

Warwick PATHWAY Programme: A positive action programme to facilitate Black researchers' careers

Victoria Strudwick¹, Sotaro Kita²

¹Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK; ²Department of Psychology, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Correspondence: ¹Victoria.Strudwick@warwick.ac.uk; ²S.Kita@warwick.ac.uk

Bluesky: ²[@sotarokita](https://bsky.app/profile/@sotarokita)

ORCID: ²[0000-0002-0088-3654](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0088-3654)

Funding: See Acknowledgements.

Editorial review: This article has been subject to an editorial review process.



Copyright notice: This article is issued under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits use and redistribution of the work provided that the original author and source are credited.

You must give appropriate credit (author attribution), provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

Underrepresentation of Black researchers and academics is one of the most pressing issues in the UK Higher Education sector. The University of Warwick launched the Warwick PATHWAY Programme in November 2023 to address this issue. The programme supports aspiring Black researchers in all disciplines from undergraduate to postdoctoral level to become independent researchers in universities and other organisations. We aim to create 'a career pipeline that does not leak' and a multi-level community of aspiring Black researchers, presenting a visible career pathway and support network.

Keywords: research; careers; inclusion; diversity

Introduction

Underrepresentation of Black researchers and academics is one of the most pressing issues in the UK Higher Education sector today. According to HESA data (**HESA, 2024**), 0.86% of UK Professors and 3% of all UK academics in 2022/23 were Black, compared with an 8.8% Black representation within the UK working-age population (**GOV.UK, 2024**) - the most severe underrepresentation by ethnic group. By comparison, Asian academics made up 7.6% of Professors and 11.7% of all UK academics in 2022/23, compared with 15.7% of the total working age UK population (representing the total of 'Asian', 'Indian', 'Pakistani, Bangladeshi' and 'Asian other' categories within the GOV.UK working age population data). Under-representation of Black academics is not just a problem highlighted in the UK, but is also well documented across universities in the USA (**Allen et al., 2000**).

Historically, Black researchers have been underrepresented in academia as various systemic barriers are thought to impede their career progression (**Ibid**). In recent years, several studies conducted across UK universities have revealed that ethnic minorities are underrepresented and face racism across all academic career stages, from PhD students to senior academic leaders (**Arday 2018, 2020**). For example, Black academics are frequently faced with microaggressions and an unfair scrutiny of their performance. Findings indicate that Black academics in UK universities experience injustice, and the problem is worse among non-British Black academics than British Black academics (**Adisa et al., 2025**). In particular, Black academics report that less qualified White persons are often selected for the positions they have applied to, contributing to unjust hiring and promotion processes. The experience of racism also differs across genders (**Stockfelt, 2018; Blell et al., 2022**). Anti-Black racism can lead to poorer mental health, exacerbated by the stigma surrounding mental health issues as a sign of weakness within their own community and within the White dominant professional community (**Arday, 2021**). To address these inequities, AdvanceHE's (n.d.) Race Equality Charter was established in 2015 as a sector-led charter mark that UK higher education institutions voluntarily participate in to assess their context, identify priority issues, and design and implement actions to advance race equality. However, ethnic minority academics, including Black academics, remain sceptical as to whether such a policy tool can bring about substantive change (**Bhopal & Piktin, 2020**).

In response, the University of Warwick has created a positive action programme, called the Warwick PATHWAY programme, to bring about real substantial improvement in Black representation at Warwick and beyond. Warwick's mission is to solve the most profound intellectual

questions and most pressing societal challenges faced by Black academics. We need all talents to do so. The PATHWAY programme builds on existing initiatives at Warwick to create a coherent programme of support across all academic disciplines.

