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Breaking Barriers: EDI in Academic Career Progression at the University of Oxford

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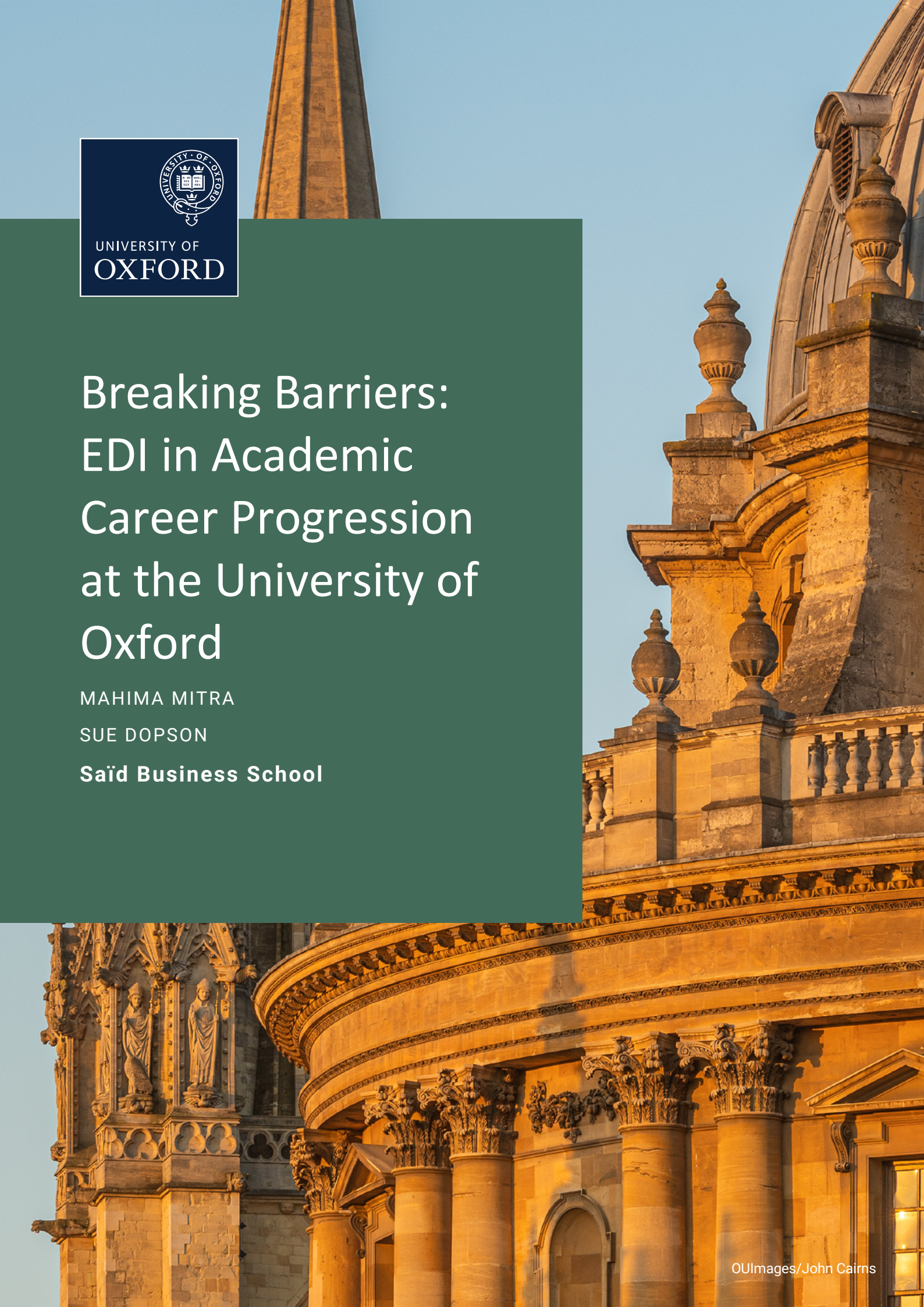

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Foreword

What is it like to be an academic from an underrepresented background at Oxford? And what must we do to strengthen the prospects of academic career progression for everyone?

These are essential questions for Oxford as we strengthen our efforts on equality, diversity and inclusion.

In this timely report, Mahima Mitra and Sue Dopson capture the voices of more than 100 academics from across Oxford. Theirs is the first qualitative study of its kind, examining the barriers encountered by academics at different stages of their careers from the humanities, social sciences, medical sciences and mathematical, physical and life sciences. As the report identifies, academics from underrepresented backgrounds – in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and social class – can face multiple barriers. Many of us have long recognised this. But now, through this research, we have a more precise vocabulary with which to talk about these issues.

More than merely offering a diagnosis, *Breaking Barriers* calls for the University to prioritise what its authors call intentionality and inclusivity – taking clear actions to achieve measurable change, and valuing every individual's contribution to the institution. It makes recommendations for how Oxford can enhance its efforts on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

This report is an example of how the University's academic expertise – in this case, in qualitative social science and organisational studies – can help shape our institutional response on EDI. Indeed, the report's findings have already informed our collegiate University EDI Strategic Plan, which will be released in the coming months.

In this respect, this report has already had a significant impact on Oxford's thinking and practice on EDI. And with its publication, there will undoubtedly be many more conversations and actions that it will spark across our collegiate University. I am pleased to commend *Breaking Barriers* to you, and hope that it will inspire us to think about how we can harness our academic expertise within Oxford for EDI progress.

Professor Tim Soutphommasane
Chief Diversity Officer
May 2024

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Executive Summary

Background

The University of Oxford has demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within its academic community. This has resulted in progress along several directions. The proportion of women Statutory Professors is now 22%, and the proportion of women Associate Professors is now 33% (Equality and Diversity Unit, 2024). BME representation at the Statutory Professor level is now 8%, while Associate Professor and senior research levels have both increased to reach 9% and 18% respectively (ibid.). However, the University recognises that there remain areas where further improvement is required, including representing women within the University's decision-making and governance structures, and further consolidating its position in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (ibid.).

This report explores the barriers to progression faced by under-represented academics at the University of Oxford and their expectations relating to how EDI and careers, more broadly, can be supported at the University. The underlying data is drawn from a research study funded via the Wellcome Trust's Institutional Strategic Support Fund (ISSF), which conducted over 100 in-depth narrative interviews with junior and senior academics at transition points in their careers to understand the individual and institutional barriers and opportunities relating to their progression at the University.

Although the findings in this report are structured along five different types of under-representation, namely, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and social class (although this is not among the 2010 Equality Act's protected characteristics), the individual experiences documented in this research resulted from an interplay between more than one of these at any given time. Our recommendations bear this intersectionality in mind when proposing inclusivity as one of the key pillars for addressing the EDI challenge.

Barriers to progression

The academics that participated in our research reportedly faced five distinct barriers when navigating their careers at the University:

1. **The accomplishment barrier** where participants felt challenged in being perceived as 'high flyers' based on existing norms relating to academic success.

2. **The agency barrier** where participants experienced a reduced sense of individual agency due to challenges linked with following the academic pursuits of their choice or having the ability to shape the elements of their job.

3. **The credibility barrier** where participants were perceived as not being sufficiently 'dedicated' or 'serious' based on their appearance or personal characteristics, or both.

4. **The 'do more' barrier** where participants were expected to take on more responsibility than usual to fall in line with perceived stereotypes or establish academic credibility.

5. **The productivity barrier** where participants faced challenges related to

research income generation, academic outputs, teaching, and related activities due to their personal characteristics.

While these barriers were consistently reported across the five participant groups in this study, the following patterns were noted:

1. **Women** chiefly faced barriers related to credibility, productivity, and being expected to 'do more'.

2. **Ethnic minorities** primarily experienced barriers linked to academic credibility and agency.

3. **Academics with disabilities** mostly encountered credibility, productivity, and accomplishment related barriers. These barriers were experienced differently by those with disabilities that presented themselves in a visible form, as compared to those that were not always evident or observable.

4. **LGBTQIA+ academics** experienced barriers related to credibility and the expectation to 'do more'.

5. **Social class** posed barriers linked primarily to credibility, academic accomplishment, and the pressure to 'do more'.

Enhancing EDI at the University

Participant expectations for enhancing EDI at the University related to two core asks: intentionality and inclusivity.

Expectations linked to **intentionality** centred on conscious, deliberate actions taken towards achieving specific, measurable goals for improving diversity and inclusion at the University by:

1. Moving from piecemeal actions to a long-term strategic vision for EDI

2. Moving beyond a general acknowledgement of individuals' diversity needs, to a day-to-day understanding and consideration of these in the workplace.

3. Clear signposting to support services and creating proportionate numbers of professional support staff to provide these.

4. Moving beyond simply increasing staff numbers across under-represented categories to recognizing patterns around barriers and addressing them.

Expectations relating to **inclusivity** centred on changing mindsets to create a culture where everyone's contribution is valued, and inclusion is integrated into the fabric of the university by:

1. Shifting focus from specific equality characteristics to a plurality of characteristics, views, and abilities more generally.

2. Building a more collaborative rather than competitive environment that promotes 'academic altruism', characterised by mutual support and encouragement, at its core.

3. Incorporating diversity as a core mission rather than a standalone or secondary strategy for the university.

4. Better joining up between and across the various EDI structures and resources within the university.

5. Appointing senior leadership based on their ability and motivation to support individuals and promote their wellbeing.

6. Widening the definition of success by, for example, rewarding contributions to the public good, or the social value created through academic contributions, and delivering excellent teaching.

Recommendations

Our examination of the empirical evidence gathered through this research, specifically participant career experiences, barriers to progression, and expectations for enhancing EDI at the University lead to the following recommendations:

1. Embedding inclusiveness into the university culture while adopting an intersectional approach towards its long-term strategic EDI vision.

2. Espousing the values of safety, nurturance, and collaboration, underpinned by mechanisms for enabling accountability.

3. Enabling careers more generally through establishing clear career pathways and investing in professional development support.

4. Defining, mapping, and reporting on EDI activities.

Conclusion

By setting clear goals and standards for inclusivity and demonstrating intentionality through developing a suite of activities that are effectively monitored and evaluated through each EDI programme cycle, Oxford can lead the way in demonstrating how diversity can be meaningfully achieved and maintained. This exemplary approach will not only benefit the University but also serve as a valuable model for other academic institutions striving to enhance equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The Argument for Diversity

Two key arguments frame the debate for improving equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in organisations. The social justice case presents a moral argument for diversity – that everyone has the right to be treated fairly and based on their individual merit at work, and that "equality and social justice are desirable ends in themselves" (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010:105).

The business case for diversity is based on the premise that diverse teams are more productive, and that gender, ethnic and racial diversity improves financial performance, enables better decision-making, and promotes creativity in organisations, which translates to profitability (Rock and Grant, 2016). Furthermore, diversity in teams is linked to the avoidance of Groupthink – "the psychological drive for consensus at any cost that suppresses dissent and appraisal of alternatives in cohesive decision-making groups" (Janis, 1972:8).

