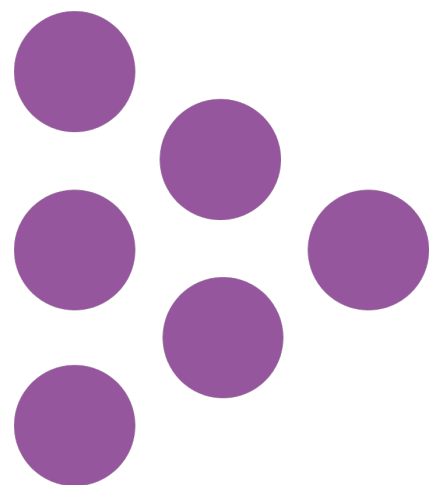


Report

Ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training, teacher retention and progression to leadership

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training, teacher retention and progression to senior leadership

Juliet Kotonya, Dawson McLean, Chihiro Kobayashi, Katherine Aston and Jack Worth

Published in June 2025

By the National Foundation for Educational Research,

The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/>

© 2025 National Foundation for Educational Research
Registered Charity No. 313392

ISBN: 978-1-916567-31-3

How to cite this publication:

Kotonya, J., McLean, D., Kobayashi, C., Aston, K. and Worth, J. (2025) *Ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training, teacher retention and progression to senior leadership*. Slough: NFER.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the individuals and organisations who have supported and contributed to this research. We thank the advisory group for its assistance with interpreting the research findings, which included representatives from funders Mission 44. We are particularly grateful to the practitioners on the advisory group for giving us the benefit of their advice, expertise and experience: Nadine Bernard (Aspiring Heads), Sarah Botchway (London South Teaching School Hub), James Coleman (National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers), Patrick Cozier (Highgate Wood School), Evelyn Forde (Educational Leadership Consultant), Dr Pinky Jain (Leeds Beckett University), Sanum J Khan (Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School), Prof Vini Lander (Leeds Beckett University), Faizal Musa (Dixons Academies Trust), Nav Sanghara (Woodland Academy Trust), Yalinie Vigneswaran (Ambition Institute).

We are very grateful to the Department for Education for granting us access to analyse their datasets and for the advice and guidance the respective data teams within the Department gave us for using and understanding them. This work was undertaken in the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS) using data from ONS and other owners and does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or other data owners.

We would also like to thank NFER colleagues who contributed to this research project, particularly Natasha Armstrong, Neelam Basi and Ben Styles.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Glossary	7
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Policy context	9
1.2 Previous research	9
1.3 About this study	10
2. Methodology	12
2.1 Quantitative methodology	12
2.2 Qualitative methodology	15
2.3 Limitations to the quantitative analysis	17
2.4 Limitations to the qualitative analysis	18
2.5 Advisory group	18
3. Ethnic disparities in applications to initial teacher training (ITT)	19
3.1 Key findings summary	19
3.2 Introduction	19
3.3 Overall number and composition of applications to ITT courses	20
3.4 Are there disparities in rejection rates between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds?	23
3.5 Does international recruitment drive any of the disparities in rejection rates?	29
3.6 Do differences in applicants' age, socio-economic status and provider region contribute to disparities in rejection rates?	37
3.7 What factors contribute to ethnic disparities in rejection rates?	42
4. Ethnic disparities in teachers' intentions to apply for promotion	54
4.1 Key findings summary	54
4.2 Introduction	54

4.3	Are there disparities in intentions to apply for promotion between teachers from different ethnic backgrounds?	55
4.4	Does existing under-representation in middle leadership drive any of the disparities in promotion intentions?	59
4.5	What factors contribute to ethnic disparities in intentions to apply for promotion?	60
4.6	Are the reasons why teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds do not seek promotion different from teachers from a white British background?	64
	5. Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' intentions to leave teaching?	65
5.1	Key findings summary	65
5.2	Introduction	65
5.3	Are there disparities in intentions to leave the state sector between teachers from different ethnic backgrounds?	66
5.4	What factors contribute to ethnic disparities in intentions to leave state-sector teaching?	68
5.5	Are the reasons why teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are considering leaving systematically different from teachers from a white British background?	74
5.6	Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' pay progression and perceptions of fairness about decisions on teacher pay?	77
	6. Conclusions and recommendations	80
6.1	Conclusions	80
6.2	Recommendations	81
	References	84
	7. Appendix A: Further methodological details	88
	8. Appendix B: Estimating the implications of equalising progression rates for additional teacher numbers	95
	9. Appendix C: Focus Group Topic Guides	97

Executive Summary

The teaching workforce in England does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the UK working-age population or of the pupil population that schools serve. Removing any bias in teacher recruitment, retention and promotion is essential to ensuring we have the most capable and qualified teachers. A more diverse teaching workforce benefits society, supports teacher recruitment and retention, and improves pupil experiences and outcomes (Sharp and Aston, 2024). This requires a shared commitment from many individuals and organisations across the system and a willingness to listen to voices from diverse communities, as well as using evidence to bring about improvements in racial equality and ultimately racial equity.

NFER's previous study of racial equality in the teacher workforce (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022) showed that under-representation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds¹ in teaching is most pronounced at senior leadership and headship levels, but driven by disparities throughout the teacher career pipeline, especially during early career stages and particularly in initial teacher training (ITT).

The Government has pledged to 'recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects' over the course of the current parliament (Labour Party, 2024). Achieving this target in the context of on-going teacher supply challenges in England will require action that increases recruitment of new teachers and/or improves the retention of current teachers. Equalising the disparities in progression between applicants and teachers of different ethnic groups would support the Government's goal of increasing the number of teachers in the education system. For example²:

- If UK-domiciled applicants to postgraduate teacher training from ethnic minority backgrounds were accepted on to training courses at the same rate as their white counterparts, the system would train around 2,000 more teachers per year.
- Retaining ethnic minority teachers in the state-funded sector at the same rate as their white counterparts would mean the system retaining an additional 1,000 teachers per year.

Caution should be exercised in interpreting these ethnic disparities (see Appendix B for details). In particular, given limitations with the currently available data, it is not possible to ascertain the proportion of applicants (from any ethnic background) that were below the quality standards set by ITT providers (e.g. without qualifications that form a key requirement for enter teacher training).

The research in this report, funded by Mission 44, follows NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce to further explore the factors influencing ethnic disparities at three key progression points: entry into ITT, progression to leadership and retention. Our analysis draws on data from the DfE's Apply for Teacher Training ('DfE Apply') platform, the Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey and qualitative focus groups with ITT providers and school leaders.

The key findings from our research are summarised below.

¹ See Glossary for how we write about ethnicity in this report.

² See Appendix B for more information on these calculations.

Teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds have a significantly higher intention to apply for promotion than their white counterparts, even after controlling for differences in characteristics.

Differences between ethnic groups in teachers' demographic characteristics and experiences somewhat contribute to explaining differences in intentions to apply for promotion by ethnicity. Teachers who were younger or less experienced tend to be more likely to seek promotion and the data indicates that teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds were more likely than teachers from a white background to fit this profile. Similarly, teachers dissatisfied with their salary were more likely to intend to apply for promotion and teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds tended to express more salary dissatisfaction than teachers from a white ethnic background. This suggests that salary concerns are a significant factor influencing promotion aspirations, particularly for teachers from black and Asian backgrounds.

However, even after accounting for these characteristics, teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds were still more likely than teachers from a white ethnic background to intend to apply for promotion. If teachers from all ethnic backgrounds had similar roles, workplace experiences and demographic characteristics, intention to apply for promotion for teachers from an Asian ethnic background would be 12 percentage points higher than for teachers from a white ethnic background, and 17 percentage points for teachers from a black ethnic background compared to white counterparts.

This suggests that the disparities in progression rates found in our previous research were not due to a lack of interest in applying for promotion among ethnic minority teachers and more likely to reflect a lack of opportunity or inequitable treatment in decision-making processes.

Teachers from a black ethnic background were more likely than their white counterparts to report experiencing bullying and harassment, that they did not feel valued by their school and that a lack of support from superiors was an important reason for considering leaving.

These are likely drivers for the finding that teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to consider leaving state-sector teaching³ than their white counterparts. In contrast, teachers from an Asian ethnic background are less likely to be considering leaving than their white counterparts. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were slightly more likely than their white counterparts to have reported experiencing bullying and harassment and cite a lack of support from superiors as an important reason for considering leaving, but the differences were small. Our analysis found little difference in intention to leave and explanatory factors between teachers from mixed and white ethnic backgrounds.

The survey finds that 12 per cent of all teachers report that they experience bullying and harassment. School leaders creating more inclusive and equitable working environments in which all staff feel supported and valued could encourage more teachers, especially those from a black ethnic background, to be retained in the state sector. From school leaders we spoke to in the focus groups, examples which supported staff retention and progression included supporting flexible

³ Our analysis is based on the WLTL survey, which only covers teachers working in the state-funded sector and has a question that refers to intentions to leave teaching within the state-funded sector.

working to meet individual teachers' needs and work-life balance, a whole-school culture of celebrating diversity and proactive development of staff who were interested in promotion.

There are significant ethnic disparities in initial teacher training (ITT) rejection rates among UK-domiciled applicants that are not explained by differences in applicant and application characteristics. This suggests that discrimination has a role, but limitations with the available data mean we cannot definitively rule out other factors such as being below the quality standards set by ITT providers.

Before accounting for differences in characteristics, UK-domiciled applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds were around twice as likely to be rejected as applicants from a white ethnic background. For applicants from a mixed ethnic background, rejection rates were around ten percentage points higher. Systematic differences across ethnic groups in characteristics such as age, socio-economic status and ITT provider region appear to partially drive these disparities in rejection rates. Specifically, applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely than applicants from a white ethnic background to be older, eligible for free school meals when they were in school⁴ and apply to London-based providers, characteristics that are associated with higher rejection rates among all applicants. The disparities in rejection rate by age and socio-economic status are particularly concerning, as applicants who belong to more than one marginalised group may face compounded disadvantage in the selection process.

After accounting for the role of differences in other characteristics between ethnic groups, disparities in rejection rates persist between UK-domiciled applicants from different ethnic groups. Our analysis suggests that if UK-domiciled applicants from all ethnic backgrounds were the same age, had similar socio-economic backgrounds and types of qualifications, and applied to the same providers, the gap in rejection rates between applicants from white and Asian ethnic backgrounds would still be 14 percentage points. Similarly, the gap would be 18, 6 and 18 percentage points for applicants from black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, respectively. These gaps are equivalent to around 1,400-1,700 trainees per year.

The persistence of ethnic disparities that are not explained by the characteristics of the applicant that we can observe in the available data suggests that discrimination by ethnic background is likely to play a role, although we cannot definitively rule out other factors (such as differences in qualification levels or work experience). ITT providers pointed to the role of bias in selection processes, including culturally biased interpretations of professionalism and English language skills, and unconscious bias in selection. In addition, lack of visible ethnic diversity in recruitment settings at key stages compounds the disadvantage faced by applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Many of the ITT providers we spoke to in focus groups were adapting their attraction and selection processes to foster the recruitment of an ethnically diverse cohort. Examples included equity-focused training for administrative and recruitment staff, foregrounding diversity and inclusion in quality assurance of admission decisions, adapting interview activities to be more equitable and diversifying interview panels and staff at recruitment events. Addressing ethnic disparities in ITT

⁴ Applicants are asked whether they were eligible for free school meals when they were in school, which is used as a proxy for socio-economic background.

rejection rates requires a comprehensive and sustained commitment to embedding equity into every stage of the recruitment process.

International applicants face much higher ITT rejection rates and an admissions process that places greater burden on them, related to the needs to obtain a visa, demonstrate UK-equivalency of foreign degrees and demonstrate sufficient English language skills.

International applicants domiciled outside the UK comprised almost a third of all applicants in 2023/24, a substantial growth compared with previous years. This was likely driven by foreign nationals becoming eligible for training bursaries that year for the first time, for physics and modern foreign languages ITT courses.

Applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be domiciled outside the UK than applicants from a white ethnic background. Whether applicants had British citizenship, were native English speakers and held only degrees granted by British universities also varied across ethnic groups, mainly reflecting patterns in applicant domicile.

Which country/region an applicant was domiciled in, whether an applicant was able to get permission to study in the UK, English language skills and international degree recognition were also all factors that impacted the likelihood applicants from all ethnic backgrounds were rejected. These differences meant that the overall rejection rates among applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were disproportionately impacted by the high rejection rates associated with the characteristics of international applicants.

ITT providers highlighted the increased length of the admissions process and complexity of the requirements for international applicants, which created additional barriers to admissions. In addition, providers identified misalignments between DfE requirements and guidance, ITT provider expectations and applicant expectations, which led to international applications being rejected or withdrawn.

Recommendations

The following policy and practice recommendations focus on improving equity at key progression points in the teaching workforce: ITT entry and promotion to leadership. However, equity is a systemic issue in the teaching workforce. Improvements to equity in recruitment and promotion processes must be accompanied by a genuine commitment to inclusion. It is insufficient to improve equity in recruitment to teaching and leadership, if individuals are not subsequently supported, respected and valued in these roles.

A specific challenge for recommendations in recruitment and promotion decisions is that judgements of specific applicants, and even judgements about what qualities should be assessed, are subject to debate. For example, there is limited evidence on which applicant characteristics at the point of ITT selection are associated with successful ITT completion or long-term teaching effectiveness. The applications system should strive to both hold a high standard for the quality and potential of future teachers and be fair and equitable for all applicants.

Approaches to equity need to be tailored to specific cases, as an approach which improves equity in one instance may hinder equity in another. For example, some organisations use anonymised recruitment processes, which remove contextual data about candidates, such as names, schools

and universities. The principle behind anonymised applications is that if potentially biasing information is removed, recruitment decisions cannot be affected by bias.

Conversely, other organisations use contextual recruitment, which uses the same contextual data to mitigate for structural disadvantage. For example, an ITT provider may require lower GCSE or A-Level grades for candidates who have experienced educational disadvantage, on the basis that their attainment record reflects the disadvantage they experienced, rather than their potential (Bygraves, 2022; Sanders, 2022). In each case, it is crucial to understand what is causing bias, tailor an approach to mitigate and remove this bias, and monitor the effects on equitable recruitment. Therefore, changes in practice need to be tested and monitored within specific settings.

Recommendations for Government:

- The Department for Education (DfE) should play a more proactive role in encouraging ITT providers, schools and trusts to adopt more inclusive recruitment practices. This will help it deliver its key objective of recruiting 6,500 teachers, thereby increasing education quality, as well as promoting equality and fairness within the workforce.
- The DfE should use its comprehensive data collections that collect information on ethnicity and key workforce outcomes (such as rejection rates in Apply and retention and progression in the School Workforce Census (SWC)) to share comparative institution-level and benchmark data with institutions to allow them to understand ethnic disparities in their settings and make improvements accordingly.
- The DfE should embed equity, diversity and inclusion within programme frameworks and within selection criteria for appointing providers, including across Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Early Career Framework (ECF), National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) and Teaching School Hubs.
- The DfE should pilot innovative approaches to improving equity in teacher recruitment and promotion processes and rigorously evaluate their impact to build the evidence base.
- The DfE should work with ITT providers to map the application process for international applicants, identifying opportunities to align expectations and streamline processes. For example, providers suggested that international applicants could be enabled to upload degree certificates within the DfE Apply platform to reduce additional requests. Guidance for international applicants should clarify the expectations, pathways and support available, with tailored guidance for next steps when an applicant does not meet a requirement.

Recommendations for school and trust leaders:

- School and trust leaders should develop pathways to actively support ethnically diverse teachers who are interested in promotion, such as coaching, shadowing, or promoting leadership training opportunities (internal or external). Pathways could also include temporary projects and responsibilities, provided they are supported by training, supervision, clear and fair expectations and recognition.
- School and trust leaders should evaluate their selection criteria and processes for appointing to promoted and leadership posts to ensure they are transparent, inclusive and equitable, particularly considering disparities by ethnicity.

- School and trust leaders and trustees/ governors should provide on-going support, such as mentoring, coaching and external supervision, for ethnically diverse leaders to retain them and facilitate continued growth.
- School and trust leaders should proactively engage with inclusivity training and professional development to improve representation and retention of ethnic minority staff.
- School and trust leaders and trustees/ governors should ensure that their schools have clear, accessible and fair policies and processes for reporting and acting on bullying and harassment. Leaders should promote work cultures that are inclusive and supportive for all staff.

Recommendations for ITT providers (including HEIs and school-based providers):

- ITT providers should audit and evaluate their selection criteria and processes for equity, diversity and inclusion, particularly considering disparities in admission by ethnicity, socioeconomic background and age. For example, providers should consider how assessment criteria related to professionalism, English language proficiency and school experience value the diverse experiences of applicants.
- ITT providers should provide ongoing professional development and reflection to improve equity in their attraction and selection processes. This should include all colleagues who make admissions decisions or interact with candidates.
- The ITT sector should improve recruitment of ethnically diverse ITT leaders and tutors. Without visible leadership figures as they enter teaching, aspiring teachers may struggle to see themselves reflected in the profession.

Recommendations for future research:

- Undertake theory-based evaluation to explore how the ITT application process can be made more equitable. Many providers are actively seeking to improve practice, and rigorous context-specific research would provide important guidance for the sector. For example, providers suggested that the DfE should conduct an independent survey of applicants who discontinue at key application stages. Systematically documenting these reasons would enable evidence-based improvements to recruitment strategies, reducing attrition and enhancing applicant support.
- Conduct further quantitative analysis of large-scale survey data that is enhanced by linkages to administrative data. There are differences between teachers' intentions and subsequent decisions about leaving state-sector teaching. The WLTL data explored in this report only considers teachers' intentions. Future research should explore the pathway between leaving intentions and decisions, for example by combining rich experiential data from WLTL with leaving outcome data from the SWC.

Glossary

Language shapes our thinking and how we see the world. Language about identity is particularly complex because it concerns how other people see us and how we see ourselves.

When referring to ethnic groups, this report follows current government guidance. We are using this official guidance for consistency and in recognition of its basis in research and user feedback. The ethnicity categories also align with the way the quantitative data has been collected. The guidance was updated in December 2021, including the decision not to capitalise ethnic groups, (such as ‘black⁵’ or ‘white’) unless that group’s name includes a geographic place (for example, ‘Asian’, ‘Indian’ or ‘black Caribbean’).

We recognise there are limitations to this approach. For example, using major ethnic groups aggregates data, which enables analysis and synthesis of patterns at a broad level. However, we acknowledge that this could also serve to ignore different experiences of particular ethnic groups which can cause inaccurate interpretations. To mitigate this, we have reported on more specific ethnic groups and included information on intersectionality (for example, considering gender and ethnicity) where data is available.

The report refers to the following ethnic groups.

Asian: Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese; any other Asian background.

Black: Caribbean; African; any other black background.

Mixed ethnic background: white and black Caribbean; white and black African; white and Asian; any other mixed or multiple ethnic background.

White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British; Irish; Gypsy or Irish Traveller; Roma; any other white background.

Other ethnic background: Arab; any other ethnic group.

Ethnic minority: refers to all ethnic groups except the white British group. Ethnic minorities include white minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups.

Source: Writing about ethnicity (<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/>)

⁵ Note that while we are following government guidance not to capitalise ethnic groups, we recognise that there is a diversity of opinion on the capitalisation of ‘Black’ and we acknowledge the sensitivities and multiple perspectives on this.

1. Introduction

The diversity of the teacher workforce in England is not representative of the diversity of the wider population. NFER analysis found that in 2020/21, the majority of schools in England had an all-white teaching staff, including 69 per cent of primary schools and 18 per cent of secondary schools. Six out of seven (86 per cent) schools had an all-white senior leadership team (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022). In contrast, over a third of the pupil population are from ethnic minority backgrounds (DfE, 2023a).

Removing bias in teacher recruitment, retention and promotion is essential to ensuring we have the most capable and qualified teachers. Research literature points to additional benefits of an ethnically diverse teaching workforce. First, equality and diversity enrich our society, by bringing different forms of social and cultural capital (Wallace, 2018; Maylor, 2022; Teach First, 2023), and sharing experiences and perspectives which can reduce racial prejudice (DfE, 2018b, 2023a, Joseph-Salisbury, 2020, Le and Nguyen, 2019). Second, having role models from diverse cultural backgrounds can inspire all pupils, counter racial stereotyping, and provide important representation for pupils from minority ethnic groups (Zirkel, 2002; Haque and Elliott, 2017; Demie and See, 2022). Third, improving recruitment and retention of an ethnically diverse teaching workforce is likely to reduce teacher shortages (Demie and See, 2022, Tereshchenko *et al.*, 2022). Fourth, pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds have more positive social-emotional and behavioural outcomes when taught by a same-race teacher (Hart, 2020; Blazar, 2021; Gershenson, Hansen and Lindsay, 2021; Gershenson *et al.*, 2022; Gottfried, Little and Ansari, 2023; Liu, Penner and Gao, 2023).

However, when considering the benefits of ethnic diversity in the teaching workforce, it is important to consider the risks of using these arguments. For example, framing teachers as ‘role models’ can mistakenly assume that pupils will identify with teachers based on their ethnic group, perpetuate stereotypes and create an additional burden for teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds (Maylor, 2009; Beckles-Raymond, 2020). Similarly, improving recruitment and retention for teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds must be part of a longer-term strategy to improve equity and inclusion, rather than a ‘fix’ for a teacher shortage.

NFER’s previous study of racial equality in the teacher workforce (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022) established the extent of ethnic disparities at different stages of progression in teaching. The research showed that under-representation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in teaching is most pronounced at senior leadership and headship levels, but largely driven by disparities in the early career stages, particularly initial teacher training (ITT). This study builds on that research by exploring the most important factors influencing ethnic disparities at three key progression points: entry into ITT, retention and progression to leadership. This deeper understanding of the barriers to entry into teaching, retention and progression to leadership that ethnic minority teachers face is critical to taking effective action to address disparities.

1.1 Policy context

Despite longstanding concerns about the diversity of the teaching workforce, the problem persists. In 2018, the Department for Education issued a statement of intent, describing a commitment to increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce (DfE, 2018b). However, since the closure of equality and diversity hubs in 2020, there have been no government targets, programmes or funding to improve ethnic diversity in the teaching workforce in England. Many educational organisations who co-signed the statement of intent, along with other education organisations, continue to publish an annual statement of commitments and actions to improve diversity in the teaching workforce. These have included work to diversify governing bodies, embed equity and inclusion into teacher training programmes and professional development offers, and monitor programme data for different ethnic groups.

The Government has pledged to ‘recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects’ over the course of the current parliament. Achieving this target in the context of on-going teacher supply challenges in England will require action that increases recruitment of new teachers and/or improves the retention of current teachers. Equalising the disparities in progression between applicants and teachers of different ethnic groups would support the Government’s goal of increasing the number of teachers in the education system.

1.2 Previous research

Research on entry to initial teacher training (ITT) shows that applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds are less likely to receive and accept an ITT offer than their white peers. The full set of reasons behind this disparity were not clear, due to the limitations of available data (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022). However, if ITT selection processes have not been checked for bias, this could contribute to lower success rates among candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds (Bardach, Rushby and Klassen, 2021).

In the context of a substantial increase in ITT applications from candidates from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds between 2014/15 and 2020/21, this disparity in ITT acceptance rates significantly limits the recruitment of an ethnically diverse teaching workforce.

A similar pattern is seen in retention within state sector teaching. Year-to-year retention is lower for teachers from Asian, black, mixed and other backgrounds than for their white counterparts, and retention disparities between Asian and black teachers and their white peers widened significantly between 2013/14 and 2020/21 (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022). This is primarily because teachers from the Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic groups are concentrated in London, where retention is lower, although the gap between teachers from Asian and white backgrounds persists even after accounting for differences in region, age and experience (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022).

Teachers from all ethnic groups commonly cite high workload as a key reason for leaving (Adams *et al.*, 2023). However, teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds also encounter an ‘additional hidden workload’ of coping with racism (Tereshchenko, Mills and Bradbury, 2020). Additional concerns reported by teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds include overt and covert racial

discrimination and disillusionment with their capability to make a difference for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Subtle forms of racism, such as microaggressions and stereotyping, can be especially difficult to challenge, for fear of being labelled ‘aggressive’ and staff from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely than white British peers to be confident that school leaders would take action to prevent discrimination (Haque and Elliott, 2017b; Tereshchenko, Mills and Bradbury, 2020; Ozolins *et al.*, 2021; Education Support, 2023).

Lack of progression opportunities are another key concern influencing ethnic minority teachers’ decisions to leave teaching. After taking into account differences in their characteristics (especially teaching region and phase), teachers from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds are significantly less likely to be promoted to middle leadership than their white counterparts (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022). Teachers report being passed over for training and progression opportunities (Haque, 2017; Tereshchenko, Mills and Bradbury, 2020) or being encouraged or self-selecting into middle leadership positions with limited opportunities for further progression to senior leadership (e.g. Wallace, 2020).

Research exploring positive actions to support the development, retention and promotion of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds highlights the importance of deliberate strategies and pathways, including trial leadership positions, secondments or shadowing, as well as leadership CPD or coaching (Miller, 2020). Similarly, in schools with an ethnically diverse senior leadership, retention for teachers in the Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic groups is the same or higher than for teachers in the white ethnic group (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022).

1.3 About this study

This research, funded by Mission 44, aims to understand the factors influencing ethnic disparities at entry to ITT and progression to senior leadership. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do differences in characteristics between ITT applicants from different ethnic backgrounds contribute to ethnic disparities in ITT acceptance rates?
- To what extent are ethnic disparities in ITT acceptance rates driven by differences in the types of qualifications that applicants hold (e.g. international qualifications, particularly those assessed for equivalence using the UK ENIC system of international qualification recognition)?
- To what extent are ethnic disparities in acceptance rates driven by differences in other characteristics (e.g. English language proficiency, disadvantaged socioeconomic background)?
- Are the reasons why applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds are rejected by providers from ITT courses systematically different from applicants from a white background?
- What role do individual ITT provider decisions make in influencing ethnic disparities in ITT acceptance rates?
- When controlling for measured factors, is there still a disparity in ITT acceptance rates between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds?

To what extent do differences in the professional experiences of teachers and leaders from different ethnic backgrounds contribute to ethnic disparities in retention and progression?

- Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' intentions to apply for promotion?
- If so, to what extent are ethnic disparities in intentions to apply for promotion associated with differences in personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, confidence) and/or school-related factors (e.g. region, inclusive and supportive school culture, access to professional development)?
- Are the reasons why teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds do not seek promotion systematically different from teachers from a white background?
- When controlling for measured factors, is there still a disparity in the intention to apply for promotion for teachers from different ethnic backgrounds?
- Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' intentions to leave teaching?
- If so, to what extent are ethnic disparities in intentions to leave teaching associated with differences in personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, confidence) and/or school-related factors (e.g. workload, autonomy, inclusive and supportive school culture, pupil behaviour and support, access to professional development, level of deprivation, region)?
- Are the reasons why teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are considering leaving systematically different from teachers from a white background?
- Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' pay progression and perceptions of fairness about decisions on teacher pay?
- When controlling for measured factors, is there still a disparity in the intention to leave teaching for teachers from different ethnic backgrounds?

2. Methodology

2.1 Quantitative methodology

The quantitative analysis we undertook for this research involved two key data sources. The first data source was data from DfE's Apply for Teacher Training ('DfE Apply') platform, which we used in the first phase of the research. The second phase of the research used data from the DfE's Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTl) survey.

2.1.1. Phase 1: DfE Apply

NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce showed that differences in rejection rates to initial teacher training (ITT) were likely a key contributor to under-representation of teachers in the teaching workforce. However, the data used in that project was not rich enough to enable analysis of the specific factors contributing to differences in ITT rejection rates.

The DfE Apply data enables richer analysis of some of these factors. DfE Apply is the online platform on which, since 2021, all applicants to postgraduate initial teacher training (ITT) courses in England have submitted their applications. The data on the characteristics of applicants and applications collected through the platform enabled us to conduct detailed analysis of the differences in rejection rates to ITT between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds.⁶

The DfE Apply data contains an array of information on all applications made to ITT courses in England in 2022/23 and 2023/24. These characteristics include demographic characteristics of the applicant such as ethnicity, age and gender. It also collects other relevant characteristics about the applicant – such as English language skills, the country the applicant lives in, nationality, educational qualifications, eligibility for free school meals (FSM) (for applicants who attended school in the UK only) – and application – such as subject and provider characteristics.

Crucially, the DfE Apply data also includes the outcome status of the application (whether the application was accepted, rejected, withdrawn, provisionally accepted, etc.). For our analysis, our main outcome of interest was whether the application was rejected. We focussed on rejections rather than acceptances because of how the DfE Apply platform treats applicants who submit more than one application. When an applicant receives multiple ITT place offers they can only accept one and the rest of their applications will be recorded as 'withdrawn' even if they otherwise would have been accepted. In contrast, ITT providers must make an active decision to reject applications that do not meet admission criteria, so rejection rates are a better indication of applicants submitting applications that fail to meet the minimum criteria for admission.

While all our analysis of rejection rates was at the application level, we weighted the data to account for the fact that some applicants submitted more than one application each year. This weighting enables the interpretation of the data to be in terms of applicants (i.e. people) rather than applications. We provide more detail on how we weighted the data in Appendix A.

⁶ This analysis grouped applicants by ethnic group using both the 'major' ethnic group categories and the 'minor' ethnic group categories, as defined by the Office for National Statistics (GOV.UK, 2022).

Our quantitative analysis first looked descriptively at the DfE Apply data to show the key overall patterns in the number of applicants and applications and the proportion of applicants each year who were not domiciled in the UK. We also showed what proportion of applicants were from each ethnic group each year. We summarise these findings in section 3.2 of the report.

We then focussed on the role of international recruitment in driving the differences in rejection rates across ethnic groups. In particular, we focussed on whether visa barriers, language skills and international degree recognition contribute to differences in rejection rates for applicants domiciled outside the UK. We summarise these findings in section 3.4.

Beyond international recruitment, for historic/ systemic reasons, differences between applicants from each ethnic group in characteristics like age, gender and socio-economic backgrounds may also help to influence some of the overall gaps in rejection rates that we observed. For example, our analysis showed that applicants from a white ethnic background tended to be younger, on average, than applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds and which contributed to higher rejection rates for applicants from these ethnic backgrounds.

Finally, using a technique called Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition (OBD) (Oaxaca, 1973; Blinder, 1973), we estimated what proportion of the gaps in rejection rates between ethnic groups were ‘explained’ by systematic differences in the applicant and application characteristics between ethnic groups that we observed in the data.

We used an OBD model for this part of the analysis rather than a simple regression model because the likelihood of rejection is likely to be mediated by key observed characteristics (e.g. English language skills, domicile country, etc.) of the applicant and application, which is a key output of interest for the analysis. A simple regression model ‘controlling for’ observed characteristics would enable us to estimate the strength of the relationship between, for instance, English language skills, ethnicity and the likelihood of rejection. However, it would tell us little about how English language skills and ethnicity might be related.

We estimated an OBD model for all applicants and also for a subset of applicants, including only applicants who were domiciled in the UK. We estimated the second UK-domiciled applicant specification in order to include FSM status in the model, since it was not observed for international applicants. We outline the specification of the decomposition model in more detail in Appendix A.

