

Higher
Education
Admissions



Pro:NE

Dr Benjamin Ajibade

Removing barriers in postgraduate research for
people of colour and racially minoritised researchers

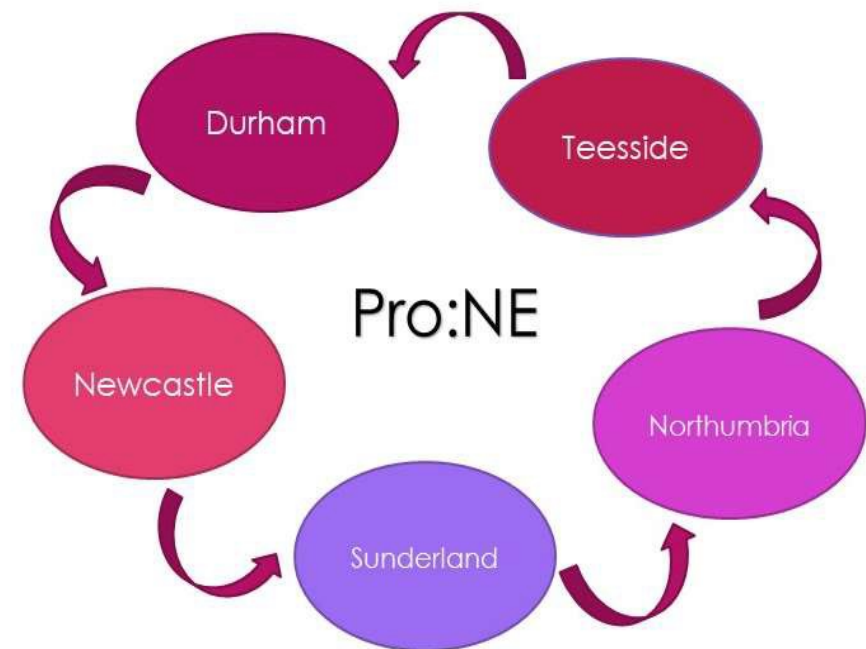
A PARTNERSHIP OF THE FIVE NORTH EAST UNIVERSITIES





- ▶ Focus on 'home' students
- ▶ Bid developed by:
Professor Jason Arday
- ▶ Project sponsor: **PVC**
EDI Dr Shaid Mahmood
- ▶ Project manager:
Gareth Lawson

Collaboration between the five NE Universities



Introductions

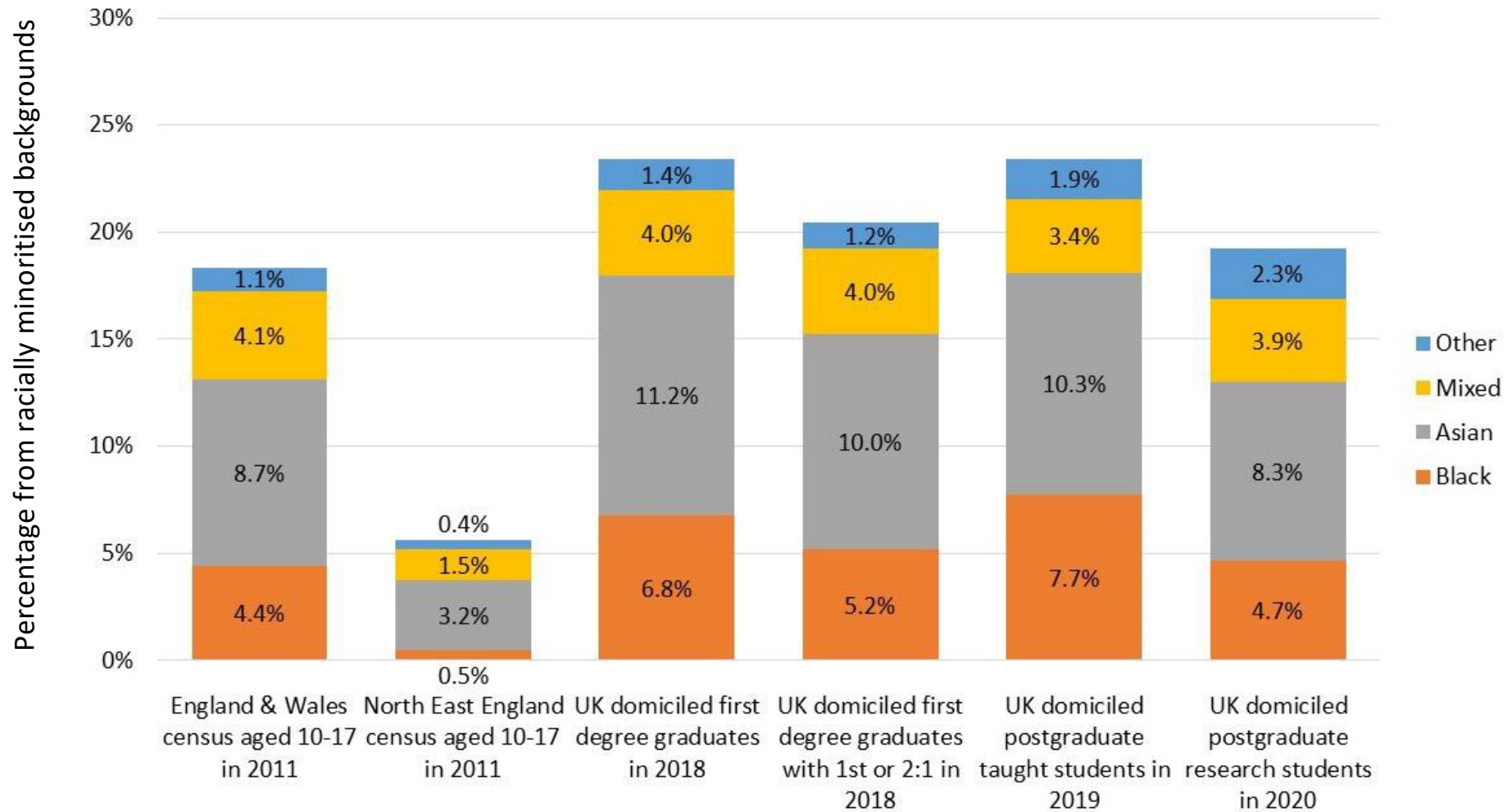
Key questions:

