



Why We Need to Fix the Broken Pipeline for Graduate Black Talent in the UK

November 2024

Research in collaboration with
BAIN & COMPANY 

www.blacktalentcharter.com

Contents

A. Introduction	3
B. Summary.....	4
C. The Case for Black Talent in the UK Economy.....	6
D. New Research: Why We Need to Fix the Broken Pipeline	9
Methodology.....	9
Results.....	11
E. Discussion.....	18
F. Conclusion.....	22
G. Third Party Contributions	23

The Black Talent Charter would like to express our thanks to everyone who was involved in the making of this research, with a special mention to Bain and Company for their support and partnership.

A. Introduction

The Black Talent Charter (BTC) was established with a single mission: to **embed race equity for black talent into the DNA of British business**. Our goal is to achieve equitable representation for black talent within ten years of our launch, taking us to 2033. The BTC began with financial professional and legal services, and has evolved to have a much broader focus, recognising that the more widely organisations work together, the faster and more substantive progress will be.

The agenda for black talent is important. **Stagnation of opportunity for black talent limits the future growth prospects of businesses**. It restricts the talent pool available to our highest performing sectors whilst leaving behind a sizeable minority of our population economically. This means that we are failing to capitalise on our key resource, our people.

Our research, 'Why We Need to Pick up the Pace of Black Representation in Finance and Professional Services in the UK', published in partnership with Bain and Company earlier this year, demonstrates that **black talent is still significantly underrepresented in the highest-paid and particularly influential sectors of British business**. Reflecting this gap, at the very top of business, only 1% of partners at UK law firms and only 1.4% of board directors in the FTSE 100 are black.ⁱ

We know that significant effort has been made by many British businesses to encourage the recruitment of black talent since 2020. Individual organisations have seen some successes. However, the organisations we speak to are facing persistent issues, both within and outside our Signatory cohort. They find it disproportionately difficult to recruit black talent into areas of strategic priority and growth, whilst also facing challenges to the retention and promotion of the black talent they do have.

We are acutely aware of the lack of targeted analysis on the reasons for those challenges and are therefore building an evidence base for action. In this research, 'Why We Need to Fix the Broken Pipeline for Graduate Black Talent in the UK,' made in partnership with Bain & Company, our focus is on exploring what the issues are preventing some organisations from building diverse graduate pipelines. Is there a gap in engagement with certain sectors from black students and a reticence to apply? Or are black students who are at university poorly qualified for the sectors on which we focus? As you will see, this paper shows that neither of these factors are an issue. **Black talent is very well represented at universities in the UK, studying relevant degrees, and proportionately more likely than their white peers to apply to roles within the financial, professional and legal sectors. However, black graduates are half as likely to be successful in graduate recruitment processes.**

We are, therefore, able to offer both an optimistic view of the opportunity available, whilst also identifying a challenge we face in seeing and serving that black talent. The evidence in this report shows that there is clearly much more work to be done. Black talent is overrepresented at university, applies for positions, but does not proceed to junior positions within organisations in representative numbers.

This research presents just one step on the path to understanding these issues. We have an ambitious list of areas that require focus and new research. If you would like to collaborate with us on future projects, please get in touch.

B. Summary

1. Black talent is well represented across UK universities

Black talent is well represented at universities, with 8% of undergraduates identifying as black. Whilst that drops to 4% at the top 20 universities, these statistics compare well to the average UK black population of 4%.

2. Black students have good representation at all stages, until job offer

When compared to peers, black students are more or equally likely to study relevant courses, and be interested in key careers and apply for graduate positions. For those black students at the top 20 universities, their career discovery is on average higher than peers.

3. Black students are more likely to apply for roles, particularly in financial services where they are twice as likely to apply as non-black peers

Black students are more likely than non-black peers to apply to the financial, professional and legal sectors. Financial services is an outlier, with the greatest discrepancy between the students surveyed and the most interest from black undergraduates.

This indicates that these careers remain very desirable to black students, with this interest translating into applications for roles.

4. Black candidates are half as likely as peers to receive an offer

Despite their engagement and greater representation than peers in the application process, at the final stage of interview, black candidates are half as likely to receive a job offer than their non-black peers. As compared to other ethnicities, black talent is also less likely to be recruited if educated outside of the top 20 universities.

5. Representation at leadership levels makes a difference

Firms with visible black leaders see higher black graduate applications than those who do not. Black talent surveyed was eight times more likely to cite a lack of visible leadership as a detractor to their decision making on applications to organisations.

6. Bias may persist in recruitment processes, impacting those who learn later about career opportunities

The black talent we surveyed was more likely to only learn about careers while at university, as compared to non-black peers who on average learnt earlier. This could impact areas such as the timing of applications for competitive summer internships and other employment opportunities. Simple changes to recruitment processes could have a marked impact upon black candidate success rates.

7. Cultural expectations may result in some candidates being perceived as 'overqualified' or too specialised

The research found that black candidates are twice as likely as their white peers to have received post-graduate qualifications. Graduate recruitment processes should be reviewed to ensure they do not penalise those who prioritise longer term academic qualifications with barriers such as perceptions of 'over specialisation'.

8. Socio-economic barriers and racial bias can form layered additional challenges

In addition to academic credentials, our research found that interviewers seek to observe a broader set of soft skills being evidenced by a candidate, often described as 'polish'. Because of the overlap of race and ethnicity with stereotypical perceptions of what presents as professionalism, a black candidate may have heightened awareness of the need to manage anti-black stereotypes in meeting this assessment. In addition, the relationship between socio-economic inequality, race and ethnicity presents further practical barriers.

9. There is an additional opportunity if organisations recruit beyond the top 20 universities

Our research shows that black talent is overrepresented at universities as a whole (at 8%, double the UK working population). However, candidates from beyond the top 20 universities are less likely than peers at the same institutions to be offered graduate roles. Instead, the data indicates that the black candidates at top 20 universities receive a disproportionately high number of offers. Therefore, employers may be placing themselves at a competitive disadvantage with other organisations, all pursuing the same individuals, at the expense of the wider pool of black talent available.

C. The Case for Black Talent in the UK Economy

In February 2024 the BTC published research in collaboration with Bain & Company, 'Why We Need to Pick up the Pace of Black Representation in Finance and Professional Services in the UK', showing that, at the current rate of progress, it will take 50 years to reach proportional representation for black talent in finance and professional services (based on the 2021 census demographics of the UK working population). An updated analysis using 2022 census demographics has revealed this **gap has widened to nearly 70 years until we achieve proportional representation.**ⁱⁱ This research also demonstrated that black talent is significantly underrepresented in the most highly remunerated industries in the UK economy.

Four years after the death of George Floyd, efforts to progress race equity have not had the desired effect in relation to black talent in business and the professions. Black professionals account for only 2.2% of employees in the professional, scientific and technical sectors and only 2% of employees in finance and insurance, although black people make up 4.4% of the UK working population and 13.5% of the population of London, the centre of the financial and professional services sectors (see Figure 1 below).

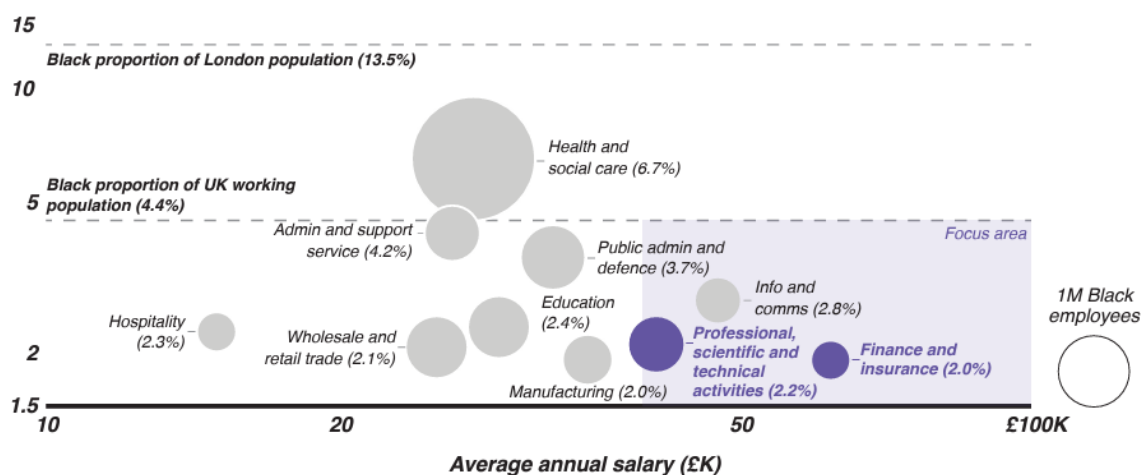


Figure 1 Percentage of black employees and the average annual salary by industry in the UK as of 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ

In contrast, we know that black talent is well represented at universities, with 8% of undergraduates identifying as black. Whilst that drops to 4% at the top 20 universities, these statistics compare well to the average UK black population of 4%. In theory, therefore, businesses and organisations seeking to expand their black talent representation should be able to recruit a generation of highly educated black talent to join their workforces.

