

# Race and Representation in the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain

Final Report

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## About the Runnymede Trust

Runnymede is a leading independent race equality research and policy think tank. Established in 1968, we have provided high quality research and thought leadership in order to:

- Identify barriers to race equality and good race relations
- Provide evidence to support action for social change
- Influence policy at all levels

Our work covers a range of public policy areas including education, employment, criminal justice, financial inclusion and political participation and of most relevance to this commission is the work we have conducted on the experiences of BME students and staff in higher education relating to access, participation, progression and retention; research we have conducted for a number of universities in support of their submissions to the Equality Challenge Unit Race Equality Charter Mark; action research and policy writing on the impact of changes to the national curriculum for teacher practice in promoting diversity with students in schools and the production of a wealth of educational resources, lesson plans and student oriented websites to enable the teaching and learning of diversity and inclusion within all classrooms.

## Introduction

In the autumn of 2015 Runnymede was commissioned by the PESGB Executive Committee to conduct a short review of the PESGB membership with regards to minority ethnic representation, as well as exploring the inclusion of papers and topics for discussion at conference events including issues of ethnic diversity, difference and race equality. During 2015 the Executive Committee initiated a number of interventions, alongside this review, to highlight the importance of issues of race and ethnicity to the Society more broadly, including the establishing of a Race, Ethnicity & Philosophy of Education Committee; the adoption of the British Philosophical Association Society for Women in Philosophy Good Practice Scheme, as evidence of wider commitment to issues of equality and diversity and the inclusion of a statement on the PESGB website highlighting the Society's commitment to issues of tolerance, inclusion and diversity. This review and the findings included below, thus form part of a wider piece of work currently being conducted by the Society and overall will consist of broad findings and recommendations to enable the Committee to reflect on the following:

1. Identifying both barriers to minority ethnic representation as PESGB members as well as highlighting solutions to underrepresentation more specifically
2. Providing suggestions for increased recruitment from within the UK more broadly

Below is included a summary of findings gleaned from an online survey administered to members during late 2015/early 2016, together with some initial analysis in the final section from interviews and focus group discussion with 14 PESGB members. The survey element of the work was supplemented by qualitative research building on a number of themes emerging directly out of the survey findings.

An online survey was distributed to 259 PESGB members who attended the 2015 annual conference. There were 69 respondents to the survey. The survey was open for approximately one month between the 7<sup>th</sup> of December and the 11<sup>th</sup> of January. In addition to the survey, qualitative research has also been conducted in the form of telephone interviews and one focus group discussion specifically for minority ethnic members all held between February and March 2016. The list of interview/focus group discussion questions were developed out of a number of themes emerging from the online survey. These themes included:

- Differences between international and national minority ethnic members
- The extent to which low minority ethnic representation reflects underrepresentation in philosophy more broadly and other specific Society factors
- Lack of discussion of specific topics covering race, ethnicity and diversity within conferences and events
- Work to increase membership of those in the teaching profession

On the online questionnaire form, respondents were asked to volunteer to participate in additional discussions with the Runnymede research team either through interview, focus group or email response. Thirty eight respondents in total expressed some initial interest in speaking with the research team further, with final telephone/Skype interviews and focus group discussion taking place with 14 members altogether. Seven out of the fourteen people consulted were from minority ethnic backgrounds.

## Structure of the Report

The report is separated into two main sections for ease of reading – firstly we have outlined the general findings drawn from the survey of members, which is then followed by a discussion of points raised during the interviews and focus group discussion. Separating the report in this way enables us to demonstrate how some of the initial themes outlined in the survey – for example what might prevent Black and minority ethnic applicants joining the Society, as well suggestions for ways to improve or increase minority ethnic participation – were further explored in discussions with an ethnically mixed group of existing members. These further elaborations include discussions on the nature of barriers to representation, the extent to which representational difficulties merely reflect wider issues in higher educational more broadly as well as ways that finding solutions to increasing diversity may be intricately tied to the future of the Society as a whole. We outline all findings below.

Throughout the report we employ the acronym ‘BME’ to reflect the term Black and minority ethnic, though we use this interchangeably with ‘minority ethnic’ or indeed ‘Black’ and/or ‘Asian’ where these terms are raised by respondents either in quotes taken from their interviews or their survey responses.

## Summary of Findings

Overall respondents felt that the Society was an open and supportive Professional Body that they were proud to be part of. Respondents also pointed to what they felt was the potential for the Society to have real impact on teacher education, such was the expertise covered by its membership. There was some indication however that change was sought, certainly by those consulted via interview and in focus group discussion and that the nature of this change was linked to the demographic of the membership which would in itself lead to wider transformation.

Responses certainly in answer to survey questions, as to the perceived ethnic diversity of the Society and indeed the existence of barriers to membership were mixed, but the findings from both aspects of the research can be summarised as follows:

- It was not felt that minority ethnic groups were well represented across the membership of the Society, however the majority of survey respondents did not feel that there were barriers to membership
- Most survey respondents felt that ways to increase membership could include greater contact with postgraduate students, a finding echoed by interviewees who further suggested specific activity to be conducted with teachers
- Survey respondents were also not in complete agreement as to whether Society events covered issues of race very well, though when asked to look across all

equality strands<sup>1</sup>, noted that religion and gender were well represented compared a poorer representation of race, sexuality and disability.

- The majority of survey respondents felt that attendees at Society events were not very diverse with a greater number feeling that the speakers at future events should be more diverse than currently.
- As was raised by some survey respondents, it was recognised by all interviewees that there was a clear distinction between British born BME members and international students/members of which there were increasing numbers attending the Annual Conference and events. The perception that this created an erroneous view that the Society was increasingly diverse was shared across all ethnic groups consulted.
- All interviewees excluding two, felt that the Annual Conference could be overly intimidating to new attendees, affecting participation and increasing difficulties for BME members
- The nature of philosophy of education as a discipline, the analytical tradition, and rejection by some of the academic rigour of subjective approaches was seen by BME respondents as a way of preventing discussion about race, ethnicity, religion and diversity.
- As a way of potentially increasing the diversity of the membership, the introduction of more interdisciplinary discussion or activity within the Society was broadly welcomed by some but certainly not by all consulted, with members worrying about fracturing, and noting the already decreased status of philosophy of education within teacher education.
- All BME members consulted had broadly experienced feeling isolated and marginal at Society events, either with regards to the tone of discussions following papers presented or in (frequently but not exclusively) passing comments made in informal settings during the Annual Conference. There was not however complete agreement as to whether BME only spaces at the Conference or elsewhere, were the best ways to enable support.
- The majority of interviewees felt that there were a number of structural barriers both to membership but also to participation for BME groups, which included the existing low numbers of BME members and the lower take-up of philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> Equality strands here refers to those protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics include age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation.

either at undergraduate or postgraduate level by BME individuals more broadly, and philosophy of education most specifically among others

- Other structural barriers were noted by interviewees. For example, the ways in which subjects were chosen for discussion at events were not always seen as facilitating broader inclusion of a range of subjects – giving speakers the opportunity to discuss work of their choosing when those making choices were largely white, as reflective of the membership, would not lead to the inclusion of a range of perspectives
- Interviewees suggested that issues of race and identity politics were regarded as unimportant, and in the case of religious diversity, as ‘non-rational’ by some Society members, exacerbating pockets of informal discussion experienced by BME members in ways they felt were harmful and exclusionary.

