Diversity and Inclusion in Economics in United Kingdom Higher Education

Prof Leonard Nosa Aisien *FHEA*

professor, Elizbeth School of London, United Kingdom

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0014

Received: 31 December 2024; Accepted: 04 January 2025; Published: 04 February 2025

ABSTRACT

The Equality Act of 2010 provides a legal framework promoting diversity and equity within UK higher education. The Act aims to eliminate unlawful discrimination and ensure fairness, equity, and inclusivity in the United Kingdom. However, several studies have revealed discrimination and a lack of diversity in UK higher education. This study examined the state of diversity and inclusion in the field of economics in UK universities, a discipline highly influential in global policy formulation, using secondary data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The importance of having a diversified economics profession cannot be overemphasized. Greater diversity in economics provides opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to contribute new and innovative ideas to tackle the ever-changing challenges facing the economy and society. The findings from this study however show that that economics lacks diversity relative to other disciplines such as Law, Art and humanities, languages, management, and social sciences. The field of study is still male-dominated, and the BAEM groups and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are also underrepresented. This paper therefore aligned with the call for a targeted mentorship programme for the underrepresented groups in economics, decolonisation and internationalisation of economics curriculum, broadened and inclusive admission policies for economics, and stronger collaboration with specific organisation hiring economics graduates to organise industry-specific workshops on practical industry-relevant skills.

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusion, Economics, UK Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Economists play a crucial role in policy formulation in every society. They provide policy advice in the public and private sectors that directly or indirectly affect the lives of millions of people from diverse backgrounds. To formulate innovative policies, a diversified economics profession is essential. Greater diversity in economics provides opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to contribute new and innovative ideas to tackle the ever-changing challenges facing the economy and society (Fuentes at. al 2023). Failure to attract, train, and engage economists from diverse strata of society may result in biased views on critical socio-economic issues. This can reduce the credibility and trust in economic research findings and policy prescriptions (RES, 2024; Fuentes et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of having a diversified economics profession in society, statistics have revealed that economics is one of the disciplines in UK higher education that lack diversity. Although the literature on diversity and inclusion in UK higher education is rich, there has been less attention to diversity and inclusion in economics. This may be due to the discipline's classification by researchers among the social sciences, where the female gender and the ethnic minorities are doing well in teams of representation and visibility (Mumford, 1997; Burser et al., 2022). Statistics from HESA show that economics displays a similar trend to STEM subjects rather than other social sciences. Therefore, there is a need to redirect research attention to diversity and inclusion issues in economics. Hence, this paper examines the level of diversity and inclusion in economics in UK universities and recommends strategies to promote diversity and inclusion in economics in UK universities.

Apart from this section, which deals with the introduction, section II covers the theoretical discussion of

diversity and inclusion. Section III presents statistical facts on diversity in economics in UK universities, while section IV focuses on discussion on the implications of the statistical findings, while section V explore the institutional responses to diversity and inclusion issues in Economics in UK universities. Section VI contains recommendations and concludes.

Theoretical foundation of diversity and inclusion.

Different theoretical perspectives on diversity and inclusion exist. These include the similarity-attraction theory, the social categorical theory, the social identity theory, the contact hypothesis, and the information-processing paradigm.

The social-attraction theory propounded by Theodora Newcomb in 1956 stems from the Heider theory of cognitive balance. The theory postulated that similar attributes such as beliefs, values, interests, hobbies, and demographics (for example, age, gender, and race) facilitate interpersonal affiliation and attraction (Newcomb, 1956). This implies that individuals are more likely attracted to others they believe hold similar attributes to themselves. Empirical works such as Newcomb (1961, 1968), Byrne (1971), and Berscheid (1985) found empirical support for this assertion.

Another theoretical explanation for group formation is **the social identity theory.** The theory developed by Henri Taijfel and John Turner posits that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity. When people have identified their social group, they tend to maintain a positive image of the group (in-group favouritism). The existence of these diverse groups within a social state is termed diversity. The motivation of individuals to maintain a positive image of their group constitutes the root of intergroup conflict. If social groups are categorised along a status dimension (race, gender, abilities, colour, sexual orientation), the low-status group members will strive to correct that low status individually or collectively. This is achievable through individual mobility (individuals seeking to leave that low-status group and join the high-status group), social creativity, and direct competition (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). However, while the low-status group members strive to migrate into the high-status group, the high-status group also seeks to protect their privileged position (out-group discrimination). Social identity theory, therefore, explains the psychological process of an individual identifying with a group. The theory better explains the relationship between self-concept, in-groups, and intergroup phenomena (Tseng, et al. 2022). Also, it provides a clear explanation of intergroup conflict caused by in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Ellemers, 2024).

An offshoot of the social identity theory is **the self-categorisation theory** developed by John Turner and others in 1987. The theory focuses on the cognitive process of an individual identifying with a group. The theory assumes that the self can be categorised into various levels of abstraction such as personal identity (self or personal) and social identity (group). Personal identity here refers to individual attributes while social identity refers to that of the group. Scholars have argued that in social identity, the self (personal) identity is cognitively grouped as identical and interchangeable to other stimuli within the category. This leads to depersonalisation (the process of viewing oneself as a group member rather than an individual) and group behaviour (Turner, 1985). This variation in self-categorisation is the foundation of many intergroup phenomena (Turner et al., 1987).

The contact hypothesis attempted to provide ways of reducing prejudices resulting from out-group discrimination. According to the theory, prejudices, and discrimination, which are common features among rival groups, can be reduced if certain conditions are met. These conditions include equal status between groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, support of authorities, and law and customs (Allport, 1954). This theory has been supported by numerous empirical studies such as Goto and Chan (2005), Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), Mckoeown and Dixon (2017), Paluck *et al* (2019), Mulak and Winiewski (2021) and Martiny *et al* (2022).

The information processing paradigm originated from the works of Miller (1956) and Houg and Page (2004). It argued that individual cognitive diversity enhances group abilities to solve complex problems. When individuals from diverse backgrounds form a group, there is a richer pool of ideas and perspectives. When these cognitive diversities are properly harnessed, groupthink is more likely to be avoided, resulting in better decisions and innovative outcomes. However, this depends on moderating factors such as leadership,

supportive organisational culture, inclusive practice, and proper team management (Mannix and Neale, 2005).

From the above theoretical discussion, group identification and membership and its impact on the organisation or society can be grouped into two perspectives. The pessimists (The similarity-attraction, social identity, and self-categorisation theories) help to explain the pull individual members of society feel towards a group of common attributes as theirs. This validates homogeneity, focussing on in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. This group of theories, therefore, implies that diversity, particularly the surface level, such as race/ethnicity, gender, or age, may create social divisions, resulting in poor social integration and negative group outcomes. Empirical findings from the works of Jehn et al. (1999), Phillips and O'Reilly (1998), Ancona and Caldwell (1992), Kearney et al. (2009), Lau and Murnighan (1998), and Kochan et al. (2003) validate this view.

