all DSA institutional members, but even after removing administrators, IDS accounted for 31% of our sample.

2.3 Sample descriptives

Given the data limitations outlined above, we have stayed at the level of descriptive statistics and not tested the significance of any differences found. These included cross-tabulations to look at the effect of ethnicity and ethnicity intersected with gender on some of the career-related variables identified in the body of the report (for example, likelihood of being a Professor rather than a Teaching Fellow or on a permanent rather than a fixed term contract).

Table 1: Participating institutions

University	Frequency	Percent
IDS	163	30.6
King's College London	36	6.8
London School of Economics	28	5.3
Open University	19	3.6
Open University (GCSD)	3	0.6
SOAS	53	10.0
University of Birmingham	39	7.3

University	Frequency	Percent
University of East Anglia	39	7.3
University of Edinburgh	25	4.7
University of Greenwich	41	7.7
University of Sheffield	76	14.3
University of Warwick	6	1.1
University of Wolverhampton	4	0.8
Total	532	100.0

The sample comprised 55% female, 44% male, and 1% other. Of the people in the sample who gave their sector, 44% were engaged in research (possibly skewed by IDS), 43% in research and teaching, and 10% in teaching only. Of those who gave their role, 33% were a research fellow, 5% a teaching fellow, 12% a lecturer, 21% an assistant professor, and 17% a professor (14% were other). 90% were on permanent contracts with only 10% on fixed term. This may understate the level of casualisation within the sector as Heads of Centre were not asked to include Hourly Paid Lecturers. 76% were full time and 24% part-time. Through the lens of higher education institutions, the field of development studies appears overwhelmingly White (63%) with only approximately 30% of the sample categorised as Black or Asian.

Table 2: Ethnicity

Category	Percentage
Asian	17%
Black	7%
BAME	5%
Mixed	1%
Other	8%

White	63%

n.b. with the exception of BAME, which was added by one of the participating institutions, the categories are taken from HESA. The limitations of these are discussed in more detail in the aforementioned pilot report.

2.4. Cross-tabulations

In the cross-tabs reported below, we have focused on what the qualitative research identified as the most important junctures, for example, securing a permanent contract and moving into academic leadership.

Working on fixed term contracts

10% of the sample were on fixed term contracts (FTCs), with the breakdown by ethnicity as follows: 9% White, 26% Black, 11% Asian. Further analysis showed that black males were three times as likely to be on FTCs (29%) as white males or females (9%) and twice as likely as black females (17%). This suggests that much of the diversity we see within our sample is only temporary, and confirms that experiences of precarity are unevenly distributed.

Working as a teaching fellow

10% of the sample were teaching fellows which represents the lowest rung of the academic ladder (typically grade 6 or below). The breakdown by ethnicity was 4% White, 13% Black, 7% Asian, 17% Mixed. Further analysis showed that black males were the most likely to be working as teaching fellows (18%), which was six times the percentage of white males (3%). This makes sense given the predominance of this role among academic fixed term contracts; however, it also suggests that white males have a different and easier path into the sector. While no black women were recorded as holding this role, 17% of women defined as of mixed ethnicity were teaching fellows.

Working as a professor

17% of the sample were Professors - 20% White, 9% Black, and 11% Asian. Nearly twice as many white males were Professors (23%) as black males (12%). While 18% of white females were Professors (Harris et al, 2025 would argue that this is an effect of a female-dominated workplace), there were no black female Professors reported in the dataset, hence the importance of the initiatives described in Appendix 4.

Working part time

The majority of respondents worked full time (76%) and there were marked differences in distribution by ethnicity (28% White, 4% Black, 14% Asian) and gender. The domination of part-time work by particular ethnic groups probably relates to the intersection between ethnicity and visa status with part-time salaries too low for international workers to secure visas. However, gender also plays a part with white females twice as likely to be working part time as white males (36% vs 18%).