## Survey Findings

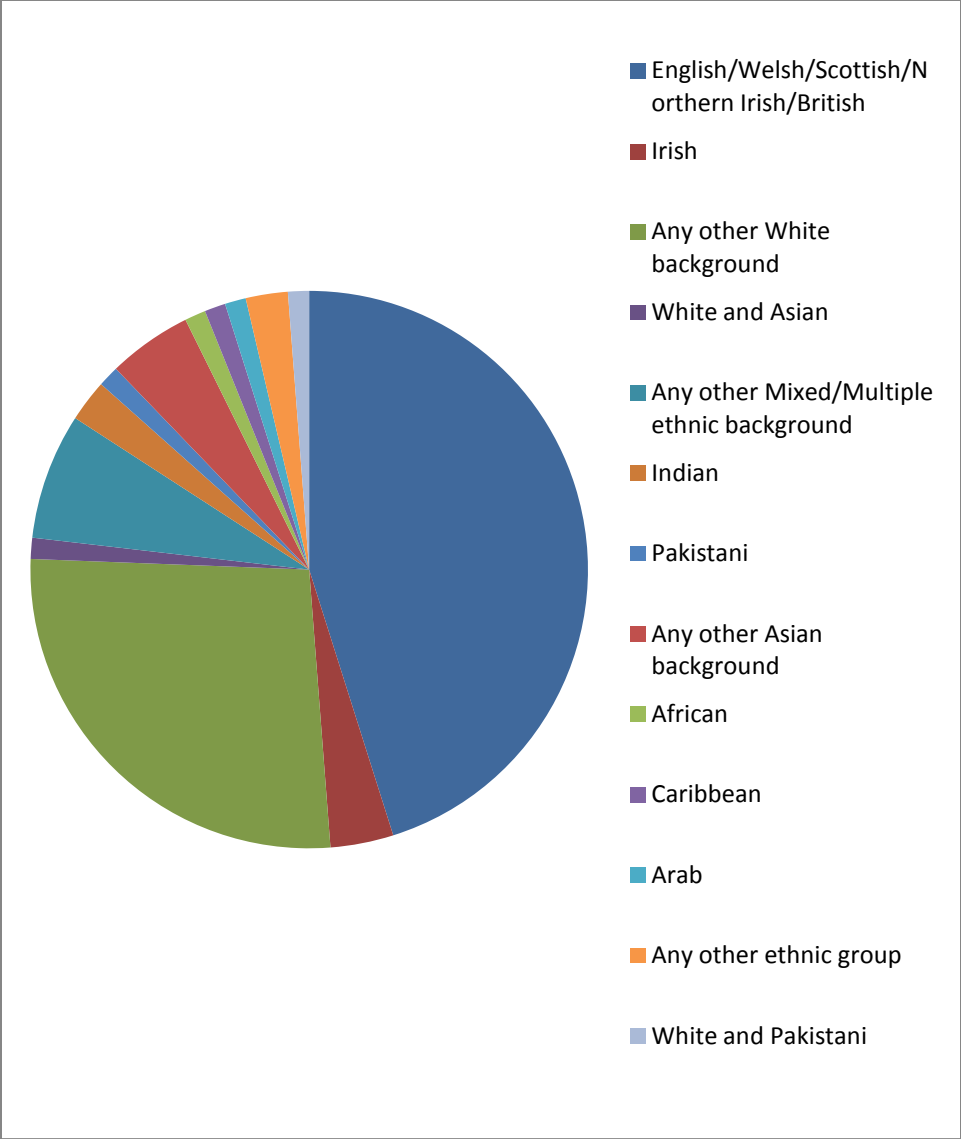
### Membership

Most survey respondents had become PESGB members via recommendations from tutors or lecturers, followed by those whose colleagues had recommended the Society to them. The majority of respondents (46%) had been members of PESGB for 6 years or more - only 10% had been members for less than a year.

45% of survey respondents identified as White British, this was the largest group in the sample followed by Any Other White background at 27%. The numbers of those from BME communities were very small with the largest being Any other mixed at 7.3% of the sample, Any other Asian at 4.9% and Indian at 2.4%.

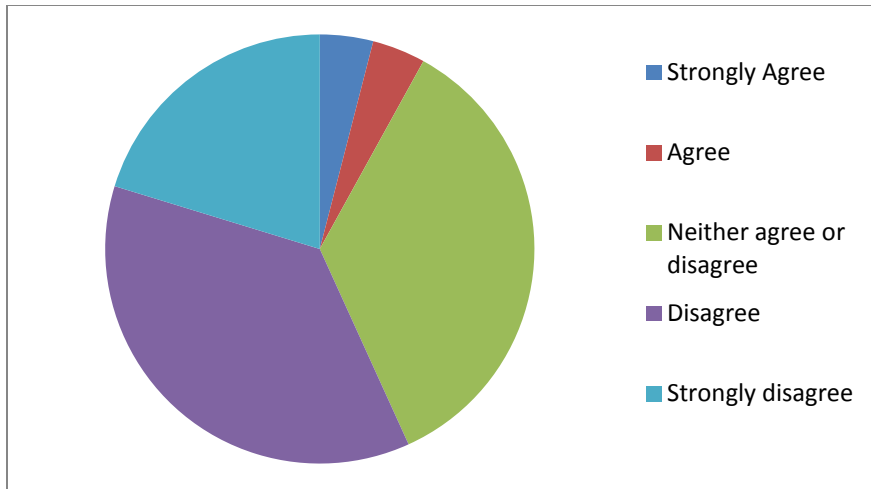
With regards to religious identification, the largest group were those with no religious identification at 39% of all respondents, followed by those of Christian faith at 26%. Jewish and Muslim respondents constituted 8% and 6% respectively.





We asked respondents to comment on the statement **Minority ethnic groups are well represented across the PESGB membership** - only 8% of respondents agreed. This is in contrast to 55% of respondents disagreeing. The remaining 34% neither agreed on disagreed with the statement.

Filtering the results to look at respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds, 12% agreed with the statement and 63% disagreed.



Of those that agreed reasons cited included that “membership is open to all and fees reflect different circumstances” and that “Conferences are international in scope and not at all limited to 'Great Britain' in content, or indeed, in the origins of participants.”

Amongst those who disagreed a strong theme emerged around personal experiences and not having seen non white participants:

“On the conferences and seminars I [have] never see[n] a black or heard a black speaker”

“The annual conference must have been 97%+ non-minority people.”

“At most PESGB events, the participants and presenters are overwhelmingly White.”

In particular many people made a distinction between the representation of British minorities as opposed to international members. For example one respondent answered:

“I think there are not enough young home students at PESGB. There needs to be a better balance between international and domestic student[s]”.

Another noted:

“There are a lot of foreign students - so if they count as minority ethnic while in Britain, then I would change my assessment. But of those permanently living in Britain there are hardly any 'Black', 'Asian', or even, to my knowledge, Polish or other white minorities.”

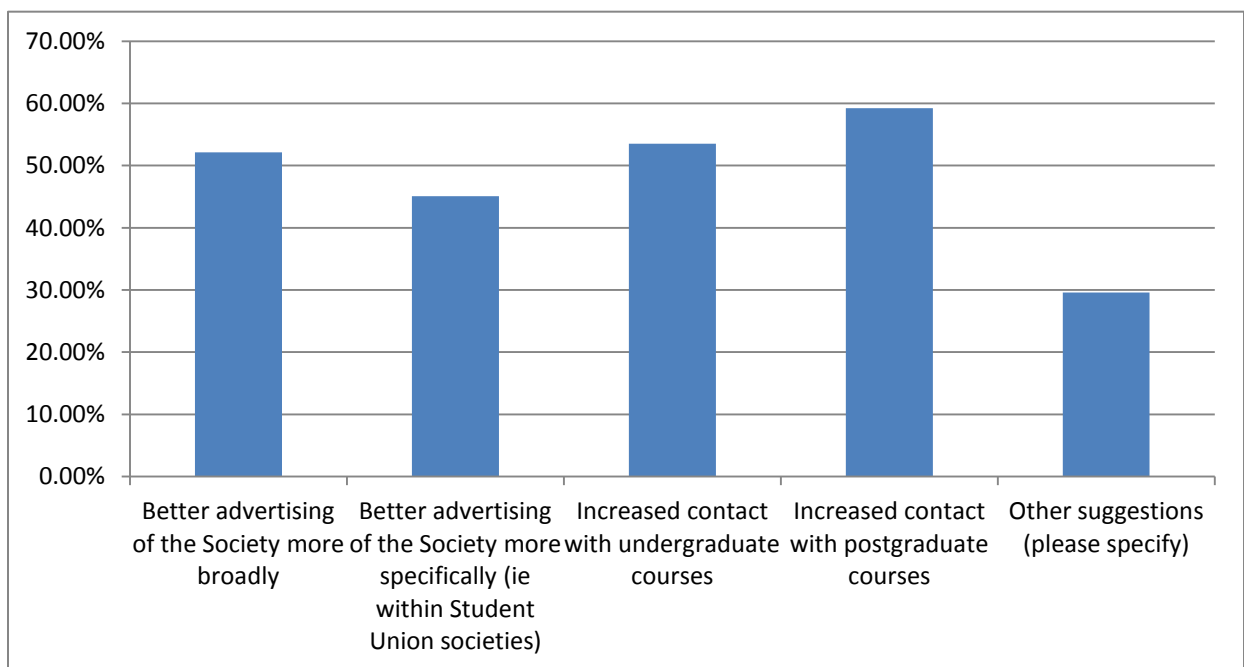
A couple of respondents commented on the relative performance of the PESGB in comparison to other Societies both national and international, including commenting on the diversity present at British Educational Research Association (BERA) conferences.

“PESGB events do not attract the level of racial diversity seen at other academic educational events such as BERA. A BME man was recently elected to the PESGB Executive for the first time I think. There were reports of racist comments in response to the election which have concerned me and the other BME members I know.”

Those who neither agreed or disagreed with the statement on representation had either not ‘paid attention to this’ or were unsure how to qualify the term ‘well represented’. Additionally some felt that the number of minority ethnic members was ‘representative of minority groups in the general population in Higher Education’ and noted that this was therefore not an issue specifically for PESGB but representative of broader difficulties:

“Minority ethnic groups are not well represented in Higher Education, and in positions of power in society, so it is difficult to say that minority ethnic groups are not well represented in PESGB, because this is a societal issue rather than a PESGB issue. I think PESGB is committed to equality and I think the PESGB can do much to promote diversity using philosophy of education.”

Below we highlight support for proposals on the best ways to increase the membership of those from minority ethnic backgrounds to the PESGB. The most popular suggestion was to explore ways of increasing contact with postgraduate courses, followed by courses at undergraduate level:



## Barriers to Membership

We asked respondents whether they felt there were barriers to membership for minority ethnic potential applicants – 36% felt that there were but the majority felt there were none.

|            |           |               |
|------------|-----------|---------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>36.00%</b> |
| <b>No</b>  | <b>48</b> | <b>64.00%</b> |

We were keen to explore what respondents felt those barriers might be, and while offering two potential explanations (that they lacked knowledge either about the Society itself or existing members), 78% felt there were other reasons. For some this related more broadly to the interests within Academic Associations or Societies generally:

“I am not sure about this, but from my knowledge of other professional societies, one reason could be that the research interests of the society reflect the dominant ethnic groups of the society and are not seen as open to other interests. This need not be intentional of course.”

