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Research report

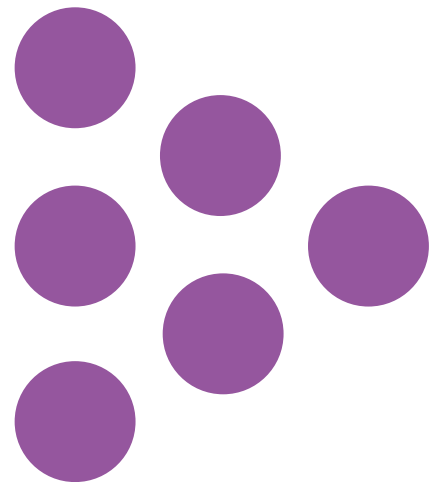
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# Racial Equality in the Teacher Workforce

An Analysis of Representation and Progression  
Opportunities from Initial Teacher Training to Headship

Summary Report

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



# Racial Equality in the Teacher Workforce: An Analysis of Representation and Progression Opportunities from Initial Teacher Training to Headship

## Summary Report

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Finally, we would like to thank all of the researchers who have investigated these issues before us and provided such important insights into the experiences and concerns of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds working, or wishing to work, in teaching.

This work was produced using statistical data from ONS. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.



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## Glossary

### Ethnic groups

This report follows government guidance on referring to ethnicity. We decided to use this official guidance for consistency and in recognition of its basis in research and user feedback. The guidance was updated in December 2021, including the decision not to capitalise ethnic groups, (such as ‘black’<sup>1</sup> or ‘white’) unless that group’s name includes a geographic place (for example, ‘Asian’, ‘Indian’ or ‘black Caribbean’).

The report refers to the following ethnic groups.

**Asian:** Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese; any other Asian background.

**Black:** Caribbean; African; any other black background.

**Mixed ethnic background:** white and black Caribbean; white and black African; white and Asian; any other mixed or multiple ethnic background.

**White:** English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British; Irish; Gypsy or Irish Traveller; Roma; any other white background.

**Other ethnic background:** Arab; any other ethnic group.

**Ethnic minority:** refers to all ethnic groups except the white British group. Ethnic minorities include white minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups.

Source: Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK ([ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/writing-about-ethnicity))

**Equality** is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability.

Source: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/secondary-education-resources/useful-information/understanding-equality>

**Ethnicity** is a social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioural patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

Source: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

**Disparity** means a lack of equality or similarity, especially in a way that is not fair.

Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disparity>

**Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognises everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued.

Source: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

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<sup>1</sup> Note that while we are following government guidance not to capitalise ethnic groups, we recognise that there is a diversity of opinion on the capitalisation of ‘Black’ and we acknowledge the sensitivities and multiple perspectives on this.

**Progression** as used in this report means that people at one stage of the teaching profession move to the next stage within the profession (e.g. an applicant to ITT is accepted onto a course, a newly-qualified teacher enters teaching, or a senior leader is promoted to headship).

**Race:** A racial group is a group of persons defined by reference to race; and a reference to a person's racial group is a reference to a racial group into which the person falls.

Source: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/9>

**Racial equity** is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or that fail to eliminate them.

Source: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

**Representation** as used in this report means the percentage of people from a given ethnic group compared with the proportion the same group of a similar age-group in the population of England as a whole. Groups are over-represented if their percentage in the teacher workforce in 2019/2020 is significantly greater than in the wider population and under-represented if their percentage in the teacher workforce is significantly lower. See the full report for details on how this is calculated.

# 1 Introduction

Racial diversity within the school workforce is valuable in ‘fostering social cohesion and most importantly, in supporting pupils to grow and develop in an environment of visible, diverse role models’ (DfE, 2018, p.2). Ensuring equal opportunities ‘helps realise everyone’s potential and that powers our economy, strengthens society and increases fairness’<sup>2</sup>. Teachers from diverse ethnic backgrounds bring different types of cultural capital which, if properly recognised and utilised, have the potential to enrich pupils, schools and society as a whole (Wallace, 2018).

A diverse workforce is likely to promote greater cultural understanding and inclusion when educating pupils from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including white. A body of evidence from the United States also highlights the positive impact of same-race teachers on the educational outcomes of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, especially for pupils from black<sup>3</sup> ethnic backgrounds (see Gershenson *et al.*, 2021).