Appendix III: Workshop locations, timings, and speakers

Location	Date	Speaker(s)
London (Workshop 1)	28 May 2025	Dr. Sarah Njeri
Birmingham (Workshop 2)	08 July 2025	Dr. Emeka Thaddues Njoku
Edinburgh (one-off)	04 September 2025	Dr. Radhika Govinda
London (Workshop 2)	18 September 2025	Prof. Naomi Hossain Dr. Eyob Balcha Gebremariam
Birmingham (Workshop 2)	23 September 2025	Dr Tewodaj Mogues Dr. Sameen A. Mohsin Ali
London (Workshop 3)	06 November 2025	Prof. Uma Kambhampati Dr. Thi Bogossian
Birmingham (Workshop 3)	26 November 2025	Dr. Pritish Behuria Dr. Eyob Balcha Gebremariam

Appendix IV: Summary of evidence on racial equality and related EDI initiatives

This appendix synthesises evidence from institutional written submissions, interviews with EDI leads, and a desk review of publicly available EDI materials across DSA member institutions. It provides an overview of racial equality initiatives across the sector and detailed evidence from specific institutions to support Heads of Departments and institutional leaders in identifying promising practices.

EDI Training and Common Initiatives Across the Sector

The desk review of DSA member institutions revealed that certain EDI initiatives are nearly universal across UK higher education. These include mandatory staff training on EDI and unconscious bias, BAME/BME staff networks, and participation in national frameworks such as Athena Swan and Race Equality Charters.

Athena Swan and Race Equality Charters

All 23 DSA member institutions included in this study are signatories to both the Athena Swan Charter and the Race Equality Charter. These national frameworks provide sector-wide benchmarks for institutional action on equality, diversity and inclusion. The Athena Swan Charter focuses on advancing gender equality across higher education, including in recruitment, progression, workload allocation and leadership. The Race Equality Charter aims to improve the representation, progression and success of racially minoritised staff and students by requiring institutions to assess structural inequalities, develop action plans, and demonstrate institutional accountability. Participation in both charters indicates a shared baseline commitment across DSA member institutions to addressing systemic inequalities.

Mandatory EDI Training

Nearly all DSA member institutions offer mandatory EDI training for staff. The most common modules include:

- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Essentials (typically mandatory for all staff)
- Unconscious Bias Awareness
- Recruitment and Selection EDI training
- Bullying and Harassment / Dignity and Respect
- Active Bystander/Upstander training

- Let's Talk About Race / Race Awareness
- Allyship training

BAME/BME Staff Networks

Most DSA member institutions have established BAME, BME, Race Equality, Black and Ethnic Minority Staff Support, or similarly named staff networks. These networks exist across the sector, though information on their activities, resourcing, and impact is rarely publicly available.

Theme-wise: Detailed Institutional Evidence

The following sections organise evidence thematically around the four themes presented in the body of the report, integrating findings from institutional submissions, interviews, and desk review to show what is being done across the sector to address the concerns raised.

1. Addressing Precarity and Career Progression

Several institutions explicitly link racial equality to employment conditions and contractual insecurity, recognising precarity as a driver of the racialised attrition visible in Appendix 2.

A large university in East of England (University B): They challenge reliance on short-term contracts, noting that insecure and part-time roles are disproportionately occupied by racially minoritised staff and women of colour, and often fail to meet visa requirements for international staff. They have actively argued for reduced use of short-term contracts and full-time FTE releases to widen access for international applicants.

A Russell Group university in the Midlands (University D): They identify precarity at Research Fellow and early-career stages as a key driver of staff exit. They recognise that informal decision-making around contract extension, lack of feedback on performance, and opaque progression criteria intersect with race, gender, nationality, and migration status.

A Russell Group university in London (University C): They address progression structurally through improving data on their workforce and benchmarking against other institutions but translating their improved understanding into day-to-day change remains an ongoing challenge.

The desk review revealed limited sector-wide initiatives specifically addressing contract precarity, or the transition from PhD status into employment. One

promising model is the Postdoctoral Bridge Grants | EISA which support recently graduated or final-year PhD students who have not yet secured an academic contract, providing up to €3,500 to bridge the gap between doctoral research and postdoctoral employment. This allows additional time to finalise publications or develop postdoctoral funding proposals.

2. Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Leadership Development

Mentorship features prominently across institutions, although purpose, resourcing, and effectiveness vary considerably.

