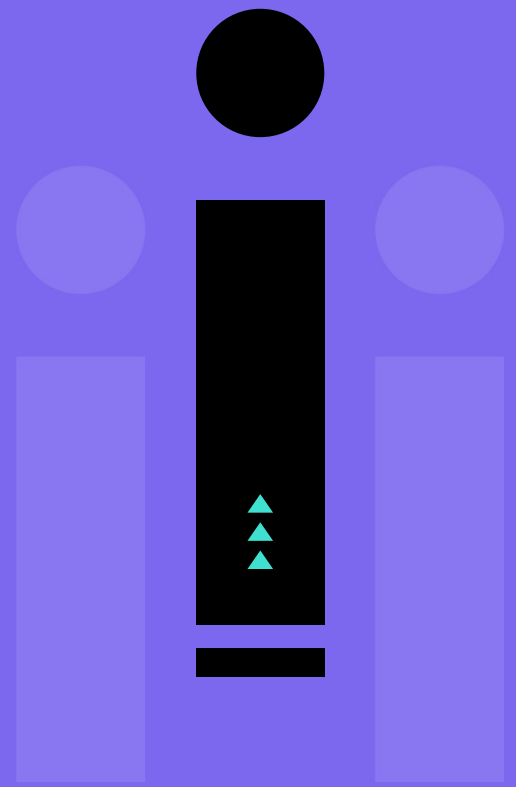


IMPERIAL / VISiBLE



The VISiBLE Report: Reserve Your Seat at the Table

August 2026

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“

Ti Koro Nko Agyina (an Akan proverb)

“Two heads are better than one”

”

The **VISiBLE** programme is grounded in the belief that meaningful change happens through collective wisdom, shared responsibility and courageous conversation.

“Reserve your seat at the table”, when viewed through the lens of African culture, the table transforms from a cold boardroom fixture to a warm communal ecosystem of a shared life. The table serves as a space where history, values and life lessons are passed down.

Across academia women, but Black women in particular, continue to be underrepresented in positions of influence and leadership. Yet behind every position occupied is a story of talent, ambition, resilience and outstanding contribution.

This report invites readers to move beyond the numbers and engage with the experiences, insights and leadership of Black women who are shaping research, education and society.

The question is not only:

How many?

It is also:

Why so few?

What gets in the way?

What must change?



VISiBLE

Valuing Inclusion, Supporting Black Leadership & Excellence

Context and Rationale

This report emerged from a simple but uncomfortable question:

Where are my Black professors?

For decades, universities have collected demographic data, produced reports and published commitments to equity.

The numbers are important.

They tell us who is present.

They tell us who is absent.

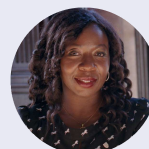
But numbers alone cannot explain why.

Recent literature reviews and research, alongside our own work in race equity, organisational change and leadership development, have increasingly demonstrated that representation is only part of the story.

While diverse representation remains an important indicator of progress, evidence suggests that it is insufficient on its own to address persistent inequities or achieve meaningful and sustainable change. Increasingly, research points to the need for organisations to move beyond numerical diversity and focus on the systems, structures, cultures and leadership practices that shape individuals' experiences, opportunities and outcomes.



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Progression and success therefore requires systemic organisational change, inclusive leadership, and intentional investment in environments where individuals not only gain access, but are empowered to flourish, contribute and lead.

We must understand:

- **who progresses;**
- **who flourishes;**
- **who leads;**
- **who feels they belong;**
- **who leaves.**

The **VISIBLE** programme (Valuing Inclusion, Supporting Black Leadership & Excellence) was created to delve deeper than the statistical data, to gain greater understanding by listening to the lessons learnt from the lived experience of underrepresentation.

This process requires us to understand how opportunity is created, how exclusion operates and how organisations can become better stewards of talent.

Most importantly, it requires us to recognise that Black women are not simply subjects of research or recipients of policy.

They are leaders, innovators, scholars, educators and change-makers.

This report is an invitation to move beyond counting and towards action.

Executive Summary

Despite progress in recent decades, Black women remain significantly underrepresented within senior academic leadership in the UK, particularly within Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) disciplines.

While representation data help us understand who is present within academia, they cannot fully explain why progression remains uneven or why talented individuals experience different career outcomes.