Ensuring there are equal opportunities for people to enter the teaching profession, and progress within it, is a necessary condition for ensuring the profession is representative of society. This requires a shared commitment from many individuals and organisations across the system and a willingness to listen to voices from diverse communities as well as using evidence to bring about improvements in racial equality and ultimately racial equity. There is a substantial and growing base of qualitative evidence exploring the lived experience of teachers and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, the quantitative evidence base on the extent to which there are equal opportunities within teacher career paths is limited.

This NFER research, in partnership with Ambition Institute and Teach First, aims to establish the extent of ethnic disparities and where they occur in the teacher career pathway. We use teacher census data to explore the representation and career progression opportunities in the teaching profession among people from different ethnic minority backgrounds, from applications to initial teacher training through to headship<sup>4</sup>. We also analyse differences across regions, training courses and schools (see Worth *et al.*, 2022 for further details).

Focusing on the numbers of teachers from different ethnic backgrounds is a necessary, but by no means sufficient, first step towards establishing racial equity. However, understanding more about where ethnic disparities<sup>5</sup> occur within the teacher career pathway and which groups are most affected will support the education system to focus on the areas where action to address them can have the greatest impact.

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<sup>2</sup>Taken from <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/equality-and-diversity>.

<sup>3</sup> Note that while we are following government guidance not to capitalise ethnic groups, we recognise that there is a diversity of opinion on the capitalisation of ‘Black’ and we acknowledge the sensitivities and multiple perspectives on this.

<sup>4</sup> Definitions for each of these stages are included in the full report (Worth *et al.*, 2022).

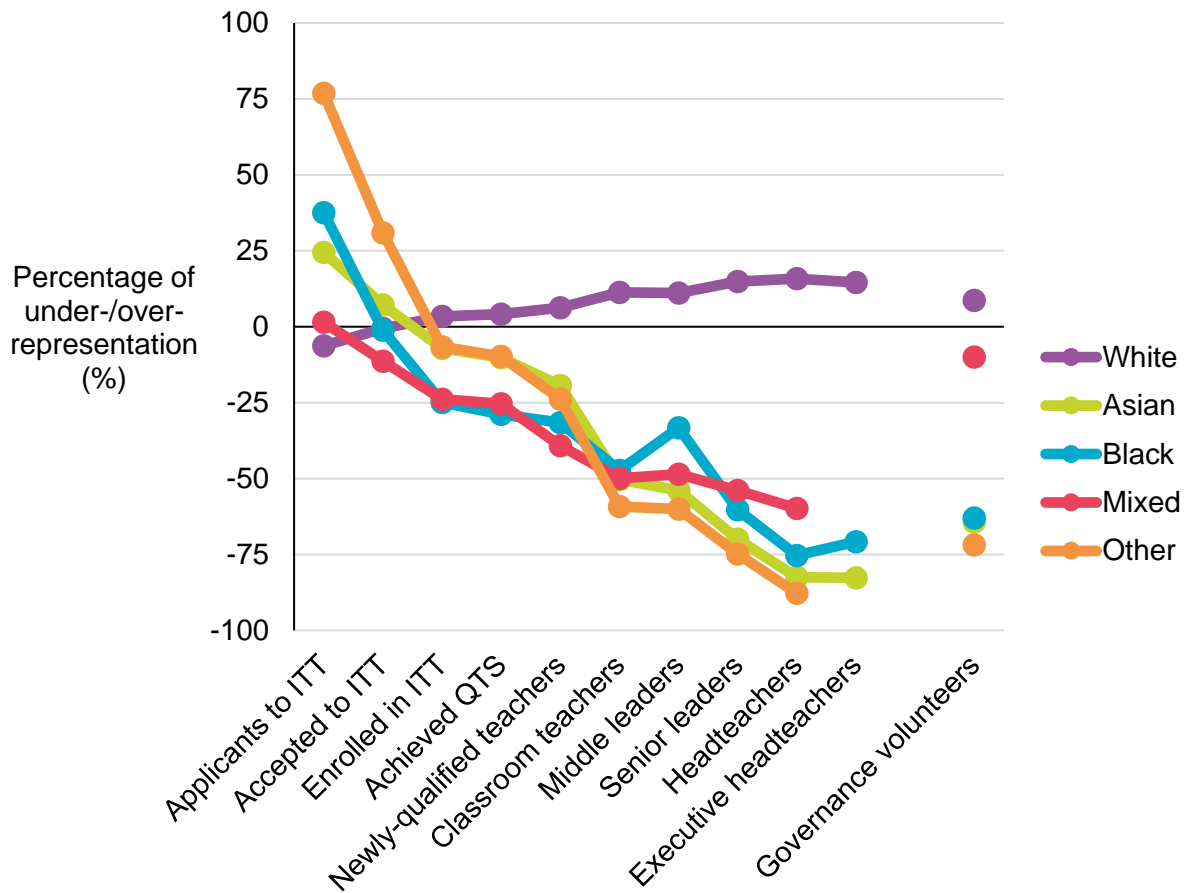
<sup>5</sup> We use the term ‘ethnic disparities’ rather than ‘racial disparities’ because the databases underpinning this research identify ethnicity, rather than race. This research is not able to identify the extent to which such disparities are caused by inequalities in the system.