Preventing Leaks in the Pipeline

UK universities, charities and learned societies have established a variety of positive action programmes aimed at addressing this issue by providing funding for research opportunities to Black researchers. These initiatives vary in scope from undergraduates (e.g., ASPIRE programme at Sheffield Hallam University) (**Awolowo et al., 2023**) to faculty members (e.g., Wellcome Accelerator Awards) (**Wellcome Trust, n.d.**), and disciplines. The current landscape of programmes is fragmented, as individual schemes typically support only one research career stage. This makes it difficult to navigate support for Black researchers throughout their career journey across UK higher education.

Consultation with Black researchers at Warwick, from undergraduate to senior academic levels, indicated that providing multi-level, sequential packages of financial support, networking and community-building could be important ways to counteract loss of talent at various stages in research career development. PATHWAY provides an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of offering multi-level support within a single institution in terms of stemming talent loss from the research career pipeline.

A Brief History of the Warwick PATHWAY Programme

Inspired by the Wellcome Sanger Institute's Excellence Fellowship (**Wellcome Sanger Institute, n.d.**), Warwick's Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Stuart Croft, tasked Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Prof. Caroline Meyer, and (then) Academic Director for Research Culture, Prof. Sotaro Kita, in 2022 with developing a positive action programme for Black researchers at Warwick.

Kita consulted Black undergraduates, PhD students and academics, including a senior academic leader, Prof. Franklyn Lisk (then Academic Director for Africa), for their views on the key barriers to career development for Black researchers and potential interventions to support this. He then consulted with colleagues leading existing Warwick programmes and activities to support researcher career development to identify resources, frameworks and expertise which could support this. He also consulted the legal department to discuss legal implications and restrictions. By February 2023, the 'Warwick PATHWAY programme' was born.

On the 22nd of November 2023, we held a launch event for the programme, inviting Black alumni, current staff, and students to speak about the barriers they had faced and their hopes for the programme. One PhD alumna cited a lack of funding continuity post-PhD as a key factor that contributed to their move away from an active research role, and into a research-related post supporting equity and diversity. They said they would have benefitted from an Early Career Fellowship to give them time to explore follow-on research funding opportunities.

Another speaker – a Black undergraduate student who'd recently completed a summer research project – said that though they were keen to pursue a career in research, they previously had little understanding of what this would entail, but carrying out their project had helped to address this:

I've always known I wanted to go into research since I was like, 17 – it was just trying to get to that pathway and knowing, for example, how do I work on an independent research project, how do I fit within the scientific community, how do I work within a lab. By doing the [undergraduate research project] I was able to attend lab meetings, see different kinds of students in their different career stages – if that was postdoctoral researchers, if that was PhD students or Masters students – I could talk to them, and that kind of collaboration was what I didn't kind of understand. I thought a PhD was just kind of solo, you would just do it by yourself, but this project has kind of shown me it's really collaborative and it's just made me want to do research even more.

(Undergraduate Student Speaker)

The importance of access to information about research careers was emphasised by a Black Professor who had tried to encourage promising Black undergraduates to progress to a PhD:

I had some brilliant undergraduates pass through me – brilliant, outstanding undergraduates with a high first [class degree] [...] I tried to encourage them to pursue a research career. For one reason or another, they were not interested. These reasons stemmed from financial to “there are opportunities elsewhere”, “it's a hard grind if you want to work your way through” and [...], “how long will take for me to become a professor?” **(Professorial Speaker)**

The Professor suggested that individual mentoring and sponsorship for Black students could prove critical to addressing such concerns, citing the example of having brokered an introduction to a supervisor for an aspiring Black PhD candidate who subsequently became a professor at Warwick within 12 years.

Opportunities to present and publish research at an undergraduate level, as well as opportunities to build networks with Black peers in relevant disciplines, were also cited as interventions which had helped speakers at the event to either consider or develop their research careers further.