The **VISiBLE** programme (Valuing Inclusion, Supporting Black Leadership & Excellence) was established to move beyond the distraction of counting numbers, towards developing solutions.

This is a call to action.

Drawing on qualitative research with a subset of Black women researchers and academics, this report explores the organisational, cultural and structural factors that shape academic experiences, progression and leadership.

At the centre of the findings is the **VISiBLE Paradox**: the experience of being simultaneously hyper-visible because of one's identity, yet insufficiently recognised in relation to expertise, influence, opportunity and progression.

The study findings informed the development of the **VISiBLE Framework**, which highlights the importance of organisational climate, institutional responsiveness and stewardship in creating pathways to scholarly flourishing. The framework shifts attention from individual resilience to the organisational conditions that support belonging, recognition, leadership development and progression.

The findings suggest that meaningful and sustainable change requires more than increasing representation alone. It requires institutions to align values with practice, invest in talent, and create environments in which individuals flourish, contribute and lead.

Ultimately, the significance of this work extends beyond academia. Academic leadership influences the knowledge that is produced, the questions that are prioritised and the communities that benefit from research and innovation. Creating more inclusive pathways to leadership therefore has the potential to strengthen research excellence, enrich learning environments, advance equitable practices in health and other societal areas, and contribute to a more innovative and globally relevant future for higher education.

The goal is not simply to change the numbers, but to create the conditions in which talent, knowledge and leadership can flourish for the benefit of all.

Introduction



What is your number?

What is your number?

Introduction

There are some inequalities so persistent that they can be counted person by person. For Black women in UK academia, underrepresentation in senior leadership remains one such challenge.

Professor Nicola Rollocks' **Staying Power** report on the 20 out of 25 Black women professors in the UK in 2018, led to the establishment of WHEN Equality and their 100 Black Women Professors NOW initiative.

Similarly, the EQuity Lab at Imperial College London was inspired, by the Staying Power report, to research gender and racial inequalities in research careers. The VISiBLE programme continues the work of the EQuity Lab, by moving beyond documenting the counting of underrepresentation and towards understanding the organisational, cultural and structural conditions that continue to produce them.

From Number 83 to VISiBLE

Professor Stacy Johnson MBE's inaugural lecture *"Becoming Number Eighty-Three"* captured an important reality.



When numbers remain small enough to count individually, representation ceases to be an abstract statistical concern and becomes evidence of structural inequality.

Why Are We Still Counting?

For many Black women academics in the UK, "their number" is not a metaphor.

It is a stark reality.

Because the number of Black women professors remains limited, many can identify the numerical position at which they became a professor.

When representation is this constrained, people are no longer experienced simply as individuals.

They become:

- Firsts.
- Onlys.
- Exceptions.
- Statistics with names.

VISiBLE aims to address this challenge.

Not simply:

What number are you?

But:

What organisational cultures, systems and structures underlie these persistently low numbers?



The Current Landscape

Higher education data continue to highlight the persistent underrepresentation of Black academics at the most senior levels of UK academia. HESA figures for the 2024/25 academic year report approximately 25,670 professors working across UK higher education institutions. Of these, around 250 identify as Black heritage and approximately 70 are Black women. More recent analysis by WHEN Equality suggests that the number of Black women professors in the UK has now surpassed 100 in 2026¹, representing progress but remaining a small proportion of the professoriate overall.

The picture becomes even more striking within STEM disciplines. Earlier HESA analyses identified approximately ten Black women professors working in science subjects across the UK², illustrating how underrepresentation becomes increasingly pronounced at the intersection of race, gender and scientific leadership.

These figures help us understand who is present within academic leadership. However, numbers alone cannot explain why particular groups remain underrepresented or why career outcomes differ across academic pathways. The figures prompt a deeper set of questions:

**25,670 professors
working across UK
higher education
institutions**

**250 identify as Black
heritage**

70 are Black women

These figures help us understand who is present within academic leadership. However, numbers alone cannot explain why particular groups remain underrepresented or why career outcomes differ across academic pathways. The figures prompt a deeper set of questions:

- What enables progression, leadership and scholarly flourishing?
- What barriers continue to shape career trajectories?
- Who receives sponsorship, advocacy and developmental opportunities?
- Who experiences a sense of belonging and sees a future within academia?
- Why do some talented individuals remain and flourish, while others choose to leave?