“I don't think it's PESGB specifically, but the white (and often male) dominance of philosophy in general”

While others related the barriers more specifically to the PESGB itself, drawing in particular on the nature of events and Conferences:

“There is a vicious circle perhaps in that BME students see that conference papers, the journal etc do not address issues relating to race/racism/Islamaphobia etc and so choose other educational organisations”

“[PESGB is a] traditional Institution that needs more contemporary thinking (e.g. Butler, Hall, Foucault, etc.)”

“The program ... little apparent interest in issues of race. Not that all scholars of colour are interested in race, but it makes a difference.”

“Conferences and seminars predominantly white, at times lacks hospitality for others”

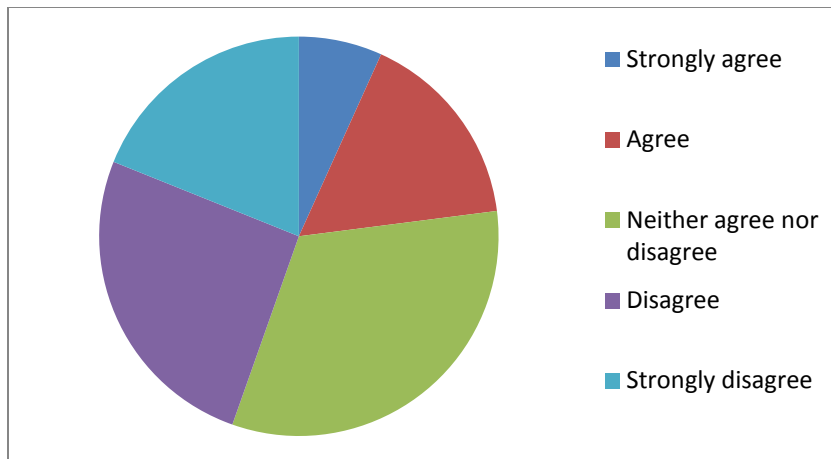
And for others, an openness among the membership to consider subjects and interests outside of philosophy itself:

“There needs to be more awareness of PESGB in education at large and a greater openness in PESGB to those interested in philosophy of education who work in other fields outside the Universities. There is too narrow a view on the part of some in PESGB about what constitutes a philosopher of education - this is a grave barrier to many other underrepresented groups in PESGB.”

We continue the focus on events and conferences below.

## Events

Approximately 45% of respondents disagreed with the statement '**PESGB events cover issues of race very well in terms of content (conference paper titles, conference themes etc)**' compared to 23% who agreed and 32% who neither agreed nor disagreed.



A common theme amongst the few that agreed with the statement was the emphasis the PESGB place on 'reason and logical argument'.

Of those who disagreed with the statement there were repeated references to members having "not experienced these themes at conferences or in papers". One respondent felt the "representation of topics and philosophers discussed was frankly dire." Additionally several respondents related the lack of representation in terms of themes/conference content to the general lack of diversity. For example one respondent felt that "issues of race and diversity are generally not addressed at the conference because the speakers at the conference are generally not from diverse backgrounds".

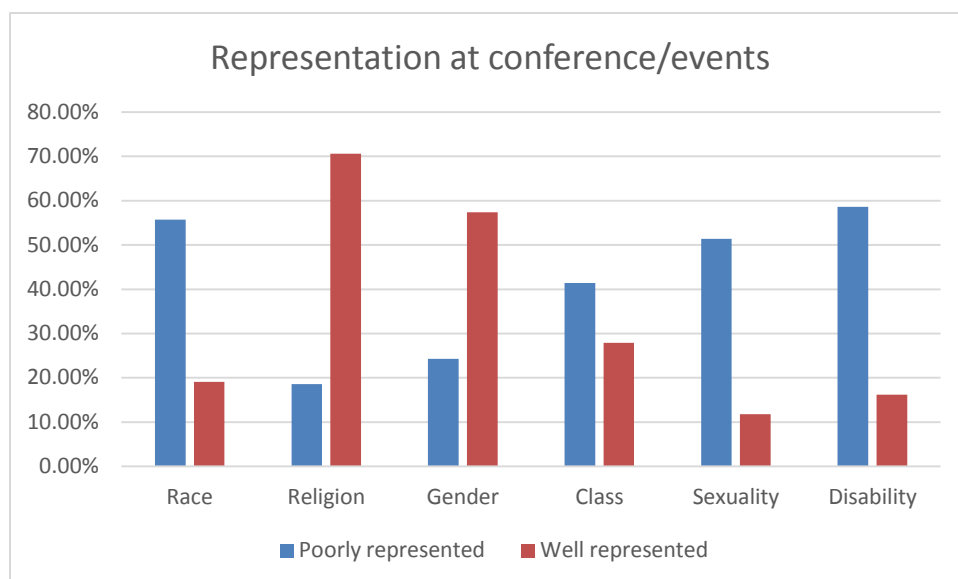
Others felt that even when race was mentioned it was more in "general terms – e.g. as multiculturalism, otherness – it is not often addressed directly". One respondent went on to comment that where race is concerned it tends to be about the "difficulties of multiculturalism, and largely from the perspective of the majority."

One respondent felt that "ethnic minorities are stereotyped as people with chips on their shoulders if and when they discuss race".

These responses give further insight in to some of the barriers to good representation of race for the PESGB. It seems that the lack of diversity is a key element of the poor coverage of the topic, both in terms of fewer people who might be naturally inclined to research/present on the topic but also because it makes it difficult for the few ethnic minority members to discuss the topic without being stereotyped or pigeonholed. It also seems key that race is not just discussed from the 'majority' perspective or in terms of the difficulties of multiculturalism.

## Conferences

When asked about the representation of different equality strands at conferences and events a clear theme emerged; respondents felt that religion and gender were well represented overall and race, sexuality and disability were poorly represented.



60% of respondents felt that there was no difference in the way that race has been covered in comparison to other areas of diversity. Of those who felt there was no difference a few key themes emerged in their comments:

- Many felt that all areas of diversity were 'poorly represented' and not 'covered comprehensively', and that 'this is part of a larger issue with lack of coverage of diversity more broadly.' Notably a few commented on gender being the exception. With respondents commenting on the recent improvement in representation of women as a result of effort by "groups within PESGB [who have] worked to address participation of previously marginalised such as women in recent years."

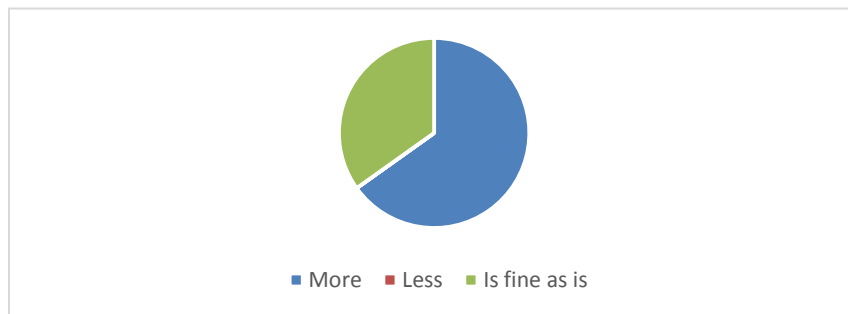
- Some had not ‘noticed anything either way’ or were ‘not aware of a difference in the types of content’, whilst others felt they had ‘had plenty of discussions about discrimination and prejudice.’ A few cited the lack of evidence available to them in order to answer this question.
  - One respondent stated that “the main problem in PESGB is over representation by academics and under representation by teachers”.
  - Once again people highlighted the representation of race in papers ‘concerned with diversity and understanding other cultures’ or ‘under discussions of equality and justice’ but ‘rarely highlighted or taken as the starting point of papers.’
  - One respondent felt it was wrong to ‘even plan to deal with race as [a] separate subject.’
- Of those who felt that there was a difference many of the same themes were present in their comments:
  - The better representation of gender and for some religion was commented on by many.
  - As in previous questions many respondents made a link between poor coverage of race and low levels of diversity in membership:
 

“The lack of representation of non-white academics in the field is probably part of the reason”,  
 “some races [*sic*] are not adequately represented in the Society, hence their views or problems do not rise in the Society’s publications.’
  - A few respondents commented on either the “sense of uncertainty whether one should even talk about race” or the “tendency in philosophy to think that race is not a philosophically worth or relevant topic”
  - One respondent commented that the “PES in the USA has made some progress with including work on race and work by philosophers from racial minority backgrounds” and felt that “more could be done to engage BME undergrads who may choose higher degrees in other disciplines partly because philosophy of education in the UK appears to be a field where race and racism are not discussed.”

