

Structural inequalities in the Employment of Academic Staff in the UK Discipline of Education: In what ways can our research serve to address exclusion, marginalization and disadvantage?

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Commissioned by BERA, we undertook a study for the purpose of providing an evidence-base about the impact of social determinants on access to, and conditions of, employment for academics in the discipline of education in UK higher education. The report drew from an analysis of statistical data curated by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) from the period of 2015-2020. Five of the socio-demographics studied were selected from the nine supposedly protected 'characteristics' of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty in England, Scotland and Wales; and The Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 in Northern Ireland. They were age, sex, ethnicity, disability and religious beliefs, to which we added the study of nationality.

The findings provide clear indications of which inequalities were consistent in that period across the UK; and the differences that existed between the devolved nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Cognisant of critiques that comparisons between the devolved nations do not recognise their contextual histories, populations, legislation, size et cetera; comparisons were also drawn within each of those contexts, between the Education staff composition and that of the whole staff composition in the HE sector. This approach was settled upon in the absence of recognised, agreed upon targets for the achievement of equality in the UK.

The researchers will utilize this opportunity to focus discussion on the most concerning findings of inequality in the discipline, and further research of priority. This is in the hopes of deepening the discussion and the action undertaken towards addressing inequality, when engaging with the informed audience. Audience members would have had opportunity to access the methodology, findings, discussion and recommendations of this study (Belluigi et al 2023). It was published in January 2023 as an open access publication by the British Educational Research Association. An overview and key findings on sex, ethnicity and nationality were presented orally to members of the learned society at their annual conference in September 2022 (Belluigi et al, 2022), in addition to a range of other means of dissemination.

As such, the presentation will be arranged in two parts, with a discussion of:

- (i) exclusion, marginalization and disadvantage in the discipline of education in UK higher education;
- (ii) recommendations for further research, informed by the prioritization of addressing the inequalities observed from this study; by the limitations of the study; and by that which has been under-researched about Education in UK higher education.

The session has been purposefully designed with as much time for discussion as there is for the presentation. The researchers thus welcome audience members' sharing of their own deliberations, insights and experiences as part of the discipline of Education and/ or as researchers of higher education.

Education research in the UK: mapping the experiences and perspectives of those working in the discipline

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The strength of education research is necessarily dependent on the strength of its workforce. Recent research has highlighted the many challenges facing the discipline and the wider higher education (HE) sector, and has pointed to the impact of these on education researchers and their work (e.g. Belluigi et al., 2023; Boyle et al., 2021). To develop a better understanding of these issues and the complex landscape within which education research is being conducted, BERA commissioned the UK-wide State of the Discipline survey. The survey focused on four main areas: identity and background; employment, career and institution; research activities, expertise and motivations; and current issues and debates in education research. It was completed by 1,623 education researchers, and provides timely new insights into the experiences, identities and attitudes of the university-based education research community. This presentation will share key findings from the study, particularly drawing upon themes of education researchers as an 'atypical' HE workforce, the diversity and commonalities of experience across different regions and institutions, the motivations and value which are attached to education research, and the often-challenging contexts where research is being conducted at present. We will also examine the potential implications of the survey findings and discuss recommendations and possible next steps for the sector and discipline. Audience contributions will be warmly invited in order to stimulate dialogue and debate around the direction of education research, and the conditions needed to support the development and flourishing of its workforce.