However, black representation continues to remain at an overall low of just 2%. Furthermore, that 2% comprises the outcome of all recruitment of black talent, not limited to graduates. To date, this has translated into black talent being poorly represented at the top of organisations. With just 0.5% of senior investment bankers and only 0.4% of partners of professional service firms identifying as black, there is a significant underrepresentation of black leaders in business. It is interesting to note that law firms (with 50+ partners) are doing better than other sectors where, as of 2021, 1% of partners identified as black (see Figures 2 and 3.). Unfortunately, all of these figures are well below the **4% UK average of the black working population** noted above. Further, when compared against the average black population of London, where these sectors are disproportionately based, that comparative figure is 13.5%.

Percentage of employees by ethnicity in finance and the professions

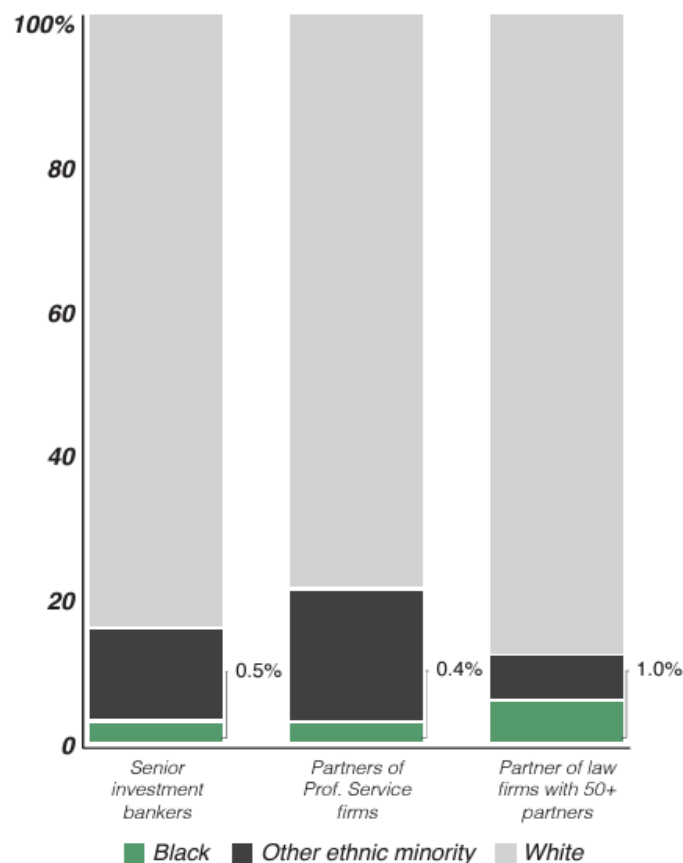


Figure 2 Percentage of employees by ethnicity in finance and the professions.

Ethnicity split

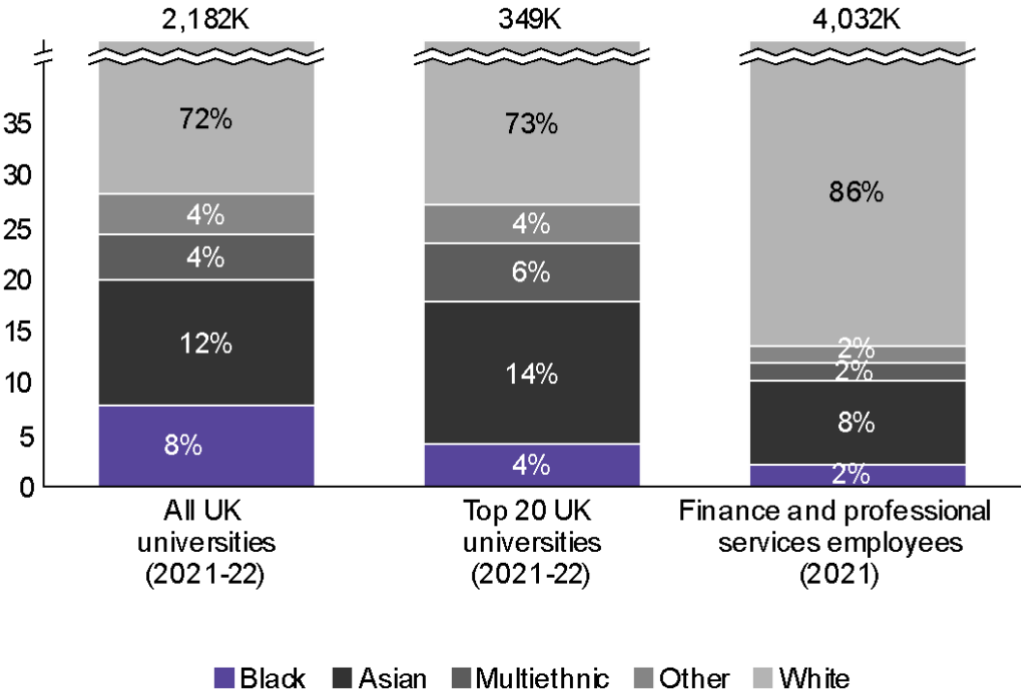


Figure 3 Percentage representation of black students at all UK universities, and finance and professional services employees, 2021-22.

The issues manifesting in this very low representation for black talent across a whole career are complex. At the BTC, we are exploring the recruitment, retention and promotion of black talent in the broadest sense. However, in analysing our priority areas for research, we wanted to build the evidence in respect of the graduate pipeline for our Signatories and other third-party organisations to benchmark themselves against peers and challenge assumptions about what issues may be arising. Whilst retention and promotion are also priority areas, without a strong representative cohort at graduate level, the largest employers in key sectors will lack a robust foundation from which to find talented individuals and support them to build successful careers.

Our first phase of research raised the question as to why industries such as the financial and professional sectors appear to be struggling to recruit black talent, when the pipeline for highly educated talent coming out of UK universities seems secure.

D. New Research: Why We Need to Fix the Broken Pipeline for Graduate Black Talent in the UK

Methodology

This research has taken an in-depth analysis of the candidate journey, from university to job offer. During the winter of 2023/24 Bain & Company, in partnership with the BTC, surveyed 400 students in UK universities and 308 employees in FS, PS and Legal Services firms, combined with a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups with 10+ industry organisations.

All candidates undergo similar stages in their journey to secure prestigious graduate positions in financial services, professional services and law. Whilst experiences dating back as far as primary school can be formative to a candidate's early career journey, this analysis focuses on 6 key steps where employers can make the most change in graduate recruitment: from university application and placement, through to job acceptance.

This research focuses on the candidate journey from undergraduate study through to job acceptance. This included looking at their:

- university;
- chosen subject;
- discovery of and interest in our key areas of professional focus;
- assessment of what attracts them to particular careers;
- subjective experiences in the candidate journey; and
- objective outcomes of the candidate journey.

We would note that, for an applicant to secure an interview, candidates frequently go through two key steps: CV / experience screening and pre-interview tests. CV screening requires a rigorous assessment of academic history, work experience and extracurricular activities, whilst pre-interview assessments often test psychometric capabilities, strengths and specific skills (e.g. numerical), though varied by firm. Traditional CV screening has historically resulted in disproportionate numbers of black students not being invited to interview and many firms have adopted contextualised recruiting software and shifted their focus to evaluating candidates on pre-interview tests rather than CVs, in attempts to combat bias.

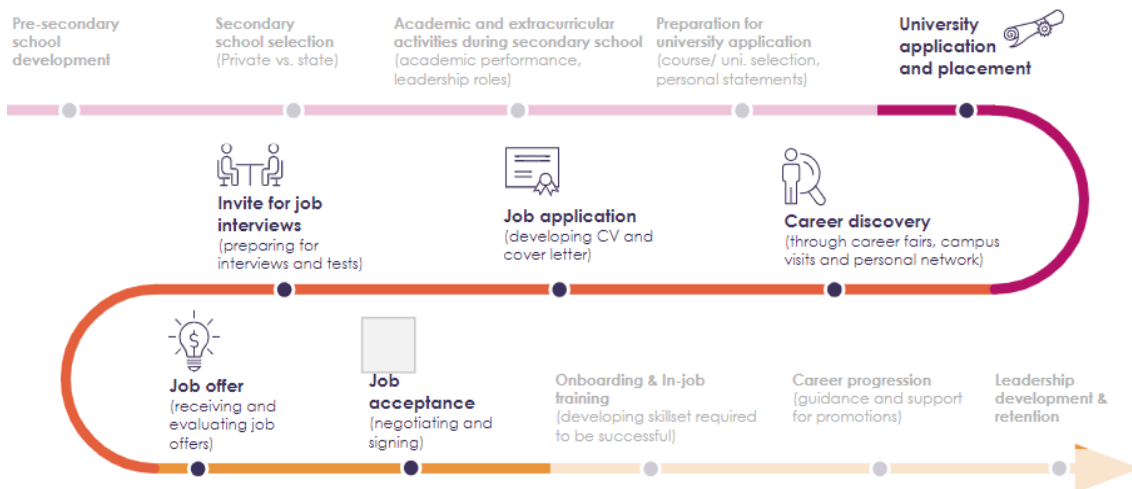


Figure 4 The standard candidate process for securing jobs within the financial and professional services.