We recruited the first cohort (27 undergraduates, 3 PhDs and one Early Career Fellow) to the PATHWAY programme during the academic year 2023-2024, with Victoria Strudwick leading on programme implementation since February 2024. In 2024, we established links for the programme beyond both the UK and academia. In May 2024, Strudwick secured support from Warwick and Stellenbosch University's joint seed fund to establish collaboration between PATHWAY and Stellenbosch's mid-career researcher support programme through joint online events, reciprocal mentoring, and mobility of participants. In 2025, we provided participants with opportunities to network with and hear about the careers of Black researchers working in different research settings, from the pharmaceutical industry to the University of Oxford. The programme has also established a collaboration with British Geological Survey in which BGS provided funding (in addition to the Stellenbosch-Warwick seed fund) to enable a second PATHWAY PhD student to visit Stellenbosch in July 2025 and expand their research network beyond the UK. They will also share a report of their visit with BGS to inform the development of BGS's own EDI strategies and activities.

The PATHWAY Programme Structure

The programme provides four distinct levels of financial support, supplemented by a wraparound programme of networking and community-building activities which is open to all programme participants, as follows:

Undergraduate Research Support Scheme Awards (25 in 2023/24, 40 in 2024/25):

This provides bursaries of up to £1,500 each (**University of Warwick, 2025a**) as a contribution towards living expenses and other associated costs for undergraduate students to carry out 6-to-8-week research projects in the summer, under the supervision of academic staff at Warwick.

PhD studentships (up to three per academic year):

The scheme provides both tuition fees at the relevant UK or International rate (**University of Warwick, 2025b**) and a stipend for living costs at standard UKRI rate (**University of Warwick, 2025c**) for 3.5 years.

Early Career Fellowships at Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) (two per academic year):

This 9-month Fellowship (**University of Warwick, 2025d**) enables recent PhDs to undertake IAS's Accolade academic career training programme (**University of Warwick, 2025e**) and develop publications and external fellowship applications built on the outputs of their PhD. The fellowship awards a stipend to cover half of the Fellow's time - the other 50% of their time is free to undertake other work. The stipend is based on half of the standard UKRI Research Council PhD rate. In addition, Fellows receive £600 to support Fellowship-related activities (e.g., conference attendance, organising a workshop, dissemination activities), and have access to IAS's facilities, library and IT services at Warwick.

The Warwick PATHWAY career development grant for research fellows (up to five in 2024/25):

This is for career development activities (e.g., training courses, networking, developing a fellowship application) for postdoctoral researchers (up to £2,000 per award) (**University of Warwick, 2025f**). Supervisors must provide a statement to the effect that the funding will be used exclusively for the awardee's own career development.

In addition to this financial support, we run an enrichment programme of group events and networking opportunities throughout the academic year for researchers in the above schemes, with the aim of building a sense of community among aspiring Black researchers at Warwick and providing visible role models in different research contexts.

So far, the programme has included lunchtime talks from Black researchers at academic and non-academic research organisations about their research career journeys, and funded opportunities to participate in conferences for minoritised researchers.

After initially experiencing low sign-up rates for the lunchtime talk series, we surveyed participants to identify more convenient scheduling options and to gather suggestions for speakers. Subsequently, our first speaker event in March 2025, which was promoted to both PATHWAY and non-PATHWAY participants at Warwick, drew an audience of 13. Two PATHWAY participants (a PhD student and a postdoctoral researcher) applied for and received £150 travel bursaries from the programme to attend the 9th Annual BME Early Career Researcher (ECR) Conference, 4 July 2025 at University of Kent (Canterbury).

The first PATHWAY cohort (entry in academic year 2023/24) comprised 27 undergraduates (in addition to the 25 ringfenced bursaries, two further awards were made available to PATHWAY applicants from the main URSS scheme), three PhD students, one Early Career Fellow and four

Postdoctoral staff members. In March 2025, a further 42 undergraduate bursaries were awarded for projects to take place in summer 2025. Recruitment to the three PhD studentships for entry in October 2025/26 is currently underway, and applications for the 25/26 Early Career Fellowships opened in May 2025.