Understanding these patterns requires us to move beyond representation alone and examine the organisational, cultural and structural conditions that shape academic careers. The challenge is not simply identifying who is present, but understanding the systems, experiences and opportunities that influence progression throughout the academic pipeline.

¹ whenequality.org/100 & lnkd.in/p/eyu_geEH

² Neate R: Why Britain needs more black science professors. The Guardian, 2023

The Imperial Picture

Imperial College London is consistently recognised as one of the world's leading universities and remains internationally renowned for excellence in research, education and innovation. Excellence is central to Imperial's identity and global reputation.

This raises an important question:

Who is **VISiBLE** within that excellence?

The Imperial academic workforce comprises over 4,500 staff. Around 17% of academics hold professorial positions, equating to approximately 755 professors. Of these, three identify as Black and one is a Black woman professor. Black academics represent approximately 0.4% of the academic workforce.

These figures provide more than a snapshot of representation. They provide an opportunity to explore how progression, leadership and scholarly flourishing are experienced within a globally recognised institution committed to excellence.

At an institution of Imperial's scale and influence, the question is not simply whether representation matters. Rather, it is what organisational conditions produce these outcomes and what institutions can do to ensure that talent is recognised, supported, developed and able to flourish.

>4500 academic staff

755 Professors

3 identify as Black

1 Black woman

**Black academics
represent 0.4% of
the workforce**

The challenge therefore extends beyond increasing numbers. It involves understanding how opportunity is created, how leadership pathways are navigated, how sponsorship and recognition are distributed, and how organisational environments shape experiences of belonging, progression and success.

These questions sit at the heart of the **VISiBLE** programme. Rather than asking only how many, **VISiBLE** asks:

What produces these numbers, and what must change to create the conditions for equitable progression, leadership and scholarly flourishing?

This shift moves the conversation from representation to responsibility; from counting people to understanding experiences; and from documenting inequalities to identifying practical pathways for change.



Excellence is not only about who arrives. It is also about who progresses, who flourishes, who leads, and who sees a future for themselves within the institution.





Beyond the Numbers: The Human Story Behind the Statistics

The VISiBLE Paradox: the experience of being simultaneously highly visible and deeply unseen.

Black women experience a paradox throughout their academic careers.

They are often highly visible in their academic environments. Their presence is noticed and felt. They stand out in meetings, lecture theatres, committees and leadership spaces. Yet despite this visibility, they are unseen.

Their expertise can be overlooked. Their contributions often go unrecognised. Their leadership is often questioned or underestimated.

While their presence is noticed, their voices are not always heard. They are often not invited to the table.

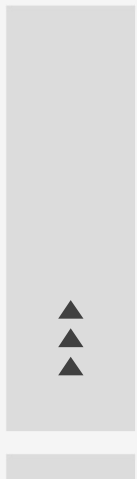
As a result, many experience a powerful contradiction:

Visible in the room, but invisible in the conversation.

Seen as different but not always recognised for their value.

Hyper-visible because of their identity, yet **invisible** when it comes to influence, opportunity, recognition and fair compensation for their contributions.





Listening to Lived Experience: The Leaky & Broken Pipelines study

What is the STEM pipeline?

STEM Pipeline

Path to careers in STEM starting from school or university

Broken Pipeline

Factors contributing to (ultimately) the lack of Black Academics in the UK

Leaky Pipeline

Gradual and continuous loss of women at each career stage in STEM from Postdoctoral researcher to Professor.

Study Purpose

The qualitative research underpinning **VISiBLE** explored the lived experiences of Black heritage researchers and academics working in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine) at Imperial College London.

For the purposes of this **VISiBLE** programme, the analysis presented here focuses specifically on participants who self-identified as both Black heritage and women.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences in depth.

Participant Recruitment and Eligibility

Participants were recruited from Imperial College London and included both current and former staff members. Eligible participants were required to:

- Self-identify as being from a Black heritage background;
- Be aged 18 years or older;
- Have current or previous employment at Imperial College London; and
- Belong to one of the following staff groups:
 - Academics and senior leaders;
 - Senior Teaching Fellows and Teaching Fellows;
 - Research Fellows and Postdoctoral Researchers; or
 - Research Assistants and Technicians.

A total of nineteen participants took part in the study.

