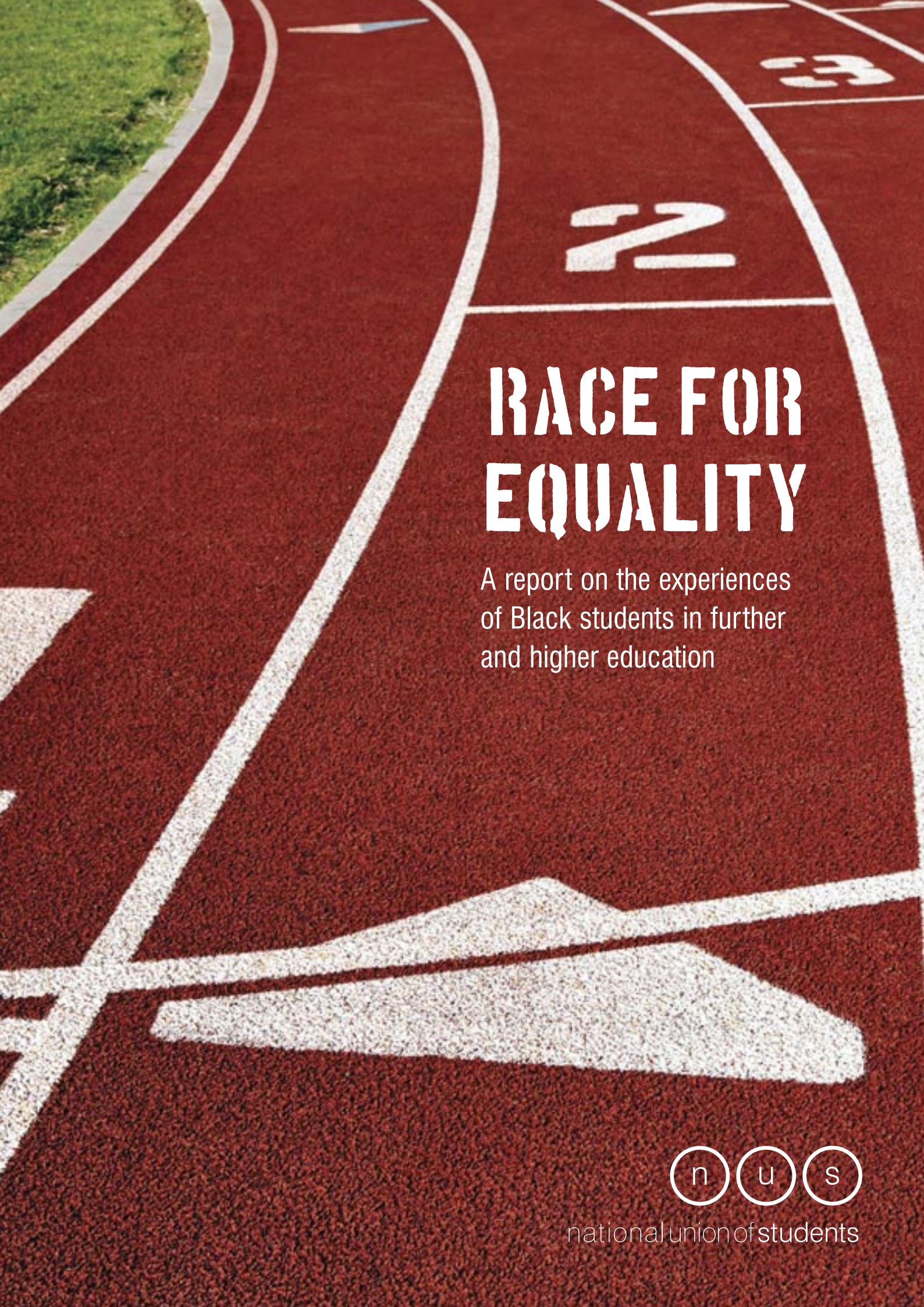




RACE FOR EQUALITY

A report on the experiences
of Black students in further
and higher education



national union of students



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Foreword

There has always been a strong correlation between education and achieving success in life. This lesson has been understood by generations of Black people and explains the massive increase in Black students' participation education. However, institutional racism has embedded itself in our education system and Black students continue to face inequality, as shown in this report. Our findings not only illustrate the challenges Black students face in further education (FE) and higher education (HE), but also provide a damning account of education prior to further and higher education.

Left unaddressed, these barriers will only continue to grow, especially with the ideologically driven cuts that the Coalition Government has imposed on education budgets over the last year – the biggest for a generation. Government failure has forced course closures, threatened institutional shut downs, slashed Education Maintenance Allowance for FE college students by 60 per cent, and imposed draconian increases in tuition fees up to £9,000 a year on HE university students.

At every step of the way, the NUS Black Students' Campaign has drawn out the seriousness of the situation with examples to illustrate the detrimental and disproportionate impact of these policies on access to opportunities for Black students. We have mobilised thousands of students in a range of actions against these cuts and we have not been alone in voicing these concerns. When 50,000 parents and lecturers took to the streets of London, to join the coalition of resistance that the NUS Black Students' Campaign helped to build and lead, they joined our organised opposition to the tripling of tuition fees and the threats to slash EMAs. It was made clear that those in education understand the devastating impact on students and society as our education system becomes one of the most expensive in the world. Pricing out the disadvantaged from education and ending investment in jobs simply condemns whole sections of the population to endure

hardship and marginalisation. This is no way to help Britain beat a recession or build a tolerant and prosperous country.

This report is a powerful account of the daily experiences of Black students and should be viewed as an important resource in influencing change. Now more than ever, it is time to make a stand and stop the systematic marginalisation of Black perspectives in education. We must close the attainment gap between Black and White students and tackle racism in the classroom and on campus, all of which are symptoms of the barriers that restrict gifted Black students from fulfilling their potential.

With this resource we have a formidable and forward-thinking tool that will enable the NUS Black Students' Campaign to isolate, tackle and redress the inequalities that exist. We also invite the government, institutions and students' unions to take immediate action to address the dissatisfaction and barriers highlighted in this report. All Black students have a right to learn in an inclusive environment and it is crucial we work together to attend to these challenges and improve Black students' experiences of education now, and in the future.

Ultimately, this report seeks to promote equality and excellence and as such its recommendations should benefit institutions and the student population as a whole in producing high quality and inclusive education provision. We hope the report inspires you to get involved and that you will join us in confronting the challenges we face. We also thank all the Black students who participated in this project – it is through our collective voice that we will continue to be a force for change.

Kanja Sesay, NUS National Black Students' Officer



Executive summary

In 2009 the National Union of Students' Black Students' Campaign, which represents college and university students of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean descent, launched a research project exploring the experiences of Black students in further education (FE) and higher education (HE). The project included a literature review, an online survey of 938 Black students and three focus groups. Both the survey and focus groups explored various aspects of the academic experience and aimed to shed light on recent research, which has shown that Black students are less likely to be satisfied with their educational experience and to attain first-class degrees in comparison to their White peers.

Our findings have shown that a simple explanation for the attainment and satisfaction gap of Black students does not exist; it is a complex issue with a range of causal factors. Although the Black student population is a highly heterogeneous group, our research identifies and highlights common concerns among Black students, which are clearly linked to their attainment and overall satisfaction yet often overlooked by institutions.

Improving the experiences of Black students and helping to close the attainment gap in education requires commitment and a willingness to critically reflect on current practices, perceptions and thinking. It is a matter of social justice that affects the entire student population and educational system. Therefore, institutions need to examine institutional barriers to student achievement, developing trust with Black students and investing in their progress and achievement. This cannot begin by locating the problems within Black students, or negatively referring to their ability, aspirations and work ethic. The problem is a societal one, and an institutional one, which will only change through a whole institution approach, including partnership between students and institution staff.

The following summarises the headline findings from this research:

Previous educational experience

In both the survey and focus groups, Black students reported that there was a complex interplay between their satisfaction and attainment at FE and HE and problems with the education system as a whole.

- Qualitative analysis found that schooling and college education had a direct impact on how prepared respondents felt for academic life in FE and HE. Respondents frequently commented that being from a low socio-economic background meant that they did not have access to a high standard of education during their formative years.
- There was a perception among both survey and focus group respondents that many Black students enter further and higher education without the same academic skills, such as study skills and understanding of theoretical debate, as their White peers.
- Some respondents also reported that they had encountered widely-held stereotypes based on race and attainment from teachers while at school and college.
- While 75 per cent of the respondents rated the information, advice and guidance they received as excellent or good, nearly 25 per cent felt that it was poor or could have been better. Qualitative evidence from the survey indicated that the level of support appeared to be widely dependent on the type and quality of schools and colleges Black students attended, their socio-economic background and teachers' expectations of their academic performance.

Teaching and learning

When asked to speculate why minority ethnic students were less satisfied about their course and did not achieve as well as their peers, respondents consistently highlighted problems with the curriculum, academic environment, teaching quality, assessment, and academic support. At the heart of this discussion was the importance of equal treatment from teachers and tutors. Respondents expressed how essential it is to receive fair and balanced teaching, assessment and support – treatment that many stated was currently lacking, to some extent, at their current institution.

- While the majority of respondents were positive about their teaching and learning environment, a significant minority viewed it negatively, with 23 per cent describing it as 'cliquey', 17 per cent as 'isolating', 8 per cent as 'hostile' and 7 per cent as 'racist'. These Black students detailed their feelings, often speaking of alienation and exclusion. Many of these feelings spawned from inside the classroom, with several respondents describing feeling left out of discussions and debates or being 'invisible' to lecturers.
- 42 per cent did not believe their curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination.
- 34 per cent stated they felt unable to bring their perspective as a Black student to lectures and tutor meetings. A running theme through both the survey and focus group data was a frustration that courses were designed and taught by non-Black teachers, and often did not take into account diverse backgrounds and views.
- Respondents regularly cited racial and cultural bias among lecturers as a deterrent to their overall satisfaction and attainment in further and higher education. Analysis of the qualitative data indicated that fair assessment and transparent marking procedures was a key area of concern for respondents. Many expressed the need for anonymous marking, without which they felt potential bias and discrimination could take place.

- Some students surveyed believed that their teachers did not provide the same level of attention or encouragement they would to non-Black students and that they were 'condemned to fail'. While this perception was difficult to quantify, respondents pointed to a lack of support and constructive feedback, providing examples of instances where they believed their teachers were willing to help other students, but were apathetic when they requested the same.
- While the majority of respondents (71 per cent) felt adequately supported by their academic tutors, with one student even describing their tutor as "the nicest and most understanding person I have ever met", almost one in four (24 per cent) did not. Nearly the same amount (22 per cent) also expressed dissatisfaction with their personal (pastoral) tutor when asked if they felt sufficiently supported by him/her.

The institutional environment

To gain an understanding of student life as a whole, we explored various aspects of the further and higher education institutional environment. What is evident from the findings is that a range of factors outside the academic environment can affect attainment and satisfaction levels.