Figure 4 above demonstrates where our research sits in the wider context of an individual's experiences. For example, this research does not analyse why candidates chose courses, their socio-economic status or subsequent career experience.

Results

1. Black talent is well represented across UK universities

There is good representation of black talent at UK universities (see Figure 5).^{iv} Whilst there is significant variation between universities, the top 20 universities have an average of 4% black students, reflecting the average black UK working population represented in the 2021 UK Census. Looking at all universities, that representation rises to 8%. This relative overrepresentation of black students within UK universities shows that the pipeline for graduate black talent is strong, indicating a potential opportunity for employer recruitment.

Black students¹ as % of total UK domiciled student enrolments by HE provider (2021/22)

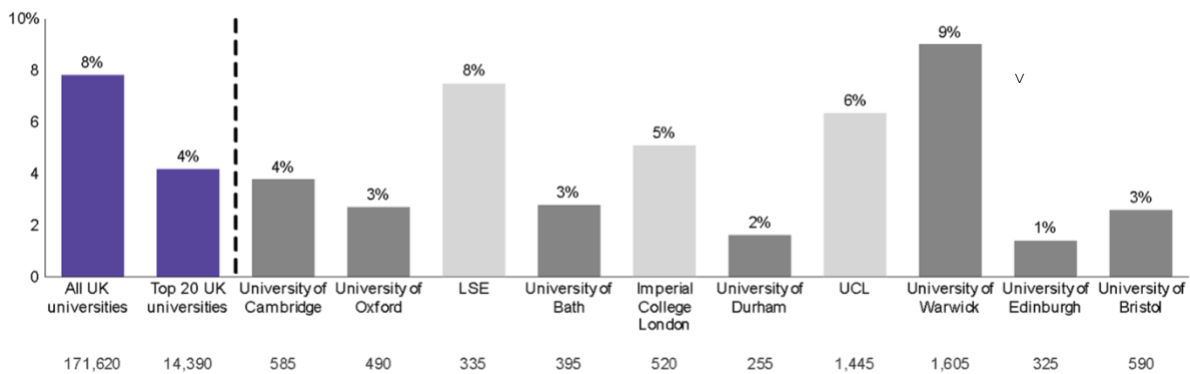


Figure 5: Percentage of black students enrolled at UK universities, 2021/2022.

2. Black students have good representation at all stages, until job offer

Figure 6 below shows the candidate journey, from arriving at university, through career discovery, job application, interview, offer, and acceptance. The percentage figures show the relative representation of black talent at each stage of the candidate journey, with the colours indicating the differential above, at or below the 8% representation of black talent in UK universities as a whole. We note again that top 20 universities have 4% black talent representation, as shown in Figure 5 above.

Across university courses, there is a strong and uniform representation of black talent studying relevant feeder courses for the financial and professional services. Further, these students are interested in and applying to job roles across the financial services, law and the professional services sectors (see Figure 6). Notably, at the career discovery and application stages, the finance sector is a particularly attractive option for black students, with high interest and engagement.

The low acceptance rate of black talent in law at 4-6%, reflects the low representation of black talent at the Bar, which has pulled down this statistic. For

solicitors' firms, there will be significant variation between sizes of firms and sectors so that individual averages may be higher. Based on our underlying analysis with several firms, significant progress has been made on junior recruitment, particularly where firms have large graduate intakes.

vi

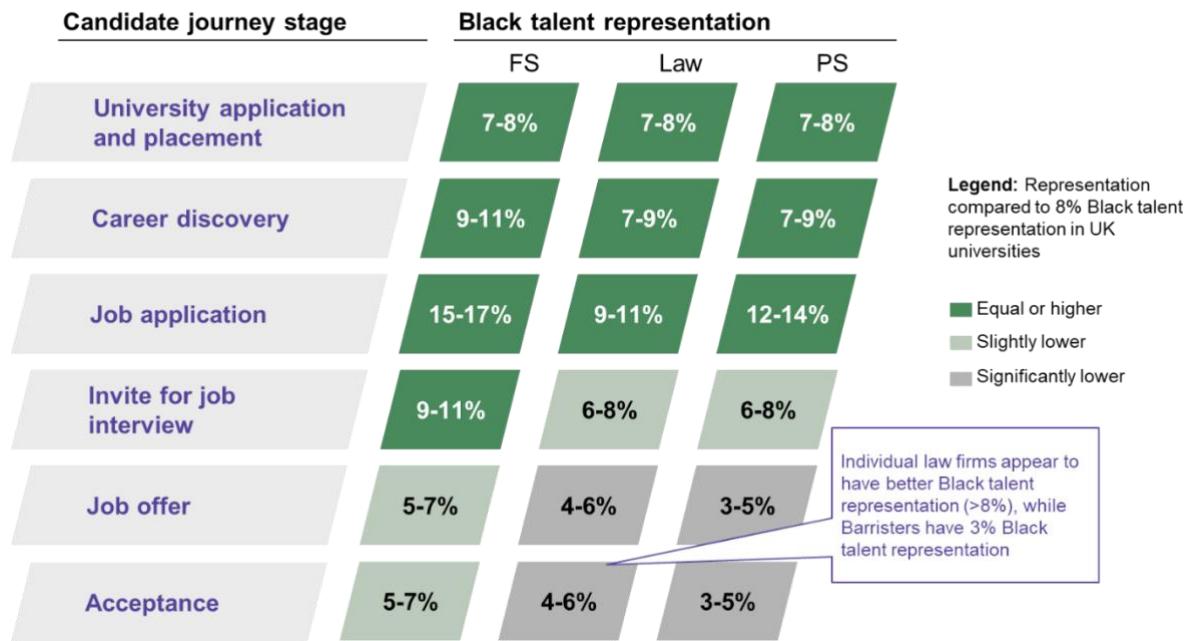


Figure 6: The percentage representation of black talent throughout the candidate journey, from university application to job acceptance, across the financial services, law and the professional services.

Figure 7 builds on this analysis, with specific details of courses studied by black students. Overall, representation of black students on courses relevant to professional services is relatively high, at 9%. Not only is black talent well represented at university, they are also proportionately over-represented in the key academic disciplines relevant to the financial, professional and legal sectors.

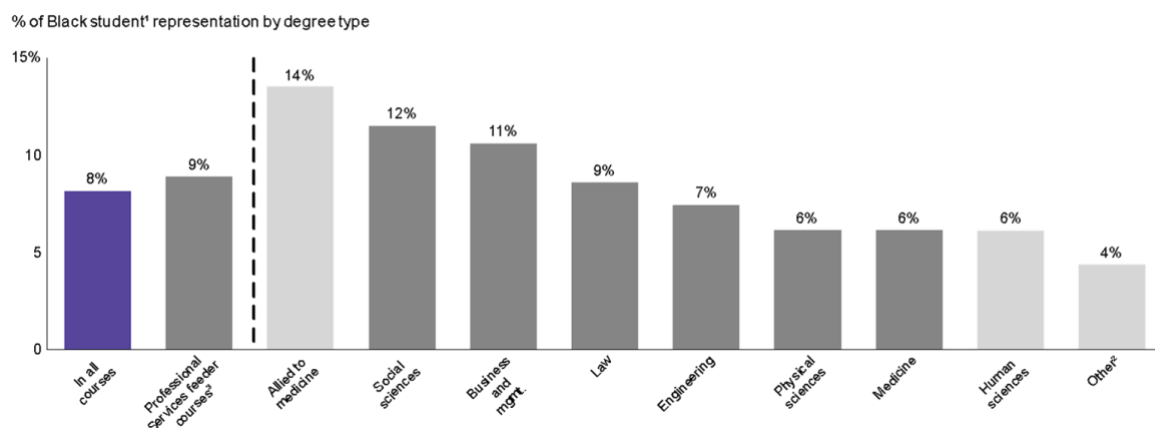


Figure 7: Black university representation across university courses, comparing all courses and professional services feeder courses.^{vii}

Figure 8 shows that this subject interest translates into a correspondingly high familiarity with financial, professional and legal services roles versus non-black peers, while Figure 9 breaks this down by more specific career. Taken together, these graphs demonstrate that black and mixed black heritage students are generally at least as familiar with careers in financial services and the professions as their peers, providing support for the percentages in Figure 6, which translates this interest into career discovery and job applications. Further, there is disproportionately high interest in investment banking, wealth and asset management as compared to their peers.

