

*Finding the 'Missing Dimension': The Social Policy Association's action plan
for 'race' and ethnicity in Social Policy*



Social Policy Association Executive¹

Context

In 2018, the SPA Executive recognised that issues relating to ‘race’ and ethnicity should have a higher profile and prominence within Social Policy in the UK. We then commissioned Gary Craig, Bankole Cole and Nasreen Ali to carry out an independent audit and to produce a report, [*The Missing Dimension: Where is ‘race’ in Social Policy teaching and learning?*](#) which recognises various areas where teaching and learning in Social Policy could be diversified, as well as the role of the SPA in supporting a higher profile for journal articles, research and curriculum development. As a first step in response to that report, the SPA organised for the opening plenary at the 2019 SPA conference in Durham to focus on ‘race’ and ethnicity in Social Policy, including esteemed academics within this field.

The goal of this action plan is to further and directly respond to the recommendations of the report and, as such, should be read in conjunction with the report. As a starting point, it is important that the SPA recognises the need for action. For example, in terms of the SPA’s nomination and endorsement process for the REF 2021, the lack of diversity among those submitting interest and subsequently being nominated was stark. And it is also evident that the Social Policy conferences lack diversity in terms of attendees and paper content, BAME writers and topics are under-represented in journals, and there is some evidence to suggest that there is limited diversity amongst Social Policy undergraduates. This reflects a broader trend in academia of under-representation of BAME staff, which is especially pronounced at the highest levels.

This action plan, alone, cannot be a panacea to all of these concerns, but it can be a springboard to recognising areas of concern and making a public stand to address them. Concerns regarding under-representation of (i) BAME academics in Social Policy, (ii) BAME students studying Social Policy, (iii) papers in journals and conferences examining BAME issues, and (iv) BAME academics featured in journals and conferences², can form part of a wider debate that is happening within other learned societies at the current time. This not only means that we need to ‘keep up’ with such debates, but that we also have the opportunity to bring learned societies together to create synergy. The latter means that not all of the recommendations below need to be addressed solely by the SPA.

¹ The SPA Executive would like to acknowledge a huge debt to Steve Iafrazi, Vice Chair of the SPA, for his leadership in driving our work in this field forward and, in particular, drafting this Action Plan

² Note that (iii) and (iv) are separate issues

Issues to bear in mind regarding the action plan:

- After ten years of austerity, welfare reforms and associated policies, evidence suggest that 'race' and ethnicity are key concepts that define inequalities in areas such as housing, welfare, work and poverty. As such, they should be more visible within Social Policy
- The SPA is similarly concerned about lack of representation in relation to class, gender, disability and other protected characteristics. It will be mindful of all of these, and the intersections between them, in all its work.
- The action plan builds on the recommendations made in the Missing Dimension report (see appendix 1). However, the plan also goes beyond these recommendations following further reflection by the SPA Executive.
- The action plan is a live document that will be a regular agenda item with the SPA executive and also in discussions with our partners. As such, the action plan, whilst being based around the core of recommendations from the Missing Dimension report, will be updated, amended and/or expanded as necessary.
- Reflecting the scope of the action plan and breadth of change, every SPA Executive member has responsibility for implementing the plan and considering further actions that may be helpful
- Many of the actions are long-term, though there are some more immediate tasks
- The action plan is a way for the Social Policy Association to play a role in influencing and changing the discipline of Social Policy to ensure it is both diverse and inclusive as well as maintaining relevancy
- Many of the actions will require partnership working. Some will require developing new partnerships, which will position the SPA as an increasingly outward facing organisation. Importantly, this raises fundamental questions about the role of the SPA beyond managing and maintaining what we already do.

Action plan

Theme	Response to recommendation	Action	Lead	Timescale
SPA activities	The SPA will monitor for ethnicity and 'race' in all its work, including membership, leadership, publications, conferences, etc. to understand better the lack of diversity and then measure whether this action plan is achieving greater diversity	Membership forms and records to include data on 'race' and ethnicity Regular monitoring of the demographic profile of SPA members and conference attendees	Membership secretary with Chair, Vice Chair, Conference organisers	Annual report presented to Exec every April
	The SPA will work with other learned societies (eg BSA, SRA, PSA, RSS) to explore ways to increase diversity among members and within academia more generally, particularly at more senior levels	Meeting of key representatives from cognate learned societies to discuss how to diversify membership and support BAME academics better	Chair	Late 2020/early 2021
	The SPA will increase the profile of issues relating to 'race' and ethnicity within publications, in part through special issues, whilst avoiding 'ghettoization', and mini-thematic sections. The SPA will also actively seek BAME writers, rather than waiting for offers, for publications recognising that they may be	Journal editors to work with Cambridge University Press to monitor BAME content Journal editors to consider appropriate 'special editions' and/or themed sections Journal editors to develop a strategy to engage with BAME researchers and authors, alongside other under-	Journal editors and Publications lead	Annual report presented to Exec every April