- Throughout the survey and focus groups, respondents touched upon both institutional and personal racism, and how these forms of racism must be acknowledged to fully understand Black students' experiences of further and higher education.
- Nearly one in six (16 per cent) of survey respondents reported that they had experienced racism in their current educational institution, and focus group respondents provided a range of examples of either experiencing or observing racism while at college or university.
- Many survey and focus group respondents linked their experience of racism with a drop in their self-esteem, confidence, motivation and desire to continue their education, reporting that they felt marginalised and socially excluded.

- 43 per cent of students surveyed were aware of the equalities policies at their institution. Through further analysis, it was apparent that postgraduate students were more likely to be aware of their institution's equalities policies than undergraduate students.
- The majority of respondents who were aware of their institution's equalities policies believed they had a positive impact and influenced how they felt in their college or university. However, other respondents were more sceptical of their impact and reported that their existence alone did not create an inclusive institutional ethos, stressing that it was the everyday practices of staff and students that truly made an environment welcoming and inclusive.
- 66 per cent of respondents were aware of how to make a complaint at their college or university and 14 per cent had made a complaint at their institution in the past.
- Almost one in three (32 per cent) of Black students surveyed reported that they did not trust the integrity of their current educational establishment to deal with complaints fairly.
- Two-thirds of respondents who had made a complaint were dissatisfied with how their complaint was handled, citing a range of reasons, including: the procedure being too time-consuming; no action being taken as a result of the complaint; or the complaint being ignored or dealt with insensitively.
- Both survey and focus group respondents reported that Black students at college or university are more likely to feel isolated and struggle with greater financial burdens, all of which affect their overall further or higher education experience.
- The role of students' unions and Black representation were identified by respondents as crucial elements in ensuring that Black students were satisfied with their further and higher education experience. For some respondents, it was important that students' unions do more to cater for the specific needs and interests of Black students.

International students

There were few statistically significant differences between international students and home students in terms of the quantitative data gathered on their experience, but it was clearly evident from the qualitative data that this cohort faced many unique difficulties.

- Nine per cent of Black international students involved in our research described their current teaching and learning environment as 'racist', compared to 5 per cent of UK-domiciled students – a finding that was frequently featured in the qualitative data from both the survey and focus groups. Worryingly, some international students viewed discrimination against themselves as a matter of course.
- Both survey respondents and focus group participants alike wanted IAG to be more easily available, pointing out that as international students they were often unable to seek face-to-face information from knowledgeable advisors, and so they had to seek out IAG themselves. Many drew particular attention to the lack of support and guidance in the student visa application process.
- Language, communication barriers and difficulties in adapting to an unfamiliar teaching and learning style were commonly cited. These problems were compounded in cases where the respondent did not feel adequately supported by their teachers or lecturers.
- Many of these respondents were studying at postgraduate level and felt that there was an assumption that they had studied the same subject in the UK and were acquainted with the content covered at the undergraduate level. Others felt their curriculum had a narrow focus, with some expressing their dismay at how their country of origin was portrayed, or their fear that the course did not cover material relevant to life outside the UK.
- International respondents frequently expressed feelings of isolation and alienation at their institution, both in their academic and social environment. This

played a role in their sense of well-being; those who felt excluded often explained that this negatively influenced their motivation and overall desire to attend their course.

- The high rate of fees was a source of real frustration for most Black international students surveyed. Some stated that they had not received adequate IAG about finances and were taken by surprise by the hidden and unexpected costs of their course, such as course materials or specialist equipment. Others simply believed that the fees were not good value for money, in terms of the quality of education and support services they received. Meeting these high fees was a huge source of worry for most Black international respondents and strained their ability to study.

Broader issues

- While our survey focused on Black students' experiences within their current educational institution, respondents frequently spoke about the

existence of racism and discrimination within society, and the long-term effects this had on their self-esteem and confidence in their current educational environment.

- Respondents pointed to negative media portrayals of Black people, suggesting that these perpetuated certain stereotypes that influenced others' perceptions of their ability to succeed, as well as their own.
- Others discussed the low expectations of their teachers and peers, explaining that from a young age they were made to feel as if, as one respondent put it, "failure was already predetermined".
- The concept of an inferiority complex or self-fulfilling prophecy, also known as the 'Pygmalion' effect, was frequently cited, with many respondents suggesting that it was difficult not to internalise negative assumptions about their identity, particularly when these had been ingrained from a young age.



Introduction

In 2009 the National Union of Students' Black Students' Campaign, which represents college and university students of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean descent, launched a research project exploring the experiences of Black students in further and higher education. This report outlines the findings from its survey and focus groups exploring various aspects of the academic experience such as teaching and learning, attainment, campus life and support networks. In doing so, this report provides a valuable perspective on these issues and also aims to shed light on recent research, which has shown that Black students are less likely to be satisfied with their educational experience and are less likely to get first-class degrees than their White peers.

The study comprised full-time and part-time students in both further and higher education. It is worth noting, however, that the majority (72 per cent) of survey respondents were in HE and thus their perspectives are perhaps better represented than those of FE in this report. Both UK-domiciled and international students took part, and the survey was completed by students in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Three focus groups were carried out in England.

Unlike the 2007 DfES report and other research projects exploring degree attainment, this report explores the experiences of both Black UK-domiciled and international students in further and higher education. By highlighting first-hand experiences of Black students, our aim is to contribute to the ongoing work to address the inequality faced by Black students and create change in FE and HE institutions. This report is intended to be read in conjunction with existing literature and regularly cites *National Student Survey* and *HSBC Student Survey* data.

Black – unless stated otherwise the term 'Black' is used in this report to refer to members of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean communities.

Background

The attainment gap

In 2007, research carried out by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES)¹ found that although the participation of UK-domiciled Black students in higher education (HE) was proportionately higher than for White students, Black students were less likely to achieve first-class degrees than White UK and Irish students, even after controlling for potentially confounding variables such as prior attainment, age, gender and discipline. This finding was further highlighted in a study by Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA), which found that "being from a minority ethnic group (except the Other Black, Mixed and Other groups) was still found to have a statistically significant and negative effect on degree attainment."² Studies by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE),³ Richardson,⁴ Leslie,⁵ and Connor et al⁶ have also consistently shown that White students are more likely to obtain first or upper second-class degrees than Black students. However, it should be noted that there are consistent variations across the different non-White ethnic groups. For example, Richardson⁷ reported that the odds of an Asian student being awarded a good degree were half of those of a White student, whereas the chances of a Black (African or Caribbean) student being awarded a good degree were a third of those of a White student.

Work has already been undertaken to begin addressing the degree attainment gap. In 2007–08, the HEA and ECU jointly ran a summit programme that brought together 15 higher education institutions (HEIs) to focus on the issue of ethnicity and degree attainment. A recently published report⁸ showcases the work of these 15 HEIs and highlights a range of institutional approaches to address the attainment gap, which are invaluable in developing our understanding and knowledge of the issue.

Although far less research on ethnicity and attainment has been carried out in the further education (FE) sector, a study by Foster and Willemstyn⁹ exploring the achievement rates between White and Black FE students found similar results to the studies already cited in relation to students in HE. The study, which focused on eight FE colleges in the eastern region of the UK, concluded that Black students have far lower success rates in completing and achieving their learning aims than White students. Although further exploration of ethnicity and attainment in FE needs to be made, it would be incorrect to view the difference in attainment between Black and White students as only being a concern for the HE sector.

Satisfaction rates

In addition to the disparity in degree attainment between Black and White students, there are other concerns for Black students in higher and further education. For example, from 2006–10 the *National Student Survey*, which surveys HE students at both FE and HE education institutions, consistently found that UK-domiciled Black students have lower overall satisfaction with their HE experience than White students.¹⁰ However, it is important to note that the difference in satisfaction is reducing for most ethnic groups, apart from respondents with Mixed ethnicity and unknown ethnicity.¹¹

It is possible that these satisfaction levels are linked to the type of institutions attended and the quality of teaching and learning offered: only a minority of Black students attend the elite Russell Group universities (the 20 leading research universities in the country), as they are half as likely to be offered a place as White students.¹² In 2007–08, London Metropolitan University, ranked 107th in Times Higher Education's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) league table, accepted 6,115 Black students – almost as many as the 7,815 Black students spread between the 20 universities of the Russell Group.¹³

Transitions to the labour market

In a market where there is great competition for jobs, it is important that Black students leave further or higher education able to compete in the global economy.

Degree attainment has a direct impact upon graduate employability and it has been shown that certain Black groups are significantly disadvantaged in the British labour market. A study by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) in 2007 found that, except for Asian graduates who are slightly more likely to be working than White students, the gap between the Black (African and Caribbean) graduate employment rate and that of their White peers was 7 percentage points.¹⁴ Research by HESA has also shown employers favour graduates from the pre-1992 institutions, suggesting that Black graduates' employment opportunities are influenced by the type of institution they attend.¹⁵ Although further data from HESA suggests that this employment gap is beginning to close, it is highly likely that it will be a number of years before the gap is completely eradicated.

Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) also suggests that Black communities have been disproportionately affected by the recent rise in graduate unemployment with Black (African and Caribbean, Black British and Mixed race) young people seeing the biggest increases in unemployment.¹⁶ Once in employment, it has also been shown that Black graduates have lower earning levels than that of their White peers.¹⁷

Concerns for the future

Our research data on the experiences of Black students and graduates is especially worrying in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which has led to unprecedented cuts in public spending, and the Browne Review's proposal to increase tuition fees.¹⁸ These cuts and fee increases will undoubtedly have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups who already face a range of barriers, potentially Black students and their communities. Data has shown that, Black students are more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background – 75 per cent of Britain's Black communities live in 88 of Britain's poorest wards.¹⁹ Based on this, it is feared that many Black students will be deterred by the debt they will face following the rise in tuition fees, and this may lead to a decrease in the number of Black students entering FE

and HE. Moreover, Black and women graduates have been shown to take longer to pay off their student debts. The rise in tuition fees will only increase the time it takes to pay off this debt, again potentially discouraging students from entering HE.

With child poverty rates higher for Black young people, the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has been a vital source of additional income. Research into the impact of the EMA on participation, retention and attainment in FE has consistently shown the strongest effect is on Black learners, with Black women students in particular more likely to stay in education post-16 and much more likely to achieve full Level 3 qualifications if they receive EMA.²⁰ Although the Government has announced a replacement package for EMA, the funds available through this will represent only around a quarter of those available under EMA, and only a tiny fraction of students will be entitled to this assistance. Scrapping the EMA will have major consequences for Black learners, affecting their ability to participate in and benefit from FE.

Research method

Research was carried out between April 2009 and March 2011, and consisted of an in-depth literature review, an online survey of Black students' experiences of further and higher education, and focus groups.

The survey was developed after extensive research into existing data on Black students' degree attainment and satisfaction, and best practice in conducting surveys of this nature. The study was open to all Black students (as defined by the NUS Black Students' Campaign) in further and higher education and collected 938 valid responses across the UK.

After initial analysis of the survey data, focus groups were conducted to further investigate three questions in the survey. These were held at the Black Students' Campaign Annual Conference, a Black Students' Campaign regional meeting, and a student conference at De Montfort University. Following the focus groups, the proceedings were transcribed verbatim and analysed. This report reproduces a selection of quotations from students who participated in the survey and focus groups to illustrate key issues.

