

Social diversity in academia: research outline

Universities are making progress in recruiting students from less advantaged backgrounds – but do they subsequently give them jobs? How socio-economically diverse are academics and university researchers?

The Bridge Group and Professor Paul Wakeling plan to research the socio-economic diversity of universities' academic and research staff, and the impact of socio-economic background (SEB) on their lived experience. Relatively little is known about this, but the evidence we have suggests that there are barriers. This research aims to clarify current issues and, where required, inform improvements in access to and participation in academia for people from currently underrepresented groups. The resulting report will emphasise recommendations for universities and research funding bodies.

The research will involve collaborating with a small group of universities to survey their academic and research staff about their socio-economic background, current role and experiences in the workplace. It will then involve interviewing selected respondents about their career progression and lived experience.

We are inviting participating universities to make a modest financial contribution to the research, but in view of the current financial constraints in the university sector, we are also seeking to supplement this through sponsorship from elsewhere.

The Bridge Group has extensive experience of this type of research with employers. This includes a 2017 report on diversity in recruitment and grant awarding at Wellcome (www.thebridgegroup.org.uk/research). Professor Paul Wakeling was Head of the School of Education at the University of York from January 2018 to September 2023. His current research focuses on access to postgraduate study, especially social class, gender and ethnic inequalities; the background of academics; and institutional stratification in higher education.

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