- How **ethnically diverse** are the home (UK-domiciled) PGR populations in the universities of the North East?
- Are there differential rates of **application** to PGR programmes; if so, how can barriers to application be removed?
- Are there differential rates of **admission** given application; if so, how can admission rates be made equitable?

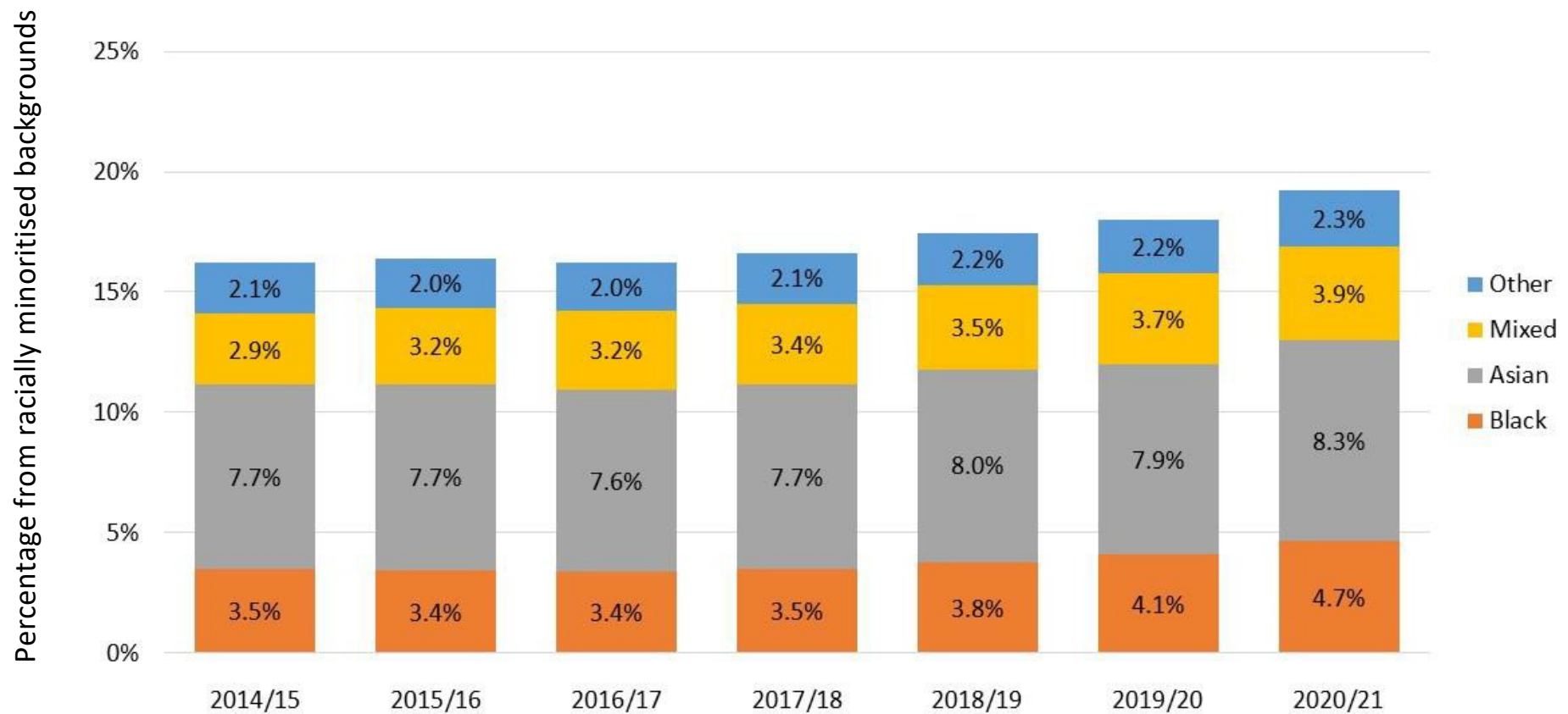
Admissions: To make admissions more equitable, review policies, pilot new processes, to increase access for students of colour