Diversity in management teams has also been shown to lead to more innovative outcomes, as reflected in higher innovation revenues and overall financial performance (Lorenzo, Voigt, Tsusaka, et al., 2018). The evidence indicates that the biggest gains come from changes in the leadership team, particularly from diversity of national origin, gender, career paths and industries (ibid.). A lack of representation results in fewer role models, as well as limited peer support from those with a shared experience (Herrmann et al. 2016; Piccoli & Guidobaldi, 2021; Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015).

It has been shown that a lack of inclusivity can work to the detriment of an individual in several ways. For example, through imposing the 'minority tax' (Mahoney et al, 2008), which refers to the overt burden carried, and disparities experienced due to being a minority. The minority tax can lead to inequalities of treatment in the form of racism and overt or covert forms of discrimination, or create unfairly high expectations relating to performance or being the EDI representative for the institution. It can also lead to isolation and a loss of career growth opportunities, for example through a lack of mentorship or promotion. According to Taylor and Johnson (2020), academic environments are also perceived as being "inaccessible" to those who work in atypical ways, making them challenging contexts for neurodivergent individuals.

Secondly, by promoting privilege – the "automatic unearned benefits bestowed upon perceived members of dominant groups based on social identity" (Case, 2013:2). According to Morimoto (2022:1), this results in "…the continuation of status quo practices and alienation of minorities that do not share—or do not have the ability to acquire—capital".

Finally, a lack of inclusivity can also be reflective of a 'fixed-ability environment' (Clark et al, 2021), which is characterised by the notion that intelligence, and therefore ability, is inherent rather than possible to acquire based on hard work or a supportive environment. Such environments have been found to be characterised by greater perceptions of sexism and the erosion of women's self-efficacy and belongingness (Clark et al, 2021).

Challenges to EDI in the Higher Education Sector

Acker (2006) uses the term 'inequality regimes' to describe the social and economic

inequalities operating within organisations: "…practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (p.443). While there are several factors that pose challenges to HEI efforts to increase EDI, three factors emerge as significant:

1. The difficulty of overcoming a history of exclusionary practices based on gender, race and other characteristics (Brown, 2004);

2. Entrenched attitudes marked by the perception that moving from an 'elite' to a 'mass' system of education leads to a decline in quality and standards (Morley, 1999); and

3. The assumption that diversity is about increasing numbers rather than creating supportive and nurturing organisational culture (Bebbington, 2009).

Given the above factors, there are three risks currently facing HEIs considering their EDI strategy and practice:

1. **The risk of 'diversity washing'**, or the incongruence between an organisation's outward position on EDI as compared to their investment and practices within the organisation (Baker et al, 2022). In the higher education sector, this can manifest in increased gender and ethnic diversity reporting in relation to academic staff without the recognition that this might be driven by appointments at the fixed-term, low-paid postdoctoral level.

2. **The risk of stereotype threats**, the absence of which can lead to investment and support based on perceived stereotypes related to under-represented groups. Stereotype threat is the "fear or anxiety of confirming a negative stereotype about one's social group" (Casad and Bryant, 2016: 1) that impacts individuals' performance, wellbeing and other behavioural outcomes.

3. **The risk of discrepant diversity messaging**, or the difference between the organisational diversity rhetoric and the perceived reality among organisational members. Evidence from a higher education context indicates that where such discrepancies are high, individuals are at a greater risk of being doubly disadvantaged, which can detract from the EDI agenda instead of supporting it (Rankin et al, 2022).

EDI at the University of Oxford

The University of Oxford has demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering EDI within its academic community. Recognizing the importance of creating an inclusive environment, Oxford has implemented a range of initiatives and strategies aimed at promoting EDI among its faculty members, resulting in being awarded an Athena Swan Silver award for gender equality, a Bronze award on the Race Equality Charter, and listed in the Stonewall Workplace Quality Index for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. There are several key aspects that form the foundation of Oxford's EDI strategy for faculty members, including recruitment and retention, training and development and support networks, as well as data collection and analysis (Equality and Diversity Unit, 2023a; University of Oxford, 2022a; 2020a). These have resulted in progress in several areas. The proportion of women Statutory Professors is now 22%, and the proportion of women Associate Professors is now 33% (Equality and Diversity

Unit, 2024). [1] BME representation at the Statutory Professor level is now 8%, while Associate Professor and senior research levels have both increased to 9% and 18% respectively (ibid.). However, the University recognises that there remain areas where further improvement is required, including representing women within the University's decision-making and governance structures, and further consolidating its position in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (ibid.).

[1] The equality targets for 2029 are 27% and 35%, respectively (University of Oxford, 2024f).

Research Overview

This report explores the barriers to progression faced by under-represented academics at the University of Oxford and their expectations relating to how EDI and careers, more broadly, can be supported at the University. The underlying data is drawn from a research study funded via the Wellcome Trust's Institutional Strategic Support Fund (ISSF), which conducted over 100 in-depth narrative interviews with junior and senior academics at transition points in their careers to understand the individual and institutional barriers and opportunities relating to their progression at the University.

The data used in this report has been drawn from specific interview questions that examined:

1. Behaviours and perceptions relating to Equality & Diversity within the University;

2. Career transitions of junior and senior academics currently or previously at the University of Oxford and whether these vary based on belonging to an under-represented group; and

3. Institutional challenges, barriers and opportunities relating to academic career progression of under-represented groups at this University.

Methodology

We utilized a cross-sectional sample of academics at different career stages, including postdoctoral researchers, lecturers, and different levels of permanent professors (see Table 1). A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 104 participants from across the Humanities; Social Sciences; Medical Sciences; and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences. The study was qualitative and exploratory and examined underrepresentation through the lens of subjective individual experiences. Potential participants were contacted through calls circulated via various communication channels at the University – divisional and departmental. Those who agreed to participate completed questionnaires prior to being interviewed to provide information on stratifying features including gender, ethnicity, academic affiliations, and work patterns. Participants also shared a copy of their updated curriculum vitae to enable us to understand their career.

The tables below give an overview of the sample size and breakdown in terms of several equality characteristics by both career stage and academic division. It is a useful reference when considering responses and examining the diversity of experiences of participants.

Table 1: Sample overview by career stage

Career stage	Overall	Women	Ethnic minorities	Individuals with disabilities	LGBTQIA+	Intersectional
Early	42	30	10	13	12	30
Mid	49	28	8	17	5	25
Mature	13	5	3	4	2	4
Total	**104**	**63**	**21**	**34**	**19**	**59**

Table 2: Sample overview by division

Divisions	Overall	Women	Ethnic minorities	Individuals with disabilities	LGBTQIA+	Intersectional
HUMS	32	18	2	12	10	20
SSD	28	20	7	8	2	15
MSD	28	18	9	9	5	15
MPLS	16	7	3	5	2	9
Total	**104**	**63**	**21**	**34**	**19**	**59**

Interviews were conducted over a period of 18 months between 2019 – 2021 in person, or by phone, Skype or Zoom and progressed via the following steps. We began with a drawing exercise – the journey plots – that invited participants to reflect on the key milestones of their career journey by reflecting on the significant events, individuals and relationships that helped or hindered their getting to where they were today. This was followed by a detailed oral reconstruction of their career journey. Several other interview probes explored the meaning of work and its significance, the nature of expectations from the workplace and the extent to which they had been met, and the career choices being made and levels of satisfaction in relation to these.

Narratives around feeling underrepresented and how that impacted career experiences emerged naturally in the context of several interviewee accounts. For others, they emerged as a result of probes relating to EDI perceptions and provisions within the University, experiences with feeling underrepresented and the impact of such experiences on individuals' careers.

Results were analysed through the creation of a thematic analysis framework in NVivo 12 and coding data along three key themes: (i) barriers to progression, (ii) expectations regarding enhancing EDI at the University, and (iii) mechanisms for enabling careers more generally at the University.

Barriers to Progression

Establishing a successful academic career today has been made significantly more challenging in the context of the neoliberal university. The move to managerialist principles in higher education has placed academics under pressure to deliver 'value for money', which has become a defining feature of the "academic labour process" (Worthington and Hodgson, 2005: 96). Quantitative metrics drive performance management in relation to teaching, research income and output, and administration (Boncori et al., 2020). This has led to commentaries of a loss of control that poses challenges to academic identities (Deem et al., 2007). For example, Nixon and Scullion (2022: 19) write that students are now seen as service consumers, which creates "dependency [and] vulnerability" among lecturers. Willmott (2011: 439) describes the practice of journal list 'fetishism' as having reduced academic writing to "shoehorning" research into elite journal formats. Such pressures often lead to unrealistic norms around the 'ideal academic' that "remains, for the vast majority…always out of reach." (Harding et al., 2010: 159).

While these pressures are not unfamiliar at the University of Oxford, navigating them is made more challenging due to the complexity of the University context – multiple departments within university divisions, alongside the unique collegiate structure, and the plurality of academic roles and contracts along which these are structured.

The prestige of rankings and outputs, and an understanding of '*the Oxford way*' is bound up with success at this University. Such success manifested in the form of four 'schisms' or divisions in the present study:

1. Teaching *versus* research, with teaching being significantly less valued than research.

2. Fixed- *versus* long-term appointments, with disproportionately larger numbers of academics on the former and a more accomplished career linked to the latter.

3. Impact as research *versus* teaching excellence, with reward and recognition associated with research excellence.

4. Being at Oxford *versus* returning to Oxford, with the latter being analogous to academic success.

While the career trajectories of all our research participants were impacted by these schisms, navigating them placed greater demands on the under-represented academics in this study. In this context, participants reported experiencing five types of barriers linked to career progression:

1. **The accomplishment barrier** where participants felt challenged in being perceived as 'high flyers' based on existing norms relating to academic success.

2. **The agency barrier** where participants experienced a reduced sense of individual agency due to challenges linked with following the academic pursuits of their choice or having the ability to shape the elements of their job.

3. **The credibility barrier** where participants were perceived as not being sufficiently 'dedicated' or 'serious' based on their appearance or personal characteristics, or both.

4. **The 'do more' barrier** where participants were expected to take on more responsibility than usual to fall in line with perceived stereotypes or establish academic credibility.

5. **The productivity barrier** where participants faced challenges related to research income generation, academic outputs, teaching and related activities due to their personal characteristics.

While these barriers were reported by most under-represented groups covered by this study, the form and extent to which these manifested varied greatly by participant group.

Women

The three barriers most commonly faced by the women in this study related to credibility, productivity, and being expected to 'do more'.

The credibility barrier manifested in not being considered a dedicated or serious academic due to having children or family duties, being subject to gender-based hierarchies at work, or being seen as young and lacking sufficient experience, and, therefore, credibility.

"I feel that being a part-time academic [mum] is not something you necessarily want to publicise … Part-time is generally not seen as a positive, if you describe somebody as part-time, you're generally kind of describing somebody who's not pulling their weight (Jane, MPLS)"

I'm one of the few Mums in academia, definitely in Associate Professor roles. So, we have quite a few strong women in our department – [but] all of them without children – so that is one of it. (LMP, MSD)

I'm at this tipping point where I want to move to a more senior position, but I also want to have children and they just don't seem compatible in any way. (Carmen, MSD).