Scope of the research

The survey asked questions about the following issues relating to students' place of study:

- factors influencing choice of university or college
- information, advice and guidance (IAG) received
- teaching and learning environment
- course curriculum
- academic and pastoral support
- institutional environment
- equalities policies
- complaint structures and processes
- representation
- experiences of racism in the educational environment.

Open text boxes were provided, which allowed respondents to detail their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the survey discussed the findings of the *National Student Survey* relating to Black students being less positive about their course than other students. Our survey asked respondents to speculate about why this might be the case, drawing from their own experiences when possible. They were also asked to provide their thoughts on why Black students were less likely to achieve first-class degrees than White and Irish students, as found by DfES research.

A complete list of survey questions are provided in Appendix 1.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the survey was analysed through SPSS (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences) software. Percentages reported are based on 'valid' responses – that is, these figures are calculated from only the number of participants who answered the question and excludes any missing responses. The demographic profile of survey respondents is provided in Appendix 2.

Multivariate frequency distribution was explored by cross-tabulating survey results. Areas we focused upon included the differences of experiences between:

- HE and FE;
- levels of study
- postgraduates and undergraduates;
- part-time study and full-time study;
- and UK-domiciled and international students.

Where possible, any statistically significant differences between these groups are highlighted in this report.

Notably absent from this report is discussion of differences between ethnic groups. This was because of the low response rate from some ethnic groups (see the Survey participant profile in Appendix 2) and the accompanying difficulty in attaining statistically significant results. It is important, however, to recognise that the Black student population is highly heterogeneous and that their experiences of education varies across ethnic groups, which is well documented in existing literature.

Qualitative data from both the survey and focus groups underwent rigorous examination by two researchers who independently identified common patterns within responses. These were then cross-analysed and a final list of themes produced. The qualitative data was then coded according to theme.

Structure of this report

Although there is a wealth of information on Black students' attainment and participation in FE and HE, less prominent is research that highlights first-hand experiences by the students themselves. Previous research in this area has emphasised the importance of qualitative data. In a research project report exploring degree attainment, ECU and HEA commented on the value of qualitative data as a "vital source of institutional intelligence, enabling depictions of the circumstances students face, and the range of explanations, interpretations, arguments and rhetorical strategies they employ to support their views of such circumstances." ²¹

This report therefore strives to include the student voice where possible, drawing extensively from the qualitative data gathered from the national online survey and focus groups.

The structure of this report follows students' educational journey, from their school background and entry into FE and HE, through to specific aspects of teaching and learning, and the institutional and academic environment in which they currently study. Recognising that Black international students may face unique challenges, an additional chapter addresses their experiences.

When appropriate, comparisons with the *National Student Survey* and *HSBC Student Survey* data will be included. The *National Student Survey* is a national initiative, conducted annually since 2005. It runs across all publicly-funded HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and participating HEIs in Scotland. Since 2008, FE colleges with directly-funded HE students in England have also been eligible to participate in the survey. It is designed to assess students' opinions of the quality of their degree programmes, with seven different scores including an 'overall satisfaction' mark. *HSBC Student Survey* data for this report comes from the *NUS/HSBC Experience Report*, an ongoing research project between NUS and HSBC since 2008, and is the first major survey measuring the expectations and satisfaction of undergraduate students UK-wide.

Recommendations in this report are principally led by the views of student participants in the research, as we believe that for improvements to be successful, they must be made in consultation with the people most directly affected. Thus, following exploration of Black students' experiences, each chapter concludes with a series of solutions that were proposed by survey respondents and focus group participants to improve the overall experience of Black students in FE and HE. The final recommendations included in this report seek to synthesise these student-led proposals into concrete guidance.

How to use this report

The Equality Act 2010 places a positive duty on educational institutions to promote equality and ensure that students' diverse needs are recognised and adequately supported. This report is aimed at any

organisation or practitioner wishing to improve the experience of Black students in further and higher education. It will be of particular interest for students' unions, along with FE and HE teaching and support staff and those involved in the implementation of equalities policies, race equality, addressing the attainment gap and promoting social cohesion.

We acknowledge that each place of learning will be different, and this report should be used as a starting point to examine what can be done to address the concerns and challenges Black students face in each individual setting. Our recommendations provide a general direction of travel, but the exact path will vary from institution to institution.

It is also important to remember that Black students are not a homogenous group, and that certain types of Black students, such as international students, may need different solutions. However, what is certain is that Black students are passionate about their education, and working with them and allowing them to develop appropriate policy responses in partnership with their educational institution will be critical to the success of any initiatives to improve their education experience.



Factors influencing entry into FE and HE

In both the survey and focus groups, Black students reported that there was a complex interplay between their satisfaction and attainment at FE and HE and problems with the education system as a whole. When exploring factors that affected their entry into FE or HE, respondents commented on their previous educational opportunities, parental support, and socio-economic background. Survey respondents were also asked about the factors that influenced their choice of college or university and how they would rate the information, advice and guidance they received when choosing to enter FE and HE.

Previous educational opportunities

Qualitative analysis found that schooling and college education had a direct impact on how prepared respondents were for academic life in FE and HE. Respondents frequently commented that being from a low socio-economic background meant that they did not have the same access to a high standard of education during their formative years, in comparison to their White peers.

“Whether you like to admit it or not, ethnic minorities come from poorer areas, and poorer areas have fewer good teachers. If you make it as far as uni you probably had a few legendary, hands-on teachers.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“The root of the higher education system lies in an educational failure starting from secondary school level.” Mixed race respondent, HE

Some respondents also reported that they had encountered widely-held stereotypes based on race and attainment from teachers while at school and college. For some Black students there was a perception that these stereotypes lead to a lack of support from teachers, which affect Black students' motivation, sense of self and confidence in their academic abilities.

“Minority ethnic group students feel excluded from the educational process and this leads to a natural withdrawal from the system. They are perceived to be disinterested, and as a result little effort is made to develop these students.” Other respondent, HE

“We are always stereotyped as not being able to concentrate as well as all other students. And also from personal experience, people don't always expect a lot [more] from Black students than ... average work, as I found out in my GCSEs. I was predicted low grades and was never really paid much attention when it came to trying to improve personal development, which is why a lot of people were amazed when I passed all my GCSEs with 10 A-C grade results.”* Black African respondent, HE

“Expectations for ethnic minorities, especially Black students, are considerably lower. Lack of expectation can lead to lack of motivation in psychological terms.” Mixed race respondent, HE

For many respondents there was a belief that encountering racial stereotypes and being educationally disadvantaged from an early age meant that they were not academically prepared for FE and/or HE. This is partly because experiencing disadvantage often leads to underachievement in school, which makes the transition to further and higher education increasingly difficult. For instance, existing research suggests that Black Caribbean groups and Black Caribbean males, in particular, significantly underachieve at school, which impacts negatively on access to further and higher education.²² A study by Richardson also concluded that the “under-achievement of adults from ethnic minorities in higher education is a legacy of their under-achievement as children in secondary education.”²³

There was a perception among both survey and focus group respondents that many Black students enter FE and HE without the same academic skills, such as study competence and understanding of theoretical debate,

as their White peers. This finding echoes a literature review of research into degree attainment, ethnicity and gender, which concluded, “secondary education has left ethnic minority students not only with poorer entry qualifications, but also with less effective forms of study behaviour”.²⁴ For respondents there was a strong belief that being academically unprepared due to poor schooling will impact on a Black student’s overall experience and attainment while at college or university.

“Most of my friends went to very good schools/sixth forms and therefore I feel they are more academically prepared than myself ... This may not be because the others are ‘cleverer’ or ‘better’, but maybe because they had better teachers and therefore were taught better.” Mixed race respondent, HE

In addition to feeling unprepared for academic life, many respondents reported how these negative experiences, from primary school onwards, highlight social inequality and can lead to Black students questioning where they belong in society. When exploring this, some respondents commented on the lack of Black teachers and role models, and little or no teaching of Black history while at primary and secondary school.

“The majority of those from minority ethnic backgrounds for a long time have felt like second-class citizens, whether it is from things they have heard, situations that they have faced personally or things that have been said or done during their younger years in the education system ... We are not taught enough about our ethnicity’s history, whereas we are taught the UK’s history as part of the curriculum, even though we are not all descendants of the UK and therefore don’t feel that it relates to us. Our White peers probably do and therefore feel more accepted and included into the system.”

Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“I really feel that any difficulties Black students face are already embedded from societal injustice at an early age and it is too late by [the time they reach] HE to undo that harm.” Mixed race respondent, HE

Parental support

Although the survey and focus groups did not specifically ask about parental support, a small proportion of respondents stated that the level of parental support and guidance a Black student receives could affect their attainment and satisfaction levels in further and higher education. For some students this was based on their actual experience, while for others it was a perception.

These respondents felt that being raised in a family that valued education was very important in shaping how motivated and prepared they felt to enter FE and HE – a finding echoed in a study by Bagguley and Hussain,²⁵ which showed that the participation of South Asian women in HE had increased partly due to high levels of parental support. A minority of respondents reported that the importance of education had been instilled in them at an early age by their parents. For these respondents, this had occurred partly because their parents understood, based on their own experiences, that being from an ethnic minority background would make it harder for them to do well in life and consequently working hard and education was an avenue to obtain success.

“When I was young, my mum always told me that I would have to work five times as hard as a White person to get to the same place as they are.”

Black African respondent, HE

“I come from Kerala, a state in India, which is a state that is 98 per cent literate ... education is pushed on to children from a young age. They are taught [that] the better you study, the more successful you can become. So, parenting plays a huge role in education as well.” Indian respondent, HE

Respondents provided a variety of reasons for the lack of parental support and guidance, including the fact that their parents may have studied in another country and are unfamiliar with the UK education system or have never had any experience of FE and HE. Additional reasons included language barriers, being from a low socio-economic background, and lack of parental time (potentially due to working). These

respondents believed a lack of guidance and understanding from parents could affect the type of institution and course Black students choose.

“Because our parents never went to university so there isn't really anyone to guide us or to inform us we are doing the right thing, as our parents do not know.” Black British respondent, FE

“Support from outside sources and family is important, and not always being able to have that support at home due to parents’ lack of academic skills and [their] first language not always being English, can put a strain on achievement.”

Mixed race respondent, HE

A minority of respondents reported that Black students might also feel pressured by parents to attend university and undertake a course that is viewed as socially respectable, such as medicine or law. These respondents believed this pressure can lead to Black students undertaking a course they are not interested in, which inevitably impacts on their level of satisfaction and attainment. For instance, one respondent reported that their first degree was chosen based on parental pressure and that they have since begun a second degree course, which is the course they originally wanted to do.