The optimist (The contact hypothesis and the information processing paradigm) sees value in diversity. Their views suggest that heterogeneity creates values and benefits, generating better team outcomes. This theoretical viewpoint has been supported by empirical findings from the studies such as Florida (2002), Page (2007), Phillips et al. (2009), Hewlett (2013), Hunt et al. (2015), Lorenzo et al (2018), DBE et al. (2020), and Sharma, et al. (2021).

The above theoretical discussion sheds light on the possible foundational causes of discriminatory practices in some universities. Also, merely having a diverse workforce does not guarantee better performance. The positive impact of diversity is conditioned on some moderators, such as inclusive practice (Mannix and Neale, 2005). Therefore, diversity must be accompanied by inclusion for better performance in an organisation or society.

Statistical Facts on Diversity in Economics in the United Kingdom Universities

This section illuminates the trend and current state of diversity in economics in UK universities, focusing on the gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background of Economics students' enrolments.

Gender representation in economics in UK universities.

One dimension of assessing diversity is gender. Data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) shows the lack of diversity in undergraduate economics enrolment relative to other disciplines regarding gender. The enrolment figures for economics and the total enrolment in the UK universities are shown in the chart below.

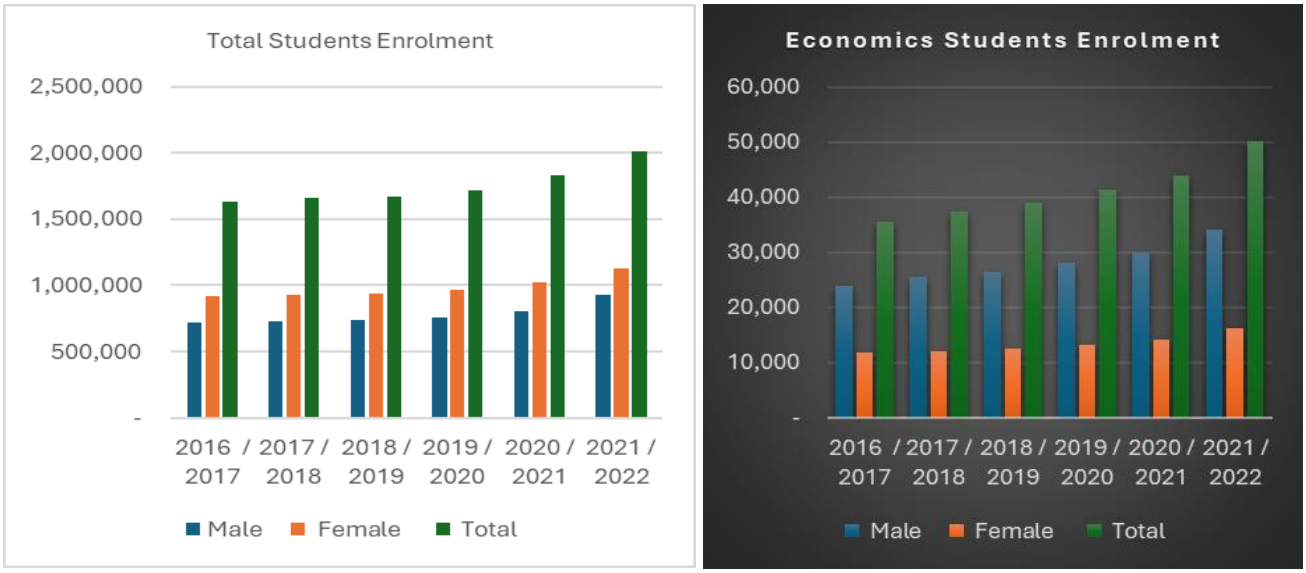


Fig. 1: Students undergraduate enrolment in UK Universities between 2016 and 2021

The data sources are the Diversity Report of the Royal Economics Society (2023) and the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

The above chart compares the gender distribution of students' undergraduate enrolment in economics and overall undergraduate enrolment in UK universities. Contrary to the overall picture of female dominance in total enrolment in UK universities, enrolment into economics departments is male dominated. From the chart above, in the 2016/2017 session, the total enrolment in undergraduate economics programmes in the UK was 35,425. The female enrolment was 11,690, or 33%, while males were 23,735, representing 67%. Similarly, in the 2021/2022 session, out of the 50,213 enrolled in economies, 16,069, representing 32%, were females, and 34,154, or 68%, were males. On average, 32% of undergraduate economics program enrolments between 2016/2017 and 2021/2022 were females, while 68% were males. This implies a gender imbalance in economics in the UK universities against the female gender.

According to the Royal Economics Society (2023), the gender imbalance in economics starts at the early stage of education. From their findings, only 18% of females who study economics at the A level choose to continue with economics up to the degree level. This is lower than that of male students, which is 25%. Costa-Dias (2023) added that there has been a stagnation in female representation among economics students at the undergraduate and PhD levels in the past 10 years. Within this period, only the master's degree level in economies witness a balanced intake by gender.

In terms of continuation rate and degree output, the female gender performed well during the period 2016/2027 to 2021/2022 sessions. While the number of female students attracted to economics was lower than their male counterparts, female economics students had a low dropout rate. They were awarded good class degrees (2:1 and above) and even more first-class degrees than their male counterparts from the same socioeconomic background and ethnicity (Royal Economics Society, 2023). The proportion of males and females with a good degree and first-class degree for the 2016/2017 and 2020/2021 sessions is shown in the chart below.