There are constant reminders, even now, that people think you're a surprise and, "Why are you here?" And so, you always feel there's some credibility gap you have that you must overcome. (Annie, SSD)

With five years of post-doc experience I should be leading some of these things, but that has not happened. … There is a problem with people assuming that because you are young you can't take responsibilities. Whereas a man, they think he is responsible enough. (Indy, MPLS)

Women also experienced their credibility as being in question or needing additional justification during salary negotiations when being appointed for jobs, or when making a case for promotion.

I had a colleague being paid more than me and I said, "Well they wouldn't negotiate

with me, how can they negotiate with you?" "Oh well" he said, "you know, I had to bring my partner over from Canada and she had to give up her job". I was like, "So your argument was you have a girlfriend? And my argument was I'm already at a higher level of appointment than this and this will be a substantial pay cut and you got a pay rise, and I didn't?" That's appalling. … I now have got that promotion, but I had to work a lot harder for it. (Helena, MSD)

When I was first offered the post, I was … the conversation with the department at that point, the negotiations begin with, "Well you're a single woman … so you need to explain to us why we should pay you more than the lowest level". … And then we hired a new person just this last academic year… they used my job description and further particulars. … And we hired a man [with] fewer academic qualifications, and about the same number of publications. And the head sent this email saying, "Oh we've just agreed the contract and the starting salary". It was 26% more than mine. (Alexa, HUM).

Some women in the Medical and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences reported as needing to present more stereotypically male traits such as dominance or pushiness to be considered credible. Or, having to appropriate a specific style of dress to be taken seriously.

The medical world, all the senior people pretty much are male, there's very few females at the top. And [those] that are, are not like me, they're a lot more pushy, a lot more male for want of a better phrase, you understand what I mean? That's not who I want to be (JJ, MSD).

And then the other annoying thing about the clinical world is when presenting and things you have to dress up more and again, I don't like doing that. I'll dress smart but I am who I am, I'm not going to wear heels and make up because that's just not who I am but there's that expectation to be taken seriously… it's never just about the work. You would never do that with a man. With a woman you do comment on her appearance, it's never just her work. (JJ, MSD)

Those in primarily male-dominated subject areas reported as not being included in networking or collaboration opportunities or having to prove themselves twice as much to earn the same amount of respect.

Most people on my project don't feel affiliated to [College] even though we have lunch there, because if we sit next to older men at lunch they ignore us, almost all of them (Elizabeth, HUM).

It's only when you are brilliantly better than others that they respect you. Here you have to prove twice your ability; you have to work twice what a normal man would have done. I can't go wrong, because if I do it means that my reputation… While a man can make a mistake and it's just a mistake, if I make a mistake, it challenges my intelligence (Indy, MPLS).

… Being a woman you have to work twice as hard to prove yourself, my male colleagues definitely have it easier, they have their clubs, they stick together, they don't need to do a huge amount to impress, being a woman to be taken seriously you have to do so much, so much more and I know I'm not the only one on the team that feels this (JJ, MSD).

The **'do more' barrier** meant that women were expected to carry a heavier burden of duties at work in order to be considered a serious academic with 'skin in the game'.

People think that you should do more, because you should be grateful for your job, so whilst other people can turn things down, you shouldn't be able to turn things down, or somehow if you turn things down it's a more egregious thing for you to have said no (Annie, SSD).

I think the administrative burden is huge, and the expectations around that are a huge barrier. So [I] especially [felt that] when I was a younger academic…in the first three to four years of my first appointments, both at [another] University and at [this University] (Imogen, HUM).

Women were also presumed as being 'better' suited to welfare activities such as student support and advice as part of this 'do more' expectation.

She and I are seen as the go-to people for students. So, students that see that you are the people that they can relate to, you end up being the person that students with problems turn to, even though they are not your supervisee. So, I perform a lot of that function to colleagues, and again … it does tend to be the women… And … so it ends up being a huge amount of additional work because there is [also] relatively few of us on the appointments committees, so there is a lot of the committee work that we get asked to be on because they need a second woman or a third woman to be on a committee of some description. (Becky, SSD)

Finally, the **productivity barrier** manifested in having 'dips' or periods of lowered work output during early motherhood or when children were younger. A specific challenge was that such periods were not sufficiently acknowledged or recognized, nor was the impact on career prospects.

Six months before my final review, I was looking at taking three weeks off in August as both my kids were off school. And the advice I got [from my male mentor] was, "in your position there is no way I would be taking holiday at this juncture, you need to get to work". … Or the "yes I have children too", and it is like, well yes you do, you have four children, but you also have a full-time wife at home who irons your shirts and gets your kids to school! … I think that has been the biggest challenge, trying to fit in a workplace that on the face of it is incredibly flexible, but with a culture of really high competition (Becky, SSD)

I think early motherhood is very difficult and … I lost 10 years there, right? And … we don't consider that even if women work, they can't work at the pace. … I think it's unfair to … women who've had children and brought them up, because…it's undoubted that you compromise things professionally (Annie, SSD).

I did have two kids in my PhD which probably for my career was not a good thing. … I have no publications for that year because I had a baby and then another baby. (LMP, MSD)

We had to stop at 5.00pm, go home, put the kids to bed and then it sort of starts again about half eight, nine and that is when you kind of get time but then you do not really. The danger is that you end up not being able to work as well because you're always tired and catching up with yourself and I know it's not productive, but I just need to find a way for it to work (Jane, MPLS)

The productivity barrier was also faced by those encountering the 'do more' barrier**.** This 'double whammy' manifested in, for example, carrying a heavier administrative burden on the one hand, and losing out on productive research time, on the other.

The administrative burden was outrageous, actually, and prevented me from getting my research on track. And that's been very hard to recover from. So, I think there's a huge burden around that, especially on younger female academics. (Imogen, HUM)

Ethnic minorities

The key barriers faced by ethnic minorities related to academic credibility and agency. The **credibility barrier** was faced as a result of being judged based on their physical appearance, perceived demeanour or stereotypical assumptions about their abilities.

Sometimes I wonder, if I were not BME and if I didn't have an accent, how people would perceive me and how would the relationship be, especially coming from students, but … that's the way things might still institutionally be presented, and so that level of trust that people are prepared to put tends to be different (Will, SSD).

A Japanese woman, I think is expected to be very quiet and obedient. I am not, so clearly, I don't fit in this model (Alex, HUM).

This led to individuals' contributions not being trusted or valued or them having to continuously justify their presence or position to others.

Some students, …. don't seem to rely on or trust or value my contribution or even

my availability. … I tend to be active in terms of offering myself to contribute to someone, and this is something I have noticed with other colleagues who are non-BME (laughs), where they make the same kind of offer, everybody goes to them, and then when I do the same thing, hardly anyone comes (Will, SSD).

With my race and gender, I was constantly being asked to explain and justify why I was here, and it was wearing. It is wearing. It was, like, "Why are you here? What's your project? Oh, I don't think much of that. Hasn't that all been done before?" [And] at the time, I remember thinking, "Oh, maybe you're right," (Annie, SSD).

Some of our respondents reported being seen as undeserving of their position and assumed to be credible only due to receiving 'special exemptions'.

I think there's a common experience, in speaking with other academics of colour … in Oxford, … for the narrative to be, "You're here because you got all these special exemptions", as if you've had some kind of extra treatment. But the reality is the opposite. You start at the bottom of the hierarchy, and you struggle, and you suffer, and nothing gets given and you have to fight every single step. … So, even though the proof is, like she's like 20 times what the average is, yet there's this kind of image that gets imposed. "No, you're not good enough." (Stephanie, SSD).

So, … I was [featured] in the [department] newsletter for a number of things, [and] they both made a joke … that I'm probably in the newsletter because I tick so many boxes. And … I remember when I started at Oxford and I had some very good friends …and one of my other mates was like, "Oh, how many quota boxes did you tick for them there?" And that [was] just infuriating (Bob, MSD).

The **agency barrier** manifested when, despite working hard or making valuable contributions, individuals did not receive recognition in the workplace, or were unable to shape their career as they hoped.

Since I graduated with my PhD until today, I am trying to climb the academic ladder and I applied to hundreds of jobs just to get onto the academic ladder. And I never managed to do that. And I had one of my professors [say] to me, "I am disadvantaged because I am a woman, and you are disadvantaged because you are not native" … Within only about four years I [have] brought [high value funding] to the department, and I am not faculty. … I have been discussing very recently there is a fellowship that I wanted to apply for.. [But] the head of department came back to me and said, "we are sorry, but we can't actually help to keep your pay scale, you have to go down". So, I have to go down [a grade], and I feel like they are not investing in me. … The way I see it is that… we are just accessories. We come and go (Disposable Scholar, MPLS).

There was a period about seven, eight years ago when I was doing a lot of freelance work, because I didn't have an academic post. There are not a lot of jobs in [subject] and they tend to be very white anyway, so even though I had written lots of books and I edited a national journal, I still didn't have an academic job. … And

there were times when I used to wonder what it would be like if people really did recognise my ability and my work and they're not defining me solely because I was this odd Black working-class individual who stumbled into the very rarefied white middle-class elite world of [subject] (Freddie, HUM).

Individuals with disabilities

The key barriers faced by participants with disabilities in this research related to credibility, productivity, and accomplishment. These barriers were experienced differently by those with disabilities that present themselves in a visible form, as compared to those with non-visible disabilities, the nature of which may not always be evident or observable.

The **credibility barrier** was more frequently reported by participants with non-visible disabilities such as chronic pain, diabetes, fibromyalgia, or a spine disorder. Because the disability was not always evident, participants were perceived as being difficult or unforthcoming, or seen as being lazy or avoiding doing work. Such perceptions impacted their credibility in the workplace.

Although the diabetes has given me a way of monitoring stress, coming to Oxford was not a healthy move. One of the side effects [of diabetes] is diabetic retinopathy, and that got noticeably worse during that [period]. I don't like being accused of being lazy or dishonourable, which happened in quite a lot of emails. … I wouldn't trust many academic colleagues from that experience (Steve, HUM).

I am being perceived as being unfriendly or unforthcoming or inflexible because I can't do things. And I can't really explain why, because it takes too long to explain what chronic pain even is! And, even when I explain it a lot of people…don't have the category of understanding, … and they are always asking me, "where is it?" (Elizabeth, HUM).

I've been reluctant to talk about my disability because this is such a culture of performance, but I also feel like the response I get from colleagues when I do talk about it is so negative that I don't really want to say anything (Andrea, HUM)

Individuals' academic credibility was also impacted when, despite being aware of their disability, others expected them to 'act as normal'. In other cases, a non-visible disability was disregarded as being insignificant because individuals were not considered as being 'disabled enough'.