## 2 Main findings

### All ethnic groups except white are under-represented at all career stages of the teaching profession, except for initial teacher training (ITT)

Our analysis shows that there is significant under-representation of people from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic minority backgrounds<sup>6</sup> within the teaching profession, except for in ITT. Conversely, there is significant over-representation of people from white backgrounds at all stages of the teacher career pipeline, except for in ITT<sup>7</sup>.

**Figure 1: Representation of ethnic groups in the teacher profession in 2020/21**



Source: NFER analysis of data from<sup>8</sup>: UCAS; TF; ITT-PP; SWC; and NGA. Population estimates are based on 2011 National Census data for England, projected forwards to 2021.

<sup>6</sup> We analyse representation for the smaller ‘minor’ ethnic groups in Section 2 of the full report (Worth *et al.*, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> People from white ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in postgraduate ITT applications but over-represented from ITT enrolment onwards.

<sup>8</sup> Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); Teach First (TF); Initial Teacher Training Performance Profile (ITT-PP); School Workforce Census (SWC); and National Governance Association (NGA).



Figure 1 summarises the over- or under-representation of different ethnic groups at the various stages of the teacher career pipeline<sup>9</sup>. It provides a snapshot at a particular moment in time, rather than tracking the same individuals through their careers. For example, in 2021, 12 per cent of ITT applicants were from Asian ethnic backgrounds, compared to ten per cent in the population as a whole (meaning ITT applicants from Asian backgrounds are just over 20 per cent over-represented). Similarly, 76 per cent of ITT applicants were from white backgrounds, compared to 81 per cent in the population as a whole, and so ITT applicants from white backgrounds are about five per cent under-represented.

People from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds are over-represented among applicants to postgraduate ITT, which suggests that there is no shortage of interest in joining the profession among these groups. However, among those who are accepted onto an ITT course, people from Asian, black and other ethnic groups are generally not over-represented, which indicates acceptance rates for applicants from these ethnic backgrounds are generally lower than for applicants from white ethnic backgrounds (as we discuss further in our analysis of progression rates).

By the time applicants have enrolled, completed their training and achieved qualified teacher status (QTS), Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic minority groups are under-represented compared to the wider population. Teachers from all ethnic groups other than white are also under-represented at each subsequent stage of the profession from newly-qualified teacher through to headteacher, compared to their representation in the population in 2021.

The under-representation of people from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds is most pronounced at senior leadership and headship levels. For example, 96 per cent of headteachers are from white ethnic backgrounds, compared to 83 per cent of people in the wider population (an over-representation of 15 per cent). In contrast, ethnic minority groups other than white are under-represented among headteachers by 60 per cent (mixed ethnic group), 75 per cent (black ethnic group), 83 per cent (Asian ethnic group) and 88 per cent (other ethnic group), compared to their proportions in the wider population.

These trends contribute to schools having senior leadership teams that are predominantly white: 86 per cent of publicly-funded schools in England have all-white senior leadership teams. We also find that 60 per cent of schools in England have an all-white teaching staff. Although secondary schools have a more diverse teaching staff than primary schools<sup>10</sup>, children entering school today have a high probability of rarely or never being taught by a teacher from an Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic minority group.