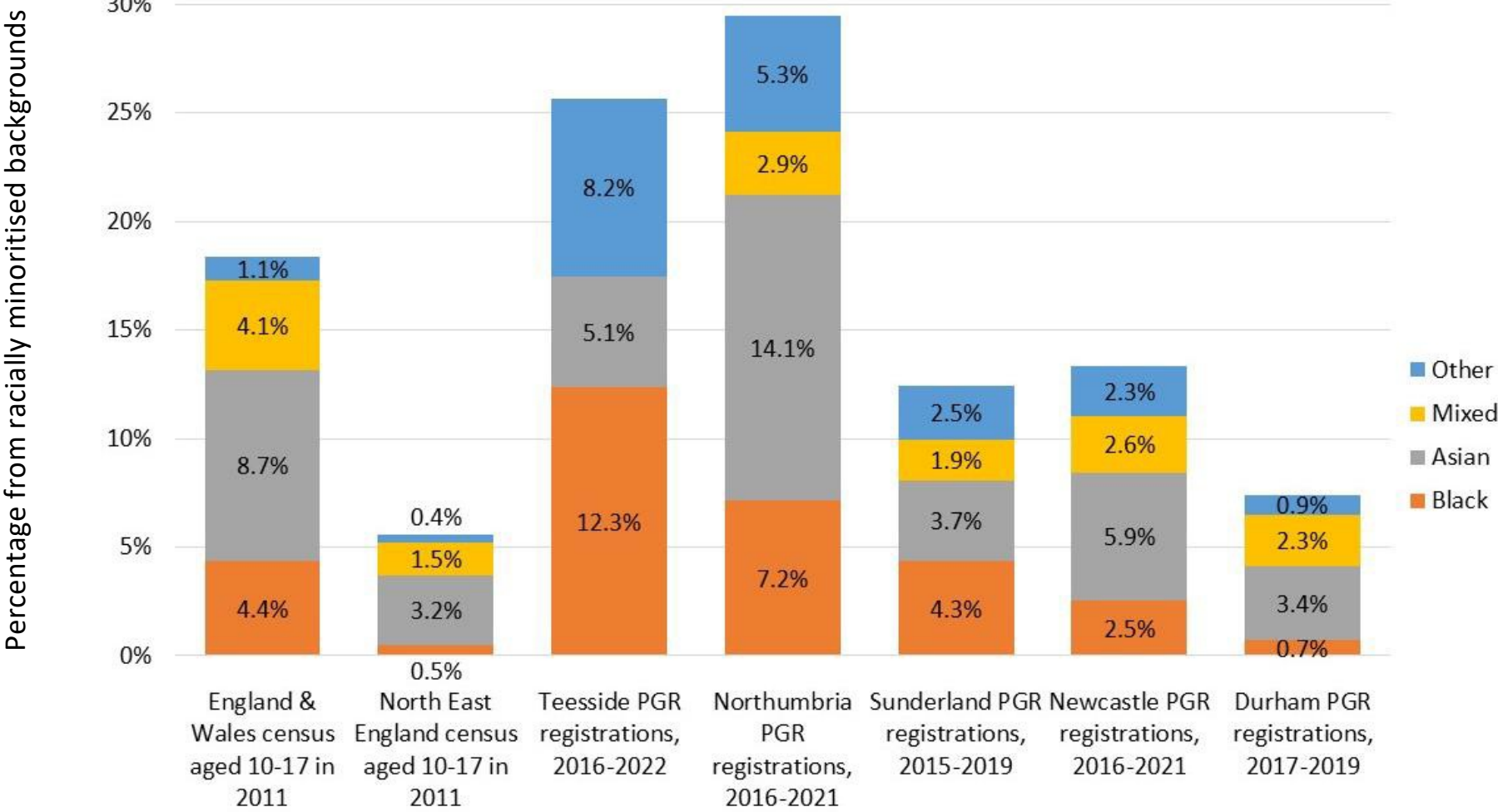
The PhD pipeline nationally



PGR population has gradually become more ethnically diverse over time

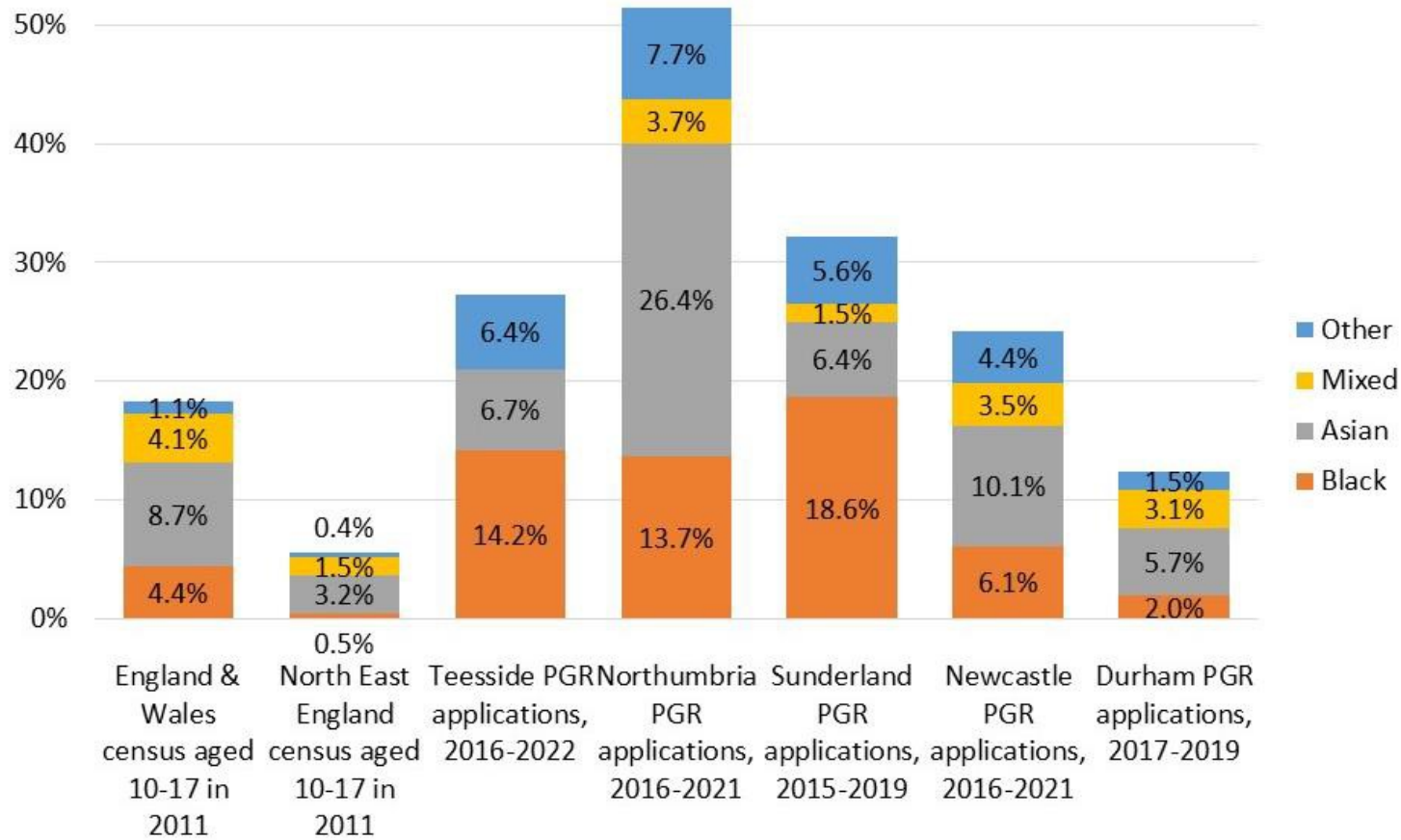


Some North East universities more diverse than others

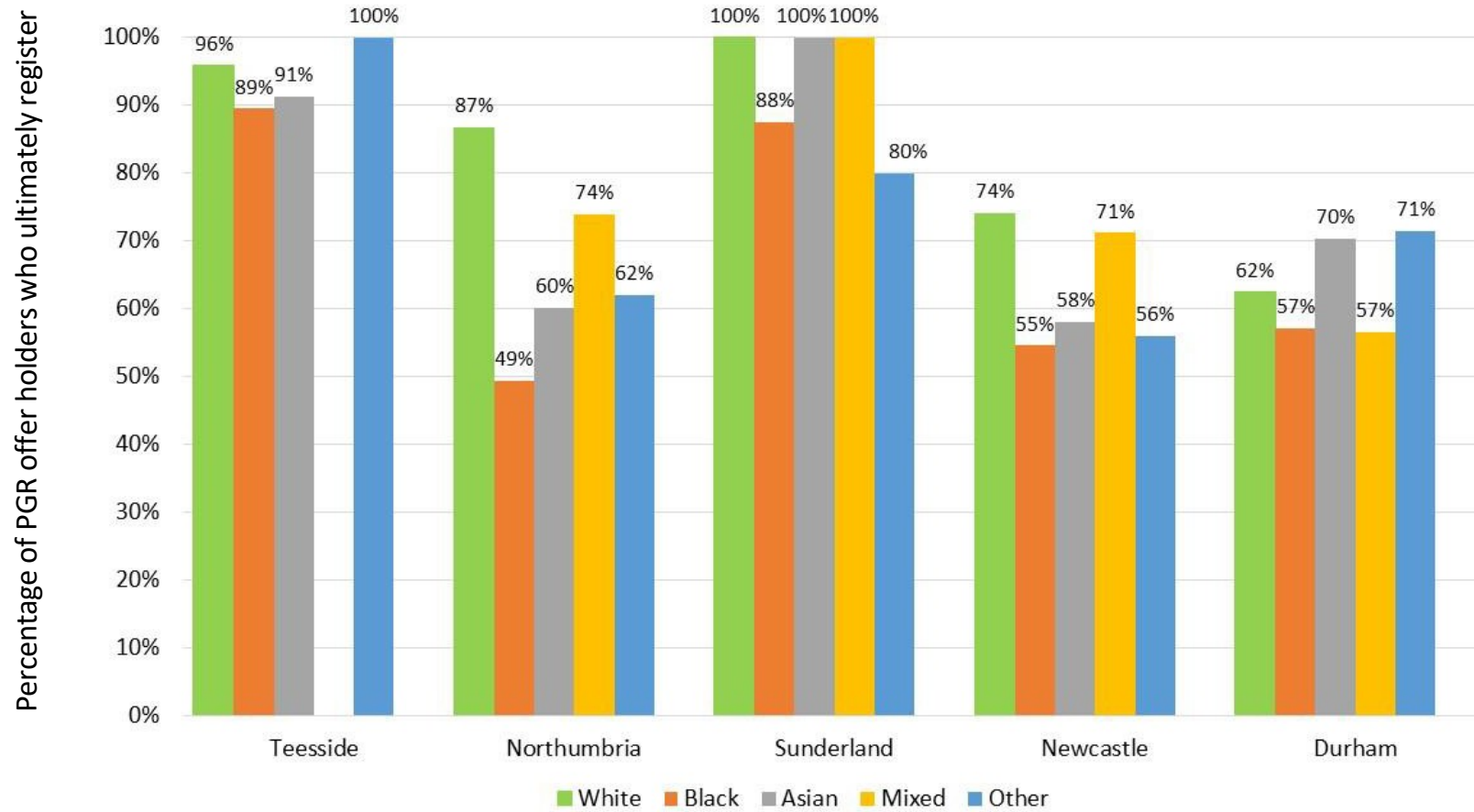


Most North East universities attract a diverse applicant pool...

Percentage from racially minoritised backgrounds



...but racially minoritised offer holders less likely to take up their PGR places

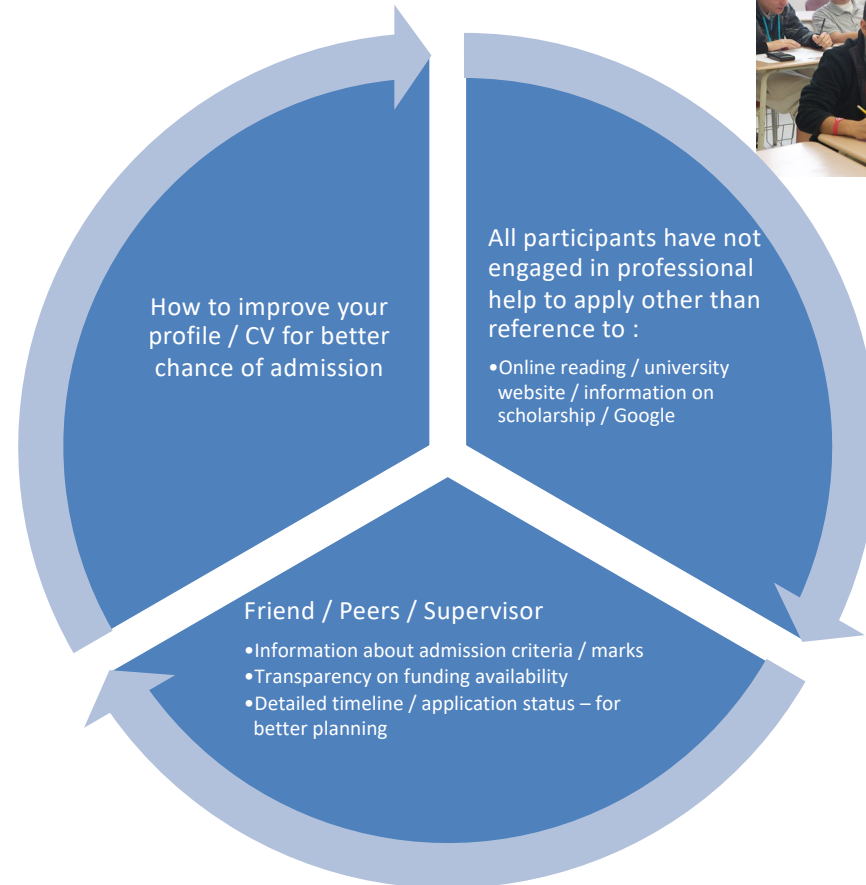


Data from Focus group exercise relating to Admission



All participants are not aware of leaky pipeline terms. Agreed the followings as barrier to access and complete PGR :

- Lack of student motivation / confidence / family
- Funding issue
- Lack of job opportunity, career advancement
- Mature student (left university life and rejoin after some time)
- Different system (banking)
- Perception on preference (white vs minority ethnic, male vs female)
- Discrimination of admission process (should be equally distributed, merit based)
- Insufficient advice / support for admission to PGR



Data from Focus group exercise

Barrier to Admission

What do you think are the key barriers for UK-based students of colour to gain access to PGR studies?

- Lack of student motivation / confidence / family
- Funding issue
- Lack of job opportunity, career advancement
- Mature student (left university life and rejoin after some time)
- Different system (banking)
- Perception on preference (white vs minority ethnic, male vs female)
- Discrimination of admission process (should be equally distributed, merit based)
- Insufficient advice / support for admission to PGR
- Underrepresented at all levels

Lack of role models

Socio-economic pressure (need to provide for family sooner)

What was your experience of the application process like?