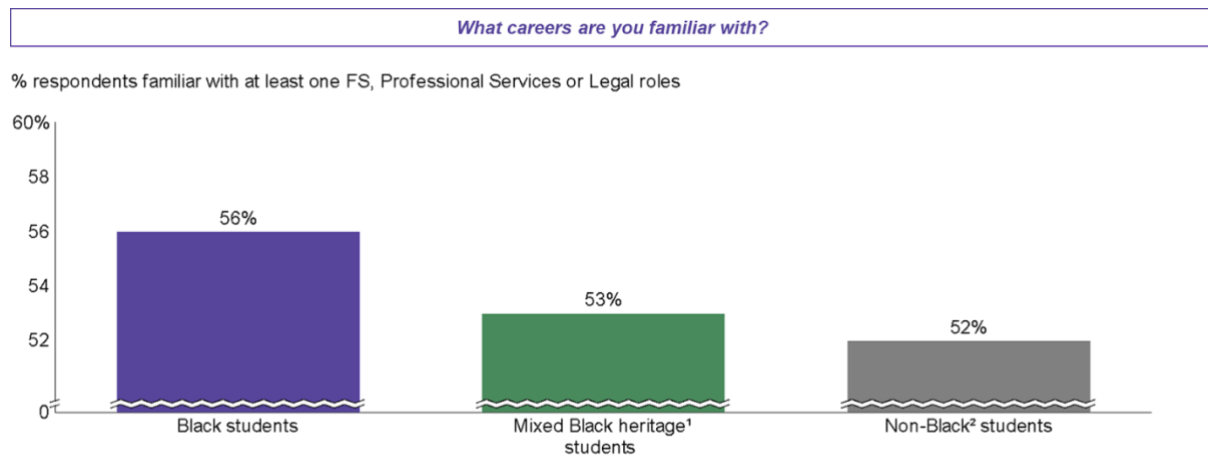


Figure 8: Comparative familiarity of financial, professional or legal services roles, by ethnicity. ^{viii}

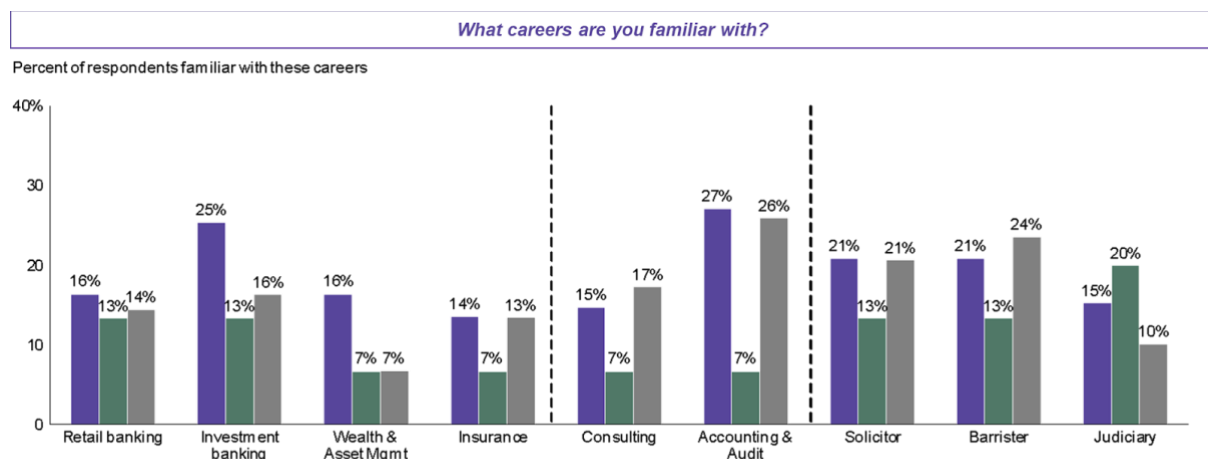


Figure 9: Comparative familiarity by UK university students with career specialisms, by ethnicity. ^{ix}

This familiarity drops to a level commensurate with peers outside of the top 20 of universities, (see Fig. 10), indicating that career discovery into the financial, professional and legal sectors is particularly secure for the cohort of black talent at the top 20 universities.

Overall, therefore, whilst there is therefore some variation between universities and specific areas of specialism, by the time black students graduate university, they

are relatively well informed of their career opportunities within the financial, professional and legal sectors as compared with peers. ^x

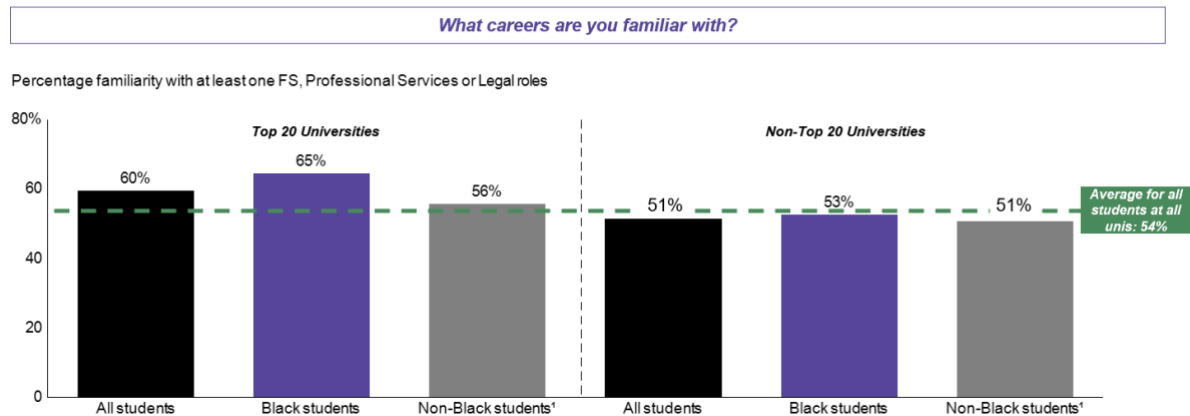


Figure 10: Comparative familiarity of financial, professional or legal service roles, by ethnicity, between top 20 and non-top 20 universities. ^{xi}

However, Figure 11 shows that black students on average learn about these options later than their peers, with 40% of the black and 50% of the mixed-black students we surveyed learning about professional services roles once at university. Meanwhile, 70% of their non-black peers are aware of their career opportunities before they reached university.

~40% of Black and 50% Mixed-Black students surveyed learn about PS roles at University vs. 30% of non-Black

When did you first become familiar with roles in financial, professional or legal services?

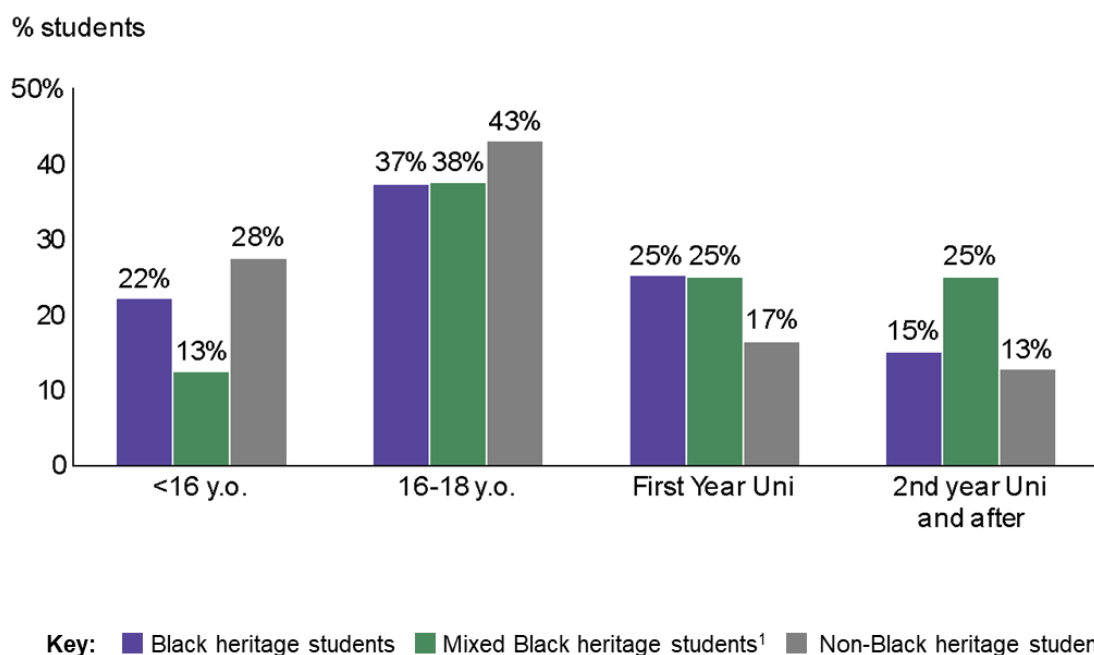


Figure 11: Age when students became familiar with roles in financial, professional and legal services by race. ^{xii}

Figure 12 shows some of the factors identified in our survey which may deter black students from applying to roles. Generally, there is not a marked difference of deterrents across ethnicities, but certain specifics should be considered in detail. For example, the black students we surveyed were less concerned about deterrents such as challenging work environments and unsustainable hours than their peers. Compared to their white peers, the black talent surveyed was eight times more likely to cite a lack of visible black leadership as a detractor to their decision making on applications to organisations.

