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The factors that affect the retention of BAME and female students in postgraduate Chemistry

Despite best efforts of initiatives that seek to increase participation within Chemistry and its related fields, BAME and female students are seen to be less present at the more elite stages of study and career. The Aspires 2 research project acted as a launchpad into the educational and wider experiences of BAME and female students aged 10-19, within the context of STEM. The research suggests that there are points throughout the academic study of STEM, where the retention of some minority sects by the field can dramatically decrease - especially compared to their majority sect counterparts. The project tracked students no further than the first year of undergraduate study.

Across higher education, there is evidence that there is a higher ratio of female to male students at the undergraduate stage, but the rates of progression by female students in STEM dwindles and does not always reflect this. Similarly, BAME students are also less likely to progress than their majority group counterparts, and significant inequalities persist.

This study explains the need for the inclusion of pedagogical factors (intersectionality, sense of belonging) within STEM, whilst presenting insight into the complexities of relating barriers to diversity that may contribute to the lacking retention of BAME and female students in postgraduate Chemistry. A survey with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that probed into how feelings of representation may influence student intentions after graduation with the sample and population of Chemistry students at The University of Kent is discussed. The findings indicate that BAME and female undergraduates generally feel underrepresented and that this can affect how, if at all they consider postgraduate study in Chemistry. Strategies to improve both BAME and female chemistry student feelings towards postgraduate progression, and thus retention, within The University of Kent are outlined.

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Author: NZOU, Deon (University of Kent)

Presenter: NZOU, Deon (University of Kent)

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