- One respondent commented on the challenges associated with tackling race in philosophy of education, suggesting that “to some extent the problems associated with race require more empirical forms of research – for example, statistical research regarding progression to higher education.”
- This further points to the possibilities that interdisciplinary work might present for future applicants (please see next section).
- One respondent however did feel that some progress had been made, certainly with regards to the ways in which discussions were conducted but noted more work remained to be done:

“The new guidelines for discussions at seminars which seem to aim at being more inclusive are an improvement, however, yet are sometimes scoffed at by others and are perhaps not always fully endorsed nor enforced by chairpersons and other participants.”

47% of respondents disagreed with the statement ‘**The group of attendees at PESGB events are very diverse (in terms of ethnicity/nationality)**’, and 30% agreed. 65% of respondents



thought that speakers at future PESGB events should be more ethnically diverse, with only 35% thinking it is fine as is.

### Racial harassment or abuse

7% of respondents had needed to report witnessed or experienced racial harassment or abuse to another PESGB member. Of that 7% none felt that their report had been handled well. This issue was picked up however in greater detail in interviews and focus group discussion

Interviewees hoped that people would feel comfortable reporting anything to a Society member, although one noted that to his knowledge he had not seen any formal guidelines of what to do in such a situation.



“There might be a tendency to be sceptical about the charge of racism. To do what men typically do with the charge of sexism. To say things like ‘that wasn’t the intention’.”

We now turn to further develop these and other points raised in the qualitative research undertaken.

## Qualitative research findings

### The importance of the Society

Members spoken to during this element of the research generally had a positive outlook on the purpose of the Society. There was broad agreement certainly among those from non-BME backgrounds consulted that the PESGB Annual Conference provided an important space for the development of ideas around scholarship, that it enabled learning and provided respite from political attack on the teaching profession more broadly.

“Probably one of the best conferences I attend” (White UK member)

“I think what the Society does, is it enables philosophers from new generations to pick up knowledge and work with it and apply it and explore what we mean by democracy or respect. It’s one of the most important societies I’m part of” (White UK member)

“A friendly society on the whole, sometimes a bit intimidating, but there are some good people, many of whom have a strong commitment to democracy and inclusion. And there is a lot of goodwill there. PESGB does genuinely provide a space to talk about bigger, deeper, more meaningful things” (White UK member)

“[It’s] a classic UK learned society, 50 years old and brings together practitioners, academics, policy makers, young people, older people, around a set of common interests” (White UK member)

“There is something for everyone. Through the PESGB I have been given lots of opportunities to collaborate and that would not have happened had I not been part of the PESGB” (BME UK member)

“A collection of individuals who are engaged in a very common set of concerns and interests, who look to one another for collegial support and opportunity to exchange and share ideas. [Provides the] opportunity to come together and get refreshed once a year” (White international member)

“Very wonderful society, pleasure to be associated with it” (BME international member)

However these views were not shared by all and those members expressing some discontent were all, excluding one, from a minority ethnic background. Some of these points – particularly those relating to the pace of change - were shared by members quoted above. Other points reflected views on the demographic makeup of the Society and the impact of this on non-White members.

“Difficult, I’ve been going to it for nearly 35 years [and] it’s changed a lot in that time. It’s difficult to talk about diversity among the membership. Like any other organisation it’s changed quite a lot in its self-perception. Started off quite informally [but] attitudes have changed a lot over that time. In some of them the Society has changed quite slowly relative to society” (White UK member)

“I would describe the PESGB as a predominantly white male organisation” (BME UK member)

“The Society is quite traditional. The background that I come from – working class and ethnic minority background – there isn’t much that resonates with the reality of the world as it appears to be” (BME UK member)

“There’s a hierarchy and you have to have that patronage in order to be able to ‘get in’. Can’t do this on your own without support” (BME UK member)

“It feels like PESGB is behind other philosophical societies, compared to the PES in the States, in terms of keynote speakers and who presents. If you’re talking about race and you’re racialised as not white, the number of times I have said what I’m presenting on and there’s a tumbleweed [moment] of not knowing what to say” (BME UK member)

All of the members spoken to recognised that the numbers of those from minority ethnic backgrounds were small and while some felt that international diversity was also very important and were delighted with the increasing numbers of international members attending the Annual Conference, others felt that this either obscured the lower number of British born BME members or was based on an assumption that all international members were non-White.

“[It’s] true that [there are] more international members, although even international members are still overwhelmingly white. Very little of the global south. One of the factors is the distance and cost – [it’s] very easy for Europeans” (White international member)

“I wouldn’t exaggerate the success of the Society in recruiting international members. [The] journal is international, annual conference attracts a proportion of international students. Philosophy of Education has grown as an attractive brand in certain societies and there is huge interest in Philosophy of Education in China [but] very little headway in Africa, despite devoting resources. That’s because it doesn’t have that appeal in African schooling” (White UK member)

“Although international representation is good, I have noticed a higher level of white English speaking attendees” (BME UK member)

Others noted that there were clear differences between minority ethnic international students and those born in the UK and that presumptions about the similarities of those who were non-White were misplaced:

“I don’t think PESGB is international. It would be easy to convince yourself that it is and that’s because there are a lot of Chinese, Taiwanese and Japanese students of Philosophy of Education. Now that reflects wider trends in our education in the UK so it’s natural that we would have students coming through. So it may look as though PESGB is diverse but if we have students from East Asia, I’ve never seen papers that are on an East Asian topic or about East Asian philosophy. And I’ve had conversations with students from China and Taiwan about race and they say, ‘I’m not really interested, what’s that got to do with me?’ ” (BME UK Member)

Further while all members consulted felt that the lack of diversity among the membership was an issue, they were not agreed on the extent to which this was one that the Society itself should be tasked with resolving. Indeed some felt attention should be directed more broadly at policy development, the erosion of philosophy both as a subject of study within schools themselves and indeed its absence from teacher education courses.

“The problem is in a sense outside the Society’s control, I can’t think of things the Society does to inhibit access, I think people from all ethnicities are very much embraced by the Society.” (White UK member)

“I think the barriers that exist are in the society – if Philosophy of Education was recognised as a subject in schools, we would give young people of colour the opportunity to excel [and] they would have the pathways to Philosophy of Education. I don’t think we can put this at the door of PESGB. This is a societal issue. We need to enable the flow to that door.” (White UK member)

“[There is] no conscious attempt to determine or restrict membership. Object of Society isn’t to have a statistical representation of the world.” (White UK member)

It was suggested however, that PESGB *should* try to do more and that the initial activities so far initiated by the Executive Committee were a step in the right direction.

“I think they [the PESGB] could do more. I know racist remarks have been made. From a philosophical point of view that’s a strange response. If [members] think they have fulfilled a sense of obligation, there is a sense that our obligation can never be fulfilled” (BME UK member)

What is interesting about these points is the extent to which the word 'barrier' is defined – either as something perhaps to be approached and/or overcome by BME potential applicants given that all are welcome to apply or that the cause of, and hence solution to, the barrier was to be found elsewhere. As the next section will show however, these barriers are often structural and hence difficult for individual potential applicants and indeed existing members to overcome. This may suggest that existing Society initiatives, coupled with broader work on strategies for recruitment, can assist in attempts to diversify the membership.

## Barriers to access and participation

Respondents outlined a number of existing barriers to access and participation for BME applicants and members which included the following:

### The subject of philosophy

While there was broad agreement among all members consulted, building on points highlighted above, that the subject matter at the heart of the Society itself was not one popularly picked up by BME individuals either at undergraduate or postgraduate level, not all agreed that there was little the Society could do to counter this difficulty. Only 4.2% of first year undergraduate students generally study Historical or Philosophical subjects in higher education with even smaller proportions of BME students taking the subject either at undergraduate or postgraduate level<sup>2</sup>. Indeed it is the least popular subject area among BME graduates taking research postgraduate courses such as Masters or Doctorates. In 2015, BME students were most likely to be underrepresented in Historical or Philosophical subjects at the level of research postgraduate study. Other longer standing members of the Society suggested that this was reflective of broader political anti-intellectualism, affecting both the study and inclusion of the subject in universities and schools. These processes were seen to negatively impact on the pipeline of those developing an interest at a younger age and wishing to take it up later on:

“As far back as the Black Papers, philosophical ideas were really demonised. There's been a real mistrust of Philosophy of Education. I don't think PESGB can do any more. They are up against power issues” (White UK member)

“There has been systematic anti-intellectualism by successive governments over the last 20, even 30 years” (White UK member)

For others, there was a broader recognition that studying philosophy generally and philosophy of education more specifically was not a process that could clearly lead to employment. Research suggests that BME students are more likely to be found studying science, engineering and technology subjects and indeed those which may be more likely to enhance their opportunities in the labour market<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Equality Challenge Unit (2015) *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015. Part 2 - Students*  
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Equality-in-HE-statistical-report-2015-part-2-students.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Equality Challenge Unit *ibid*

“In the first place you have to be quite privileged to have access to, and/or to feel secure enough to do a Philosophy degree; that’s a pre-existing barrier. The result is that Philosophy is then populated - to a large degree - by privileged people, which inevitably creates a tacit cultural ethos which can be alienating to those less privileged others who have taken a leap of faith into a subject that may lead to an uncertain future” (BME UK member)

“Because Philosophy of Education has become very much a minority [subject], there are very small numbers involved and certainly in terms of employment, the numbers of people in the UK employed to do Philosophy of Education is not more than 20, 25. I haven’t taught [it] since 1987 - my work involves other things. I continue to do Philosophy of Education but that’s on the back of a career of a different kind. You’d be hard put to recommend somebody today to pursue Philosophy of Education exclusively as a career” (White UK member)

With the studying of philosophy positioned as a rather elitist, non-employment linked practice, those from poorer and/or minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely realistically to consider it a viable option. The representation of minority ethnic individuals within higher education has increased year on year, but they are less likely to be found either in highly selective/research intensive higher education institutions or participating in non-vocational oriented subjects.<sup>4</sup> Therefore while it is possible to liken the participation of BME students in H.E more broadly to their access to and participation within the PESGB, the unique position occupied by the Society and those studying Philosophy of Education does not make for a straightforward comparison.

