

FEEDING THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PIPELINE:

COVID-19 AND CLOSING THE AWARDING GAP

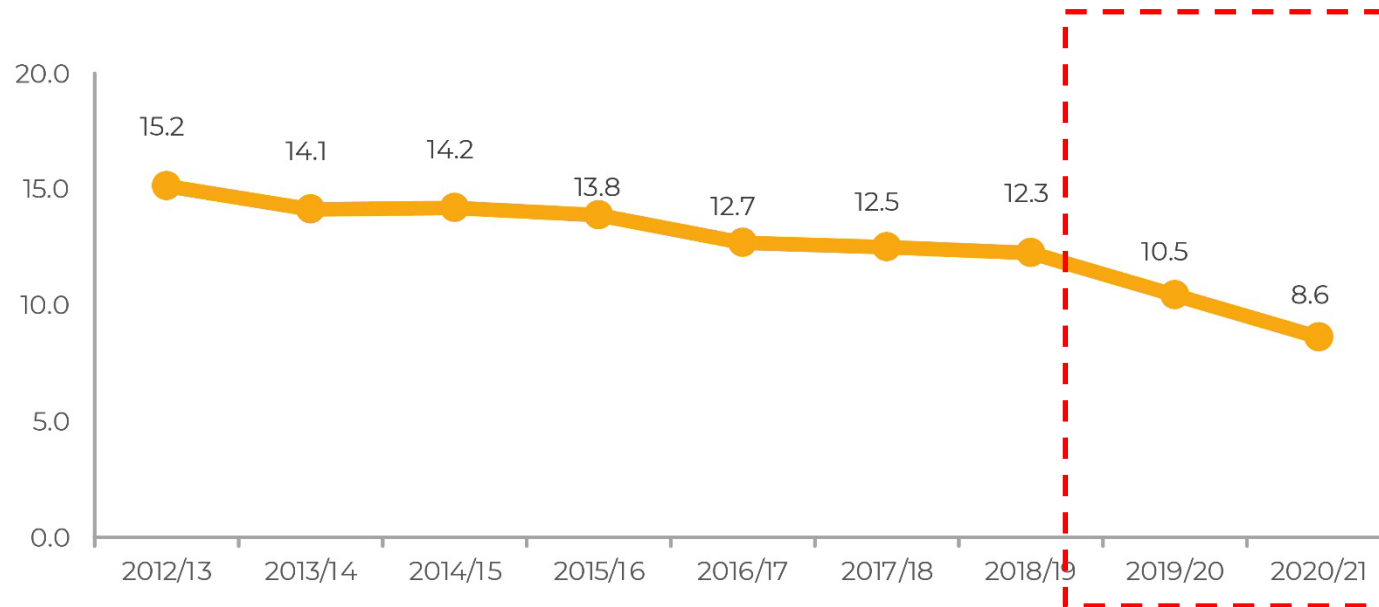


LEADING ROUTES >

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Introduction to the research

DEGREE AWARDING GAP 2012-2021 (%)

