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THE COST OF BLACK EXCELLENCE™ · SECTOR
REPORT SERIES

Education

What the Excellence Tax™ Costs Black Professionals in Education

177 participants · Schools, higher education, further education, community education

4 countries · United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia

Phase One, 2025 · Natasha Williams, Founder · The Cost of Black Excellence™ Research Institute

Education is built on the promise of equal opportunity. It is a sector that teaches fairness, models inclusion, and is expected to embody the values it claims to instil. For Black professionals working within it, that gap between stated values and lived experience is one of the most acute forms of the Excellence Tax™ documented in this study.

This report documents what 177 Black education professionals — teachers, lecturers, academics, school leaders, education support workers — told us about the real cost of showing up to work in spaces that were not designed for their full presence.

What Is the Excellence Tax™?

The Excellence Tax™ is the mandatory, uncompensated burden of additional emotional labour, identity suppression, and personal cost that Black professionals pay simply to participate in predominantly white workplaces.

Organisations demand this labour and rarely acknowledge it, compensate for it, or take steps to reduce it. The word “tax” reflects reality precisely: payment is required simply for occupying professional space.

THE EDUCATION LENS

Education operates with a particular double burden. Black educators are expected to model inclusion, support students of all backgrounds, and uphold institutional values of equity while simultaneously navigating the Excellence Tax™ themselves.

Four Excellence Taxes manifest with specific intensity in education settings:

TAX	HOW IT SHOWS UP IN EDUCATION
Representational Burden	Black educators are expected to represent all Black students, lead diversity conversations, and carry EDI work. 91.5% work harder than peers the highest rate of any sector.
Unresourced Sponsorship	Black teachers and lecturers provide pastoral support, mentorship, and navigation guidance to Black students that institutions fail to provide — without timetable allocation or compensation.
Voice Suppression	Black educators suppress responses to racism in staff meetings, student interactions, and leadership conversations. The sector’s progressive values become a pressure to stay silent.
Proof Burden	Credentials, expertise, and authority are questioned by colleagues, students, and leadership. Present whether teaching in a secondary school or lecturing at a Russell Group university.

The Numbers

177 Black education professionals across the UK, US, Canada and Australia. These figures are consistent across schools, further education, higher education, and community education settings.

91.5%

work harder than peers to be seen as competent — the highest “always + often” rate of any sector in this study

85.3%

suppress aspects of their identity to succeed professionally

90.4%

have experienced microaggressions, bias or discrimination at work (Frequently + Occasionally)

69.5%

report severe or significant health impacts from their work environment

27.1%

have already left an education role specifically to protect their wellbeing — 4 points above the overall average

91.0%

have considered leaving a role to protect their mental or emotional wellbeing

46.9%

experience microaggressions daily or weekly, a frequency that makes them ambient rather than exceptional

40.7%

do not feel psychologically safe expressing opinions or advocating for themselves at work

48.0%

have no access to culturally sensitive support — Black therapist, safe workspace, or culturally aware leadership

Education claims progressive values. The data shows those values have not protected Black professionals from the full weight of the Excellence Tax™.

Education vs the Overall Study

How Black education professionals compare to the overall research average of 1,037 participants across all sectors.

METRIC	EDUCATION	OVERALL	DIFFERENCE
Work harder (always + often)	91.5%	86.4%	+5.1 pts ABOVE average
Identity suppression	85.3%	86.8%	Consistent with average
Microaggressions (freq + occ)	90.4%	89.3%	Consistent with average
Severe / significant health impact	69.5%	63.2%	+6.3 pts ABOVE average
Already left a role	27.1%	23.1%	+4.0 pts ABOVE average
No culturally sensitive support	48.0%	48.5%	Consistent with average

THE SENIORITY FINDING

Senior/Manager level carries the highest “always” rate

In education, Senior/Manager level department heads, programme leaders, middle and senior leadership show the highest “always work harder” rate at 63.2%. Health impacts peak at the mid-level (79.2%), suggesting the burden is greatest at the point of greatest career investment.

CAREER LEVEL	WORK HARDER “ALWAYS”	HEALTH SEV + SIG
Entry level (n=11)	54.5%	63.6%
Mid-level (n=53)	60.4%	79.2%
Senior / Manager (n=57)	63.2%	63.2%
Director / Executive (n=32)	53.1%	62.5%
Self-employed (n=14)	50.0%	64.3%

Mid-level highlighted for health impact; Senior/Manager highlighted for performance burden.

HEALTH IMPACT

What the Body Carries

69.5% of Black education professionals report severe or significant health impacts directly attributed to their work environment — 6.3 points above the overall average, the second-highest health impact rate of any sector. The profession that nurtures others is producing measurable harm in its Black workforce.