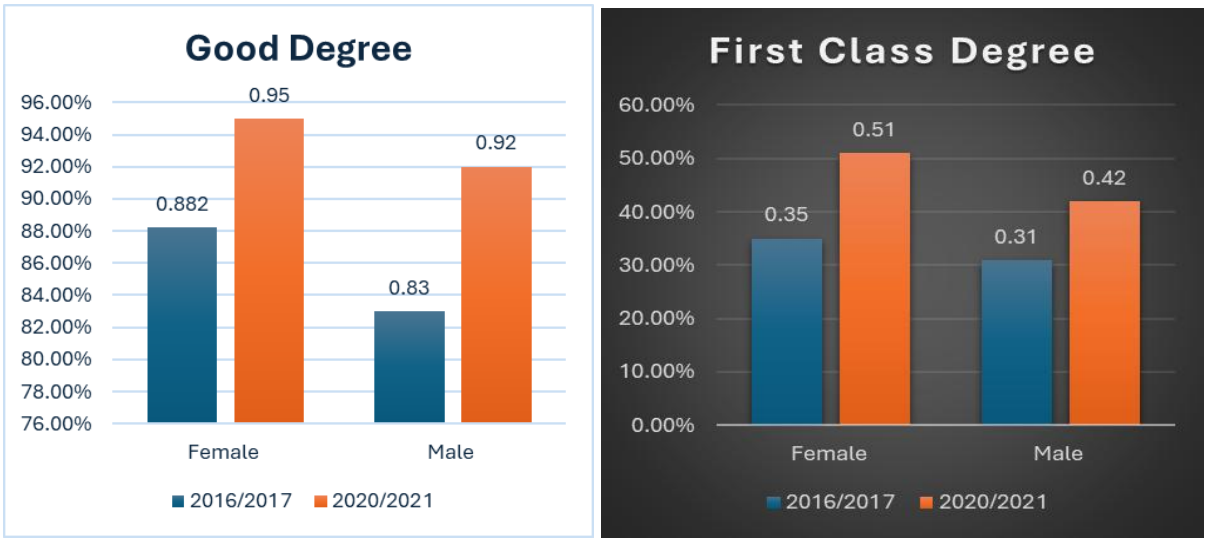


Fig. 2: Degree output for undergraduates in Economies for 2016/2017 and 2020/2021.
Source of data: The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Gender Representation in Employment in the Economics Departments in the UK

Apart from the gender disparity in the students' enrolment rate in economics, there is also statistical evidence of gender disparity in employment in the economics profession, particularly at the senior level. Statistics from the diversity report of the Royal Economics Society (2023), summarised in Table 1 below, show that the total employment of academic staff in the Department of Economics in the United Kingdom Universities in the 2021/2022 session was 1,800. From this figure, the female employment rate was 520, representing 28.89%. Comparing this to total employment in economics in 2012/2013, female employment was 22.99% of total employment in the field. This shows that female employment in economics increased by just 5.90 percentage points over the ten years. The gender gap is wider at the professorial level, where only 17.86% of total employment is female. Compared to the 2012/2013 session, female employment at the Professorial level increased by just 3.76 percentage points. The statistics for employment in various categories for the 2012/2013 and 2021/2022 sessions are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Gender disparity in employment in economics departments in UK Universities.

		Actual number	%	Actual number	%	
	Male	450	69.77	525	63.64	16.67 (-6.13 points)
	Female	195	30.23	300	36.36	53.85 (6.13 points)
	total	645	100.00	825	100.00	27.91
	Male	270	80.60	410	73.87	51.85 (-6.73 points)
	Female	65	19.40	145	26.13	123.08 (6.73 points)
	total	335	100.00	555	100.00	65.67
	Male	335	85.90	345	82.14	2.99 (-3.76 points)
	Female	55	14.10	75	17.86	36.36 (3.76 points)
	total	390	100	420	100.00	7.69
	Male	1,055	77.01	1,280	71.11	21.33 (-5.90 points)
	Female	315	22.99	520	28.89	65.08 (5.90 points)
	total	1,370	100.00	1,800	100.00	31.37

Source of data: Diversity report, Royal Economics Society (2023)

The gender gap in employment in economies is more comprehensive than in other disciplines except for the STEM courses, where the proportion of female employment was slightly lower. In the other Social Sciences, Humanities, and Languages, female employment at the lecturer level for the 2021/2022 session in the UK universities was 52.2%. The female employment for Reader and Professorial levels were 45% and 39%, respectively (Royal Economics Society, 2023). The employment gender gap across disciplines in the 2021/ 2022 session is shown in Fig 3 below.

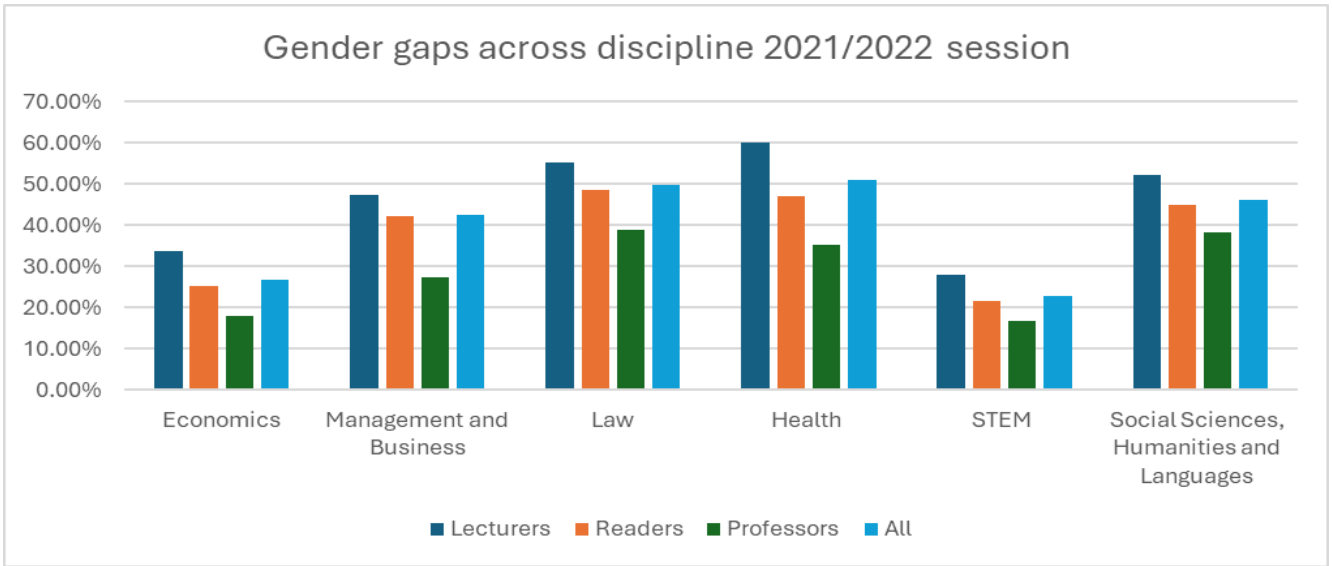


Fig 3: Gender gaps across disciplines for the 2021/2022 session
Source of data: Diversity report, Royal Economics Society (2023)

The above statistics show that economics remains one of the disciplines where there is stagnation in women's advancement. Several factors have been identified in the literature as probable causes of women's underrepresentation in economics relative to men. These factors include the low level of female interest in economics due to the mathematical nature of the discipline (Booth, et al 2000), the stereotypes associated with the field of study (Simon et al, 2022), work-life balance and family responsibilities (Stockdale and Nadler, 2013), The hostile environment and culture, occasioned by established men's dominance (Booth et al 2000; Burser et al, 2022), poor networking and mentorship for female economists (Kwiek and Roszka, 2020) and pipeline issues occasioned by underrepresentation in the early stage (Fuentes, et at 2023).

i. Distribution of Students' Enrolments in Economics in the UK Universities by Ethnicity

In terms of ethnic diversity, economics has attracted students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Table 2 and the charts in Figures 4, 5, and 6 show the representation of student enrolments according to ethnicity. According to statistics from HESA, 1,634,490 students enrolled in the 2016/2017 session in the United Kingdom universities. This increased to 2,008,525 in the 2021/2022 session. The enrolment of students of BAME background for the corresponding 2016/2017 and 2021/2022 sessions was 372,662 and 524,216, respectively. This shows that BAME students' enrolment constitutes 29.53% and 35% for the 2016/2017 and 2021/2022 sessions, respectively. Within the same period, economics students' enrolment of BAME background constitutes 37% and 42% of total students' enrolment in economics undergraduate programmes for UK universities for the 2016/2917 and 2021/2022 sessions, respectively. This shows that the representation of students of BAME background is higher in economics relative to the national level and increased by five percentage points within the six years.