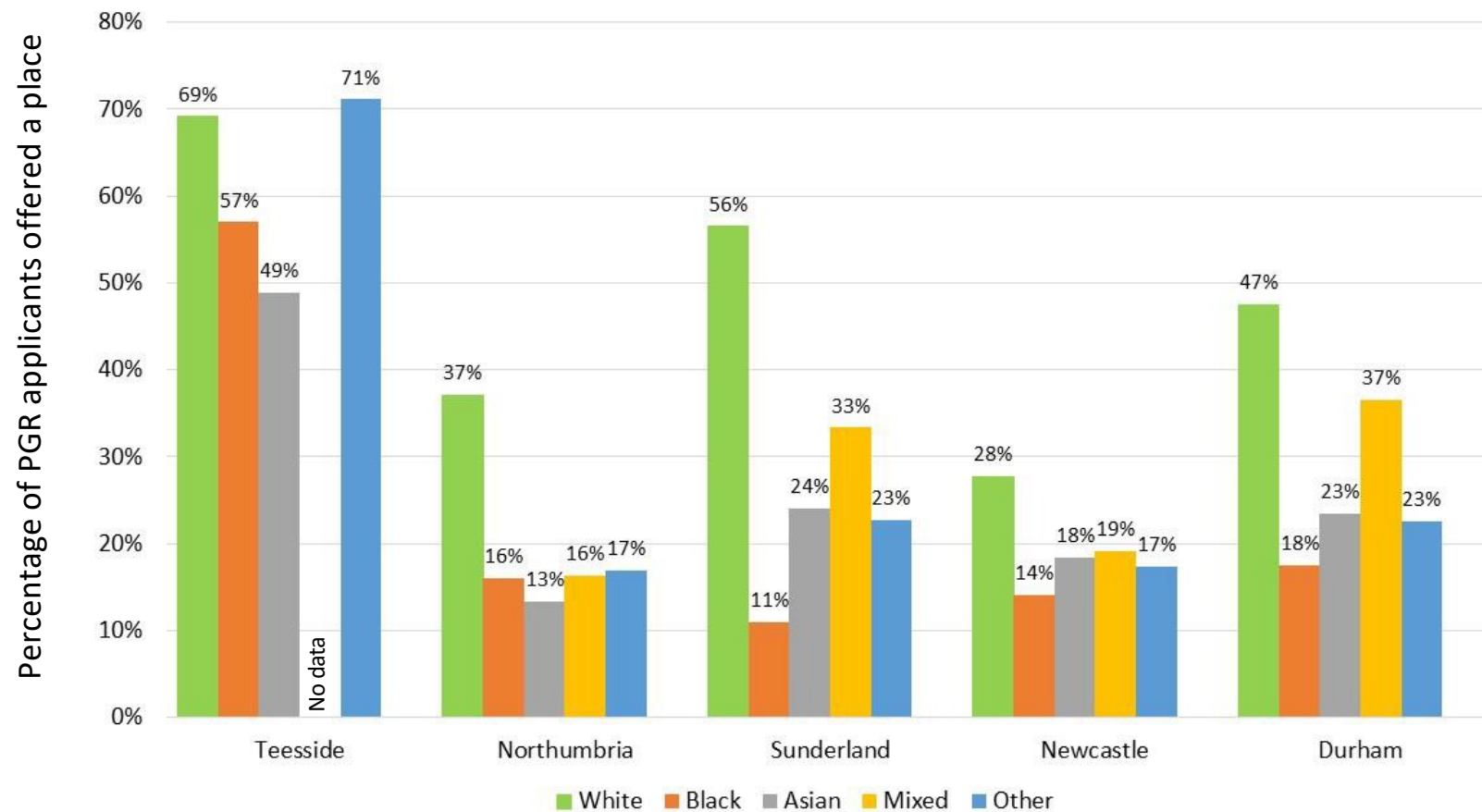
- The process was gruelling and stressful.
- All participants have not engaged in professional help to apply other than reference to online reading / university website / information on scholarship / Google, Friend / Peers / Supervisor
- How to write a good proposal / personal statement, secure a supervisor and more clarity about the overall application process and requirement for ATAS certificate

PhD does not reflect better remuneration / performance monitoring

Despite (a), applicants need to be ready for competition, being up to the standard and face rejection

- Lack of student motivation / confidence / culture barrier
- Lack of support from employer (study leave, financial incentive)
- PhD perceived as personal rather than professional achievement

Racially minoritised PGR applicants less likely to be offered a place



LESSON LEARNED

- Statistical analysis of data for the five North East universities indicates that racially minoritised groups are significantly under-represented among PGR applicants only at one University.
- PGR acceptance rates are substantially lower for racially minoritised home applicants to PGR programmes than for White applicants at all five North East universities
- Prospective PGRs from racially minoritised backgrounds are less likely to make early contact with a suitable prospective PGR supervisor and/or receive support from a prospective supervisor over the significant timespan needed to develop a high-quality PGR application
- PGR acceptance rates are substantially lower for racially minoritised home applicants to PGR programmes than for White applicants at all five North East universities. While this may be driven partly by the need for more guidance and support in the preparation of high-quality PGR applications
- It is also likely that there are racial inequities in the PGR admissions decision-making process that need to be addressed.