Interview Schedule Development

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed prior to data collection. Interview topics were informed by multiple sources: a review of relevant literature; the Principal Investigator's (PI) professional experience in the design and delivery of organisational race equity workshops, forums, focus groups, and action planning activities; and insights from previous race equity initiatives within organisational settings.

The interview schedule consisted of a series of open-ended questions organised around key themes, including career experiences, workplace culture, barriers and facilitators to progression, experiences of race and gender, leadership opportunities, and recommendations for organisational change.

Data Collection Procedure

All interviews were conducted online by the PI on Microsoft Teams. Each interview followed the semi-structured interview schedule to ensure consistency across participants while allowing flexibility to probe emerging topics and individual experiences in greater depth.

Prior to each interview, participants were provided with information about the study and gave informed consent to participate. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Science, Engineering and Technology Research Ethics Committee (SETREC) at Imperial College London prior to the commencement of data collection. To protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, each participant was assigned a unique identifier, derived from Fante number names, originating from a Ghanaian language.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a combination of thematic and content analysis to identify patterns, meanings and recurring topics within participants' descriptive accounts.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo 15 to support data management and coding. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times by the PI to develop familiarity with the data. An initial coding framework was developed using both deductive codes, informed by the study aims and existing literature, and inductive codes that emerged directly from participants' narratives.

Related codes were grouped into broader categories and themes to capture common experiences across the subset of data. Content analysis was also used to examine the frequency and prominence of themes raised by participants. Throughout the analysis, codes and themes were refined iteratively to ensure they accurately reflected participants' accounts.

To enhance analytical rigour, findings were triangulated through discussions with two experienced social scientists with expertise in qualitative research. Emerging codes and themes were reviewed and further interrogated to ensure interpretations remained grounded in the data.

Findings

The analysis revealed that experiences of progression, belonging and success are shaped not only by individual circumstances but also by the organisational environments within which individuals work and develop.

Adopting a systems approach, the **VISiBLE Framework** brings together the key findings from the study to illustrate how organisational climate, institutional responsiveness and stewardship can create pathways to flourishing.

The **VISiBLE Framework** is designed to understand experiences as well as to initiate action by providing a practical model through which institutions can translate equity commitments into meaningful organisational change that promotes enhanced scholarly flourishing.





Understanding the Analysis

Qualitative researchers use different approaches to organise and interpret participants' experiences. The descriptions below explain some of the terms used.



Deductive codes are labels developed before analysing the data

They are informed by the study aims, existing research, previous evidence and topics the researchers expect to explore. Deductive coding helps researchers examine whether participants' experiences reflect issues already identified in the literature and help researchers look for known concepts and patterns within the data.

Example:

Anan: "I never had a senior academic actively advocate for my promotion."

Deductive codes:
Sponsorship, Career progression support



Inductive codes emerge directly from participants' accounts during analysis

Rather than starting with predefined categories, researchers remain open to new ideas, experiences and patterns that participants introduce. Inductive coding helps identify issues that may not have been anticipated at the outset of the study and allow participants' experiences to shape new insights and concepts.

Example:

Duesuon: "I was the only Black female speaker."

Inductive codes: Being the only one, Hypervisibility, Representation burden

These codes contributed to the development of the **VISiBLE Paradox**, the central concept of the **VISiBLE Framework**.

The VISiBLE Framework: A model for Organisational Responsiveness, Stewardship & Scholarly Flourishing

The **VISiBLE Framework** emerged from the Leaky & Broken Pipeline research study exploring the experiences of Black women researchers and academics. The framework proposes that career progression and scholarly flourishing are influenced not only by individual talent and achievement, but also by the extent to which institutions demonstrate responsiveness and stewardship towards their staff.

Black women often navigate the **VISiBLE Paradox**, that is, being simultaneously highly visible because of their identity, yet insufficiently recognised in relation to influence, expertise, opportunity and progression.