Evaluation of PATHWAY

With our first cohort underway, social scientists within the Doctoral Education and Academic Research Centre at the University of Warwick started an evaluation of the programme in October 2025. The researchers are using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to evaluate its effectiveness, involving both PATHWAY participants and those involved with developing and delivering the programme. The outcomes of the evaluation will be shared with the rest of the sector at the International Research Culture Conference, either in 2025 or 2026.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The Warwick PATHWAY programme was established to address underrepresentation of Black academics in UK universities and other research institutions (**Adisa et al., 2025**). The PATHWAY programme is a positive action intervention that provides opportunities for Black students and researchers to engage in research and build their careers in research. This should partly address the cynicism expressed by Black academics that real substantive progress has not been made despite the gradual adoption of policy tools such as Race Equality Chartermark by UK Universities (**Bhopal & Piktin, 2020**). The PATHWAY programme provides opportunities regardless of nationality and residence status, which is important given that non-British Black academics report a stronger sense of racial injustice than British Black academics (**Adisa, et al., 2025**). This programme, in the long run, should contribute to reducing underrepresentation of Black scholars among senior academic leaders in the UK (**Arday, 2018**).

There are several issues to which the Warwick PATHWAY programme needs to pay attention as it develops. We need to avoid tokenism for Black researchers supported by the programme and unfair burden on Black researchers to support the scheme (**Adisa, et al., 2025**). We also need to create a safe and welcoming community of aspiring Black students and researchers, without isolating them from a larger research community.

We plan to extend the spirit of the PATHWAY programme beyond Warwick by linking similar programmes across the UK to share best practice, creating a holistic UK-wide career pathway. We will also make a national career pathway more visible by co-creating a database of similar positive action programmes in other UK institutions. We hope to work in

collaboration with other institutions working in this space to secure funding to evaluate the effectiveness of this network in tackling the underrepresentation of Black researchers in UK Higher Education. This will contribute to the evidence base for best practice in positive action interventions.

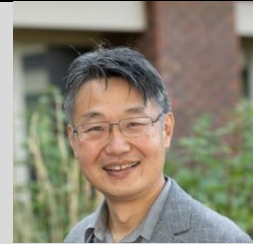
Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the University of Warwick's Institute of Advanced Study, Doctoral College and Student Opportunity teams for their collaboration and support in funding and implementing this programme. The programme is also supported by Research England's Enhancing Research Culture Fund and the British Geological Survey (BGS). Our thanks also to the external speakers who have engaged with the programme and its participants, including Professor Meleisa Ono-George (University of Oxford), Dr Ifedapo Francis Awolowo (Sheffield Hallam University) and Dr Azzedine Dabo (GSK). We also wish to acknowledge the valuable advice of the Medical Research Council's 'Black in Biomedical Research' Advisory Group, Sarah Goler-Solecki and Nic Farmer (MRC), and Dr Grace Ese-osa Idahosa (University of Cambridge).

Vicky is Head of Research Culture Partnerships within the National Centre for Research Culture (NCRC) at Warwick and leads on developing partnerships and collaborations with universities, research organisations, industry, funders and publishers in the UK and beyond. Specific projects within her portfolio include leadership of the Warwick PATHWAY Programme, a pilot multi-level positive action programme for Black researcher career development. With substantial experience of enabling international research collaboration, she has a keen interest in bringing together voices from different national, disciplinary and organisational contexts to enhance global research culture.



Professor Sotaro Kita is Professor in Department of Psychology, and a former Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor (Research), at the University of Warwick. He led the research culture strategy in the University from 2021-2024. He was also the founding Director for the National Centre for Research Culture, which facilitates coordination and collaboration among universities and other stakeholders. He founded the Ethnic Minority Researcher Careers Forum and Teaching Race Equality Taskforce, in the Department of Psychology.