This year for admissions they booked a room that was on the third floor and …there was no way I could get the ergonomic chair up to the top. I think because I don't look like someone with a disability, the person from accommodation was like, "Oh, you want us to carry this chair?" like really, "Can't she sit on one of those?" [So] the reception I've had from the college is [that] they don't understand it and they're just not willing to deal with it in a correct way. … I think ironically if I looked like

someone with a disability, whatever that is, it would be much easier than explaining to people [all the time]. … Every day I'm in pain, every single day, as I perform my job. And that's not good, yeah (Andrea, HUM).

I do live with chronic pain and that's not great considering that my job involves sitting for eight hours a day. The chairs are no good, [and] I did try to contact our HR department to try to … help me find equipment to make it more comfortable but that just never panned out. … And so, I … just set up my own standing desk by using two polystyrene boxes to [make] a makeshift standing desk. … Right now, I'm really close to the centre of [this University] and I'm going to move out and … I could drive but then to get a parking space is basically impossible [as] I'm not disabled enough (Carmen, MSD).

The **productivity barrier** was faced by participants with visible as well as non-visible disabilities. Because non-visible disabilities were not often observed or understood, there were not enough sources of support to facilitate adjustments, which hindered work productivity significantly.

I have this lifelong thing with my spine, [and] increasingly I'm feeling like even when I do tell people they don't put the adjustments in that are suitable … my sense is they just don't know what to do with the information; even at the [departmental and college] level where they're supposed to know. So, I'm a bit stuck. … I just feel like the response is to throw more stuff at you. It's not 'stuff I need'; it's work adjustment (Andrea, HUM).

[My line manager] would just say 'you must work every single day, otherwise it's just not going to work. You can't take weekends, you can't take holidays, you can go on holiday, but you must take your work with you and work at least a couple of hours a day'. I tried to explain to her that if I do that I will burn out because … I am less capable of working long hours and long weeks and long months than someone without chronic illness would be. And that was very intimidating (Maria, SSD).

My chronic migraines, which have got much worse since all of this Zoom stuff, are quite a major damper on my working life. It's not so much the pain of the headache but it's the cognitive dysfunction that comes with them where I feel unable to think properly. And I think it's very little understood, particularly because I tend to insist on sort of pushing on through them. … It's something which happens so frequently that it seems to be something you can't really take time off (Edie, HUM).

The adjustments sought by participants included, e.g., having sufficient breaks during the day's schedule to manage diabetes, being able to get up and walk frequently or use ergonomic furniture during teaching, writing, and meetings to manage a spine condition; or having the option to work remotely frequently during chronic pain 'flare-ups'.

I get extremely ratty and bad-tempered if my blood sugar is low. … I think

institutionally, because Oxford people have pressured times, there has always been a tendency for meetings to happen at mealtimes, which for me doesn't work. I know one of the Equality and Diversity Unit's standard recommendations [is that] meetings are not held [at lunchtime], and that has been addressed recently [in my department]. I think what I find difficult is one constantly having to say, 'I can't come to that meeting because it's at lunchtime'. … Obviously nobody wants to have to deal with anybody's disability, and I think when it's not obvious everybody tends to try and forget it (Steve, HUM).

I have a very severe scoliosis…. So, this means that sitting, standing [or] holding any position for long periods of time is really painful. So, …the sitting one on one with students in tutorials… this is what makes me think I won't be able to keep doing this job for 20 years. And the hours of marking: sitting at the desk again. So, this is why I have this whole set up and I use speech recognition software, but even with that it's just not enough. And the way the disability system is set up here is that they do all these lovely things, which is great, but if the condition is variable there's no real adjustment for it because it's not the same all the time (Andrea, HUM).

For those with visible disabilities that had reasonable adjustments made to their work, the challenge was to keep up with the productivity that is expected from academic work, such as high numbers of teaching hours or research output. For such participants, work was always a trade-off for something else, such as work-life balance or physical and mental well-being.

I am not publishing all that much now, for fairly obvious reasons. It is hard to research. You can teach when you are in pain, … through gritted teeth. But …you have periods where you lose function and periods where you get it back again. … I don't know whether it is possible to be an academic and to be in severe pain. …[S]omeone like my head of department could sit me down and say you are doing enough; it is okay if you don't publish that many papers. [But] nobody says to an academic you are doing enough – disabled or not (Matthew, MPLS).

I have depression and chronic fatigue, so everything is extremely tiring. … I love interacting with the students [but] the part where I have to lecture for an hour is less great, simply because … it leaves me completely drained, and so … work is always a trade-off for something else (Ruth, HUM).

[Y]ou'll hear this from anyone else who has chronic health conditions, we just learn to work in a different way, on very low reserves because we've got no choice (JJ, MSD).

The **accomplishment barrier** was experienced when academic credibility and productivity was hindered as a result of visible or non-visible disabilities. For example, it was reportedly rare for participants with a disability to be seen as 'high flyers' or be recognised for academic distinction, promotion or a pay rise. According to one participant, there was a fundamental contradiction between having a disability and being seen as an academic.

My career, up to the point I became disabled, was a high-flyer. And it actually went practically rather easily, basically everything I applied for I got. … Until the point I became disabled – everything changed at that point. … I don't think it actually affects the quality of my work at all, but it sure affects the quantity of it. … And, so my career is on its last ten years certainly, and it is really a matter of holding on to it for as long as I can. I no longer have any aspirations to do any promotion. So yes, I was a high-flyer and then … No one in my department has ever talked to me about Recognition of Distinction, even though we have a policy of approaching anyone who might be eligible for it, from which I take a fairly strong message that they don't think I am up to it (Matthew, MPLS).

I feel like if I was not disabled, then in five years, I'd want to be running a major research project, you know, that was always my ambition. … I had ideas for that and was kind of gearing up to that when I got sick. And now I know that five years for me … is a very short amount of time because there's so little that I manage to get done in a day, that maybe … a third book would be nice, and a few more articles. … But my ambitions have now shrunk right down. …I really wanted to get a professorship and be running a big project … and now I'm just, like, you know, it would be nice to be publishing more regularly (Imogen, HUM).

LGBTQIA+

The most frequently reported barrier among academics from the LGBTQIA+ community was linked to **credibility**. This manifested primarily as misplaced judgements around not being a 'serious' academic based on participants' appearance or physical presentation.

As a Trans person, the risk is that you are perceived as some kind of childish character. [Y]ou do not want to go into a job interview thinking, "I have to fight against the fact that all these people will see me as younger than I actually am. Two or three years ago I would look like a teen, and it is really problematic when you are teaching 20-years-olds and you get regularly mistaken for one of them. And, … the more you push back against that, and as a trans person, say, "No, I am not actually a young woman, I am non-binary and I am asking you to make a little bit more of an effort in how you perceive me", … people are not willing to do that, because you don't get to demand extra effort as a young person who is trying to have a career, essentially (Ruth, HUM).

One of the big things that affected me personally in-between [previous] University and Oxford is that I started to explore more of my personal identity and started presenting and identifying as gender nonbinary and that, in contrast to [previous city] which is very liberal [and] there's … acceptance of people's identity, …Oxford is the complete opposite. Institutionally, Oxford isn't set up at all for … having any flexibility around trans issues. And there is very little literacy and awareness of what it means to someone like me to be like putting effort … into using particular names, pronouns or honorifics. And so that [as] a baseline on a personal level already makes it difficult for me to even go into a coffee shop or feel connected to my colleagues (Dr Pizza, SSD).

LGBTQIA+ participants also faced the '**do more' barrier**. In contrast to how this was experienced by some other underrepresented groups, for this group it manifested as both an internal and an external pressure to do more. For example, some felt pressure (internal or external) to advocate for diversity. However, this often came at considerable personal cost, such as hindered work productivity, or a diminished sense of academic agency or sources of psychological support for the self when it was needed. In these ways, the 'do more' barrier linked closely with the productivity and agency barriers identified in this study.

I wanted to focus on my research, [but] now, because of the pressure of the particular environment in the [department], I have needed to come back to … being this person who is [advocating for diversity]. …And that takes a huge amount of time away that I could be spending on my research, and I think that's impeded my progress … (Meg, HUM).

I enjoy academic work but I don't enjoy the institutions of academia and so I've been doing a lot more protest and activism than I had previously. [We have] a long history of unaddressed complaints of bullying and harassment in my department which I've now been trying to organise and continuously raise and provide my own support and advocacy for. And that's been frustrating because there … it doesn't seem like there [have] been commitments to really thinking about what it would take for bullying and harassment to not be a major issue, … every little thing has to be fought for rather than … constructively discussed. … I only have circumstantial evidence for this, but what had been a relatively smooth journey so far, … in terms of the … general feedback on my performance, suddenly shifted... I received an email saying that … I should be expecting to be going through a formal probation process for the remaining probationary term on my contract. Which was something that, as far as I can tell, no one else in my department has ever had to do. [I]t seems like …suddenly I was getting the book thrown at me (Dr Pizza, SSD).

Social Class as an emerging form of under-representation

Although not part of the 2010 Equality Act's protected characteristics, social class emerged as an important factor influencing the kind of a career an individual was able to chart at the University. While social class is at the core of the student recruitment and university experience at Oxford, its presence among and influence on academic staff careers is less well understood. In discussing 'class', we focus on the experiences of individuals from working- or middle-class backgrounds, and the social, cultural, and economic capital that they often do not possess when charting academic careers.

The three key barriers associated with social class related to credibility, academic accomplishments, and the pressure to 'do more'.

As with the other under-represented groups, the **credibility barrier** was experienced when participants' academic potential was judged based on their appearance, postcode, or previous educational institution/s. Similar to the experience of the ethnic minority participants in this study, those from working- or lower-middle-class backgrounds also received covert or overt feedback that they were at Oxford due to special exemptions,

rather than academic credibility or calibre.

I will turn up to work in my jeans and T-shirt and people say to me oh you just don't look like a professor; like you should be here. […] I think that sense of belonging is important, … and if you don't have that, you are often on the back foot. … As a [fellowship holder] you raise your money, you are here on merit and you share an office, and somebody comes in from [elite university] on exactly the same thing, and they have a college position, and you don't. And then you are then told by senior academics that you are not really the same as they are, because you never went to [this University] or [other elite University]. And, those things may be said in jest, but actually they hurt deep down (Johnny, MPLS).

When I first did tutorials … I came into a [tutors'] meeting…. They started talking to me and just literally [asked], "So, have you come through the system?" and I went, "What system?" "Are you Oxbridge-educated?" I was asked explicitly and then when I said no they said, "Oh. Are you on your own funding then? Are you on one of the fellowship schemes…?" … So, at that point I was a poster girl and that was it; nobody talked to me for the rest of the evening. I thought, "Okay, right, maybe this is not for me". (LMP, MSD)

One time I applied for a job, I accidentally put my home address on because I was doing ethnography in Corby, and the whole interview was about how poor Corby was and stuff, and then I didn't get the job. And that was like, "Wow, that shouldn't have been the interview." (Stephanie, SSD).

Coupled with the credibility barrier was the pressure to **'do more'**. This was seen as a mechanism for expressing gratitude, e.g., for grants and funding received as a student; or as a means of giving back through doing admissions and outreach work, for instance.