### **The Annual Conference as an elitist space**

In discussions with interviewees there was some agreement that the strength of Philosophy of Education as an academic discipline lay in the potential it provided for enabling broad discussion about what education should be for – both for teachers and students. There was however concern expressed by largely all consulted in interviews/focus groups that Society events could be, and indeed by the BME individuals spoken to, had been, perceived as intimidating and/or exclusionary.

“I’ve been to events [where] I wouldn’t say [anything]. It can be intimidating, the level of discussion because if you wanted to ask clarifying questions, I suppose it’s like being a kid in a class, you don’t want to appear stupid. But as a person who doesn’t mind asking questions, I didn’t have the confidence to do that[...] You kind of feel like you’re not qualified to ask questions” (BME UK member)

“I went to the conference for a number of years and just didn’t speak. I am a relatively confident person but at the annual conference in Oxford, I probably didn’t say anything. I mean I spoke at lunchtime and informally and in networks and I wouldn’t have come

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander, C & Arday, J. (2015) *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy*, Runnymede Perspectives <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf>

back if I didn't find it interesting and want to join in but in the actual sessions, I found them pretty intimidating." (White UK member)

The last quote here from an interviewee shows that she clearly understood why she had responded to the Conference in this way, but was also able to acknowledge that her resolution of these initial difficulties was greatly influenced by her own capital

"On the one hand this is one of the top philosophy of education conferences in the country and you just get some amazing people there and that is quite exciting but also it is quite intimidating. I persevered but then I've got a lot of cultural capital in my favour - I'm an Oxbridge graduate, I'm a white person who has had academic success, I've got all sorts of things that are going to help me persevere. It wouldn't feel quite as alien for somebody like me as it would do for somebody who is very definitely in a minority."

The practice of taking questions following a paper at PESGB conferences/events have recently been adapted to enable greater time for initial reflection rather than the traditional process in which the chair responds to questions from those who are the first to raise their hands. This latter approach was felt to stifle debate, and had been changed by the Women in Philosophy group. The more traditional approach had led, certainly among the BME members consulted, to some anxiety and self-doubt among those attending for the first time:

"That's the kind of philosophy that it often feels the Society is talking to, it's that 1960s Oxbridge adversarial for adversarial sake rather than updating itself to the world out there now"

"I [spoke to] a lecturer, she's white Jewish and she found [the conference] very male dominated and based on a very confrontational model where people demolished each other's ideas rather than [gave] critical feedback or highlight ways to improve. .She said when you get responses like that it can be very destabilising to the person and bring such overwhelming doubt that you feel that you don't want to carry on."

"They have tried to change the culture through the follow on questions [and] give other people opportunities to have a voice but to be honest that can be quite tokenistic because it tends to be the same people having the same conversation, asking the same questions"

Therefore the implicit elitism of the Society, reflected in the presence of highly regarded philosophers as members, together with a particular approach to engaging in philosophical discussion, had created barriers not just for BME individuals, but also women philosophers. Work to create a more open environment had clearly already begun at the time of the research, but it was also noted that the site in which the Annual Conference was held itself exacerbated an association between the way in which philosophy was discussed and a particular type of academic institution.

"Oxford symbolises elitism and that lends itself to a rarefied atmosphere around the Conference. Suppose that it was held at the University of Birmingham? Even these institutions can be very selective and are not reflective of the cities. But if the Society

made a choice to go to a more diverse city, that might have an impact on who shows up. People have a very strong nostalgic attachment to meeting at New College in Oxford. Trying to move it would not go down well” (White international member)

“It’s definitely an elite setting and maybe that is part of the selling point. Maybe it would be good to move it around, and it is quite expensive. If it was in London or moved to somewhere else, on the one hand, it’s a good marketing tool, but it is a really exclusive space.” (BME UK member)

“I have this inbuilt assumption that philosophy happens in elite institutions or in the countryside! If you think that you can’t do deep thinking in inner city areas, given what the term inner city connotes then that’s a real problem. The culture of [the Conference] away from the academic content is geared towards a certain type of person” (BME UK member)

And as with a number of other issues previously raised, comparisons were made both with the Philosophy of Education Society in America and with other learned societies or academic associations

“The North American Society moves around from city to city every year, so draws from many more different faculties. A little bit more representation when the conference comes to town” (White international member)

“Most of the other learned Societies rotate the conference in different university towns [though] I haven’t found the Oxford environment unhospitable” (White UK member)

These comments are important as they reflect not only knowledge of the institutions at which minority ethnic students are, and indeed are not found but also suggest that activities to broaden knowledge of the Society are not outside the realms of possibility. It cannot be ignored however that other PESGB events are indeed held in other parts of the UK, but the institutions chosen as venues could indeed generate more pipeline interest certainly at the undergraduate level. Generally BME students are more likely to study at post 1992 HE institutions. More specifically 25% of all BME students can be found studying at 30 universities – this includes 60% of all black students and 36% of Asian graduates<sup>5</sup>. Research also suggests that BME students continue to find it particularly difficult to access older more research intensive institutions - while 55% of White applicants to Russell Group institutions were offered places to study in 2013, only 36% of those from BME backgrounds received such offers<sup>6</sup>. Diversity at the postgraduate level is much lower across all institutions, particularly for individuals from Black backgrounds. Holding PESGB events at Russell Group institutions, and indeed having a regular

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<sup>5</sup> Tatlow, P (2015) “Participation of BME Students in UK Higher Education” in C. Alexander and J. Arday (eds) *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy*, Runnymede Perspectives

<sup>6</sup> Bolliver, V (2014) *Why aren’t there more black British students at elite universities?* The Conversation, April 9 <http://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-why-arent-there-more-black-british-students-at-elite-universities-25413>

home for the Annual Conference is indeed a unique aspect of the Society as noted by interviewees. However where it is clear that these are not necessarily the sorts of locations in which much student diversity exists, certainly with regards to ethnicity, then with a view to diversifying the membership, it may be that some attention be given to where future events could be held.

### **The impact of low BME member numbers**

We included a quote above by a BME member reflecting on what has been a very recent change to the process of Paper discussions at PESGB events. Their response, implying that the initiative can appear 'tokenistic' reflects a broader issue which will clearly have an impact on a wide variety of attempts to embed work on diversifying the membership. Changing and adapting the process of inviting questions, enabling all members to feel able to contribute and discuss points raised in a paper and improving participation, can only work as race equality interventions if there are sufficient numbers of BME members to participate and engage. The point raised below highlights the feeling experienced by new BME members to spaces in which they are a minority:

“I just found the whole thing [Society event] unhospitable as I was the only ethnic minority there. I asked a question of one of the speakers – questioning his ideas around common heritage and shared values and them being so easily debunked and he said I can see why someone like you [would ask]. And I asked him what do you mean by someone like me?”

This member has felt excluded, rather than included, by a speaker's response to his question. The way in which his experience of exclusion is defined relates to issues of representation and there are two points raised here that are worth noting. Firstly, there is the low numerical representation for this member who was the only BME individual present at a Society event which negatively affected both his enjoyment and overall impression of the subsequent discussion. Secondly this issue is however not solely or simply numerical. It is clear without the additional support to be gained from the presence of other minority ethnic attendees that this particular member felt both unable to raise points of clarity, or indeed to garner support for his view from others around him.

If we also consider the ways in which papers are selected for inclusion, the numerical issue becomes even more apparent. Interviewees referred to the relaxed, almost informal nature of the selection of papers for discussion at the Annual Conference, a process which was welcomed by members.

“Conferences never set themes [it's] a matter of coming up with topics or issues likely to be there. I quite like the laissez-faire attitude. People tend to be quite maverick [and] wouldn't respond well to being told what to talk about. [People] want to talk about what is important to them.” (White member)



“[It’s an] individual’s choice over what they want to talk about. Wouldn’t dream of asking people to present on anything” (White member)

However, where those who are choosing to present are all from very similar ethnic, gendered or social backgrounds, the topics presented and indeed the way they are discussed may ultimately be very similar. While all interviewees, without exception, agreed that there should be no requirement or expectation that BME philosophers will only ever wish to talk about race, diversity or ethnicity, there was general acceptance that if BME individuals are not present numerically, there is the possibility that particular topics, and indeed a diversity of responses to topics, may be missing.