We interpreted the findings from the decomposition carefully. If systematic differences in applicant and application characteristics ‘explained’ a significant proportion of progression rate gaps, then it does not necessarily indicate that we can conclude that there is equality. A further step is to interpret why these factors ‘explain’ the gap and interrogate the reasons why people from different ethnic groups may have the characteristics that they do.

We were not able to account for all possible differences in the characteristics of people from different ethnic backgrounds, so any remaining gaps in progression rates may have been driven by other characteristics that were not captured in the data. For example, there were limitations in the DfE Apply data that prevented us from being able to observe an applicant’s work experience (either in teaching or in any other job) and detailed information on qualifications. However, given that we have accounted for as many key characteristics as we are able to in the analysis, it seems

reasonable to conclude that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is likely to have been playing some part in explaining the gaps that remain.

2.1.2. Phase 2: WLTL survey

The Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey is a large-scale survey dataset that captures the demographic characteristics of teachers and responses to survey questions about teachers' and school leaders' experiences, career intentions and working conditions. We use data from wave 1, which was collected in spring 2022. The dataset comprises 11,177 teachers and leaders, allowing for an examination of comparisons across different ethnic groups. At the time of writing this report, data from waves 2 and 3 had been collected in spring 2023 and 2024, respectively, but the datasets had not yet been made available to researchers.

We used the WLTL data to analyse differences in teachers' intentions to apply for promotion and intention to leave teaching in the state-funded sector. Intention to apply for promotion was derived from two separate items, one asking respondents whether, in the following 12 months, they were considering applying for promotion (including applying for upper pay range) in their current school and the other asking respondents whether they were considering moving to another state school on promotion. The combined measure indicated whether the teacher responded 'yes' to either or both. We removed a small number of 'don't know' responses to either question from our analysis.

Intention to leave was based on responses to a single question: whether, in the following 12 months, they were considering leaving the state school sector (excluding retirement). Again, we removed a small number of 'don't know' responses to this question from our analysis.

Given sample size constraints, the analysis focussed on teachers in four of the five major ethnic groups: teachers from white, Asian, black, and mixed ethnic backgrounds. We were unable to analyse teachers from an other ethnic background due to small sample sizes. We were also unable to conduct very much granular analysis of teachers across minor ethnic groups, due to insufficient sample size. The sample sizes for the major ethnic groups present in the survey (including leaders and teachers with incomplete data in some fields used in our analysis) and the final sample used in our analysis (including only teachers with complete outcome and characteristic data) are shown in the table below.

Table 1 Sample sizes by ethnicity in the WLTL survey and NFER's analysis

	N in WLTL survey wave 1	N in NFER analysis
White	10,129	6,881
Asian	404	255
Black	190	93
Mixed	241	151
Other	47	25

Source: NFER analysis of WLTL data 2021/22.

Additionally, some responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale have been converted into a binary format to ensure the sample sizes were sufficient for meaningful statistical comparisons. This methodological adjustment enhances the robustness of the analysis while preserving the integrity of key comparisons.

We conducted descriptive analysis of the WLTL data to show how intention to stay in and progress in teaching varied across teachers from different ethnic backgrounds. We summarised these findings in sections 4.2 and 5.2 of the report.

We used the same Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition method as described above to explore the factors that may help to explain disparities in intentions to apply for promotion and intentions to leave the state sector. The variables we included in the decomposition analysis included: teacher sex, age, experience, salary satisfaction, workload acceptability, perceived control over workload, confidence with adapting teaching to pupil needs, feeling valued by school, SLT support for flexible working, having a middle leadership role, having caring responsibilities, having children, whether manager supports well-being, whether manager supports work-life balance, support to deal with disruptive pupil behaviour, opportunities to actively participate in whole school decisions, experiencing bullying and harassment, academy school, region (London/ outside London) and school intake deprivation (top 40 per cent of schools according to FSM eligible pupils/ bottom 60 per cent).

Similar to the DfE Apply analysis, we also conducted descriptive analysis of the WLTL data to outline how differences in retention and progression intention vary by the characteristics of the teacher and how these relate to ethnic disparities.

2.2 Qualitative methodology

Our quantitative analysis of the DfE Apply and WLTL data is useful to point towards some of the general factors which drive differences in ITT rejection, retention and progression rates. For instance, our analysis highlighted how international recruitment appears to have been a significant contributor to gaps in rejection rates.

However, gaining a more nuanced understanding of the specific challenges faced by applicants in these areas, and potential policy solutions, requires additional research. We therefore collected qualitative data from focus groups to identify some of these specific factors and relevant policy solutions.

We conducted two online focus groups with ITT providers. We sourced relevant participants via the two main ITT provider associations: Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) and National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT). We asked participants about their understanding of why there are ethnic disparities in acceptance rates and what the barriers and enablers are. We also explored selected findings from the quantitative data analysis to gain additional insights and build a more nuanced understanding.

Table 2 Sample for ITT focus groups

Target sample	Achieved sample
2 focus groups, 6-8 participants for each. ITT tutors, programmes leads and admissions specialists	Group 1: 7 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 2 from NASBTT member institutions b) 5 from UCET member institutions Group 2: 6 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 1 from NASBTT member institution b) 5 from UCET member institutions

We also undertook complementary qualitative research to add nuance to our understanding of the barriers and enablers to achieving racial equality in progression to senior leadership. We conducted two online focus groups with senior leaders from primary and secondary schools. We sampled the schools from published School Workforce Census data and contacted them by email to identify individuals to participate. Although individual-level demographic data on participants' racial or ethnic identity was not systematically collected, several participants self-identified their ethnic background during the discussions. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure alignment with the study's aims. Schools were selected using publicly available data from the School Workforce Census, with a focus on those with a high proportion of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

We asked school leaders about their experiences of developing teachers, exploring enablers, barriers to teachers' career progression, as well as enablers and barriers to long term retention of an ethnically diverse school leadership team. We also explored selected findings from the quantitative data analysis of DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey to gain additional insights and build a more nuanced understanding.

The focus groups involved 90-minute sessions led by a moderator and supported by an assistant. The discussion was framed by a written topic guide, setting out the key stimulus and questions for the group (see Appendix C). The sessions were recorded, transcribed and analysed in the MAXQDA qualitative analysis software.

We offered a £75 thank you voucher to respect the thought and time invested by leaders.

Table 3 Sample for school leadership focus groups

Target sample	Achieved sample
2 focus groups, 4-6 participants each School leaders (primary and secondary)	<p>Group 1: 6 participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 2 headteachers b) 4 deputy headteachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary schools: 3 participants • Secondary schools: 3 participants <p>Group 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total: 4 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 2 headteachers b) 2 deputy headteachers • Primary schools: 4 participants • Secondary schools : None

2.3 Limitations to the quantitative analysis

While the smaller ‘minor’ ethnic group categories were recorded in the DfE Apply data, differences with how data on the minor groups was collected compared to the major groups, alongside small sample sizes within the minor group categories, posed challenges for our analysis. While we were able to present some overall descriptive statistics on the number of applicants from each of the minor group categories, we were unable to include them as part of the decomposition modelling.

In addition, while the characteristics we observed in the Apply data were richer than in the data we used for our previous research there are still key factors we were unable to observe about the applicant. For instance, we were unable to observe anything about work experience (either in teaching or in other jobs) and qualifications (other than whether degree was from an international university).

We were also unable to observe anything about the specific application stages at which applicants were rejected, which could have yielded some important insights about how far applicants from different ethnic backgrounds tend to make it in the application process before being rejected. For instance, we were unable to determine whether applicants were rejected immediately after submitting their application, at the interview stage or later in the process. Making this data available for analysis in future could further improve the potential insights.

Some similar limitations apply to our analysis of the WLTL data. Despite the survey’s overall large sample size, a key limitation of this study is the inability to analyse minor ethnic groups due to insufficient sample size. As a result, important nuances within these groups may not be captured.

Another limitation stems from the reliance on self-reported data regarding teachers’ intentions to apply for promotion or leave the state school sector. The dataset does not also include objective career outcome data, such as whether teachers applied for promotion, were promoted, or left the

profession, thereby limiting the study's ability to assess discrepancies between intentions and actual career trajectories. Future research incorporating behavioural data, such as administrative records on teacher promotions and retention, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of career progression disparities.

2.4 Limitations to the qualitative analysis

The focus groups provided rich, detailed data, offering valuable insights into the experiences of senior leaders in schools where over half of the teaching staff identified as being from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, there are some limitations to consider. The study involved only two focus groups, which, despite efforts to ensure diversity in school phase (primary and secondary) and region (London and non-London), inevitably limited the range of perspectives.

Participants in the focus groups for ITT admissions staff were recruited through open invitations sent out by two national member associations for ITT providers, which may have led to self-selection bias, as those with a strong interest in the topic were more likely to respond. We made efforts to include a range of provider types and regional locations, but the small number of participants means we captured a limited variety of perspectives. As a result, the findings reflect only a small portion of the broader provider landscape.

While the School Workforce Census data offered a structured approach to sampling, it may not account for recent changes in staffing. Additionally, recruitment via email could have introduced self-selection bias, as individuals already engaged with or particularly interested in diversity issues may have been more likely to participate.

While the sample size was relatively small and demographic information incomplete, the discussions yielded rich, experience-based insights. Given these parameters, the analysis did not seek to compare perspectives across demographic subgroups. Instead, a thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns, shared experiences and points of divergence within and across the focus group discussions. Where relevant, participants' self-identified characteristics were considered as part of the contextual interpretation of their contributions.

2.5 Advisory group

We convened a research advisory group to actively involve practitioners in the interpretation and discussion of the research findings and gain additional insights from the lived experience of teachers, school leaders and teacher trainers from ethnic minority backgrounds. The group met twice to discuss emerging findings and assist with interpretation and drawing out the implications for the education sector. Advisory group members gave feedback on early drafts of this report.

3. Ethnic disparities in applications to initial teacher training (ITT)

3.1 Key findings summary

- If UK-domiciled applicants to teacher training from ethnic minority backgrounds were accepted on to training courses at the same rate as their white counterparts, the system would train around 2,000 more teachers per year⁷.
- There are significant ethnic disparities in postgraduate ITT rejection rates among UK-domiciled applicants that are not explained by differences in applicant and application characteristics. The persistence of ethnic disparities that are not explained by the characteristics of the applicant that we can observe in the available data suggests that discrimination by ethnic background is likely to play a role, although we cannot definitively rule out other factors (such as differences in work experience).
- ITT providers pointed to the role of bias in selection processes, including culturally biased interpretations of professionalism and English language skills, and unconscious bias in selection. In addition, lack of visible ethnic diversity in recruitment settings at key stages compounds the disadvantage faced by applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- Many of the ITT providers we spoke to were adapting their attraction and selection processes to foster the recruitment of an ethnically diverse cohort. Examples included equity-focused training for administrative and recruitment staff, foregrounding diversity and inclusion in quality assurance of admission decisions, adapting interview activities to be more equitable and diversifying interview panels and staff at recruitment events. Addressing ethnic disparities in ITT rejection rates requires a comprehensive and sustained commitment to embedding equity into every stage of the recruitment process.
- International applicants, who are more likely than UK-domiciled applicants to be from ethnic minority backgrounds, face much higher ITT rejection rates and an admissions process that places greater burden on them, related to the needs to obtain a visa, demonstrate UK-equivalency of foreign degrees and demonstrate sufficient English language skills. ITT providers highlighted the increased length of the admissions process and complexity of the requirements for international applicants, which created additional barriers to admissions.

3.2 Introduction

NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce showed that under-representation of teachers from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds emerges early in the career pipeline. Differences in rejection rates to initial teacher training (ITT) were found to be a likely key contributor to this under-representation, but the data used for the project did not enable

⁷ See Appendix B for more information on this calculation.

detailed analysis of the specific factors contributing to differences in ITT rejection rates (such as differences in nationality, educational attainment, deprivation or other characteristics).

This research expands on our previous work by examining administrative data from the DfE Apply platform – the online platform where, since 2021/22, all applicants to a postgraduate ITT course in England have submitted their applications. Crucially, the DfE Apply system records an array of information about applicants and the applications they submit to the system. We used this new data source to extend our previous research and analyse whether any of these characteristics might be contributing to differences in rejection rates across applicants from different ethnic backgrounds.

We conducted complementary qualitative research to deepen our understanding of the barriers and enablers to achieving racial equality in entry to ITT. By analysing data from focus groups with representatives from ITT providers, we gained valuable insights into the key admissions processes faced and navigated by ITT candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds. Our analysis also examines additional factors not covered by the quantitative analysis that are potentially influencing ethnic disparities in rejection rates, including those affecting UK-domiciled applicants.

3.3 Overall number and composition of applications to ITT courses

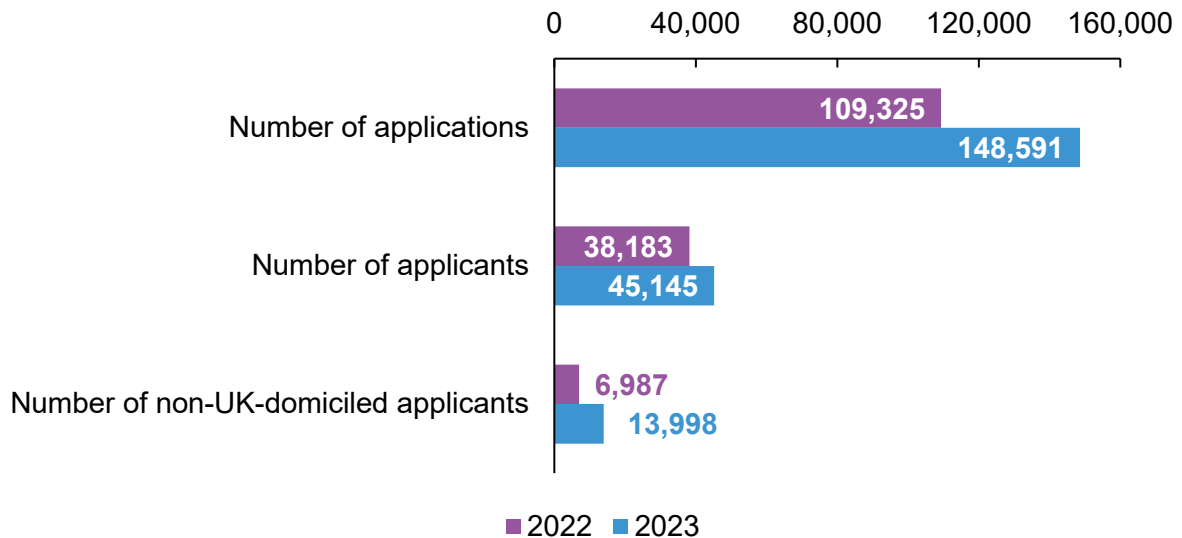
Figure 1 shows a summary of the number of applicants and applications to ITT courses in 2022/23 and 2023/24. The DfE Apply data shows that applicants submitted about three applications to the system each year, on average. The total number of both applicants and applications to ITT courses increased significantly between 2022/23 and 2023/24. In 2022/23, there were 109,325 applications (for 38,183 applicants) and in 2023/24 there were 148,591 (for 45,145 applicants). This means application numbers increased by 36 per cent over the two years, and applicant numbers by 18 per cent.

Most of the increase in application numbers was driven by an increase in international recruitment. In 2023/24, there were 13,998 ITT applicants who were domiciled outside of the UK,⁸ constituting nearly a third of all applicants that year. This was about double the number of applicants domiciled outside the UK compared to the previous year.

The significant increase in applicants domiciled outside the UK was likely linked to a policy change which took place during the 2023/24 application cycle. In that year, foreign nationals looking to apply to physics and modern foreign languages (MFL) ITT courses in England became eligible to receive training bursaries for the first time. This led to a significant increase in applications to ITT courses from overseas applicants, primarily in physics and MFL (McLean and Worth, 2025). There are also likely to have been push factors relevant to some specific countries that may also have influenced these trends (for example, teacher strikes in West Africa: see, Conover and Wallet, 2022).

⁸ We considered applicants who were domiciled in Guernsey, Jersey, the Isle of Man and Gibraltar to be domiciled in the UK.

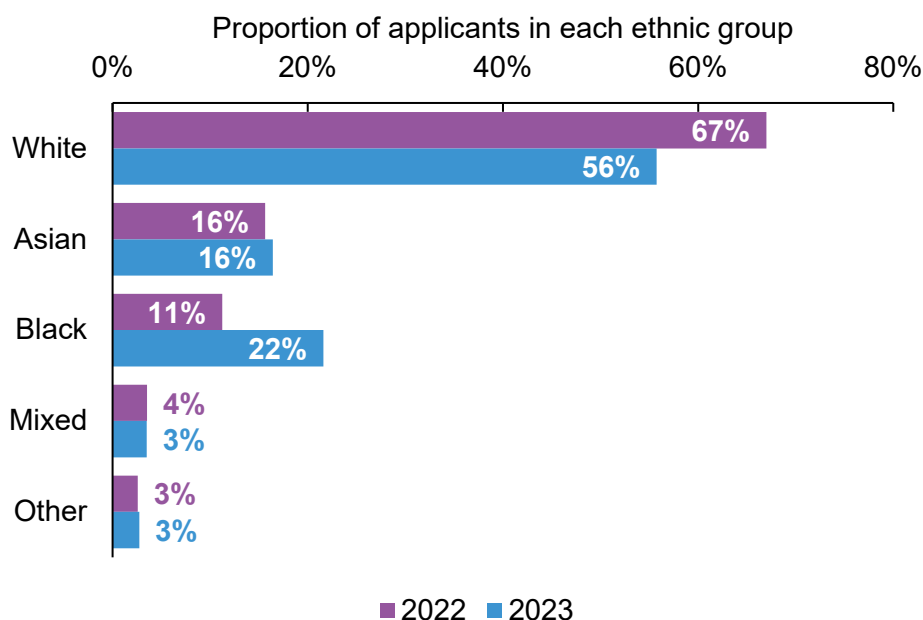
Figure 1 The number of ITT applications and applicants increased between 2022/23 and 2023/24, driven largely by non-UK-domiciled applicants



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24)

ITT applicants from a white ethnic background made up the majority of applicants in both years, but the proportion of applicants from a white ethnic background fell from two-thirds in 2022/23 to 56 per cent in 2023/24. The proportion of applicants from Asian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were similar over the two years, at 16 per cent, four per cent and three per cent, respectively. The proportion of applicants from a black background, however, doubled from 11 per cent of applicants in 2022/23 to 22 per cent in 2023/24.

Figure 2 Most ITT applicants were from a white ethnic background, but the proportion of applicants from a black ethnic background doubled from 2022/23 to 2023/24

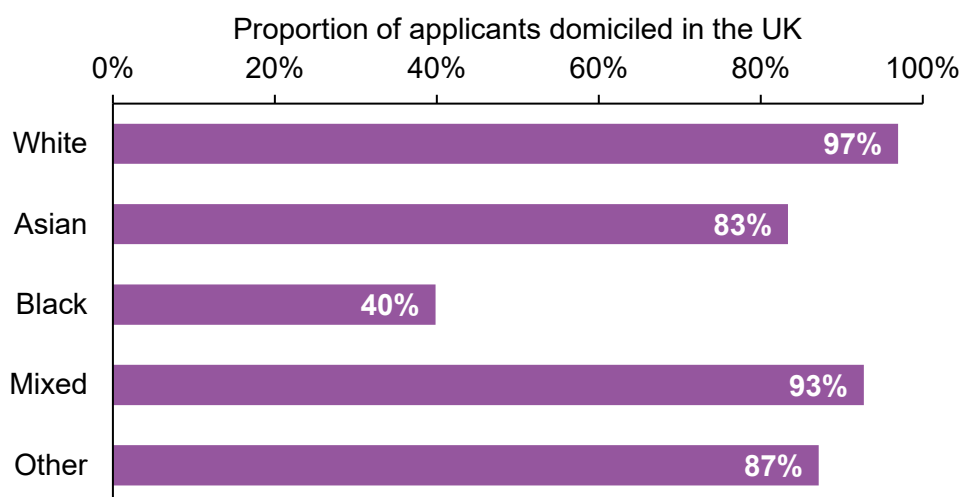


Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24)

Much of the increase in applicants from a black ethnic background has been driven by applicants domiciled outside of the UK. Figure 3 shows that, among applicants from a black ethnic background, only 40 per cent were domiciled in the UK. This compared to 97 per cent of applicants from white ethnic backgrounds.

Applicants from Asian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were also less likely to be domiciled in the UK than applicants from a white ethnic background, but only slightly. Specifically, among applicants from Asian and other ethnic backgrounds, 83 and 87 per cent, respectively, were domiciled in the UK. For applicants from a mixed ethnic background, 93 per cent were domiciled in the UK, similar to applicants from a white ethnic background.

Figure 3 A significantly higher proportion of applicants from a black ethnic background were domiciled outside of the UK than for any other ethnic group



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24)

Applicants from a black ethnic background who were domiciled outside of the UK lived predominantly in two countries – 84 per cent of applicants from a black ethnic background domiciled outside of the UK lived in Nigeria and Ghana. International applicants from an Asian ethnic background were slightly more geographically dispersed. Among applicants from an Asian ethnic background domiciled outside of the UK, 65 per cent were domiciled in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, seven per cent were domiciled in China and 13 per cent were domiciled in other Asian countries. Applicants from mixed and other ethnic backgrounds domiciled outside of the UK were more evenly distributed across different countries and regions.

Taken together, this suggests that international recruitment could play more of a role in the recruitment of trainees from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, particularly for those from a black ethnic background. International applicants may face additional barriers to recruitment that domestic trainees may not, which could impact applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds more than those from a white ethnic background. We discuss the role of international recruitment on rejection rates in more detail in section 3.4.

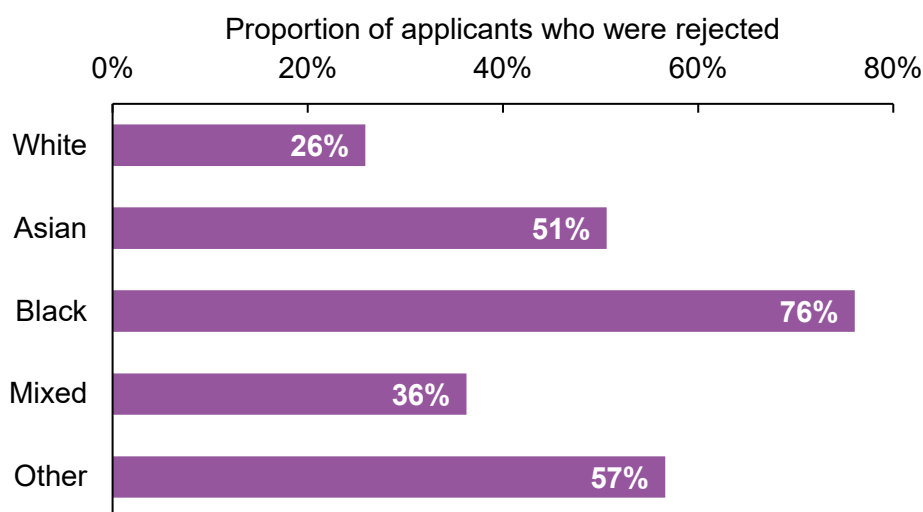
3.4 Are there disparities in rejection rates between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds?

The main application outcome we focussed on in this research was rejection rates. We focussed on rejection rates, rather than acceptance rates, because they provided a clearer indication of where applications failed to meet the minimum criteria for admission to an ITT course. This can, in turn, help point to where sets of factors might pose more recruitment challenges for one ethnic group compared to others. We discuss our focus on rejection rates in more detail in Section 2.1.1.

3.4.1. Differences in rejection rates between major ethnic groups

Our analysis of the DfE Apply data indicates that there were considerable differences in rejection rates faced by applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. For applicants from a white ethnic background, 26 per cent of applicants were rejected, which was the lowest rejection rate among all the major ethnic groups. For applicants from Asian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, rejection rates were 51, 36 and 57 per cent, respectively. Applicants from a black ethnic background had the highest rejection rates – 76 per cent of applicants were rejected.

Figure 4 Rejection rates for applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were much higher than for applicants from a white ethnic background

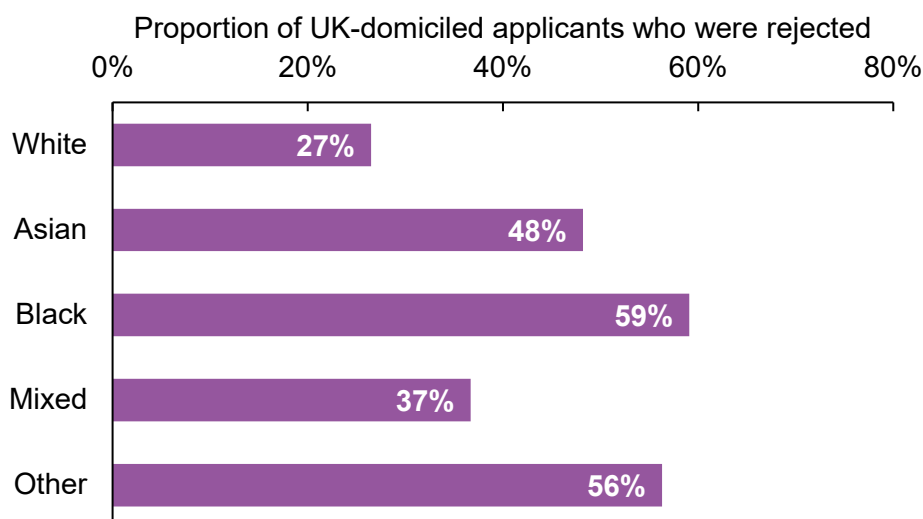


Note: Rejection rates calculated at the application level and weighted to account for applicants submitting more than one application. See Appendix A for methodological details.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

Figure 5 shows that there are significant differences in rejection rates between ethnic groups among UK-domiciled applicants only. These gaps were smaller than the overall gaps (where international applicants were included). Nonetheless, among UK-domiciled applicants, applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds were around twice as likely to be rejected as applicants from a white ethnic background. For applicants from a mixed ethnic background, rejection rates were around ten percentage points higher.

Figure 5 Ethnic disparities in rejection rates for UK-domiciled applicants were considerable, although smaller than the overall disparities.



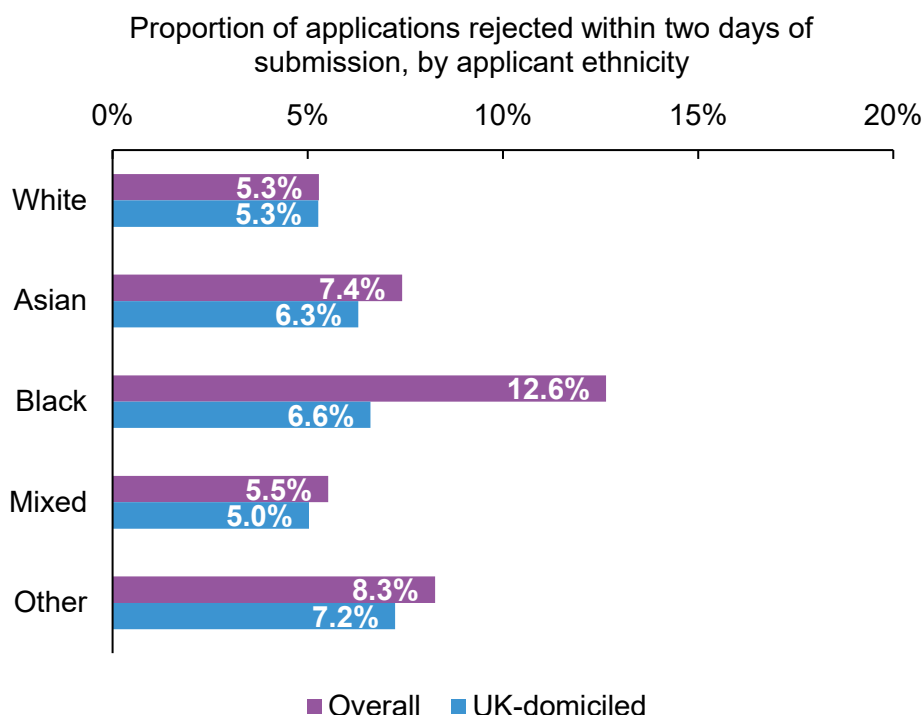
Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

The Apply data we analysed did not record at what specific application stage an application was rejected (e.g. whether it was rejected when providers checked an applicant's qualifications and experience early in the process, before or after an interview, or whether it was rejected during later reference checks or when an international applicant attempted to apply for a visa). The data does, however, contain timestamps which records when an application was submitted to the system and when a decision was made on its status.

As shown in Figure 6, analysis of the timestamp data shows that five per cent of UK-domiciled applicants from a white ethnic background had their applications rejected within two days of submission. UK-domiciled applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds tended to have their applications rejected slightly more quickly than applicants from a white ethnic background, but this difference was small. UK-domiciled applicants from an Asian ethnic background tended to have six per cent of applications rejected within two days, while for applicants from black and other ethnic backgrounds it was seven per cent for each. There was no difference between applicants from a white ethnic background and applicants from a mixed ethnic background.

However, these gaps were much larger when international applicants were included. For instance, the overall proportion of applicants from a black ethnic background whose applications were rejected within two days of submission was 13 per cent, more than double the rate for applicants from a white ethnic background. Applicants from an Asian ethnic background overall had seven per cent of applications rejected within two days of submission, while for applicants from mixed and other ethnic backgrounds it was six and eight per cent, respectively.

Figure 6 Applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds tended to have applications rejected quicker than applicants from white and mixed ethnic backgrounds



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

The DfE Apply platform requires ITT providers to select a reason for why they have rejected an applicant, which can provide some insight into why there are significant disparities in rejection rates across ethnic groups. However, the rejection reasons data had considerable limitations. In particular, for almost half of rejections each year, ITT providers selected 'other', 'unknown' or 'feedback given offline' as the reason for rejection.

ITT providers may also not necessarily assess against all possible rejection reasons when an application is rejected. For instance, if a provider rejects an international applicant because they fail to meet minimum degree requirements, they may not assess whether the applicant would have been able to obtain the correct visa. The reasons for rejection data was therefore unlikely to provide a full picture of the most common rejection reasons. We show the full breakdown of rejection reasons, and discuss the limitations of the detail in more detail in Appendix A.

Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the rejection reasons data suggests that incorrect qualifications, lack of teaching knowledge and inability to obtain a study visa were common reasons for rejection for applicants from all ethnic backgrounds and domicile countries. The data suggests that an inability to obtain a study visa was a particularly common rejection reason for applicants from a black ethnic background, which points towards immigration barriers being a key part of the reason for the high rejection rates faced by applicants from a black ethnic background

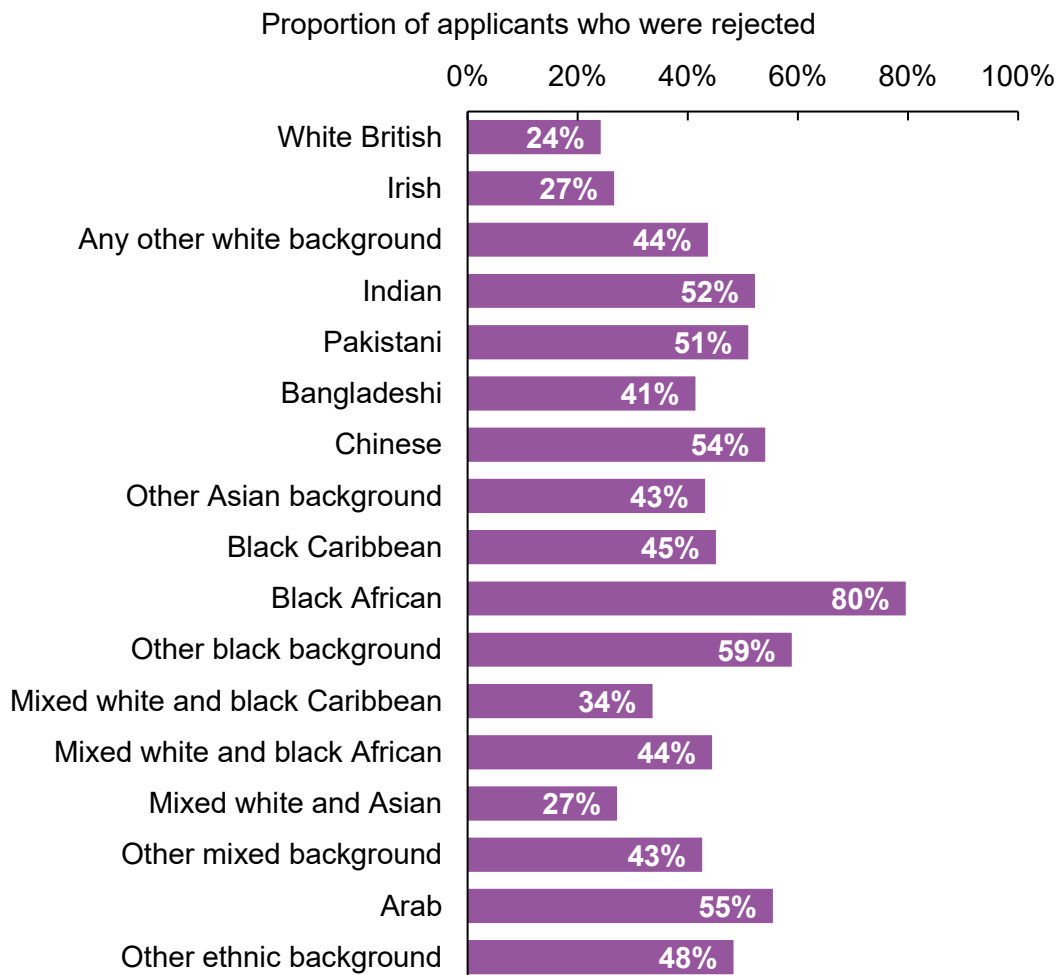
(and especially international applicants). We consider immigration barriers alongside some of the other challenges facing international recruits in more detail in section 3.4.

3.4.2. Differences in rejection rates between the minor ethnic groups

As shown in Figure 7, there appears to have been relatively minor variation in rejection rates between the ‘minor’ ethnic groups within each of the ‘major’ groups. Rejection rates for applicants from a Bangladeshi ethnic background were slightly lower than for other Asian ethnic groups, while for applicants from a Chinese ethnic background, rejection rates were slightly higher. Similarly, applicants from mixed white and black African ethnic backgrounds and applicants from an Arab ethnic background tended to face slightly higher rejection rates than applicants from other mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, respectively, but these differences were all within about ten percentage points.

There was considerably more variation, however, between rejection rates faced by applicants from different black ethnic backgrounds. For applicants from a black African background, 80 per cent of applicants were rejected, compared to 45 per cent for applicants from a black Caribbean background and 59 per cent for applicants from any other black background. Again, this is likely to reflect factors relating to international applicants, as 95 per cent of applicants from a black Caribbean ethnic background are UK domiciled, compared to 33 per cent of those from a black African ethnic background.

Figure 7 Rejection rates for applicants from a black African ethnic background were substantially higher than for any other minor ethnic group



Note: Rejection rates calculated at the application level and weighted to account for applicants submitting more than one application. See Appendix A for methodological details.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

Since applicants domiciled in Nigeria and Ghana made up a large proportion of applicants from a black ethnic background, the difference in rejection rates for applicants from a black African background could have reflected particular challenges for international recruits. Indeed, rejection rates for applicants from a black Caribbean background, who were mainly domiciled in the UK, were similar to rejection rates for applicants from other Asian, mixed and other minor groups. We explore the specific role of international recruitment in contributing to differences in rejection rates in section 3.4.

3.5 Does international recruitment drive any of the disparities in rejection rates?

In sections 3.2 and 3.3 we showed that a significant and growing proportion of ITT applicants are domiciled outside of the UK, which could be driving some of the ethnic disparities identified. Figure 3 showed that applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be domiciled outside the UK than applicants from a white ethnic background. This means that international recruitment might play a disproportionately greater role in impacting rejection rates for applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds than applicants from a white ethnic background.

There are numerous, intertwined reasons why overseas-domiciled applicants might face higher average rejection rates than domestic applicants. Overseas applicants may face direct barriers such as difficulties obtaining a visa to study in the UK. They could also face other barriers such as a lack of English language skills, international degrees or teaching qualifications that are not recognised in the UK, or work experience that does not transfer over in terms of relevance.

The DfE Apply data records some of these factors, which we can use to outline how much of a challenge each may pose to potential international recruits. We summarise each of these factors in the sections below. We also summarise data from the focus groups to supplement our secondary data analysis and point towards specific policy actions that might be beneficial.

3.5.1. Immigration barriers

The DfE Apply data is somewhat limited in the information it provides on how immigration barriers can disproportionately impact overseas ITT recruits compared to domestic recruits. However, it records whether an applicant was a British citizen and, if not, what their immigration status was. Applicants who do not hold British citizenship would need to obtain a visa permitting them to study in the UK. There are multiple routes by which a foreign national could be granted the right to live and study in the UK. For instance, European nationals who hold settled status in the UK would be eligible to study and live in the UK (DfE, 2022) or other foreign nationals could apply for a student visa.⁹

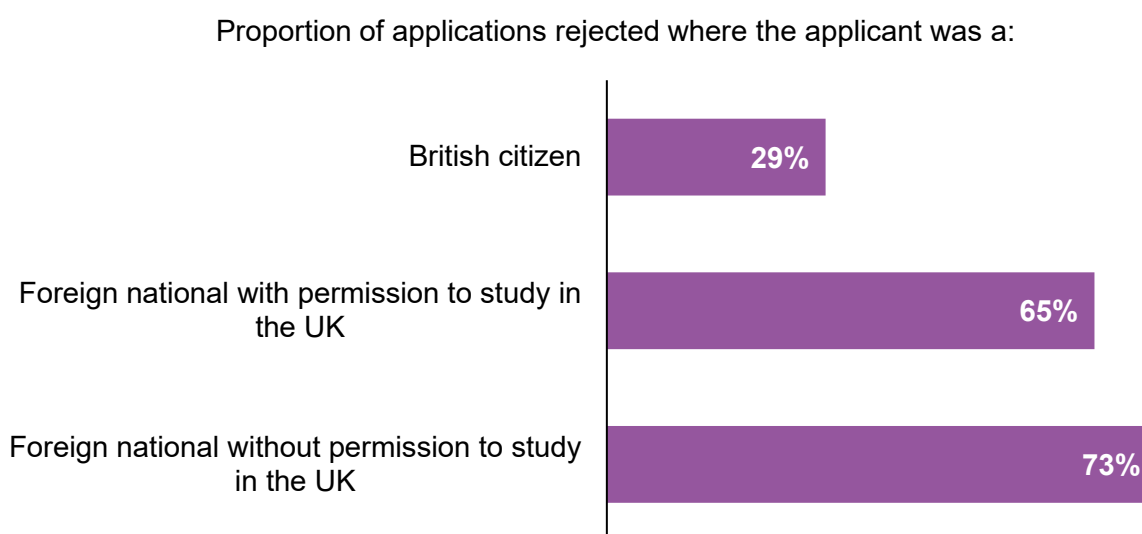
The DfE Apply data records whether an applicant is a British citizen or otherwise has permission to study and live in the UK via any legal channel. Figure 8 shows that there were significant differences in rejection rates for all applicants (regardless of ethnicity) depending on an applicant's nationality and immigration status.

Specifically, among applicants who are British nationals, 29 per cent were rejected. This was much higher for non-British nationals. The data shows that for applicants that were non-British nationals who did not hold permission to study in the UK, 73 per cent were rejected, nearly three times higher than for British nationals.

⁹ Many other immigration routes also enable foreign citizens to live and study in the UK, such as Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), Ancestry visas or refugee status (for asylum seekers).

However, even among foreign nationals who held permission to study in the UK, rejection rates were only slightly lower. Specifically, among non-British nationals with permission to study in the UK, 65 per cent were rejected, nine percentage points lower than for those not holding permission to study in the UK.

Figure 8 Rejection rates tend to be higher for non-British nationals than for British nationals



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

The DfE Apply data requires providers to select a reason why they have rejected an application. As we discuss in Appendix A, the rejection reasons data has considerable limitations but can potentially point towards some of the key factors driving this difference. Visas appeared to have been a common rejection reason, highlighting how direct immigration barriers could have played a role driving gaps in rejection rates.

Focus group participants highlighted a significant misalignment between the expectations of international applicants and the realities of ITT funding. Many candidates were found to misunderstand the financial requirements for visa eligibility, incorrectly assuming that ITT bursaries would cover their relocation expenses upfront. In reality, the first bursary installment is only paid after the ITT course has begun. One participant explained the consequences of this misunderstanding:

A lot of our applicants think they can use the bursary to meet the financial thresholds for UKVI, and then they fail credibility interviews. (ITT Provider staff)

Inaccurate information about eligibility for alternative routes and funding further complicates the process, particularly when applicants receive conflicting guidance from independent overseas recruitment agencies or DfE advisors. One participant described the impact of inaccurate information:

Sometimes we think international students have gone through an agency or even sometimes, the DfE advisor, who tells people that there are alternative routes, and then we have to unpick a lot of information that they've been given. (ITT Provider staff)

Visas were not, however, the only common reason for rejecting an application from an overseas applicant. Other reasons included the applicant having inadequate qualifications and insufficient teaching knowledge, highlighting how broader differences in factors around qualifications and skills may also have been playing a role. We outline the role of English language skills and degree recognition in the next two sections.

3.5.2. English language skills

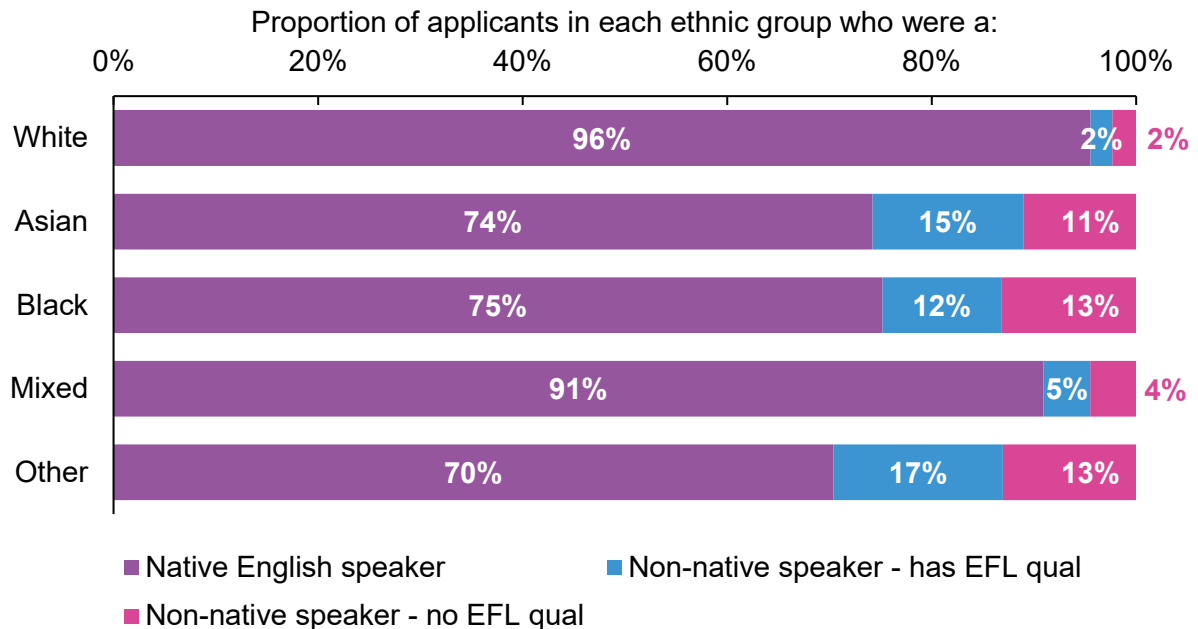
Applicants' English language skills also tend vary across ethnic groups, which mainly (but not entirely) reflects patterns in applicant domicile. Figure 9 shows that 96 per cent of applicants from a white ethnic background were native English speakers. Among applicants from a mixed ethnic background, 91 per cent were native English speakers, reflecting how, as shown by Figure 3, nearly all applicants from a mixed ethnic background were domiciled in the UK.

Applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds, who were less likely to be UK-domiciled, were also much less likely to be native English speakers. Specifically, 74, 75 and 70 per cent, respectively, of applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds were native English speakers. A similar proportion of applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds also held a recognised English as a Foreign Language (EFL) qualification (15, 12 and 17 per cent, respectively).¹⁰

This leaves 11, 13 and 13 per cent of applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds, respectively who were not native English speakers and did not hold a recognised EFL qualification when applying. This was a much higher proportion than for applicants from white and mixed ethnic backgrounds.

¹⁰ Examples of a recognised EFL qualification include the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

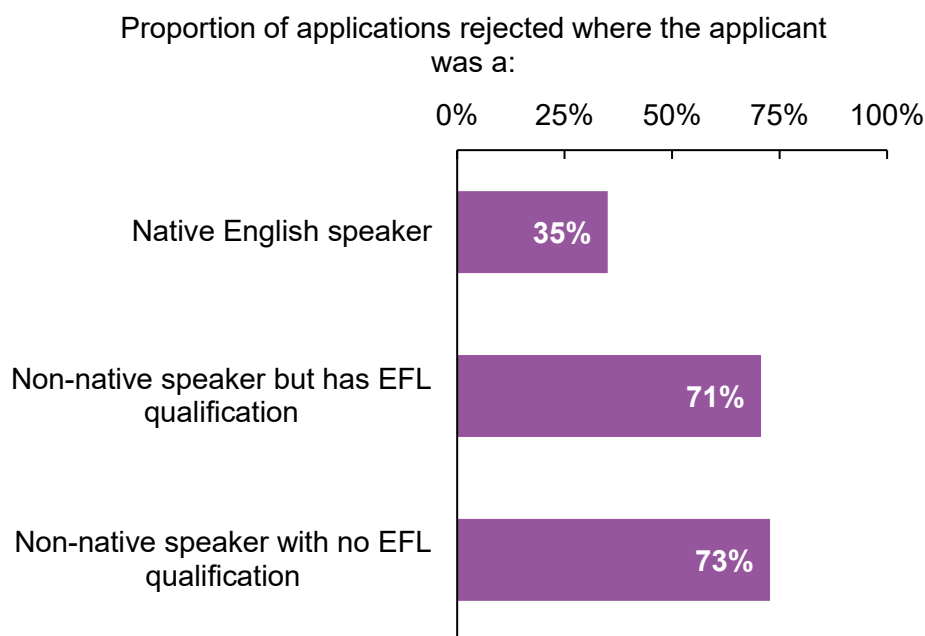
Figure 9 Applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds were less likely than applicants from white and mixed ethnic backgrounds to be native English speakers or hold a recognised EFL qualification



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

English language proficiency is an essential requirement for admission to an ITT programme in England: applicants must be able to demonstrate that their English language skills meet the standard of GCSE grade four (DfE, 2024). International applicants, who are less likely than UK-domiciled applicants to be native English speakers or to hold an EFL qualification, may need to sit additional testing to demonstrate their English language skills or otherwise face higher risk of rejection.

Figure 10 Rejection rates were much higher for non-native English speakers than native English speakers



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

Indeed, all applicants, regardless of ethnic background, tend to face much higher rejection rates if they are not native English language speakers than if they are. Figure 10 shows that 73 per cent of applicants who were non-native English speakers and did not hold an EFL qualification were rejected. This was slightly lower among applicants who were non-native English speakers but held an EFL qualification (71 per cent) but more than double the rejection rate for native English speakers.

ITT provider staff in the focus groups agreed that language barriers lead to heightened scrutiny of international applicants, particularly when it comes to disparities between written and spoken English proficiency. While many candidates meet formal requirements, such as achieving an IELTS score of 6.5, some still struggle with standard English and effective communication during interviews. One participant highlighted this issue, stating,

Just being able to prove that you've passed the IELTS 6.5 doesn't actually mean that your English is going to serve you well enough in a classroom setting in England.

Overall, these disparities become particularly evident during interviews, where some candidates struggle with fluency, standard English usage and effective communication in a UK setting. Difficulties in articulating responses confidently and effectively can undermine their ability to demonstrate subject knowledge and suitability for the role, ultimately affecting their interview performance and selection outcomes.

3.5.3. International degree recognition

Holding an undergraduate degree is also an essential criterion for admission to a postgraduate ITT course. For applicants who hold one or more degrees from universities outside of the UK, they must also ensure that their degree meets the same standards as a UK degree (DfE, 2024). This can make it harder for international recruits to demonstrate that they meet the minimum educational criteria for admission. While the responsibility for judging the equivalence of overseas degrees lies with each ITT provider (DfE, 2025), applicants are often encouraged to acquire a statement of comparability (DfE, 2024) from the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC), which is an additional burden for the applicant compared with UK degree holders.

Degree qualifications and assessed foreign degree equivalencies were recorded in the DfE Apply data, which enabled us to examine disparities in these factors between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. There were some limitations inherent in our definitions of foreign degree holders and assessed equivalence of foreign degrees. In particular, applicants could list multiple educational qualifications under different categories, such as 'degree', 'GCSE' and 'other qualifications'. We focussed only on qualifications that applicants listed as 'degrees' even if they listed further degree qualifications under a different category. We discuss our definitions and associated limitations in more detail in Appendix A.

As with English language skills, the pattern of foreign degree holders also followed domicile patterns. As shown in Figure 11, a small proportion of applicants from white and mixed ethnic backgrounds held only foreign degrees (five and 12 per cent, respectively). On the other hand, applicants from Asian, black and other ethnic backgrounds were much more likely to hold only foreign degrees. This was particularly true for applicants from a black ethnic background, where two-thirds of applicants held only foreign degrees.

Applicants from Asian and other ethnic backgrounds were less likely than applicants from black ethnic backgrounds to hold foreign degrees but were still much more likely than applicants from a white ethnic background. Among applicants from an Asian ethnic background, 28 per cent held only foreign degrees and 34 per cent for applicants from an other ethnic background.

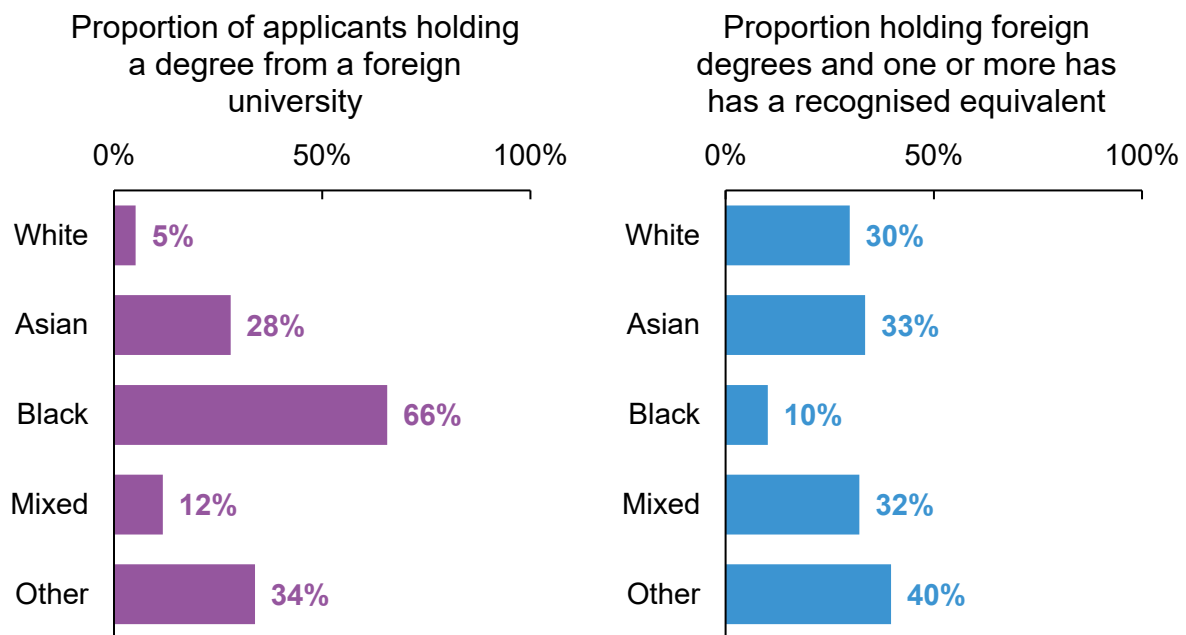
Holding a foreign degree itself does not necessarily pose any barriers to an ITT application. However, the data shows that 79 per cent of applicants holding one or more international degrees did not have any assessed equivalencies in the UK. This could make it harder for an applicant to demonstrate that they meet the educational qualification requirements necessary for admission to an ITT course.

The data also indicates that a relatively small proportion of applicants who held only foreign degrees had one or more of their degrees recognised as equivalent to a UK degree. Among applicants from white, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds who held only foreign degrees, around a third of applicants had one or more of their foreign degrees recognised as equivalent. This was slightly higher (40 per cent) for applicants from an other ethnic background.

However, for applicants from a black ethnic background who held only foreign degrees, only 10 per cent of applicants had one or more of their degrees recognised as equivalent. This was substantially lower than for applicants from all other ethnic backgrounds and could indicate that

ensuring degree equivalence might be more of a challenge for applicants from a black ethnic background.

Figure 11 Applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely than applicants from a white ethnic background to hold a degree from a foreign university and a minority of foreign degree holders have their degrees recognised in the UK

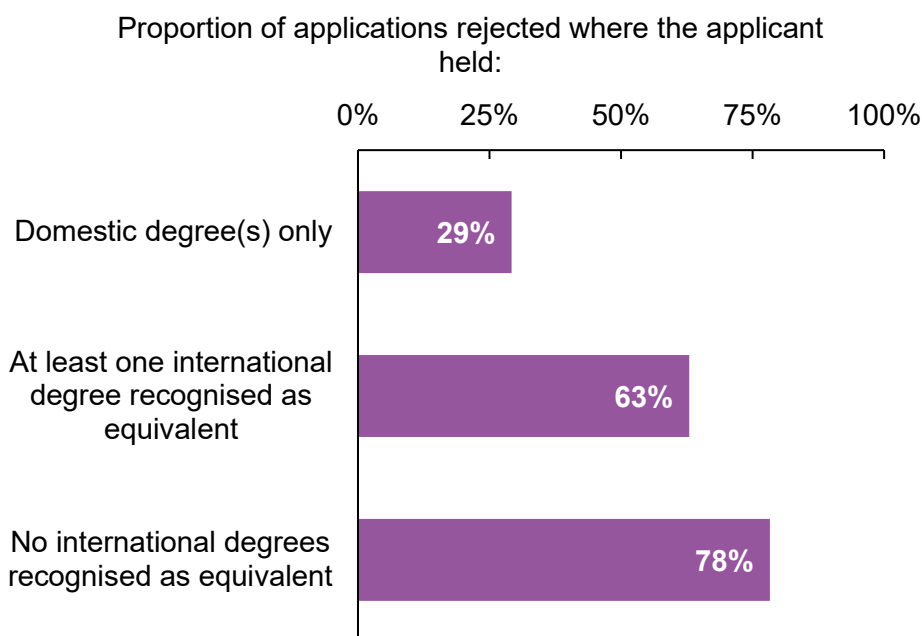


Note: Based only on educational qualifications that the applicant lists on their application as a 'degree'. Any degree qualifications listed under other categories, even if it had a recognised UK equivalent, were excluded from the analysis. See Appendix A for detail.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

Like English language qualifications, foreign degree recognition appeared to be strongly related to the likelihood of rejection. Figure 12 shows that among all applicants who held only foreign degrees where none were recognised as having a UK equivalent, almost 80 per cent were rejected. Having a foreign degree recognised as equivalent reduced rejection rates somewhat: among applicants with one or more foreign degrees recognised as equivalent, 63 per cent were rejected. However, even this was still double the rejection rate of applicants holding only UK domestic degrees.

Figure 12 Holders of foreign degrees that were not recognised as equivalent to a UK degree faced much higher rejection rates than applicants holding only domestic degrees



Note: Based only on educational qualifications that the applicant lists on their application as a 'degree'. Any degree qualifications listed under other categories, even if it had a recognised UK equivalent, were excluded from the analysis. See Appendix A for detail.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

A lack of clarity around qualification equivalency emerged as a significant barrier for international applicants during the pre-interview stage, as highlighted in our focus group discussions. Participants expressed that many candidates find it difficult to determine how their qualifications compare to UK standards, which often leads to lengthy exchanges and repeated requests for additional information. This process can be both time-consuming and frustrating and, in some cases, candidates choose to withdraw or abandon their applications altogether. Procedural delays, such as those related to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, for example obtaining overseas police clearance, further add to the uncertainty and increase the likelihood of candidates dropping out of the process. One participant noted:

Equivalency judgement is not easy. There's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, asking for more information about the qualification. That takes time and often the application withers and vanishes. (ITT Provider staff)

Participants also pointed out that the structure of the DfE Apply platform, which is heavily geared towards UK qualifications, creates significant obstacles for international applicants trying to present their credentials accurately. As one participant explained:

The way the DfE Apply system is set up, it's very much tailored to UK qualifications. We always have to go back and ask for copies of their qualifications, which adds an extra step and makes the process much longer for them compared to UK students. (ITT Provider staff)

This added complexity not only causes delays but also disproportionately extends the application timeline for international candidates, making the process more cumbersome and less equitable.

3.5.4. Other barriers faced by international applicants

We asked ITT providers to reflect further on the rejection rates of applicants domiciled outside the UK, drawing from their experience in managing applications from international candidates. Discussants reported that at the interview stage, overseas-domiciled applicants often struggle with UK-specific interview expectations and competency-based questions. This is particularly noticeable among candidates with previous teaching experience in their home countries, where pedagogical approaches may differ significantly. A participant explained:

Applicants often reference teaching as a lecture process, which is very different from how we approach classroom engagement in the UK. (ITT Provider staff)

This misalignment can lead to lower interview performance and increased rejection rates.

3.6 Do differences in applicants' age, socio-economic status and provider region contribute to disparities in rejection rates?

Our analysis shows that international recruitment could be one driver of disparities in rejection rates across ethnic groups. However, international recruitment is unlikely to be the only reason for the disparities. As shown above, there are significant ethnic disparities in rejection rates among UK-domiciled applicants.

These disparities may be driven in part by systematic differences in some of the characteristics of applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. In this section, we focus on the role of differences in age, provider region and socio-economic status in driving disparities in rejection rates. These are not the only characteristics which differ systematically across ethnic groups and appear to drive differences in rejection rates. However, these are the characteristics which seem to have the strongest relationship with rejection rates. We discuss the relative impact of other factors such as gender, provider type, degree type and subject choices, in section 3.6.

3.6.1. Age differences

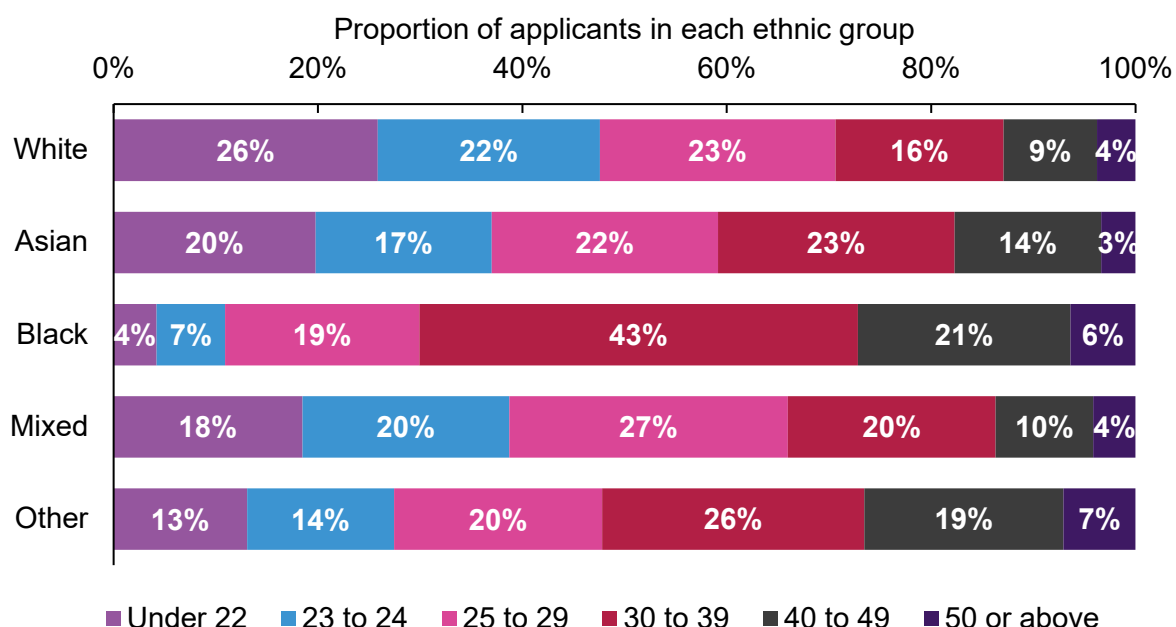
NFER's previous research on racial equality in teaching identified systematic differences in the age of ITT trainees and teachers as one of the reasons why teachers from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were less likely than those from a white ethnic background to enter and progress in teaching.

A similar pattern is apparent in the DfE Apply data. Figure 13 shows that applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds tend to be older than applicants from a white ethnic background. For applicants from a white ethnic background, 48 per cent were under the age of 25.

This was much lower for applicants from other ethnic backgrounds – 37 per cent of applicants from an Asian ethnic background were younger than 25, 11 per cent of applicants from a black ethnic background, 39 per cent of applicants from a mixed ethnic background and 27 per cent of applicants from an other ethnic background.

Applicants from a black ethnic background were on average the oldest. The largest age group for applicants from a black ethnic background was 30 to 39 – 43 per cent of applicants from a black ethnic background were in this age group. This compared to only 16 per cent of applicants from a white ethnic background who were aged 30 to 39.