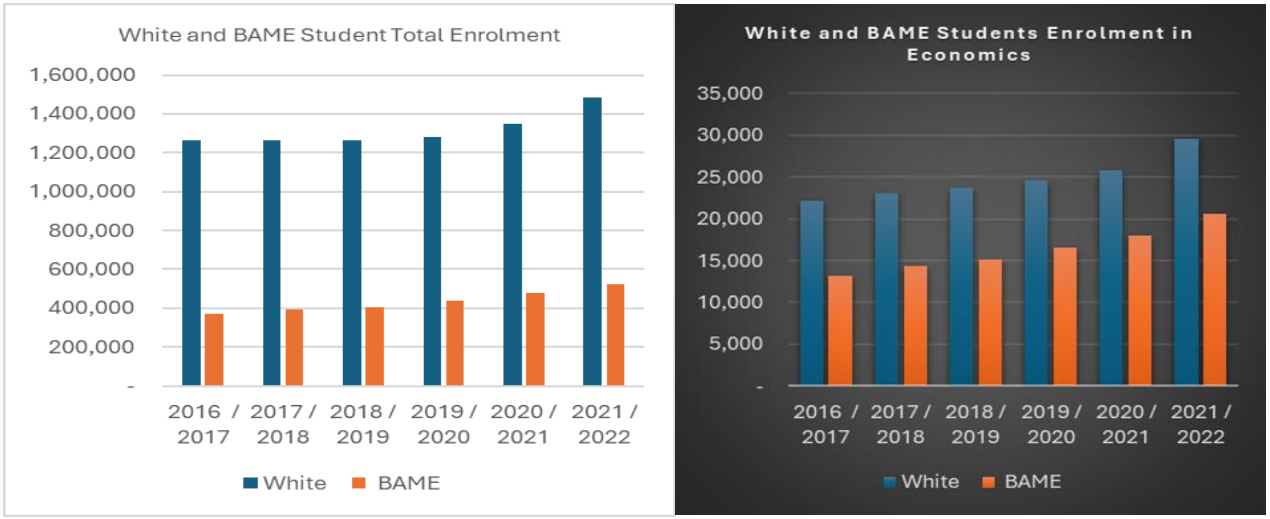


Fig 4: Total student enrolments and enrolments in economics in UK Universities according to race.
Sources of data: The UK Higher Educa tion Statistics Agency (HESA)

Table 2: Proportion of students' enrolment in economics according to ethnic background in UK Universities.

Sessions	White (%)	BAME (%)	Black (%)	Asian (%)	Mixed (%)	Others (%)
2016 / 2017	63	37	7	20.7	4.9	4.4
2017 / 2018	62	38	8	21.4	5	3.6
2018 / 2019	61	39	7	21.6	5.2	5.2
2019 / 2020	60	40	8	22.3	5.6	4.1
2020 / 2021	59	41	8	22.6	5.8	4.6
2021 / 2022	58	42	8	22.6	5.9	5.5

Sources of Data: The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Although the students of BAME background, overall, have been adequately represented in enrolment in economics, some groups within the BAME, such as students of Black ethnic group, are underrepresented. Students of black background enrolled in economics constitute only 7% of the total enrolment into economics programs in UK universities for the 2016/2017 session. This increased to 8% in the 2021/2022 session, showing an increase of just one percentage point. Students of Asian background, on the other hand, constituted 20.7% of total students in economics undergraduate programmes in the UK universities in the 2016/2017 sessions and increased to 22.6% in the 2021/2022 session. The implication is that, on average, 55.3% of students of BAME background enrolled in economics are of Asian origin, while only 19.5% are of black background, and 25.2% can be classified as others. This shows that 1 in every 2 BAME students enrolled in economics undergraduate programmes in UK universities is likely of Asian background. On the other hand, 1in every 5 BAME students enrolled in economics undergraduate programmes in UK universities is likely of black ethnic background. The dominant nationalities within the BAME group are Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Chinese, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

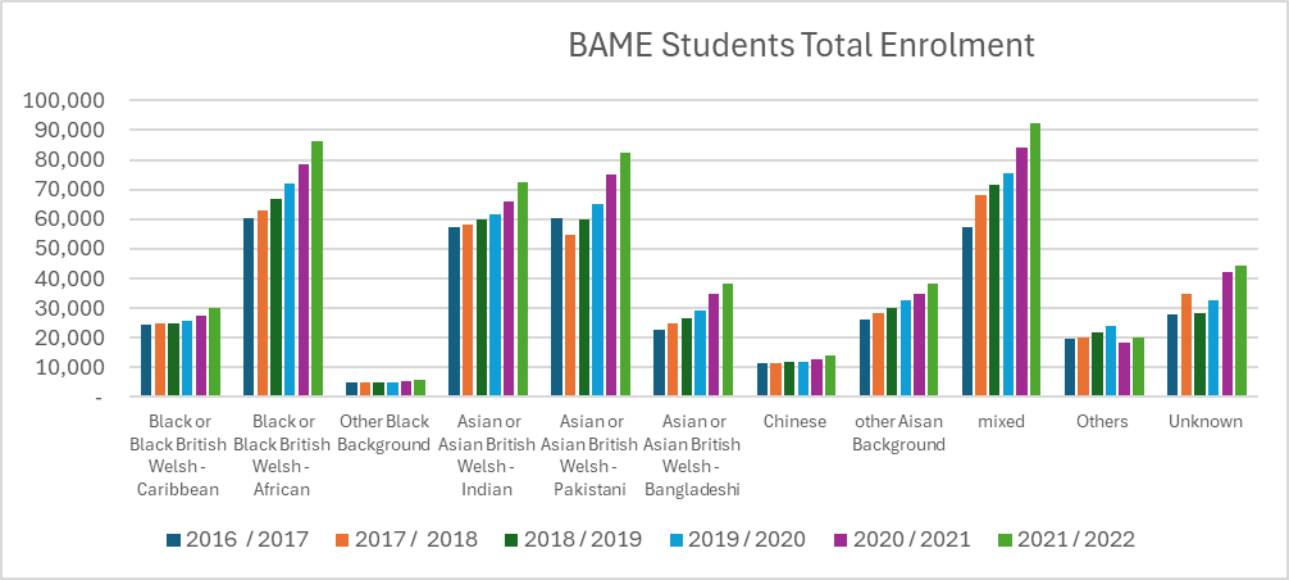


Fig 5: Distribution of BAME Students' total enrolment in UK universities
Source of data: The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

