



Social class, the overlooked element of diversity within higher education: An analysis of policy documents and data collection practices by Russell Group Universities in the United Kingdom.

Background: EDI and higher education

EDI is becoming an increasingly dominant discourse in higher education



- **Section 1:** a public sector 'socioeconomic duty' for government and public organisations to work towards reducing socioeconomic inequality
- Has not been enacted in England
- Not required to protect against class discrimination in same way as protected characteristics

Background: Social Class

The extent to which people possess different forms of capital that provide them with advantages over others in specific contexts:



Economic capital: occupation, material assets, income, personal and generational wealth, and savings

Social capital: social networks, associations, and connections

Cultural capital: education, tastes, cultural activities, dialect, and dress etc

Background: Class inequalities in higher education

ECONOMIC CAPITAL

- Class pay gap
- Financial precarity due to insecure contracts, especially for those without economic capital, savings, and generational wealth to insulate them
- **17%** of people on casualised contracts struggle to pay for food
- **34%** struggle to keep up with rent payments

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

- Not 'fitting in'; belittled and overlooked due to class background
- Microaggressions and symbolic violence related to class stereotypes and classist language (e.g., 'chavs') including:
 - having their accents,
 - communication styles,
 - hobbies,
 - dress-sense,
 - humour,
 - tastes ... **critiqued and ridiculed**

REPRESENTATION

- People from working class backgrounds make up **29%** of UK workforce but only **14%** of academic workforce

Background: Importance of data

- Crucial to addressing class inequalities is measuring, monitoring, and publishing data on the class background of staff, alongside having policy commitments that promote class diversity
- Data can tell us who 'gets in' and who 'gets on'



Civil Service

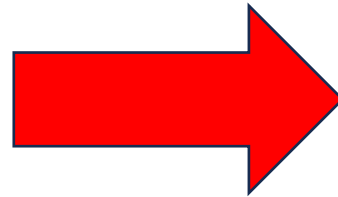


Background: Importance of data

- Collecting and using data is commonplace across protected characteristics
- Also, collection of class background data for students supported by Widening Participation initiative
- It is unclear what data is collected by higher education institutions on the class background of staff members

1. To identify the data that Russell Group Universities collect on the class background of staff and compare this to data collected on protected characteristics and data collected on student backgrounds,
2. Analyse the content and commitments made to promoting staff class diversity in relevant policy documents.

Methods: Freedom of Information Requests



Methods: Freedom of Information Requests

Measures of class background recommended by the Social Mobility Commission	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Occupation of a person's parent/guardian/carer when they were a child2. Type of secondary school a person attended (e.g., state, grammar, private)3. The highest qualification of a person's parent/guardian/carer (e.g., O Levels, BSc,/BA)4. Whether a person was eligible for free school meals at any point during their school years
Protected characteristics identified under the Equality Act 2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gender identity, and if it is the same as sex registered/sex assigned at birth.2. Age3. Disability4. Gender reassignment5. Marriage and civil partnership6. Pregnancy and maternity7. Race8. Religion or belief9. Sex10. Sexual orientation

... and requested EDI policy documents for content analysis

Findings: Policy analysis (what universities did, or claimed they did)

University	Main policy document			Additional relevant policy documents
	Mention of Equality Act and/or protected characteristics?	Recognition of EDI going beyond characteristics included within the Equality Act	Mention of class or socioeconomic background?	Mention of class or socioeconomic background?
Birmingham	Y	N	N	Y
Bristol	Y	N	N	N
Cambridge	Y	N	N	N
Cardiff	Y	N	N	N
Durham	Y	N	N	N
Edinburgh	Y	N	N	N
Exeter	Y	N	N	N
Glasgow	Y	N	N	N
Imperial College London	Y	N	Y	N
King's College London	Y	Y	N	Y
Leeds	Y	N	N	N
Liverpool	Y	N	N	Y
LSE	Y	N	N	N
Manchester	Y	N	N	N
Newcastle	N	N	N	N
Nottingham	Y	N	N	Y
Oxford	Y	Y	N	N
Queen Mary, University of London	Y	N	N	N
Queen's (Belfast)	Y	N	N	N
Sheffield	Y	N	N	Y
Southampton	Y	Y	Y	N
UCL	Y	N	N	Y
Warwick	Y	Y	Y	N
York	N	N	N	Y
Total 'Y'	22 (92%)	4 (13%)	3 (13%)	7 (29%)

- 22 referred to Equality Act or protected characteristics
- Overall, 10 mentioned class or socioeconomic background as an important component of EDI
- Reference to class and socioeconomic background was brief (especially compared to protected characteristics)