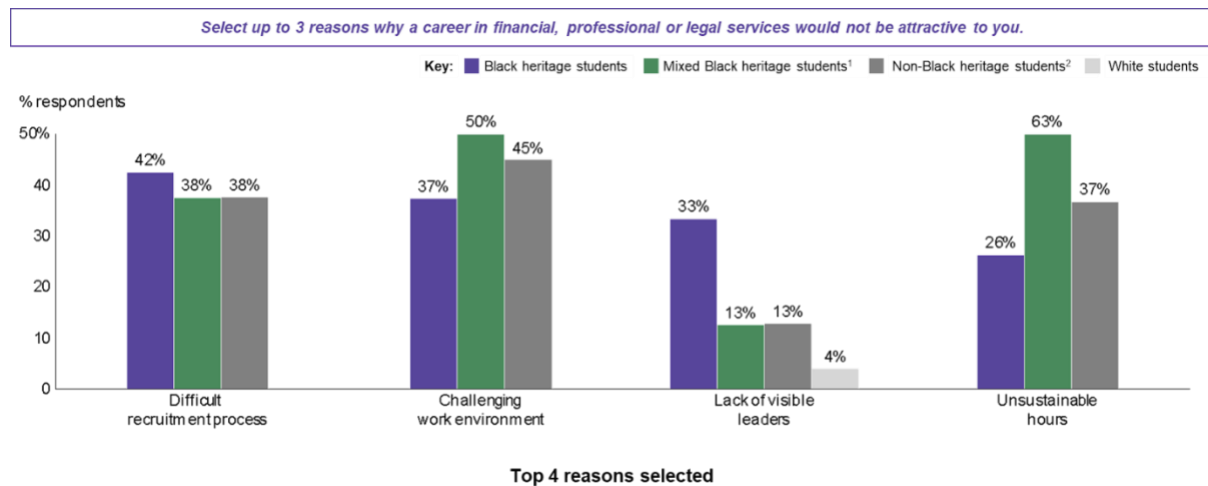


Figure 12: Factors making careers within the financial professional and legal sectors less attractive to students.^{xiii}

3. Black students are more likely to apply for roles, particularly in financial services where they are twice as likely to apply as non-black peers

Despite the potential reservations set out in Figure 12, the black talent surveyed were twice as likely to apply to a career in the financial sector as their non-black peers (see Figure 13). Whilst financial services was an outlier with the most interest, black talent was more likely to apply than their peers across all industries. For example, 34% of black students surveyed identified themselves as likely to apply for a financial services role, versus 16% of their white peers. And for wider professional services roles the figures were 31% versus 20% respectively. For law, the figures showed a slight increase in interest for black talent but were broadly very similar.

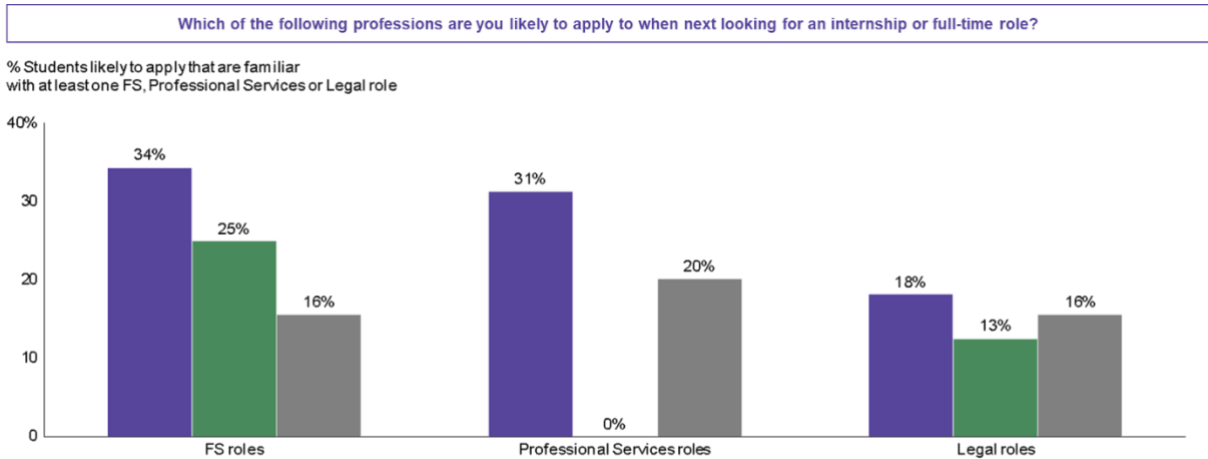


Figure 13: Likelihood of students of apply to financial services roles, professional services roles and legal roles, by race.^{xiv}

Our research then explored the offers received by the individual surveyed. For black and mixed black employees, our research found that black talent was less likely to be recruited when educated outside of the top 20 (see Figure 14). This differential was not present for the non-black group surveyed.

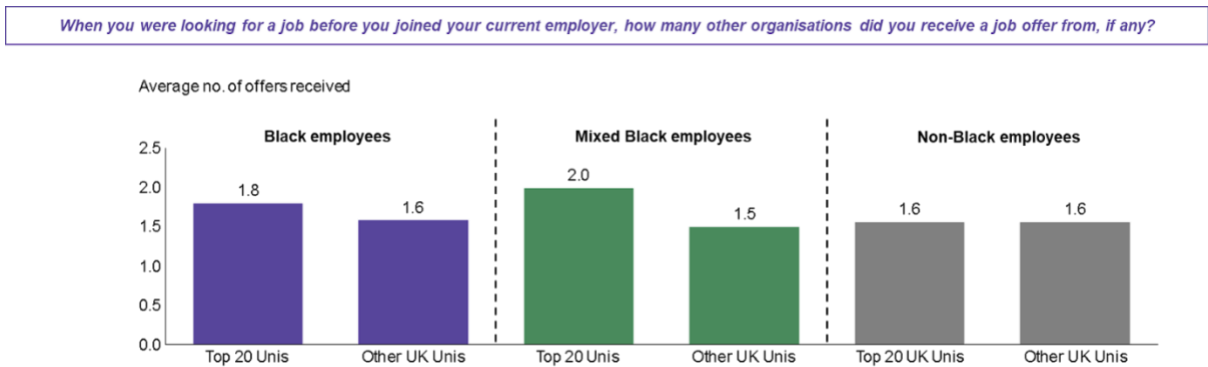


Figure 14: Comparison of the average number of job offers made across top 20 universities and other UK universities, to black, mixed black and non-black candidates.^{xv}

4. Black candidates are half as likely as peers to receive an offer

Building on Figure 6, above, Figure 15 below shows that, despite having good representation on relevant courses combined with relatively high representation at universities (including at the top 20 universities), and a higher level of career engagement, black students are less likely to receive a job offer than peers. Indeed, at the final stage of the graduate recruitment pipeline, black candidates are half as likely to be successful in securing an offer than their non-black peers.