What the Literature says

Racially minoritised graduates are **less likely to receive funding to support their PhD studies**. Black doctoral students are particularly **disadvantaged** in this regard, accounting for just 0.15 per cent of those who received **UKRI-funded PhD studentships** between 2016 and 2018 (Williams *et al.*, 2019).



Among those who do enrol in a PhD programme, ethnic minority PGRs in the life sciences have been found to be **less likely to complete their PhDs than their White peers**, and to be less likely to obtain academic employment at postdoctoral level after successfully completing a PhD (Dias Lopes and Wakeling, 2022).



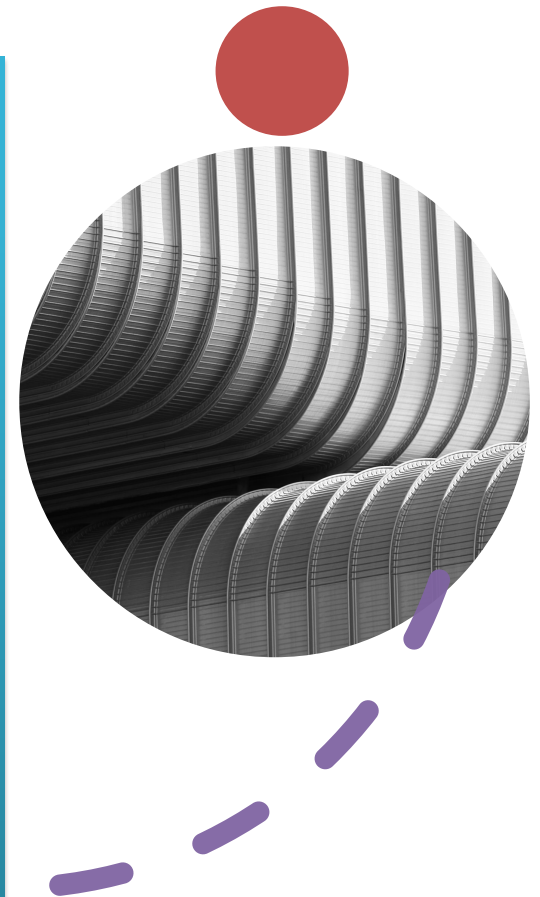
Although the percentage of UK university staff from British Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups has increased markedly over time, from 5.4% in 2003/4 to 11.4% in 2020/21 (Aldercotte, 2022)

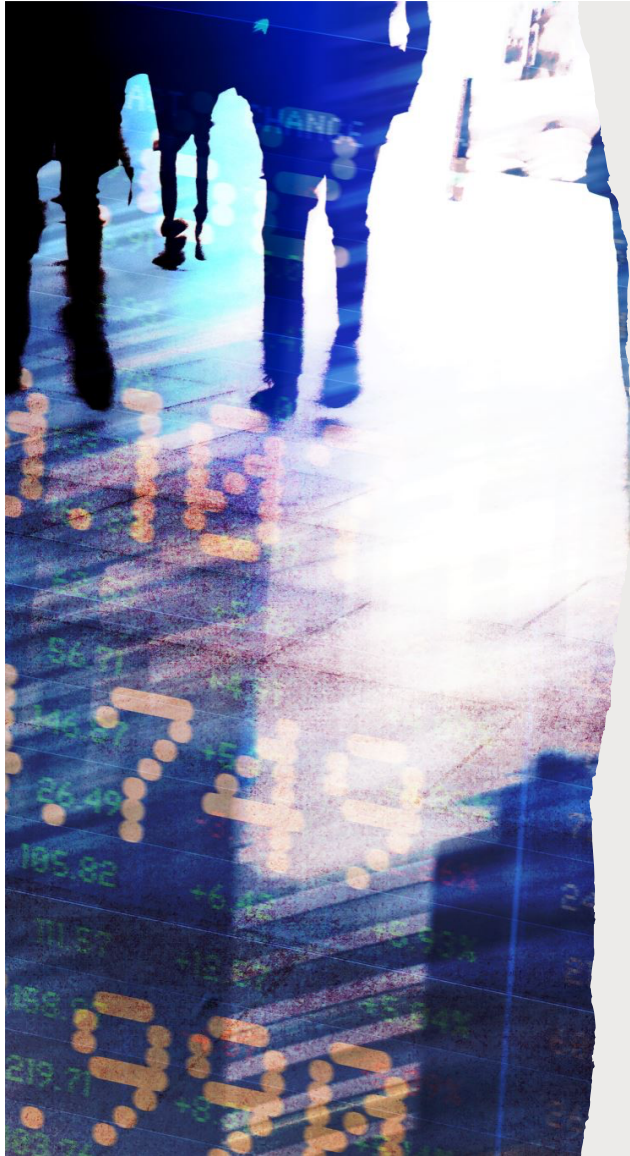


These groups remain under-represented among academic staff working in UK higher education institutions, particularly in higher tariff universities and at the professorial level (Bhopal, 2014; Arday, Branchu and Boliver, 2022).