Figure 13 Applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds tend to be older than applicants from a white ethnic background



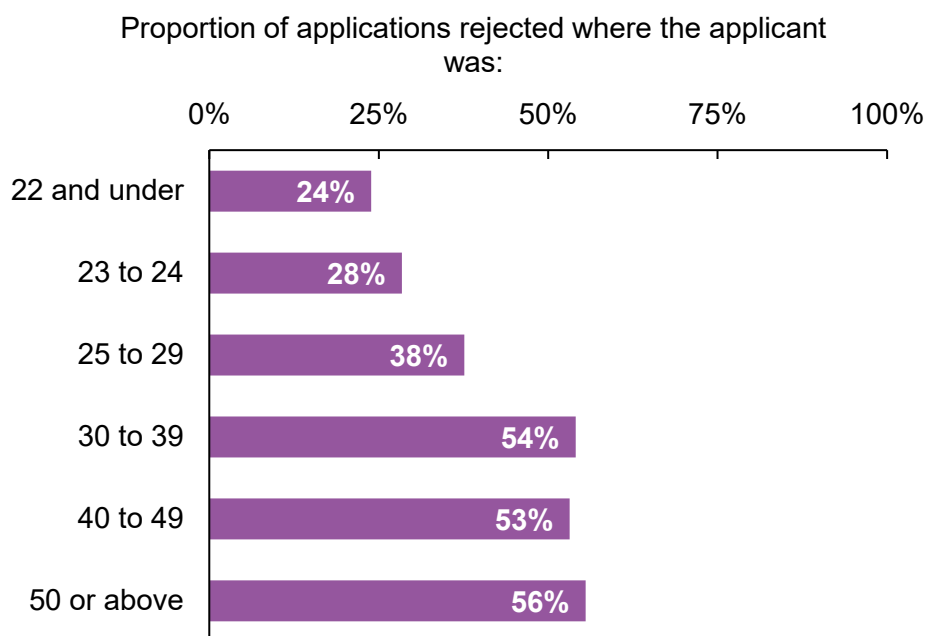
show

com

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

Applicants are, on average, more likely to be rejected if they are older, regardless of their ethnic group. Figure 14 shows that more than half of applicants who are 30 and older were rejected. This was more than double the rejection rate of applicants who were younger than 25.

Figure 14 Rejection rates tend to be higher for older applicants, regardless of ethnic background



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (for 2022/23 – 2023/24).

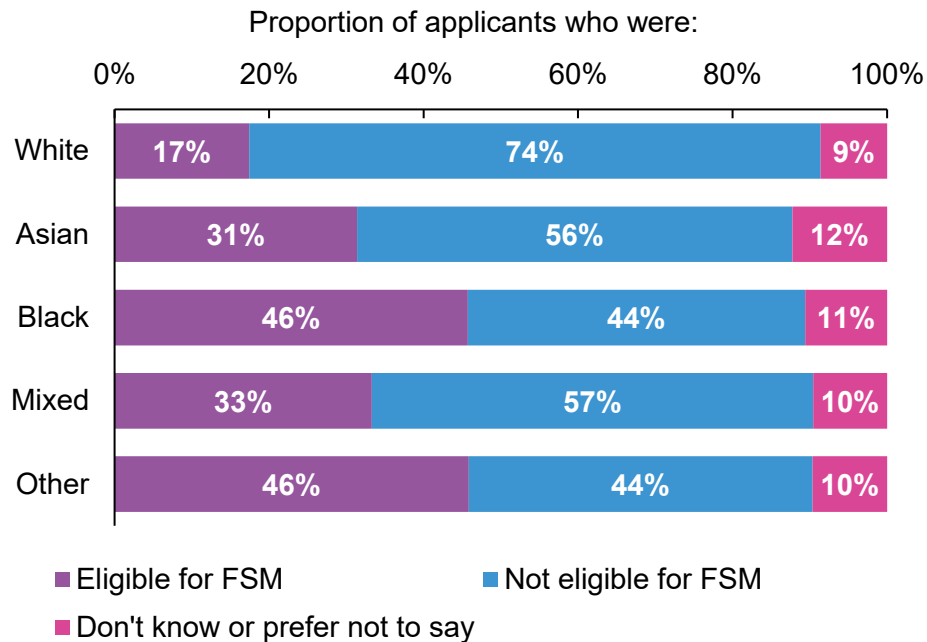
3.6.2. Differences in socio-economic status

Applicants from different ethnic backgrounds also tend to come from different socio-economic backgrounds. We were only able to observe socio-economic background for UK-domiciled applicants. This was because we used self-reported free school meal (FSM) status while the applicant was in school as a proxy for whether the applicant came from a deprived background. However, FSM status was only observed for applicants who went to school in England.¹¹ The FSM data was also only collected on the DfE Apply platform for applications made during the 2023/24 cycle so we focus only on 2023/24 data for this section.

The data suggests that FSM eligibility varied significantly across applicants from different ethnic groups but applicants from a white ethnic background were the least likely to have been eligible for FSM while in school. Specifically, among applicants from a white ethnic background who were UK-domiciled and attended school in England, 17 per cent were eligible for FSM. Among applicants from Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds, 31 and 33 per cent, respectively, were eligible for FSM. Among applicants from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds, 46 per cent were eligible for FSM.

¹¹ Socio-economic status is likely to impact disparities in rejection rates for international applicants as well, but we cannot observe it using the DfE Apply data.

Figure 15 Applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely to have been eligible for FSM than applicants from a white ethnic background

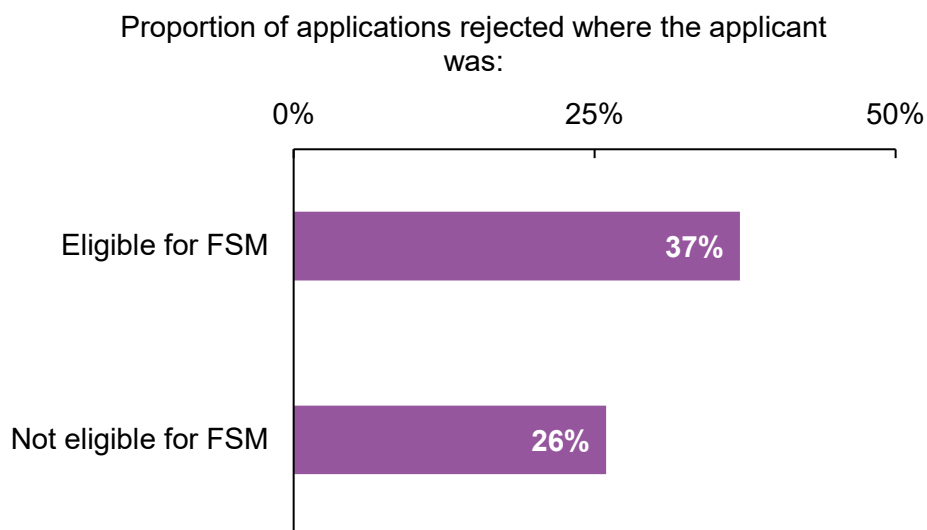


Note: Based on applicants who were UK-domiciled, attended school in the UK and did not have missing FSM data. Data from 2023/24 only.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2023/24).

Childhood deprivation is often linked to a variety of negative educational attainment and labour market outcomes and the data indeed shows that those who were eligible for FSM were more likely to be rejected than those who were not. Specifically, among UK-domiciled applicants who were eligible for FSM while in school, 37 per cent of applications were rejected. For applicants who were not eligible for FSM while in school, 26 per cent of applications were rejected.

Figure 16 Applicants who were eligible for FSM while in school were more likely to have their applications rejected than applicants who were not FSM-eligible



Note: Based on applicants who were UK-domiciled, attended school in the UK and did not have missing FSM data. Data from 2023/24 only.

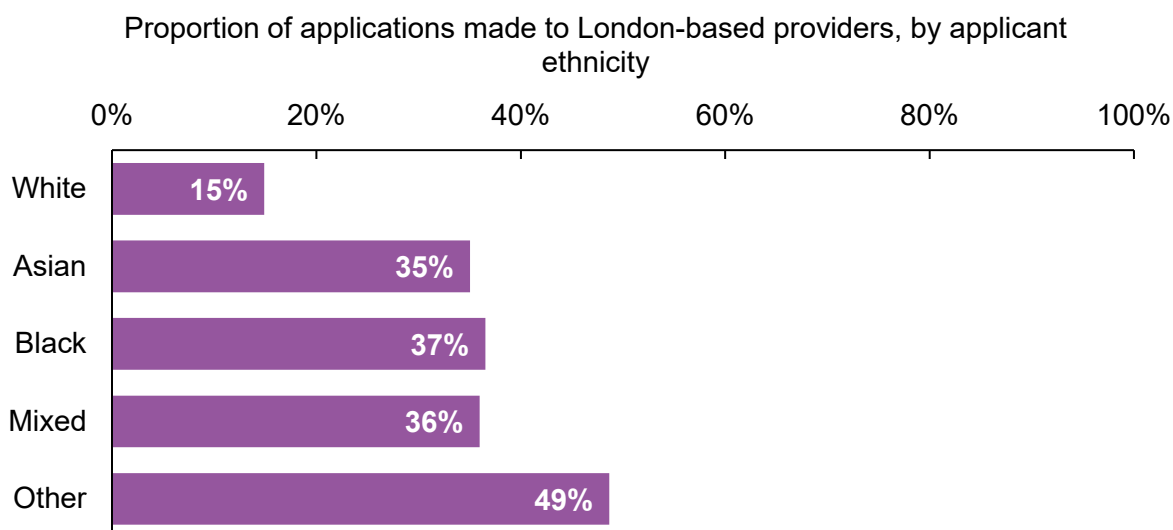
Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2023/24).

3.6.3. Differences in provider region

Applicants from different ethnic backgrounds also tend to apply to providers in different regions. In particular, applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely to apply to providers in London (versus other regions in England) than applicants from a white ethnic background.

Specifically, among all applications made by applicants from an Asian ethnic background, 35 per cent were to providers in London. This was similar to applicants from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds (37 and 36 per cent, respectively) though it was slightly higher for applicants from an other ethnic background (49 per cent). For applicants from a white ethnic background, only 15 per cent of applications were made to providers in London.

Figure 17 Applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely than applicants from a white ethnic background to apply to ITT providers in London



Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

At the same time, applications made to providers in London tend to be more likely to be rejected than in other regions. The data indicates that, of all applications made to providers in London, 49 per cent were rejected. This compared to 36 per cent of applications made to providers in all other regions which were rejected.

3.7 What factors contribute to ethnic disparities in rejection rates?

In section 3.4, we showed how barriers related to international recruitment are likely part of the reason why there are significant disparities in rejection rates between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. We also showed how applicant demographics and the types of providers applied to tend to vary systematically between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds, which may also be contributing to part of the observed rejection rate gaps.

In this section, we investigate how much of the observed gaps in rejection rates are ‘explained’ by these differences and how much of the gaps remain ‘unexplained’ by any of these factors. We do this using a statistical technique called the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition. See section 2.1 and Appendix A for further details on how we implemented this technique on the data.

We estimated two sets of results – the first of which contained all applicants, regardless of where they lived. This analysis accounted for the impact of international recruitment on rejection rate gaps. Accordingly, this specification excludes FSM eligibility as it was not observed for applicants domiciled outside of the UK.

The second set of results focussed on UK-domiciled applicants only and includes FSM eligibility as a proxy for applicants' socio-economic background. Since FSM eligibility was only captured in the DfE Apply data for 2023/24, the analysis used data only for that year.

3.7.1. All applicants

Figure 18 shows how much of the gaps in rejection rates between applicants from different ethnic backgrounds is due to differences in the characteristics of the applicant. The top row of the charts shows the raw gap in rejection rates for applicants from each ethnic group compared to applicants from white ethnic backgrounds.

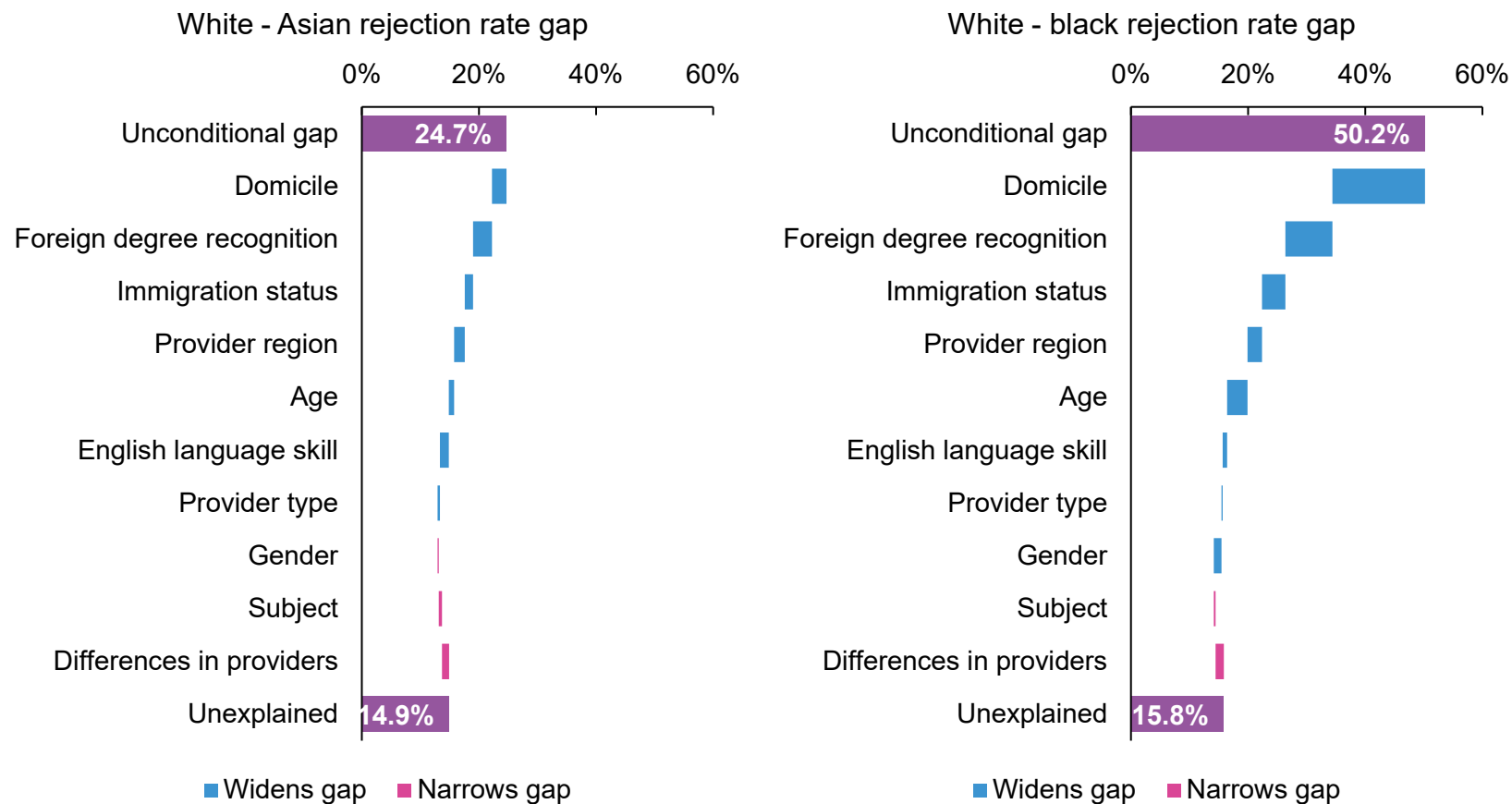
The size of the remaining bars indicate how much of the raw gap can be attributed to differences in each characteristic. For instance, as we discussed in section 3.2, differences in where applicants from different ethnic backgrounds live (domicile country) can strongly influence the likelihood their application is rejected. The larger the size of the bar, the more this factor is contributing to the overall size of the rejection rate gap.

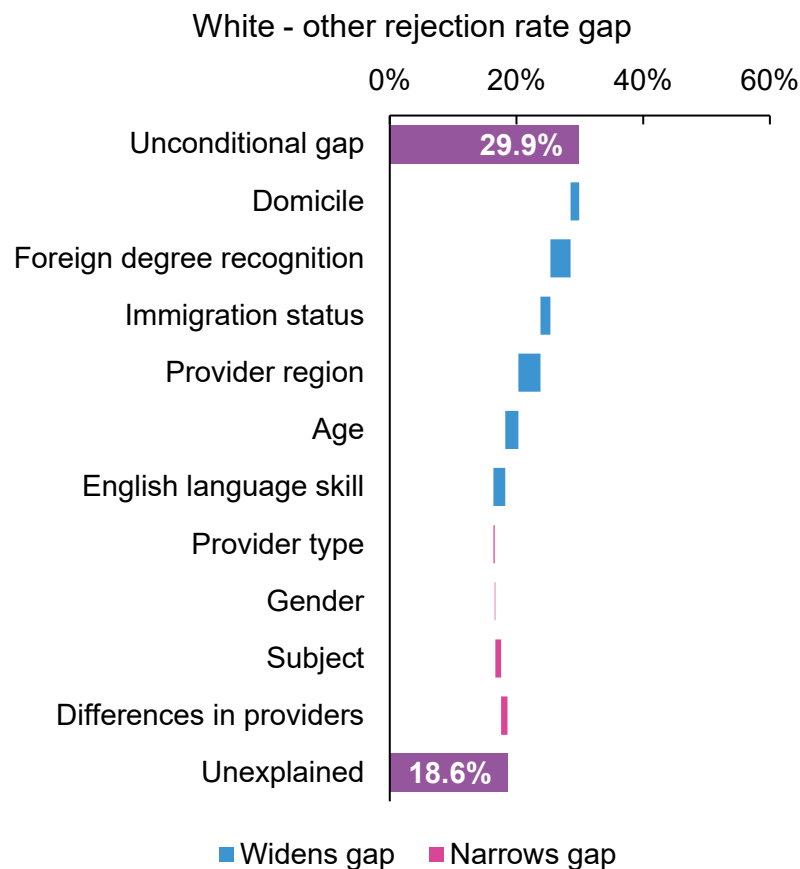
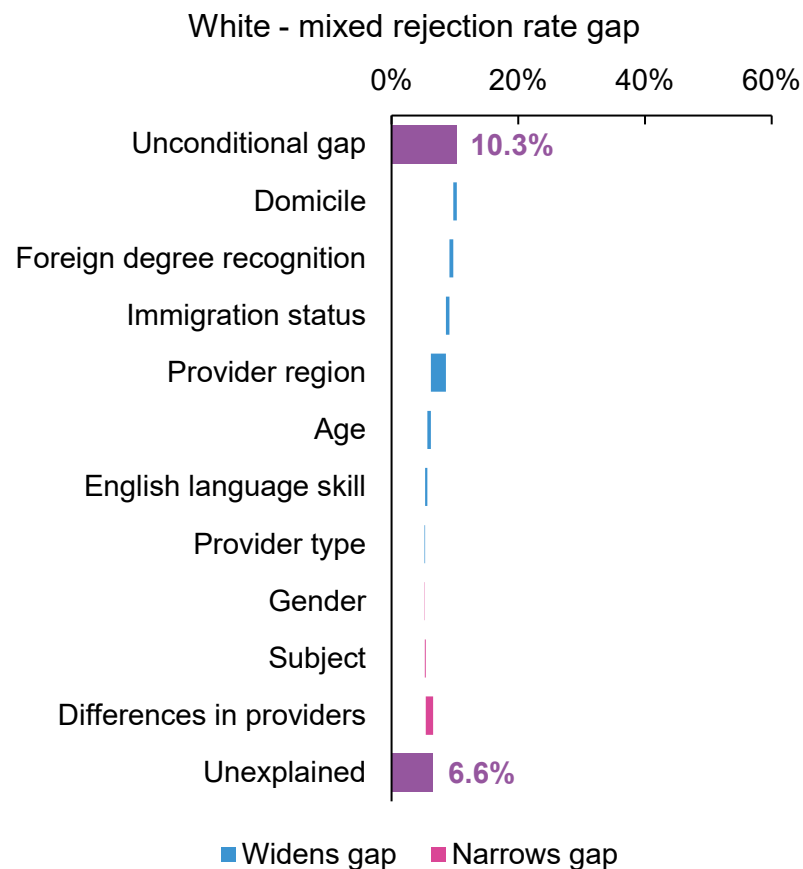
Some factors also influence the size of the rejection rate gap in different ways. Characteristics that are coloured in blue in the charts below tend to widen the rejection rate gap. For example, applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds tend to be older than applicants from a white ethnic background and thus face higher rejection rates.

Some characteristics, however, work in the opposite direction. For example, applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds are more likely than applicants from a white ethnic background to apply for physics training courses, which tend to have lower rejection rates. This difference would, all else equal, tend to lead to lower rejection rates for these groups. Factors which serve to narrow the rejection rate gap are coloured pink in the charts below.

The bottom bar in each chart shows how much of the gap in rejection rates cannot be explained by any of the observed characteristics we include in the model. This bar shows what we might expect the size of the rejection rate gap to be if applicants from each ethnic group had the exact same observed characteristics (e.g. all applicants lived in the same countries, had the same age profile, were equally likely to hold foreign degrees, etc.).

Figure 18 Differences in applicant and application characteristics explain some, but not all, of the gaps in rejection rates across ethnic groups





Note: There are slight differences in the raw rejection rate gap between this table and Figure 4 due to a difference in the samples used for the analysis.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

The analysis indicates that differences in applicant characteristics across ethnic groups explained a statistically significant part of the gap in rejection rates for all ethnic groups.

Domicile country, immigration status, English language skills and international degree recognition were significant contributors to the size of the gap for applicants from all ethnic backgrounds. This reflects how, as we showed in section 3.4, international recruitment could pose barriers to applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds that applicants from a white ethnic background are less likely to face. These barriers could be in the form of the need to obtain a student visa, being more likely to hold a foreign degree unrecognised as equivalent or having insufficient English language skills, which all increase the likelihood of rejection.

For applicants from a black ethnic background, domicile appeared to be a particularly key driver of the rejection rate gap over and above other factors related to international applicants, such as foreign degree qualification, immigration status and English language skill. This is likely because, as we discussed in section 3.2, a large proportion of applicants from a black ethnic background were domiciled in Ghana and Nigeria. While this explanatory factor could itself be a proxy for ethnicity, and potentially represent discrimination based on origin country, it is likely to also be linked to characteristics distinct to applicants from these countries that mean that many are deemed unqualified or unsuitable for ITT (e.g. lack of familiarity with UK education system, etc.).

Differences in provider region and applicant age also explained a statistically significant part of the gap in rejection rates for all ethnic groups. This is because, as we showed in section 3.5, applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely to apply to providers in London and were on average older than applicants from a white ethnic background. London-based providers tend to reject more applicants than providers in other regions, while older applicants tend to be rejected more often than younger applicants. Gender differences were only a small contributor to the size of the gaps and was statistically significant only for applicants from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds.

Differences in the subject applicants applied to was also related to the size of the rejection rate gap, but in the opposite direction to the other characteristics. This is because the subject choices and specific providers applied to by applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, on average, decrease the likelihood of a rejection. For instance, applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were more likely to apply to physics ITT courses than applicants from a white ethnic background. Applications to physics ITT courses are, on average, less likely to be rejected than applications to other ITT courses like primary.

We also included a set of variables in the model to account for the specific ITT provider the applicant applied to in the model. The results indicate that differences in the providers applicants applied to appeared to have similarly contributed to 'narrowing' the gap, though the contribution of this factor (while statistically significant for all groups) was relatively small compared to other demographic factors such as age.

The data does not provide any indication of why differences in the provider applied to might be contributing to a narrowing of the gaps. However, it could be indicative of applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds being more likely to apply to individual providers that overall have lower rejection rates. Indeed, differences in the *type* of providers applied to (i.e.

universities, school-based training providers and employment-based training providers) contributed very little to the size of the gaps (and this was only statistically significant for applicants from Asian and other ethnic backgrounds).

While differences in all the characteristics above explained a significant part of the gaps in rejection rates for applicants from all ethnic backgrounds, significant rejection rate gaps remain unexplained by these factors. Our analysis suggests that if applicants from all ethnic backgrounds had all the same characteristics (e.g. lived in the same countries, had the same English language skills and similar degrees, etc.) the gap in rejection rates between applicants from white and Asian ethnic backgrounds would still be 15 percentage points. Similarly, the gap would be 16, 7 and 19 percentage points for applicants from black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds respectively.

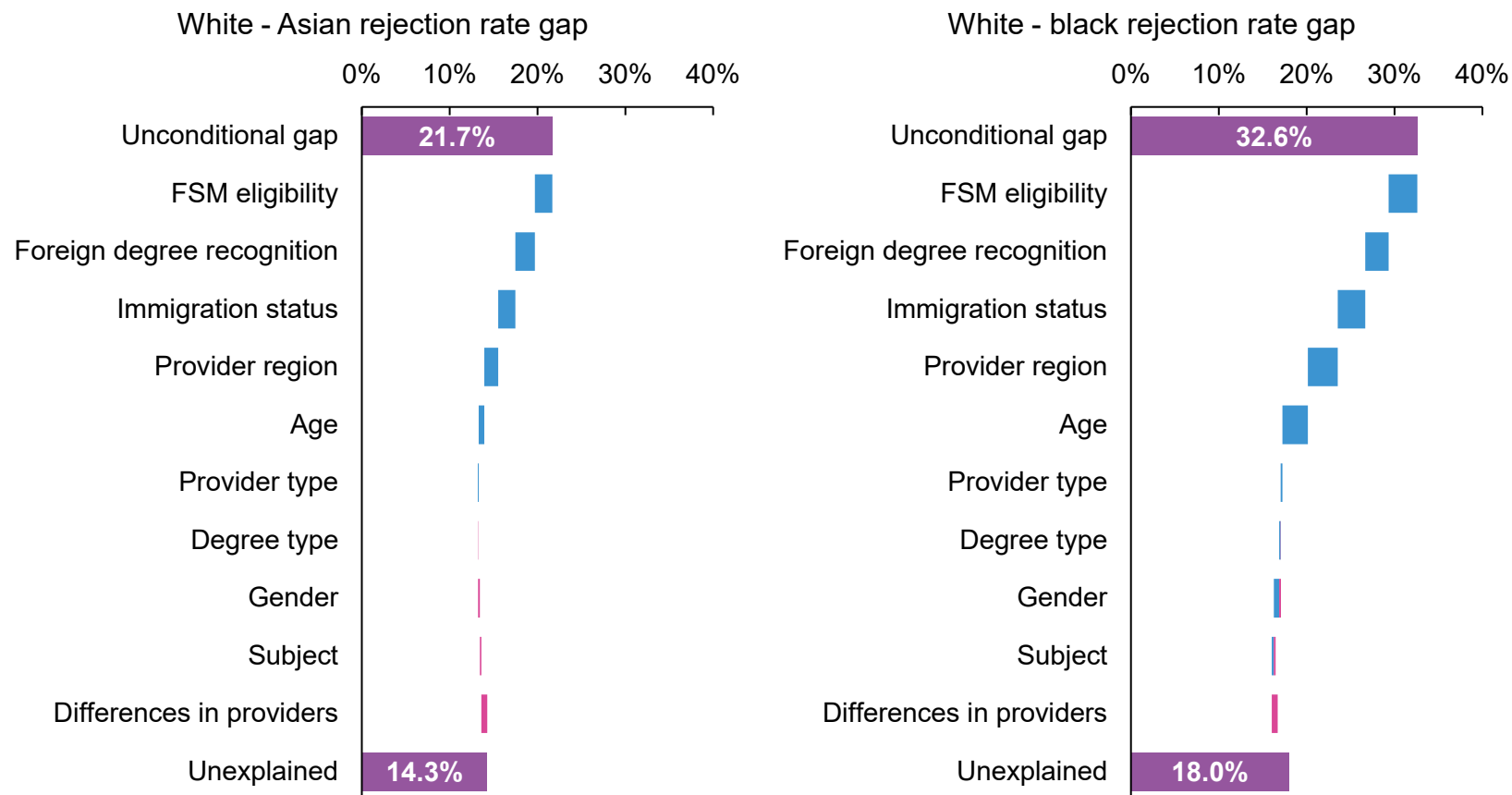
These remaining ‘unexplained’ gaps could reflect the influence of direct discrimination against applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. However, it could also be reflecting differences in other characteristics which we have not accounted for in the modelling. In particular, we were unable to observe applicants’ teaching and work experience in the data, which could be a significant driver of rejection rate gaps. We also were unable to include detailed information on qualification quality due to the unstructured way it was coded in the data. We outline what some of these additional factors, raised during the focus groups, could be in section 3.6.3.

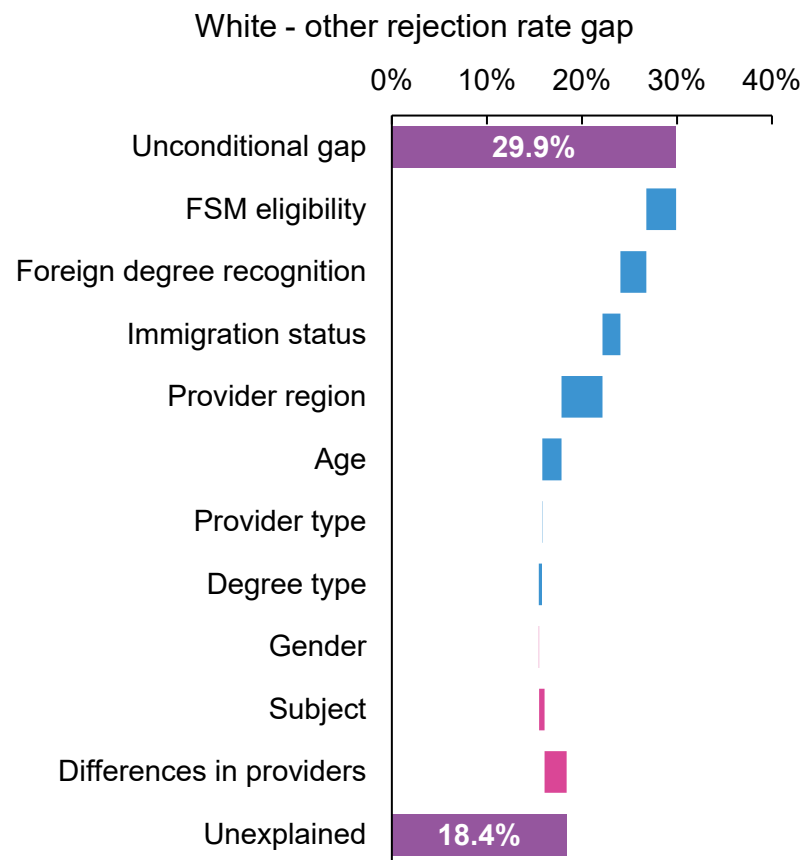
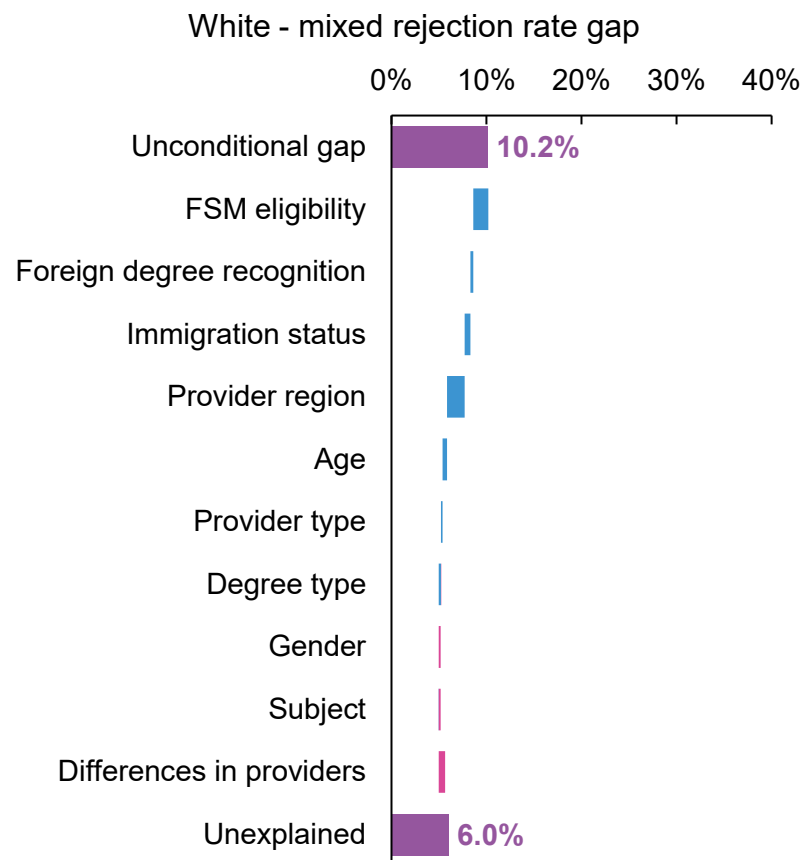
3.7.2. Domestic applicants only

As we discussed in section 3.5.2, the FSM status (as a proxy for socio-economic background) of the applicant appeared to have been significantly related to the likelihood that they were rejected. Omitting FSM status in the first stage of the modelling therefore likely missed a key contributor to the gaps in rejection rates, but this was necessary as FSM status was not observed for international applicants.