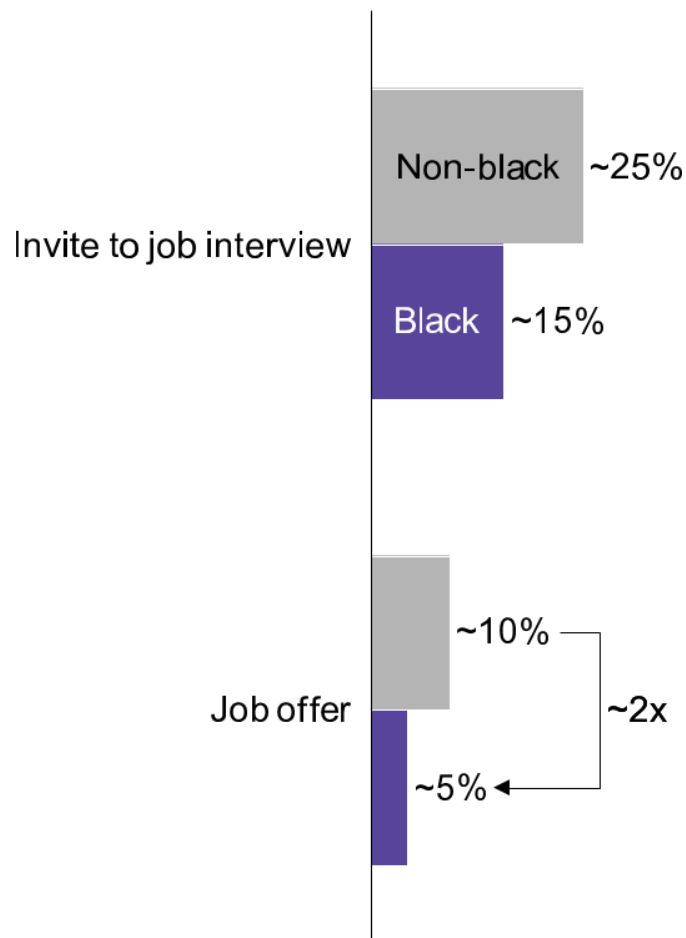


Figure 15: Percentage drop between black and non-black candidates when offered a job role.

E. Discussion

Our research has found that black talent is well represented, well educated, knowledgeable of career opportunities, keen to apply and doing so in numbers at or greater than their representation in the general working age population. Employers in financial services, the professions and law therefore have a significant opportunity to diversify their graduate pipeline with qualified individuals of black heritage. However, based on this research, there are continuing barriers to the recruitment of black talent through the final interview stage.

1. Black talent is well represented across UK universities

Black talent is well represented at universities, with 8% of undergraduates identifying as black. Whilst that drops to 4% at the top 20 universities, these statistics compare well to the average UK black population of 4%.

2. Black students have good representation at all stages of application process, until job offer

When compared to peers, black students are more or equally likely to study relevant courses, be interested in key careers and apply for graduate positions. For those black students at the top 20 universities, their career discovery is on average higher than peers.

3. Black students are more likely to apply for roles, particularly in financial services where they are twice as likely to apply as non-black peers

Black students are more likely than non-black peers to apply to the financial, professional and legal sectors. Financial services is an outlier, with the greatest discrepancy between the students surveyed and the most interest from black undergraduates.

This indicates that these careers remain very desirable to black students, with this interest translating into applications for roles.

4. Black candidates are half as likely as peers to receive an offer

Despite their engagement and greater representation than peers in the application process, at the final stage of interview, black candidates are half as likely to receive a job offer than their non-black peers. As compared to other ethnicities, black talent is also less likely to be recruited if educated outside of the top 20 universities.

In addition, our qualitative and survey research found that:

5. Representation at leadership levels makes a difference

From our qualitative research, **firms with visible black leaders see higher black graduate applications than those who do not.** In our survey, 46% of respondents highlighted 'limited representation in management' or 'limited representation in leadership' as a challenge to their likelihood to apply for certain roles. In our survey, black talent was eight times more likely to cite a lack of visible leadership as a detractor to their decision making on applications to organisations.

In qualitative interviews and focus groups, individuals commented that, *'It makes a difference when people look and sound like you.'* Others noted that, when searching for a role, *'You look for somewhere you can see people like yourself - people with similar characteristics and see their progression, to see a pathway and support.'* As one person reflected, *'If you don't see people ahead of you, encouraging you, applications are quite challenging including assessment centres - you already feel like you're behind others.'*

There is clearly a deterrent which is removed for black talent by having visible leadership reflecting the diversity of the graduates an organisation wishes to recruit. Indeed, having visible black leadership is one of the easiest ways for graduate talent to feel that the company will support their career when considering where to apply. We would therefore recommend that organisations that wish to secure greater black applicants should ensure senior recruitment slates are appropriately diverse, whilst also supporting any existing black staff as they progress to senior levels.

6. Bias may persist in recruitment processes, impacting those who learn later about career opportunities

Our research found a **disparity between when black students first learnt about pathways to secure careers** within the financial, professional and legal sectors as compared to non-black peers. The timing of applications for competitive summer internships for undergraduates could disadvantage those whose career discovery takes place later. To secure internships positions, students must often be aware of and ready to apply within their first and second years. This is relatively easy for students with the prior knowledge and familial support to anticipate this process. However, Figure 11 shows us that 40% of mixed students and 50% of black students learn about professional service roles at university, compared to 30% of non-black peers. Whilst at the end of their student careers black candidates feel familiar with their options, during the all-important first few years of university, they may have lesser awareness and thus learn later than their peers about opportunities to apply for internships and other relevant employment experiences.

During our interviews, one student remarked that, *'I got an understanding of 'what it takes' too late.'* This may result in black students being disproportionately rejected by recruitment processes due to a lack of specific early internship experience. **Simple changes to recruitment processes and a broader assessment**

of indicators of potential could have a marked impact upon black candidate success rates. Organisations should also be mindful of using undergraduate internship programmes as a key route to identifying talent.

This raises the question as to why black talent may be late to learn about career opportunities, which for some may be related to socio economic barriers. If candidates are the first in their family to attend higher education or are not part of a personal network with strong representation across a variety of sectors, they may not receive the same level of career preparation and advice for certain sectors as their peers. A consequence of the under representation demonstrated by Figure 1 above, is that a family of black heritage may be less likely to have careers in the financial, professional and legal sectors. And, as noted above, if candidates learn later than their peers about career opportunities this may impact their ability to meet application requirements. Diversity schemes such as Rare Recruitment, Bright Network, and The Amos Bursary are a key source of advice and coaching according to many black students interviewed, but these programmes are often highly competitive and sometimes black students are not aware of them. During interviews, some reflected on their own process of applications, noting that, *'The lack of support and knowing what to expect was a challenge.'* Others commented that, *'If you knew about Rare, you were fortunate,'* and that, *'Not everyone knows about third parties who can help'.*

7. Graduate recruitment processes could penalise those who prioritise longer term academic qualifications.

Our research has found that black candidates are twice as likely as their non-black peers to have received post-graduate qualifications. Whilst further analysis is required, we would question whether graduate recruitment processes could penalise those who prioritise post-graduate qualifications, with candidates potentially being viewed as 'overly specialised' or insufficiently able to demonstrate a focus on a commercial career as compared to peers.

8. Socio economic barriers and racial bias can form layered additional challenges

Our research found that **non-black candidates were twice as likely to be offered a role at the end of interview stage than their black peers.**

During interviews, a hiring manager noted that, *'Black candidates significantly drop-out in the interview process mainly because of verbal skills and commercial judgement.'* Often, once at the interview stage, **interviewers will be looking for a broader set of soft skills to be evidenced by the candidate, often described as 'polish'.** For anyone from a lower socio-economic background, regardless of race or ethnicity, an employer may be looking for an ability to operate within professional corporate social codes, and this may unintentionally favour individuals with a particular accent, mannerisms or conversational skills. Race can amplify this process, overlaying a socio-economic stereotype with long-held historic racial stereotypes. This may mean that black candidates must spend more time than their peers on code switching, for example preplanning conversational anecdotes.

Our research also found that there were socio economic related issues surrounding access to interview processes generally. One person interviewed reflected that, *'One graduate scheme in particular required candidates to go to for assessment days - I had a weekend and evening job which helped to pay for travel, and interview outfits. For some roles travel is eventually reimbursed, but I can see how it's a barrier for some people.'*

Separate from these socio-economic issues, **a black candidate may be hindered by their seeking to manage certain anti-black stereotypes.** For example, black women may be aware of perceptions of what is professional and smart in terms of hair presentation. Awareness of wishing to navigate and avoid reductive stereotypes such as the 'strong black woman' or the 'angry black man' can hinder individuals from feeling able to express themselves honestly without fear of being judged or dismissed. Signs of hesitancy or a lack of confidence seen by the interviewers may in fact be the result of candidates steering away from these potential risks, rather than a lack of polish or suitability for the role. Such stereotypes and fear of being judged can hamper confidence and distract from preparation and performance. One interviewee noted that, *'Because of perceptions about hair, I spend extra time straightening, not preparing. There's a combination of nervousness and distraction.'* Another reflected that, *'I was often criticised for being quiet in assessment centres - striking the balance between being quiet and overbearing because of stereotypes.'*

9. There is an additional opportunity if organisations recruit beyond the top 20 universities

Our research shows that black talent is less likely than non-black peers to be recruited when educated outside of the top 20 universities. This aligns with our qualitative research from young black talent, who feel that they are perceived as a 'risk'.