Racially minoritised students value and benefit from **being taught and mentored by racially minoritised academic staff** who have similar lived experiences and may serve as inspirational role models (Griffin-James, 2022)





INITIATIVES

- Explore whether lower acceptance rates to PGR programmes at the five universities of the North East for British non-White ethnic minority applicants as compared to White British applicants are **associated with systematic differences in the application materials submitted by these two groups.**
- Institutional investment in high-quality advertising of PGR opportunities, benefits, and how to apply, targeted at racially minoritised people
- Development of high-quality digital materials to improve the visibility of current PGR students and current academic staff from racially minoritised groups on the university website, in digital marketing materials, and on social media
- Development of a set of materials for use by prospective supervisors to provide structured support to prospective PGRs and co-develop a PGR application
- Recruitment of current home PGRs from racially minoritised groups to provide additional advice and support to prospective PGRs preparing PGR applications

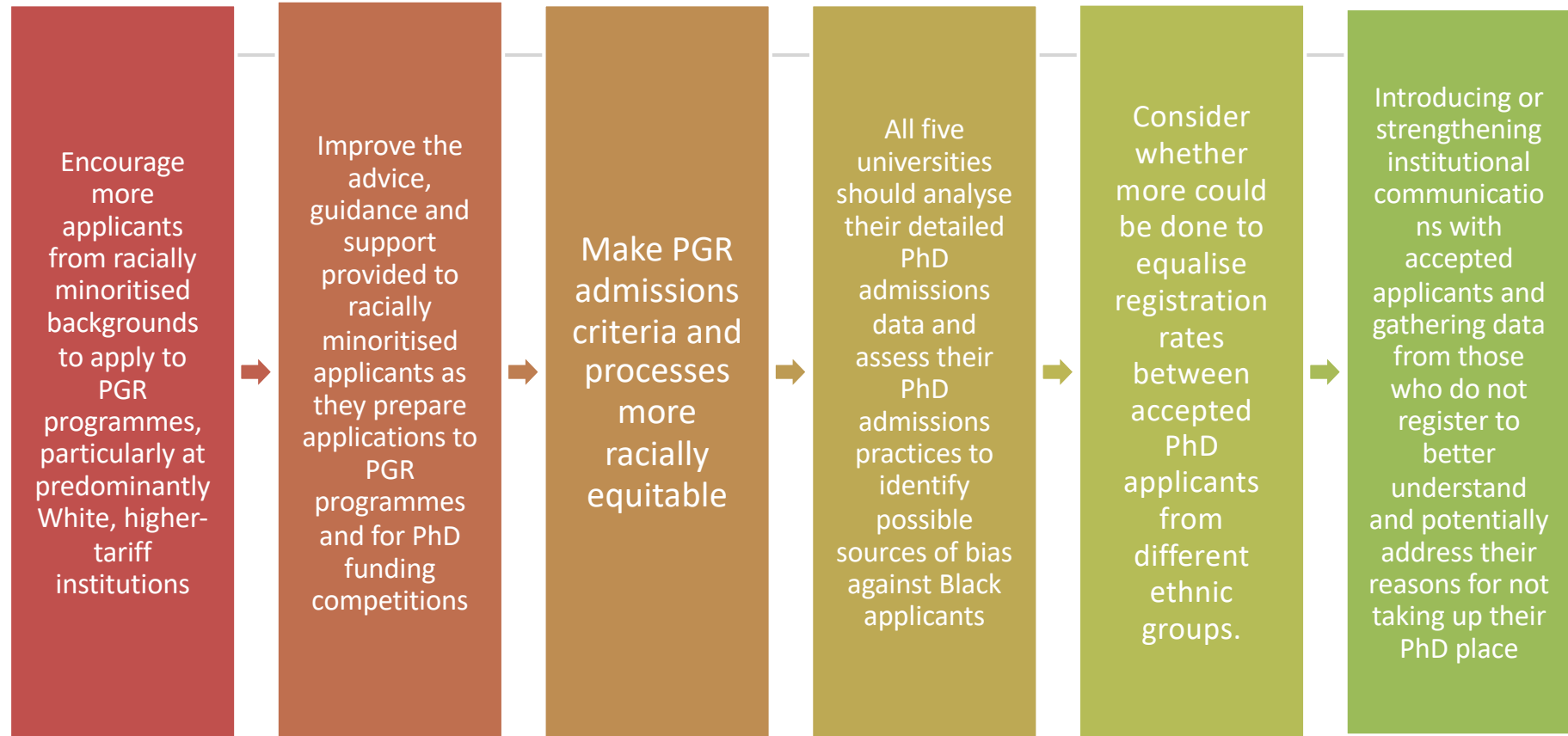
Ensuring equitable admission

A **more proactive approach to supporting** prospective PGRs throughout the application process

A **contextualised approach to PGR admissions** to ensure that e.g. the awarding gap at undergraduate level is taken into account

Fostering an **anti-racist culture** throughout the university

Recommendations





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