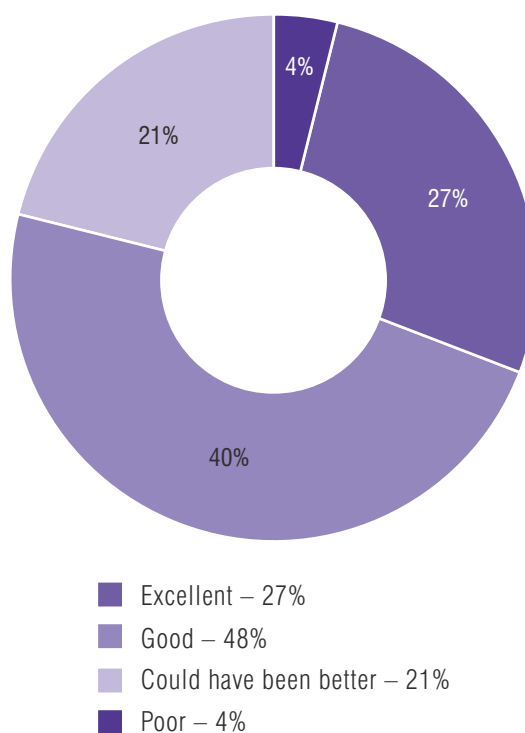
“If you're not studying something that you're passionate about or you're really interested in and have been pushed into by parents and your community, then perhaps that leads to feeling less satisfied with your course.” Mixed race focus group participant, HE

Information, advice and guidance

Respondents were asked how they felt about the information, advice and guidance (IAG) they received prior to attending further and higher education. While 75 per cent of the respondents rated the IAG excellent or good, 25 per cent felt that it was poor or could have been better. Qualitative evidence from the survey indicated that the level of support appeared to be widely dependent on the type and quality of schools and colleges Black students attended, their socio-

economic background and teachers' expectations of their academic performance. This finding is supported by a review of IAG services provided to young people aged 14–19 across 88 local authorities, which found that there was far less confidence in school and college IAG provision compared to external provision, such as Connexions services.²⁶ More than half of local authority and/or Connexions staff in the review believed that young people were not receiving high-quality careers education in school or college, or that IAG was delivered inconsistently in these settings.²⁷

How would you rate the information, advice and guidance you received when choosing to enter further or higher education?



The majority of respondents were positive about the IAG they received, citing the availability of printed materials, online information, tours, fairs, and open days. However, many noted that while IAG was obtainable, it needed to be actively sought out.

“There was plenty of help available but you have to take your own initiative to search for help.”

Other Asian respondent, HE

Qualitative analysis revealed that many respondents conducted research online to inform their decision to attend further or higher education. This research included looking at universities' websites as well as the UCAS, Aimhigher and Connexions websites. For those who were not able to access the Internet easily, this was problematic.

"The information is there but to reach it is not that easy." Black African respondent, HE

Respondents also expressed how important their school or college was in terms of the quality of support they received in reviewing their options and the application process. The respondents that had positive experiences believed the IAG they received allowed them to make an informed choice about the institution they wanted to attend and feel fully prepared for academic life. For instance, some respondents commented that they received guidance from career advisors at their college, who were able to give them resources, such as university prospectuses, and provide them an opportunity to discuss their options.

"I was well informed and guided in my choices for university by my college school teachers. They provided research and information on the best universities I should attend in regards to my interests in subjects and the other factors I would judge in attending a particular institution. In all, I was able to make the best decision and successfully get into my first choice university." Black British respondent, HE

"In my college, the careers team were absolutely brilliant! They were there to help every step of the way and knew what they are talking about."

Black British respondent, HE

However, not all respondents felt their school or college provided the appropriate IAG. In both the survey and focus groups, respondents who believed the IAG they received could have been better or was poor commented that this had an impact on the type of institution they chose to apply to and how prepared they felt for academic life. Black students reported that they lacked information and guidance on various aspects of the application process, such as:

- how to write an application form
- understanding and using league tables
- applying for funding
- the importance of personal references.

Some respondents also commented that their college teachers had low expectations of their academic abilities and potential, which affected their confidence in pursuing a degree course. For example, one respondent reported that they received no encouragement while at college and although they wanted to study medicine, their college teacher told them they would be better suited to a course in nursing or biomedical sciences.

"As an FE student, my classmates and I were pretty much left to ourselves to decide what we wanted to study and where we wanted to study... I went to a college where the aspirations of Black students were low and there were conflicts (inter-racial and BNP). The college did not attempt to reach out to the Black students who were frustrated by their society, peer pressure and family." Other Asian respondent, HE

"My personal tutor at college did not like me, so was not interested in my choices after college. Also I was told off for attending university interviews because I missed lessons at college. My college only paid personal attention to prospective students of Oxford or Cambridge - the others did not count. The college were more concerned about making us do routine procedures, such as stating our extra-curricular activities or positions of responsibilities on a piece of paper rather than asking us about what we wanted to do with our lives after leaving college. Guidance about finance was poor, and guidance about jobs non-existent. The whole experience felt like a bureaucratic process." Bangladeshi survey respondent, HE

"I did not feel they [staff] truly supported me and made comments making me feel I had already been rejected [by HEIs]. They could have done so much more and did so for a non-ethnic pupil in a similar position. I feel my sixth form doesn't encourage

people to seek the best in themselves and many people, even potential high achievers, slip under the cracks and go to universities well below their ability.”

Indian respondent, HE

Many survey respondents and focus group participants stated that researching a potential college or university to attend was sometimes difficult for Black students whose parents did not have knowledge of the process or did not want them to attend. This difficulty was compounded if the student in question also did not receive support or guidance from their secondary school and/or college. The important role of parents and secondary schooling in providing IAG was highlighted in a longitudinal study of 16,000 young people in England commissioned by the DFE.²⁸ The study found that young people are far more likely to receive IAG from their family or school than specialised Connexions services. Therefore, if a young person does not receive appropriate IAG from these sources, it places them at a disadvantage as the aim of IAG is to improve social mobility and reduce inequality “by helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds to raise their horizons and by giving them the support they need to fulfil their potential.”²⁹

“I didn’t really know what university to apply to, and the sixth form I went to was not very helpful or organised. In addition, I didn’t have any guidance from my family and my friends were in the same position.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Factors influencing choice of college and university

Survey respondents were asked what factors influenced their choice of college or university. Many of the responses can be viewed as relevant for the whole student population, not just Black students. The following highlights a summary of the answers provided:

- **Prestige and reputation of institution:** an institution’s league table position and whether a university is a research institution.
- **Course type, content and reputation:** suitability and availability of course and choices of modules offered,

being able to study part time, flexibility of course timetable and whether distance learning, evening courses, an exchange programme or placement course are offered.

- **Entry requirements:** grades obtained and UCAS points required.
- **Location of institution:** proximity of the institution to the student’s home, whether the institution is based in a diverse city or remote town and has a good atmosphere; the quality of life offered by the geographical area, including amenities and nightlife.
- **Cost and affordability:** the cost of living and tuition, if there are any financial incentives available (ie. bursaries offered by the institution) and the payment scheme for student loans and accommodation.
- **Diverse student body:** a multicultural and international student body.
- **Political progressiveness of university:** whether the institution promotes student activism and is not Eurocentric.
- **Social life:** union societies and activities, student support networks, extracurricular activities and campus atmosphere.
- **Campus and institution facilities:** equipment, resources and technology available; support, including tutor support, for students; accessibility for disabled students; the quality of staff, including lecturers; and the quality of university accommodation.
- **Job and work experience opportunities:** whether the institution offers a range of opportunities that will increase employability, and whether it has high graduate employment rates.
- **Personal reasons:** proximity to family, friends, partners; wanting to attend a college or university to specifically break down the stereotype of Black young people and education.

Student-led solutions

Both survey and focus group respondents felt strongly that the barriers Black students face during FE and HE can only be addressed if the inequalities Black communities experience in society as a whole are tackled. Respondents also stated that if Black students are to have equality of opportunity when they enter further and higher education, it is crucial that they receive a high standard of teaching from primary school onwards, attend colleges and universities that cater for the needs of Black students and have parents who are able to effectively support them.

The following points are a summary of suggestions proposed by survey respondents and focus group participants:

Address societal inequalities

“Tackle the problem as a whole, instead of looking into what happened in school/university only. As long as gaps between society in terms of wealth is still huge, it will still happen.” Malaysian respondent, HE

- address institutional racism, particularly around employment opportunities
- improve the socio-economic status of the poorest people in society through progressive tax systems
- provide positive portrayals of Black communities and individuals in the media
- recognise positive Black role models in the community, such as Black doctors, dentists and entrepreneurs.

Improve and promote opportunities in schooling and college

“We all need to believe we can do it! We all need the confidence to try it! We all need someone to tell us we CAN do it!” Indian respondent, HE

“Make university seem more easily accessible and the norm for Black students.” Mixed race respondent, HE

- improve teaching standards, especially in areas of social deprivation – for example, ensuring all schools are funded equally

- include positive aspects of Black history and culture, which highlights Black role models in the national curriculum
- provide after-school support when necessary
- have high expectations of all students, and empower and encourage Black students from primary school onwards to improve their self-esteem and fulfilment of their potential
- promote further and higher education from an early age so that Black students are aware of opportunities to attend college and/or university
- develop Black students' academic skills, such as how to revise, take notes and understand theoretical texts, in preparation for further and higher education
- increase the number of programmes and initiatives focused on improving Black students' access to university – help Black students know what to expect from university and what their options are so they enter college or university with the right expectations
- provide advice on the various courses that can be studied, including which courses lead to which job
- introduce mentoring throughout the education system to provide encouragement and support.

Widen participation in universities

“Certain universities are not that inviting. They are not that accessible when it comes to grades and not really properly advertised to Black students. So Black students think that they're not really good enough. It's not for them.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

“A taster week of lectures prior to first year entry would be good to familiarise students with the process, with an emphasis on pastoral care. This could help them to be aware of the support mechanisms which are available to them, as once they begin study, as important as support is, it can be difficult to make time to find out what is available and how to access it.” Other respondent, HE

- promote the fact that many Black students do attend university
- raise awareness and education surrounding the issues Black students may face
- manage expectations of university and inform students of opportunities and services available to them
- provide pastoral support and advice for Black students who are the first generation to attend university
- provide financial support for those from a low socio-economic background.

Encourage family support and guidance

“Parents should tell their children to protect their dream like my parents did to me, to never be scared if I need something in life. Encouragement is important in not taking things for [granted] and always being grateful.” Black British respondent, HE

- encourage and support Black students to pursue further and higher education
- provide the opportunity for parents to improve their literacy and numeracy skills where necessary
- educate parents about how the further and higher education system works.



Teaching and learning

“All students can do well, but many things such as non-anonymous marking, underlying racism or even not supporting students properly due to lack of understanding is a problem.” Pakistani respondent, HE

The DfES project on attainment controlled for potentially confounding variables and found that even when Black and White students entered HE on a level playing field, the Black students sampled still were more likely to achieve worse degrees than their White peers.³⁰ Thus, while our respondents felt issues prior to HE were a factor, the DfES results suggest the degree attainment gap is strongly related to the experience within teaching and learning at the institution.

The quality of teaching and learning received by survey respondents was, quite understandably, central to their experience of further and higher education. When asked to speculate why Black students were less satisfied about their course and did not achieve as well as their peers, respondents consistently highlighted problems with the curriculum, academic environment, teaching quality, assessment, and academic support. The overall quality of institutions Black students were likely to attend was also called into question.