I'd have to be introduced to funders and kind of had to adopt this role of someone who was, like, this 'poor project'. It was just so humiliating, but I did it because I was just so grateful for being supported. … I just tried to give back so much … I felt that I constantly had to keep thanking (Stephanie, SSD).

I really do love the science, I like doing the outreach. […] In term-time I normally do one or two school visits a week, … and what has been nice about that is there have been a number of people that applied [that] may even have got in (Johnny, MPLS).

I have been doing a lot more access stuff, so I do academic sessions for school groups visiting…. I have been allowing more time for that, and less time for research really (Elizabeth, HUM).

The **accomplishment barrier** was posed as a result of participants from a working- or middle-class background, or first-generation learners not having access to academic networks or

connections that others might have. For some, this resulted in low relatability with the academic world or an inability to 'talk the academic talk'.

I am more willing to associate myself with the college staff than with the fellowship …. And, that speaks to the kind of perceived class difference, I think. I always feel like I can't relate to them because … they just have a completely different experience of reality! In many ways, they say things that are just like, "oh gosh, I can't believe that is where you came from! And you are not going to understand when I say something" (Elizabeth, HUM).

I've not done my degree or my PhD at Oxford or at Cambridge and if I look at other PIs here most of them come from the golden triangle… So, there are many of these conversations: "Oh, when I was an undergraduate in Cambridge…" I think, "Oh, I cannot relate". …, I'm [also] the first generation to go to university; [so not aware] of, "This is what it should look like and this is what it should be like" (LMP, MSD).

For others, this meant not understanding the systems and processes well enough to be able to utilise them well for their career growth, or for knowing the 'rules of the game' in relation to academic success.

I have a lot of success with research jobs but not with teaching, and I've been told by some people that because of my background, I won't get a teaching job in Oxford (Stephanie, SSD).

I'm the first person in my family ever to have been to university and so not knowing what to make of it, what the rules of the game are, and what to get out of it, was an obstacle (Robert, HUM).

I come from a background where … neither of my parents ever went to university so for them, having children that would go to university was the most amazing thing they could have ever expected. … [And] I guess the way [I saw] an academic job, I was too focused on teaching.... But then, an academic job does not only involve teaching. You need to do research because we have REF …, and you need to do a lot of admin. […] I felt let down by my naivety. I really had this wonderland idea of academia that it's definitely not. And I think that might be due to my background. […] The couple of things that you need to know about REF to just shine at an interview, those things…I haven't had access to. […] [I]f people are going to be employed by higher education institutions in this country, they need to be aware of the nuts and bolts of the system. Because that's what's going to make you employable (Claire, HUM).

As somebody that has not been born and bred within the Oxbridge cycle, understanding how the system here works is so bloody complicated and there doesn't seem to be a good road map for helping you navigate or understanding the system in the first place, if you are not coming … from Oxbridge (Nick, SSD).

My supervisor already had a pet student and gave all of his teaching to her, including all the interviewing experiences. … She has recently got a permanent job,

because she has experience of all these things (Elizabeth, HUM).

For some, this also simply meant no wealth to fall back on during periods of contractual breaks or gaps; or the freedom to take 'time off' from work in general to pursue academic writing or job applications.

I know perfectly well there are people who do a 'no teaching' post-doc, give themselves two years: "Yeah, I just want to pursue my research for two years". One colleague of mine, his parents funded him for five years. He had no academic job, he was a Visiting Academic at the university, I think he might have volunteered to do a little bit of teaching – it's often good to a little bit of teaching for your CV but nothing onerous. And he got a permanent academic job. And if the system is such that someone can do that and get a job but someone who works 12 hours a week and does really well cannot get a job, then clearly it is treating people who have to work for money very differently (Robert, HUM).

Enhancing EDI at the University

Participant expectations for enhancing EDI at the University related to two core asks: intentionality and inclusivity.

Intentionality

While acknowledging some of the strides made in improving representation, especially in terms of gender and work-family balance, the ask for 'intentionality' centred on conscious, deliberate actions taken towards achieving specific, measurable goals for improving diversity and inclusion at the University. There were four specific actions that emerged from participant accounts in this regard.

First, participants articulated the need to move from piecemeal actions to a **long-term strategic vision** for EDI. Suggested areas for consideration included:

- What kind of context do we want to build with the diversity that we can bring in through academic staff?;
- What value does diversity really add to the University?; and
- How might progress be monitored, and through establishing what kinds of metrics?

What is missing there I think, in my opinion, lack of intentionality. You need to be intentional if you want to change. If you just wait for things to change and happen outside and expect that if they change outside then this is going to change inside, no (Will, SSD).

[It is important to recognise] that the diversity space is really important, and can clearly bring something to the organisation. So, not seeing it as something [that] the world outside is forcing us to do. But, really, trying to understand what the value of diversity is for the University. [Perhaps borrowing from] the whole idea of high-class research, [which] is built around [the belief] that no matter where the idea comes from, no matter who said it in their physical being, if it makes sense, it needs to be discussed. Otherwise, if we keep [to] our mental siloes..., then advancement is way slower.... (Nick, SSD).

I think the departments need to be taking more of a responsibility for monitoring the discrimination that's happening. [The] information is there but no-one's collating it. I think [this is needed] ...if they're serious about changing things (Stephanie, SSD).

Second, was the need to move beyond a general acknowledgement of individuals' diversity needs, to a **day-to-day accommodation** of these in the workplace.

For example, Steve expressed the need to not have lunch time meetings as his diabetes needed him to monitor his food habits, and House spoke of having a learning disability that interfered with the quality of writing she produced and hoped for access to reliable proofreading services. Ruth, who had a chronic pain condition and needed more time to do the same things that others did, wished

for research funding eligibility criteria to be relaxed to allow her to pursue an academic career, albeit at a slower pace.

I am quite profoundly dyslexic, and …when you're a PhD student, obviously you get educational support for that, and your poor supervisor just has to suck it up and someone has to correct your spelling. … And then you become a junior postdoc, and you're writing, [and] it's nobody's job to help. So I really struggle because a lot of what you're judged on is written work, and there is no support for written work at all. […] There should be something built in and there is no-one (House, MSD).

Time, time is the thing that would help, …, disabled students and disabled academics are constantly catching up. Because even if we get extra time to do something, we really need that time to do the thing and then we are behind on the other things like applying for a job and conducting research at the same time. … But I don't get to pause the clock now [and]I have five other things to do, and I literally don't know if I can do it. And if I could just have three months longer, then maybe... (Ruth, HUM).

It would be nice to think that if I did apply for Recognition of Distinction, they would make reasonable adjustments. I don't think that, and that makes me reluctant to apply (Matthew, MPLS).

Third, was a combination of two actions:

- **Clear signposting** to people who could help support specific individual needs such as those relating to disabilities, mental health, and access to work; while also
- Ensuring that **proportionate numbers of professional support staff** roles were created to manage the demand for such services. This also included trained professionals to take on specific roles such as harassment officer or unconscious bias trainer instead of relying on existing staff to take on these functions in a secondary capacity.

I do think that…if I were being inducted now, I would expect to benefit from having very early on a conversation with somebody who was an expert in mental health [illness], and how that fits in with working in a University environment (Hiroko, HUM).

What I needed and what was not there was a network of support, …a website in the University that I could go to that [said], … "Here's how to deal with Access to Work [government organisation], here's their expectations, here's what to do, here's someone to speak to if you get stuck." And if there'd been a resource website that I could have gone to, with a list of contacts, [to be able to] say, "I don't how to deal with this, how did you deal with it?". (Imogen, HUM).

There must be lots more mental health support, which I find is totally non-existent. Whatever sources are there available, … you feel like the system is so clogged. You are trying to get in there, and just find the right support for you – [it] is just not worth the hassle. A lot of people just stay out of it and try to sort out issues on

their own. It is not just me, I have met other people who have done the same thing, gone the same route (Alice, HUM).

I was talking to a colleague [who] said that when she worked in an NGO, they had an outside expert who they could speak to [on harassment]. The problem is, if I had complained, I also think that people wouldn't really have known what to do. So, the HR Department doesn't really know what to do about these things whereas there are people who do know what to do or who just can hear you [out and] say, "Yes, okay…" (Sarah, SSD).

[T]here is one disability advisor. We've got 18,000 staff in the University. It's this sense that the colleges will deal with it, which does a massive disservice to the University, it's very lazy on the University's part. And it leaves those of us who are really struggling with quite complex situations feeling very troubled (Helen, HUM).

Fourth, was the need to move beyond simply increasing staff numbers across under-represented categories to **recognizing patterns around barriers and addressing them**. For example, why and how contractual insecurity disproportionately impacts women more than men, how parents can be better supported to manage career activities such as conferences and networking virtually and acknowledging that academic mobility (often a prerequisite to career growth and permanence) is at odds with demands on those with children.

I think the insecurity in the contracts affects women more than men. [For example] every woman I know trying to have a baby is always clamouring around the contract. And people must risk losing their job. … And perhaps [that is] one of the reasons that the senior jobs don't have many women in them (Helena, MSD).

[There is] this period of time in your life where many women want to think about children [but] you have to be on super-uncertain contracts and be extremely mobile geographically. And those two things just don't mingle. And just putting more focus on hiring more women... maybe we need to focus more on actually what's creating that problem... (Hejn, SSD).

I think what the war did to getting people to accept the fact that women can also work, I think this Covid crisis might hopefully do the same for parents. Parents can also work, you know, as long as you provide the right environment, they can do it. … It's just not done for no reason than the fact that it hasn't been done. … And research opportunities, I would love to keep these open and to build my field, and to be honest, I think the main thing that the University could do is to sort of open up these online avenues for people (Katy, MPLS).

Inclusivity

The ask for inclusivity centred on a change in mindset to create a culture or ethos where everyone's potential and unique contribution is valued and welcomed, and inclusion is integrated into the fabric of the University.

Participants suggested six key mechanisms through which inclusivity could become

central to the University's EDI mission.

First, through **widening the understanding of diversity** from focussing on specific equality characteristics (most commonly, gender or ethnicity) or structures through which to account for them, to embracing a plurality of characteristics, views, and abilities more generally. This would also entail moving away from the 'segregation' of initiatives by equality characteristics to balancing the representation of views in each context.

The poorest colleges… have really good records of access and outreach, and don't have any money. It is an ethos change. … [Y]ou have to shift the mindset behind it. (Alexa, HUM).

Sometimes in our race for gender equality, … we forget about other underrepresented groups. (Peter, HUM).

My [view] is that if there are specific events for certain groups, … what is the balance, and is everyone else getting some form of access or equivalent access? I don't think segregating people out is ever the way to do it (Bob, MSD).

Second, by working on building a more **collaborative rather than competitive environment** that helps everyone realise their potential, gives value to every voice, recognizes each individual's capabilities, and places 'academic altruism' at its core. It was suggested that relational skills training in this area more generally might help as a starting point.