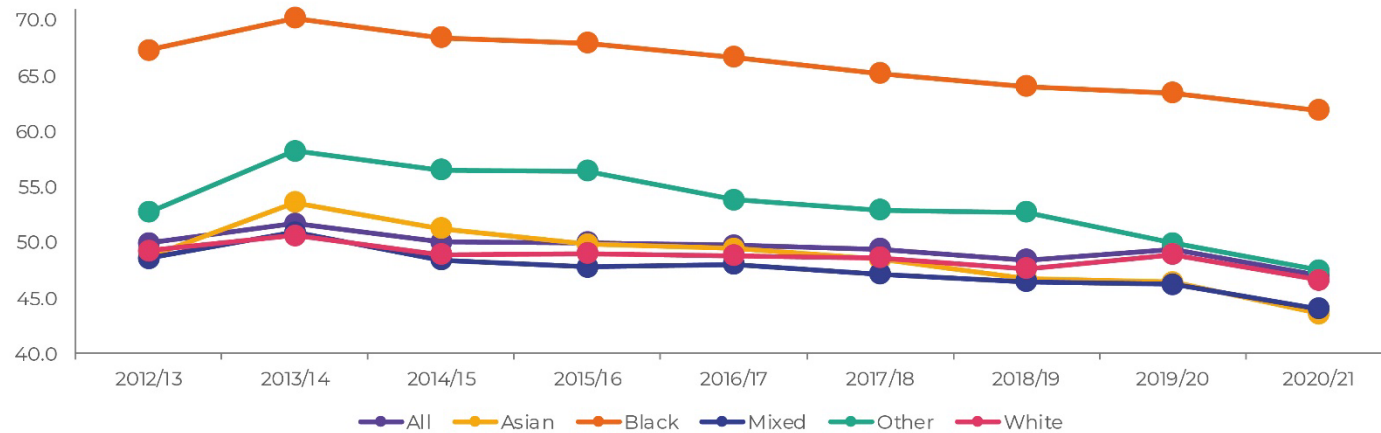


Source: Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey data from 2017-2021 and Destination of Leavers (DOL) survey data from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

- Decline in the awarding gap by 3.7%, largest reduction in 16 years.
- Coincide with COVID-19 mitigations.
- With the lifting of mitigations, the gap widens.
- Universities are under pressure to reduce the gap and are held to account for their successes/failures.
- In this environment, we risk obscuring other COVID-19 impacts on minoritised groups; and, overshadowing more complex anti-racist interventions.
- So, we asked: **Did a ‘good’ degree for racially minoritised graduates open careers in research and innovation?**

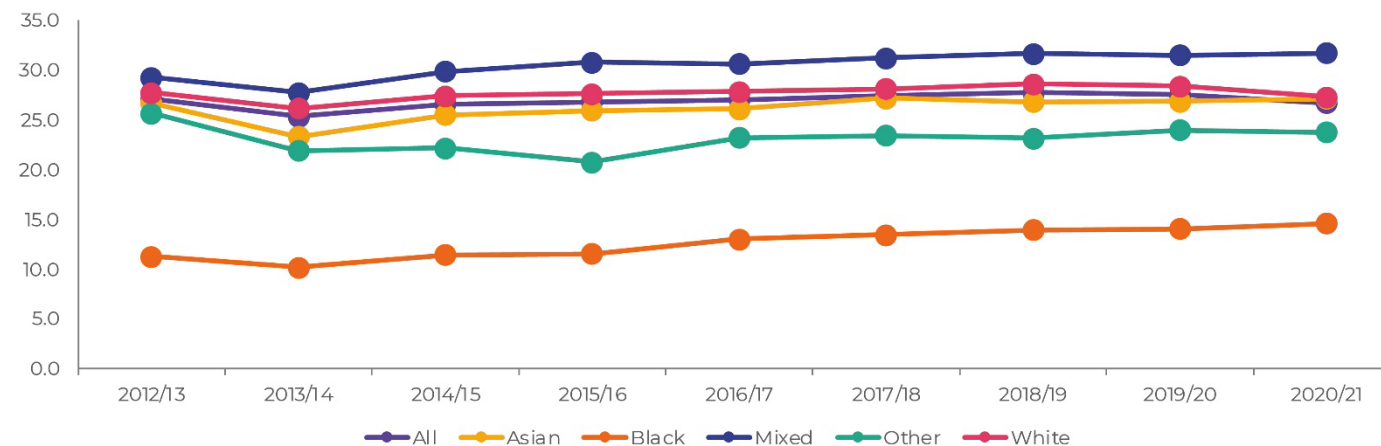
Understanding the Awarding Gap

'GOOD' DEGREES FROM POST-1992 UNIVERSITIES BY ETHNICITY (%)



- Non-Russell Group universities award the highest proportion of 'good' degrees.
- Over 60% of Black graduates with a 'good' degree achieved this from a post-1992 university in 2020/21.
- In Russell Group institutions, Black graduates fair the worst in 'good' degree awards.
- The number of Black graduates awarding a 'good' degree has increased by 3.3.% since 2012/13.