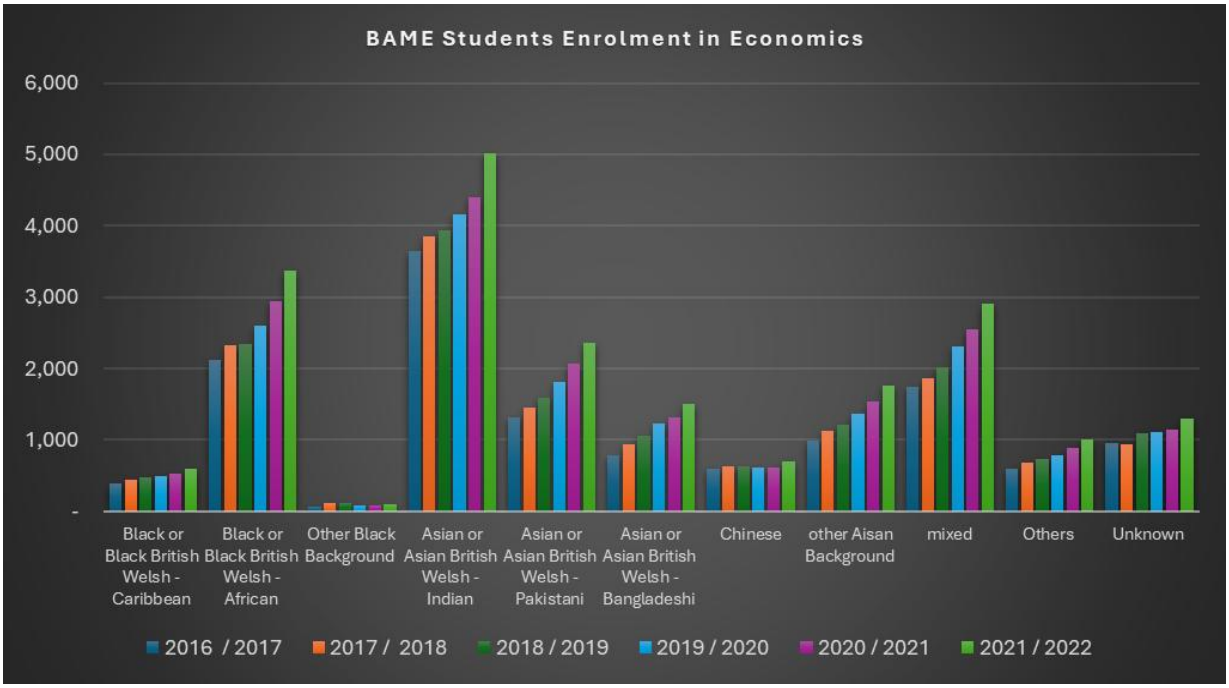


Fig 6: Distribution of BAME Students' enrolment in Economics in UK universities
Source of data: The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

The above statistics show that students of BAME background are well represented in economics undergraduate programmes in UK universities. However, the same could not be said of the students' output. From the conditional probabilities computed in the works of Fuentes et al. (2023) and Advani et al. (2020) based on data from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), students from BAME are less likely to obtain a good class degree (2:1 and above). Specifically, white students were 13 percent more likely to obtain a good class of degree relative to their counterparts of BAME background in the 2016/ 2017 session. This gap, however, dropped to 8.8 percent in the 2020/ 2021 session. This degree-awarding gap can hinder greater diversity in senior research positions in economics (Advani et al, 2020). This is likely to be true as poor attainment of BAME students in economics at the undergraduate level can dissuade them from further study in the field, reducing their chances of higher research positions in economics. Some of the causes identified in the literature include the problem of self-confidence of the students of ethnic minorities (Sedley, 1999), institutional culture (HEA, 2021), lack of role models (UUK, 2019), curriculum content, design and delivery (NUS, 2011), poor sense of belongs (Thomas & Hall, 2012, and NUS, 2011), and Inadequate information, advice and guidance (UUK, 2018; NEON, 2017; Crockford et al 2015).

ii. Distribution of Students in Economics in the UK Universities by social economic classification.

Economics can be classified as one of the elitist disciplines in UK higher education. Statistics show that socioeconomic background plays a significant role in students' enrolment in economics in UK universities. A considerable proportion of economics students who study in privately founded schools account for a sizeable proportion of students in Russel group universities and pre-1992 universities, are from upper socio-economic backgrounds, and have parents who attended higher education (Fuentes et al., 2023). Fig. 7 below shows the proportion of students whose parents attended higher education. From the figure, on average, between the 2016/20217 and 2020/2021 sessions, 55% of students enrolled in economics have parents who attended higher education. This is higher than the national average for all students enrolled in UK universities, which is 44% for the same period.