Governance volunteers from white backgrounds are slightly over-represented, whereas people from other ethnic backgrounds (particularly Asian, black and other ethnic groups) are under-

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<sup>9</sup> Points above zero indicate that the proportion of teachers from that ethnic group is higher than the proportion of people of the same age in the same ethnic group in the general population in England. Points below zero show under-representation of the particular ethnic group compared to the general population.

<sup>10</sup> In 2021, 69 per cent of primary schools and 18 per cent of secondary schools in England had an all-white teaching staff.

represented among governance volunteers compared to their proportions in the wider population. Diversity in governing bodies is important for racial equality, given the key influence that governance volunteers have on senior appointments and strategic decision-making in schools.

Overall, we find that people from ethnic minority groups other than white are under-represented at all levels once they enter the profession. The under-representation among senior leaders, headteachers and governance volunteers is a particular concern, given their influence on strategy, decision-making and the cultural values of schools.

**There are significant disparities in progression rates from one stage of the teacher career pipeline to the next between trainees and teachers from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic minority backgrounds and their counterparts from white backgrounds**

An analysis of representation at a single point in time only reveals part of the picture. Representation at senior levels reflects the diversity of the workforce from decades before, and the current cohorts of senior leaders are likely to have faced different barriers and contexts to younger cohorts. Assessing ethnic disparities in progression<sup>11</sup> from one stage of the teacher career to the next using the latest data provides a more complete picture of the current state of racial equality within the teaching profession.

Our progression analysis shows that people from most ethnic minority groups and at most stages of the teacher career pipeline are less likely to progress to the next stage compared to their white counterparts. Despite recent progress in improving diversity at the first point of entry into teaching, significant disparities in progression rates from one stage of the teacher career pipeline to the next remain.

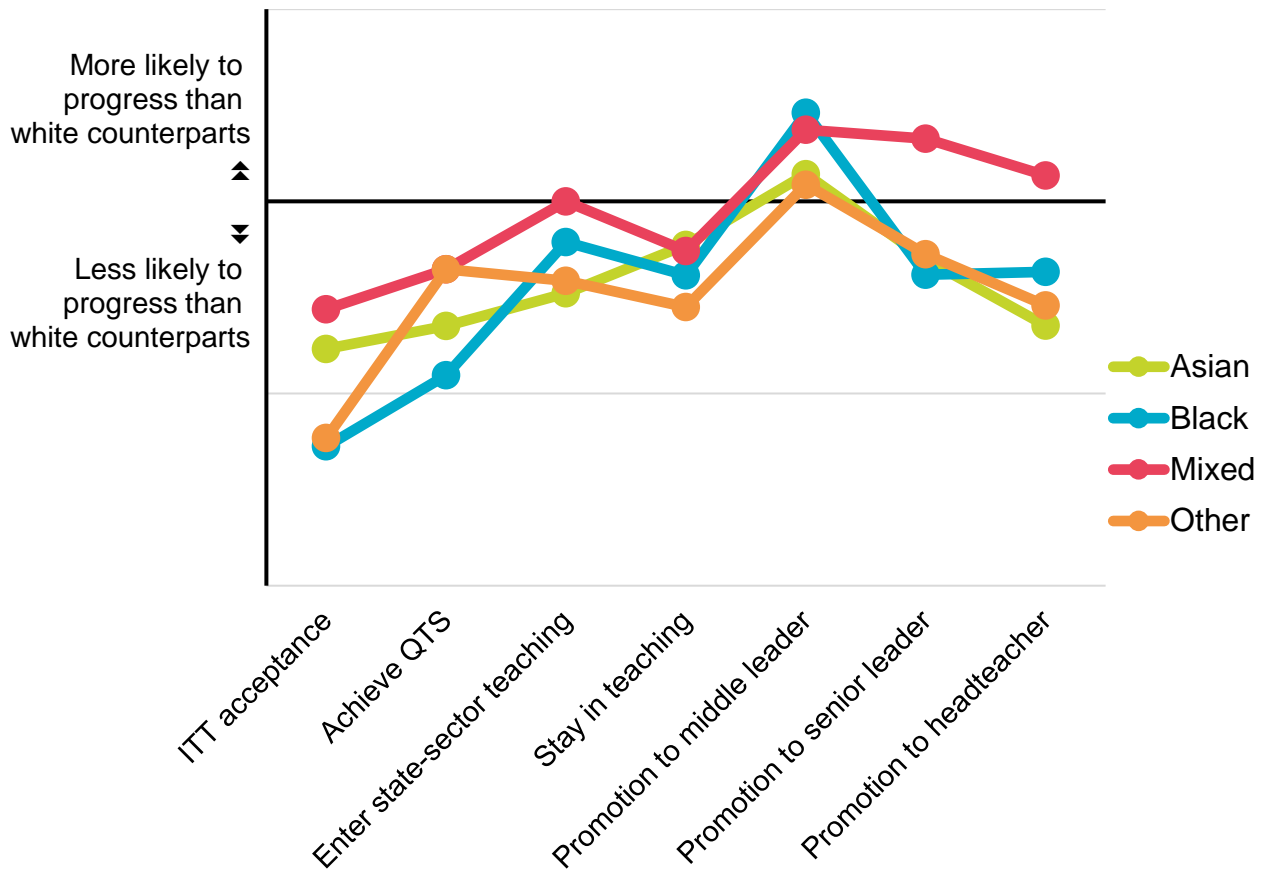
Figure 2 shows the relative likelihood of people from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic groups moving from one stage of the teaching profession to the next, compared with people from white ethnic backgrounds<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Progression means the percentage of people at a given stage of the profession who move on to the next stage within a specific period of time. It includes only teachers who stay in the profession, except for 'retention' in teaching. See the glossary and full report (Worth *et al.*, 2022) for a more detailed definition.