We therefore ran a second version of the model (summarised in Figure 19), focussing on UK-domiciled applicants only, which did include FSM status (and excluded English language skills, which was relevant mainly for international applicants). We included foreign degree recognition and immigration status in the model because there were UK-domiciled applicants who held degrees from foreign universities or were not British citizens (for example, if someone had just completed university studies in the UK and was in the process of switching their visa). This version of the model also included data from 2023/24 only as that was the only year the FSM data was collected.

Figure 19 Differences in applicant and application characteristics also explain some, but not all, of the gaps in rejection rates across ethnic groups for UK-domiciled applicants





Note: Data for 2023/24 only.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2023/24).

The raw gaps in rejection rates for UK-domiciled applicants were smaller than the raw gaps in rejection rates for all applicants. However, FSM status appears to have been a large contributor to the size of rejection rate gaps for all groups. For applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, two to three percentage points of the raw gap in rejection rates was due just to differences in the socio-economic background of the applicant, and this was statistically significant for applicants from all ethnic groups.

Differences in applicant characteristics also explained a statistically significant part of the gaps in rejection rates for UK-domiciled applicants, similar to the overall model discussed in section 3.6.1. Differences in immigration status and foreign degree recognition explained a significant part of the size of rejection rate gaps for applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic groups, but less so than in the overall model. Differences in provider region, age, gender and the specific providers applicants applied to also appeared to contribute to the size of rejection rate gaps in a broadly similar way to the patterns discussed in section 3.6.1.

Nonetheless, after controlling for all the applicant and application characteristics we observed in the data, statistically significant gaps in rejection rates remain. Our analysis suggests that if domestic applicants from all ethnic backgrounds had all the same characteristics, the gap in rejection rates between applicants from white and Asian ethnic backgrounds would still be 14 percentage points. Similarly, the gap would be 18, 6 and 18 percentage points for applicants from black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, respectively.

As we outlined in section 3.6.1, the fact that a large part of the gaps in rejection rates were unexplained by systematic differences in the observed characteristics we had in the data could indicate that discrimination plays a big role. However, the remaining unexplained part of the gap could also be due to differences in other characteristics we were unable to observe in the data. We asked our focus group participants what some of these additional factors not included in the data could be, which we summarise in the next section.

3.7.3. What could be some of the factors driving ethnic disparities in rejection rates among UK domiciled applicants?

Focus group participants provided insights into the key factors driving these ethnic disparities in rejection rates of UK-domiciled applicants. It emerged that across various stages of the application process—from preparation and submission to interviews and meeting entry requirements—applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds encounter challenges that their white counterparts are less likely to face.

A lack of access to voluntary school experience was mentioned as a significant barrier for some applicants, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds. While not mandatory, school experience is often encouraged and can be an advantage during selection and many providers require candidates to gain such experience.

However, many applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds face challenges in meeting this requirement, especially if they lack personal networks to access such opportunities or the financial means to undertake unpaid placements. One participant highlighted this inequity, stating:

Some of those students don't have that opportunity because they don't have the contacts.

However, others suggested that even highly motivated applicants may face difficulty obtaining school experience because of geographic disparities in provision, rather than a simple absence of social capital. Participants highlighted that in some cities, there are few or no schools participating in schemes like DfE's *Get into Teaching*, requiring applicants to travel considerable distances to gain experience.

There was also strong consensus on the role of unconscious bias in application screening and interview processes. While some organisations are actively reviewing how written applications are initially assessed, others admitted that early-stage decision-making can be influenced by implicit assumptions. One participant described current efforts to challenge these habits:

We're doing some work... with the people who take the first look at applications, to say don't make assumptions and reject straight away. (ITT Provider staff)

This indicates a growing awareness of how subtle forms of bias can shape selection processes.

Another key issue highlighted was the impact of expectations around professionalism and the use of standard English during interviews. Multiple participants acknowledged that candidates from racially minoritised backgrounds are more likely to be judged harshly on their communication style. One provider explained:

Those students who don't get through interview because of concerns around standard English and professionalism do tend to be from racially marginalised backgrounds. (ITT Provider staff)

These standards reflect dominant norms that do not account for the linguistic and cultural diversity of applicants. As a result, candidates may be penalised for differences in accent, expression, or ways of articulating their motivation and experience. In particular, the DfE's explicit requirement in the ITT criteria for providers to assure that, prior to the award of Qualified Teacher Status, teachers "use standard English grammar [and] clear pronunciation" (DfE, 2025, p10) influenced providers' decisions at ITT entry, even if they did not agree with this policy. One participant elaborated:

We are assessing standard English in the written form and the spoken form and placing a lot of emphasis on that therefore in our interview process... It still makes me uncomfortable every time I have to assess someone on it because it is contested, and rightly so. But it comes from the DfE and therefore we have to uphold that. (ITT Provider staff)

Additionally, participants highlighted the lack of visible ethnic diversity in recruitment settings, such as interviews and information sessions. This absence of representation can impact applicants' sense of belonging and their perception of the programme's inclusivity. One participant reflected on this:

If all the people they meet and all the teachers they see are white... what message does that send? (ITT Provider staff)

This reflects a shared concern that representation is not just symbolic but a clear indicator of an institution's values and commitment to inclusivity.

Finally, several participants discussed how some applicants struggle to meet conditions after receiving an offer, particularly around GCSE equivalencies. While this issue is not unique to

racially minoritised applicants, providers noted that it tends to disproportionately affect those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often face additional financial, time, or support challenges in fulfilling these requirements. One participant explained:

We've lost a significant number of applicants even after making an offer... because they don't complete their GCSEs in time. (ITT Provider staff)

3.7.4. Strategies for recruiting ethnically diverse teacher training cohorts

Focus group participants reported undertaking a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving the recruitment of ethnically diverse cohorts in ITT programmes.

A commonly cited initiative was the adaptation of interview formats to foster inclusivity and psychological safety. Several participants reported reducing the emphasis on group interviews and ensuring that every applicant had the opportunity to contribute individually. One participant explained,

We reduced the group element to interviews and made sure everybody had an opportunity to speak separately if they felt there wasn't something they could say in front of the group. (ITT Provider staff)

This flexible approach helps create a more equitable and less intimidating environment, particularly for candidates from underrepresented backgrounds who may be less familiar with selective interview formats.

Many ITT providers are actively working to address unconscious bias in recruitment, particularly during the early stages of the application process. Some providers have introduced unconscious bias training for administrative and recruitment staff, while others are embedding this awareness into ongoing quality assurance discussions where formal training isn't available. This approach aims to ensure a fairer assessment of candidates, particularly those who may face disadvantages due to written expression but demonstrate strong potential for teaching.

Participants also emphasised the importance of visible diversity within recruitment teams and promotional materials as effective strategies for attracting ethnically diverse cohorts. There was a shared view that having diverse representation on interview panels and at recruitment events can positively influence how applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds view the inclusiveness of a programme. Similarly, providers are updating marketing materials—such as brochures and website imagery—to better reflect the diverse communities they hope to attract. These efforts help prospective applicants see themselves as part of the programme, building trust and encouraging applications from underrepresented groups.

Increased outreach and accessibility through flexible events was also a recurring theme. ITT providers reported scheduling more online Q&A sessions during evenings and weekends to accommodate working applicants or those with caring responsibilities. Similarly, expanding teacher taster days via the *Get School Experience* service was highlighted as a way to offer early exposure to teaching for applicants from underrepresented backgrounds.

Furthermore, new targeted roles and routes such as teacher degree apprenticeships are emerging in schools, with an explicit aim of recruiting from more disadvantaged communities. These routes

are designed to provide alternative entry points into teaching, reducing financial and structural barriers for ethnically diverse candidates.

Finally, while participants acknowledged ongoing efforts to enhance diversity, several noted that the absence of sustained, structural change risks undermining the efficacy of these initiatives. One participant highlighted that a previous university-wide initiative to support students of colour, which included forums to share experiences, coincided with the lowest racial awarding gap;

That year that they did that... was the year that they also saw the lowest racial awarding gap. (ITT provider staff).

However, the initiative was not continued, prompting questions about the depth of institutional commitment.

4. Ethnic disparities in teachers' intentions to apply for promotion

4.1 Key findings summary

- Teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds have a significantly higher intention to apply for promotion than their white counterparts, even after controlling for differences in characteristics. This suggests that the disparities in progression rates found in our previous research were not due to a lack of interest among ethnic minority teachers and more likely to reflect a lack of opportunity or inequitable treatment in decision-making processes.
- School leaders we spoke to highlighted systemic shortcomings in institutional support and mentorship as significant barriers to leadership progression. They noted that while teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds often show strong aspirations and ambition, these are not adequately met with the guidance, encouragement, or structured opportunities needed to progress.

4.2 Introduction

NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce showed that there are significant ethnic disparities in rates of promotion to school leadership. Teachers from Asian, black and other ethnic groups are significantly less likely than white counterparts to be promoted to middle leadership after accounting for differences in their respective characteristics¹². Similarly, middle leaders from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds are less likely than their white counterparts to be promoted to senior leadership and senior leaders from an Asian ethnic background are less likely than their white counterparts to be promoted to headship.

However, the research was unable to illuminate the underlying mechanisms; for example, whether the ethnic disparities in promotion rates were driven by differences in interest in applying for promotion or a difference in opportunity and success due to decision-making processes in schools.

This research expands on our previous work by examining rich teacher data from the DfE's Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey. The survey responses provide detailed information on teachers' intentions to seek promotion, the reasons for doing so or not and about other personal and school-related factors. The analysis aims to identify disparities in intentions to apply for promotion and examine the underlying factors, including personal characteristics and school-related conditions, that contribute to the disparities.

This section includes qualitative research which builds on findings from NFER's analysis of the WLTL survey, offering a more in-depth exploration of the factors that influence racial equality in

¹² The proportion of teachers promoted to middle leadership were found to be higher among teachers from black, mixed and Asian ethnic backgrounds than for their white counterparts in raw terms. However, these higher promotion rates were found to be largely driven by differences in teachers' characteristics, especially region and phase.

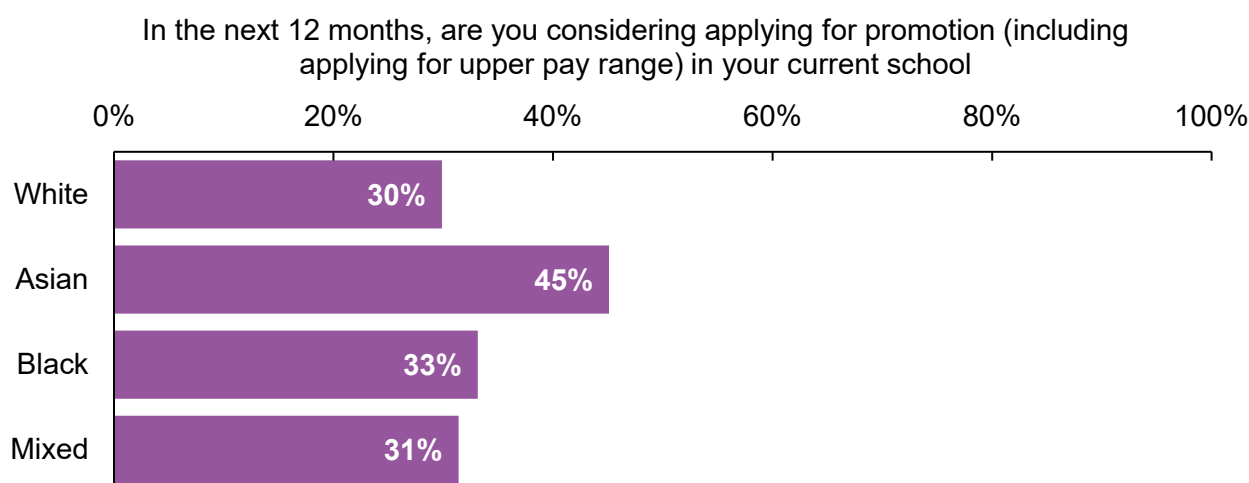
progression to leadership. By analysing focus group data, the research provides a nuanced understanding of the barriers and enablers that shape the experiences of ethnically diverse candidates as they navigate leadership pathways. Our qualitative analysis also explores the disconnect between the high promotion aspirations and application rates of teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds, and their continued underrepresentation in middle leadership roles.

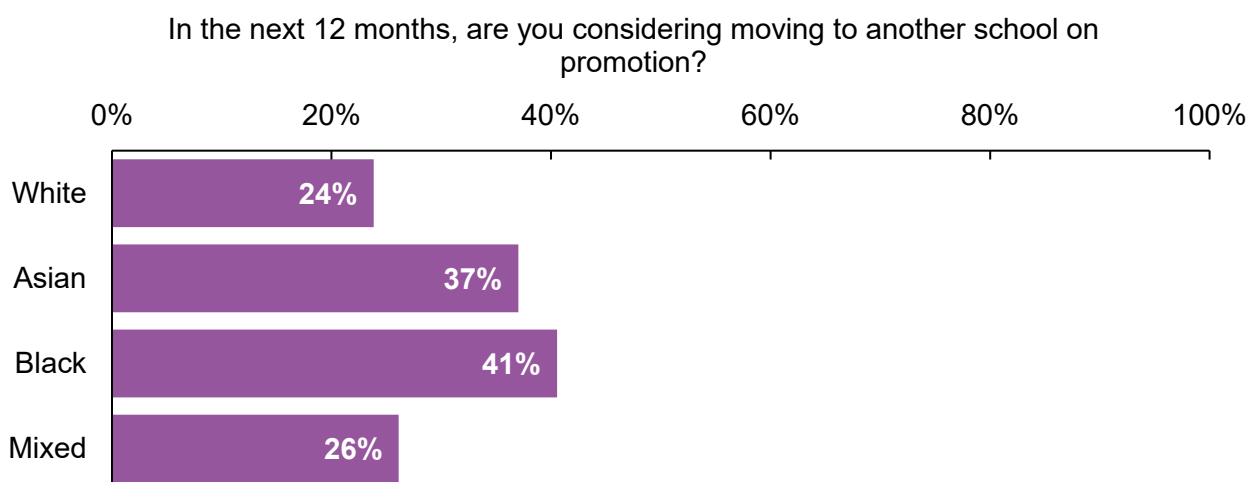
4.3 Are there disparities in intentions to apply for promotion between teachers from different ethnic backgrounds?

The data on intentions to apply for promotion in the WLTL survey come from two separate survey items. The first asks whether, in the next 12 months, teachers (including middle leaders) were considering 'applying for promotion (including applying for upper pay range) in your current school'. The second asks whether teachers were considering 'moving to another state school on promotion'.

Figure 20 shows the differences in response to these two questions depending on ethnicity. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were the most likely to indicate an intention to apply for promotion within their current school, indicated by 45 per cent. The proportions among teachers from white, black and other ethnic backgrounds were similar, at around 30 per cent. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were also more likely than their white counterparts to be considering moving to another school on promotion, indicated by 37 per cent compared to 24 per cent. Teachers from a black ethnic background were even more likely to be considering moving to another school on promotion, indicated by 41 per cent. The sample sizes for the 'other' ethnic group were too small for us to be able to report.

Figure 20 Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were more likely than white counterparts to be considering applying for promotion in their current school and moving to another school on promotion



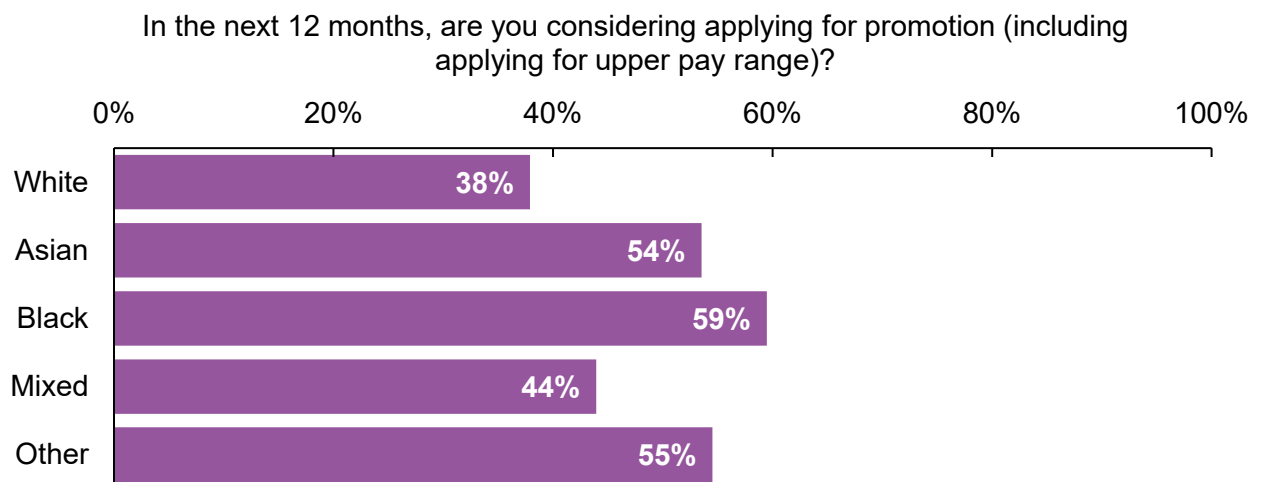


Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

Figure 21 shows the data from the combined measure, which records whether teachers indicated they were considering applying for promotion in their current school and/ or moving to another school on promotion. Overall, teachers from a black ethnic background were the most likely to express an intention to apply for promotion in the next 12 months, with 59 per cent indicating this ambition. Just over half (54 per cent) of teachers from an Asian ethnic background were considering applying for promotion, while teachers from an other ethnic background reported a similar rate of 55 per cent. The proportion of mixed ethnicity teachers who were considering applying for promotion was 44 per cent. Teachers from a white ethnic background were the least likely to express an intention to apply, at 38 per cent.

There are issues of comparability between the WLTl measure summarised here and data on promotion to a leadership role as measured in the School Workforce Census (SWC) because the WLTl measure also includes intentions to apply for promotion to the upper pay scale. However, comparing the ethnic disparities across the two datasets shows some differences. The SWC data indicates that teachers from Asian, black and mixed ethnic backgrounds had slightly higher rates of promotion to middle leadership over five years than their white counterparts, with the gaps varying between two and eight percentage points. However, the gaps in intentions are wider in percentage point terms, varying between 6 and 19 percentage points.

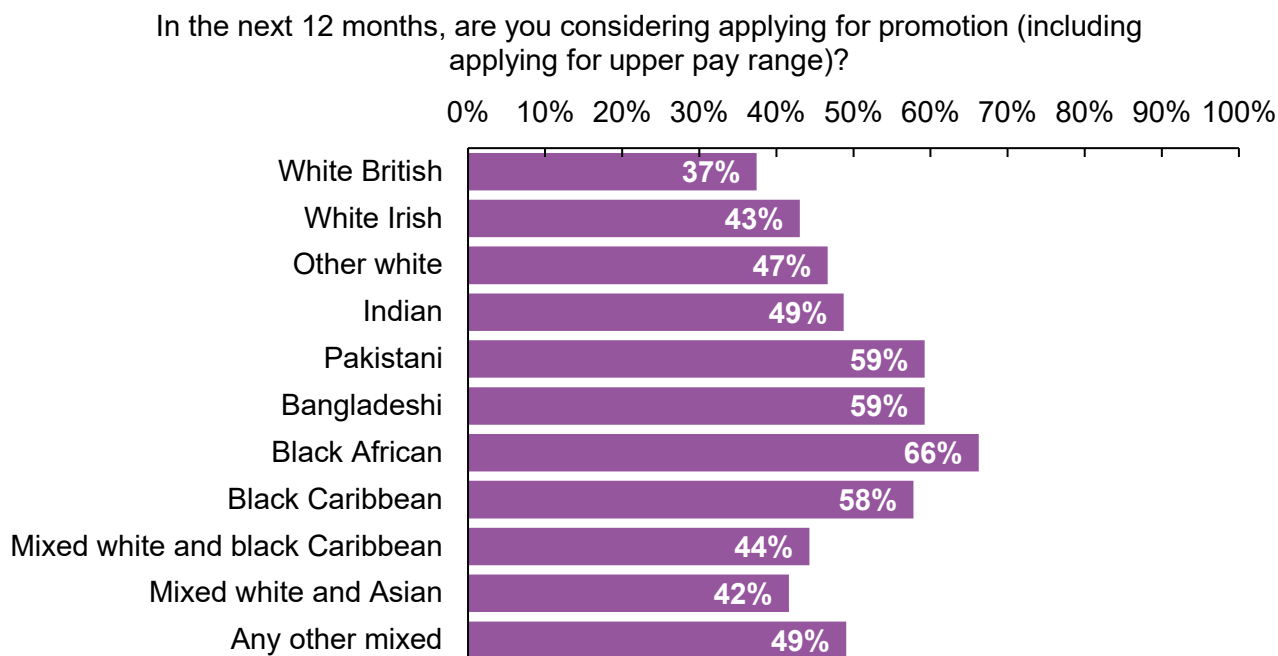
Figure 21 Teachers from a white ethnic background are the least likely to be considering applying for promotion



Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

As shown in Figure 22, analysis of differences by minor ethnic group reveals further variation. Within the Asian ethnic group, teachers from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds were the most likely to be considering applying for promotion (59 per cent), followed by teachers from Indian backgrounds (49 per cent). Among teachers from a black ethnic background, respondents from a black African ethnic background exhibited relatively high promotion intentions, with 66 per cent indicating an intention to apply for promotion, compared to 58 per cent of teachers from a black Caribbean ethnic background. Among the minor ethnic group categories, teachers from a white British background were the least likely to be intending to apply for promotion, indicated by 37 per cent. Other white minor ethnic groups (white Irish and white other) were slightly more likely to be considering applying for promotion compared to their white British counterparts.

Figure 22 Teachers from a white British ethnic background are the least likely to be considering applying for promotion



Source: NFER analysis of WLTL data for 2021/22.

4.3.1. Conditions shaping leadership aspirations and progression for ethnic minority teachers

We asked school leaders to reflect on the ethnic disparities in promotion intentions among teachers, as revealed by the WLTL data, to help us gain a deeper understanding of the leadership pathways for Asian and Black teachers. The insights below, highlight a range of interconnected factors that both support and hinder the leadership progression of teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

A recurring theme in the discussions was experiences of imposter syndrome. Many described it as a barrier that impacts how individuals perceive their readiness for leadership. One participant elaborated on the internal conflict experienced as a person from ethnic minority background in leadership settings, stating:

I describe it a lot as 'impostor syndrome', like, I feel like as much as I have every right to be in that room where there's a lot of other leaders and you're the only person from a BAME minority background. (School leader)

This illustrates the psychological toll of underrepresentation and self-doubt that may arise, even for leaders already in position.

Participants suggested that provision of targeted leadership coaching, informal conversations about aspirations, and role modelling are some of initiatives that help individuals overcome this.

The ASPIRE programme was cited as an initiative that prepares ethnically minoritised staff for leadership by building self-belief and clarity about progression routes.

Mentorship and coaching structures emerged as a critical enabler. Some schools are embedding coaching into their leadership pipeline, making it a formal part of staff development. One participant explained:

We coach people... we want them to shine. There's a clear structure for progression, and people can coach others. (School leader)

These open structures not only encourage self-reflection and goal setting but also provide safe spaces for discussing identity-related challenges—something participants agreed was often missing from standard leadership training.

Several participants emphasised the importance of clear and flexible progression pathways. For instance, one school leader reported that their school introduced four paid temporary leadership roles each year, open to all staff, including Early Career Teachers (ECTs). This approach allows staff to gain leadership experience in accessible and supportive ways.

Another participant shared how their school deliberately used whole-school projects as a platform to develop leadership across all staff groups, including teaching assistants, teachers, year leaders, and senior leaders. Examples of collaborative initiatives mentioned by participants include, developing the school library, leading a whole-school reading project, or coordinating Sustainability Week. While responsibilities may vary, this approach allows individuals from diverse roles and backgrounds to contribute meaningfully to school improvement. Such inclusive approaches create space for staff to lead visibly and confidently, often for the first time, helping to build both capability and aspiration.

4.4 Does existing under-representation in middle leadership drive any of the disparities in promotion intentions?

The WLTL data indicates that teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be in middle leadership positions than their white counterparts. While 35 per cent of the teachers from a white ethnic background surveyed responded that they had a middle leadership role, only 32 per cent of teachers from an Asian ethnic background and 25 per cent of teachers from a black ethnic background indicated the same.

This could potentially contribute to explaining the gaps in promotion intentions outlined above if being in a middle leadership position was associated with being less likely to be intending to apply for promotion. However, the data shows that the opposite is true: teachers who responded that they were in a middle leadership position were actually slightly more likely to be intending to apply for promotion. The under-representation of Asian and black teachers in middle leadership is therefore not likely to be a significant factor in explaining why Asian and black teachers are more likely to indicate that they are intending to apply for promotion than their white counterparts.

We asked school leaders in the focus groups to reflect on the reported underrepresentation of black teachers in middle leadership. Most participants drew attention to the issue of discrimination

and bias in hiring decisions, adding that some ethnic minority teachers, despite being highly qualified, are explicitly told that they are not appointed due to concerns about how parents or the school community might perceive them.

Furthermore, school leaders highlighted systemic shortcomings in institutional support and mentorship as significant barriers to leadership progression. They noted that while teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds often show strong aspirations and ambition, these are not adequately met with the guidance, encouragement, or structured opportunities needed to progress. Several participants also acknowledged the limited pipeline of ethnic minority teachers entering and remaining in the profession, which is a consequence of broader structural inequalities, that in turn restricts the development of a diverse leadership pool.

Participants also highlighted how limited opportunities in middle leadership, particularly in schools with low turnover, create additional barriers. One school leader commented:

We just don't have the positions available... and we don't want to be creating tokenistic positions. This is the challenge that we're really facing. (School leader)

While these structural constraints are not unique to ethnic minority teachers, their impact is particularly pronounced when combined with under-representation and a lack of mentorship or visibility.

4.5 What factors contribute to ethnic disparities in intentions to apply for promotion?

NFER's analysis of racial equality in the teacher workforce (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022) found that differences in characteristics between teachers from different ethnic groups played a role in helping to explain promotion rate gaps. The comparison of rates of promotion to middle leadership among teachers of Asian and black ethnic backgrounds compared to their white counterparts revealed that differences in characteristics played a very significant role. Before controlling for differences in characteristics, teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds were significantly more likely to be promoted into middle leadership positions than their white counterparts. However, after controlling for differences in characteristics, teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds were significantly less likely to be promoted into middle leadership positions than their white counterparts. Region and phase were key contributory factors: teachers from Asian and black ethnic groups are more likely to be working in London and secondary schools, where promotion rates are generally higher.

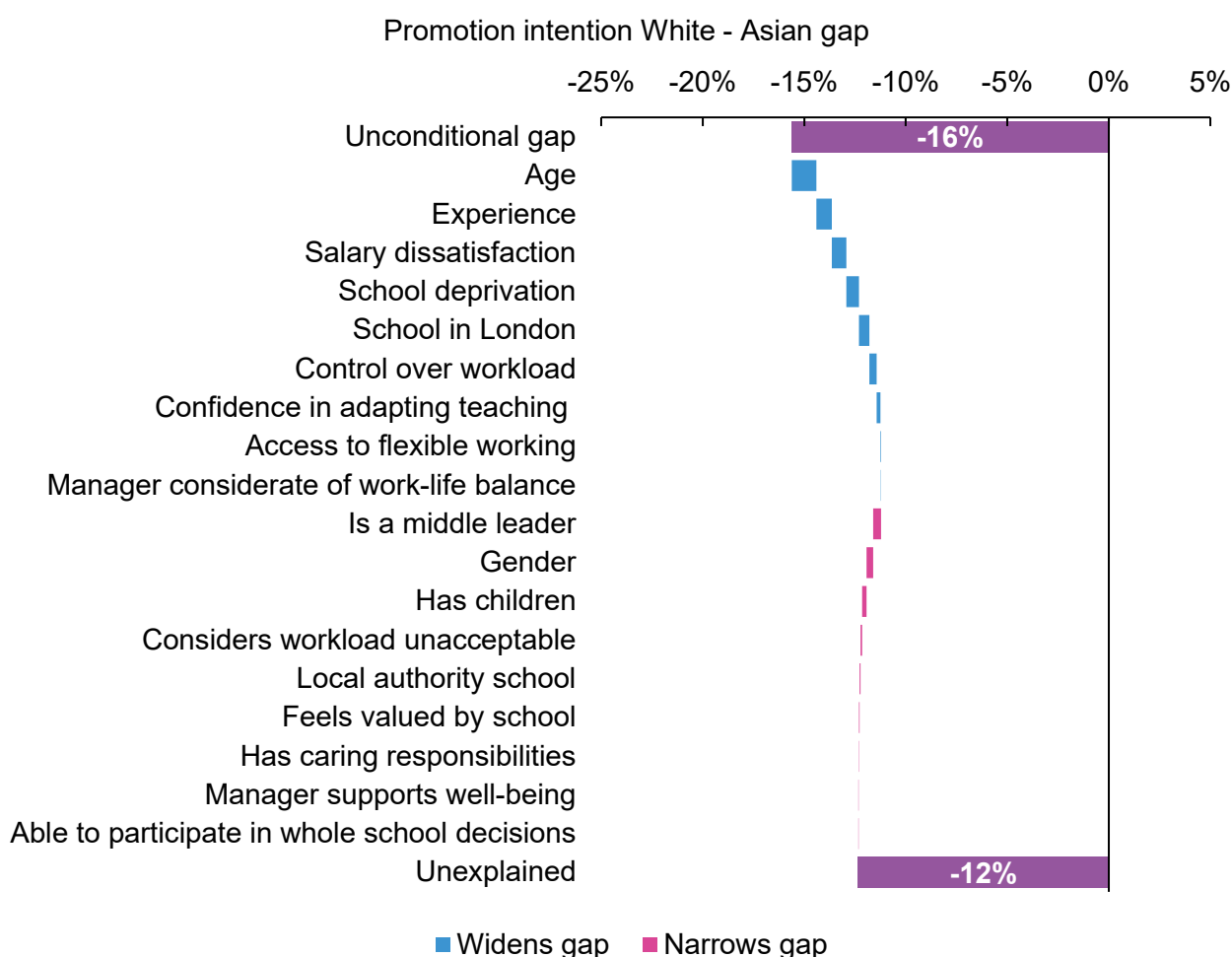
We conducted similar analysis using data on a range of personal characteristics (e.g., age, experience, role) and school-related factors (e.g., working environment, salary satisfaction) from the WLTL survey to explore the role they played in helping to explain the gaps.