	working on many different topics	represented groups		
	The SPA will work with the Royal Historical Society and other learned societies to discuss organising a joint conference to explore common issues raised here and share best practice	Joint conference or learning and teaching event on race and ethnicity organised by the SPA in partnership with other learned societies such as the BSA, RHS, PSA and others	Teaching and Learning lead	Autumn 2021
	The SPA will encourage and support teaching of issues relating to 'race' and ethnicity in HEIs	The SPA will commission a team to identify and signpost teaching materials that could be useful to members to expand teaching of 'race' and ethnicity	Teaching and Learning lead, with a task and finish group	Spring 2021
Working with partners in education	The SPA will provide resources for the teaching of 'race' and ethnicity in schools, FE colleges and HEIs	Review of how the SPA might engage with schools and FE providers – to engage with the next generation of Social Policy students	Teaching and Learning lead with a task and finish group	Spring 2021
	The SPA will provide resources to support targeted recruitment drives for prospective BAME students with clear messages about the value of Social Policy. The SPA will provide resources to help provide appropriate support for BAME students once recruited	Development of a centralised bank of Social Policy sources and/or video shorts that schools, FE providers and HEIs can use with their prospective and existing students		
	HEIs will be encouraged to undertake an effective audit of the	The SPA Executive will liaise with social policy convenors in relation	Chair	Autumn 2021

	balance of all departmental courses and the content of each course	to social policy departments and work with other learned societies to engage more broadly with HEIs on this issue		
	HEIs will be encouraged to establish effective training for staff including on unconscious bias	The SPA Executive will liaise with social policy convenors in relation to social policy departments and work with other learned societies to engage more broadly with HEIs on this issue	Chair	Spring 2021
	HEIs will be encouraged to collect, and act on, retention and performance data of BAME students	The SPA will start by liaising with those HEIs with which we have contact. The SPA will seek to compile a more detailed snapshot of BAME staff and student numbers at HEIs where we have connections to understand Social Policy and BAME in more depth	SPA Vice-Chair	Spring 2021
	The SPA will commission research into whether and why BAME students choose Social Policy: this might be the basis for a further SPA-funded study or perhaps something much more wide-ranging	SPA to fund/commission research, perhaps as part of the Opportunity Grants	SPA Vice Chair	Autumn 2021

Working with partners in research	The SPA will apply pressure on a range of external organisations to ensure proper representation of BAME academics and proper representation of issues of 'race' and ethnicity	The SPA will work with other learned societies to apply pressure to Research England, the ESRC, the Academy of Social Sciences and so on to lobby for better representation of BAME academics and issues of 'race' and ethnicity	SPA Chair, External Relations	Ongoing
Other points from the SPA executive, not included in the Missing Dimension report	Increasing the diversity of the SPA executive	Encouraging and supporting applications to join the SPA executive from groups currently under-represented Adverts for new SPA executive opportunities to specifically mention that we welcome applications from under-represented groups	All SPA executive members SPA Secretary	Ongoing
	Explore the possibility and viability of establishing a Social Policy BAME network	Consult with SPA members	SPA Vice-Chair	Autumn 2020

Appendix 1 Recommendations from [the Missing Dimension report](#) were as follows:

1. The SPA needs to monitor for ethnicity and 'race' in all its work, including membership, leadership, publications, conferences, etc.
2. There needs to be targeted recruitment drives for prospective BAME students with clear messages about the value of Social Policy. This should be complemented with work at the school level and in terms of appropriate support for BAME students once recruited.
3. Increasing profile of 'race' issues within publications should be sought and this can be done in part through special issues (avoiding ghettoization) and mini-thematic sections and by actively seeking BAME writers (rather than waiting for offers).
4. Pressure should be brought to bear on the four national research funding bodies, ESRC and sister organisations, to ensure proper representation of BAME academics in REF panels and ESRC assessment panels and subgroups. The ESRC should be pressed to revive the idea of a thematic research programme.
5. Each HEI needs to undertake an effective audit of the balance of all departmental courses and the content of each course.
6. The SPA should meet with the Royal Historical Society and perhaps think of organising a joint conference to discuss common issues raised here.
7. There needs to be discussion with the various school bodies to ensure that the teaching of 'race' issues is properly reflected in later years of secondary schooling as a prelude to university study. For example, Black history offers an opportunity to more fully engage with 'race' issues.
8. HEIs should each establish effective training for staff including on unconscious bias.
9. HEIs need to valorise the teaching of 'race' and ethnicity in their courses including through effective publicity: the so-called prestigious universities would appear less so if they were to be seen to ignore or downplay the significance of 'race' in the curriculum.
10. Retention and performance data need to be collected in each HEI and acted upon.
11. More research is needed on whether and why BAME students choose Social Policy: this might be the basis for a further SPA-funded study or perhaps something much more wide-ranging.
12. All administrative recording mechanisms need to be improved, particularly to ensure that the present disjuncture between departments/schools and centralised administrative record keeping is addressed.

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