By restricting recruitment to the top 20 universities, organisations are failing to reach the wealth of black talent at UK universities, who are studying relevant subjects and pursuing additional qualifications, yet still facing rejection. Our research observed some indicators that this bias towards the top 20 university graduates results in a scenario where the firms that do issue offers to black candidates disproportionately offer roles to a select group from the top 20 universities. Black students who successfully obtain a job offer in target industries often receive multiple offers, which implies employers are targeting the same candidate pool. Black employees surveyed who have successfully obtained a job offer received 1.7 offers on average and 80% of them had a cross-offer whereas the average is 1.6 offers for non-Black employees and only 73% had cross-offers. In short, they may be placing themselves at a competitive disadvantage with other organisations, all pursuing the same individuals, at the expense of the wider pool of black talent available.

F. Conclusion

Our research suggests that the old adage is true; black talent works twice as hard to get half as far. They are well represented at university, well educated, knowledgeable of career opportunities, keen to apply, but black graduates continue to fall away through the recruitment process.

Organisations should take a renewed look at both the barriers that continue to exist in the recruitment process, and work to change mindsets focusing on the potential of a candidate. It can no longer be said that qualified black talent is not available. Our research shows that there is an opportunity here to significantly diversify graduate pipelines with talented individuals of black heritage.

G. Third Party Contributions

The BTC is building a platform for collaboration on this issue, between our Signatories and those who can support their efforts to drive equitable representation for black talent. Before publication, we hosted a roundtable with key third parties and invited their commentary on the research and their own work on this agenda to help frame the findings with some of the tools so far identified to counter this complex issue. We are grateful for their input, expertise and support.

I. The Chika Collective

The Chika Collective is the human performance collective focused on Black Talent. We believe that Black Talent is an extraordinary asset and that when we can fully thrive, everybody wins.



We work shoulder to shoulder with leaders and Black Talent, using our deep subject matter expertise and experience to ensure your Black Talent fully thrives.

Thank you Black Talent Charter for continuously challenging the status quo with innovative, evidence based research and solutions. This research not only shows the disparity when it comes to representation, it also represents a clear call to action for any organisation that says it values Black Talent and wants to see us thrive.

As human performance experts, we know that in the world of high performance, when it comes to Talent, there are 3 key phases, all of which are essential for high performance. Firstly, Talent Identification. Secondly, Talent Acquisition and thirdly, Talent Fulfilment. We see this research through that lens.

Firstly, in relation to Talent Identification, the research makes it clear that the notion of Black Talent being hard to find simply cannot be true, when there is a fourfold difference in current representation in target sectors and the available graduating Black Talent pool.

Secondly, it makes it clear that when it comes to Talent Acquisition, despite much outward facing branding that features Black Talent, the experience during the acquisition phase lies in stark contrast. It is time that organisations matched their customer facing imagery with a reality that includes a true anticipatory welcome for Black Talent.

Finally, while the research does not look specifically at Talent Fulfilment, it is highly likely that organisations failing at the first two phases are unlikely to be creating conditions where the Black Talent they do benefit from is able to fully thrive. Without that, the organisational reputation when it comes to Black Talent will be further damaged and thus the current cycle will be repeated.

Thank you again to the Black Talent Charter for this important work. Research continues to prove that there is a high and strong supply of Black Talent that continue to perform in spite of the reality of their conditions.

Organisations that invest in Black Talent will continue to benefit from the highest levels of human performance, giving themselves huge commercial advantage.

The Chika Collective works shoulder to shoulder with organisations to match their brand promises with their reality when it comes to Black Talent - because Black Talent is a force for good, not a problem to be solved and when they can fully thrive, everybody wins.

II. BR Insights

Odessa Hamilton

MSc, PhD candidate, Consultant Scientist & Statistician and Translational Science specialist



Findings arising from the BTC and Bain and Company report are compelling. Indeed, the insights reveal a notable underrepresentation of Black talent in some of the most influential and highest-paying salaried roles in the UK. Tested at a population level, it is striking that this bares out most in financial, technology, and professional services. With under 2.9% representation in a group that constitutes c.4.4% of the UK working population. This discrepancy is unsurprising given BTC and Bain and Company's findings that Black candidates are disproportionately rejected, despite being twice as likely to be overqualified. This, coupled with failed retention efforts. Regrettable too is the revelation that fewer than 1% of senior leaders in these sectors are Black, which is 3.40% less than what would be expected from an equitable perspective. Now is the time to critically examine the systemic factors driving these disparities, to enable effective and sustainable mitigating strategies.

As a socially responsible endeavour with bottom-line consequences, improving the proportional representation of Black talent in the corporate world has been an ongoing priority for firms. It is, however, well documented that behavioural risk can destabilise such efforts and contribute to why good intentions and strong strategies have led to less than optimal progress. The important findings from the BTC and Bain and Company report underscore the need to join leading organisations worldwide in their pursuit to identify behavioural patterns and drivers that lead to such undesirable outcomes. With a view to advancing forward, firms should adopt targeted, evidence-based interventions that address systemic behaviours and structures. To this end, firms are called to commit to a bold strategy that ventures beyond compliance. One that demands a reimagining of the recruitment, retention, and promotion *status quo*.

BR Insights, led by Dr Wieke Scholten, is a team of applied behavioural scientists skilled in identifying and managing behavioural risk. With qualitative, statistical, and technical expertise, they have a combined experience of over 50 years gauging the behavioural temperature and enacting evidence-based change strategies. They boast a strong history of helping prominent multinational firms, across industries, diagnose and resolve behavioural root causes that frustrate firmwide ambitions. Through a behavioural science lens, they also equip firms with the necessary tools to engage in forward-looking risk management, so that *culture* can support strategy. Scientific behavioural risk assessments allow the team to determine what exactly needs to be addressed to shape a context at work that encourages representation of Black talent. Interventions are consequently designed and tested in the organisation to measure effectiveness and evidence what really works. A comprehensive approach that allows for effective, sustainable organisational change to improve outcomes in a way that meets the moment.

III. 10,000 Interns Foundation

Jameela Raymond

Chief Operating Officer

Jameela Raymond is Chief Operating Officer at the 10,000 Interns Foundation, where she leads on building a sustainable and resilient organisation capable of driving long-term change for Black talent throughout the UK.



In undertaking this research on the broken pipeline for graduate Black talent, the Black Talent Charter has shone a light on an uncomfortable but all-too-common set of realities that young Black talent often face at the beginning of their career journey. The findings in this research qualify a truth which for many has long been only an assumption: the lack of Black employment in key corporate workplaces in the UK is not due to a lack of Black talent, but rather that corporate job recruitment processes are often inaccessible and exclusionary.

This truth was at the heart of founding the 10,000 Interns Foundation and the 10,000 Black Interns programme. In a professional landscape where Black graduate talent are two times less likely than their peers to secure a job role while being twice as likely to be overqualified for the same job, the 10,000 Interns Foundation seeks to open doors for Black students and graduates, through our flagship programme 10,000 Black Interns. As a result of this targeted intervention, we have seen great results, which are in line with the Black Talent Charter research findings. More than 70% of our 10,000 Black Intern programme alumni are currently employed, with 30% of alumni retained at their internship host organisations. And importantly, we've found no direct correlation between application quality and intern performance for our candidates. While many applications from Black candidates may be perceived to be falling short, the performance of these same individuals once hired often matches or surpasses their peers. It's the narrow definition of "quality" that biases recruitment and creates the highest barrier to entry.

It is clear that the primary barrier to entry lies in how these narrow definitions manifest in the recruitment process, which in turn limits access for candidates who don't fit within these constrained criteria. Our own Impact Report includes a case study in which a surveyed participant shared that although they were aware that Black candidates were often statistically more qualified, the quality of applications for BAME applicants are generally poorer. There is an acknowledgment that white counterparts have more access to coaching on how to write applications, making them more likely to succeed in a rigid application process even if they are not the most qualified for the role.

We have found that a "skills gap" has often been cited as a core challenge in recruiting Black talent, although the most common critiques focused on "soft skills" – CV errors, interview performance, presentation, and office etiquette – rather than competency in the role. At the 10,000 Interns Foundation, we provide training for Black talent to improve on these soft skills, while also seeking to disrupt outdated

ideas around “quality” in a job application. The Black Talent Charter research supports our view: it is time to challenge the narrative that Black talent isn’t up to par, in order to stop cycles of exclusion and conformity. This research on the broken pipeline for graduate black talent is timely and of great importance, and a valuable contribution to our understanding of the realities of early careers for Black talent.

IV. Our Journi

Sharla-Jaye Duncan

Sharla-Jaye Duncan is the founder and CEO of Journi and Day one, empowering high potential diverse professionals and school-leavers from black heritage, female or low-household-income backgrounds from day one to board level. Sharla-Jaye holds a BSc from King's College London and an MSc from Oxford University.



The report provides a compelling case that more needs to be done, which resonates with our feedback from employer partners, government relations and our community.