<sup>12</sup> This chart uses 'odds ratios' to make comparisons between ethnic groups across different stages of the teacher profession. Points above the bold horizontal line indicate a greater likelihood of moving to the next stage than their white counterparts, whereas points below the line indicate a lower likelihood of moving to the next stage than their white counterparts.

**Figure 2: People from most ethnic minority groups and at most stages of the teacher career pipeline are less likely to progress to the next stage than their white counterparts**



Source: NFER analysis of data from UCAS; Teach First; ITT-PP and SWC.

Here we see that ethnic disparities are present across most stages of the profession, but the most significant disparities in progression occur in ITT. For example, acceptance rates onto postgraduate ITT courses are nine percentage points lower for applicants from mixed ethnic backgrounds, 13 percentage points lower for applicants from Asian ethnic backgrounds and 21 percentage points lower for applicants from black and other ethnic backgrounds compared with acceptance rates for white applicants. There are further disparities in the rates of achieving QTS and entering state-sector teaching.

Teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely than their white counterparts to stay in teaching, but looking at the data underneath this, these differences are largely driven by differences in region, age and experience. This is because teachers from white backgrounds are relatively older, more experienced and less concentrated in London; all of which are associated with higher retention rates. Once these differences are taken into account, only teachers from Asian backgrounds are significantly less likely to stay in teaching than their white counterparts.

Teachers from Asian, black and mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be promoted to middle leadership positions than their white counterparts, but looking at the underlying data, this is

largely driven by the fact that teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are more concentrated in London and in secondary schools than their white counterparts, where rates of promotion into middle leadership are higher for teachers from all ethnic groups. After taking account of differences in their characteristics (especially region and phase), teachers from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds are significantly less likely to be promoted to middle leadership than their white counterparts.

Even though they are less pronounced than at early career stages, there are also some significant disparities in rates of promotion<sup>13</sup> to senior leadership and headship roles. In particular, middle leaders from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be promoted to senior leadership, and senior leaders from Asian backgrounds are less likely to be promoted to headship than their white counterparts working in similar regions and schools.

Although disparities in progression largely affect all ethnic minority groups, teachers from mixed ethnic backgrounds are equally as likely to remain in the profession, and achieve promotion to middle leadership, senior leadership and headship as their white counterparts working in similar regions and schools.

### **Disparities in progression rates between ethnic groups differ between regions and training routes, and depend on the ethnic diversity of the senior leadership team**

Differences across regions are a crucial factor for understanding the patterns of ethnic disparities in progression through the teacher career pipeline in greater depth. In particular, the gaps in ITT acceptance rates between applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds and their white counterparts are significantly smaller in London than they are nationally.