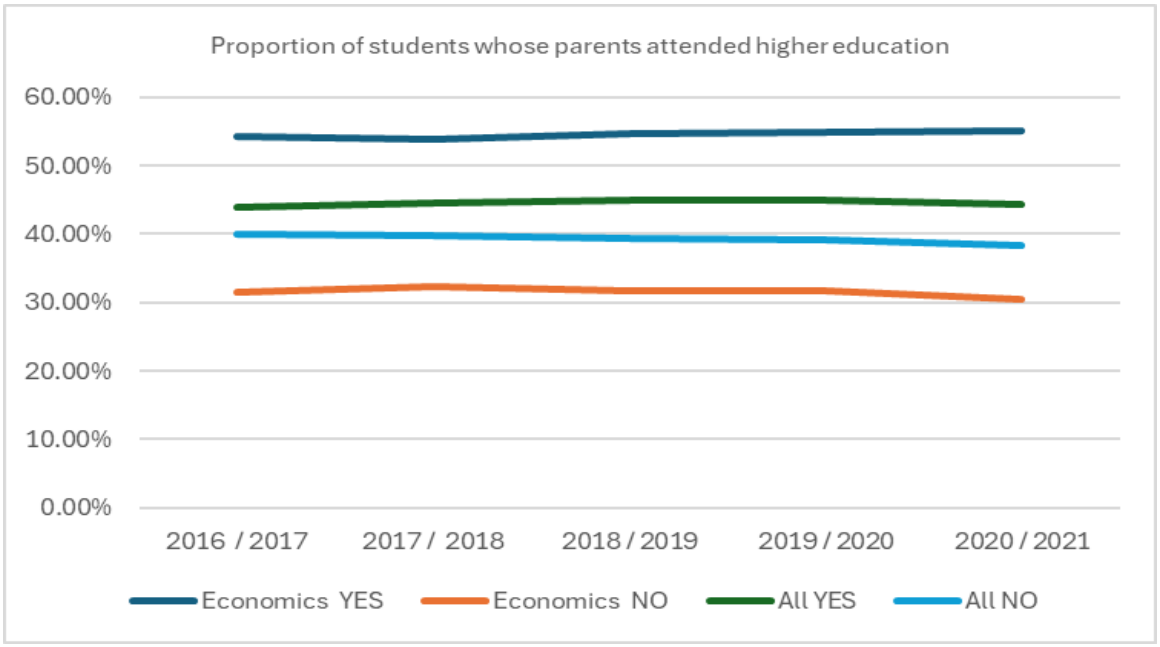
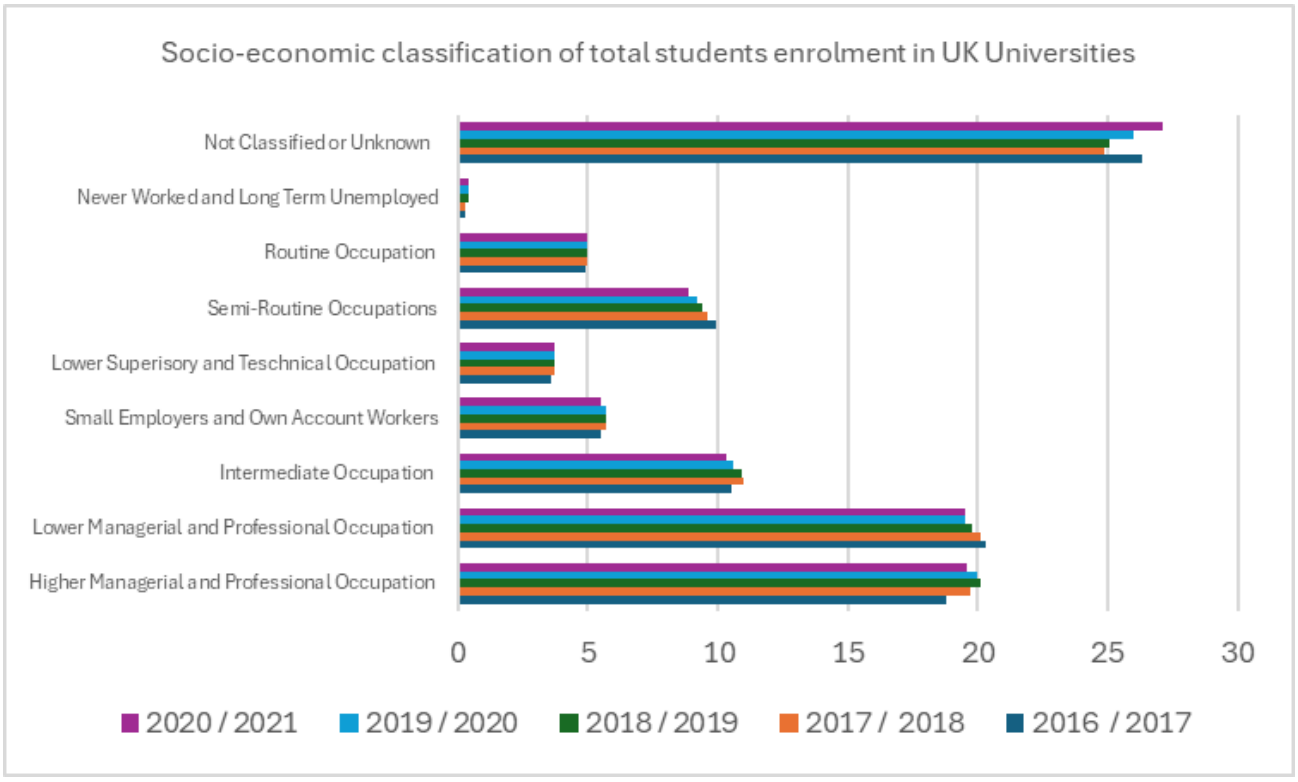


Fig 7: The Proportion of UK undergraduate students whose parents attended higher education.
Sources of data: The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Another dimension of socio-economic classification is the occupation distribution of the student's parents. Fig 8 below compares the occupation distribution of parents of students enrolled in economics and those of total students enrolled in UK universities. From this chart, on average, between 2016/20217 and 2020/202, over 50% of students enrolled in economics were from upper socio-economic backgrounds. Specifically, they are from parents who have managerial and professional occupations. Comparing this to the overall student enrolment in UK universities, an average of 20% of the students enrolled in the UK universities between 2016/2017 and 2020/2021 come from upper socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, economics intake into

undergraduate programmes is highly skewed towards highly prestigious universities. According to statistics from HESA, 49% of undergraduate students registered in economics in UK universities between 2016/2017 and 2020/2021 were in the Russel group, while 32% were in the pre-1992 universities and 19% were in post-1992 universities.