This is analogous with *National Student Survey* data as reported in a study on ‘Findings and trends, 2006–2010, which indicated that “students from a White ethnic background were significantly more satisfied than the global score, and students from all other ethnic backgrounds were significantly less satisfied than the global score” in the areas of Teaching and Learning and Academic Support.³¹

However, this is not to say that uniformity exists across higher and further education. Analysis of *National Student Survey* data reveals that in certain areas, Black students in FE are more satisfied than those in HE, particularly with feedback and assessment – though Black students in FE remain slightly less satisfied than

their White peers.³² Other research supports the idea that the gap in satisfaction is greater in HE, with the data from *HSBC Student Survey 2010* showing Black students in HE to be considerably less positive in rating the quality of their teaching and learning experience: only 67 per cent Black (African and Caribbean), 82 per cent Asian, and 85 per cent of Mixed race respondents rated their experience as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’, compared to 92 per cent of White participants.³³ Differences between further and higher education students, in terms of their attitudes and experiences of teaching and learning, were also observed in our survey data and, when statistically significant, are highlighted in this chapter.

At the heart of this discussion is the importance of equal treatment from teachers and tutors. Respondents expressed how essential it is to receive fair and balanced teaching, assessment and support – treatment which many stated was currently lacking, to some extent, at their current institution.

“[There are] double standards: different treatment and support for the same course, from the same tutor.” Black British respondent, HE

“Tutors/lectures do have a tendency to look down on ethnic minority students. If not racist, [they are] at the least favourable towards White students.”

Other Asian respondent, HE

While this was perceptual data, the fact that many Black students surveyed held this viewpoint was striking. Whether real or not, these perceptions had a genuine effect on respondents’ confidence, self-esteem and motivation to succeed academically.

Quality of institution attended

Many respondents speculated that Black students were more likely to attend colleges and universities of a lower standard, therefore affecting the quality of the

learning environment they accessed, their ability to succeed academically, and ultimately, their overall satisfaction with the experience.

“Many students from ethnic minorities aren't selected for the better schools or the better courses and their experiences reflect this fact.” Mixed race respondent, HE

Analysis of university admission rates suggests this may indeed be the case. Patterns of participation indicate that the majority of HEIs have a fairly low Black student population (generally under 10 per cent) and that Black students are in fact clustered in a small number of universities.³⁴ In 2007–08, London Metropolitan University, ranked 107th in Times Higher Education's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) league table, accepted 6,115 Black students – almost as many as the 7,815 Black students spread between the 20 universities of the Russell Group.³⁵ A report by ECU and HEA further confirmed that the majority of Black students are registered at post-1992 universities in London, many of which are seen as less prestigious than older, more traditional and established institutions.³⁶ Although data on the patterns of participation in FE is less available, the fact that FE students typically live at home³⁷ would suggest that for many Black FE students, their educational options are limited to the colleges in the area in which they grew up (where the quality of teaching and learning is often linked to students' socio-economic background).

“[We are] unable to get into institutions that are typically the reserve of the White middle class and so obviously things such as assessment will not be that good.” Mixed race respondent, HE

Some respondents believed that Black students were actively excluded from such institutions through institutional racism in the application process, whereas others saw this disparity as a legacy of class barriers and the corresponding opportunities to achieve while in primary and secondary school (as discussed in Chapter 1). Regardless of their reasoning, it was clear that respondents felt there were institutional and societal barriers that prevented most Black students from attending prestigious institutions. While widening

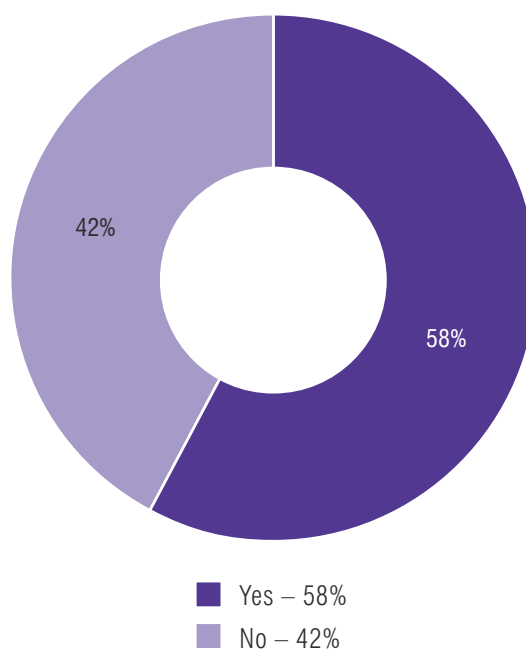
participation efforts in the last few decades have been successful, these need to extend beyond simply increasing the quantity of students accessing HE towards ensuring that Black students are also able to access quality institutions.

Curriculum

Existing research suggests that a multicultural curricula not only help to promote inclusion, but also the academic achievement of Black students. Bhattacharyya et al, for instance, state that, “teachings based on unfamiliar cultural norms, histories and points of reference may have the potential to affect the educational attainment of certain minority ethnic groups.”³⁸

While the majority of survey respondents (58 per cent) felt their curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination, 42 per cent did not believe this to be true of their current course.³⁹ A running theme through both the survey and focus group data was a frustration that courses were designed and taught by non-Black teachers, and often did not take into account diverse backgrounds and views.

Do you feel the curriculum on your course reflects issues of diversity, equality and discrimination?



“Often, programmes are heavily focused on what is considered ‘mainstream’ and may not adequately cater to students of diverse backgrounds.”

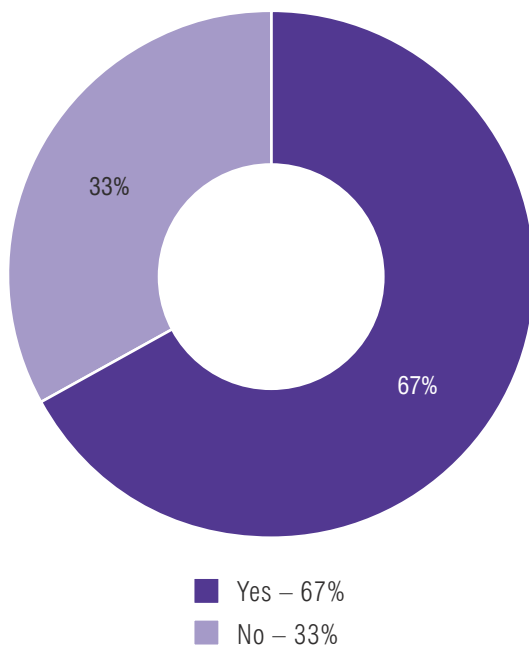
Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“There is a standard way of thinking that is hegemonically White, and students from ethnic minorities either have to get with the programme or do worse ...” Black African respondent, HE

“Teachers automatically assume we’ve had the same education as Whites. The tests are biased and framed around a White discourse that makes it impossible at times for us to understand.”

Black African respondent, HE

Are you able to bring in your perspective as a Black student during lectures and/or tutor group meetings?



Respondents frequently reported feeling marginalised within their learning environment, with more than a third (34 per cent) stating they felt unable to bring their perspective as a Black student to lectures and tutor meetings. It is worth noting, however, that there were statistically significant differences in responses to this question between students studying at different levels. Almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of Black

respondents studying at Levels 1–3 felt they were able to bring their perspective as a Black student during lectures and tutor group meetings, as opposed to only 64 per cent of those studying at Levels 4 and 5 (such as bachelor degrees, HNDs, masters and PhD courses).⁴⁰ This suggests that those studying at higher levels, typically in HE environments, feel less able to bring in their perspective as Black students than those studying at lower levels, generally in FE colleges.

“Educators should realise that they may have many qualifications in their subject area, but they cannot possibly know all the past experiences of life that a student had before coming to their institution. If they try to know us better, they may be able to teach us from the correct angle. Often they just do not want to know, but there are exceptions, rarely, and students like us put all our hopes into those teachers.”

Bangladeshi survey respondent, HE

Many respondents in both further and higher education held the view that the Black perspective was not valued in an academic setting and, in some cases, actively discouraged.

“If you choose to do what are perceived as ‘Black’ subjects or you include ‘Black’ material as part of your work – you get lower grades for it because institutions don’t value the work.” Black African respondent, HE

“Not being able to express or hear [our] own experience in learning – especially with a discipline as subjective as English, being told ‘you are wrong’ at the slightest transgression from the norm, or for not conforming to ‘group think’, or for questioning the assumptions of other students and teachers. Is this not the process of learning? Questioning the deeply-held sentiments and cultural beliefs, attitudes and ideologies of teachers can only lead to trouble, hostility, and behaviour verging at times upon gross professional misconduct. I felt that teachers were trying to fit me into a mould, and if I was resistant then they desired to ‘correct’ my way of looking at the world. Surely, they should be working with the diversity and different eyes, mind, and experiences that I could bring to their discussion, and/or development of the research areas of the discipline?” Mixed race respondent, HE

Respondents expressed how important it was that their perspectives were included in the learning environment, a finding consistent with the *HSBC Student Survey 2010* data, which found that nearly half of Black (African and Caribbean) and Asian respondents (49 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively), and an overwhelming 80 per cent of Mixed race respondents, stating a desire to be involved in shaping the content, curriculum, or design of their course.⁴¹

“This could be improved by broadening the education system. When it comes to education, different people approach it in different ways. Things have to be taught in a way that suits the learners’ needs. They [the university] could try teaching ethnic groups about their history and personalise their education. They could bring in successful ethnic figures to demonstrate that any goal is achievable.” Black British respondent, FE

“More BME-related courses – BME history, arts, politics, etc. More BME lecturers, more support for BME students.” Black British respondent, HE

ECU’s statistical report, *Equality in Higher Education*, found there is currently Black under-representation within academic staff: as of 2010, only 7% of UK academic national staff are Black, compared to 18% of UK-domiciled students.⁴² Moreover, Black academic staff are more likely to be on fixed-term contracts rather than permanent positions and less likely to be in teaching roles than white academic staff.⁴³ Respondents highlighted the need for an increase in Black lecturers in the educational system, expressing how Black representation within staff would not only allow for a more diverse teaching perspective, but also would provide them with role models whom they could be inspired by.

“In my last term, a Black lady came into science. And it was weird to me because I had never seen a Black teacher in my life before, which is not good! But because I saw that woman in that role, I thought, ‘Ooh!’ I felt really empowered, I thought, a Black woman in that role? I felt proud. And I thought, ‘If she can do anything, I can do anything’.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

Academic language and skills

Respondents often described their difficulty in adjusting to the styles of teaching and assessment at their institution, many highlighting that their primary and secondary schooling did not prepare them sufficiently for FE and HE (as outlined in Chapter 1). They reported being particularly concerned about their academic skills related to essay writing and their knowledge of academic vocabulary.

“I think it is as a result of our various English Language experiences – both writing and speaking, with emphasis on the former. Many of us do not, for a long time, understand the writing pattern that is acceptable in the system.” Black African respondent, FE

“The shock of what is needed to do in order to pass is great. Especially when you have to do an essay and form it to the ... university style. I must agree it took three years to get my head around it. It is nothing to do with being daft, it's simply learning a new tool and now I am getting Bs and Cs for my assignments.” Black Caribbean respondent, FE

A significant minority of Black students surveyed described difficulties in understanding their lecturers – some because of unfamiliarity with academic jargon, others because of language barriers. Students whose first language was not English, and international students still adjusting to the UK educational system, found it particularly difficult.