SEVERITY	%	WHAT THIS MEANS
Severely impacted	22.0%	Health deterioration requiring medical attention
Significantly impacted	47.5%	Substantial effects on daily functioning and capacity
Somewhat impacted	22.6%	Noticeable effects on wellbeing
Minimally / not impacted	7.9%	

SYMPTOMS EXPERIENCED IN LAST 12 MONTHS

SYMPTOM	% OF EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS
Sleep disturbances / insomnia	72.3%
Persistent fatigue or exhaustion	70.1%
Burnout or emotional collapse	57.1%
Muscle pain or tightness	52.5%
Tension headaches or migraines	48.0%
Anxiety or panic attacks	46.3%
Depression or emotional numbness	43.5%
Digestive issues	35.6%

THE GENDER DIFFERENTIAL

GROUP	HEALTH SEV+SIG	SUPPRESS IDENTITY	WORK HARDER ALWAYS
Women (n=152, 85.9%)	74.3%	87.5%	61.8%
Men (n=25, 14.1%)	40.0%	72.0%	44.0%

The 34-point health gap between Black women and Black men in education is the largest gender differential of any sector in this study.

"I, like probably most of us, have learned how to disassociate from my stress and numb my feelings in order to survive. This tax impacts emotional and physical health. The constant need to simultaneously monitor myself and my environment for danger is exhausting. Thriving is not on the menu."

Mid-level · 65+ · United States · Education

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Voices from the Research

177 Black education professionals documented what the Excellence Tax™ costs them. These are not anecdotes. They are evidence.

THE PERFORMANCE BURDEN

“For me, the Excellence Tax™ shows up as constant over-performance to reach baseline credibility. I manage perception as much as delivery. I translate myself in real time. I soften edges. I calibrate tone. I anticipate misreadings before they land.”

Director/Executive · 45–54 · United Kingdom

“Having to work twice as hard professionally than my white counterparts. Overlooked for a promotion three times. Inequity in the processes and a sense of favourability for others. Taken to mediation twice and both times were unfounded.”

Senior/Manager · 35–44 · United Kingdom

IDENTITY & AUTHENTICITY

“In my 40s I didn’t know who I really was. Everyday I questioned if this is what I wanted. I became a contractor to have some independence and agency. The various suppressions of expressions and mimicking of whiteness had eroded me.”

Senior/Manager · 55–64 · United Kingdom

“It’s the identity suppression part for me. In the past it meant that I felt like I had to be someone else to succeed. I hid motherhood, the way I spoke, my creativity — to fit into their version of excellence. The truth was all of those things made me excellent in the first place.”

Self-employed · 35–44 · United Kingdom

THE WEIGHT OF REPRESENTATION

“My role is centred on EDI and I find it difficult to detach my role from my identity. Responding to incidents of racism takes its toll and impacts me significantly, and I then can’t switch off when I get home.”

Senior/Manager · 25–34 · United Kingdom

WHAT YOU WISH PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD

“I wish more people understood that success does not reduce the load. It increases it. Visibility amplifies scrutiny. Progress raises the bar without

widening the margin for error. Being competent is not enough. You must be unimpeachable.”

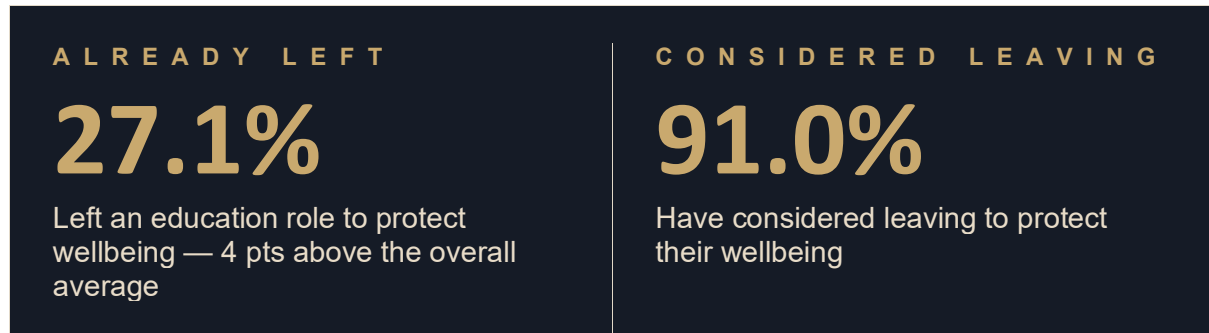
Director/Executive · 45–54 · United Kingdom

“That it is lonely and isolating to be successful in organisations where you are a minority. I wish more people understood the nature and impact of microaggressions we are facing daily at work. I wish there was better understanding of how to be allies.”

Senior/Manager · 55–64 · United Kingdom

What Your Exit Interviews Miss

27.1% of Black education professionals have already left a role specifically to protect their wellbeing, 4 percentage points above the overall study average. Standard exit interviews do not capture this. When someone leaves to protect their health, they rarely say so directly.



LEAVING CONSIDERATION DETAIL

RESPONSE	% OF EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS
A few times	29.4%
Already left	27.1%
Frequently	20.3%
Once	9.6%
Never	6.2%
Yes (considered)	4.5%
No	2.8%

“Either suck it up or leave is my experience. You can’t win. It all comes at a huge cost to you, whilst those perpetrating racism get promoted and protected. I have currently got myself signed off to prevent further burnout. I won’t let them break me, I will use the time off to consider and plan my next steps and recover.”