A Russell Group university in the Midlands (University D): They provide one of the most developed accounts of linking mentorship to structural barriers. They formally recognises that staff diversity declines sharply at senior levels, research-intensive routes amplify inequalities, and 'pipeline leakages' occur at key transitions. They have developed a five-year academic development programme that:

- Explicitly interrogates institutional conditions: whether competition feels safe, how informal networks shape access, how international and racially minoritised staff experience UK norms
- Offers proactive promotions workshops with particular attention to Black women academics
- Provides leadership development focused on confidence-building in giving and receiving feedback
- Analyses EDI data for both staff put forward for promotion AND those who are not—addressing invisible exclusion before formal decision-making

A large university in South East England (University A): They have a mentoring infrastructure at School-level that includes BAME Coaching and Mentoring Network for staff, Departmental Race Equity Leads with formal responsibility, and mandatory race equity training aligned with Race Equality Charter work. This represents a significant investment, though available evidence does not yet demonstrate improvements in progression or promotion.

A large university in East of England (University B): Mentors are allocated to all new staff as part of Athena Swan action plan to support navigation of academic careers. However, staff survey data indicates trust in fairness and workload allocation has not improved.

A Russell Group university in London (University C): They embed mentorship within broader leadership and people-development frameworks, including coaching programmes funded through the Race Equity Innovation Fund, mandatory EDI training for Heads of Department, and targeted leadership development for professional services staff from Black and Global Majority backgrounds.

Sector-Wide and Cross-Institutional Mentorship Initiatives

The desk review identified a growing ecosystem of mentoring, coaching, and leadership programmes designed to address barriers faced by racially minoritised staff and students. These focus on different points in the life cycle, for example:

Entry into the sector

Into Academia is a mentoring scheme for undergraduate students from racially minoritised backgrounds who are considering academic careers. It strengthens the pipeline by addressing underrepresentation at the point where students first begin to consider—or rule out—academia.

Similarly, Thrive Mentoring supports first-generation students, with strong relevance for racially minoritised students and for early academic and professional pipelines more broadly [A large university in the South East of England (University F – Written Response)].

At an institutional level, the University of Bradford provides a strong example through initiatives such as the Learning Partnership Programme and Brad-iCOUNT, which combine structured engagement with senior leadership, targeted EDI funding, and leadership development to embed accountability and systemic change.

RISE Coaching Circle (LSE EmRace Network) is a coaching-focused development program for Black and global majority professional services staff and Bath Spa Empowers is an annual programme supporting students from African, Arab, Asian, and Caribbean heritage.

Progession and Retention

INKLUDE TO THRIVE is a research culture initiative which aims to test innovative ways to tackle systemic barriers experienced by underrepresented groups across Higher Education in the UK.

Ebony Initiative (SOAS): Comprehensive programme for Black scholars including skills-building, wellbeing workshops, writing support, mentoring, research guidance, scholarships, and community-building. Explicitly supports scholars across the pipeline and foregrounds knowledge production alongside wellbeing.

Leadership

Black Female Professors Forum (BFPF): The Black Female Professors Forum (BFPF) was established to address the severe underrepresentation of Black women in the UK professoriate, who make up less than 2% of all professors. The forum aims to increase visibility, generate positive narratives, and create supportive pathways for Black women across higher education. Its strategic actions include empowering Black women at all levels in academia, challenging institutional racism, fostering collaboration, and influencing decision-makers to promote recognition and equitable opportunities. A key initiative is the creation of a publicly accessible website that identifies Black female professors in the UK, serving both as a research resource and a source of inspiration for Black female students and scholars. Supported by the Equality Challenge Unit and the Wellcome Trust, the BFPF seeks to ensure that Black women academics are respected, visible, and able to achieve their full potential.

Aurora (Advance HE): Leadership development for those who identify as women, normally up to Senior Lecturer level. Widely used across UK universities to address gendered progression barriers.

3. Safe Spaces, Belonging, and Wellbeing

Safe spaces are most clearly developed for students, with far less provision for staff and ECRs.

