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Are ethnic minorities underrepresented in UK postgraduate study?

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Abstract

Despite recent rapid increases in postgraduate numbers, little is known about the ethnic background of current postgraduates. This lacuna is addressed using data about the UK postgraduate population. Overall, students from minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented among research and teacher-training students but not on masters degrees. The trend over time is encouraging. Substantial differences between minority ethnic groups are found and patterns of participation are shown to be structured by subject of study, institutional location and prior attainment. It is argued that differences in representation must be understood in the context of existing knowledge about prior educational patterns and subsequent labour market outcomes. Viewed in this way, underrepresentation of certain minority groups is potential evidence of disadvantage but underrepresentation can be interpreted more positively for other groups. Concerns remain over minorities' access to research degrees and the implications of this for the demographic composition of the academic profession. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)