“Sometimes we find it hard to understand the teachers’ accents, and they speak very fast, and so I do not get all the notes my White brethren might understand.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“First of all, some students from ethnic minorities are learning subjects in a completely different language from what they may be using at home, and coupling this with a very specific ‘academic language’ which is almost certainly alien to most means that it is harder for these students to start their courses at an equal level ... as their White counterparts. This in turn can leave students struggling throughout their studies and lead to lower qualification achievements.” Black African respondent, HE

While inexperience with academic language generally resulted from lack of exposure to these tools earlier on in their education, many Black students surveyed felt that communication barriers were often exacerbated by their teachers' apparent lack of concern or understanding. Respondents asserted that teachers did not always take into account the diverse range of academic and language skills in the classroom. Those who perhaps were less familiar with academia felt they were left to struggle on their own.

"[There is a] lack of adequate understanding of how to communicate with minorities, [a] notion that 'one-size-fits-all' when communicating with minorities."

Black African respondent, HE

"Often teachers make comments about my culture when they think they understand [when they don't] - ignorance is a real problem for me coming from a very white dominated school. Even when a teacher can't say your name properly because its 'foreign', it's hugely embarrassing for you. One teacher for the last two years has been calling me any Indian name he can remember despite teaching me daily! It's shocking that behaviour like this is tolerated from minority pupils like me!"

Indian respondent, HE

Several respondents, both from the survey and focus groups, detailed experiences in which they attempted to seek clarification or support from their teachers, only to be met with hostility or derision. Others talked about instances in which they were ridiculed by fellow students for asking 'stupid questions' in the classroom. These experiences were detrimental to respondents' confidence and furthered perceptions that there was no one to turn to for academic help. The need for teachers and tutors to be approachable was discussed at length by both survey and focus group respondents, many stressing that staff should recognise that cultural differences are not indications of one's intelligence.

"We were learning about mortgages and I was finding it difficult at the time to fully grasp the concept. Where I come from, a lot of people buy their own land and build their own homes and these are passed down to their kids. Any new developments are also usually

bought outright and so the issue of mortgages and repayments does not usually occur. When I asked the teacher to please explain the concept again so I could understand it, one of the other students said, during the class, that obviously I wouldn't understand mortgages because after all, the people in my country still live in trees. The teacher did not necessarily reprimand the student after the comment was made. I found that very insulting."

Black African respondent, HE

Indeed, some students surveyed believed that their teachers did not provide the same level of attention or encouragement they would to non-Black students and that they were 'condemned to fail'. While this perception was difficult to quantify, respondents pointed to a lack of support and constructive feedback, providing examples of instances where they believed their teachers were willing to help other students, but were apathetic when they requested the same. Whether this was real or perceived, this had a direct impact on the student's self-esteem and motivation.

"Although this is highly debatable, ethnic minority students are treated differently from their White counterparts in terms of teacher support and actual belief in the potential of the student. Teachers often do this unconsciously. The dreams of ethnic minority students are also often dampened by teachers with negative attitudes [who] tell students who are more than capable that there are 'other' things to do. Unfortunately, Black students are not encouraged to maximise their ... potential academic excellence."

Other respondent, FE

"[Black students are] not encouraged as much as other students, the teachers don't know how to deal with them. The teachers don't know how to separate their prejudices of skin colour with just what the student needs."

Black Caribbean respondent, HE

"Because minority groups are stereotyped, teachers think that they won't do the work. In turn the student thinks, 'If the teacher doesn't care, why should I?'"

Black Caribbean respondent, FE

Feedback and assessment

“There is still a strong prevalence of institutional racism which causes predetermined bias towards Black students. The more subjective the assessment, the more likely the bias.”

Black Caribbean respondent, HE

The qualitative data suggests that many respondents were unsatisfied with the current feedback they received. However, data from the *National Student Survey* indicates that in this area, Black student satisfaction is actually relatively on a par with, or slightly higher than, that for White students. Those in FE were most satisfied, with 77 per cent of Black (African or Caribbean) and 74 per cent of Asian FE respondents stating they had received detailed comments on their work (compared to 74 per cent of White students).⁴⁴ These figures, however, fell when considered sector-wide (ie. FE and HE as an aggregate), suggesting that HE students are markedly less satisfied than those in FE. Sector-wide, 69 per cent of Black students and 60 per cent of Asian students agreed that they had received detailed comments about their work, compared to 64 per cent of White students.

However, the Black students we surveyed were considerably less satisfied about the assessment and marking they received. Respondents regularly cited racial and cultural bias among lecturers as a deterrent to their overall satisfaction and attainment in further and higher education. Again, evidence suggests that Black students in HE are less likely to be satisfied with assessment and marking at their institution than those in FE. According to the *National Student Survey*, 75 per cent of Black (African or Caribbean) and Asian students in FE believed assessment arrangements and marking had been fair (compared to 79 per cent of their White peers). This number fell to 68 per cent when considered sector-wide (compared to 75 per cent of White students sector-wide).⁴⁵

“The lecturers are very culturally biased and hold low expectations for non-White students. I got a really low grade in an essay which was far below my average and my lecturer greeted me with disdain.”

I don't want to assume it's because I am a 6 foot tall, working class male, with a working class accent but his equation of me and my grade as being good enough for me despite my previous essay being graded by another lecturer awarding me a first was disheartening to say the least.” Black British respondent, HE

“I believe there is injustice in marking. They can tell, from the way you get across the answers in exams, because your way of getting your ideas across are different. Also, they could just grade you anyhow since there is no one that is really bothered to check accuracy in grading and they tend to soften the marking of White students [more] than ethnic minorities. And you can't contest on the basis of injustice, therefore you just have to accept it on faith.” Black African respondent, HE

Analysis of the qualitative data indicated that fair assessment and transparent marking procedures was a key area of concern for respondents. Many expressed the need for anonymous marking, without which they felt potential bias and discrimination could take place. As one respondent stated:

“If your name is a foreign-sounding name then you're more than likely to get less marks than someone with a Western-sounding name.”

Mixed race focus group participant, FE

“Anonymous marking doesn't exist. Those with noticeably 'ethnic' names will find themselves more susceptible to academics who, whilst not self-identifying as racist, may [have] an automatic stigma to give for example ... African students (known so because of their name) a first in a module.” Black British respondent, HE

“I am not happy with the assessment part of my course as it's not anonymous and tutors can see whose work they are marking.” Indian respondent, FE

Some respondents also felt that they could not sufficiently express their perspective, particularly around subjects involving race, equality and history, for fear that they would be marked down as a result.

“If we write about race issues in our work and from an area that the lecturer does not agree we can be marked down.” Mixed race respondent, HE

It is clear that this belief had a negative impact on the degree to which Black students engage with lecturers and tutors, with large numbers of both survey respondents and focus group participants stating that they were often reluctant to approach anyone for academic support because of their perceived bias in feedback and assessment. This also had an impact on Black students' confidence and motivation to succeed academically, confirming existing research into the correlation between feelings of vulnerability to discrimination and achievement.⁴⁶

Academic support

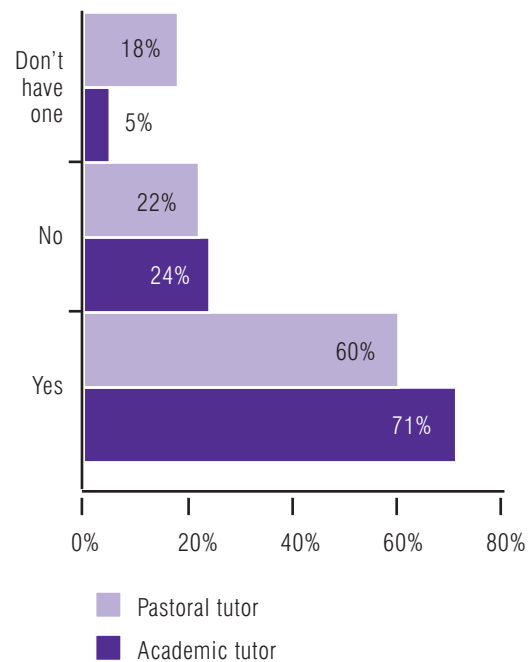
Concerns over academic support appeared more frequently than any other theme when respondents were asked to speculate why there might be a degree attainment gap between Black students and their White UK and Irish peers. Moreover, there was clearly a perception among these respondents that the degree to which Black students were supported by their lecturers and tutors was a crucial aspect of not only their academic success, but also to their overall self-esteem both inside and outside the classroom.

“[There is] not enough support. Culturally, as a minority ethnic student myself, I may be more shy about asking for help as tutors do not appear to have the time, and I feel not to bother them. In other words, they adopt an unapproachable manner. I know that more support can make a great deal of difference in the way of encouragement and positive feedback. This is not always forthcoming, especially where tutors already may hold preconceptions about the student... In my experience, where tutors do not identify in any way with the person they are trying to help, I feel it may be an impossible task to expect any improvement.” Black British respondent, HE

While the majority of respondents (71 per cent) felt adequately supported by their academic tutors, with one student even describing their tutor as “the nicest and most understanding person I have ever met”,

almost one in four (24 per cent) did not. Nearly the same amount (22 per cent) also expressed dissatisfaction with their personal (pastoral) tutor when asked if they felt sufficiently supported by him/her. Some 60 per cent felt they were supported enough, while 18 per cent stated that they did not have a personal tutor at all.

Do you feel supported enough by academic tutors and pastoral tutors in your institution?



This is consistent with *National Student Survey 2009–10* sector-wide results, which found that Black (African and Caribbean) and Asian respondents were slightly less positive than White respondents about their overall academic support: 71 per cent of Black (African and Caribbean) and Asian respondents were positive, compared to 75 per cent of White respondents. Black (African and Caribbean) and Asian respondents were less likely to feel they: received sufficient advice and support with their studies; were able to contact staff; and could access good advice when they needed to make study choices.⁴⁷

However, our survey data suggests that there are significantly different experiences of academic support between students studying at different levels. Those

studying at Levels 4–5 were less likely to have tutors (6 per cent stated they did not have an academic tutor and 21 per cent stated they did not have a pastoral tutor, compared to only 4 per cent and 9 per cent of those at Levels 1–3). Moreover, even if they received support from a tutor, respondents studying at Levels 4–5 were less likely to be satisfied. A large majority (82 per cent) of respondents studying at Levels 1–3 felt adequately supported by their academic tutor, compared to only 67 per cent of students studying at Levels 4 and 5. Similarly, 79 per cent of those studying at Levels 1–3 felt the same about the pastoral care they received, as opposed to only 53 per cent of students surveyed at Levels 4 and 5. These differences suggest that Black students in FE may be more supported than those in HE, as Levels 4 and 5 typically are taught at higher education institutions whereas Levels 1–3 are generally at further education colleges.

