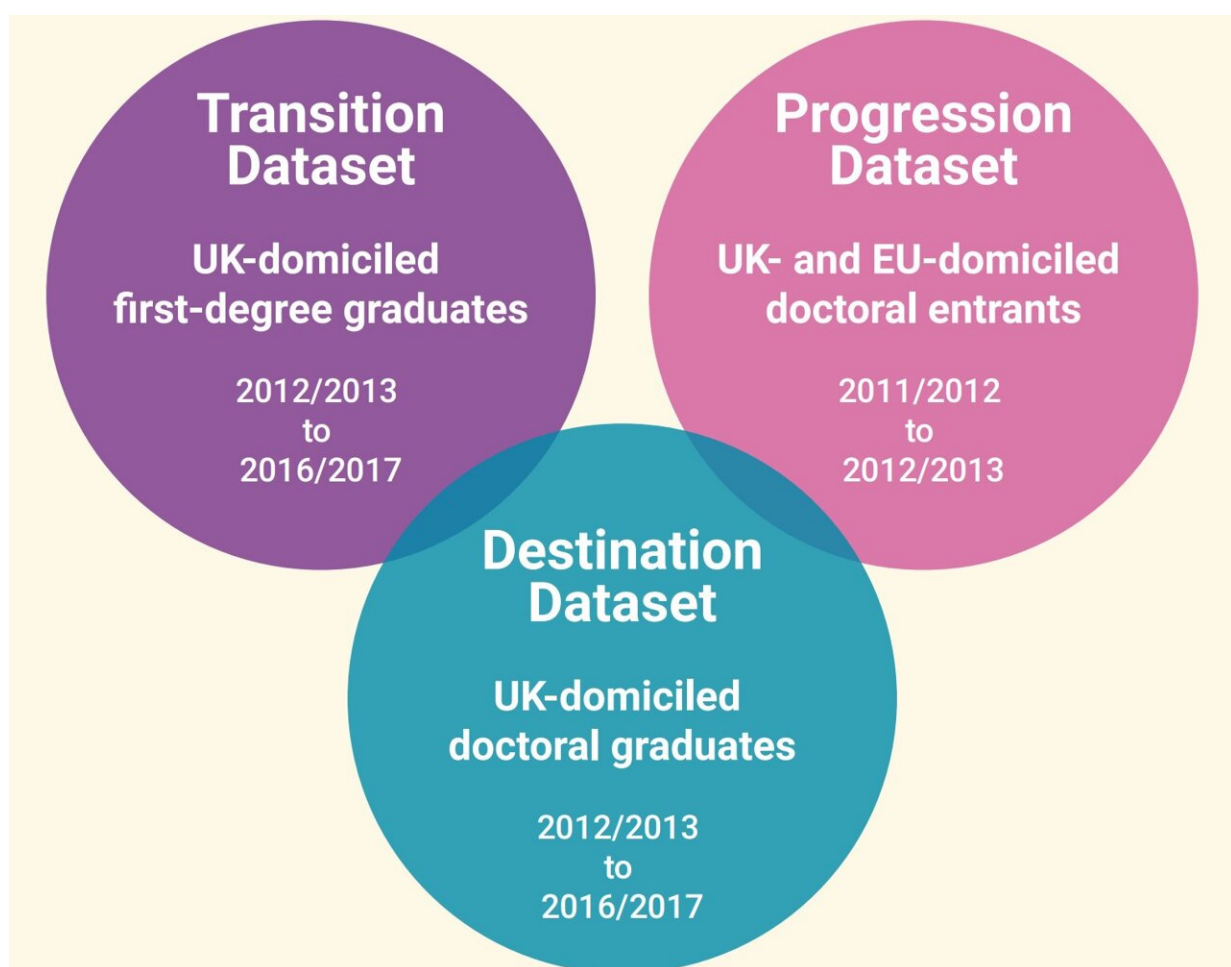


Report outlines key recommendations to broaden diversity of PhD students in life sciences

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Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) datasets. Credit: *Inequality in Early Career Research in the UK Life Sciences* (2022).

A new report has revealed some of the barriers prospective students face in studying life sciences at postdoctoral level.

The [conclusions](#) and recommendations are included in a new report which reveals that black graduates, women and those who have non-[graduate](#) parents are less likely to succeed in the [life sciences](#) at Ph.D. level.

The report, which was commissioned by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, revealed inequalities that created barriers for graduates from post-1992 universities wanting to pursue a career as a researcher in the life sciences.

Key recommendations:

- Creating an equality, diversity and inclusion partnership framework that involves engagement with expert groups and the life sciences community
- Establishing doctoral studentship schemes in the life sciences for minority ethnic groups
- Introducing targeted postdoctoral schemes for minority ethnic groups.
- Addressing structural barriers to opportunity—graduates from underrepresented groups better connected with Ph.D. opportunities
- Regional distribution of life science funding and opportunities
- Investing in developing an understanding of early research career inequalities—with a need for better and more joined up data

The research behind the report, which was carried out by the University of York, found that "prestigious higher education institutions continued to be richer and whiter for life sciences at the doctoral degree level."

Using data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) and from BBSRC doctoral training programs (DTPs), the study examined equality, diversity and inclusion across the life science disciplines.

Key findings:

- Black graduates less likely to be called for interview or offered a studentship; less likely to successfully complete their Ph.D. and also less likely to transition to postdoctoral academic employment after successfully completing a Ph.D.
- Women are less likely to progress to a life sciences Ph.D. than men, as are graduates from post-1992 universities and those who have non-graduate parents
- Women, Black or Black British graduates and those gaining their Ph.D. from a post-1992 university were all less likely to proceed to a postdoctoral position immediately after their Ph.D.
- A [gender wage gap](#) for life sciences doctoral graduates in their first roles post-Ph.D.
- Life sciences doctoral students are concentrated in a relatively small set of universities, which also tend to have higher numbers of first-degree students from advantaged backgrounds and lower numbers from minority ethnic groups
- Low levels of movement across types of university between undergraduate and doctoral level, suggesting structured pathways which work against graduates from the post-1992 institutions
- Most regions are net exporters of graduates into life sciences Ph.D.s, except for London and the East of England which benefit from 'brain gain'

Widen access

One of the report authors, Professor Paul Wakeling, from the University

of York's Department of Education, said, "These findings are really concerning and we absolutely need to address them. We hope the report will inform and galvanize efforts to widen access to doctoral study in the life sciences and address early career inequalities."

"We found relatively low levels of movement across some universities between undergraduate and doctoral level in the life sciences, suggesting that there are structured pathways which work against graduates from the post-1992 universities, which are sometimes referred to as 'new universities' or 'modern universities'."

"Our report suggests that universities and funders need to take serious action to address the underrepresentation of black graduates at doctoral and postdoctoral levels to make rapid progress in achieving a more diverse and inclusive research workforce in the life sciences."

More information: Report: www.ukri.org/publications/ineq...he-uk-life-sciences/

Provided by University of York

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