Senior/Manager · 45–54 · United Kingdom · Education

What This Costs Education Organisations

Schools, academies, multi-academy trusts, universities, and colleges absorb the financial cost of the Excellence Tax™ every year without measuring it, naming it, or addressing the conditions that produce it.

<h2>£61,140</h2> <p>estimated Excellence Tax™ cost per Black education professional, per year</p>	<h2>£6.1M</h2> <p>annual cost for every 100 Black education professionals employed</p>
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COST COMPONENT	WHAT DRIVES IT IN EDUCATION	ANNUAL COST (100 STAFF)
Excess attrition (27.1% vs 13.3% avg)	Black teachers and lecturers leaving after years of qualification and professional development	£2,055,375+
Presenteeism (69.5% health impact)	Educators working while managing burnout, insomnia and anxiety — affecting teaching quality and student outcomes	£913,000+
Unresourced pastoral & EDI labour	Black educators providing student support and EDI work outside formal roles without timetable or pay	£250,000
Voice suppression loss	Curriculum insights and pedagogical knowledge silenced by the 85.3% suppressing identity professionally	£750,000
Leadership pipeline destruction	Black representation falling sharply between Senior/Manager and Director level in a sector claiming to value diverse leadership	£500,000

Schools and universities that include “diverse and inclusive” in their vision statements, while these costs accumulate, are not practising what they teach.

“Working six and a half days a week when my colleagues are doing five and a half when it’s really busy. Not always because I’m there — more often because I’m too tired afterwards to be a fully present friend, sister, daughter, auntie. I’m bringing the work home not in my bag but in my body.”

Mid-level · 35–44 · United Kingdom · Education

Three Requirements for Education Organisations

The education sector publishes more equity and inclusion frameworks than almost any other. It has staff networks, unconscious bias training, and diversity action plans. None of this has moved the numbers. Three structural requirements follow directly from the evidence.

01

Measure what stays invisible — introduce Excellence Tax™ assessment

Standard staff surveys in education ask about workload, wellbeing, and job satisfaction. They do not ask whether Black staff suppress their identity to succeed, whether they feel psychologically safe naming discrimination, or how often they consider leaving to protect their health. Schools, multi-academy trusts, and universities should commission independent Excellence Tax™ assessment — with findings published to governors and senior leadership.

02

Compensate and protect the pastoral and EDI labour Black educators perform

Black teachers and lecturers carry student-facing pastoral and EDI work that institutions have not resourced. This includes mentoring Black students who cannot access culturally responsive support, leading diversity conversations in staff meetings, and absorbing the emotional labour of representing an entire community to white colleagues. This labour should be timetabled, compensated, and protected — not treated as a professional calling that requires no formal recognition.

03

Connect leadership accountability to Excellence Tax™ outcomes, not diversity optics

The 27.1% exit rate in education is not visible in most schools' or universities' performance data. Headteachers, principals, vice-chancellors, and boards should be required to review Black staff retention, Excellence Tax™ burden levels, and exit reasons alongside financial and student outcome data. Where

senior leaders' teams show persistent patterns of Black educator departure and health deterioration, their performance reviews should reflect it.

"I wish people would see us as human beings. There tends to be a sense that we can handle more stress than others because of perceived higher levels of resilience. This also means when the alarm bells are being sounded they are too often ignored until it's too late. Overloading Black professionals has become normalised."

Self-employed · 45–54 · United Kingdom · Education

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Natasha Williams

Natasha spent thirteen years as a Managing Director in the Building Surveyor sector, where Black professionals remain severely underrepresented. She subsequently retrained as a trauma-informed coach, holds a Level 7 postgraduate Diploma in Business and Organisational Psychology, and founded The Cost of Black Excellence™ Research Institute to create the evidence base that organisations have consistently refused to collect themselves.

She delivers keynote presentations, executive briefings, and leadership sessions that translate this research into what organisations need to understand and act on. Phase Two of the research is underway, targeting 2,000 voices.

THREE WAYS TO TAKE THIS FURTHER

01

Book a Briefing

A 30-minute conversation to explore what the research means for your school, trust, or institution and whether a keynote, executive briefing, or leadership session makes sense.

calendly.com/blackexcellenceresearch/meetings-with-natasha

02

Request the Full Report

The complete research report — 1,037 Voices — includes the full framework, all fifteen taxes, demographic analysis, all sector breakdowns, and organisational recommendations.

research@costofblackexcellence.com

03

Share With Leadership

If this report raises questions your headteacher, principal, vice-chancellor, or board of governors need to be asking, please pass it on. The research exists for those with the power to act on it.

costofblackexcellence.com

The Excellence Tax™ operates in the gap between what education organisations proclaim and what Black professionals experience.

This research closes that gap.

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