This difference is supported in the *National Student Survey* data, where in response to the statement, “I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies”, Black (African or Caribbean) students studying in FE were 6 per cent more satisfied than the sector-wide average – yet were still 1 per cent less satisfied than White students studying in a FE college.⁴⁸ Our survey respondents speculated about possible reasons for the lack of academic support. Some believed that tutors were simply disinterested in their progress; others felt that there might be some racial bias in terms of the level of support offered. At the same time, respondents often recognised that their tutors were unable to offer the level of care they desired because they themselves were overburdened with academic responsibilities.

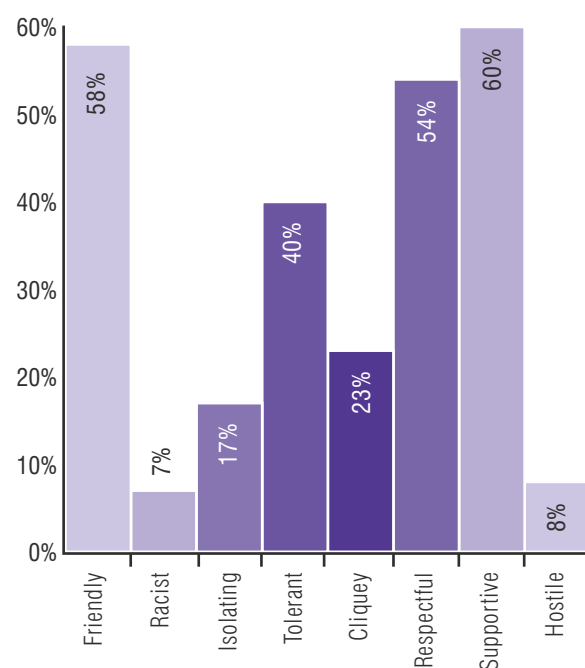
“I am sure my particular tutor would be more supportive if she herself was better supported.” Mixed race respondent, FE

“I want to reach out to my personal tutor, but I don’t want to feel the guilt that I’m taking her time away for myself. I want to talk to a wiser person about life and about my career but I want to feel that the person wants to talk to me, and for some reason I don’t feel comfortable around my own personal tutor.” Arab respondent, HE

Academic environment

Factors inside the classroom, as well as the general ethos of the university or college, contributed to respondents’ feelings about their academic environment. When asked whether their institution promoted a welcoming and diverse culture, the vast majority (87 per cent) affirmed this to be the case. Again, FE respondents appeared to be more positive, with 92 per cent believing their institution to have a welcoming and diverse culture, compared to 85 per cent of HE students.

How would you describe your experience of your current teaching and learning environment? Tick all that apply.

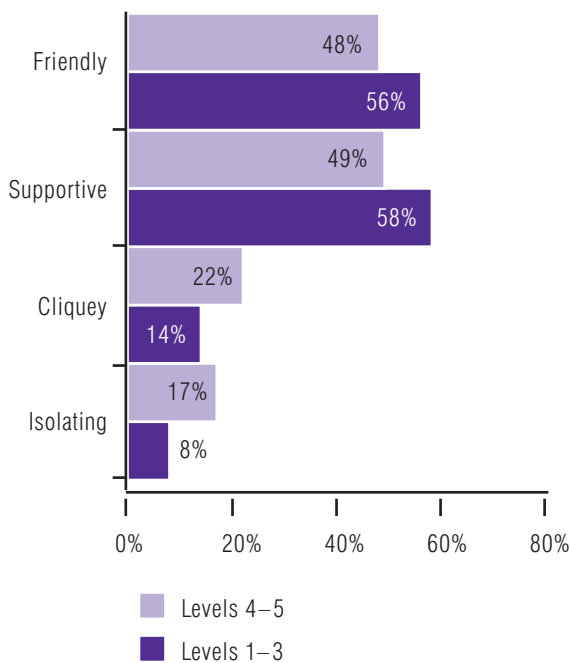


Across the overall sample, most Black students surveyed were also positive about their current teaching and learning environment, with 60 per cent describing it as ‘supportive’, 58 per cent as ‘friendly’ and 54 per cent as ‘respectful’. Some 40 per cent felt their academic environment was ‘tolerant’.

Closer analysis once again revealed that students studying at Levels 1–3 were much more positive about their academic environment than those studying for a bachelors degree, masters or PhD (Levels 4–5). The

chart below depicts the statistically significant differences between the two cohorts, with Black students surveyed in Levels 1–3 more likely to describe their academic environment as ‘friendly’ and ‘supportive’, and less likely to believe it to be ‘isolating’ and ‘cliquey’.

Differences in levels of study and teaching and learning environment: How would you describe your experience of your current teaching and learning environment? Tick all that apply.



Those who felt well-supported, fairly assessed, and who believed they were studying an inclusive curriculum in which their perspectives were valued were more likely to describe their institutions positively (selecting adjectives such as ‘supportive’, ‘respectful’, ‘tolerant’ and ‘friendly’). Such respondents closely linked their academic environment to their self-esteem and achievements.

“[My academic environment] helps me to keep at it by motivating me. It makes me feel more welcome because I am being treated for who I am and not my skin colour. I feel more open so I can express myself freely.” Black British respondent, FE

“[My academic environment] makes me more focused because I know that my teachers are there

to help me, and not to single me out in any way. It helps me perform better because I am comfortable in my environment and I feel that I am able to perform better whilst knowing that there are supportive teachers and students.” Black British respondent, HE

However, a significant minority of respondents were less positive about their current teaching and learning environment, with 23 per cent describing it as ‘cliquey’, 17 per cent as ‘isolating’, 8 per cent as ‘hostile’ and 7 per cent as ‘racist’. These Black students detailed their feelings, often speaking of alienation and exclusion. Many of these feelings spawned from inside the classroom, with several respondents describing feeling left out of discussions and debates or being ‘invisible’ to lecturers, whom they believed did not acknowledge their presence as much as other students. Whether this was real or perceived, these feelings have a direct effect on many students’ motivation to succeed academically.

“[Feeling excluded] tends to make me less engaged in the learning process. I generally go to classes and complete the necessary work but rarely engage in class discussion.” African American respondent, HE

“Not wanting to attend lecturers, not asking for help.” Black British respondent, FE

“Well, you dread going into class every morning. And you can’t wait until it’s all over.” Black African respondent, HE

“Isolation, left feeling as an intruder, rather than having the right to be here.” Black British respondent, HE

“I feel as if I’m on the edge, not quite part of the experience, the team, or taken as a valued member with something important to say.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Even so, some respondents harnessed the negativity of their academic environment to make themselves work harder, often referencing the need to dispel stereotypes in the face of adversity.

"It just spurs me to work harder and prove to those that think Black students are dumb that they are wrong." Black African respondent, HE

"At first, it is very disempowering, but I have managed to make friends who have supported me in running in student union elections as well as kept me going at university. So now I feel in a better position to challenge what I see as racism in the institution and cliques in the student union."

Mixed race respondent, HE



Student-led solutions

Teaching and learning

Although many of the following suggestions may be typical of any student, Black or not, they were often put forth by respondents as a way to address the particular challenges that Black students can face. A Black student who is not familiar with the UK educational system or is the first in their family to attend further or higher education, for instance, may require additional personal attention and advice. An awareness and understanding of the unique issues that Black students face, in the form of sensitivity training, was often proposed for both fellow students and staff.

Ensure equal treatment

“Teachers should make us feel supported and the same as Whites and other students. Treat everyone equal.” Black British respondent, HE

Black students surveyed stressed the importance of equal treatment and highlighted the need for transparency and accountability. Fair, just and balanced teaching and assessment practices were particularly emphasised, with the ideal being anonymous marking. This could be achieved through the use of clear guidance on assessment and feedback procedures for staff and students alike, as well as policies ensuring that students receive feedback on their marks and are able to dispute them, if necessary. Students should be assured that their concerns will be heard and carefully considered, and if possible, rectified by unbiased staff. Equalities policies should also be widely distributed and strictly adhered to.

Provide encouragement and care

“I want someone to inspire me and say, ‘You know what, it doesn’t matter about your colour. You can get there as well. Don’t let anyone discriminate against you, regardless of what they are.’ So I think it should be more focused on how you can get up there, overcome these racial barriers, rather than feed in the anger.” Black African focus group participant, HE

Teachers and tutors alike should encourage their students and actively work to help them succeed. Patience, flexibility and understanding were key attributes described.

Recognise unique issues Black students may face

“I think some form of sensitivity training needs to be undertaken by many of the existing White educators; when an individual can sense that this person who is supposed to be guiding you is uncomfortable either because they see you, or even themselves, as ‘other’, it can severely decrease one’s confidence in that person.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Tutors and teachers should understand the cultural and language difficulties some Black students face and proactively work to ensure their approach to teaching suits learners’ needs.

Include diverse perspectives

“[Diversity could be facilitated] by curricula being more diverse – Britain colonised most of the world and played a heavy role in the slave trade – how can you understand contemporary Britain without acknowledging this history or understanding how the rest of the world shaped it?” Black African respondent, HE

Many Black students surveyed expressed the need for more diverse perspectives in their modules, particularly in the areas of history, arts and politics.

Improve Black representation in role models and staff

“Those that have a foothold in the educational system need to make themselves models for those wishing to enter higher education. A wider ethnic representation that does not promote ethnic aggression or difference but works towards incorporating ethnic qualities into a new standard that mirrors the diversity of student campuses.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Increased ethnic representation among teaching and tutoring staff was often suggested as a way to increase the potential for Black perspectives to be included in curriculum content and delivery of courses and to provide assurance that Black students would be treated equally and fairly. Many respondents also noted that the presence of Black staff could serve to inspire and encourage Black students.

Increase academic support

Survey respondents suggested an array of academic support, including skill-building workshops, online learning resources, language support, writing and teaching courses, revision classes and peer-to-peer mentoring. They also highlighted that clear signposting was needed, as they were often unclear about the existing support services offered at their institutions.

Tutor support

Respondents also highlighted the fact that tutors were in an ideal position to provide encouragement and care for Black students who felt isolated and excluded from university or college life, or who were hesitant to approach lecturers for help for fear of being 'laughed at'. Suggested improvements to the tutor system included:

Give personal attention and advice

"Take out more time to talk to each student about how they feel about their course, take into consideration their problems and concerns." Black African respondent, HE

"Actual tutoring sessions where the tutor actually listened to your problems and cared about what was being said." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Tutors should have a direct interest in the students' success and make themselves available to speak and discuss the students' futures, in terms of personal development, higher education and career choices.

Enhance access to tutor

"My tutor is so busy and [sees] tutees as a burden rather than an opportunity to give support to someone less experienced. [I'd like] a tutor who makes the effort to return messages (e-mail or telephone) and arranges regular contact if needed."

Mixed race respondent, HE

Interaction with tutors could be improved by increasing office hours and methods of communication – such as online, email and telephone as well as face-to-face discussions.

Provide individual support

"[Tutors] are more focused on the group and so you hardly get the individual help you may need."

Black African respondent, HE

Tutorial groups should be limited in size to ensure that individual support and adequate feedback is provided. One-on-one meetings were seen as the ideal.

