

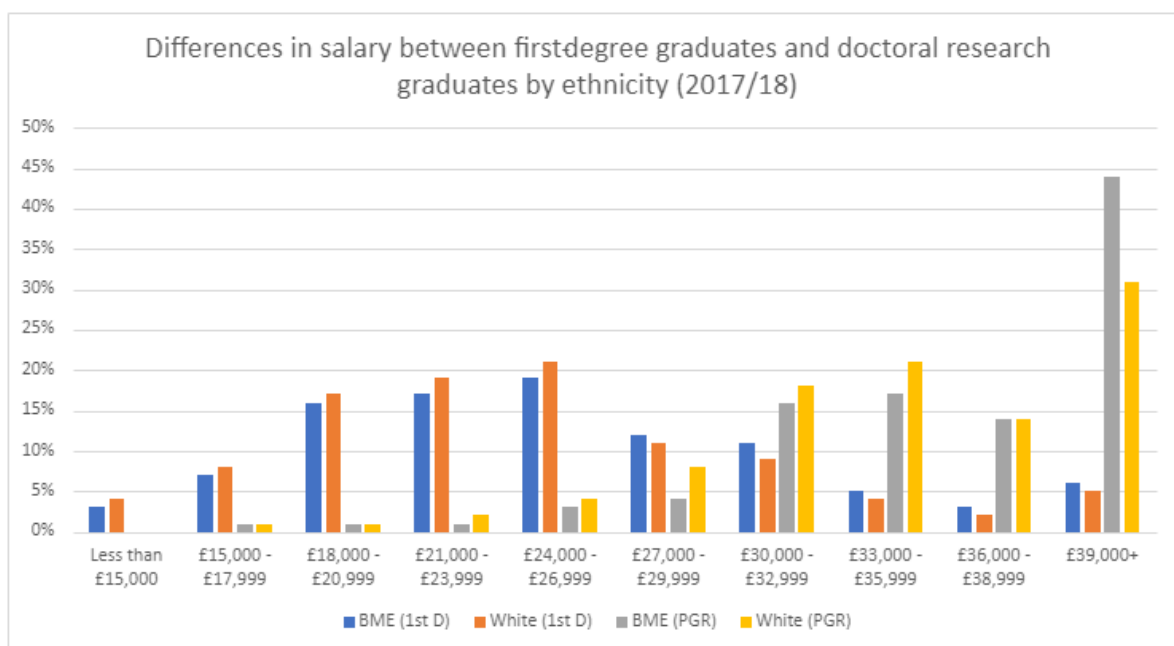
## It quite literally pays to do a doctorate if you are a 'BME' graduate...But what does it mean if you're Black?

*Guest author Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green, Associate Professor and Head of Year, Leeds University Business School, sheds some light on current employment data about BME PGRs*

HESA (2019/20) reports that 8% of UK domiciled students are Black. Yet (HESA 2020) reports that only 2.2% of all PGRs domiciled in UK are Black. There is undoubtedly a broken pipeline between undergraduate to doctoral level study. One of the structural issues related to the broken pipeline is that of degree awarding gaps. The Broken Pipeline Report (2019) by Leading Routes, expertly points to the 'Black' awarding gap as a contributing factor for under-representation of Black students at doctoral level.

The Financial Times reported in December 2018 that Black male graduates in the UK earn almost £4 an hour less on average than their White peers. Figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show that 5% of Black graduates were unemployed 15 months after leaving university, compared with just 3% of White graduates. However, according to HESA graduate outcomes data, 2017/18, salary parity is achieved between BME and White PGRs at the £36,000 - £38,999 threshold. Interestingly, a greater proportion of BME PGRs (44%) than White PGRs (31%) earn beyond this threshold i.e. > £39,000. The 'PGR BME' earnings premium shines a light on the structural inequalities faced by Black students in the academy throughout their studies from undergraduate to doctoral level. It is only those comparably few 2.2% (2,525) Black students who do manage to progress through the academy to doctoral level study who seemingly then start to earn a comparable salary to their white peers (and start to exceed it).

The numbers of BME PGRs 2017/18 (11,590) are much lower than White PGRs (52,580). Additionally, there are 48,365 PGRs with unknown ethnicity status. As a result, we must caution in extrapolating or generalising the headline results which suggests BME PGRs earn more than White PGRs. A (weighted) average salary relating to 12 way ethnicity groups, would provide a much more meaningful comparison across different ethnicities. Despite the limitations with the data, it is clear that it quite literally pays for BME students to have degrees.



Whilst further research needs to be undertaken to understand the reasons why a higher proportion of BME PGRs earn over £39,000 than white PGRs, we propose that it is the intersecting characteristics e.g. gender, disability characteristics and destination outcomes (industry v academy), that are likely to be significant contributing factors. A reasonable proposition is that Black, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi PGRs are over-represented in the 41% of PGRs that go into industry, which typically pays PGRs more than PGRs who go on to work in the academy.

The need to draw an inference, rather than being able to analyse the data to determine the reasons for the BME PGR salary premium, highlights the limitations in the existing PGR datasets and need for disaggregation of data across different intersecting characteristics in order to analyse 12 way ethnicity data and draw out meaningful analysis.

**References:**

[The Broken Pipeline – Barriers to Black PhD Students Accessing Research Council Funding](#), by Paulette Williams, Sukhi Bath , Jason Arday and Chantelle Lewis (2019)

[Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19 - Student numbers and characteristics](#) – Higher Education Statistics Agency

[Degree attainment: Black, Asian and minority ethnic students](#) - Office for Students