References

Adisa, T.A., Gbadamosi, G., & Chang, K., 2025. Unequal Academy: The Struggle and Challenges of Token Black Academics in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Management*. DOI: [10.1111/1467-8551.12902](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12902) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

AdvanceHE (n.d.). *Race Equality Charter*. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Allen, W.R., Epps, E.G., Guillory, E.A., Suh, S.A., & Bonous-Hammarth, M., 2000. The Black Academic: Faculty Status among African Americans in U.S. Higher Education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 112-127. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696268> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Arday, J., 2018. Understanding race and educational leadership in higher education: Exploring the Black and ethnic minority (BME) experience. *Management in Education*, 32(4), 192-200. DOI: [10.1177/0892020618791002](https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618791002) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Arday, J., 2020. Fighting the tide: Understanding the difficulties facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Doctoral Students' pursuing a career in Academia. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 53(10), 972-979. DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2020.1777640](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1777640) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Arday, K., 2021. No one can see me cry: understanding mental health issues for Black and minority ethnic staff in higher education. *Higher Education*, 83, 79-102. DOI: [10.1007/s10734-020-00636-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00636-w) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Awolowo, F., Owolade, F., Abidoye, A., Dosumu, O., & Ajao, O., 2023. Towards widening participation in post-graduate research: The ASPIRE programme. *People, Place and Policy Online*, 18(1), 48-58. DOI: [10.3351/ppp.2023.4627796626](https://doi.org/10.3351/ppp.2023.4627796626) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Bhopal, K., & Pitkin, C., 2020. 'Same old story, just a different policy': race and policy making in higher education in the UK. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(4), 530-547. DOI: [10.1080/13613324.2020.1718082](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1718082) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Blell, M., Liu, S.S., & Verma, A., 2022. Working in unprecedented times: Intersectionality and women of color in UK higher education in and beyond the pandemic. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 30(2), 353-372. DOI: [10.1111/gwao.12907](https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12907) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

GOV.UK, 2023. Working age population. *Ethnicity facts and figures*, 31 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/working-age-population/latest/#ethnic-groups-by-working-age> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2024. Higher education staff statistics: UK, 2022/23. *Higher Education Statistics Agency*, 2 February 2024. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/16-01-2024/sb267-higher-education-staff-statistics#working> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Stockfelt, S., 2018. We the minority-of-minorities: a narrative inquiry of black female academics in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(7), 1012–1029. DOI: [10.1080/01425692.2018.1454297](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1454297) [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

University of Warwick, 2025a. Undergraduate Research Support Scheme. *University of Warwick*, 25 April 2025. Available at: <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/skills/urss/> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

University of Warwick, 2025b. Postgraduate research fees. *University of Warwick*, 17 April 2025. Available at: <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/finance/studentfinance/fees/pgr> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

University of Warwick, 2025c. PGR stipend & fee rates. *University of Warwick*, 5 February 2025. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/services/dc/schols_fund/current/feelevels/ [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

University of Warwick, 2025d. Early career fellowships. *University of Warwick*. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/fellowships/ecf/ [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

University of Warwick, 2025e. Academic career and leadership development. *University of Warwick*. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/earlycareer/accolade/ [Accessed: 12 May 2025]

University of Warwick, 2025f. PATHWAY postdoctoral awards. *University of Warwick*. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/research/research-culture-at-warwick/get-involved/pathway-programme/postdoc_awards [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Wellcome Sanger Institute (n.d.). Sanger Excellence Fellowship. *Wellcome Sanger Institute*. Available at: <https://www.sanger.ac.uk/about/equality-in-science/sanger-excellence-fellowship/> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

Wellcome Trust (n.d.). Wellcome Accelerator Awards. *Wellcome Trust*. Available at: <https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/schemes/wellcome-accelerator-awards> [Accessed: 12 May 2025].

To cite this article:

Strudwick, V., & Sotaro, K., 2025. Warwick PATHWAY Programme: A positive action programme to facilitate Black researchers' careers. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 12(3), 175-185. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v12i3.1852>.