

Black Geographers

A decorative graphic in the top right corner consisting of several concentric, wavy, yellow lines on a yellow background, resembling a topographic map or contour lines.

Participation of Black students in geography

Reporting on Black students studying Geography at Secondary
and Higher education level.

2020

Black Geographers

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NOTE

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Black Geographers formed as a collective of Black geography students and graduates who have first hand experience of the many barriers which prevent Black students from studying geography, and how isolating the field can be even after navigating these barriers.

Black Geographers poses one question to schools, universities, and organisations alike: **why aren't there more Black people in Geography?** Through collaborative effort Black Geographers aims to not only answer this question, but to also begin transforming Geography as a discipline to make it more engaging and inclusive at every level of education.

This report has been developed to provide context and understanding for why Black Geographers has emerged as a necessary intervention, and what disparities the organisation aims to address going forward.

- Black Geographers

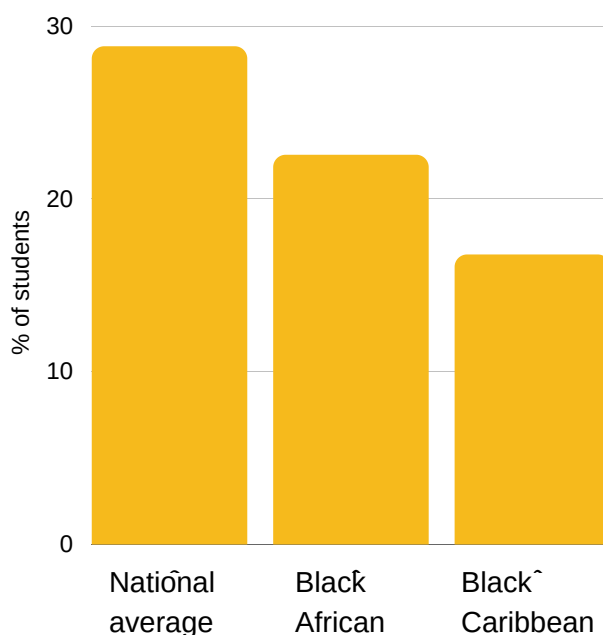
"Geography could do so much better in who it takes in, what it produces, and where it is going" ¹

KS4 / KS5 Level

Although overall participation in geography at GCSE and A-Level has increased in past years², patterns in the demographics of geography students persist; in schools with a higher proportion of low-income pupils the uptake of Geography at GCSE is notably lower, a gap which further widens at A-Level³.

Targeted research on the topic is scarce so it is difficult to analyse the participation of Black secondary school pupils in geography. However, data from the last 10 years consistently indicates that at a school level this gap is connected to income and ethnic diversity^{4 5}.

Uptake of Geography GCSE by ethnic group 2007⁶



Why aren't Black pupils choosing geography in secondary school?

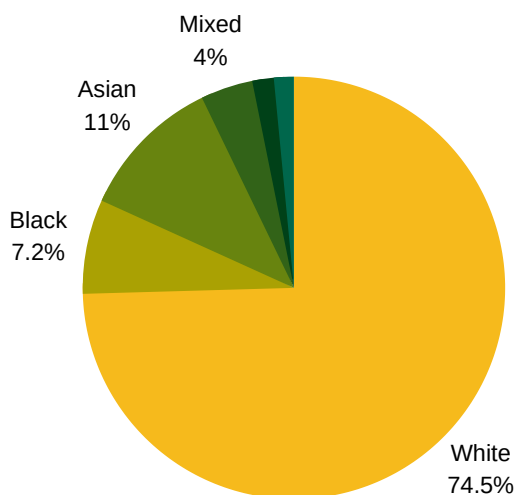
One issue may be the curriculum. Pupils who struggle to relate to or find use in geographical knowledge are less likely to study it at the GCSE level or further⁷. If geography teaching is not engaging with the issues that Black pupils care about, including through discussing how the subject intersects with race and inequality, then it follows that few choose to continue studying it.

"The way geography was taught at school was so dry...I had no clue how interesting, broad and actually *relevant* the subject was until after I'd gone to uni."