“I get tired of doing philosophy of women’s ‘things’. We want to do philosophy, [I’m] not just interested in sex/gender or abortions. Just philosophy. [However] lots of discussion about multiculturalism and about issues of religion and faith based education tend just as much to get discussed by people who are not themselves the target group [and] yes presented as a ‘problem’. The lack of experience in conference-goers comes from a lack of diversity. [You’re] much more likely to want to talk about racism if it impacts you.” (White UK member)

“Maybe because people prefer to write on the topic they are interested in, if there is no representation of races, there will not be coverage” (BME international member)

The low numbers of minority ethnic members therefore affects not only the levels of comfort/discomfort they experience, but also the extent to which issues of race, and indeed racialised or diverse perspectives on a range of topics are included. All of these contribute to making the Society appear as welcoming or inclusive for existing as well as potential members. However it was also rightly pointed out that simple numerical increase may not on its own be sufficient to enable equality for BME members.

“A lot of people think you can relax if you just add more diversity. That it’s somehow inherently a good thing. A more interesting question is power sharing. For one thing just having more numbers doesn’t say anything about the wider structure of the Society. Who makes the decisions?” (White member)

Finally the means through which experienced supportive Society members sought to provide mentorship and guidance for the next generation of philosophers was not a process that could be shared by BME members given that there were no experienced members of colour to provide that support for them. It was also an active barrier to engaging in progressive work to both increase membership (some of which we take up in sections below) but to encourage broader discussion, reflection and thought on the issues of diversity.

“They had some very experienced women philosophers of education who were willing to give their time because they weren’t necessarily getting a lot out of [the conference] to help the next generation. We don’t even have that possibility for people of colour –

because there's no one to look to to say, 'you've been through this, you've struggled, how did you manage?' " (BME UK member)

"Lack of [BME] numbers makes it difficult to do that kind of thing that [we] did for women. Any one that arrives feels the spotlight on them" (White UK member)

"Individual professors are keen that the next generation are doing work that takes their work on. We don't have anyone doing that for race" (BME UK member)

"I know of social psychologists working on contact theory – how would this work in this situation? You have to actually bring this stuff out in the open and talk about it for people's attitudes to change, but how do you talk about it with people if those people are absent? We could talk about it but if its lots of white people just talking about this stuff in the abstract is that going to make [a difference]?" (White UK member)

### **The Analytical Tradition**

It was suggested by many in interviews that the analytical philosophical tradition prevalent across the Philosophy of Education within the UK could act as a potential barrier to discussing issues of ethnic and racial diversity. While some members feel that the analytical tradition can incorporate issues of race and racism if applied properly, this view was not shared by all of the minority ethnic individuals consulted.

"If you want to highlight identity politics, often the discussion is ignored or not taken very seriously. The general mode of the philosophy being done is such that general issues of identity politics are - for the most part - excluded from that philosophical methodology, and so there's no way to begin talking about them."(BME member)

"[The PESGB] romanticises the analytic" (BME member)

"There is something about more continental approaches, which are more prominent in North American society, that lends itself to more radical approaches. Doesn't mean the quality is better" (White international member)

"The analytical tradition in the last 20 years has extended to include critical theory and continental philosophy. [It's] certainly the case that discussion and debate around critical theory would be far more engaging with issues of race. [There are] University departments that won't touch some of these and relegate them to literature. There is a declared emphasis on the traditions of British philosophy. There would be leaders in the Society that would dispute this and say that analytical tradition is equipped to speak to issues of race and racism if applied properly" (White UK member)

Others, felt that the analytic tradition excluded subjectivity, an issue of relevance to those discussing and/or researching diversity topics:

"There's something about the subject matter and mode of philosophy in the UK - being analytic - which tries to abstract from subjectivity and the everyday; the result is that anything that appears as being subjective is pushed aside. However, of course, issues

of ethnicity or of being racialised do involve the subjective, and are something we experience as subjects. Additionally, the subjectivity that dominant groups have is often viewed as being objective - the view from nowhere - and is seen as fitting that mould which slots neatly into the 'analytic' method. Often, when someone tries to talk about something that isn't about 'everyday-objectivity' then it is jumped on as being somehow overly subjective and viewed as not worthy of this forum." (BME member)

It was within this theoretical context in which conference and event discussions were situated that some minority ethnic members found both alienating and excluded from:

"Although I've been to a number to a number of conferences now, I'm in two minds as to whether I want to commit to an academic career in this particular strand of philosophy. I had something to bring in terms of an idea but it wasn't the idea that was looked at, it wasn't the philosophy contained in the idea in that was challenged but it was where the idea came from. [It was] who I represent or what I represent that was challenged"

"If you're a person of colour and you're talking about issues of race, your work often stops being a paper about [the topic]; instead, the perception is that you're talking about this *because* 'you're of colour', and the work therefore comes under a different kind of additional scrutiny... a kind of negative visibility that means it stops being about the work. You're never just a philosopher if you're a person of colour and talking about issues of race: I think you're viewed as a philosopher plus your racial/gender identity, and you're therefore viewed as not quite fitting the mould of credibility."

Other members felt that the broader reticence to consider race as important related to two issues. Firstly that the subject of race itself was inherently problematic as a theoretical concept and secondly that it simply was of no relevance – that discussions of race, ethnicity, colonialism, identity, were quite simply, unimportant.

"I did once raise whether something displayed a post-colonial attitude in the questions and discussion after a presentation. I was very quickly put in my place by a senior member of PESGB who said we had got past all that kind of post-colonial thing now. As someone affected by Britain's colonial past I found this very dismissive and somewhat upsetting and I learnt from this experience not to mention such things" (BME UK member)

"Race is a pseudo-scientific notion/construct that most people dismiss offhand, but it is shorthand for issues to do with justice" (White UK member)

"Being in a white dominant society, I get the impression that a majority of folks don't see the relevance. They don't want to talk about it. [It] doesn't have anything to do with philosophy so leave it at the door. I can just hear people saying this. All of the identity questions are incidental. [Then] if it comes up, many people feel very uncomfortable. In continental Europe they don't accept the construct of race so they deny it. [They] want to believe these categories are not real and shouldn't be spoken about. Leads to a

denial of racism, colour's not relevant. [There's] a downplaying of what racism does in society and how we are complicit in that" (White international member)

## Discussing racial and religious difference

The final barrier in this section draws on the comments above to explore how difference is discussed within the Society. The quotes above suggest both the existence of a desire for silence around the issue of diversity but also that where it is discussed, this may not occur in a way that enables open discussion. In other words, it is discussed in order to close down, rather than open up debate. Members were aware for example that while religion was a topic which featured frequently within conference papers, the ways in which discussion occurred was not always diverse. Members could recall listening to papers discussing faith schooling for example, but often these presentations would highlight problems or difficulties – religious indoctrination for example – and would for the large part refer to majority rather than minority religions. This reinforced for them that the absence of diverse voices within the conference audience prevented broader, nuanced discussion.

"Religion and gender covered by very particular positions. I'm not that interested in religion but from my perspective I think if we are talking about religion as Islamophobia, Catholic-Protestant, faith schools and whether they are useful, [the papers] tend to be from a conservative small view. I don't think religion is well covered" (White UK member)

"[People] write on religion but in the same old tired way that they have for years and years. These topics are taken up as the opposite of rational thinking, forms of indoctrination, some form of child abuse. Diversity of religion is not covered at all. Extremely protestant way where everything comes down to a set of beliefs." (White international member)

"The two times when I have heard religion spoken about [in the conference] they have been reductive and the end result is negative – 'if you don't see the world in this way then you're blind' " (BME UK member)

"Different faith perspectives aren't as well represented. Can't think of any Muslim or Hindu educators who have had a chance to share their perspectives and the issues raised. [There's a] fairly traditional UK liberal agenda with issues connected with Church of England of Roman Catholic pressure on schools" (White UK member)

Very rarely was the subject of religion discussed in relation to different faith perspectives. The absence of debate, where diverse voices are missing by virtue of lack of presence, or indeed

when BME members are present as illustrated above, due to feelings that there is no support from others who share experience/perspective, it was felt that an environment was created in which negative comments from other members could be made freely.

“I was sitting opposite two people, much older than me, carrying out research in [Central Asia]. We were talking about Muslim culture [there], the lady was talking about the fact they don’t wear headscarves, promoting equality in Muslim schools. I was talking about my cousins here, and we were having a very general chitchat and I was talking about my cousins wearing headscarves. When I tried to explain to them that if you told my cousin to take off her headscarf, then it would be tantamount to undressing someone in public, they couldn’t understand it. In fact the lady said something like, if you can’t stand by our laws or our rights in terms of whether you wear a headscarf in a primary school in England, then you shouldn’t be here, you should go back to where you come from. It shut down the conversation. It’s hard for me to say if what we had here was someone from a very different generation, and obviously that’s not an excuse, or whether [this was] entrenched racial prejudice.” (BME UK member)

“Someone had had to leave the dinner hall because she had been about to cry. Having heard someone respond to [a paper on religion] it made her so upset that she wanted to leave that space (BME UK member)

“[A member] thought the paper was written by someone white, and then it took on a different identity because it’s written by you” (BME UK member)

Ultimately BME members were unsure whether the reticence to discuss issues reflected quite simply a lack of broad knowledge about critical race philosophy, Eastern philosophies etc which could be partially addressed by including regular themes at Annual Conference or indeed, the setting up of conferences/seminars as part of the work of the new Race and Ethnicity Committee. Other more established members felt that there was a broader reluctance to accept the pace of change

“Diversity [has] grown to such an extent that older members feel that [the subject] has been diluted slightly. [A] perception that is mainly to do with a particular understanding of what the discipline is, [The] ethnocentrism that goes along with that is an unintended consequence” (White UK member)

## Possible Interventions

In this final section we highlight three main suggestions for both diversifying the membership and enabling increased participation/inclusion for existing BME members as raised by interviewees and focus group members. The three discussed across all ethnic groups, though notably not drawing consensus were

- Introducing interdisciplinary approaches
- Increasing teacher engagement

- Developing BME only spaces

### Interdisciplinary Approaches

There were suggestions in some of the survey responses that an interdisciplinary approach might be of use as a means of opening up the membership to those from minority ethnic backgrounds. These were subjects we continued to explore in qualitative interviews with respondents, and certainly with regards to the suggestion of taking up more of an interdisciplinary approach at conferences/event, little consensus was reached.