I really valued my college as being somewhere where … you feel that you are on an equal footing, …, there was never a sense of hierarchy … [You] weren't being at all dismissed or belittled or your views seen as less relevant or less important …, and concomitant with that the sense that you could speak from where you were as who you were, … I can be completely myself and that is valued (Helios, HUM)

When I was in [previous university], graduates and staff shared the same common room and … there was a really strong collaborative sense … a kind of academic altruism of supporting each other, that made a massive difference. Whereas … here… I walked in and … it's totally sterile… There's … certainly no sense of kind of camaraderie or community (Helen, HUM).

It would be great if we were able to see the capabilities of people from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, and to give that the weight and consideration it deserves. … [T]here's [a] part of me that felt that, given the level of achievement I have made, it's a shame that this didn't come ten years ago. Therefore, to be very clear, I have no doubt that the reason why it's taken so long is because I'm Black, and I think also because my specialism is … a double whammy. In an ideal world those things would not be impediments, or they would not need additional extra work and input from myself just simply to be visible at a normal level that white scholars take for granted. It would have been nicer had that battle just not have to be so enduring (Freddie, HUM).

Third, through incorporating **safety, nurturance and accountability** as core values, and diversity as a core mission rather than a standalone or secondary strategy.

You know, ideally, you would want diversity to mean not just having all kinds of people around but having an environment that can nurture all kinds of people, ideally at all levels (Ruth, HUM).

[T]he hierarchy of this university is intense and is much more than other universities that I've spent time at. And that combined with there not being cultures or robust procedures for holding [individuals] accountable is a big part of what creates all of this toxicity. […] So, you … need to really make EDI more core to the mission of the University rather than being fixated on this idea of being arbiters of excellence and maintain the status as an elite institution (Dr Pizza, SSD).

Maybe if there's a process where people can actually go and feel safe to talk about these things and raise these issues without having dire consequences on their career trajectory then that's a small step (Hannah, MSD).

Fourth, through better **joining up between and across** the various EDI structures and resources within the University to build a sense of solidarity and belonging.

An obvious one …, would be significant change in the way that EDI is structured. represented and integrated into the fabric of the University, rather than being stuck in … [one standalone central unit], so a massive reshape of that would be necessary (Helios, HUM)

It is difficult to build alliances between people and join up, and it's very easy for someone to feel isolated. For example, someone may not be the only member of staff from an underrepresented background in the university field or even in their field of study, but they may not know that because they are the only one in their immediate purview. And that fractures abilities to build solidarity and a sense of belonging. It is just such a huge place, I think there is something about the structure of the University that is interesting to think about (Meg, HUM).

Fifth, by being **mindful of senior appointments**, including those in managerial roles, and selecting those that understand the need to support the people they work with.

A person who doesn't care about people is not going to help anyone, so that has to change. (Disposable Scholar, MPLS).

And sixth, by **widening the definition of 'impact' or 'success'** to better recognise and reward 'competence' instead of 'competitiveness'. Success reconceptualised this way could reward contributions to the public good, creating social value through the

work one does, and delivering excellent teaching.

The emphasis, it's not about being competent, it's about competitivity, you must get the big grants, and that's almost the only thing that matters, whereas there are so many people who contribute to the [subject] community in different ways by doing outreach, by drafting teaching materials, by putting up content online – and that's almost not recognised. I mean, yeah, that is something that you can add to your research proposal, …it's a nice sprinkling on the top. But it's not somehow recognised (Katy, MPLS).

It would be far better to be able to recognise [those on teaching contracts] for what they are doing and to think that there is continuity between teaching and research. For systemic reasons we are living in a period where academic apartheid is developing between those that teach and those that research. … And those that do the teaching are constantly on poorly paid temporary contracts; … You're on a dead-end street; it's impossible to get off one track and onto the other (Robert, HUM).

Probably a less stressful environment where it's not all about bringing in money and it's more about the science of what you are doing and why it's relevant [or] important (Nisha, MSD).

Enabling Careers at Oxford

Participant recommendations for promoting EDI were dovetailed with broader expectations around career enablement. These are important to note, as they feed into the wider desire for building a culture and ethos of inclusivity at the University.

There were four key recommendations that emerged from participant responses on career enablement.

First, was the need to establish **clear career pathways** by:

- Plugging existing career gaps such as between the postdoctoral and Associate Professor stage; and
- Generating pathways for roles that are not on the traditional tenure track route, such as, language instructors, teaching- or research-only careers, or those that have been provided through long running fixed-term contracts.

The big hole in the career structure at Oxford is the postdoc gap. … Why don't we have an above-JRF level? So, after a first postdoc but before a tenure track, what you really need is an Assistant Professor position, which we don't have in Oxford (Matthew, MPLS).

[It would be helpful] having a proper [research-only] pathway, [and] to know how to achieve that and what support you could expect along the way. [Also], who are the right people to talk to, and at what points in your career should you be putting in certain processes to make that happen? (JJ, MSD).

Having a sort of intermediate career path or something like senior scientist positions that don't have to be permanent positions [that] you have to be accountable for… but embed them in departments and institutes where you find groups who you can work with. And allow a certain degree of career development and achievement. And, of course, many of those people will never become a full professor but there must be another level of recognition and distinction for them (Mao, MSD).

I think the policy about … fixed-term research needs to change. I think [the] people who are hard workers, … have to have the credit. There must be a clear roadmap on how these people are going to progress their career, other than just offering them random courses [that] are not helpful (Disposable Scholar, MPLS).

The likelihood of my job needing to go [is dim], for the past 15 years it hasn't. But I've been on these fixed-term contracts for that long. I have raised it perhaps two or three times, once with HR, another time with the director of the department, … but no, nothing gets changed. That's not a debate that anyone is willing to have here, not just in terms of, 'Oh, let's have a look at those fixed-term contracts,' but in terms of what do these fixed-term contracts mean for you and how you feel about your career, and how you can plan for the future. […] certainly 15 years on fixed-term contracts I think is unacceptable. That needs to be looked at and I think that should be changed. (Wanda, SSD).

Second, was the need to access strong **professional development at different career stages**. Examples included having a designated person for discussing one's professional development and related support needs, and a responsibility to enable career development irrespective of whether the role related to teaching or research. There was also a recognition that a lack of coordination – both around professional development information and provision – causes confusion in a context characterised by many fragmented offerings for leadership or professional development.

I do personal development plans for my admin colleagues that I line manage, so we do it each year, but for the academic side, there isn't an equivalent process. … Everywhere else you get your 360 appraisal every year and it is just really lovely, because these are my strengths, these are the things that people really appreciate, and these are the areas they think I could change and you discuss with your line manager and you … we don't have any of that! (Becky, SSD).

I'm doing a Leadership in Management course [as] if I want to move into management, I've got to get all my ducks in a row. But it's a course with 40 members of the University in it and I'm the only academic, [and I] feel like the track they're on is not the track I'm on so the course is not that useful, to be honest. … What can I do? Who can I talk to? What course can I take? How can I take responsibility for steering my way through this?" I spend a lot of time thinking about that. And my frustration really comes from not finding the solutions often (Andrea, HJM).

I would just sort of speak to my colleagues, really, as much as anything about professional development, and really seek it for myself. For example, I've been applying for other positions. … I go out there and apply for stuff, talk to people. There are loads more I probably could be doing, making more connections with people at the [subject association…but I've only got so much time. Here in this department, there is no structure as far as I'm concerned for thinking about my career development and my progression. […] I think if a department values research so much, there should be structure, organisation, time and effort put into me as a member of staff building up a research-active profile. At the moment, that is massively ad hoc, only down to me attending and putting in effort over and above what my contract requires of me, which is teaching only (Wanda, SSD).

Third, was the provision of **enhanced career support**, customised to each career stage. For **early career researchers**, examples included sabbaticals achieved through no-cost extensions that give postdocs an opportunity to focus on a specific developmental goal, plugging of funding gaps to avoid career breaks or shifts out of academia, support in the form of suitable accommodation or a designated office space to work, the availability of more formalised teaching opportunities and awareness generation around how to build an academic career.

And so, in [this University], you're at a stage where most of your teaching is being done by casual employees and there's barely any permanent positions, but whatever mechanisms are there, are only extended to those people already on

permanent positions (Meira, SSD).

Once you're in the postdoc, … [grants] increasingly dry up… But, the University could step in and they – we appreciate that the funding streams are drying up, especially right now …. [Because that is] where things start to get dicey and difficult for people [who] realise [that] maybe the instability of this career is not what I want… At that point a lot of people have families to think about and they go off to be an administrator somewhere, … and it's usually women and minorities who get left behind because they don't have that stability. So, if the university could just plug the gap initially, that would be amazing (Rochelle, MSD).

Leeds has this nice opportunity where postdocs could formally teach one course a year, and in exchange, you would get an extra year's funding. … It's not like I taught instead of somebody, no, I did this. And that meant that I could have ownership of how the course was structured. … I would have mentors who would come and sit through my lectures and tell me if I'm teaching okay, what I could change …. And in some sense, it makes you immediately ready to think about teaching as not just pushing knowledge, but what is effective …. And I … got the extra year's funding. If you're a postdoc and you have a year where you are not answerable to anyone, you can do whatever you want, and you have that extra year to search for a job, apply for fellowships, basically time. That's the hardest thing to get, and you're getting that there (Lyze, MPLS).

For **mid-career academics**, the ask was for support to plan the next step in the career once tenure was achieved, help in charting career goals and planning how to get there, support in navigating the day-to-day expectations successfully when transitioning into a new role, and a structure for promotions and progression for those further on in their careers.

I don't see how I get to the next rung. … So, there's kind of a disconnect there in terms of I think what the University can provide. […] [I would like] a clearer sense of how to progress into management because now it seems like you can be a Professor and then you can be a Pro Vice-Chancellor but the route from Professor to Pro Vice-Chancellor seems completely unclear to me … Like I would love to move into that not next year but eventually, but I don't see the road. And I wish the University could help me figure that out (Andrea, HUM).

I would say an annual appraisal with someone who is thinking about your career trajectory. [For example], what did you do last year, what are you going to do this year? How does that fit into a longer-term career path? Acknowledging that even when you've only got ten years to go, you know, there's still a lot of options actually. […] [Also] the promotions path here is extremely lumpy. … So there's actually not much sense of progression in terms of the promotions structure and I think that's really out of kilter with the entire rest of the sector (Annie, SSD).

[I would have liked] clarity over issues such as contract and what the job meant. I think that would have made a huge difference. … It would be nice to be given a clear sense of what one should be doing and then also be told how to do it if one

didn't know, not having this constant feeling of sink or swim. Support is the word I keep coming back to. I think that is the thing, and that many supportive people and many supportive high institutions, I don't feel as much day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month support at the middle level of management in the institution (Steve, HUM).

And fourth, was the need for an **enhanced coaching and mentoring offer** at different career stages. This included, for example, one-to-one coaching rather than group professional development programmes to focus on personal career goals and to get undisturbed time to plan and reflect, and increase one's effectiveness and ability to perform well.