'GOOD' DEGREES FROM RUSSELL GROUP UNIVERSITIES BY ETHNICITY (%)



Understanding the Awarding Gap

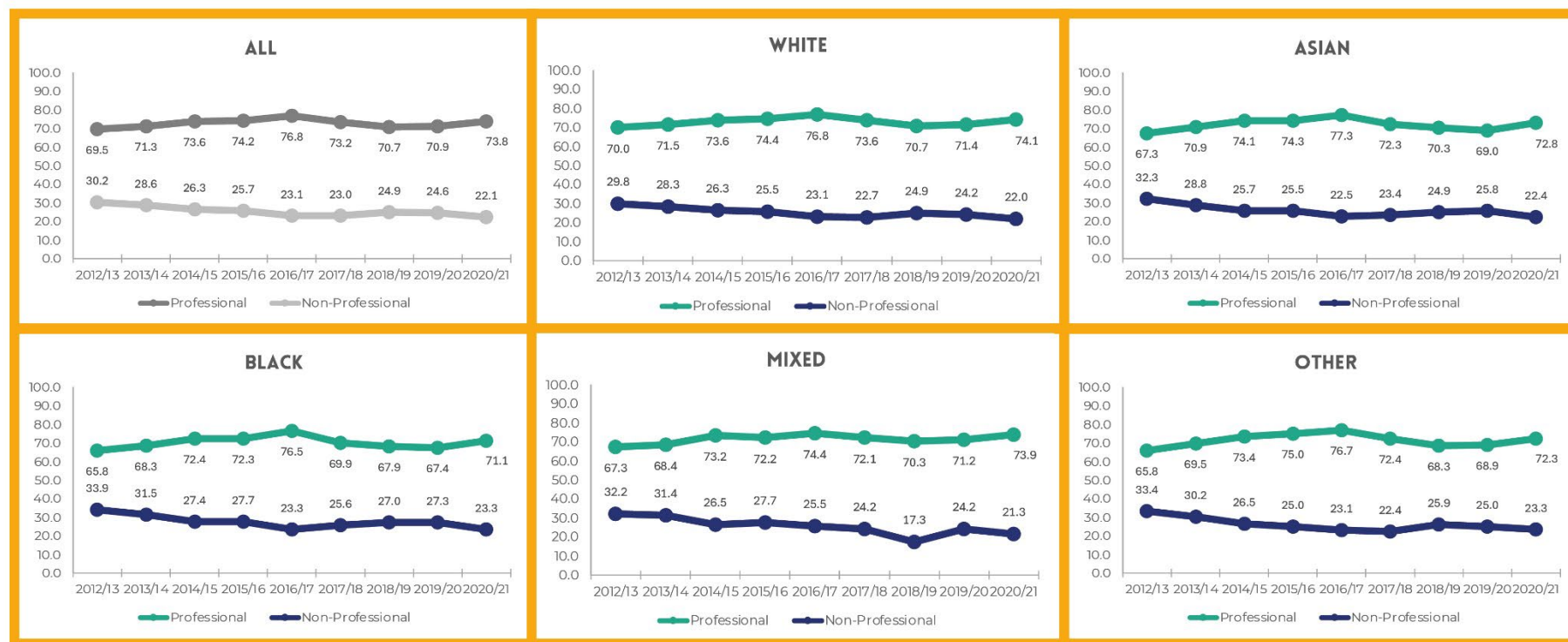
PROPORTION OF 'GOOD' DEGREES BY SEX & ETHNICITY (%)



- Women outperform men across all institutions.
- Within racial groups, Black women consistently outperform Black men in degree outcomes.

Where did racial minorities go after 20/21?