The **VISiBLE** Paradox

Hyper-visible because of
their identity

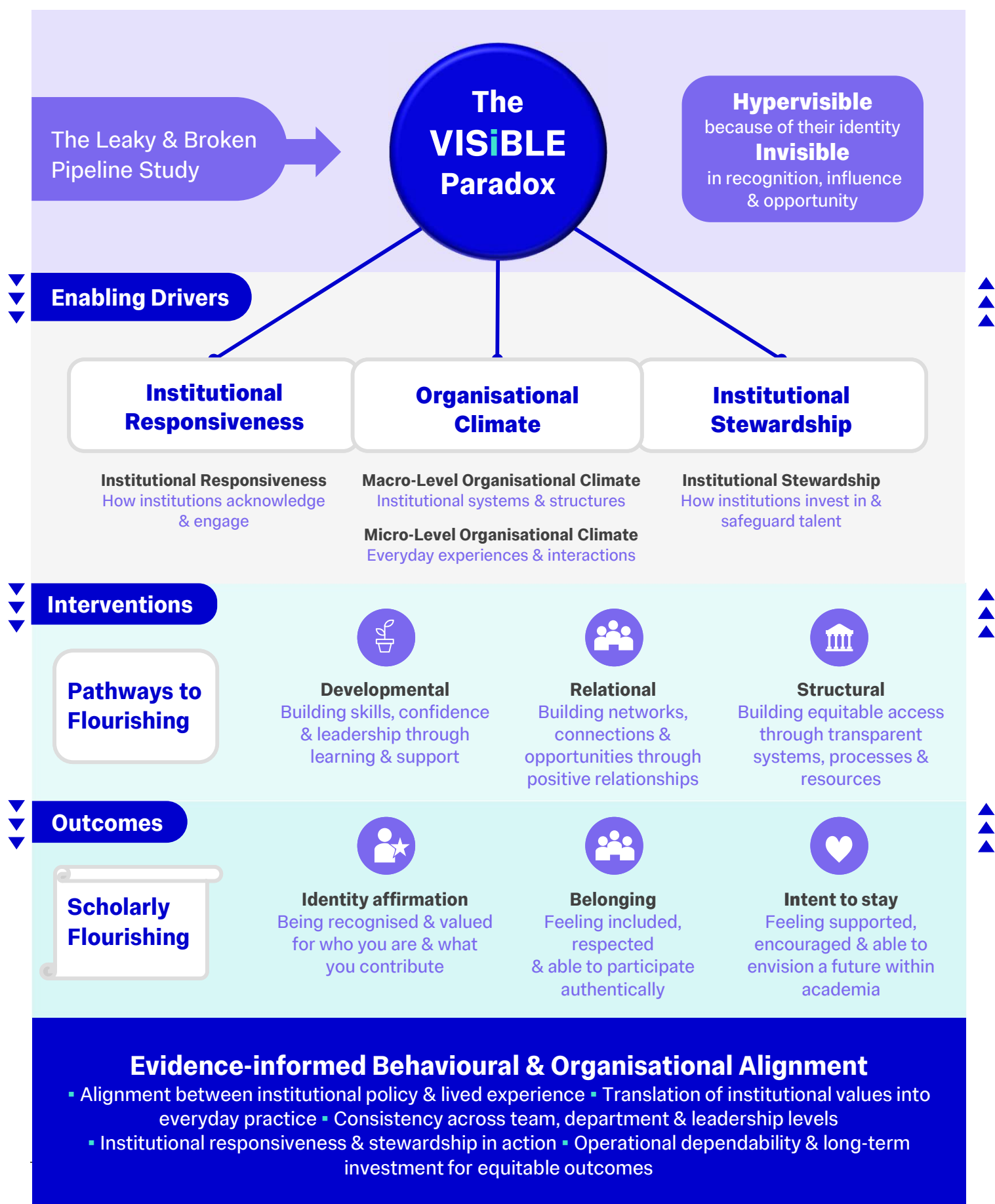
Invisible in recognition,
influence & opportunity

Participants frequently described experiences of being highly visible as one of few or the only Black women in their academic environment, whilst simultaneously experiencing barriers to recognition, influence, sponsorship and progression.



The **VISiBLE Framework** identifies the organisational mechanisms, developmental pathways and outcomes that enhance flourishing within academic environments.

The VISIBLE Framework: A Model for Action



Organisational Climate

Organisational climate refers to the wider environment within which staff work, develop and progress. Within the **ViSiBLE Framework**, organisational climate shapes how the **ViSiBLE Paradox** is experienced and influences the extent to which institutions demonstrate responsiveness and stewardship. In turn, responsiveness and stewardship help create the conditions that support pathways to flourishing and scholarly flourishing.

Organisational climate operates at two interconnected levels.