I feel like I need coaching in certain areas … It needs to be a one-to-one thing [as opposed to] group courses that are designed for maximum benefit but perhaps not necessarily really benefitting individual people. So, that's what I would like the department to give the money to [provide the] coaches to help me overcome specific hurdles that I feel are stopping me doing things in terms of getting the next stage of job (Jane, MPLS).

I have a personal life coach who I pay for myself, and I would recommend that … I haven't been able to make mentoring work for me but …. And it really pays for itself, it really makes you more effective and more emotionally intact and able to perform well (Sarah, SSD).

In addition to coaching, it was also considered important to provide more thoughtful and considered mentoring. This was expected in the form of having a mentor that was close to academics' own career path, a more structured rather than ad-hoc mentoring setup. The importance of focussing on strategizing together about building a career especially at the early career stage was also highlighted, whilst not disregarding that senior academics also have a need for mentoring.

I think if you can have a mentor as close to your own career path as possible, that would be helpful. Or for people to have two mentors, because quite often, I know that people are very mercenary and they want a big name, but the big names often won't really help you. They have had the magic carpet treatment. They don't actually know what you're talking about (Annie, SSD).

I think research mentorship could have been better. …[I]t would have been nice to have had someone to help me figure out a research strategy that was not my former PhD supervisor, because as great as he is, he never had to think about these things, he was just, like, churning out brilliant articles, you know, with ease, without having to strategize. And for those of us that need to strategize and need to plan and need to just structure our lives a bit more, I think having someone to mentor me through that at an early stage would have been enormously helpful (Imogen, HUM).

I know there is work afoot on developing career conversations, in other words what we call meetings to talk about where you are at that aren't about appraisals, because we don't really do appraisals within academic structure, but we need to do something. And I want to develop that in a more integrated way, particularly for the stretched middle, so it doesn't just become a morass, and doesn't then lead to brilliant people leaving (Helios, HUM).

When they suddenly brought out all the mentor/mentees programme, … it was, like, "Oh [House], but you can mentor all these people." And I thought… I need some help. … I think [mentoring] programmes are great, but sometimes the matching is just random. Because it's not just a mentor, … it's someone who … needs to sit down with people and say, "This will make it easier." (House, MSD).

Recommendations

Our examination of the empirical evidence gathered through this research, specifically participant career experiences, barriers to progression, and expectations for enhancing EDI at the University lead to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Embedding inclusiveness into the University culture while adopting an intersectional approach towards its long-term strategic EDI vision.

The University is currently drafting an end-to-end action plan – which will act as an overarching collegiate EDI strategy to bring the different strands of work on EDI across the collegiate university together and identify gaps for taking action.[2] Such joining up is crucial to unify the often-fragmented diversity initiatives into a standard offering, avoid replicating efforts and identify gaps in provision where either an intervention is missing or the quality of input is lacking, as well as generate an integrated narrative relating to EDI that can create a shared sense of responsibility and belonging.

Going forward, the University could additionally develop and deliver cross-cutting pieces of work, such as, on inclusive leadership, effective line management and the creation of support networks and services for meeting the day-to-day needs of its employees across a range of diverse needs. While some initiatives on inclusive management are taking place at divisional or department/faculty level – for example, see the WIN Inclusive Leadership Programme (Wellcome Centre for Integrative Neuroimaging, 2024), the University should consider delivering this at a central level. A further mechanism for promoting inclusiveness more generally could be through 'in-group organizational endorsements' (Burrows, Pietri, Johnson et al., 2022) in which under-represented individuals learn about the positive experience of other underrepresented employees, including how out-group employees can serve as role models and mentors. These measures have been shown to promote identity-safety and higher attraction towards employing organisations (ibid.).

The above overarching interventions could be complemented by specific workstreams relating to e.g., ethnicity, disability, and gender, that require differing levels or areas of focus depending on employees' felt needs. In this context, a greater focus on areas that have been previously less invested in, such as disability and social class related barriers among staff, is merited.

At the heart of such change should be a strengths-based approach that focuses on developing good practices that showcase *what works* to promote inclusiveness in the workplace and avoids the problem of 'diversity fatigue' or a "diminished response to or desensitization towards diversity efforts" (Smith, McPartlan, Poe and Thoman, 2021: 660). This requires moving on from initiatives such as, for example, unconscious bias training that is rarely shown to change behaviours (Atewologun, Cornish and Tresh, 2018), runs the risk of adverse reactions and backlash (Georgeac and Rattan, 2023; Zheng, 2022), and can weaken the support for diversity programmes due to its perceived

[2] This is being led by the University's Joint Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion co-chaired by Professor Tim Soutphommasane and Helen Mountfield.

linkages with worsened organisational performance (Georgeac, Kaplan, Unzueta, Birnbaum and Ely, 2019).

Recommendation 2: Espousing the values of safety, nurturance, and collaboration, underpinned by mechanisms for enabling accountability.

The University's current focus on promoting *safety* through tackling bullying and harassment has resulted in communication and awareness generation campaigns and forums for debate and discussion. To improve its capacity and capability to provide harassment support, it is piloting an online reporting tool – Report + Support (University of Oxford, 2024a) that can potentially work as a safe and transparent mechanism for reporting bullying and harassment incidents (University of Oxford, 2024b). While any long-term initiatives to embed inclusiveness as a core value will positively impact these efforts, the University could, in the short- to medium-term focus on strengthening redressal mechanisms to make them safe and non-threatening for both the complainant and the subject of the complaint. Another step forward could include training for line managers to understand, support and help report incidents, including clarifying procedures for both informal and formal reporting and resolution. Building confidence in having challenging conversations earlier to avoid escalation would also be helpful.

While promoting safety has been an area of action and impetus for the University, nurturance and collaboration remain two core values that emerged as significant in our findings and can speak to the University's strategic EDI efforts, including the creation of a culture of inclusivity. As a starting point, *nurturance* can focus on fostering an individual's potential, providing avenues and opportunities for employees to be seen and heard, and the giving and receiving of feedback via constructive dialogue to align employee and employer goals and expectations. In this context, engaging with employee expectations came up as especially significant in the data we collected, and was considered especially helpful in the context of creating opportunities for growth and giving recognition and reward.

However, embedding *collaboration* as a core value will need determined action. Collaboration is one of the key mechanisms for fostering inclusion, and a key pillar of inclusive leadership (Deloitte, 2018). To foster collaboration, the University might need to consider, for example, how collaboration can be recognized and rewarded, rather than disincentivised. Such a consideration will need to bear in mind the wider institutional context of academia. For instance, the pressures exerted by the Research Excellence Framework, that in granting credit for an academic publication to only one author within a given institutional unit, limits an academic's freedom to collaborate within their own institution. As such, one step forward might be to create an incentive structure around collaboration, whilst recognising that incentives can be both financial (for example, financial rewards) and non-financial (such as, enhanced status, formal recognition, or improved organisational climate). For example, collaboration could be defined as among one of the metrics of impact where it enhances the student learning experience, enables career progression or generates other forms of social value. In addition to incentivizing collaboration, the University might also consider creating physical spaces and opportunities to exchange ideas and engage in collaborative projects. In this regard, the termly EDI Roundtable organised by the University's Chief Diversity Officer has been exemplary in enabling the exchange of ideas,

sharing good practice, and generating formative feedback from across the Collegiate University on the University's wider EDI strategic plans.

Finally, the University might also wish to consider how it might promote collaboration beyond academic spaces, to wider initiatives that are EDI focussed. For example, King's College London runs the "Realising Opportunities" programme in collaboration with other UK universities to provide targeted support and encouragement to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue higher education, which can be replicated to support existing and future postdoctoral researchers at Oxford. Although there are several schemes that the University is also running in this respect such as, the Astrophoria Bridging Programme (University of Oxford, 2024c), or UNIQ (University of Oxford, 2024d), none yet focus on the postgraduate or early career level. Collaboration could also be helpful in designing a 'reverse' or 'up-mentoring' programme to support career progression of under-represented academics at the University. The evidence indicates that such initiatives can improve the mentoring process, work relationships, and career progression of under-represented researchers in higher education institutions (Risner, Morin, Erenrich, et al., 2020). A longer-term vision might be to create an inter-University network for exchanging knowledge, sharing best practices, and fostering collaborative learning across the wider sector. These can serve as a useful forum for developing innovative strategies and mutual support among institutions and accelerating progress towards a more inclusive academic community.

Recommendation 3: Enabling careers more generally through establishing clear career pathways and investing in professional development support.

A key step being taken by the University to enable careers is the Academic Career and Reward Framework project, which aims to structure career pathways, review workloads, and improve the system of reward and recognition of academics and researchers at Oxford (University of Oxford, 2024e). The framework is expected to be particularly helpful in supporting the career pipeline of Associate Professor and above, roles in which women and BME individuals remain under-represented (Equality and Diversity Unit, 2023b).

The University has also made some significant strides through its 2022-25 Action Plan as part of its Concordat to support the career development of researchers (University of Oxford, 2020b). Progress made has included the rollout of career development reviews, dedicated support and protected career development days, and signposting and skills training activities for researchers (University of Oxford, 2023).

Although the initiatives above cover a significant proportion of the University membership (including under-represented individuals), there remains a lack of focussed attention on those holding fixed-term teaching- and college-only roles that tend to be disproportionately held by under-represented groups (particularly women and ethnic minorities) (Equality and Diversity Unit, 2023b). Our research also identifies an unmet need for coaching, leadership development, and transition support for those taking on leadership roles, which the University might consider investing further in, to strengthen its career enablement offer.

A further area of investment relates to wellbeing and occupational health support for academic staff. Although several piecemeal initiatives have been implemented to respond to this need (e.g., the University's Employee

Assistance Programme, access to the wellbeing platform *MyMynd*, and departmental mental health first-aiders), a more holistic offering is needed. To this end, the University has been working towards a strategic operational framework and clear governance structures for a 'Whole University' staff wellbeing strategy (University of Oxford, 2022b). The success of such a strategy, however, is predicated on significant investment in building the internal capacity of the University to provide occupational health support, which requires moving one step ahead from its current reliance on external wellbeing support.

Recommendation 4: Defining, mapping, and reporting on EDI activities.

The intention to succeed in creating an inclusive University environment is incomplete without a concerted effort to map and measure the change that is sought. The metrics that currently form the basis of the equality reporting by the University focus primarily on staffing figures and diversity characteristics of the University's workforce, which, although helpful in understanding where the university is at, do not enable an analysis of the *change mechanisms* that have been put in place for EDI, and the extent to which *these have had an impact* on the makeup *and experience* of the workforce. As such, there is a need to move beyond relying solely on the University HR Analytics team's reporting and instead develop a robust and focussed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework *specifically* for planning, implementing, and mapping EDI change interventions at the University. This is under consideration as part of the new collegiate EDI strategy being developed by the Joint Committee for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

The development of appropriate metrics for mapping and measuring change are central to such a framework. In selecting these, the University should consider moving beyond workforce characteristics to assess how inclusion is embedded in key University processes and operations, such as the everyday work culture, promotion and progression, benefits and pay decision-making processes, and professional learning and development. Relatedly, the University might consider moving from a primary reliance on quantitative metrics to create relevant qualitative indicators that enable it to map whether, and in what ways inclusivity is embedded in the sorts of processes identified above, including learning where gaps exist, or where improvements can be made.