As shown in Figure 23, a significant unconditional gap exists between teachers from white and Asian ethnic backgrounds in their promotion intentions. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background reported intentions to apply for promotion at a rate 16 percentage points higher than their white counterparts. This gap was partially explained by some factors such as age and salary dissatisfaction. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background tend to be younger and less experienced on average, characteristics associated with stronger career advancement motivation.

Additionally, salary dissatisfaction was a key driver of promotion intentions generally. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background reported lower satisfaction with their pay compared to their white counterparts: 69 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with the salary received for the work they do, compared to 61 per cent for their white counterparts.

Overall, the gap in intentions to apply for promotion between teachers from Asian and white ethnic backgrounds remained significant after controlling for a range of characteristics. After controlling for differences in their other characteristics, teachers from an Asian ethnic background were 12 percentage points more likely to indicate that they intended to apply for promotion compared to their white counterparts.

Figure 23 Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were more likely to indicate that they intended to apply for promotion compared to their white counterparts

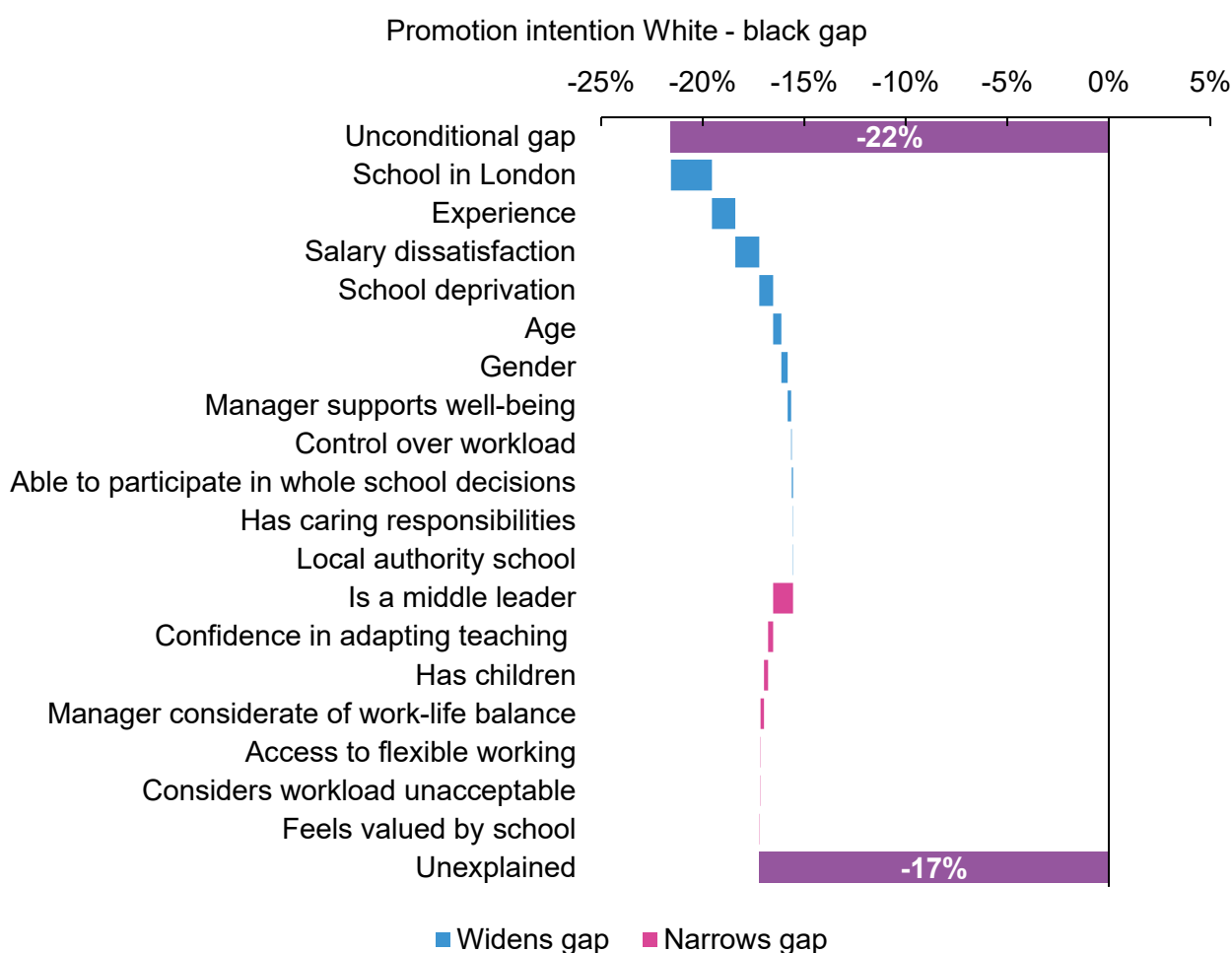


Source: NFER analysis of WLT data for 2021/22.

As shown in Figure 24, there was a similar picture for teachers from a black ethnic background. A significant unconditional gap exists between teachers from white and black ethnic backgrounds in their promotion intentions of around 22 percentage points. Teachers from a black ethnic background were more likely to be based in London, which was generally associated with a higher

intention to apply for promotion, so this factor explained part of the gap. Similar factors to teachers from an Asian ethnic background also helped to explain the gap, with age, experience and salary dissatisfaction playing an explanatory role. However, the overall gap in intention to apply for promotion between teachers from black and white ethnic backgrounds remained significant after controlling for a range of characteristics. After controlling for differences in their other characteristics, teachers from a black ethnic background remained 17 percentage points more likely to indicate that they intended to apply for promotion compared to their white counterparts.

Figure 24 Teachers from a black ethnic background were more likely to indicate that they intended to apply for promotion compared to their white counterparts

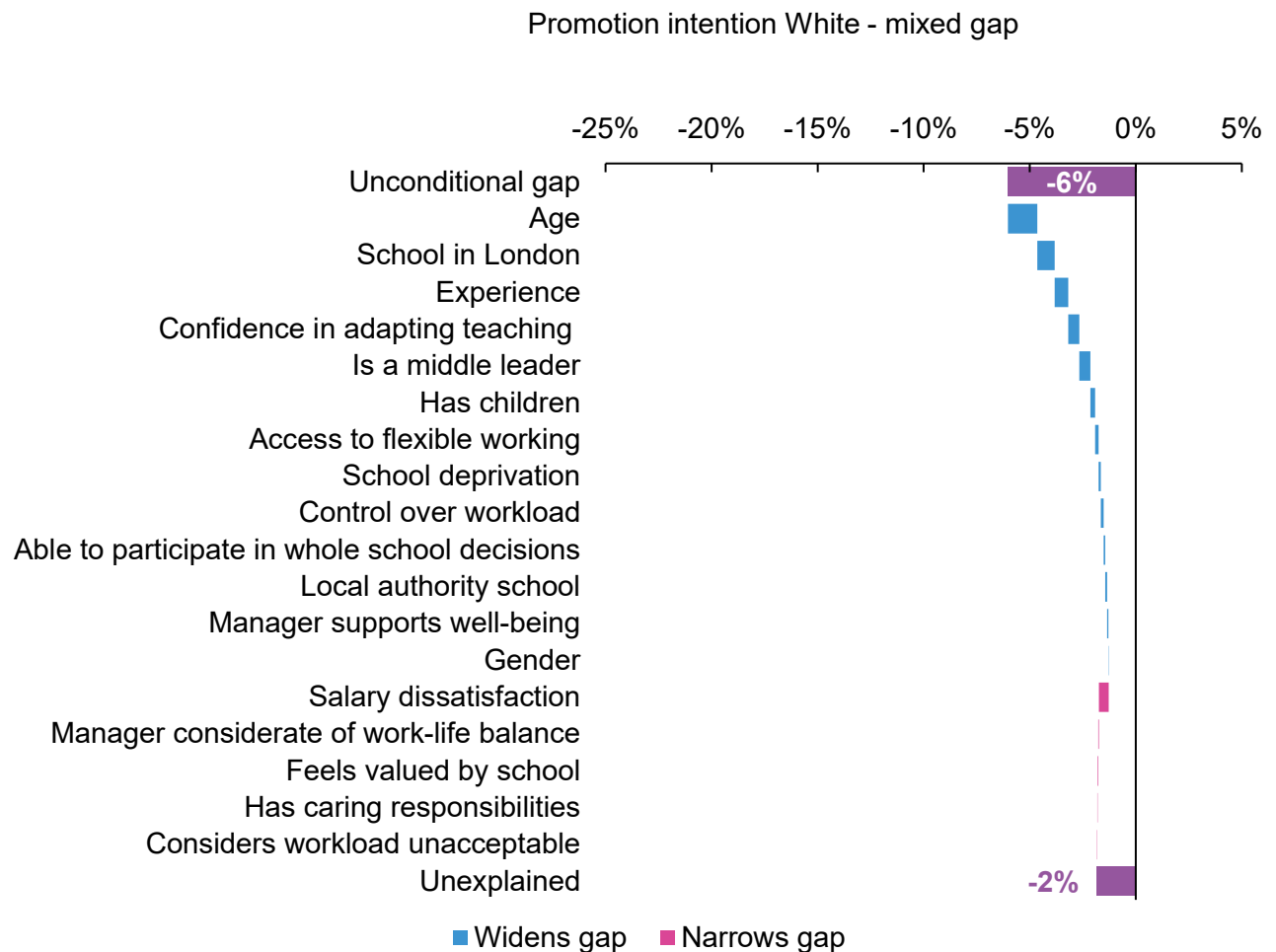


Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

As shown in Figure 25, the unconditional gap between teachers from white and mixed ethnic backgrounds in their promotion intentions is much smaller, at around six percentage points. Similar factors – being based in London, experience and salary satisfaction – play a role in explaining a sizeable proportion of that gap. After controlling for differences in their other characteristics, teachers from a mixed ethnic background were two percentage points more likely to indicate that

they intended to apply for promotion compared to their white counterparts. This difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 25 After controlling for differences in their characteristics, teachers from a mixed ethnic background were not significantly different in their intention to apply for promotion compared to their white counterparts



Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

The analysis highlighted greater salary dissatisfaction among teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds as one of the factors that helped to explain the gaps. Teachers from a black ethnic background reported the highest level of dissatisfaction, with 74 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they were satisfied with the salary received for the work they do. This was 69 per cent for teachers from an Asian ethnic background, compared to 61 per cent for their white counterparts. Teachers from a mixed ethnic background were slightly less dissatisfied with their salary, with only 55 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This suggests that salary concerns are a significant factor influencing promotion aspirations, particularly for teachers from black and Asian ethnic backgrounds.

In reflecting on differences in promotion intentions, focus group participants observed that the current pay scale structure creates financial pressure to seek promotion. This pay scale structure, especially the need to apply for promotion to move from Main Pay Range (MPR) to upper pay (UPR) scale, limits salary progression unless teachers actively apply for promotion. One school leader added:

After six years of teaching... teachers then have to try and pursue the upper pay scale and pursuing senior leadership just to earn a pay rise. (School leader)

This may disproportionately impact ethnic minority teachers, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who may primarily pursue promotion as a financial necessity.

4.6 Are the reasons why teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds do not seek promotion different from teachers from a white background?

We also used WLTL data to explore whether the reasons for not seeking promotion differed systematically across ethnic groups. Concerns about work-life balance were a significant factor for all groups, with similar proportions of teachers from white (32 per cent) and Asian (32 per cent) ethnic backgrounds citing this as a reason. However, this concern was more pronounced among teachers from a black ethnic background, with 42 per cent indicating that concern about the potential impact on work-life balance influenced their decision.

Our analysis of focus group data also highlights work-life balance as a key factor influencing leadership decisions for teachers from all ethnic backgrounds. However, this concern is particularly pronounced among ethnic minority teachers, especially women balancing family responsibilities. One participant highlighted the importance of supportive school cultures that accommodate family and caregiving roles:

We've got a lot of young mums that have got responsibilities towards family, towards their children, towards their husband... (School leader)

This indicates that cultural and gendered expectations around caregiving may add additional layers to how work-life balance is negotiated by staff.

5. Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' intentions to leave teaching?

5.1 Key findings summary

- Retaining ethnic minority teachers in the state-funded sector at the same rate as their white counterparts would mean the system retaining an additional 1,000 teachers per year¹³.
- Teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to consider leaving teaching in the state sector than their white counterparts. In contrast, teachers from an Asian ethnic background are less likely to be considering leaving than their white counterparts.
- Teachers from a black ethnic background were more likely than their white counterparts to report experiencing bullying and harassment, that they did not feel valued by their school and that a lack of support from superiors was an important reason for considering leaving.
- School leaders creating more inclusive and equitable working environments in which all staff feel supported and valued could encourage more teachers, especially those from a black ethnic background, to be retained in the state sector. From school leaders we spoke to, examples which supported staff retention and progression included supporting flexible working to meet individual teachers' needs and work-life balance, a whole-school culture of celebrating diversity and proactive development of staff who were interested in promotion.
- Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were slightly more likely than their white counterparts to have reported experiencing bullying and harassment and cite a lack of support from superiors as an important reason for considering leaving, but the differences were small.

5.2 Introduction

NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce showed that there are significant ethnic disparities in teacher retention rates. Teachers from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic groups were found to be significantly less likely than white counterparts to be retained in the state-funded sector. However, the findings suggested that, after accounting for differences in their respective characteristics, teachers from black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were about equally as likely as teachers from a white ethnic background to stay in teaching, while teachers from an Asian ethnic background were less likely to remain in teaching than their white counterparts with similar characteristics. This was mainly driven by region, because teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds other than white are concentrated in London, where retention rates are generally lower.

The research summarised in this section expands on our previous research by examining rich teacher data from the DfE's WLT survey. The survey responses provide detailed information on whether teachers are considering leaving teaching in the state-funded sector and about other personal and school-related factors. The analysis aims to identify disparities in intentions to leave

¹³ See Appendix B for more information on this calculation.

and examine the underlying factors, including personal characteristics and school-related conditions, that may contribute to the disparities.

This section includes qualitative research which builds on findings from NFER's analysis of the WLTL survey, offering a more in-depth exploration of the factors that influence teachers' intentions to leave the sector. By analysing focus group data, the research provides a nuanced understanding of school leaders' perceptions of conditions that foster inclusive, diverse working environments. Our qualitative analysis also examines bullying and harassment as a key driver for intentions to leave, among ethnic minority staff.

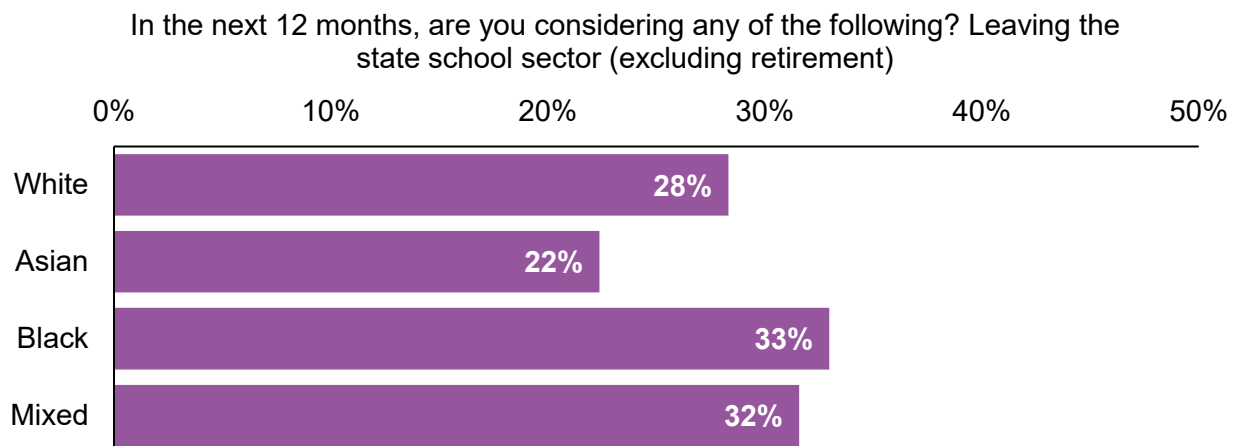
5.3 Are there disparities in intentions to leave the state sector between teachers from different ethnic backgrounds?

As shown in Figure 26, teachers from a black ethnic background have the highest proportion considering leaving (33 per cent). In comparison, 28 per cent of teachers from a white ethnic background expressed that they were considering leaving, while 32 per cent of teachers of mixed ethnicity responded in the same way. Teachers from an Asian ethnic background were the least likely to be considering leaving (22 per cent).

These findings suggest that teachers from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds may face greater retention challenges compared to their white and Asian counterparts. However, this contrasts with data on actual leaving behaviour. Data from the 2022/23 School Workforce Census suggests that teachers from a white ethnic background have the lowest leaving rate (9 per cent), while teachers from Asian (11 per cent), black (12.4 per cent), mixed (11.8 per cent) and other ethnic backgrounds (11.8 per cent) have higher leaving rates. This context of significant disparities in demonstrated leaving behaviour should be borne in mind when considering the below findings that are based on intentions.

Typically, more teachers are considering leaving than actually leave, while some teachers who respond that they are not considering leaving do actually leave (IFF Research and IoE, 2024). Analysis that combines the rich information from the WLTL survey with actual leaving outcome data from the SWC would be worthwhile exploring in future, but this data was not available to researchers when our analysis for this report was undertaken.

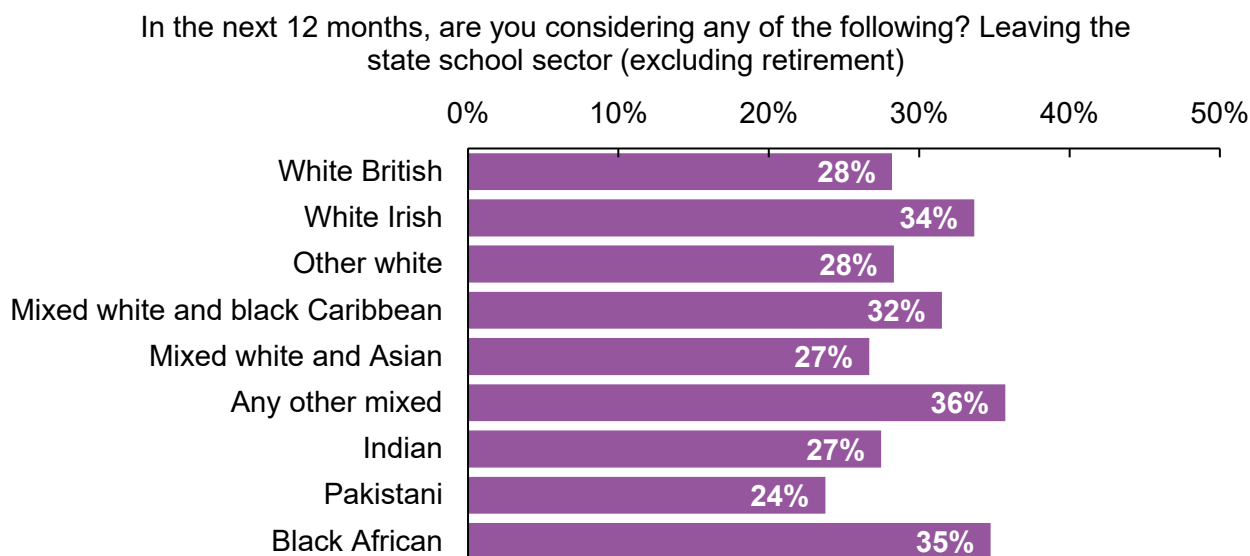
Figure 26 Teachers from black ethnic backgrounds were more likely than white counterparts to be considering leaving the state-funded sector



Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

As shown in Figure 27, analysis of differences by minor ethnic group reveals further variation. Within the Asian ethnic group, teachers from a Pakistani ethnic background were the least likely to be considering leaving the state sector (24 per cent), followed by teachers from an Indian ethnic background (27 per cent) and from a mixed white and Asian background (27 per cent). Among teachers from a black ethnic background, respondents from a black African background exhibited relatively high leaving intentions, with 35 per cent indicating an intention to leave the state sector. A consideration of leaving the state sector was made by 28 per cent of teachers from a white British background. We were unable to report data on several minor ethnic groups due to small sample sizes.

Figure 27 Teachers from a black African ethnic background are the most likely to be considering leaving the state sector, with teachers from a Pakistani background the least



Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

5.4 What factors contribute to ethnic disparities in intentions to leave state-sector teaching?

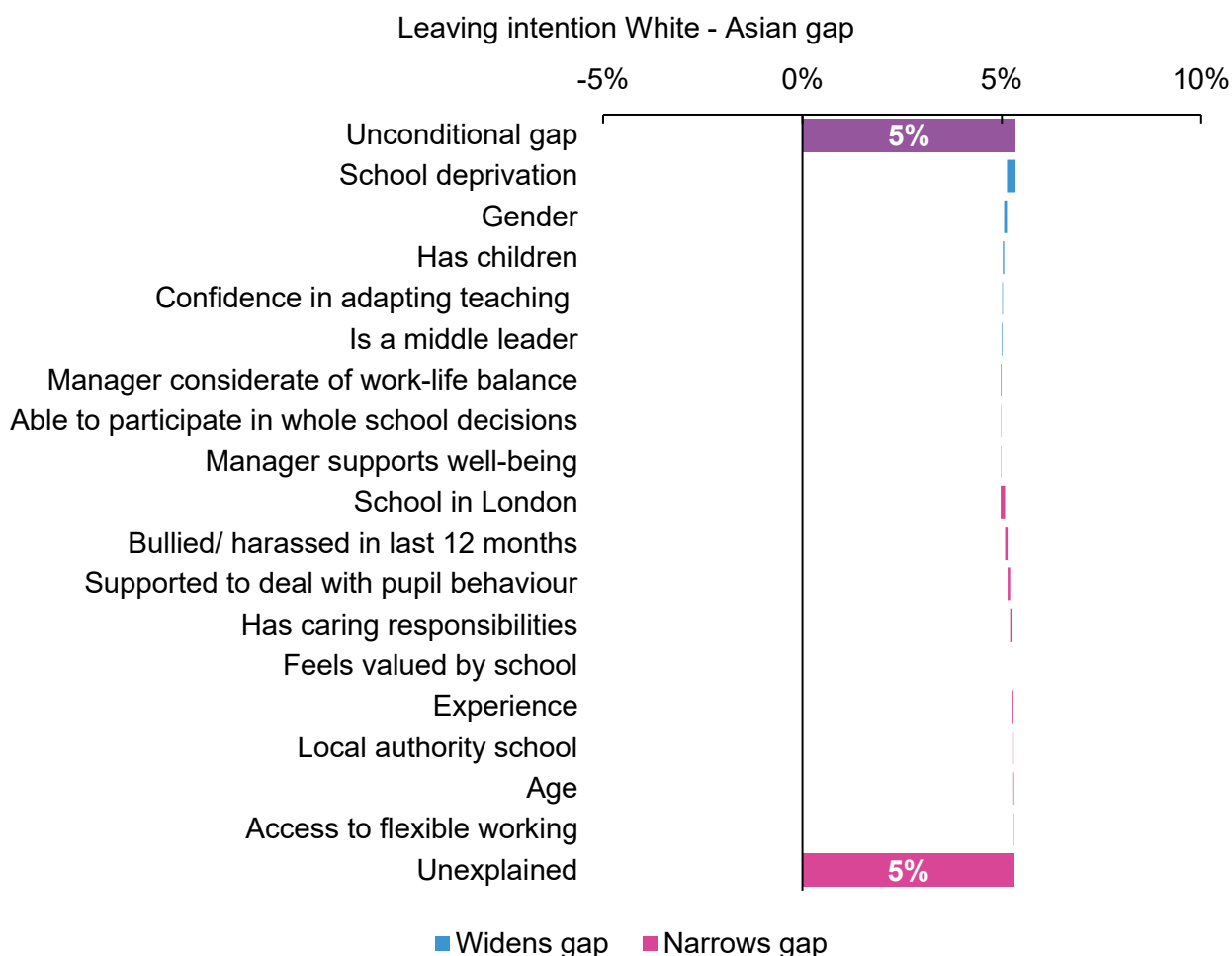
NFER's analysis of racial equality in the teacher workforce (Worth, McLean and Sharp, 2022) found that differences in characteristics between teachers from different ethnic groups played a significant role in helping to explain retention rate gaps. The comparison of retention rates among teachers of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicity backgrounds compared to their white counterparts revealed that differences in characteristics played a very significant role. Before controlling for differences in characteristics, teachers from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds were significantly more likely to leave the state sector than their white counterparts. However, after controlling for differences in characteristics, only teachers from an Asian ethnic background were significantly more likely to leave than their white counterparts. Region and phase were key contributory factors: teachers from ethnic minority groups other than white were more likely to be working in London and secondary schools, where retention rates are generally lower.

We conducted similar analysis using data on a range of personal characteristics (e.g., age, experience, role) and school-related factors (e.g., working environment, experiences of bullying) from the WLTl survey to explore the role they played in helping to explain the gaps.

As shown in Figure 28, there is an unconditional gap of five percentage points between teachers from white and Asian backgrounds in their leaving intentions: teachers from an Asian ethnic background were five percentage points less likely to be considering leaving than their white counterparts. This gap was not significantly explained by any of the factors we explored the explanatory role of in the analysis. The gap left unexplained was also five percentage points,

meaning that after controlling for differences in characteristics, teachers from an Asian ethnic background are less likely to be considering leaving compared to teachers from a white background.

Figure 28 Teachers from an Asian ethnic background are less likely to be considering leaving than their white counterparts



Source: NFER analysis of WLT data for 2021/22.

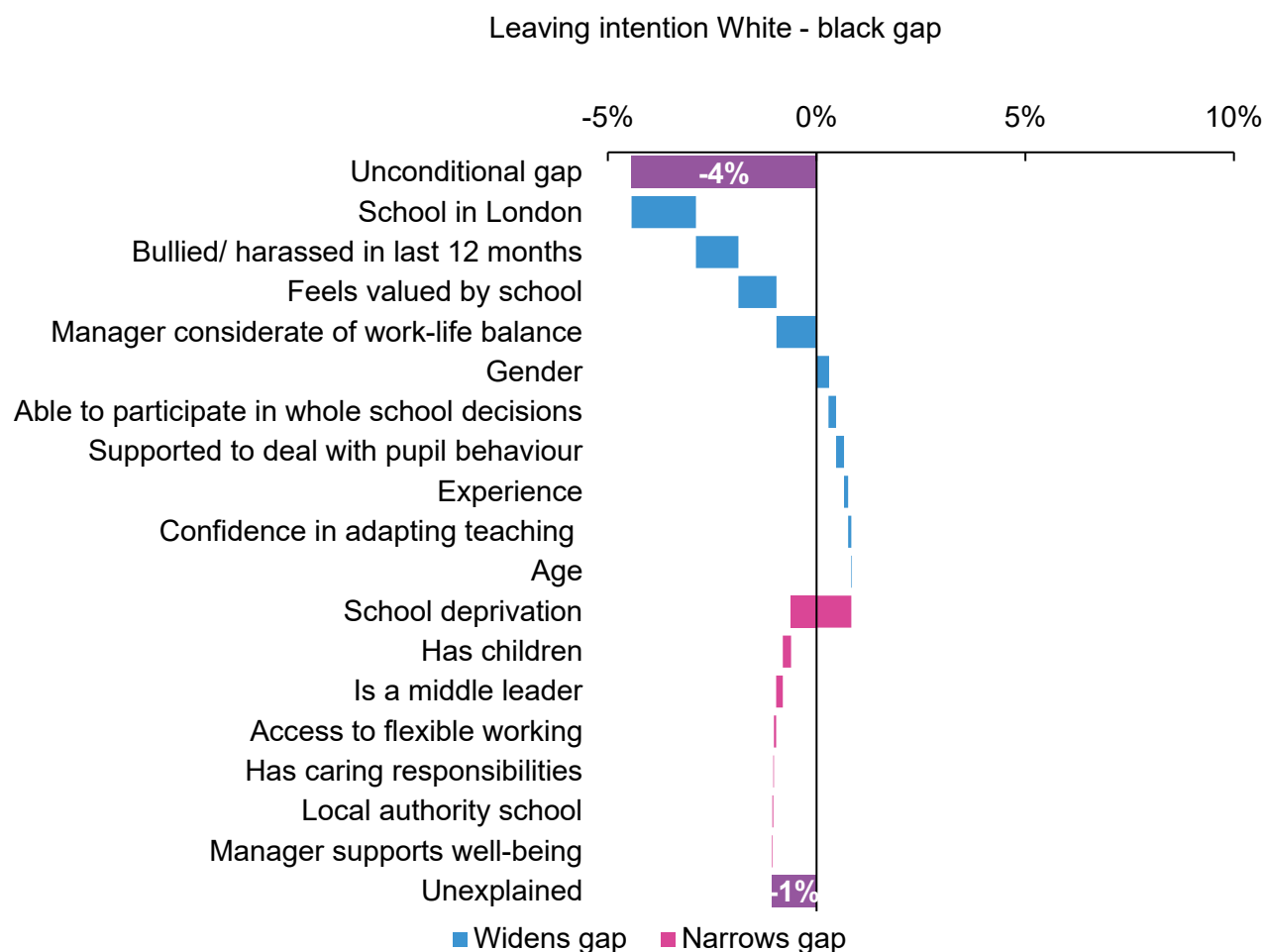
However, the findings are different for teachers from a black ethnic background. Figure 29 shows that there is an unconditional gap of four percentage points between teachers from white and black backgrounds in their leaving intentions: teachers from a black ethnic background were four percentage points more likely to be considering leaving than their white counterparts.

Several factors played a significant role in helping to explain this gap, which provides further detail on what could be driving it. First, teachers from a black ethnic background were more likely to report that they have experienced bullying and harassment during the last 12 months, which is associated with a greater intention to leave. This represents a significant explanatory factor.

Teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to be based in London, which is associated with a greater intention to leave among teachers generally. London was also a significant explanatory factor in our previous analysis of retention rate gaps. However, the role of London as an explanatory factor in the analysis in this report was not statistically significant, likely due to small sample size. Other factors appear to play somewhat of an explanatory role, but were also not statistically significant explanators (which may be due to small sample size). These included teachers from a black ethnic background being less likely to say they feel valued by their school and that managers are considerate of their work-life balance, both of which are associated with greater intention to leave.

Another factor that played a statistically significant explanatory role was working in a school with a large proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers from a black ethnic background were more likely to be working in such schools than white counterparts, but teachers in such schools were generally slightly less likely to report that they were considering leaving. This is counterintuitive, given that teachers working in schools with high proportion of the pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have a higher likelihood of actually leaving the state sector. This again emphasises the value that could come from future research that combines the rich data from the WLTl survey with actual retention outcomes, rather than intentions.