Findings: Staff and student characteristics

	Students												Staff																
	Occupation of parent*	Secondary school type*	Highest qualification*	Free school meals*	Gender identity	Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage / civil partnership	Pregnancy/maternity	Race/ethnicity	Religion / belief	Sex	Sexual orientation	Occupation of parent	Secondary school type	Highest qualification	Free school meals	Gender identity	Age	Disability	Gender reassignment	Marriage / civil partnership	Pregnancy/maternity	Race/ethnicity	Religion / belief	Sex	Sexual orientation	
Birmingham	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	
Bristol	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Cambridge	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Cardiff	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Durham	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Edinburgh	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Exeter	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Glasgow	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Imperial	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
KCL	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Leeds	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Liverpool	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
LSE	█	█	a	a	b	█	█	█	█	█	█	b	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Manchester	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	c	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Newcastle	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	c	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Nottingham	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Oxford	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
QMUL	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Queen's (Belfast)	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Sheffield	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Southampton	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
UCL	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Warwick	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
York	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

- 18 collect at least one measure of social class background on students
- One collects data on the social class background of staff

Discussion and calls to action

- These findings support calls to more critically consider the groups for which diversity and inclusion are being enhanced within higher education, and who is being ignored
- Given study findings, class may be viewed as an overlooked (or ignored) piece of the puzzle of intersectional diversity for staff in higher education

Discussion and calls to action

- 1. Collecting and using class background data to support diversity:** Class should be viewed as an important criterion of diversity by higher education institutions, and this should be reflected in the data that is collected and used. Data collection is simple, low cost and straightforward. Can be used to explore who 'gets in', 'gets on', and how class intersects with other known inequalities
- 2. Embedding class diversity in policies.** Class diversity must be legitimised through institutional policies in ways which complements, rather than competes with, existing diversity policies and initiatives (i.e., Athena SWAN).
- 3. *Changing institutional culture.*** Normalising conversations about class, alongside leaders, staff, and institutions to publicly advocate for class diversity and inclusion within their institutions and beyond.

... these recommendations should be seen as starting points ...

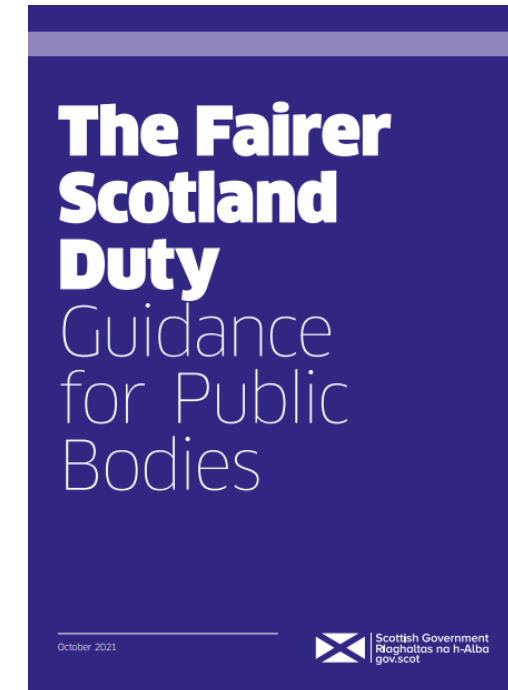
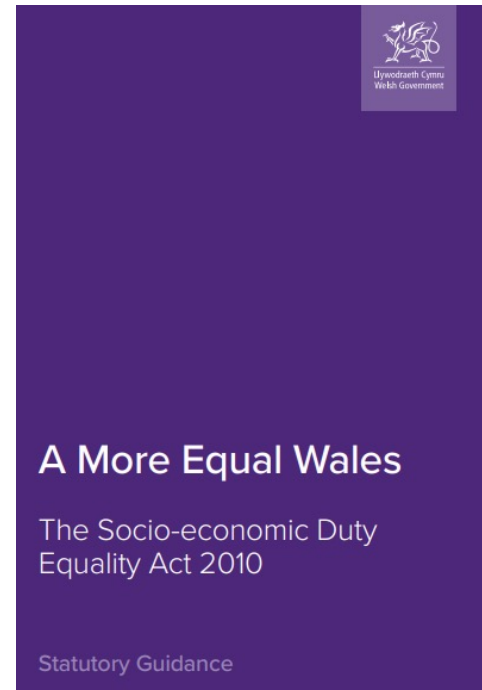
Discussion and calls to action

- Class inequalities are deeply engrained within society, impacting on people's health, wealth, education, and opportunities long before they enter higher education



Equality Act 2010

Enacting Section 1 'socioeconomic duty' within England



Thank you!

- **TO THE WIDER TEAM!**

- Dr Joanna Davies
- Dr Lesley Williamson
- Beka Torlay
- Dr Debbie Braybrook
- Hannah Scott
- Dr Sabrina Bajwah

Supporting references

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Background: Working class contributions in higher education

- Working class perspectives, strengths, and lived experiences make unique contributions to teaching, research, administration, and student support:
 - **linguistic capital** (the ability to communicate in more than one style and explain complex ideas without academic jargon),
 - **resistance capital** (i.e., by using lived experiences to act as agents for change by directly challenging and changing structural class inequalities),
 - **navigational capital** (providing higher quality pastoral care to students from diverse backgrounds)



Social Mobility
Commission

Social Mobility, the Class Pay Gap and Intergenerational Worklessness: New Insights from The Labour Force Survey

Sam Friedman, Daniel Laurison and Lindsey Macmillan

People from working class backgrounds make up 29% of UK workforce but only 14% of academic workforce