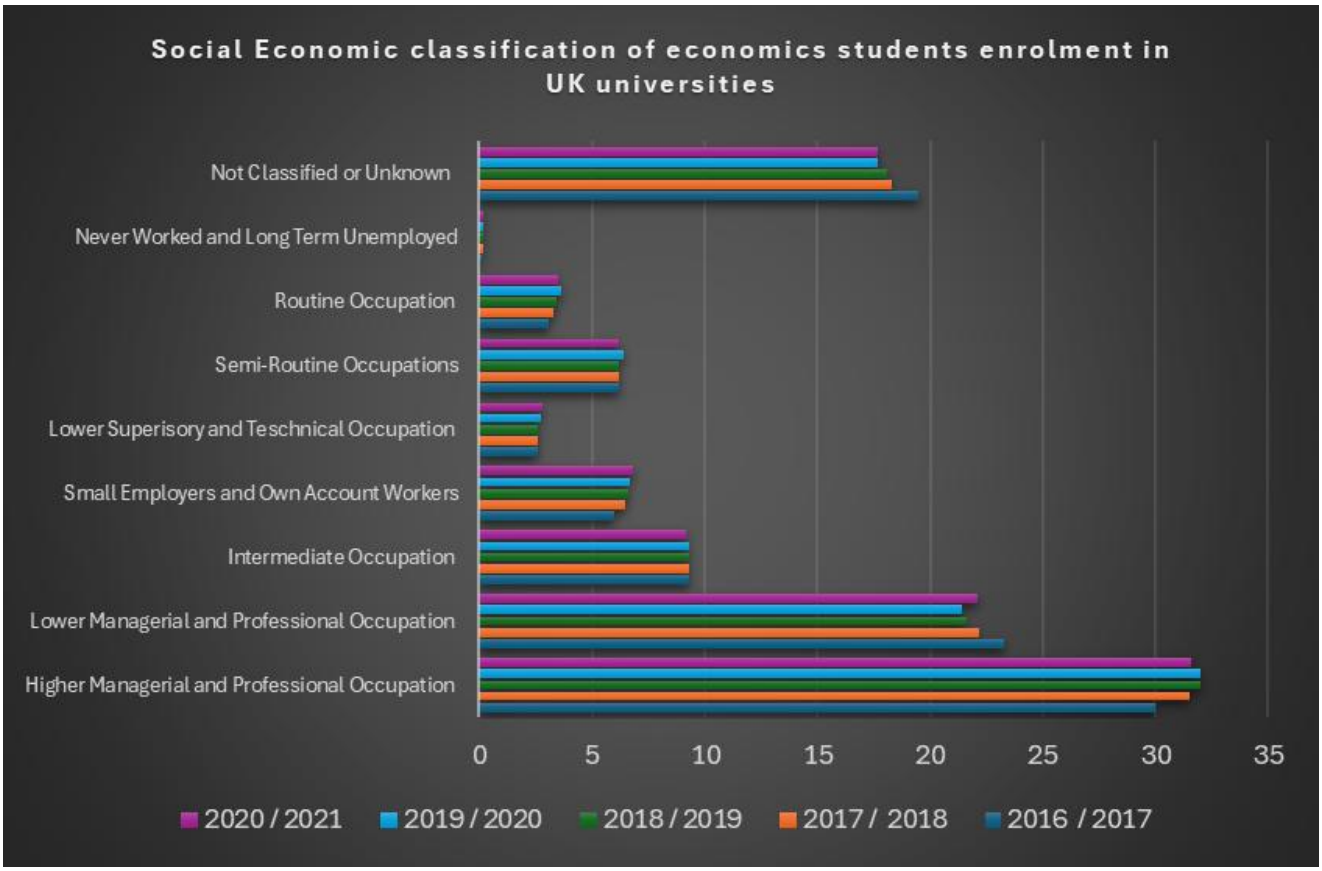


Fig. 8: Distribution of social economic classification of students' enrolments in the UK Universities (2016/ 2017 – 2021/2021 sessions)
Sources of data: The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

The students' socioeconomic background significantly affects the graduate outcome in economics. The conditional probabilities computed for economics students in the works of Fuentes et al (2023) and Advani et al (2020) based on data from HESA show that black students from a higher socio-economic background have a 30% likelihood of being awarded a first-class degree compared to their white counterpart from the same socio-economic background with 51%. Also, students of Black ethnicity from lower socio-economic backgrounds have a likelihood of 22% of being awarded a first-class degree compared to their white counterparts with a 41% likelihood. White male students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are significantly overrepresented in economics across all the various categories of universities in the UK, while students of Black ethnicity are underrepresented. Advani et al. (2020), in their survey on ethnic diversity in UK economics, concluded that Black economists are 64% more unlikely to work in Russel group universities than their white counterparts. Also, ethnic minority economists are less likely to hold senior academic and management positions. In the case of students, Black students are 60% more unlikely to study economics in Russell Group universities. At the same time, Bangladeshi undergraduates are half as likely as their white counterparts to study economics in Russell Group universities. While ethnic group differences in admission offer rates from UK universities have improved over the years, statistics show that ethnic gaps still permeate the system, particularly in the Russell Group universities.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF STATISTICAL FINDINGS.

The statistical facts presented in the previous session show that diversity and inclusion in Economics in UK universities are low compared to other social science disciplines. The course is male dominated in students' enrolment and employment at various levels, implying a long-run trend. In terms of race, the BAME group, particularly the black nationalities, are highly underrepresented in economics in UK universities. Also, the statistics revealed that economics is still one of the elitist disciplines in UK universities. A greater proportion of students in economics at UK universities are from upper socio-economic backgrounds. UK universities' lack of diversity in economics has important implications for the UK and the global economy. This is important as economists from UK universities have contributed significantly to the policy recommendations of multinational institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which dictate global economic direction.

A lack of diversity in economics narrows the perspectives reflected in research and policy prescriptions. This limitation results from the underrepresentation of groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Given their backgrounds and experience, these groups may provide helpful insight that could broaden the perspectives of research and policies.

Tradition economic models, which are mostly Eurocentric, have concentrated perspectives. They focus more on growth and efficiency issues and less on the informal economy, inequality, labour market disparities, poverty, and discrimination. Kerr and Vaughan (2024) and Savage et al. (2024) affirmed that economic research had paid less attention to these issues, particularly wealth inequality, one of the core challenges facing underrepresented groups. The lack of diversity in economics may have contributed to this oversight.

Another implication of the lack of diversity in economics is unconscious biases in research and Stereotype policy prescriptions. As correctly noted by Rodrik (2015), economists' lack of exposure to diverse social conditions can hinder their abilities to understand and address the complex issues facing different societies. This has resulted in a one-size-fits-all free-market policy prescription of economic institutions that failed in many application areas (Wolf, 2020; Actionaid, 2023).

Therefore, UK universities' lack of diversity in economics has limited the scope of research and policies by reinforcing dominant traditional economic models and neglecting perspectives from underrepresented groups that could lead to more elaborate and comprehensive policy recommendations and applications.

Institutional response to lack diversity and inclusion in economics in the United Kingdom higher education.

Policies and strategic interventions have been implemented by government and non-government organisations to boost diversity and inclusion in UK higher education and economics. The Home Office's

diversity and inclusion strategy contains the government's current direction for diversity and inclusion in the UK (2018 – 2025). Among the key objectives is to widen the representation and build a talent pipeline of people from the BAME community, women, and LGB individuals (Home Office, 2018).

In their 2021 – 2024 strategic plan, the Advanced HE introduced the idea of a holistic approach to EDI. This is with a mission of exploring the potential of a holistic approach to EDI that will support members to maximise their impacts across all equality areas (Advanced HE, 2024a). there are also the Advanced HE equality charters, which include the Athena Swan Charter of 2005, The Athena Swan Ireland of 2015, and the Race Equality Charter of 2016. These charters aimed at promoting gender and ethnic equality in higher education in the UK (Advanced HE, 2024b).

The Office for Students (OfS) has also introduced measures to promote diversity and inclusion in higher education in the UK. These measures aim to eliminate unexplained gaps in degree outcomes between white and Black students by 2024 – 2025 and eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030 – 2031 (OfS, 2018).