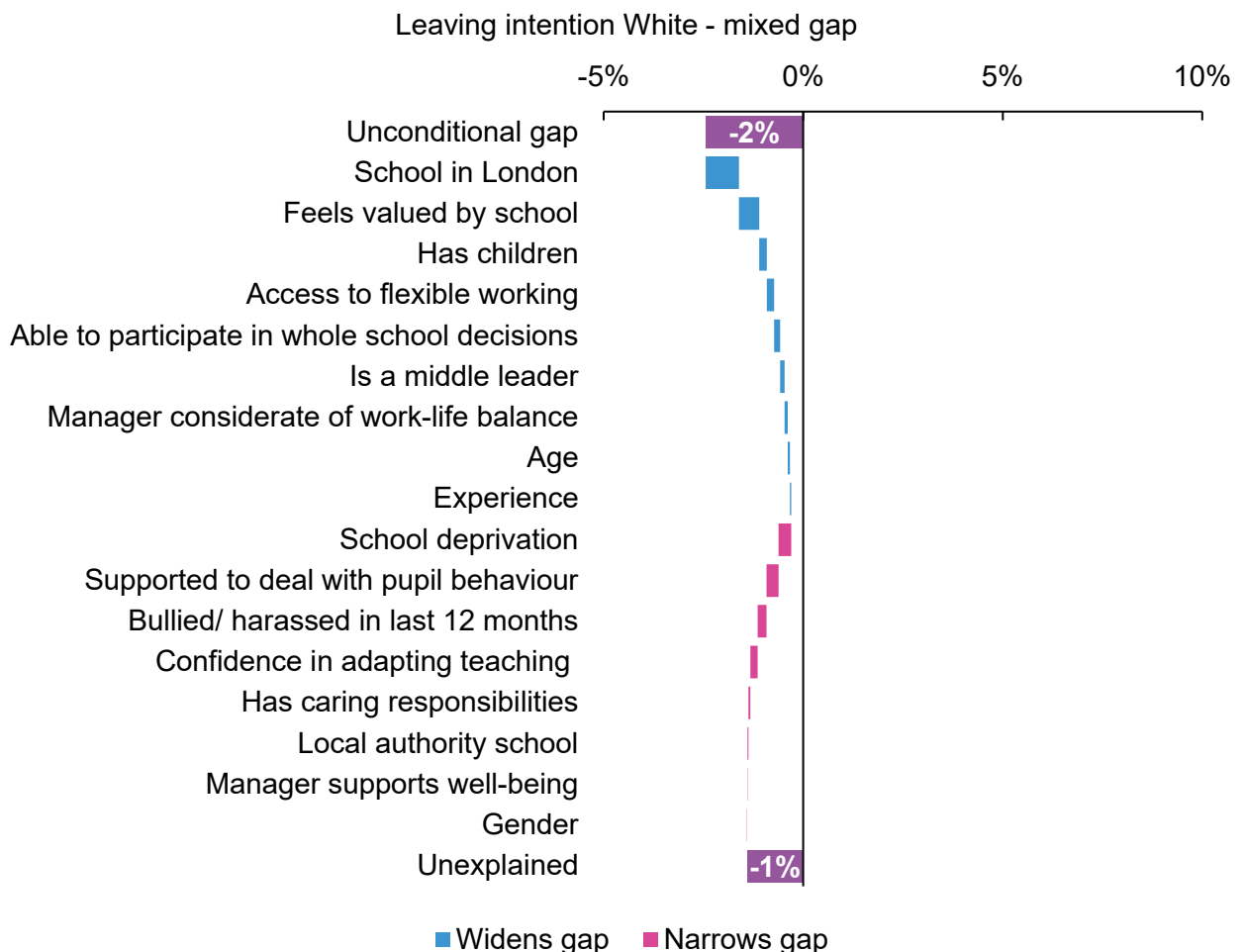
Figure 29 Teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to be considering leaving than white counterparts, which is explained by some key factors



Source: NFER analysis of WLT data for 2021/22.

The analysis of the gap in leaving intentions between teachers from white and mixed ethnic backgrounds – displayed in Figure 30 – showed that there was a small but not statistically significant gap before controlling for differences in characteristics and a similarly small gap after controlling for differences in characteristics, falling from two percentage points to one. London was the only statistically significant explanatory factor: teachers from a mixed ethnic background are more likely to be based in London, which is associated with a greater intention to leave among teachers generally.

Figure 30 Teachers from a mixed ethnic background were slightly more likely to be considering leaving than white counterparts



Source: NFER analysis of WLTL data for 2021/22.

5.4.1. Understanding the barriers to tackling bullying and harassment

The above analysis highlights that black teachers are more likely to report bullying and harassment and that this is a significant explanatory factor in the gap in leaving rates between teachers from black ethnic backgrounds and their white counterparts. Figure 31 shows that a quarter of teachers (25 per cent) from a black ethnic background reported bullying and harassment, far higher than teachers from white (12 per cent), Asian (16 per cent) and mixed (9 per cent) ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 31 Teachers from a black ethnic background are far more likely to have reported experiencing bullying and harassment than their white counterparts



Source: NFER analysis of WLTL data for 2021/22.

In examining the high rates of workplace bullying and harassment as experienced by black and Asian teachers in the data above, we asked discussants in the focus groups to consider what barriers make it difficult to effectively address this issue.

One of the most significant challenges in addressing bullying and harassment of ethnic minority staff is that these behaviours are often hidden and subtle, making them difficult to identify and address. Bullying among staff is frequently masked as professional critique, exclusion, or undermining behaviour. As one participant observed:

In schools, bullying is done in a more sophisticated way. And that's what makes it dangerous. (School Leader)

Participants also highlighted the difficulty of proving such behaviours within formal complaint systems. They noted that these processes often fail to provide adequate support for those who come forward. One participant explained:

I think it's quite difficult to prove anyway... it's got to be overt racism to actually prove it. (School leader)

Another major challenge that emerged is the fear of retaliation and a workplace culture of silence, which discourages ethnic minority staff from reporting incidents. Many worry that speaking up will negatively affect their professional reputation or career prospects. A participant illustrated the reluctance to reporting such incidents, stating,

If you're seen to complain or say something, are you going to be the one that's got the issue? And will it turn back on you? (School leader)

Discussants were largely in agreement that for women from ethnic minority backgrounds, experiences of bullying and harassment are further complicated by gender biases, making it even more difficult to challenge discrimination. This intersection creates a workplace environment where

their concerns are more likely to be dismissed or downplayed, and where they are subjected to greater scrutiny and exclusion.

The WLTL data also reveals that black teachers are more likely to work in schools with higher levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility, which is associated with a lower likelihood of considering leaving the state sector. However, despite this, the heightened experiences of bullying and harassment they face introduce additional challenges. Addressing these issues, particularly by fostering a more inclusive school culture and promoting robust racial literacy is crucial in reducing turnover intentions among black teachers. This approach would help create a more equitable and supportive teaching environment that can better retain black teachers and ensure their well-being.

5.4.2. Factors that drive retention of teachers from ethnic minority background

School leaders in the focus groups identified two key factors that drive the retention of teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. The first is proactive and strategic representation in leadership, which participants described as a powerful motivator. By intentionally tapping into diverse talent pools and fostering inclusive hiring policies, schools can create an environment where teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds see clear and achievable career progression, encouraging them to pursue leadership roles.

The second factor highlighted by participants was the importance of flexible working arrangements and well-being support. They shared examples of schools that offer flexible PPA time and accommodate family commitments wherever possible. Creating environments where teachers feel supported both personally and professionally not only improves retention but also fosters a workplace culture where teachers feel valued and able to thrive.

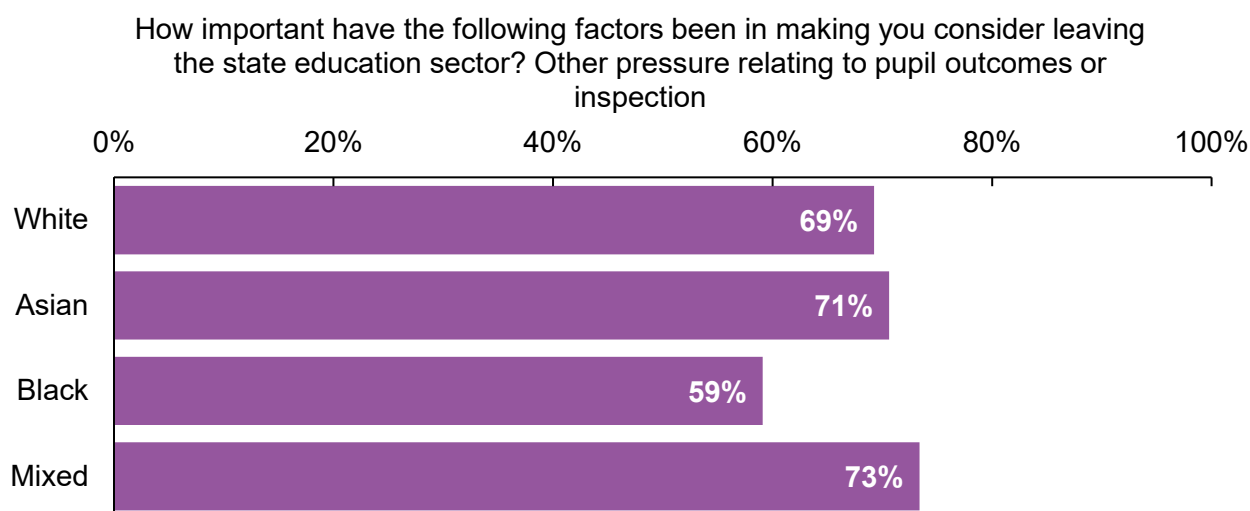
Furthermore, when discussing the workforce conditions that support career progression, participants emphasised the value of structured coaching, mentorship, and leadership shadowing. These initiatives provide targeted support for ethnic minority teachers aspiring to leadership roles. Participants explained how such programmes create feasible pathways to leadership by offering direct insight into leadership responsibilities and making career progression feel more tangible. For example, some school leaders reported creating temporary leadership responsibility roles or allowing early-career teachers to take on leadership tasks. These approaches provide a gradual and structured route into leadership, ensuring leadership experience is distributed fairly and giving ethnic minority teachers the opportunity to build their capacity before formally applying for senior roles.

5.5 Are the reasons why teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are considering leaving systematically different from teachers from a white background?

The most cited factors influencing respondents' consideration to leave the state education sector were high workload and government initiatives/policy changes, which was generally the case across ethnicity. However, due to sample size limitations, we cannot break this data down by ethnic group. Nevertheless, other workplace challenges reveal notable patterns across ethnic groups.

As shown in Figure 32, pressure related to pupil outcomes or inspections is a major concern for teachers of all ethnic groups, with high percentages reporting this issue as a reason or considering leaving. Teachers from a black ethnic background were slightly less likely to cite this reason compared to their counterparts, although this issue appears to be a widespread consideration among teachers.

Figure 32 Teachers from a black ethnic background are least likely to cite pressure relating to pupil outcomes or inspection as an important reason for considering leaving

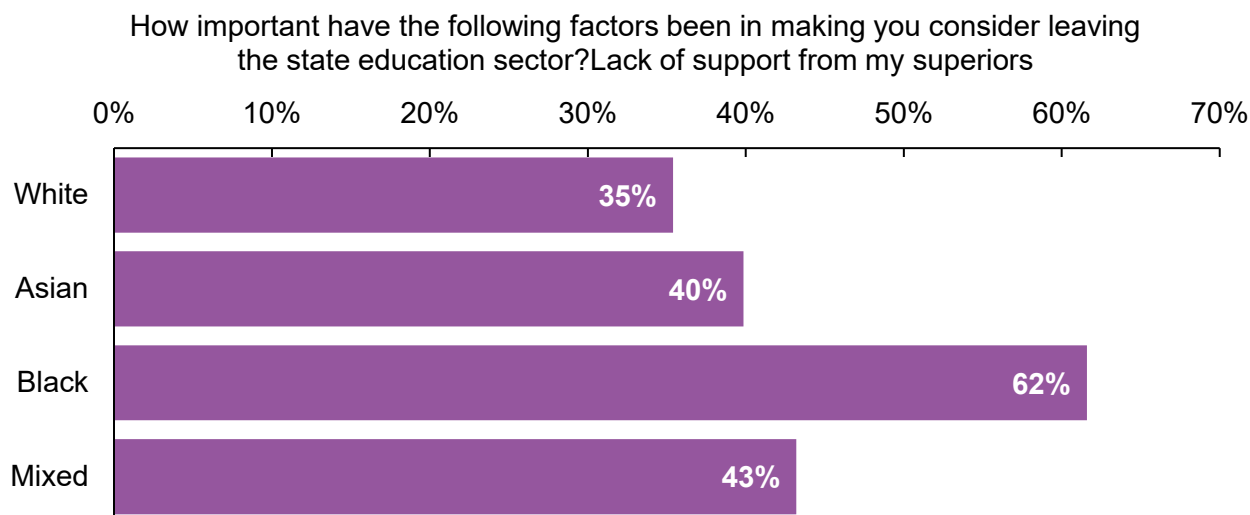


Source: NFER analysis of WLTL data for 2021/22.

Dealing with pupils' parents and carers is another common challenge, but with little difference between teachers from white (36 per cent), Asian (37 per cent), black (42 per cent) and mixed (30 per cent) ethnic backgrounds.

As shown in Figure 33, there was a marked difference between teachers from different ethnic groups in views on a 'lack of support from superiors' was as a reason for considering leaving. While 35 per cent of teachers from a white ethnic background reported feeling unsupported, this figure was 43 per cent for teachers from a mixed ethnic background, 40 per cent for teachers from an Asian ethnic background and 62 per cent for teachers from a black ethnic background. The notably higher percentages among teachers in ethnic minority groups other than white suggests that they may face additional barriers in accessing leadership support or career development opportunities. These findings underscore that, while some workplace pressures are common across all ethnic groups, a lack of managerial support seems more pronounced for ethnic minority teachers.

Figure 33 Teachers from a black ethnic background are the most likely to cite a lack of support from superiors as an important reason for considering leaving



Source: NFER analysis of WLT data for 2021/22.

Furthermore, school leaders in our focus groups voiced frustration with the slow pace of change in addressing racial inequalities. Some described diversity efforts as tokenistic, lacking follow-through. This disillusionment contributes to a growing sense that that real change is unlikely to occur from within. One participant noted:

We talk a lot about representation, but when the opportunity comes, it still goes to someone who doesn't reflect the school community. (School leader)

Another one explained:

You get to a point where you realise the system isn't going to change for you. And maybe the only option is to step away from it. (School leader)

Such experiences may contribute to overall intentions to leave the sector, as teachers question whether meaningful change is possible within the structures they work in.

5.5.1. Enablers for inclusive and supportive workplace culture

Participants in our focus groups shed light on their experiences implementing initiatives that foster inclusive and supportive workplace culture for all ethnic groups. There was consensus that a whole-school approach to celebrating diversity and inclusion plays a crucial role in fostering a supportive workplace culture. Schools that actively engage staff and students in cultural celebrations, performances, and inclusive extracurricular activities ensure that diversity is not just acknowledged but embedded into the school experience. One participant shared an example of such activities:

We have a lovely play.. called People of the Boxes... with lots of issues to do with ignorance and racism... The staff, even the admin staff.. come and watch this play. The messages reach students and staff. (School leader)

Furthermore, using core curriculum and assemblies as tools for education and awareness was cited as an effective strategy for promoting an inclusive culture. Schools that integrate religious education, PSHE, and citizenship into their teaching not only educate students but also create learning opportunities for colleagues. Discussants agreed that when inclusion is woven into everyday teaching rather than treated as an add-on, it has a greater impact on school culture.

Another important characteristic of inclusive workplace culture was the presence of open and flexible leadership structures that enable staff at all levels to contribute meaningfully to school life. Participants agreed that this approach ensures that diverse voices are heard in decision-making. One participant described such an approach:

Every colleague has the chance, if they want to, to bring forward ideas for activities. It's not just about structural leadership. (School Leader)

Having open and flexible leadership structures also an important component of fostering an inclusive workplace culture. Several schools have created opportunities for early career teachers (ECTs), teaching assistants (TAs), and mid-career staff to take on leadership responsibilities for whole-school initiatives. One participant elaborated:

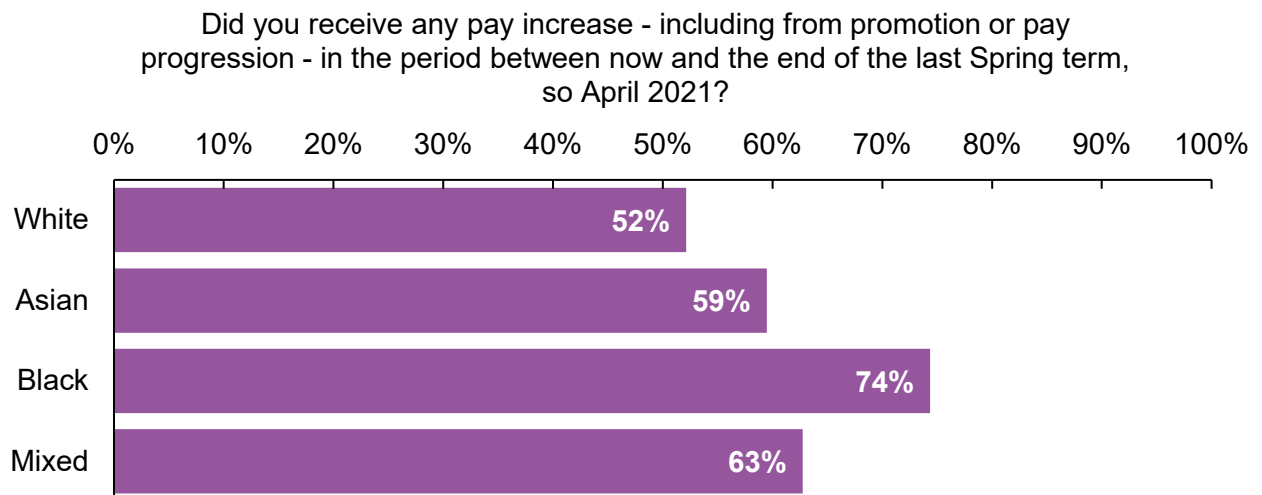
We keep our doors open... they can suggest ideas and lead and work as equals. (School Leader)

This approach ensures that leadership potential is recognised and nurtured beyond formal job titles.

5.6 Are there ethnic disparities in teachers' pay progression and perceptions of fairness about decisions on teacher pay?

Our analysis also explored experiences and perceptions relating to pay. Teachers from a white ethnic background generally report lower rates of pay progression compared to ethnic minority groups other than white. Specifically, teachers from black (74 per cent), mixed (63 per cent) and Asian (59 per cent) ethnic backgrounds reported receiving a pay increase by the end of the last Spring term (April 2021). In contrast, only 52 per cent of teachers from a white ethnic background reported receiving a pay increase during this period, making them the least likely to experience pay progression. However, this could reflect a greater proportion being at the top of the relevant pay scale due to higher prior retention rates.

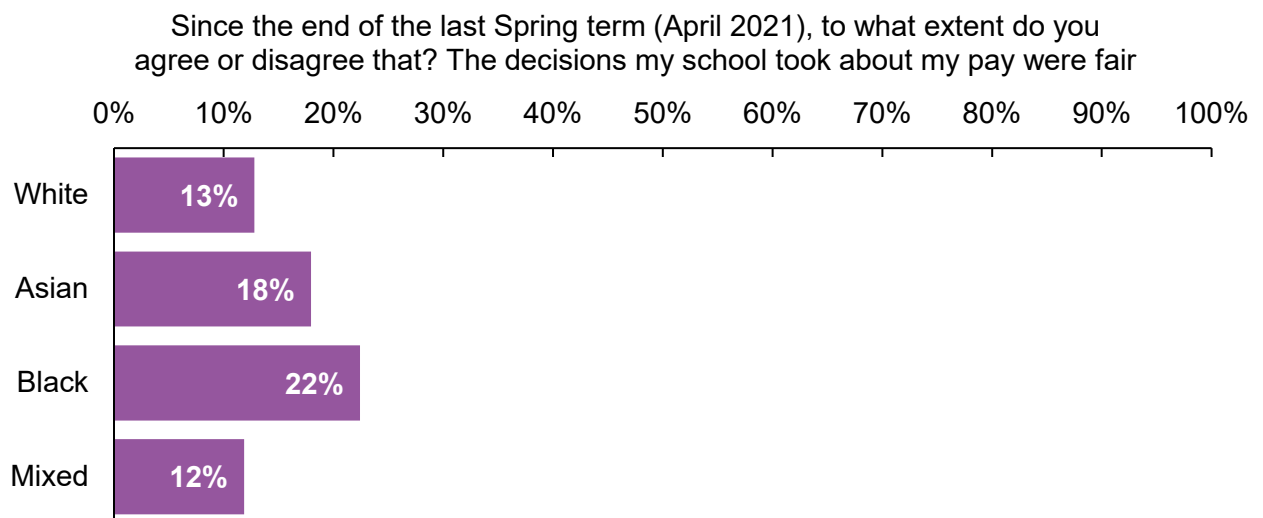
Figure 34 Teachers from a white ethnic background were the least likely to report receiving a pay increase in the most recent year



Source: NFER analysis of WLTl data for 2021/22.

Despite these differences in pay progression, there are notable ethnic disparities in perceptions of fairness regarding pay decisions. Ethnic minority groups other than white were more likely to disagree with the fairness of the pay decisions made by their schools (see Figure 35). Among teachers from a white ethnic background, 13 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that the school's decision about their pay was fair, compared to 12 per cent of teachers from a mixed ethnic background, 18 per cent of teachers from an Asian ethnic background and 22 per cent of teachers from a black ethnic background. This suggests that teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds are more likely to perceive pay decisions as unfair than their white counterparts.

Figure 35 Teachers from a black ethnic background were most likely to disagree that their schools' decisions about their pay were fair



Source: NFER analysis of WLTL data for 2021/22.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Teachers from Asian and black ethnic backgrounds have a significantly higher intention to apply for promotion than their white counterparts, even after controlling for differences in their characteristics. This suggests that the disparities in progression rates found in our previous research are not due to a lack of interest among ethnic minority teachers and more likely to reflect a lack of opportunity or inequitable treatment in decision-making processes.

Teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely than their white counterparts to report experiencing bullying and harassment, that they do not feel valued by their school and that a lack of support from superiors is an important reason for considering leaving teaching in the state-sector. These factors are likely drivers in explaining why teachers from a black ethnic background are more likely to leave teaching in the state sector. School leaders creating more inclusive and equitable working environments in which all staff feel supported and valued could encourage more teachers, especially those from a black ethnic background, to be retained in the state sector.

There are significant ethnic disparities in ITT rejection rates among UK-domiciled applicants that are not explained by differences in applicant and application characteristics. Discrimination by ethnic background is likely to play a role, although we cannot definitively rule out other factors. Focus groups with ITT providers described barriers deeply rooted in systemic discrimination which permeate the recruitment process. Culturally biased interpretations of professionalism and English language skills, unconscious bias in selection, and lack of visible ethnic diversity in recruitment settings at key stages all contribute to the disadvantage faced by applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Socioeconomic background and age are also associated with disparities in rejection rates. These factors disproportionately affect applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, contributing to the ethnic disparities seen in the analysis, and could also reflect biases in selection relating to other marginalised groups. Removing bias in teacher recruitment, retention and promotion is essential to ensuring schools have the most capable and qualified teachers.

International applicants face much higher ITT rejection rates and an admissions process that places greater burden on them, related to the needs to obtain a visa and demonstrate UK-equivalency of foreign degrees and sufficient English language skills. This disproportionately affects applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, and partially explains why the raw gap between applicants from a black ethnic background and their white counterparts is very large. Improving the alignment of expectations between DfE and ITT providers and making clearer guidance available for applicants that outlines expectations and timelines could alleviate some of this burden.

6.2 Recommendations

The following policy and practice recommendations focus on improving equity at key progression points in the teaching workforce: ITT entry and promotion to leadership. However, equity is a systemic issue in the teaching workforce. Improvements to equity in recruitment and promotion processes must be accompanied by a genuine commitment to inclusion. It is insufficient to improve equity in recruitment to teaching and leadership, if individuals are not subsequently supported, respected and valued in these roles.

A specific challenge for recommendations in recruitment and promotion decisions is that judgements of specific applicants, and even judgements about what qualities should be assessed, are subject to debate. For example, there is limited evidence on which applicant characteristics at the point of ITT selection are associated with successful ITT completion or long-term teaching effectiveness. The applications system should strive to both hold a high standard for the quality and potential of future teachers and be fair and equitable for all applicants.

Approaches to equity need to be tailored to specific cases, as an approach which improves equity in one instance may hinder equity in another. For example, some organisations use anonymised recruitment processes, which remove contextual data about candidates, such as names, schools and universities. The principle behind anonymised applications is that if potentially biasing information is removed, recruitment decisions cannot be affected by bias.

Conversely, other organisations use contextual recruitment, which uses the same contextual data to mitigate for structural disadvantage. For example, an ITT provider may require lower GCSE or A-Level grades for candidates who have experienced educational disadvantage, on the basis that their attainment record reflects the disadvantage they experienced, rather than their potential (Bygraves, 2022; Sanders, 2022). In each case, it is crucial to understand what is causing bias, tailor an approach to mitigate and remove this bias, and monitor the effects on equitable recruitment. Therefore, changes in practice need to be tested and monitored within specific settings.

Recommendations for Government:

- The DfE should play a more proactive role in encouraging ITT providers, schools and trusts to adopt more inclusive recruitment practices. This will help it deliver its key objective of recruiting 6,500 teachers, thereby increasing education quality, as well as promoting equality and fairness within the workforce.
- The DfE should use its comprehensive data collections that collect information on ethnicity and key workforce outcomes (such as rejection rates in Apply and retention and progression in the SWC) to share comparative institution-level and benchmark data with institutions to allow them to understand ethnic disparities in their settings and make improvements accordingly.
- The DfE should embed equity, diversity and inclusion within programme frameworks and within selection criteria for appointing providers, including across Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Early Career Framework (ECF), National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) and Teaching School Hubs.

- The DfE should pilot innovative approaches to improving equity in teacher recruitment and promotion processes and rigorously evaluate their impact to build the evidence base.
- The DfE should work with ITT providers to map the application process for international applicants, identifying opportunities to align expectations and streamline processes. For example, providers suggested that international applicants could be enabled to upload degree certificates within the DfE Apply platform to reduce additional requests. Guidance for international applicants should clarify the expectations, pathways and support available, with tailored guidance for next steps when an applicant does not meet a requirement.

Recommendations for school and trust leaders:

- School and trust leaders should develop pathways to actively support ethnically diverse teachers who are interested in promotion, such as coaching, shadowing, or promoting leadership training opportunities (internal or external). Pathways could also include temporary projects and responsibilities, provided they are supported by training, supervision, clear and fair expectations and recognition.
- School and trust leaders should evaluate their selection criteria and processes for appointing to promoted and leadership posts to ensure they are transparent, inclusive and equitable, particularly considering disparities by ethnicity.
- School and trust leaders and trustees/ governors should provide on-going support, such as mentoring, coaching and external supervision, for ethnically diverse leaders to retain them and facilitate continued growth.
- School and trust leaders should proactively engage with inclusivity training and professional development to improve representation and retention of ethnic minority staff.
- School and trust leaders and trustees/ governors should ensure that their schools have clear, accessible and fair policies and processes for reporting and acting on bullying and harassment. Leaders should promote work cultures that are inclusive and supportive for all staff.

Recommendations for ITT providers (including HEIs and school-based providers):

- ITT providers should audit and evaluate their selection criteria and processes for equity, diversity and inclusion, particularly considering disparities in admission by ethnicity, socioeconomic background and age. For example, providers should consider how assessment criteria related to professionalism, English language proficiency and school experience value the diverse experiences of applicants.
- ITT providers should provide ongoing professional development and reflection to improve equity in their attraction and selection processes. This should include all colleagues who make admissions decisions or interact with candidates.
- The ITT sector should improve recruitment of ethnically diverse ITT leaders and tutors. Without visible leadership figures as they enter teaching, aspiring teachers may struggle to see themselves reflected in the profession.

Recommendations for future research:

- Undertake theory-based evaluation to explore how the ITT application process can be made more equitable. Many providers are actively seeking to improve practice, and rigorous context-specific research would provide important guidance for the sector. For example, providers suggested that the DfE should conduct an independent survey of applicants who discontinue at key application stages. Systematically documenting these reasons would enable evidence-based improvements to recruitment strategies, reducing attrition and enhancing applicant support.
- Conduct further quantitative analysis of large-scale survey data that is enhanced by linkages to administrative data. There are differences between teachers' intentions and subsequent decisions about leaving state-sector teaching. The WLTL data explored in this report only considers teachers' intentions. Future research should explore the pathway between leaving intentions and decisions, for example by combining rich experiential data from WLTL with leaving outcome data from the SWC.

References

- Adams, L., Coburn-Crane, S., Sanders-Earley, A., Keeble, R., Harris, H., Taylor, J. and Taylor, B. (2023) *Working lives of teachers and leaders: Wave 1*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf (Accessed: 9 November 2023).
- Bardach, L., Rushby, J.V. and Klassen, R.M. (2021) 'The selection gap in teacher education: adverse effects of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status on situational judgement test performance', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(3), pp. 1015–1034. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12405>.
- Beckles-Raymond, G. (2020) *Recruiting, training and retaining African, Caribbean and Asian teachers*. Available at: <https://www.oasisuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Break-the-Cycle-Towards-Transformational-ITT.pdf> (Accessed: 25 October 2023).
- Blazar, D. (2021) *Teachers of color, culturally responsive teaching, and student outcomes: experimental evidence from the random assignment of teachers to classes*. EdWorkingPaper No. 21-501. Available at: <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai21-501.pdf> (Accessed: 18 July 2022).
- Blinder, A.S. (1973) 'Wage discrimination: reduced form and structural estimates', *The Journal of Human Resources*, 8(4), p. 436. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/144855>.
- Bygraves, T. (2022) 'Our pupils need more diverse teachers—here's what we're doing about it', *Teach First*, 18 May. Available at: <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/blog/pupils-need-diverse-teachers> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).
- Conover, A. and Wallet, P. (2022) 'We must pay attention to West Africa's teacher strikes'. Available at: <https://teachertaskforce.org/blog/we-must-pay-attention-west-africas-teacher-strikes> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).
- Demie, F. and See, B.H. (2022) 'Ethnic disproportionality in the school teaching workforce in England', *Equity in Education & Society*, 2(1), pp. 3–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461221134291>.
- DfE (2018a) *Statement of intent on the diversity of the teaching workforce: setting the case for a diverse teaching workforce*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747586/Statement_of_intent_on_the_diversity_of_the_teaching_workforce.pdf (Accessed: 8 September 2023).
- DfE (2018b) *Statement of intent on the diversity of the teaching workforce: setting the case for a diverse teaching workforce*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747586/Statement_of_intent_on_the_diversity_of_the_teaching_workforce.pdf (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

DfE (2022) *Studying in the UK: guidance for EU students*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/studying-in-the-uk-guidance-for-eu-students> (Accessed: 15 May 2025).

DfE (2023a) 'Equality and diversity'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/equality-and-diversity> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

DfE (2023b) 'Equality and diversity'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/equality-and-diversity> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

DfE (2024) *Check your eligibility to train to teach in England, Get Into Teaching* GOV.UK. Available at: <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/non-uk-teachers/non-uk-qualifications> (Accessed: 26 March 2025).

DfE (2025) 'Initial teacher training (ITT): criteria and supporting advice'. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67d9a7caa87d546feeda01c4/Initial_teacher_training__ITT__criteria_and_supporting_advice_-_March_2025.pdf (Accessed: 15 May 2025).