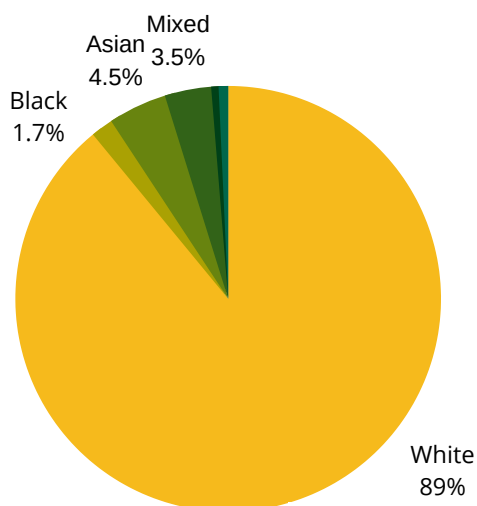
Undergraduate Level

In the 2018/19 intake only 1.7% of all enrolling undergraduate geography students in the UK identified as Black, despite Black students representing 7.2% of the undergraduate cohort ⁸. Although these percentages skew more positively in Russell Group universities, numbers remain low⁵.

Total admitted undergraduate students (UK) – All subjects 2018/19



Total admitted undergraduate students (UK) – Geography degrees 2018/19



ACROSS OXBRIDGE

FEWER THAN 3 BLACK STUDENTS WERE ADMITTED TO STUDY GEOGRAPHY IN 2018

^{9 10}

So why do so few Black pupils study Geography at the undergraduate level? The reasons for this are complex. It is partially the inevitable result of the low proportion of Black geography students at KS5 level.

However, a perceived lack of geography employment opportunities may also be a contributing factor. With Black students more likely to study subjects with clear professional or vocational career paths ¹¹, the progression of Black pupils in to geography undergraduate study will remain limited if the possibilities for future careers are not fully explored at the secondary education level.

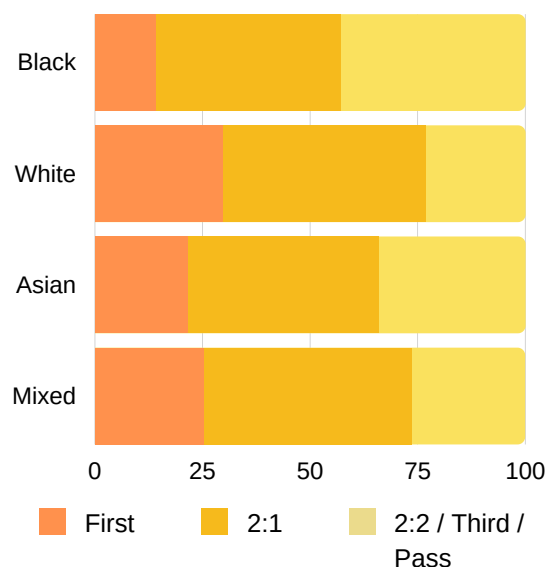
Beyond this, the image of geography may be a further deterrent. With such a small current representation of Black students within geography, many school leavers may not see the subject as a desirable option¹².

Postgraduate Level

Although numbers are low, there are still Black geography students studying at the undergraduate level. But once undergraduate education is finished, **why do we see this number decrease even further at the post-graduate level?**

This is likely partially due to the fact that there is such a large discrepancy in the percentage of Black students who receive a 2:1 or above classification at the undergraduate level, compared to the distribution within other ethnic groups. In 2018/19 76.8% of white undergraduates receive a 2:1 or above, compared to 57% of Black undergraduates¹³.

Undergraduate classification attained 2018/19 (% total completed in group)



With the reliance of much post-graduate masters or doctorate funding on academic attainment, even entering the post-graduate field holds additional barriers for many Black graduates.

Prospects for future careers in academia also influences the number of Black students pursuing Geography at a post-graduate level. In 2018 across the UK there were **only 10 Black geography professors**¹⁴, that means that

7 IN EVERY **1000** GEOGRAPHY PROFESSORS IDENTIFIES AS BLACK.

With so few Black professors across the UK¹⁵, and even fewer when looking specifically at staff within Geography departments, the limited representation of Black people in academia may be deterring undergraduate geography students from further academic pursuits.

Notes

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September 2020