A large university in South East England (University A): Race equality is structurally embedded within governance through standing EDI agenda items and EDI student representation. They provide one of the strongest student-facing models through its BAME Student Excellence and Mentoring Programme, dedicated safe spaces with daily office hours, and named staff lead with workload allocation. However, no equivalent provision exists for staff.

A Russell Group university in the Midlands (University D): They reported ongoing challenges around trust for staff. Regular staff surveys include EDI questions but

the results are not always reflective of lived experience. Leaders' reluctance to give honest feedback and fear of ECRs around reporting contribute to attrition.

A Russell Group university in London (University C): They invested heavily in formal reporting and support infrastructure, including new Report + Support system, trauma-informed training for investigators, and expanded specialist support services for students and ECRs. While systems are robust, questions remain about confidence, safety, and outcomes.

4. Knowledge Production, Publishing and Research Cultures

Curriculum decolonisation is the most developed and systematised area of racial equality work across institutions, particularly within teaching-focused initiatives.

A large university in South East England (University A): They provide the clearest example of institutionally embedded curriculum decolonisation. Since 2018-19, this has been a School-wide commitment supported by:

- Staff training delivered in partnership with Advance HE
- Structured staff-student fora and departmental workshops
- Redesign of core modules during teaching away days
- Module Audit Process explicitly reviewing assessment modes
- Inclusion of commitment to decolonisation within staff appraisal processes
- Annual review of decolonisation activity by Departmental Race Equity Leads and School EDI Committee
- Successfully lobbied for institutional-level change: embedding questions on diversity of authorship and inclusive pedagogy in Mid-Module Evaluations (MMEs) and Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs)

This represents a shift from ad hoc reading-list diversification toward procedural and cultural change, though its primary focus remains teaching rather than research.

A large university in East of England (University B): This held a comprehensive curriculum review in 2020-21 that focused on the diversity of voices and decolonial perspectives. It resulted in a fully revised first-year undergraduate curriculum (from 2022) incorporating teaching on colonialism and decolonial theory, plus a new third-year module dedicated entirely to decolonial knowledge production. This shows how decolonisation can be scaffolded

progressively from foundational learning through to advanced conceptual engagement.

A Russell Group university in London (University C): They embed inclusive education and reducing the degree awarding gap as core institutional responsibilities, however, it is unclear how this works at department level.

Knowledge Production and Publishing

Evidence on inclusive research culture and knowledge production is less developed than teaching-focused initiatives, although there are some notable examples below, and we can expect more in relation to the Strategy, People, and Research Environment (SPRE) component of REF2029.

Perivoli Africa Research Centre at the University of Bristol : The centre provides a strong example of decolonial practice beyond teaching. Through its Africa Charter, it foregrounds African-led research agendas, equitable partnerships, and ethical knowledge production, challenging extractive research models and centering African epistemologies and institutional leadership.

Decolonising SOAS Working Group (active since 2016): The working group has engaged in sustained and embedded decolonial work extending beyond curriculum reform into research development and institutional practice. This includes extending research development and funding support to PhD students as part of decolonising doctoral experience, developing training materials to address ethical hierarchies and power asymmetries in international research (for example, Ethical Reflexivity and Research Governance: Navigating the Tensions (Online Module), facilitating dialogue between UK funders, research offices, and decolonial scholars to promote institutional reflexivity and structural change. Illustrates how decolonisation can be embedded within research governance, funding processes, and institutional cultures, not just teaching content.

A Russell Group university in the Midlands (University D): They explicitly frame inclusive research environments as a strategic priority, supported by research culture funding, external collaborations, commissioned research, and cross-institutional surveys on inclusive research practice. Initiatives aim to demystify access to opportunities and disrupt informal networks that shape research careers.

A Russell Group university in London (University C): They embed inclusive research within their institutional strategy through the Race Equity Framework

pillar on Education, Research, and Our People. This includes targeted funding (Race Equity Innovation Fund) for projects addressing racial inequality in knowledge production.

However, across institutions, there is limited evidence of systematic change to publishing practices, authorship norms, research assessment, or the ways in which papers published in multiple languages or in regional journals are regarded during promotions processes.