



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

## How is academic research in Northern Ireland responsive to local ethnic minorities & migrants?

Belluigi, D. Z., & Moynihan, Y. (2023). How is academic research in Northern Ireland responsive to local ethnic minorities & migrants? *Research Intelligence*, 157, 16-17. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/winter-2023-24>

**Published in:**  
Research Intelligence

**Document Version:**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:**  
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

**Publisher rights**  
© BERA 2023

This work is made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### **Take down policy**

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [openaccess@qub.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@qub.ac.uk).

### **Open Access**

This research has been made openly available by Queen's academics and its Open Research team. We would love to hear how access to this research benefits you. – Share your feedback with us: <http://go.qub.ac.uk/oa-feedback>



# How is academic research in Northern Ireland responsive to local ethnic minorities & migrants?



DINA ZOE BELLUIGI<sup>1,2</sup> & YVONNE MOYNIHAN<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST & <sup>2</sup>NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

Universities' responsiveness to local communities' needs, and to informing and understanding social change, is important for serving the public good and building trust in this public institution by eroding the exclusions which have characterised the 'ivory tower'. Such responsiveness may be enacted through the university's functions of (higher) education, research or third mission engagements. A recent study considered such responsiveness in Northern Ireland (NI), by exploring the state of academic research enquiry about, and with, local populations who are marginalised in that context because of their positioning as 'ethnic minorities' or 'migrants' (Belluigi & Moynihan, 2023).

The triangulated findings were informed by: a) systematic analysis of research outputs (n=209) by NI's research-intensive universities; b) critical discourse analysis of primary data generated via questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with authors of those outputs (n=32); and c) report-and-respond discussions on the initial interpretations with members of non-academic partnering organisations named in the outputs (n=3) and with research developers (n=2). These were drawn upon to explore the ways in which academic research practice is shaped by various socio-cultural influences on the research ecology.

## RESPONSIVENESS TO SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Parallel to the dominant narrative of NI as being divided by ethno-political legacies from colonialism and violent conflict ('The Troubles'), is that it is the most homogenous devolved nation of the UK. However, significant

sociodemographic shifts have occurred, which differ to the norms and markers of identity of its dominant majority. Census data from 2001 to 2021 indicate that this has included increases in those 'foreign'-born (from 1.09 per cent to 6.53 per cent); those racialised as other-than-'white' (0.8 per cent to 3.4 per cent); those with religion other-than-Christian (0.4 per cent to 1.5 per cent) and without religion (2.7 per cent to 9.3 per cent). Primary languages other than English, Irish or Ulster-Scots have increased from 3.1 per cent in 2011 to 4.6 per cent in 2021 (NISRA, 2022). Public legislation and strategies have not yet responded adequately to such change, however, with the needs, protections and concerns raised by the new publics neither prioritised nor addressed (NI Affairs Committee, 2022).

Our study found similar dynamics underpinning local academic research production. Migration, race/ethnicity and majority-minority dynamics were under-studied when it came to NI's local populations. The few researchers who did so, were operating within an undervalued area of enquiry that was marginalised within the practices and priorities of NI's research-intensive universities. Of over 120,000 research outputs recorded on the institutions' research information management systems, only 209 outputs (from 159 projects) focused on these local populations.

As figure 1 shows, there was marked growth over time from the first output published in 1994; however, there were 23 or fewer outputs in any given year. The lack of academic responsiveness to local problematics has been noted before in the history of the context. A study