Macro-Level Organisational Climate

Institutional Systems and Structures

The broader policy, governance and structural environment that shapes organisational priorities, decision-making and accountability. This includes national higher education initiatives, institutional strategies, recruitment and promotion processes, governance arrangements, recognition and reward systems, and wider organisational commitments to equity and inclusion.

Anan: “I do know from what I see of the senior management team, it's not very diverse. The very senior management team, it's not diverse at all.”

This quote from Anan highlights the importance of representation within leadership and decision-making structures. Participants recognised that organisational priorities and opportunities are shaped not only by policy but also by who occupies positions of influence and authority.

Duebein: “I know about the inclusive recruitment, but I really don't understand how that gets put into practice.”

Duebein speaks to the gap that can emerge between institutional intentions and implementation, highlighting the importance of transparency, accountability and consistent application of organisational processes.





Micro-Level Organisational Climate

Everyday Experiences and Interactions

The day-to-day experiences of staff within departments, teams and professional networks. This includes leadership behaviours, collegial relationships, psychological safety, sponsorship, recognition of expertise, local practices and the quality of support available within immediate working environments.

Ekor: "You're not included in some discussions... and you just become aware of people discuss this and that and it feels unpleasant."

Duesia: "Within the team, I'm the only Black person... maybe they understand each other better than they understand me."

Esia: "I think my department is definitely a safe space... you can most definitely be yourself and share ideas."

These quotes illustrate how organisational climate is experienced through everyday interactions, inclusion, informal networks, a sense of belonging and psychological safety, or isolation, within teams and departments.



Organisational climate therefore provides the context within which institutional responsiveness and stewardship are enacted, shaping opportunities for belonging, progression, leadership and scholarly flourishing. Participants' quotes suggest that experiences are influenced not only by formal policies and systems, but also by the everyday practices and interactions that determine whether individuals feel recognised, supported and able to flourish.

The **VISiBLE Framework** identifies two connected organisational mechanisms: Responsiveness and Stewardship.

Responsiveness reflects how institutions recognise and respond to staff needs through effective onboarding, communication, recognition, adaptation and dependability. Stewardship reflects how institutions nurture, develop and safeguard talent through sponsorship, advocacy, talent development and sustained investment. Together, these mechanisms shape access to opportunity, support progression and create the conditions for flourishing.



Institutional Responsiveness

Anan: “So then when I started the role, I was literally just sent paperwork. Nobody said this is how you do it... I had no handover. I had no support. So, I had to make the role my own.”

Esia: “When you start (a new role), having a general introduction of ‘these are the people you’ll be working with’... I think at the beginning that would have been helpful”

These quotes illustrate the absence of responsiveness, particularly in relation to onboarding, communication and organisational dependability.



Institutional Stewardship

Dubiako: “I’ve seen some doors open for me... I’ve experienced open doors from different people.”

Akrɔn: “For me specifically, I am where I am because I had such a good mentor.”

These quotes from Dubiako and Akrɔn highlight how sponsorship, advocacy and institutional investment can create opportunities and talent development that enable progression and flourishing.

Pathways to Flourishing



Institutional responsiveness and stewardship create pathways to flourishing. When institutions recognise, support and invest in talent, they create **developmental, relational** and **structural** opportunities that enable progression. These include mentorship, sponsorship, leadership development, access to networks and equitable opportunities for advancement. Together, these pathways help individuals build confidence and agency, strengthen belonging and identity affirmation, and realise their academic and leadership potential.

Developmental Pathway

Dubiako: “My PhD supervisor was with me the whole way... when I was applying for this job, preparing for the interview, she helped me. She offered that support.”

Dubiako's experience highlights the importance of mentorship, guidance and sustained encouragement during key career transitions. It demonstrates how supportive relationships can help individuals navigate challenges, develop professionally and progress with confidence.

Structural Pathway

Duesuon: “Coming to Imperial has boosted my confidence... the sudden surge in the number of people who would like to collaborate with me”

Duesuon's experience illustrates how visibility, institutional affiliation and access to professional networks can open new opportunities for collaboration, recognition and influence. It demonstrates how organisational environments can create opportunities that support academic growth and scholarly impact.

Relational Pathway

Duanan: “Since I've gotten (funding) and I've managed to make connections with people at Imperial... my confidence is now sort of back to where it used to be.”

This quote from Duanan underscores how investing in relationships, collaboration and network development can lead to confidence building, all of which are pathways to flourishing.

