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The Missing Dimension: Where is 'race' in social policy teaching and learning?

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This is the summary of a report which is the result of an audit of social policy teaching and learning in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and of the dimension of 'race' and ethnicity within the Social Policy curriculum, student bodies and staffing. The audit was commissioned by the Social Policy Association (the SPA) [<http://www.social-policy.org.uk/>] and was carried out from the autumn of 2018 through to the spring of 2019. The conclusions of this report are those of the research team and not necessarily those of the SPA. Because of the modest nature of the funding available, it was not possible to explore a number of issues in great detail, but the view of the team is that the broad contours of the issues arising are clear enough for the SPA and other cognate bodies to act quickly.

The report includes seven elements:

1. A brief contextual review of 'race' and racism in public policy
2. A review of the SPA's position in relation to these issues
3. Interviews with key actors identified to us by the SPA through the informal support group associated with the project.
4. A literature review
5. Secondary analysis of publicly available data sets

6. A survey of all those HEIs in the UK identified as offering some form of social policy teaching
7. Observations and recommendations



The review of 'race' and racism in public policy presented in

Section 1 (i.e. the area of public life to which much of the teaching of social policy is directed) suggests that the dimension of 'race' has largely been rendered invisible during the past ten years as a direct consequence of government policy. Those sub-governmental agencies wishing to maintain a strong stance against racism and in favour of diversity in their work have found themselves hampered by a lack of resources and an appropriate strong policy framework to do so. Seemingly, it appears that the teaching of 'race' within Social Policy and related departments and schools in higher education institutions reflects this lack of concern for the dimension of 'race', a picture which the report overall – and particularly the response to the survey conducted by the research team – describes as dismal.

Regarding the stance of the SPA in relation to the dimension of 'race' and ethnicity as reflected in the pages of its journals, other key publications and attendance at its annual conference (including keynote speakers and paper-givers), the audit found that in areas of its key activities, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) representation is severely lacking. Further details are provided in **Section 2**.

Section 3 reports the views of a representative group of experts drawn from across the Social Policy teaching population with a range of years of experience. They identified a series of issues including recruitment of BAME students, difficulties in making the subject attractive to BAME students, and the somewhat alienating cultural orientation of Social Policy as a taught subject. Respondents referred to the 'whiteness' of Social Policy and offered a general recognition that the SPA and other relevant organisations, including funding bodies, need to do much more to strengthen the teaching of 'race' in Social Policy.



Section 4 summarises the findings of the literature related to this subject. Unsurprisingly, the literature is fairly scarce and some of what the team regarded as core literature is actually to be found in other disciplinary areas such as Sociology and Education. The team also drew on a highly relevant parallel report which addressed the teaching of 'race' in History courses.

The literature suggests that there exists an 'ethnic penalty' in areas including admission, progression, retention and achievement of BAME students in UK HEIs and that this is shaped by the teaching environment and approaches, and BAME staff ratios at UK HEIs. The lack of focus on 'race' within curricula is hardly surprising given the context provides little encouragement for 'race' to be regarded as a key element of the curriculum. This view of the field is supported by published data, summarised in **Section 5**.

In **Section 6**, we report the findings of a survey of the 65 HEIs which offer Social Policy as part of their teaching offer. Fewer than one quarter of the HEIs surveyed responded and in many cases the responses were incomplete. The picture presented was of very limited attention to the dimension of 'race' in terms of curricula, student numbers, staffing and support for students. Where 'race' was discussed, it was often in more general areas of discussion, such as migration or citizenship, rather than, for example, on the impacts of racism within public policy or in universities.

The **final section** provides a series of observations and recommendations for the Social Policy community within HEIs.

The full report is available at

<http://www.social-policy.org.uk/uncategorized/the-missing-dimension-where-is-race-in-social-policy-teaching-and-learning/>

Contact: For further information, back copies of Information Briefings or Research Briefings, or to join the Network, email gary.craig@galtres8.co.uk

The North East Race Equality Forum is a Network of around 300 individuals and organisations in the North East Region committed to promoting racial equality in the

context of social justice. No one organisation is necessarily committed to every idea published in the name of the Forum. The Forum is supported by the 'Race', Crime and Justice Regional Research Network, which includes researchers from each University in the region.