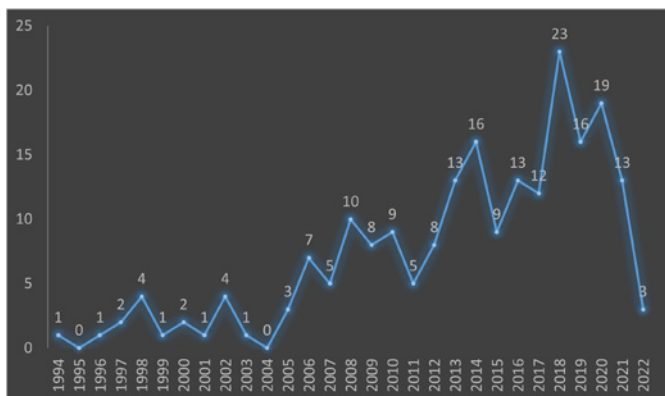


Figure 1: Timeline indicating changes in research output over time

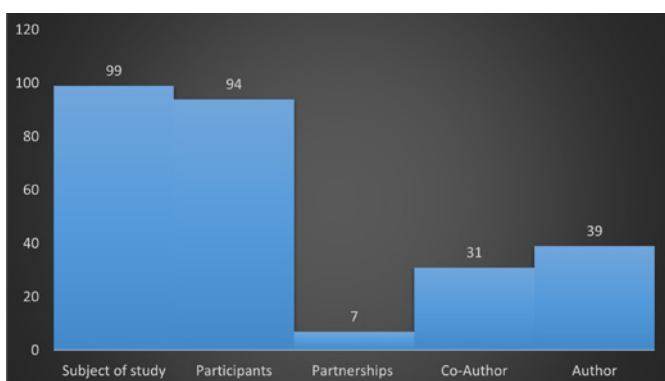


Figure 2: The positioning, participation, acknowledgement and authorship of ethnic minorities and migrants in NI research output

by Taylor (1988) similarly visualised outputs on ‘The Troubles’ by NI-based social scientists, finding fewer than 20 publications per year between 1969 and 1983. Ironically, the investment and focus of NI institutions and locally based academics in research on such ‘green and orange’ legacies is now so prevalent, that many we interviewed felt it overshadowed and whitewashed research exploring social conflict, violence, trauma, exclusion, hate crime, racism and injustice experienced by those othered by the two majority settled groups (or ‘communities’).

This lack of sustained, pluralistic academic engagement effectively maintains the NI state’s historical un-documenting of ethnic minorities and migrants. It leaves localised assumptions and perceptions about such minoritised groups open to continued non-historical, decontextualised, unsupported, nonfactual, invented or imagined assumptions, stereotyping, othering and homogenising prevalent in public discourses. The burden of knowledge-making is placed on non-academic individuals and groups, or those academics positioned outside of the locality.

## POSITIONING, PARTICIPATION & AUTHORSHIP

The politics of representation and authorship intersected in complex and often adversely limiting ways, on

academic autonomy. Outputs co-authored by an academic who was a migrant or an ethnic minority were 15 per cent of the total, with lead or sole-authorship at 19 per cent. Many of the authors were women (60 per cent). Such representation contrasts with the staff composition of NI universities, which have the lowest representation of female and migrant academics of all the devolved nations of the UK. However, the lead author was rarely a person of colour, particularly not born locally nor a woman. Many participating authors reflected self-critically about authoring knowledge on the complexities of local racialisation.

When analysing the outputs’ methodologies, acknowledgements and authorship lists (figure 2), the largest proportion positioned these local populations as objects of study. Encouragingly, a similarly large proportion included participants in primary data generation. Non-academic partnerships were rarely acknowledged in outputs, despite the value accorded to their gatekeeping and advocacy roles by the participating authors during interviews.

Such findings raise questions about the university’s role in democratising and de-racialising local knowledge production. They also affirm the importance of studying the agency and experiences of those whose practice differs from dominant patterns, towards better supporting and extending such scholarship, and informing academic development.

Financially supported by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust, the project was conceived in partnership with the Migrant and Minority Ethnic Thinktank of Northern Ireland.

## REFERENCES

- Belluigi, D. Z., & Moynihan, Y. (2023). *Academic research responsiveness to migrants and ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland*. Queen’s University Belfast. <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/academic-research-responsiveness-to-migrants-and-ethnic-minorities>
- House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee [NI Affairs Committee]. (2022, March 9). *Minority communities have often been overlooked in Northern Ireland*. <https://ukparliament.shorthandstories.com/minority-ethnic-and-migrant-people-experiences-NIAC-report/index.html>
- Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency [NISRA]. (2022, September 22). *Census 2021 main statistics: Population more diverse than ever before* [Press release]. [www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-press-release.pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-press-release.pdf)
- Taylor, R. (1988). Social scientific research on the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland: The problem of objectivity. *Economic and Social Review*, 19(2), 123–145.