Education Support (2023) *Mental health and wellbeing of ethnic minority teachers*. Available at: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/painjg2z/mental-health-and-wellbeing-of-ethnic-minority-teachers.pdf> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Gershenson, S. et al. (2022) 'The long-run impacts of same-race teachers', *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 14(4), pp. 300–342.

Gershenson, S., Hansen, M. and Lindsay, C.A. (2021) *Teacher diversity and student success: why racial representation matters in the classroom*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Education Press.

Gottfried, M., Little, M. and Ansari, A. (2023) 'Student-teacher ethnoracial matching in the earliest grades: benefits for executive function skills?', *Early Education and Development*, pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2023.2172674>.

GOV.UK (2022) *Ethnicity facts and figures: list of ethnic groups*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups/> (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

Haque, Z. (2017) *Visible minorities, invisible teachers. BME teachers in the education system in England*. The Runnymede Trust. Available at: <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/static/uploaded/6576a736-87d3-4a21-837fd1a1ea4aa2c5.pdf> (Accessed: 12 September 2023).

Haque, Z. and Elliott, S. (2017a) *Visible and invisible barriers: the impact of racism on BME teachers*. Available at: <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-02/Barriers%20Report.pdf> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Hart, C.M.D. (2020) 'An honors teacher like me: effects of access to same-race teachers on Black students' advanced-track enrollment and performance', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 42(2), pp. 163–187. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373719898470>.

- IFF Research and IoE (2024) *Working lives of teachers and leaders: wave 3 - summary report*. DfE. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave_3_Summary_Report.pdf (Accessed: 22 May 2025).
- Jann, B. (2008) 'The Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition for linear regression models', *The Stata Journal: Promoting communications on statistics and Stata*, 8(4), pp. 453–479. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536867X0800800401>.
- Joseph-Salisbury, R. (2020) *Race and racism in English secondary schools*. Available at: https://assets.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61bcc0cc2a023368396c03d4_Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf (Accessed: 8 September 2023).
- Labour Party (2024) 'Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024'. Available at: <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 4 October 2024).
- Le, K. and Nguyen, M. (2019) *Racial/ethnic match and student-teacher relationships*. Available at: <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/105390/> (Accessed: 29 September 2023).
- Liu, J., Penner, E.K. and Gao, W. (2023) 'Troublemakers? The role of frequent teacher referrers in expanding racial disciplinary disproportionalities', *Educational Researcher* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231179649>.
- Maylor, U. (2009) "They do not relate to Black people like us": Black teachers as role models for Black pupils', *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(1), pp. 1–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930802382946>.
- Maylor, U. (2022) 'Policy and practice in increasing BME teachers' access to ITE and a leadership career in the teaching profession in England', in I. Menter (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Teacher Education Research*, pp. 1035–1060. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16193-3_48.
- McLean, D. and Worth, J. (2025) *Teacher labour market in England annual report 2025*. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/afsn0rmb/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annual_report_2025.pdf (Accessed: 15 May 2025).
- Miller, P. (2020) 'Anti-racist school leadership: making "race" count in leadership preparation and development', *Professional Development in Education*, 47(1), pp. 7–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1787207>.
- Oaxaca, R. (1973) 'Male-female wage differentials in urban labor markets', *International Economic Review*, 14(3), p. 693. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2525981>.
- Ozolins, K. et al. (2021) *Equality, diversity and inclusion in schools: staff experience in schools and multi-academy trusts*. Available at: <https://home.edurio.com/insights/edi-report> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Sanders, M. (2022) 'Blinding and postgraduate research admissions', 12 December. Available at: <https://taso.org.uk/news-blog/blinding-and-postgraduate-research-admissions/> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

Sharp, C. and Aston, K. (2024) *Ethnic diversity in the teaching workforce: evidence review*. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/rgmfolec/ethnic_diversity_in_the_teaching_workforce.pdf (Accessed: 5 February 2024).

Teach First (2023) *Ethnic diversity and the teaching workforce: research insights 2023*. Available at: https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/2774%20Mission%2044%20research%20report%20v4_0.pdf (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Tereshchenko, A., Bei, Z., Bradbury, A., Forde, E. and Mullings, G.. (2022) *Supporting the retention of minority ethnic teachers: a research and practice based guide for school leaders*. Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10143370/1/Supporting%20the%20Retention%20of%20Minority%20Ethnic%20Teachers%20FINAL%20100222%202ND.pdf> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Tereshchenko, A., Mills, M. and Bradbury, A. (2020) *Making progress? Employment and retention of BAME teachers in England*. Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10117331/1/IOE_Report_BAME_Teachers.pdf (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Wallace, D. (2018) 'Cultural capital as whiteness? Examining logics of ethno-racial representation and resistance', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(4), pp. 466–482. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1355228>.

Wallace, D. (2020) 'The diversity trap? Critical explorations of Black male teachers' negotiations of leadership and learning in London state schools', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(3), pp. 345–366. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1663977>.

Worth, J., McLean, D. and Sharp, C. (2022) *Racial equality in the teacher workforce: an analysis of representation and progression opportunities from initial teacher training to headship. Full report*. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4922/racial_equality_in_the_teacher_workforce_full_report.pdf (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Yun, M. (2005) 'A simple solution to the identification problem in detailed wage decompositions', *Economic Inquiry*, 43(4), pp. 766–772. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ei/cbi053>.

Zirkel, S. (2002) 'Is there a place for me? Role models and academic identity among white students and students of color', *Teachers College Record*, 104(2), pp. 357–376. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810210400206>.

7. Appendix A: Further methodological details

In section 2 we provided an overview of the methodology we used in this research. This section is intended to complement section 2 by providing further methodological detail on some aspects of the analysis, which may be relevant to other researchers in this area.

7.1 ITT analysis methodological details

This section provides further additional details on the methodology used in the DfE Apply analysis, including how we calculated rejection rates, the full set of findings from our analysis of rejection reasons data, how we defined our international degree status, EFL and FSM variables and how we specified our Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition models.

7.1.1. How we calculated rejection rates from the DfE Apply data

Rejection rates were a key focus of the quantitative analysis we undertook in the first phase of the research. Rejection was not the only possible outcome for an application. If an application was not accepted (applications were marked 'recruited' if the offer was accepted by the applicant) it could have been 'withdrawn', 'declined', 'accepted pending conditions', 'rejected after conditions not met', 'deferred' or had the 'offer withdrawn'.

We focussed on rejection rates primarily because of how the outcome data was structured. Withdrawal is a common outcome for applications – Table 4 shows that around a quarter of applications to DfE Apply end up being withdrawn. However, this is primarily because so many applicants submit more than one application to the system in the same year. When an applicant submits more than one application and one is accepted, the rest are marked 'withdrawn' even if they would have been accepted otherwise. This would have led us to estimate relatively low acceptance rates if that was our main outcome of interest.

Conversely, ITT providers must take an active decision to reject an application, and so rejection rates are a clearer indication of where applications failed to meet minimum eligibility criteria. Rejection was also the most common outcome for applications that were not accepted.

Table 4 Overall ITT application outcomes

Outcome	Proportion of applications
Recruited	24.3%
Rejected	38.7%
Applicant withdrawn	25.8%
Declined	9.1%
Accepted pending conditions	0.9%
Accepted but conditions not met	0.8%
Offer deferred	0.3%
Offer withdrawn by provider	0.1%

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

To account for different patterns in the number of applications submitted by applicants, we weighted the applications data by the inverse of the number of applications that the applicant had submitted that year. This meant that, while our analysis was all undertaken at the application level (i.e. using our sample of data on all applications, and their outcomes, made to the system), with the weight we were able to approximate ‘applicant-level’ rejection rates (i.e. report the number of applicants who were rejected). As we might have expected, inclusion of the weight slightly reduced our estimated rejection rates, as we show in Table 5. These were the rejection rates we reported on throughout the report.

Table 5 Unweighted and weighted rejection rates

Applicant ethnic background	Proportion of applications rejected (unweighted)	Proportion of applications rejected (weighted)
White	28.8%	25.9%
Asian	54.2%	50.6%
Black	77.0%	76.0%
Mixed	39.6%	36.3%
Other	58.9%	56.6%

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

7.1.2. Data on reasons for rejection

In section 3.3.1, we discussed how the data on the reasons recorded by providers for why an application was rejected had significant limitations. This was partly because the most common rejection reason was ‘unknown or uncategorised reason’ – meaning our analysis of each recorded rejection reason may not therefore have told the whole story. Applications were also not necessarily assessed against all potential reasons for rejection.

Despite these limitations, as we discussed in section 3.3.1, there were some indications that applications made by applicants from a black ethnic background were more likely to have been rejected for visa-related reasons. We show the full set of results on why applications were rejected (for applicants from each ethnic group) in Table 6.

Table 6 The reasons ITT providers selected for rejecting applications by applicant ethnic background

	Applicant ethnic background				
Reason for rejection	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other
Inadequate qualifications	19%	23%	23%	22%	25%
Insufficient teaching knowledge	20%	17%	10%	16%	15%
Course full	12%	10%	7%	11%	11%
Challenges obtaining a visa	1%	7%	20%	2%	5%
Communication and scheduling	10%	8%	7%	10%	6%
Personal statement	5%	7%	9%	5%	8%
Interview	9%	6%	4%	7%	6%
Feedback given offline	4%	4%	4%	6%	4%
Other reasons	10%	7%	7%	9%	8%
Uncategorised or unknown reason	29%	30%	30%	31%	32%

Note: ITT providers can select more than one reason for rejecting an application, so the proportions above do not necessarily sum to 100 per cent.

Source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply data (2022/23 – 2023/24).

7.1.3. How we defined our international degree status variables

As we outlined in section 3, international degree recognition is a key reason why applicants from Asian, black, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds tended to face higher rejection rates than applicants from a white ethnic background. However, defining our set of variables summarising an applicant's international degree recognition status involved some complex data cleaning, which we outline in more detail in this section.

The DfE Apply data consisted of several modules of data, which we merged together using candidate and application identifiers. Data on the qualifications the applicant held when they submitted their application was held separately from data on other characteristics of the application (outcome, provider information, etc.).

In the qualifications data, we observed the degree qualifications the applicant listed on their application alongside any other relevant qualifications they chose to list as well. Qualifications could be recorded in different categories: 'degree', 'GCSE' or 'other'. This corresponded to how the DfE Apply platform was constructed – applicants must submit at least one degree qualification (which would be categorised under 'degree') as part of their application. However they were free to submit additional qualifications if they wished. These qualifications could be classified under the 'degree' category but also under the 'other' category as well. The 'other' category therefore

consisted of a mix of different qualification types, some degree qualifications (e.g. where an applicant held multiple Bachelor's degrees or one or more Masters or PhD qualifications) alongside a mix of international and domestic vocational and certificate qualifications.

Details on qualifications that were listed as 'other' qualifications were recorded as free text, which meant in practice it was very difficult to reliably extract useful information about these qualifications, even if the qualification in question was a relevant undergraduate degree. We therefore focussed our analysis only on qualifications which were classified as a 'degree', excluding any qualifications in the 'other' qualification categories, even if it was a relevant degree qualification.

We also excluded data on GCSE qualifications. This was because it was not mandatory to provide GCSE qualifications data on the DfE Apply platform so there were a considerable number of applicants with missing GCSE data. GCSE qualifications were also missing for applicants who did not attend secondary school in the UK which, as showed in section 3.2, constituted a considerable proportion of applicants, especially for those from a black ethnic background.

For the degree data, we first counted the number of degrees that an applicant submitted as part of their application. We were unable to assess 'quality' of a degree because, while degree class was recorded for domestic degrees, any grades associated with international qualifications were recorded as free text.

We also counted the number of degrees the applicant submitted that were granted by universities outside of the UK. We did this using the institution country associated with the qualification. We considered any qualifications awarded by a university in 'GB' to be a domestic qualification while for any other country we considered the qualification to be international.

For international degrees, we were also able to observe whether the degree the applicant listed on their application had a UK equivalent. We did this based on whether an applicant listed a valid ENIC equivalence code with their international qualification. Where a qualification had any valid, listed ENIC code, we considered it to have an equivalent UK degree. Where an ENIC code was missing, we assumed the degree was assessed to not have a recognised UK equivalent.

We then counted up the number of international degrees and international degrees with a recognised UK equivalent that the applicant had submitted with their application. This was the basis of our international degree status variable. Where an applicant submitted one or more degrees and none of them were international, we recorded the applicant as having domestic degrees only. Where an applicant listed both one or more domestic and one or more international degrees, we recorded the applicant as having both domestic and international qualifications. Where they listed one or more degrees and all were international, we considered the applicant to have international qualifications only.

Additionally, among those with one or more international qualifications, we recorded whether at least one of them had a recognised UK equivalent. We combined these two variables into one overall degree recognition status variable which we then included in the Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition analysis. We showed the proportion of applicants who fell into each of these categories in section 3.4.

7.1.4. How we defined our EFL and FSM status variables

We also performed extensive data cleaning to derive our measure of EFL status and FSM eligibility. The English language qualifications of the candidate, like educational qualifications, were recorded in a separate module of the DfE Apply data which we merged to the main data on the basis of application identifiers.

The data recorded the status of any English language qualifications an applicant held. Applicants could either hold a TOEFL qualification, an IELTS qualification, 'not need a qualification' or have missing qualification data.

The data also recorded the 'nationality group' of the applicant (i.e. whether the applicant was a British/ Irish citizen, citizen of the European Economic Area (EEA) or a citizen of a non-EEA country). The DfE Apply platform assumed that applicants who were British or Irish citizens were native English speakers who, accordingly, mainly had missing EFL qualifications data. We assumed that the very small number of applicants who were British or Irish citizens but held a valid English language qualification were in fact native English speakers and recoded them as such.

Where the applicant was not a British or Irish citizen but the English language qualification data recorded that a qualification was 'not needed', we also assumed the applicant was a native English speaker. This was mainly the case for applicants who were citizens of other Anglophone countries. Where the applicant was not a British or Irish citizen but held a valid English language qualification, we recorded them as a 'non-native speaker holding a valid EFL qualification'. Where applicants were not a British or Irish citizen and did not hold a valid English language qualification, we recorded them as a 'non-native speaker without a valid EFL qualification'. The small number of applicants missing EFL and/ or nationality group data were set to missing.

Our FSM status indicator was based on data recorded in the main module of Apply data. The data recorded whether the applicant was or was not ever eligible for FSM while they were in school. The data also recorded whether the applicant 'preferred not to say' whether they were eligible, 'did not know' or 'did not go to school in the UK'. We combined the 'did not know' and 'prefer not to say' values into one 'unknown or prefer not to say' category but kept 'did not go to school in the UK' as separate (this was the main category selected by applicants who were not domiciled in the UK). We used this as our main variable in the analysis.

7.1.5. Specification of our Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition models

As we outlined in section 3.6, we ran an Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition (OBD) model to estimate what proportion of the gap in rejection rates was due to systematic differences in observed characteristics of applicants across ethnic groups. This is a technique that has been used extensively in academic studies of gender wage gaps and discrimination.

The OBD decomposed unconditional differences in rejection rates into the component which was driven by differences in observed characteristics (the 'explained' component) and the part of the gap that remained after accounting for the effect of all observed characteristics (the 'unexplained'

component).¹⁴ In the literature, the ‘unexplained’ component is usually attributed to a ‘discrimination’ effect, but it could also be reflective of differences in other key characteristics that are not observed in the data. We discussed the extent to which our estimates of the unexplained component may be reflective of discrimination in more detail in section 2 and section 3.6.

Since our main outcome of interest (rejection) was binary, we used the ‘logit’ extension of the OBD (Jann, 2008). Additionally, as all of our independent variables are also categorical, the model could potentially be influenced by the ‘identification’ problem, wherein estimates are not invariant to the choice of base category. We therefore followed guidance in the literature (Yun, 2005), to normalise the binary independent variables where applicable.

We assessed the statistical significance of the extent to which gaps were explained by observed characteristics at the five per cent level, using a z-test.

For our OBD using all applications (section 3.6.1), we included the following observed characteristics in the regression model: applicant age, gender, international degree status, EFL qualification status, subject, immigration status, domicile country, provider type, region and the specific provider they applied to. We estimated the model on the data at application level, but included the weight (discussed in section 7.1.1) so that the analysis approximated applicant-level results. Since the same applicant was included in the data multiple times, we also clustered standard errors at the applicant level.

For domicile countries, we included the specific country the applicant lived in as an explanatory variable in the model where we could. However, in some cases the number of applicants from a particular country were too small to include in the analysis. Within each broad continental region (i.e. North America, South/ Central America and the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania), we separated out up to five of the biggest countries (based on number of applicants) to include separately in the model. For instance, within the European region (outside of the UK), we included Ireland, Italy, Spain, France and Poland as separate domicile countries. All other European countries we grouped into an ‘other Europe’ group. We adopted a similar approach across the other regions, as detailed in Table 7.

Table 7 List of domicile countries included in the modelling

Region	Countries
UK	UK
Europe	Ireland, Italy, Spain, France, Poland, other European countries
North America, South/ Central America, Caribbean	Canada, USA, South/ Central America and the Caribbean

¹⁴ This is known as the two-way decomposition. A three-way decomposition is also possible which further splits out the ‘explained’ component further. However, the broader two-way split of the gap into explained and unexplained components was what was most relevant for this research.

Africa	Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa, other African countries
Asia	India, Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, other Asian countries
Middle East	All Middle Eastern countries
Oceania	All countries in Oceania

For some ethnic groups, there were specific countries that had very few numbers of applicants (e.g. there were very few applicants from a white ethnic background who were domiciled in Nigeria). Where there were too few applicants from a particular ethnic group within the same country (as in, where the rejection rate for that group was exactly one or zero, leading to collinearity issues with the main outcome), we dropped the few applicants in that ethnic group who lived in that country. This approach dropped less than one per cent of our overall sample of applications. Where there were no applicants from one ethnic group that lived in a particular country, this domicile variable was dropped from the model.¹⁵

We adopted a similar approach for providers. We sought to include data on the individual provider that applicants applied to, in order to control for the specific providers applicants from different ethnic groups might tend to apply to. However, there were some small providers where, for applicants within a particular ethnic group applying to that provider, the rejection rate was either exactly one or zero, leading to collinearity issues with our main outcome.

We therefore identified which providers were too small to include separately in the analysis and combined them together into a ‘all small providers’ category which did have sufficient variation in rejection rates to include in the model.

For the second specification of the OBD focussing on UK-domiciled applicants only, we ran a similar specification. This model included the same variables as the overall specification, except that it excluded EFL status and domicile (there was little variation in English language skills among UK-domiciled applicants). It also included degree type (i.e. whether the applicant held only bachelor’s degree(s) or higher-level degrees alongside a bachelor’s degree) and FSM status. We implemented a similar approach as outlined above with providers to ensure that there was sufficient variation in rejection rates across providers to estimate the model. All other specification details were the same as the overall OBD model.

¹⁵ The OBD runs three logit models to generate its set of results – two that include only applicants from each ethnic group and a final model pooled across both ethnic groups. The affected domicile country would be dropped only from the iteration specific to the ethnic group in which no applicants lived in that country, but it would then be re-included (with all observations set to zero for the affected group) in the final pooled model iteration. For instance, for the white-black OBD model, the domicile variable for Nigeria might be omitted from the first logit model run only on applicants from a white ethnic background. However, it would be included for the logit model run on applicants from a black ethnic background and the final pooled specification.

8. Appendix B: Estimating the implications of equalising progression rates for additional teacher numbers

The Government has pledged to ‘recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects’ over the course of the current parliament. Achieving this target in the context of on-going teacher supply challenges in England will require action that increases recruitment of new teachers and/or improves the retention of current teachers.

There are considerable ethnic disparities within the teacher career pipeline that contribute to a teacher workforce that does not represent the ethnic diversity of the population or the pupil the education system serves, with teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds particularly under-represented in senior leadership. Teachers from ethnic backgrounds other than white are generally less likely to progress from one stage of the teacher career pipeline to the next, compared to their white counterparts. Equalising these disparities in progression would support the Government’s goal of increasing the number of teachers in the education system.

Our analysis highlights how much difference equalising acceptance rates and retention rates could make to improving both recruitment and retention, and thereby to achieving the Government’s teacher workforce goal:

- **If UK-domiciled applicants to postgraduate teacher training from ethnic minority backgrounds were accepted on to training courses at the same rate as their white counterparts, the system would train around 2,000 more teachers per year.**
- **Retaining ethnic minority teachers in the state-funded sector at the same rate as their white counterparts would mean the system retaining an additional 1,000 teachers per year.**

8.1 Further information

8.1.1. Recruitment to postgraduate initial teacher training

If UK-domiciled applicants to postgraduate teacher training from ethnic minority backgrounds were accepted on to training courses at the same rate as their white counterparts, the system would train around 2,000 more teachers per year.

Data source: NFER analysis of DfE Apply for Teacher Training data.

Note: Applicants categorised with ethnicity category ‘Missing’ or ‘Prefer not to say’ were excluded from the analysis.

4,780 people from major ethnic groups other than white, and who were based in the UK, made a successful application to postgraduate teacher training in 2022/23 and accepted the place. This represented an acceptance rate of 40.3 per cent, compared to the acceptance rate among UK-domiciled applicants from a white ethnic background of 62.3 per cent. If applicants from major ethnic groups other than white had an acceptance rate of 62.3 per cent, then the number of applicants recruited would have equated to an estimated 7,301. This would represent 2,521 more

trainees being recruited that year. The equivalent gap in 2021/22 was 1,730 applicants, suggesting that the disparity is persistent but somewhat variable from year to year. The average across the two years is 2,125 per year.

However, it is important to recognise that other underlying differences in characteristics between ethnic groups could also contribute to differences in outcomes. For example, applicants from a white ethnic background are less likely to apply to providers in London than other applicants, where acceptance rates tend to be lower among applicants of all ethnic backgrounds. See section 3 of this report for more context on these factors. Given limitations with the currently available data, it is not possible to ascertain the proportion of applicants (from any ethnic background) that were below the quality standards set by ITT providers (e.g. without qualifications that form a key requirement for enter teacher training). Caution should therefore be exercised in interpreting these ethnic disparities.

8.1.2. Retention in state-sector teaching

Retaining ethnic minority teachers in the state-funded sector at the same rate as their white counterparts would mean the system retaining an additional 1,000 teachers per year.

Data source: DfE (2024) School Workforce in England. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/77b2de80-641e-4996-7da0-08dd7ece5be0>

Note: Teachers categorised with ethnicity category 'Refused' or 'Information not yet obtained' were excluded from the analysis.

4,981 teachers from major ethnic groups other than white left teaching in the state-funded sector in 2022/23, according to the DfE's School Workforce Census. This represented a leaver rate of 11.5 per cent, compared to the leaver rate among teachers from a white ethnic background of 9 per cent. If teachers from major ethnic groups other than white had a leaver rate of 9 per cent, then the number of teachers leaving would have equated to an estimated 3,886. This would represent 1,095 fewer teachers leaving that year. These gaps have been similar in other years, suggesting the disparity is persistent.

However, it is important to recognise that other underlying differences in characteristics between ethnic groups also contribute to differences in outcomes. For example, teachers from a white ethnic background are more likely to be teaching outside of London than other teachers, where leaving rates tend to be lower among teachers of all ethnic backgrounds. See section 5 of this report and NFER's previous research on racial equality in the teacher workforce for more context on these factors. Caution should therefore be exercised in interpreting these ethnic disparities.

9. Appendix C: Focus Group Topic Guides

ITT Focus Group Topic Guide

Research on ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training and progression to senior leadership

Focus group Structure (Duration 90 minutes)

1. Introduction (10 min)



2. Candidate progression (40 min)

3. Changes in practice (30 min)



4. Closing (5 min)

SECTION I: Introduction (10 min)

Interviewer, please read the following out loud to the focus group:

My name is and I am part of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) research team. This research aims to understand the key barriers for people from ethnic minority backgrounds at two key progression points in the teacher workforce: applying to teacher training, and progressing to senior leadership. We are talking to you today to understand your experience of admissions and barriers and enablers to achieving racial equality in entry to ITT. This complements our quantitative analysis of data from DfE Apply data. We will cover:

- Your experience of the admissions process
- Any barriers or challenges for candidates applying for teacher training
- Enablers and barriers to recruiting an ethnically diverse teacher training cohort

We may report direct quotes from this discussion, but your individual name or the name of ITT provider will not be mentioned in the study's reports.

If at any time in the future you want to withdraw your responses, you can contact us to request this in advance of the final report writing (March 2025).

Terminology: Where we talk about our data analysis, we will use the Government's preferred style for writing about ethnicity. This is because it is aligned with the data

categories that were used to collect the quantitative data NFER is using and is underpinned by user research and testing

- Major ethnic groups: white, Asian, black, mixed, other
- Minor ethnic groups: 19 sub-categories

The session will take no more than **90 minutes**. Do you have any questions?

We would like to record this meeting to ensure an accurate account of our discussion. This recording will be stored securely, only accessible to the research team, and deleted at the end of the study (March 2025).

..... to add to chat: I agree to this meeting being recorded – and screenshot ‘like’ names.

Setting tone:

- Keen to hear from everyone and so we will invite contributions.
- Please use the hand-raising function.
- We’re expecting you will bring a variety of experiences and perspectives.
- We’ll keep the spoken conversation as the key discussion – [facilitator] will monitor the chat so please do message (or speak up) if you need any technical or other support.

1. Can you please tell us your name and how you’re involved in ITT admissions?

SECTION II: Candidate progression (40 min)

2. What are the most common reasons for an ITT application being unsuccessful?

- *At each stage of the application process?*

3. For ITT in England as a whole, we see higher application rates from black, Asian, mixed and other ethnic groups are more likely to apply for ITT compared with candidates from white groups, but have a lower rate of admission.

- *If you gather feedback from candidates (e.g. via a survey), are there any insights which help you to understand why candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds are less successful in the process?*

4. What’s been your experience of applications from international candidates?

- *For courses starting in autumn 2023, there was an increase of international-domiciled applicants, from 10% to 20% of applicants. What was your experience of this?*

- *Data if needed: about one quarter of applications from British citizens are rejected, this rises to about three-quarters for candidates who are not British citizens. From your experience, what do you think are the reasons for this?*
- 5. Comparing only applicants who live in the UK, we still see disparities in rejection rates for candidates from different ethnic groups. From your experience, what other factors – not included in the dataset – do you think contribute to these disparities?**
- *From our data analysis, we can see that some ethnic disparities in rejection rate are associated with characteristics which are included dataset. [show and talk through graphs – slides 16-17 – put on same axis so it's one slide]. Looking at these characteristics, what fits with your experience, and what surprises you?*

SECTION III: Enabling practice (30 min)

- 6. Have you tried anything specific to support recruitment of an ethnically diverse cohort? What have you learned?**
- 7. Are there any changes or support you would recommend to DfE, to support appropriate decision-making throughout the ITT application process?**
- *What other external factors constrain admissions processes?*

SECTION IV: Closing questions (10 min)

- 8. Do you have anything you'd like to add we have not spoken about or have any questions for us?**

Note to facilitator: *Thank the participants for their time and thoughtful answers. Note that the data analysis shared is pre-publication, so please keep that confidential.*

9.1 Senior Leadership Focus Group Topic Guide

Research on ethnic disparities in entry to teacher training and progression to senior leadership

Focus group Structure (Duration 90 minutes)

1. Introduction (10 min)



2. Staff progression (30 min)

3. Enabling retention (40 min)



4. Closing (5 min)

SECTION I: Introduction (10 min)

Interviewer, please read the following out loud to the focus group:

My name is and I am part of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) research team. This research aims to understand the key barriers for people from ethnic minority backgrounds at three key progression points in the teacher workforce: applying to teacher training, retention and progressing to senior leadership. We are talking to you today to understand your experience of managing and developing teachers, exploring enablers, barriers to teachers' career progression. This complements our quantitative analysis of data from DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey.

We will cover:

- Your experience of developing and managing staff
- Enablers and barriers to long term retention of an ethnically diverse school leadership team
- Any barriers or challenges for staff career progression

We may report direct quotes from this discussion, but your individual name or the name of your school will not be mentioned in the study's reports.

If at any time in the future you want to withdraw your responses, you can contact us to request this in advance of the final report writing (March 2025).

Terminology: Where we talk about our data analysis, we will use the Government's preferred style for writing about ethnicity. This is because it is aligned with the data categories that were used to collect the quantitative data NFER is using and is underpinned by user research and testing

- Major ethnic groups: white, Asian, black, mixed, other
- Minor ethnic groups: 19 sub-categories

The session will take no more than **90 minutes**. Do you have any questions?

We would like to record this meeting to ensure an accurate account of our discussion. This recording will be stored securely, only accessible to the research team, and deleted at the end of the study (April 2025).

Co-facilitator to add to chat: I agree to this meeting being recorded – and screenshot 'like' names.

Setting tone:

- Please keep the content of this confidential.
- Keep camera on. If interrupted please put a note in the chat.
- Keen to hear from everyone and so we will invite contributions.
- Please use the hand-raising function.
- We're expecting you will bring a variety of experiences and perspectives.
- We'll keep the spoken conversation as the key discussion – _____ (Facilitator) will monitor the chat so please do message (or speak up) if you need any technical or other support.

9. Can you please tell us your name and how you're involved in recruitment, retention, management of teachers in your school?

SECTION II: Career progression (30 min)

10. In your school, what actions would you expect to see from [how would you gauge whether] a teacher who is interested in middle leadership?

- *In what ways does this look different for teachers interested in senior leadership?*
- *In what ways does this look different for teachers from ethnic minority background?*

11. [Show slide] Data from DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (WLTL) survey suggests that Asian and Black teachers demonstrate higher aspiration for promotion within the school compared to their white counterparts. However, they remain underrepresented in middle leadership. What would be your reflection on these findings?

- *To what extent do your school policies and leadership structures recognize and support these aspirations?*
- *In what ways do you monitor and track these aspirations?*

SECTION III: Enabling retention (40 min)

12. Have you tried any initiatives to support retention and progression of teachers from ethnic minority background? What have you learned?

- *Are there particular experiences that make them feel valued and supported, or conversely, make them consider leaving?*

13. [Show slide] Our data analysis showed that bullying, harassment, and feeling undervalued are significant factors that influence intentions to leave. Black teachers report the highest rates, with 23% indicating they have experienced bullying & harassment — almost double the rate of White teachers. What would be your reflections on this data?

- *From your perspective, are there particular barriers that make it difficult to address these issues effectively?*

14. From your experience, what usually works for schools in fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture for all ethnic groups, and what else is needed?

15. Are there any changes or support you would recommend to the Department for Education, to support equitable progression in teaching?

SECTION IV: Closing questions and voucher (10 min)

16. Do you have anything you'd like to add we have not spoken about or have any questions for us?

Our final question is for you to choose your £75 thank you voucher – either a National Book Token or an Amazon voucher. These will be with you in the next 8 weeks – book tokens are usually much quicker. Please could you write in the chat which you would prefer.

Note to facilitator: *Thank the participants for their time and thoughtful answers. Note that the data analysis shared is pre-publication, so please*

Evidence for excellence in education

Public

© National Foundation for Educational Research 2025

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without prior written permission of NFER.

The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ
T: +44 (0)1753 574123 • F: +44 (0)1753 691632 • enquiries@nfer.ac.uk

www.nfer.ac.uk

NFER ref. MRET

ISBN. 978-1-916567-31-3