What's astonishing though is:

- **The representation of applications versus actual offers:** the problem isn't pipeline, it's acceptance.
- **Intense offers of 'top 20' university students:** black heritage (and mixed heritage even more so) talent from top universities is fiercely sought after. These candidates may be seen as more 'safe' options from our own insights, which may point to some of the class biases that exist in the UK.
- **The dismal representation of senior talent, which is less than 1%:** ultimately plays a role in the confidence, belonging and acceptance that black graduates must feel when interviewing.

So what now?

Now we are clear on the basis for change it's time to look at pragmatic examples of how to change. Simply implementing a number of activities in the hope they will turn the dial isn't enough; businesses must also measure their effectiveness to ensure they are making a meaningful impact. This must be measured in a comparable way to other interventions, a bit like an 'inclusion ROI (Return on Investment)'.

By quantifying the benefits of inclusion activities, corporates can better understand their impact on employee attraction, retention, inclusion, and overall business performance.

Measuring Inclusion ROI allows organisations to assess the tangible benefits derived from their inclusion efforts. For example, if companies knew that hiring a service to provide diverse interview panels increased the confidence of black heritage students by X% and therefore successful applications by Y% they could take an informed view of its cost-effectiveness.

This could be compared to spending on inclusive awards ceremonies (and the likelihood of these yielding increased offers), for example. Collating a body of evidence into 'what works' would ultimately help corporates make better decisions.

This would also increase employee trust and satisfaction. Furthermore, by systematically evaluating these metrics, companies can make data-driven decisions to refine their strategies, ensuring that their inclusion initiatives align with their business goals. There is no reason why this can't be publicly shared.

Research shows that tailored mentorship programs, internship opportunities, and networking events significantly improve outcomes for these individuals. For instance, companies that establish mentorship networks connecting black graduates with senior leaders can provide invaluable guidance, fostering professional development and creating pathways for career advancement. But to what extent? How much will this cost? And how does it compare to other possible interventions? Knowing this would help all employers take a much more powerful approach.

At the forefront of these efforts is **Journi**, dedicated to improving the career progression of high-potential black, female, and low-household-income professionals.

Our inclusive leaders programmes invite corporates into the 'what works' conversation so that we can help all employers across the UK analyse their own data, to better understand how to use their limited resources to create more meaningful change.

V. Leading Routes

Paulette Williams

Founder and CEO

Paulette is a committed leader in education with over two decades of experience in fair access, equity, and education strategy. She has led a number of impactful initiatives which aimed to create communities within higher education and research; as well as drive systemic change across the academic pipeline. Her expertise in strategy, leadership, and education policy positions her as a powerful advocate for creating equitable academic environments.



Research like *Why We Need to Fix the Broken Pipeline for Graduate Black Talent* is essential for confronting the entrenched barriers faced by Black communities. This study into the challenges encountered by Black talent in the financial and professional sectors reveals familiar patterns of systemic racism that Leading Routes identifies within higher education and academia.

In higher education, these challenges emerge early which directly impacts their career trajectory. Just as financial and professional fields struggle to recruit and retain Black talent, academia also faces lower retention and progression rates for Black students and staff. Research into these issues for Black students in higher education shows there are layered challenges linked to institutional culture and practices, along with personal financial and social barriers, all of which impact students' sense of belonging and chances of success.

The finding from '*Why We Need to Fix the Broken Pipeline for Graduate Black Talent*' that Black professionals are eight times more likely to view the lack of visible Black leadership as a deterrent is especially powerful. This resonates with the reality in higher education, where fewer than 1% of professors in the UK are Black. The scarcity of Black role models and mentors in senior positions not only discourages students but also perpetuates a cycle of exclusion. As in the corporate world, this lack of representation creates an environment where Black students and junior staff often feel isolated, without the networks and sponsorships that are critical for career progression.

The research highlights the importance of creating pathways that support Black talent, not only through the higher education system but also in their transition to employment. Initiatives like Leading Routes play a vital role by improving access and offering a strong sense of community. However, it is corporations that are best positioned to drive lasting, organisation wide change. The solution lies in a comprehensive, sector-wide approach to identifying and dismantling systemic racism embedded in policies and practices. Like higher education institutions, corporations are complex entities and risk addressing these issues in silos, often relying on the commitment of a few dedicated individuals. A strategic approach is essential—one that moves beyond short-term positive actions and deeply embeds equity and inclusion into the organisation's culture and long-term objectives.

This research serves as a vital reminder that systemic barriers are interwoven across sectors, impacting Black talent from education through to their careers. It is encouraging, however, to see corporations willing to take the lead—not only by increasing representation of Black talent in financial and professional services but also by creating pathways for their progression into leadership positions. These forward-thinking organisations have the potential to dismantle long-standing barriers and set a powerful example for others to follow.

End Notes

ⁱ Extense. *The 1% Study*. <https://publuu.com/flip-book/48941/146663>; The Parker Review Committee. 'Improving the Ethnic Diversity of UK Business'. The Parker Review, March 2024. <https://parkerreview.co.uk/>.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.bain.com/insights/why-we-need-to-pick-up-the-pace-of-black-representation-in-finance-and-professional-services-in-the-uk-report/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Notes: Professional, scientific and technical activities includes legal, accounting, advertising, management consultancy, veterinary, architectural and engineering activities, activities of head offices and scientific R&D; chart excludes other professional segments (3.1M); each bubble represents the number of employees per professional segment.

^{iv} Figure 5. Universities close to cities with high black populations, such as London and Birmingham, see the largest numbers of black students.

^v Note: 1. Black students does not include Mixed-Black students. Includes students studying all degree types (undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD). 2. Target universities gathered from Complete University Guide Tables (2024) and validated with recruiters. Ordered per ranking in 2024 league table. 3. HESA data via Gov.UK
Source: HESA 2023

^{vi} Note: 1. HESA data for Black representation only includes UK domiciled students and is used as a proxy for whole student population; Black talent representation calculated against total UK university student population at all stages (including both UK and non-UK domiciled first year undergraduates and postgraduates. Sources: BTC Student Survey, BTC Employee Survey; Market reports; HESA

^{vii} Note: 1. Black students does not include Mixed-Black students. Includes students studying all degree types (undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD). 2. Other includes Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related studies, Architecture, Geography, Languages, Historical studies, Education, General Studies, Media and Design / Creative Arts. 3. PS feeder courses include medicine, physical sciences, engineering, social sciences, law and business.
Source: HESA Table 53 - UK domiciled undergraduate students of known ethnicity by CAH level 1 subject and ethnicity

^{viii} Note: Familiarity measured by an understanding of application process and what career entails; 1. Mixed Black heritage students include Mixed White-Black Caribbean or African. 2. Non-Black heritage students includes White, Asian, non-Black Mixed and other ethnicities
Source: BTC student survey conducted in December 2023 / January 2024 (n=400)

^{ix} Note: Familiarity measured by an understanding of application process and what career entails; 1. Mixed Black heritage students include Mixed White-Black Caribbean or African. 2. Non-Black heritage students includes White, Asian, non-Black Mixed and other ethnicities.
Source: BTC student survey conducted in December 2023 / January 2024 (n=400).

^x Note: Familiarity measured by an understanding of application process and what career entails

^{xi} Note: n=68 for Black employees as excludes those who did not attend university, or attended university outside the UK
Source: BTC Employee Survey January 2024

^{xii} Note: 1. Mixed Black heritage students include Mixed White-Black Caribbean or African. 2. Non-Black heritage students includes White, Asian, non-Black Mixed and other ethnicities. Source: BTC student survey conducted in December 2023 / January 2024 (n=400, of which 216 familiar with FS, PS and Legal roles comprising of 99 Black heritage students, 8 Mixed Black heritage students and 109 non-Black students)

^{xiii} Note: 1. Mixed Black heritage students include Mixed White-Black Caribbean or African. 2. Non-Black heritage students includes White, Asian, non-Black Mixed and other ethnicities. Source: BTC student survey conducted in December 2023 / January 2024 (n=400, of which 216 familiar with FS, PS and Legal roles comprising of 99 Black heritage students, 8 Mixed Black heritage students and 109 non-Black students)

^{xiv} Note: 1. Mixed Black heritage students include Mixed White-Black Caribbean or African. 2. Non-Black heritage students includes White, Asian, non-Black Mixed and other ethnicities. 3. Does not exclude students from applying to roles outside of FS, PS or Law Source: BTC student survey conducted in December 2023 / January 2024 (n=400, of which 216 familiar with FS, PS and Legal roles comprising of 99 Black heritage students, 8 Mixed Black heritage students and 109 non-Black students)

^{xv} Note: n=68 for Black employees as excludes those who did not attend university, or attended university outside the UK
Source: BTC Employee Survey January 2024