“I’ve had to go outside of Philosophy of Education in order to re-engage myself with it”  
(BME UK member)

“It’s an interdisciplinary age. It seems at face value to be quite an appealing idea. [However] there is a strong determination in small learned societies to preserve the integrity of the discipline. In an age where Philosophy of Education is being removed from courses there is a determination that the journal publish strong philosophical pieces. The importance of philosophical question [are] at the heart of the Conference”  
(White UK member)

The Philosophy of Education conference is a unique opportunity in the education calendar to actually do philosophy and focus on philosophy. An interdisciplinary focus has a lot to recommend it but again something could be run outside rather than inside it. It’s a unique opportunity where people can spend a couple of days where [they] don’t have to worry about what Ofsted requires or what AQA requires of them but just to engage in Philosophy of Education and I would be reluctant to dilute that even if I might find it a more interesting conference! (White UK member)

For some minority ethnic members the notion of working on an interdisciplinary basis was not simply about drawing in members from other disciplines in which the representation of BME students and academics was greater, but about acknowledging some of the reasons BME groups might enter higher education in the first place. This interdisciplinary focus was also not simply related to fluidity between disciplines but also a specific criticism against the anti-empiricism of the discipline. As this BME member noted:

“I’ve had people say to me both outside and inside academia, ‘Why are you doing Philosophy of Education? You’re never going to get anywhere with that!’ It would make it more attractive to BME students if they were allowed to pursue something a bit more interdisciplinary. It would also diversity the society. If there was more emphasis on the empirical it would [appeal to] people from BME backgrounds who need to find jobs. We need to find jobs afterwards, so doing so with more than Philosophy of Education as a string in your bow might be worthwhile”

However working from within the Philosophy of Education was seen as preferable and indeed some members from across ethnic backgrounds, felt that newly emerging initiatives, enabling a broadening or expanding of the discipline, were steps in the right direction.

“There’s already this feeling that the Philosophy of Education had a much higher status in teacher education than it does now and is in danger of being squashed further. Reconceptualising what Philosophy of Education is should include more applied questions and not just theory and questions” (BME UK member)

“I always get frustrated when the balance shifts more towards academic philosophy and away from education. But if we’ve got more people studying education which includes philosophy and rather fewer people from a BME background doing pure philosophy and we want to develop our membership, then that would fit together” (White UK member)

“Our work is really enriched by talking to people on the ground and in the classroom. That kind of interdisciplinary work could be really enriching and allow the Philosophy of Education to do the type of philosophy it wants to do which is applied philosophy. Applying analytical as well as continental philosophical methods to the real world. Requires a bit of faith on the Society’s part, investing in projects on interdisciplinary work and on issues of identity politics, so that we can begin to experiment. But it requires that initial investment of time and money, also possibly reaching out to philosophy in the US but also those doing race and education in the UK” (BME UK member)

This member, as with the member quoted above who felt that an interdisciplinary focus could assist with employability, hence drawing in non-traditional entrants, saw interdisciplinary work as including broader engagement, with non-philosophers, teachers and young people. These suggestions, shared by the vast majority of those consulted on the important role of philosophy of education within teacher education are explored further in the next section.

## **Teacher Engagement**

There was broad agreement about the important historical role played by philosophy in teacher education, and earlier comments demonstrated the strength of feeling by some of the more established members on the removal of the subject from teacher training syllabuses. Many felt that there was much continuous work still to be done to encourage teachers into the discipline, not simply because of the professional benefit to be gained in doing so, but because the teaching workforce was seen as more diverse than the undergraduate and postgraduate philosophy courses which had once provided a pipeline to the Philosophy of Education. It was further recognised that the routes to the subject and potentially the Society, were starting in Education courses more broadly and teacher education more specifically.

“We do seem to be growing education studies degrees in a lot of our universities, that’s a positive sign. So how can we work with that developing student body, which is possibly going to be more diverse and learn from the students?” (White UK member)

Given the very short length of the teacher training postgraduate course, it was felt by some that trying to introduce philosophy into their courses would be practically difficult and not of real priority. Instead it was felt that working with existing teachers was important and initiatives such as the scholarships provided for teachers to attend the Annual Conference were seen by many to be useful. The Summer School for trainee teachers also worked on the same principle – introducing students to the discipline, even though some of the members involved in this recognised that the largest risk was retaining their interest throughout both training and initial employment. There were Society members currently working in teacher education, and they felt that using philosophy practically in this way could certainly assist in ‘pipeline’ activity.

However for work of this nature to be successful it was clear from speaking to interviewees that two issues were importance. Firstly a recognition that the teaching profession itself was not necessarily as diverse as it could be and secondly that outreach with teachers or any other group of non-philosophers would need to be ‘genuinely engaging.’

BME teachers make up 6% of maintained primary school and 9.9% of maintained secondary school teachers and in 2013/14, 12% of teacher training students were from BME backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> The numbers are therefore not high given that overall BME individuals constitute 14% of the UK population, and BME children 26.6% of all secondary school and 30.4% of primary school pupils. However, while BME teachers may not be representative of the BME population, it was recognised by members that education links should at best be exploited to assist with attempts to attract a wider membership.

BME members in particular felt that opportunities to work with teachers could also help to determine the future of the Philosophy of Education discipline itself:

“Genuine outreach means being in an open dialogue with the outside world in order to transform something of what you are yourself, particularly in the context where Philosophy of Education is being squeezed. So there could be a view that we’ll stick to this rigid 1960s view and just ignore the rest of the world hope we’re not squeezed too much or it could be that this is a really live and dynamic discipline and the way it can [do that] more would be by engaging with the outside world.” (BME UK member)

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<sup>7</sup> Elevation Networks (2015) *Race to the Top 2: Diversity in Education* <http://www.elevationnetworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Race-to-The-Top-2-Diversity-In-Education1.pdf>



More specifically these members felt that working with those from outside of philosophy could help to ensure engagement within it

“More sustainable engagement might mean working with teachers who don’t come from a philosophy background. Because that’s creating a new generation of teachers who can begin to at least refer to the discipline and will bring these different perspectives that can help us to renew as a society. But there is work to be done in terms of highlighting the significance of what the Philosophy of Education can offer in the teacher training process. [It means] doing innovative projects that meet teachers half way – if you just do obscure, difficult to understand philosophy then teachers won’t have the time or have enough [knowledge] of the subject to be able to engage with the subject. So talking to teachers about the texts and trying to frame their questions and saying here’s some some philosophy and here are some of the ways that you can use it to reflect on what you’ve brought to us as an issue as practitioners and real classroom experts.” (BME UK member)

“The problem with any of these things is that if they’re really inviting and you throw them open, certain people just get in quicker. And whether there is any way of saying that we recognise we have underrepresented groups and will prioritise them, without doing that if you set up something for teachers, I’ll send them to my networks but these private colleges that are applying will get in fast. I think [targeting] is essential” (BME UK member)

The issue of specifically targeting under-represented groups was not without controversy among members, but was welcomed among BME interviewees, particularly those who recognised that the positions in which they now found themselves had occurred as a result of participating in particular targeted initiatives for minority ethnic individuals.

“I wouldn’t have had this opportunity if it hadn’t been targeted” (BME UK member)

“Initially I thought we should [always] just have the best person for the job and that should naturally occur. But someone said to me that it is a shame that we have to do this in this way, otherwise it would never happen and that really dawned on me. It’s a sorry state of affairs to have to forcefully make that happen” (BME UK member)

## **BME only spaces**

This brings us to the final intervention suggested by interviewees which relates to ways of countering the feelings of isolation experienced by BME members at events in which they are notable minorities. While targeting was only raised as an issue by BME interviewees and did not emerge in conversation with White respondents, BME only spaces were discussed with all groups. The existence of BME staff networks in public sector organisations, including within major teaching unions and the emergence of the Race and Ethnicity Committee in the PESGB prompted the inclusion of this question in the qualitative follow up work. Responses to

questions about 'BME only' or 'safe spaces' were mixed both within and across ethnic groups and we have included all comments below.