Together, these quotes illustrate how flourishing is supported through both relationships and organisational opportunities. Mentorship, sponsorship, access to networks and increased visibility can all contribute to confidence, progression, scholarly development and leadership growth.

Scholarly Flourishing

Scholarly flourishing represents the outcomes that emerge when institutions create environments in which people can flourish. It extends beyond individual achievement to encompass belonging, confidence, recognition, influence, progression and the opportunity to realise one's potential. Participants described flourishing not simply as career success, but as being able to contribute meaningfully, develop professionally, influence their field and see a future for themselves within academia. Retention therefore becomes an important outcome of scholarly flourishing, as individuals are more likely to remain, progress and lead when they feel recognised, supported and valued.

Duanan: “Being given freedom and trust... trust.”

Duesuon: “To be a (top) scientist... it means that I'm an internationally acclaimed researcher.”

Duakrɔn: “I don't feel personally valued.”

“I wouldn't say that I have a particular point that I feel like... wow, yeah, I'm supposed to be here.”

Ekor: “A few months ago, I was Chair of such an expert group.”

Akrøn: “My confidence has grown in my role.”

Together, these quotes demonstrate that scholarly flourishing extends beyond individual achievement. Participants associated flourishing with developing a strong scholarly reputation, receiving recognition for their expertise, and having opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their field. Flourishing was also linked to growing confidence and self-efficacy, enabling individuals to navigate their careers with greater assurance and resilience. Participants described increased opportunities to influence decision-making, assume leadership roles and develop professionally, highlighting the importance of leadership influence and professional growth. Equally important were experiences of trust, autonomy and professional affirmation, which strengthened individuals' sense of agency and their ability to realise their potential. Conversely, feelings of being undervalued or questioning one's place within the institution illustrate how the absence of these conditions can undermine both flourishing and retention. Participants' quotes suggest that individuals are most likely to remain, progress and lead when they feel recognised, valued, trusted and supported within their academic environment.

“

Scholarly flourishing is not simply about individual success. It is about creating the conditions in which people are recognised, valued, trusted and empowered to realise their full potential.

”

Behavioural and Organisational Alignment

The **VISiBLE Framework** is underpinned by the principle of behavioural and organisational alignment. This refers to the extent to which institutional values, policies and commitments are reflected in everyday experiences and practices. Alignment occurs when governance structures, organisational systems, leadership behaviours and departmental processes work together to create equitable opportunities and experiences for staff. Scholarly flourishing is most likely to occur when there is consistency between what institutions aspire to achieve and what individuals experience in practice.

The findings suggest that meaningful organisational change is not achieved through policy commitments alone. Rather, it depends on the consistent implementation of policies, transparent decision-making, accountable leadership and everyday practices that support equitable progression, recognition and opportunity. When institutional intentions and organisational behaviours are aligned, individuals are more likely to experience trust, fairness, belonging and support throughout their academic careers.

Duebein: "There is a policy, but it's not enforced."

"People are asked the same questions, but some people are asked additional questions... which depending on the situation can be a positive or a negative for them."

Esia: "I think the general values of Imperial... collaboration, integrity... you always have to try and uphold that in whatever you're doing."

Together, these quotes suggest that organisational credibility is built when institutional values and behaviours are experienced consistently in practice, not simply expressed in policy.

“
Policies signal intention. Alignment occurs when institutional values are consistently reflected in everyday experiences, decisions and opportunities.
”



What Do the Numbers Tell Us?



What do the numbers tell us?

The findings suggest that representation alone cannot explain academic experiences or outcomes. Understanding who flourishes, progresses and leads requires us to look beyond the numbers and examine the organisational conditions that shape opportunity. The **VISiBLE Framework** offers a foundation for doing so.

This raises a broader question.

“
If we understand more clearly what shapes progression and flourishing, what responsibility do institutions have to act?

The answer matters not only for the individuals who experience these challenges, but also for the quality of research, leadership and innovation that universities contribute to society.

”



When can we stop counting?

Representation matters. It helps us understand who is present, who is absent and where inequalities persist. Yet meaningful progress requires more than representation alone.

The **VISiBLE Framework** provides a foundation for moving from understanding to action. The opportunity now is to translate evidence into sustained commitment, accountability and organisational change.