However, the gaps between the rates of promotion to senior leadership of middle leaders from black ethnic backgrounds and their white counterparts are significantly wider in London than they are nationally. This suggests there is a somewhat mixed picture in London across different stages of the teacher career pipeline and is particularly important because ITT applicants and teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are concentrated in London: for example, 62 per cent of teachers from black ethnic backgrounds work in London, compared with 11 per cent of teachers from white backgrounds<sup>14</sup> (further information on regional distribution is provided in Section 2).

There are some areas of the education system where disparities in progression between ethnic groups are smaller. These are potential areas of good practice that could help to inform action to improve racial equality across the sector. They include Teach First, where the gaps between the acceptance rates of applicants from black, mixed and other ethnic minority backgrounds and their white counterparts are significantly smaller than they are in other ITT routes.

Ethnic disparities in teacher retention rates are also smaller in schools with diverse senior leadership teams (SLTs) and larger in schools with all-white senior leadership teams. Schools with

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<sup>13</sup> Promotion to senior leadership means the percentage of middle leaders in 2015/16 who are promoted to senior leadership by 2020/21 and do not leave teaching in that time period.

<sup>14</sup> Further information on regional distribution can be found in the full report (Worth *et al.*, 2022).

SLT members from more than one ethnic minority group have significantly higher retention rates among teachers from Asian, black and mixed ethnic backgrounds than among white teachers.

The actions of leaders and decision-makers are central to understanding why ethnic disparities exist within the system. Decision-makers, including governors and trustees, are also crucial to promoting the action that is required to make progress towards achieving racial equality in the teaching profession.

## **2.1 Conclusions and recommendations**

Progress in achieving racial equality in teaching requires individuals and organisations across the education sector, particularly in ITT, to recognise racial equality as a priority and take action to address the disparities that are evident in the system. This piece of research alone cannot, and does not claim to provide the solutions, but it does provide a basis for focusing attention on the areas (for example, of the pipeline and of the country) where disparities are greatest and further action should be targeted. Identifying and implementing actions to effectively address ethnic disparities within the teacher workforce will require individuals and organisations to engage with a range of diverse voices and perspectives to understand the action that is needed.

Our recommendations centre on two broad areas of focus which our analysis, the previous research literature, and our discussions with a diverse range of individuals and organisations in the education sector suggest are most likely to be beneficial for bringing about change: supporting leaders to make equitable workforce decisions and monitoring progress towards equalising opportunities.

### **1. Support for leaders and decision-makers in ITT providers, schools and trusts to equip them to make equitable workforce decisions**

The significant disparities in progression rates between ethnic groups identified in our analysis typically arise during specific processes within organisations, such as recruitment, selection and promotion. More generally, decision-making by leaders can potentially influence ethnic disparities in, for example, rates of retention within ITT and teaching. A critical measure for addressing ethnic disparities is therefore to support leaders to make equitable workforce decisions and create an environment where teachers from diverse backgrounds are equally able to thrive.

One way to achieve this would be for decision-makers to draw on best practice within education systems, and also from industries beyond education, to ensure they implement policies and processes that are equitable.

We encourage ITT providers to review their application and selection processes to pinpoint the extent, nature and causes of the lower acceptance rates experienced by applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds and to act to address any inequalities at this crucial first stage of entry into the profession.

More broadly, we encourage leaders of ITT providers, multi-academy trusts and other large educational organisations (such as colleges, recruitment and supply agencies and professional development providers) to commit to publishing institutional data on diversity and acting to address disparities. This is particularly relevant for larger organisations, where there are sufficient numbers

to make the data meaningful. Doing so would help to identify and understand gaps in progression, monitor progress and share good practice, benefitting both organisations and the system as a whole.

## **2. Monitor progress across the system towards equalising the opportunities for progression in teaching for people from all ethnic groups**

It will be important to monitor whether progress is being made towards reducing and eliminating ethnic disparities in progression within the teacher career pipeline in England as a whole. This report demonstrates that it is possible to make quantitative assessments of the state of ethnic equality in the teaching profession using census data that is already collected by the Department for Education. We recommend that regular monitoring is conducted to assess where progress in reducing disparities is being made.

Our analysis highlights two particular features that effective on-going data monitoring will need to feature to provide an accurate picture of racial equality. First, the analysis needs to be based on progression from one stage of the teacher career pipeline to the next rather than on representation. While representation is a useful way of looking at the bigger picture, progression analysis is more useful for identifying where action is needed because it can identify changes in ethnic disparities far more quickly. Second, the analysis needs to take account of differences in the way ethnic groups are concentrated across regions to provide an accurate picture.