Which indicators are selected and focussed on should be primarily driven by the strategic goals and priorities of the University and the focal interventions designed to achieve them. However, the University might wish to look outwards for an appraisal of the industry standards or frameworks that can feed into its own M&E strategy. For example, the national standards body British Standards Institution (BSI) has recently published a new code PAS 1948:2023 (BSI, 2023) as a guide to enable organisations develop and implement an EDI framework in the workplace. Example areas covered by the guidance include (i) demonstrating leadership buy-in to EDI, incorporating EDI principles into organisational policies and practices, (ii) establishing clear business benefits of an EDI culture, (iii) developing clear Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and data analytics for EDI, and (iv) practical steps for implementing principles such as 'cognitive diversity', 'intercultural competence' and 'inclusive innovation' for creating an inclusive organisational brand relating to EDI. The National Equality Standard (NES) is another industry-recognised standard for EDI developed by Ernst and Young in

partnership with 20 public and private sector organisations in 2013. It offers an EDI assessment that identifies areas for improvement, alongside key implementation recommendations relating to seven core areas – EDU culture, talent, business, people, leadership, relationships, and measurement (Ernst and Young, 2013).

For any mapping activity to lead to meaningful learning, it is important that monitoring and evaluation form an essential part of strategic EDI action plans, instead of a retrospective exercise that is undertaken, e.g., to submit institutional applications for Athena Swan awards. To this end, the University could draw upon the expertise offered by the field of programme evaluation and incorporate Theory of Change (ToC) development and evaluation as based of its core EDI offer. A ToC[3] is a standard tool that is used by government agencies, development organisations, international NGOs, and increasingly – universities, to understand, map and evaluate processes of change by linking individual intervention components (such as the inputs and activities conducted) with short-, medium- and long-term outcomes that are variably achieved by the intervention. The identified changes are mapped in terms of key causal mechanisms, which can then be transferred on to other programmes or contexts to be tested and implemented (e.g., see Funnell and Rogers, 2011).

To unify the often-fragmented diversity initiatives, including good practice and useful learning that exist across the Collegiate University, the University might consider creating an EDI hub for collating and synthesizing evidence and guidance to effectively mobilize learning and good practice from EDI initiatives while ensuring that such information is simple to access and assess. Such a hub could cover, e.g., findings from EDI mapping / evaluation activities; guidance and information on generating, implementing and mapping an EDI monitoring and evaluation framework; guidance on how to conduct and embed evaluation activities within EDI interventions; good practice examples of successful EDI interventions; and open forums for peer discussion and engagement on EDI issues.

An EDI hub would facilitate the building of the University's internal technical capacity in relation to evidence-generation. However, focussed investments on technical skill building including creating policy evaluation specialist positions to conduct in-house analytics and evaluation activities is important. Such a hub would also build in a culture of reporting in relation to EDI, aspects of which should be made publicly available to demonstrate the University's commitment, plans, and progress towards being a diverse employer.

[3] For an overview of the key components of a Theory of Change, see The Evaluation Support Team (2024).

Conclusion

The challenges and opportunities identified in this report place the University of Oxford in a unique position to develop and exemplify a gold standard for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion for its staff and the wider academic community.

By setting clear goals and standards for inclusivity and demonstrating intentionality through developing a suite of activities that are effectively monitored and evaluated through each EDI programme cycle, Oxford can lead the way in demonstrating how diversity can be meaningfully achieved and maintained. This exemplary approach will not only benefit the university but also serve as a valuable model for other academic institutions striving to enhance equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Appendix A: EDI at other UK Universities

The University of Cambridge

Cambridge University's most recent diversity report highlights its 16/21 strategy, which encompasses initiatives aimed at fostering a more diverse and inclusive environment. The report outlines five strategic themes guiding the university's efforts: creating diverse, supportive, and connected communities; positive cultural change, and an excellent educational experience. What is noteworthy about these strategy themes is the focus on diversity as a whole (rather than on specific under-represented groups) and a core focus on inclusive culture. The university moved away from reporting against individual equality strands and have adopted a Combined Equality Scheme since 2010.

Cambridge is also distinct from other universities in its diversity reporting. In addition to reporting on its staff balance by gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief, it also reports on staff recruitment, promotion, and pay gaps by gender and ethnicity (University of Cambridge, 2023).

Changes to academic titles and establishment of two career pathways were among a wider set of changes made by Cambridge in 2021 to, among other factors, increase staff diversity and more appropriately publicly recognise career milestones. A noteworthy change with the Research and Teaching pathway was the title of University Assistant Professor to replace pre-probation University Lecturer roles. More significantly, there was a new teaching and scholarship academic career pathway created to recognize and create an associated promotions route for staff in primarily teaching roles. Titles within this category include, e.g., Teaching Associate, Assistant and Associate Teaching Professors and (full) Teaching Professor (University of Cambridge, 2021).

Finally, specific diversity initiatives currently being offered at the University include an *Academic Career Pathways CV Scheme,* which pairs junior academics looking to apply for promotion with senior academics, to encourage and support career progression among under-represented groups. It also regularly conducts research to explore and understand the lived experiences of several under-represented staff groups (e.g., see Bostock, 2014).

King’s College London

King's College London's diversity report emphasizes that EDI is everyone's responsibility. The report highlights achievements across several faculties:

1. The Faculty of Arts & Humanities introduced a module on investigating the colonial past of King's College London.

2. King's Business School explored the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) attainment gap through their Inclusive Education Partners.

3. The Faculty of Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Sciences developed a staff-facing training series

called "Culture Change" to address topics such as being an active bystander, the Equality Act, Equality Analysis, and Microaggressions.

4. The Dickson Poon School of Law launched a bullying and harassment working group.

5. The Faculty of Life Sciences & Medicine conducted Promotions workshops, leading to an 11% increase in female professors since 2018.

6. The Faculty of Natural, Mathematical & Engineering Sciences held online celebrations for Women in Science week.

7. The Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Palliative Care organized race equality events for staff and students, generating actions for the EDI Committee and faculty leadership.

8. The Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience initiated a Year of Learning, encouraging engagement with race equality and knowledge sharing.

9. The Faculty of Social Science & Public Policy launched its EDI strategic plan, attracting over 100 attendees to their launch event.

Being located in London, one of the most diverse cities in the world, presents unique opportunities for KCL to engage with a broad range of communities and address specific urban EDI challenges. One such initiative is the "Realising Opportunities" programme, a collaboration with other leading UK universities that provides targeted support and encouragement to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue higher education and attend KCL. KCL has established the Intersectional Gender Equality Network (IGEN) to address gender disparities and foster an inclusive environment for all genders. IGEN focuses on the experiences of individuals with multiple identities (such as those related to race, disability, sexuality, etc.) and promotes discussions on how to create an equitable campus culture that considers intersectionality.

University College London

University College London's diversity report presents its Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Plan for 2020-21, outlining key actions and initiatives. The plan includes several focus areas:

1. *Increasing diversity in student and staff recruitment*: UCL has implemented targeted outreach programs to encourage applications from students from underrepresented backgrounds. The university also established an EDI Hub to provide support and advice to staff on EDI issues.

2. *Embedding EDI principles in decision-making processes*: UCL has introduced measures to ensure that EDI principles are integrated into all aspects of decision-making at the institution. This includes an EDI Analysis Framework to assess the potential impact of policies and decisions on different groups.

3. *Providing training and support for staff*: UCL offers various initiatives to provide training and support for staff on EDI issues. This includes an online training program on unconscious bias and an EDI Forum to promote sharing of good practices and discussions on EDI matters.

4. *Promoting a culture of inclusion and respect*: UCL has launched an EDI communications campaign to raise awareness of EDI issues and established an EDI Champions network to promote EDI within different departments and faculties.

Three distinctive examples of how UCL is differentiating themselves are:

1. UCL's 2034 Strategy, which emphasizes the importance of creating a more inclusive and diverse environment across all aspects of the university's activities, from recruitment to research and beyond.

2. The aim to decolonize the curriculum, as the institution engages in the process of seeking to address historical biases and Eurocentrism in the content taught across various disciplines. The university has been working to diversify perspectives and ensure a more representative and inclusive curriculum that reflects the contributions of diverse cultures and societies.

3. The establishment of The Equiano Centre in 2020, named after the influential writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano. The centre focuses on advancing research and understanding related to race and racism, supporting anti-racism initiatives, and promoting racial equality within the institution and beyond.

Imperial College London

Imperial College London stands out from other institutions through its comprehensive EDI strategy. While Oxford's approach includes similar objectives, Imperial College's action plan demonstrates a more encompassing and detailed approach and commitment to fostering EDI principles. Imperial College goes beyond statements of intent and formulates concrete action points with clear priorities, specifically designed to enhance the opportunities and experiences of underrepresented groups, such as women, BAME individuals, LGBTQ+ communities, and disabled staff.

Transparency, accountability, collaboration, and open dialogue are key tenets of Imperial's approach, promoting continuous improvement and innovation throughout the institution. By integrating EDI principles into all aspects of its operations, Imperial College actively strives to make inclusivity central to its management processes and staff experience, empowering individuals and transforming structures to combat inequality and discrimination effectively.

In contrast, while Oxford's EDI approach for their junior faculty shows alignment in terms of detail in its openly communicated objectives, its broader range of actions and university-wide approach is more generic in its description in comparison to Imperial College's strategy. Imperial's commitment to implementing tangible and comprehensive EDI measures across the entire institution sets a higher standard for fostering diversity and promoting equality. Specific examples that set them apart from other universities in the UK include:

1. **EDI Strategy and Framework**: Imperial College London have developed a comprehensive EDI Strategy and Framework that aimed to create an inclusive and diverse community for all in addition to focussed initiatives on specific under-represented groups. The strategy focuses on enhancing representation, fostering an inclusive culture, and improving support for staff

and students from diverse backgrounds through:

- Integrating EDI within management processes
- Making EDI central to the student experience
- Taking actions to improve the opportunities and experiences of, especially women, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, LGBTQ+ and disabled staff and students
- Reducing the incidence of bullying and harassment
- Gathering and publish data to monitor progress
- Collaborating internally and externally to develop good practice
- Being open to dialogue and challenge on their work on equality, diversity and inclusion.

2. **Imperial As One Campaign**: Imperial's "Imperial As One" campaign focused on promoting a sense of belonging and community among its diverse staff and students. The campaign aimed to celebrate the university's diverse community and foster an environment where everyone feels valued and respected.
3. **Targeted Support for Underrepresented Groups**: Imperial College London had implemented specific initiatives to support underrepresented groups in academia and research. For example, the Women in Academic Medicine programme aimed to address gender disparities in medical research and support the career progression of women in academic medicine.

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