Additionally, the University UK (UUK) has conducted a series of research and surveys to provide an evidence-based approach to addressing issues of diversity and inclusion. In their 2019 project, they identified five steps in accelerating progress in the issue of diversity and equity in UK universities. These steps, which have formed the framework for universities to develop their own EDI policies, include providing strong leadership, having conversations about race and changing culture, developing racially diverse and inclusive environments, getting the evidence, analysing the data, and understanding what works (University UK, 2019). Most universities have adopted these steps and address BAME attainment gaps at various stages.

Apart from these general initiatives, there is the Government Economics Service Degree Level Apprenticeship (GESDAP) specific to economics. Established in 2018, this initiative is the first UK economics degree apprenticeship scheme. It allows students to gain practical experience while receiving a fee-free economics degree programme from the University of Kent. This initiative aims to attract more students from diverse groups and backgrounds to economics by eliminating the financial bottleneck hitherto identified as a problem and offering practical experience in economics. According to Government Economic Service (2018), the main benefits of the scheme include a fee-free economics degree from the University of Kent, paid government employment, engaging in jobs that specifically impact society, and gaining a permanent government job on completion of the programme. The programme is open to UK nationals and Ireland, Nationals of the EU, EEA, Switzerland, and Turkey with settled or pre-settled status and who have resided in the UK at least three years before the application. It is also open to the nationals of commonwealth countries with the right to work in the UK. The first cohort of the scheme graduated in 2023 with an outstanding performance, with 97% of the beneficiaries graduating with 2:1 and above.

Also, non-governmental organisations exist to promote initiatives to boost diversity and inclusion in economics. These include the UK Women in Economics Network (UK WEN), The Women in Economics Initiative (WiE), SOAS Feminists Economists Network, International Association for Feminist Economists, and The Black Economists Network (TBEN). These organisations regularly organise conferences, symposiums, and webinars where issues relating to Diversity in economics are discussed. The goal is to promote networking and mentorship for its members, hence, improving their representation and visibility in economics.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examined the current state of diversity and inclusion in the field of economics in UK universities. Statistics show that economics lacks diversity relative to other disciplines such as Law, Art and humanities, languages, management, and social sciences. The field of study is still male dominated, and the BAEM groups and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are also underrepresented. While there have been appreciable improvements in representations of females and certain groups within the BAME, the representation of Black Africans and Caribbean is still an issue of concern. The lack of diversity starts from early stage in the field and becomes more pronounced at higher levels, leading to a phenomenon called the

"leaky pipeline" in the field.

Findings from theoretical and empirical studies have identified the potential causes of the continuous lack of diversity in economics. These factors include inadequate information, advice, and guidance, the abstract and mathematical nature of the course, Parental educational status, and school types. Other factors are ethnicity, socioeconomic background, lack of mentorship, and other structural barriers within the discipline.

The government through the HE regulatory agencies, initiated legislation, programmes, and initiatives to address the lack of diversity and inclusion in UK higher education in general, and some specific to economics. All the universities including the Rusell Groups have adopted Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategies aimed at eliminating all unexplained gaps by 2030 in line with the OFS policy direction. However, implementation varies across the universities as admission bias and attainment gap persist in UK universities.

The efforts to improve diversity and inclusion in economics are commendable. However, more specific actions for economics are needed to eliminate the imbalance and underrepresentation of certain groups in economics by 2030. The specific recommendations from this research in the direction include:

i. Targeted mentorship programme for the underrepresented groups. This will help to create a supportive, equitable and inclusive pathways for the underrepresented groups in the field of economics. This should be an institutionalised mentorship scheme in the department of economics, made up of mentors from diversified backgrounds trained with requisite skills to support mentees career aspirations. These mentors should provide tailored support on career advice in the field of Economics.

ii. Skill development, and networking opportunities in the field of economics. Skill development is essential as economics relies heavily on technical and quantitative skills which are often problematic and intimidating to students, particularly those from the underrepresented groups. Hence, part of the mentoring should be on networking the mentees with access to training workshops on mathematical methods, data analysis using specialised statistical software (Stata, Python, R, and Excel), and econometric techniques to build their confidence for quantitative research and policy analysis.

iii. The department of economics should create a stronger collaboration with specific organisation hiring economics graduate to organise industry-specific workshops on practical industry-relevant skills. This will help the students to understand the practical applications of economic models, hence, reducing the abstract nature of the course which has been identified as one of the problems associated with the disadvantaged groups. Also, these industry-specific workshops which may include discussion on emerging issues in the field of economics may further stimulate in the interest of students including those from the underrepresented groups.

iv. Provision of scholarships and financial support specifically for the underrepresented groups. The institutions and the department of economics should expand their partnership with industry and organisations to promote diversity scholarships for qualified students from underrepresented groups who have financial difficulties. This will help reduce cases of financial barriers for the students from these underrepresented groups in proceeding with their studies in economics particularly at the post graduate levels.

v. Broaden and inclusive admission policies for economics. Flowing from the statistics on diversity in economics, there is a need to broaden the admission criteria into the economics. Factors such as socio-economics background, school type, race, and gender should be considered during admission process.

vi. Decolonisation and internationalisation of curriculum in the department of economics. There is the need to continue to broaden economics curriculum to reduce its Eurocentric foundation and incorporate diverse perspective particularly from the global south. Apart from the mainstream models such as the classical and the neoclassical economics, heterodox economics models such as feminist economics, ecological economics, institutional economics, Confucian economic thought, Islamic economics, dependency theory, ubuntu economics, and other post Keynesian economics should be well incorporated into the curriculum. Decolonisation and internationalisation of the economics curriculum

boost representation, accessibility, and empowerment of students from underrepresented groups. Students from underrepresented groups seeing their communities reflected in the curriculum boost their confidence and further encourage their participation. Moreover, decolonisation and internationalisation of economics curriculum broaden perspectives, addresses historical inequalities, enhances relevance economic discussions to current diverse economic challenges, encourage critical thinking, and hence, promoting inclusivity.

The importance of diversity and inclusion in economics in the United Kingdom higher education cannot be over emphasis and a combination of the above strategies would help in this direction. A well-diversified and inclusive economics profession broadens perspectives to policy formulation, increases the credibility of policy prescription, and fosters greater social mobility. This will enhance democracy and social cohesion in the United Kingdom.

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BIO-NOTE

Leonard Nosa Aisien, Ph.D is a professor of Economics, and former head of Department of Economics, Banking and Finance, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Nigeria. Currently, he lectures economics and statistics at Elizabeth School of London. As a postdoctoral researcher, Aisien is focused on sources of economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, conducting studies on country specific and panel of sub-Sahara Africa countries, with several publications in peered reviewed journals to his credit.