On-going monitoring could be led by government, which has good access to the required data as well as an overarching policy standpoint on the teaching profession. However, the shared responsibility for reducing ethnic disparities across the whole education system means that many individuals and organisations have an interest in assessing system-level progress.

### **2.2 Suggestions for further research**

Our research finds that differences in progression rates throughout the early stages of the teaching profession explain a significant part of the lack of diversity in the workforce, but is limited by the information contained in the existing datasets. Further quantitative research should be used to investigate other possible drivers of progression rate gaps across the profession.

This is particularly true for ITT, where our research finds that gaps in progression rates are among the largest, but the data sources are the most limited. Further research using richer datasets, including taking account of the qualifications of those applying, is important to deepen our understanding of challenges specific to the sector and the policy options to promote diversity which are available to ITT providers and decision-makers.

We also recognise the need for further research into regional disparities in the representation and progression of teachers from different ethnic backgrounds. This is particularly relevant in the context of government policy and funding decisions designed to reduce geographic inequalities and increase 'levelling up'.

Some of the potential drivers of gaps in progression rates may be difficult to research using large-scale census datasets. Therefore, qualitative and mixed methods research will have an important role to play in further understanding how to achieve greater diversity in teaching. Indeed, research

designs combining existing data with survey, interview, or other secondary data, could also be used to assess the effectiveness of specific policy proposals (such as improved access to continuing professional development (CPD), national professional qualifications (NPQs) or mentoring) aimed at increasing diversity in the sector. However, additional research should not seek to supplant or simply replicate the extensive body of research in this field. We recommend that future research should build upon the existing literature, with a particular focus on the stages of the workforce with the largest gaps in progression. Further research should help to drive forward work on equality and equity in the teacher workforce. Leaders and decision-makers in the sector should continue leveraging existing research to make progress on equality and refine best practices as new research becomes available.



### 3 Data sources and methodology

We use multiple data sources to analyse the representation and progression of people across the key stages of the teaching profession separately<sup>15</sup>. Our analysis uses the most recent year of data available in each dataset. For the representation analysis, this is the 2020/21 academic year. For the progression analysis, the year of data used was different at each career stage<sup>16</sup>.

We use data on applications to postgraduate ITT from UCAS and TF to analyse applications and acceptances onto postgraduate ITT courses and the Initial Teacher Training Performance Profile (ITT-PP) dataset for enrolment in an ITT course and achievement of QTS. To analyse entry into teaching, we use the ITT-PP data linked to the SWC and for classroom teachers, middle/senior leaders, headteachers and executive headteachers, we use the SWC data. In addition to these administrative data sources, we use data from the 2021 NGA survey of governance volunteers to identify the numbers of people from different ethnic backgrounds among school governance volunteers. Finally, we use the 2011 Census data to estimate the proportion of people in England from each ethnic group, which we use in the analysis of representation.

Our analysis of progression rate gaps considers how differences in personal and school characteristics help to ‘explain’ the gaps. For example, teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely than their white counterparts to be teaching in London, compared to other regions of the country, where retention and progression rates are different for all teachers, regardless of ethnic background. However, we are cautious about interpreting differences in retention and progression rates between ethnic groups that are ‘explained’ by differences in characteristics, especially where there is a possibility that the differences in the characteristics themselves may be influenced by wider systemic factors affecting that ethnic group. A detailed discussion of the model used for this analysis is included in the full report.

Since our analysis relies on data held in large administrative datasets, it is affected by the limitations inherent in each one. These limitations largely concern sample sizes which are insufficient to analyse the smaller ethnic groups in detail, differences in definitions for the smaller ethnic groups, and a lack of data on personal and school characteristics which restricts our analysis of some possible drivers for the disparities we observe. These limitations are discussed in greater detail in the full report.

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<sup>15</sup> This is not a full cohort study and so our analysis does not follow the same sets of people from initial teacher training all the way to executive headteacher. However, the data sources do enable our analysis of progression from each stage of the teacher career pathway to the next. See the full report for a detailed discussion of progression definitions specific to each career stage.

<sup>16</sup> For example, due to small sample sizes, we considered promotion to middle/senior leadership and headship over the five years from 2015/16 to 2020/21. See the full report for more detailed definitions of progression.



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