Ultimately, the challenge is not simply to change the numbers, but to create the conditions in which talent can be recognised, developed and supported to succeed

“
The future will not be determined solely by who is counted. It will be determined by whose talent is recognised, whose voices are valued, and whose contributions help shape what comes next.

”

Beyond the Numbers

As a global institution, Imperial has an opportunity not only to examine who is visible within excellence, but also to help shape what excellence looks like in the future.

Academic leadership shapes more than individual careers. It influences the questions that are prioritised, the knowledge that is produced, and how research translates into policy, practice and societal impact.

The significance of this work therefore extends beyond representation alone. Broadening participation in academic leadership creates opportunities for a wider range of perspectives, experiences and expertise to contribute to research, education and innovation.

In turn, this can strengthen scholarly inquiry, enrich learning environments and support more equitable and impactful outcomes for the communities that universities serve.

As a global university, Imperial is uniquely positioned to bring together diverse insights, expertise and scholarship. Doing so strengthens intellectual exchange, expands research horizons and enhances the university's ability to address complex challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.

The opportunity, therefore, is not simply to change the numbers. It is to strengthen research excellence, cultivate future leaders and help shape a more innovative, inclusive and globally relevant future for higher education.

“

The true measure of progress is not simply who is counted, but whose knowledge, leadership and contributions help shape a better future for all.

”

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Roundtable proceedings

This report presents the evidence base, findings and **VISiBLE Framework** developed through the Leaky & Broken Pipelines study. It also serves as a foundation for discussion at the **Reserve Your Seat at the Table: Black Women Navigating the Changing World of Work** roundtable.

Insights, reflections and recommendations emerging from the event will be incorporated into a subsequent version of this report, ensuring that the **VISiBLE Framework** continues to be informed by lived experience, collective dialogue and shared expertise. In this way, the report reflects not only research evidence, but an ongoing commitment to learning, partnership and meaningful institutional change.

Appendix A: Qualitative Research as a Scientific Method

Qualitative research is a systematic and rigorous approach used to investigate experiences, behaviours, relationships and organisational processes. It is widely used across healthcare, public health, education and organisational research to generate evidence about how people experience and navigate complex environments.

Qualitative studies begin with a clearly defined research question and a carefully developed **research instrument**, such as a **semi-structured interview schedule**. Semi-structured interviews combine planned questions with the flexibility to explore issues raised by participants in greater depth, enabling researchers to capture detailed and context-rich data.

Following data collection, interviews are converted into written **transcripts** and systematically analysed. Researchers organise the data using **codes**, labels that identify important concepts, experiences or ideas within participants' accounts. Codes may be informed by existing evidence or study objectives (**deductive coding**) and refined through new insights that emerge during analysis (**inductive coding**).

Related codes are grouped into broader **themes**, allowing researchers to identify recurring patterns, shared experiences and underlying processes across the dataset. This process is commonly referred to as **thematic analysis**. **Content analysis** may also be used to explore the prominence of particular topics or issues within the data.

Qualitative research places particular emphasis on **rigour**. This involves ensuring that data collection, analysis and interpretation are systematic, transparent and trustworthy. Methods such as iterative data review, documentation of analytical decisions and **triangulation**, drawing on multiple perspectives during interpretation, help strengthen the credibility of findings.

By examining patterns across participants' accounts, qualitative research provides insight into how organisational systems, practices, cultures and relationships are experienced in real-world settings. As a scientific method, it enables researchers to develop evidence-based understandings of complex human and organisational phenomena.

The value of qualitative research lies not in the number of participants alone, but in the depth, richness and relevance of the data they provide. By examining experiences in detail and identifying recurring patterns across participants, qualitative research generates insights into how people experience and navigate complex social and organisational environments.

In many African traditions, leadership and learning are rooted in relationships, shared humanity and collective responsibility.

This principle is reflected in the philosophy of **Ubuntu:**

“I am because we are.”

The **ViSiBLE** programme draws upon this understanding. The table is more than a place of discussion; it is a space where experiences are shared, knowledge is exchanged and future leaders are nurtured.

Ultimately, the goal is not simply to increase representation. It is to create academic environments where talent is recognised, leadership is supported and excellence can flourish.

Perhaps the most important question is no longer

“Where are my Black professors?”

But

“What kind of institution do we need to become, so that future generations no longer have to ask?”



“

Ti Koro Nko Agyina
(an Akan proverb).

“Two heads are better than one.””

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