EMPLOYED 'GOOD' DEGREE HOLDERS IN PROFESSIONAL VS NON-PROFESSIONAL ROLES BY ETHNICITY (%)



- All employed graduates are more likely to be in professional roles than non-professional.
- Employed Black graduates least likely to report being in professional roles.
- In 2019/20, 70.9% of all employed 'good' degree holders were in professional roles; falling to 67.4% for Black graduates.

What was the qualitative impact of a 'good' degree?

“ I bring up my first all the time. ALL the time. Because I know that I’m a Black woman, and in my job they will take intelligence away from me. Every. Single. Time. ”

“ I never thought about doing a masters, and I definitely hadn’t thought about doing one purely out of enjoyment or passion for a subject. It was more like, ‘this is my career plan. Therefore the steps to get there are ABC.’ But I hadn’t thought, ‘Oh, I can just study something that I’m really interested in’. ”

“ [a Black academic] said ‘you just need to get a good grade. And you could just go straight and do your PhD [without a masters]. In fact, I’m going to start calling you Dr. X from now.’ ... and it worked! ... My friends started calling me Dr X and then [a Black woman professor] called me Dr. X. And I’m just like, ‘How can I not?!’ I’ve been inspired. ”

What role did COVID-19 play in graduate pathways?

“ It shouldn’t be the job of students to do anything other than be students... but when you come into university as a student of colour, you don’t necessarily choose to be an activist. Some people just want to be students, and almost unilaterally, every student of colour is forced to be a spokesperson. ”

“ I did think of coming home, but at that point I couldn’t go home... because at that time the economy was very slow, and I felt adding myself to the family is just going to increase their expenses. So I just decided to stay here. ”

“ It would be so daunting, so tiring... This is something I would not look for unless it was absolutely necessary, financially. Even if this limits my career choices. But it’s also something that I know if I had to come into the office, it would negatively impact my mental health. ”

Some conclusions

Did a 'good' degree for racially minoritised graduates open careers in research and innovation?

- The narrowing of the white-racial minority awarding gap in 2020 and 2021 does **not** appear to have opened careers in research and innovation for racial minorities with a 'good' degree outcome.
- But qualitative data identifies the **profound level of effort required to stand still**, to neutralise the impact of COVID-19, that is, to stay on track for a 'good' degree outcome.
- For Black graduates, crucial factors for opening careers in research and innovation is the availability of ring-fenced scholarships.

What do these findings mean for policy and operational agenda focused on awarding gaps as a proxy for addressing racial inequity in higher education?

- Whose idea of 'success' matters most?

TO POLICYMAKERS & REGULATORS

- Commit to reading and understanding awarding gap data within a wider context of anti-racist interventions (or lack thereof) in higher education institutions.
- Encourage more collaboration between Russell Group and non-Russell Group institutions, disrupting the 'Russell Group pipeline' to provide more opportunities to students.
- In the interests of informed university choices, facilitate a sector-wide conversation on how Black students be advised on the apparent trade-off between the greater chances of a 'good' degree outcome though with fewer opportunities for careers in research and innovation, or the converse but with additional racialised burdens.

TO UNIVERSITY LEADERS

- Reform scholarships and postgraduate funding opportunities and criteria so they are truly inclusive and not reinforcing a 'Russell Group pipeline' from undergraduate to postgraduate study.
- Embed racial equity into your core strategies – including but not limited to teaching and learning strategies - ensuring that institutional policy responses are rooted in the realities of racially minoritised students and value their experiences and achievements.

TO STUDENT SUCCESS OPERATIONAL TEAMS

- Adopt a holistic definition of 'success', integrating student-informed measures of achievement that reflect lived experiences rather than solely degree classifications and national student survey frameworks.
- Work in genuine partnership with students to co-create interventions that reflect their lived experiences and needs. Focus on creating inclusive environments, through both student facing support and institutional change, where students can bring their authentic selves to university life rather than solely equipping them to navigate and succeed within a system shaped by racial inequities.