There were those who felt that BME only spaces were essentially divisive and not helpful at all:

"I don't think it will be positive. This is one Society, if we create a separate membership it will create a disunity. I am not in support of creating sub-groups" (BME international member)

"Counter-productive and would undermine the inclusiveness of the Conference. I think setting up a group perhaps before or after the conference, like the Women in Philosophy conference, would be a good model to take. Take something similar with a focus on ethnicity race and justice" (White UK member)

However it was also welcomed wholeheartedly by others:

"I see no harm in trying to offer a specialist space. Should be done experimentally to see if people want it. Who am I to say no?" (White UK member)

"For me it could only be a positive thing. For the same reason that women think that it's useful to have a space to do this. [There's] also benefit for non-academic reasons, [a] place to exchange ideas and network" (White international member)

"I don't have any problem with it at all. Annual Conference is short, if you start to fragment it you have to be careful" (White UK member)

"I've come from teaching and there is already that sort of thing for BME teachers - there is a BME network and there is a BME conference for people of colour to go and be with other people of colour. There's nothing wrong with that, it's not segregation. Possibly it's even more necessary now that you do have somewhere to go, you don't have to constantly explain yourself. And that is something that happened to me at the Conference, you are constantly having to explain yourself and your presence, all the time." (BME UK member)

"If you had said this to me a year ago, I would've been against it but now, I think there is a space for it. I didn't feel I could discuss my experiences [at the PESGB event] until I finally talked to my lecturer and talked to [other BME members]. But up until that point, to my detriment, I internalised it and I didn't realise how much I needed to talk about it. This had really upset me and I hadn't realised until I started speaking about it. Would I have spoken about that comfortably with others who hadn't shared that experience? I know they wouldn't have understood. I don't think they should be called safe spaces because that can send out the wrong message, it almost [implies] a weakness. I can understand why you might call it safe but I think it makes us almost victim-like. The whole thing is white majority narrative so why can't we have a narrative?" (BME UK member)

Others felt that working together across ethnic groups on shared aims, such as the inclusion of topics exploring race and ethnicity, was preferable to being part of BME only *formal* spaces

“I don’t think it’s achievable, I do think PESGB is a safe space for white people and there is no safe space for people of colour to talk about those spaces. I’d rather have spaces that are committed to talking about critical philosophy of race and anyone who is interested in that is welcome so that you can come and engage with it and be as critical as you want but what you cannot do is come and launch criticism of the space itself because that’s what happens sometimes. I don’t think it would be useful for it to be only for people of colour, partly because without white allies we’re not going to get anywhere. I think we have to [meet together] informally” (BME UK member)

Some BME members however worried about the impact being part of BME only groups could have on them, their relationships with other members, and the assumptions that might then be made about those who chose not to be part of such an initiative:

“There’s always a sense that safe spaces are not confidential spaces. Even by virtue of entering them you’re opening yourself up to accusations of being other or othering yourself. So it’s difficult inviting people into those spaces because it requires courage to do that publicly” (BME UK member)

“It would also divide the few people of colour because it would be the good ones and the bad ones as to who goes into the safe space: ‘oh don’t worry about me I’m not into all of that stuff’, ‘oh you’re safe’” (BME UK member)

It was clear however even to these particular members above that there was a need to be able to participate in discussions with other minority ethnic members, they agreed less as to where these spaces should be held but recognised the need to a bringing together of diverse members:

“I’m not sure that should be closed but we can say what we want to say without fear, but there are other moments when the psychic work of looking out for each other needs to be done and I’m not sure whether that needs to be done in a designated space or done elsewhere.” (BME UK member)

“Actually psychologically it’s reassuring to have other people of colour around. I’d go one step further and say having a space to be able to strategise is priceless. And whether that happens in the corridors or outside the building at night. I think it’s still important to establish a space for us, however that might be” (BME UK member)

I think we’re quite well positioned because of our contacts with [each other] whereas people from elsewhere might not have that and it’s important to have safe spaces where people can come and say, ‘am I being paranoid?’, ‘This is going on, should I feel like

this?', 'How do I respond to this? Should I respond to this? Have you been through something similar?'" (BME UK member)

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has provided analysis based on survey responses and interviews from existing members of the PESGB and while this information has provided much needed insight into the specific experiences of Society members, no comparison work with other learned societies has occurred which may have revealed similarities and differences worthy of note. It is also clear that some of the experiences reported by members may indeed be similar to those of BME students or staff in particular higher education institutions in which BME representation is low. There is no doubt therefore that many of the processes described may reflect other parts of the academy but what is key is that there is work that can be done to ensure those BME individuals who are already members of the Society, feel able to participate as fully as their White counterparts. Further the unique disciplinary position occupied by Philosophy of Education provides a number of opportunities to enable broader outreach work with those working within education – trainee teachers, teacher education providers and existing teachers themselves. The pipeline issue is one affecting teaching itself, particularly as regards attempts to diversify the profession<sup>8</sup> and much can be learnt from this work.

Before highlighting the recommendations below there are a number of points worth making at this juncture. Firstly the impact on BME members of the very low numbers of those from non-White backgrounds at Society events cannot be underestimated, particularly as those consulted were new to the PESGB, and thus at the early stages of academic careers. The BME pipeline issue is one of importance to the Academy more broadly and if the Society can assist with nurturing and developing BME early career researchers in the discipline, the impact on recruitment and retention of a BME academic workforce will certainly be welcome.<sup>9</sup> Secondly the PESGB Race and Ethnicity Committee and any activity and work stemming from it, will be a useful starting point for discussions about race, religious diversity, diversity and inclusion. While the negative comments shared by BME members in interviews and discussion may reflect interactions with a very small minority of Society members, this may provide an ideal moment to initiate discussion about race, religion, identity and philosophy at seminar and Conference level. Enabling an intellectual environment in which issues are discussed with a range of perspectives may prevent the discussions some BME members had unwillingly participated in. Indeed while many of the negative comments shared by BME interviewees reflect a broader set of discussions occurring outside of the Society in political and popular debates about migration, citizenship and nationalism among others, this clearly does not mean that the tone of discussions *within* the Society should be similar in nature. The work already developed by the

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<sup>8</sup> Elevation Networks *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Bhopal, K & Jackson, J (2013) "The experiences of Black and minority ethnic academics: multiples identities and career progression", University of Southampton: EPSRC; Alexander & Arday *ibid*

Executive Committee is particularly important and will demonstrate both to existing BME members but also potential new applicants, that the Society is welcoming and inclusive of all.

With these points in mind the following recommendations are made:

- There is an observed difference in the numbers of international compared to national (or British born) minority ethnic members certainly attending events and conferences. Some respondents are able to point clearly to some of the academic associations they have membership with (including the Philosophy of Education Society in the United States, or BERA in the UK) in which increased diversity is more visible, suggesting that it might be worth exploring work conducted in these associations as evidence of good practice.
- Suggested barriers to membership are multiple but some are that the issue can itself become circular – lack of visible diversity at events and conferences can prevent potential applications for membership from minority ethnic individuals. Furthermore, the content of papers included within the journal, in addition to those accepted for inclusion within Annual conferences, in not including reference to race, ethnicity or diversity, may suggest to potential members that the Society is not interested in these issues and, by implication, in them. Indeed the process of encouraging members to present on topics of interest to them at Conference while open and non-restrictive, can inevitably restrict the range of topics discussed while numbers of BME members are low. Introducing a regular sub- theme present at every conference in which issues of race, ethnicity, religious diversity etc can be addressed by presenters, not only enables these issues to be discussed annually, but also places less pressure on BME members to present on this issues exclusively.
- Many respondents were unaware of the official figures for minority ethnic representation across the membership which highlights the clearly important issue relating to ethnic monitoring. In order to be able to address the issue of increasing diversity within the membership of the Society, it is firstly necessary to be able to know what the membership currently looks like. It is therefore certainly recommended that the Society collect monitoring data on new members and explore and identify ways of collecting monitoring information on existing members. This should not be restricted to the collection of data on the ethnic background of members but should also extend to other equality strands including religion, disability and sexual orientation with reformulation of the gender identity question to include those who are transgender.
- Currently the membership form for PESGB does not include a question on ethnicity or indeed on any other equality strands apart from gender. As there is clearly a commitment among the Executive committee to look at issues of diversity, including a monitoring form at the point of entry into the Society would be an important, necessary intervention. For ease of reference, the guide to ethnic and religious categories as included within the 2011 Census is recommended:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/ethnic-nat-identity-religion/ethnic-group/index.html#1>

With regards to monitoring for sexual orientation refer to guidance produced by Stonewall:

[http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/using\\_monitoring\\_data.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/using_monitoring_data.pdf)

- With regards to monitoring for existing members one potential suggestion may be to include a data monitoring form within any upcoming publications which are distributed to all members such as a newsletter.
- Members noted that they hoped minority ethnic individuals who had experienced racist abuse or harassment would feel able to report any such incident. It might be useful therefore to develop reporting procedures for those who have experienced racist abuse or harassment at Society conferences or events and indeed for procedures to exist for those who experience all forms of abuse or harassment covered by the Equality Act 2010.
- Targeted activity in which interventions for teacher recruitment (either trainee or existing) involving specific teacher education courses at universities with average or above average BME student numbers is recommended. The number of BME students participating in higher education has increased from 14.9% in 2003/04 to 20.2% in 2013/14, a difference of 5.3%<sup>10</sup>.
- Finally considering a rotating Annual Conference or key seminars across different institutions in different parts of the UK might engender broader interest in the Society, its work and philosophical traditions.

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<sup>10</sup> Equality Challenge Unit *ibid*