Increase clarity on tutor's role

"Every tutor seems to have different rules and I think this can be really confusing especially when given information on an issue by one tutor but then being told something else on the same issue by another tutor. There should be a more rigorous uniformity within the tutor system to ensure that students know exactly what to expect from the tutor system and also where exactly within that tutor system could they be seeking the support needed." Black African respondent, HE

A clearly specified structure for the tutorial system would help to manage expectations and ensure that students are aware of available help and guidance.

Case studies

In 2007–08, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) jointly ran a summit programme which brought together 15 HEIs to plan, develop, and/or pilot initiatives to address the differential attainment gap in their institutions.

A recently published report showcases the work of these 15 HEIs and highlights a range of institutional

approaches to address the attainment gap. The following case studies are from HEIs that have employed a range of strategies as part of their work to address disparities in degree attainment undertaken through participation and the summit programme. They have also both had input from the NUS Black Students' Campaign.

The University of the Arts London



The University of the Arts London has supported the development of a project called *Shades of Noir* by Aisha Richards. The project complements other initiatives the university has undertaken to improve the attainment and experience of Black students. The project engages a significant number of staff, students and alumni from across the university and is

particularly important as it seeks to adopt a broad and inclusive approach to changing thinking and practice relating to race and ethnicity, in both creative HE and the creative industries more widely. Moreover, the project aims to ensure the teaching of art and design validates student identity across the institution.

Although the project is in its early stages, it is already gaining interest from industry and the media. Once developed, *Shades of Noir* will include a programme of activities and a range of resources developed around an exhibition, to be held at the Kings Cross Exhibition space in summer term 2012. This will include a series of talks, discussions and debates around race and ethnicity in the arts, design and communication, a catalogue and resources aiming to enhance pedagogy and curricula.

This project has and will engage students from a variety of backgrounds, open the debate around liberation and diversity in the curriculum and most of all allow space and a place for students to be part of developing the future of the creative fabric of the global society of the 21st century.

The programme website will be live from July 2011 www.shadesofnoir.co.uk

Coventry University

ECU and HEA's report on ethnicity, gender and attainment prompted Coventry University to explore the disparity in degree attainment between Black and White students. The university began its work by commissioning an institutional audit to identify the differentials in student progression and attainment by ethnicity. Having the support of senior management was critical in securing resources and sustaining institutional commitment. The results of the audit were used to develop four mini action research projects, which received funding from Coventry and Warwickshire Lifelong Learning Network.

In addition to securing a place on the summit programme in 2009, the university joined the National Mentoring Consortium for BME Students and secured funding to carry out a further two mini projects. As well as building up a local knowledge base from the projects, the university began disseminating learning across the institution to build sustainability. Gaining support from the university's Equality and Diversity Committee proved to be very important in this regard.

Once the work on degree attainment was included as a key objective in Coventry University's Equality and Diversity strategy, the university instituted a staff development programme, which involved the creation of 'diversity champions' within each department and service. Each diversity champion was responsible for sharing learning with their particular part of the university. To support their work, the diversity champions received training, had access to a website and attended two monthly meetings to report on developments, share ideas and discuss any difficulties. The most significant positive outcome from this approach was that in a short period of time almost every member of the university (academic and service) staff was engaged in addressing the issue of Black attainment.

A number of other initiatives have since developed, notably a national conference on Black attainment held at Coventry University in 2010, and a two-day masterclass in 2011, which was specifically geared towards staff with a strategic role to address Black attainment within their institutions.

To find out more about the work of the University of the Arts London, Coventry University and the summit programme as a whole please refer to ECU and HEA's report, Improving the degree attainment of Black and minority ethnic students www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/inclusion/ethnicity/ImprovingDegreeAttainment.pdf



Institutional environment

To gain an understanding of student life as a whole, we explored various aspects of the further and higher education institutional environment in our research. While both the survey and focus group respondents covered issues such as social inclusion, finances, racism and the role of students' unions, we also asked survey respondents to comment on their current educational institution's equalities policies and complaints procedures. What is evident from the findings is that a range of factors outside the academic environment can affect attainment and satisfaction levels.

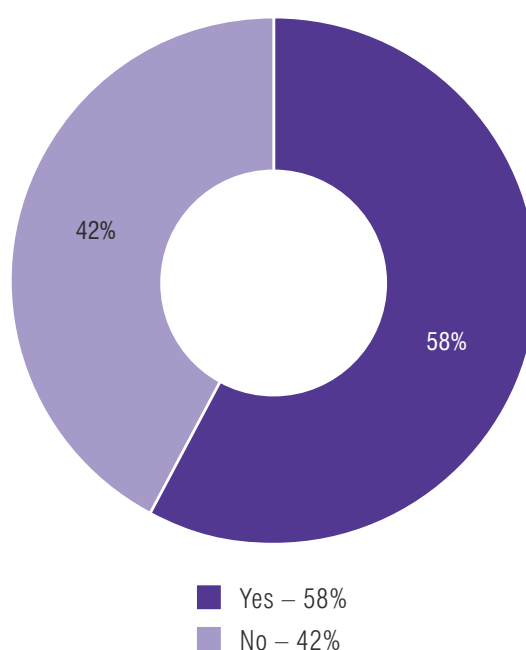
Institution's equalities policies

Some 43 per cent of students surveyed were aware of the equalities policies at their institution. Through further analysis, it was apparent that postgraduate students were more likely to be aware of their institution's equalities policies than undergraduate students. 56 per cent of postgraduates reported they knew of their institution's equalities policies, compared to only 41 per cent of undergraduate students. There are several possible reasons for this: because of their longer time spent in HE, postgraduate students will have received more IAG across their educational experience and thus greater exposure to such policies; it follows they will have more awareness of institutions' duties in this area. However, there was no statistically significant difference between further and higher education respondents.

Survey respondents were also asked what impact, if any, they believed these equalities policies had. The majority of respondents who were aware of their institution's policies believed they had a positive impact for a variety of reasons. For instance, some reported beliefs that equalities policies not only promote equality for all in a college or university, but also create an environment where discrimination is less likely to occur, as students are more mindful of their behaviour and aware of the consequences of being discriminatory. Some respondents also commented that equalities

policies raise awareness of the importance of treating people with respect, which in turn creates a more inclusive and tolerant environment, where everyone has a sense of belonging and where tutors and students have mutual respect for one another.

Are you aware of any equalities policies in your institution?



"Generally, it gives everybody a fair chance to learn in a supportive environment." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

"[The policies] have had a very positive impact as there is a zero tolerance policy and this is reflected in behaviour and attitudes as students know what is required and expected of them and what not to do, whatever their views are. This will also carry with students to later life, in effect, benefitting the whole society." Black British respondent, HE

Many respondents held the belief that equalities policies provided a reassurance that Black students would be treated equally and these policies therefore positively

influenced how they felt in their college or university. For example, respondents commented that equalities policies ensure certain standards are upheld and, in turn, this influences how an institution meets the needs of Black students. Some respondents further reported that equalities policies make Black students feel valued, respected and more confident in their college or university. Based on this, a minority of respondents reported that equalities policies encourage Black students to go on to further and higher education, as they know there is support and they can raise concerns when needed.

“... It makes me feel part of the university and it makes me feel that I belong. In case of anything concerning racial issues, I know where to go for assistance.” Black African respondent, HE

“It encourages students to go into higher education knowing that they will get support and are able to raise any concerns without fear of repercussions.”

Black Caribbean respondent, HE

However, not all Black students surveyed held these views. Some were sceptical of equal policies' impact asserting that their existence alone did not achieve an inclusive institutional ethos, stressing that it was the everyday practices of staff and students that truly created a welcoming environment. A significant minority of respondents even argued that equalities policies had virtually no impact upon their educational experience as they were not publicised well, were rarely upheld or only existed to pay lip service to the equalities agenda.

“A policy is only of significance if it is put into practice – I have personally found that the words don't necessarily match up to good practice.” Black African respondent, HE

“People do not take any notice of these as the information has not been made obvious.” Mixed race respondent, FE

“The policies were meant to be put round the college on the walls but they never were. They are still in the box in which they came, it has had no effect. I've had racial remarks made towards me that were hurtful, but no disciplinary actions were taken.” Black British respondent, FE

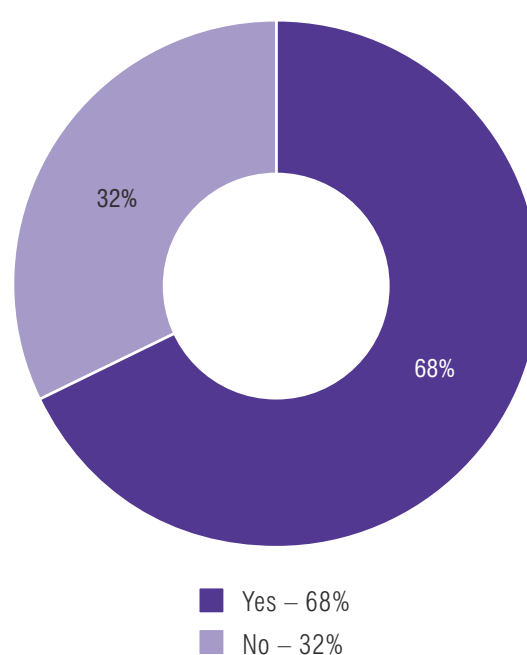
“[Equalities policies are] just words put on a website or a paper. People hardly ever follow them. They [my institution] do superficial promotions of diversity, failing or not wanting to bother to tackle the problem from its root.” Bangladeshi survey respondent, HE

While it was a minority of the students surveyed who held this belief, their views highlight how vitally important it is for institutions to not merely have equalities policies, but also work proactively to ensure that students are aware of them and can trust that their mandates are adhered in practice.

Institution's complaints procedures

We asked survey respondents whether they knew how to make a complaint if they needed to. We also asked them if they had ever made a complaint, and whether they trusted the integrity of their college or university's structures to deal fairly with complaints. The results showed that 66 per cent of respondents were aware of how to make a complaint at their college or university and 14 per cent had made a complaint at their institution in the past. Almost one in three (32 per cent) of Black students surveyed reported that they did not trust the integrity of their current educational establishment to deal with complaints fairly.

Do you trust the integrity of the university structures/system to deal fairly with your complaint?



Further analysis of this data found that within HE postgraduate students were more likely to know how to make a complaint than undergraduates. Three-quarters (75 per cent) of postgraduate respondents, compared to 62 per cent of undergraduate respondents, knew how to make a complaint. Strikingly, although postgraduates were more likely to be aware of their institution's complaints procedure they were less likely than undergraduate students to trust the integrity of their institution to deal fairly with complaints, suggesting that levels of cynicism about institutional policies may increase during time spent in HE.

Survey respondents were not asked to state why they had made a complaint, but the following reasons were cited unprompted by some respondents: racism, sexual harassment, bullying, hostile treatment from tutors, the quality of equipment, low exam results, lack of support for dyslexia and the distance to a work placement. Of those respondents that had made a complaint, around one in three felt satisfied with the way complaint was handled, mainly because they felt their views were listened to and that appropriate action was taken.

"I feel that my views were heard." Black British respondent, FE

"It was dealt with swiftly – the members of staff were very understanding and put me at ease."
Black British respondent, HE

The remaining two-thirds of respondents who had made a complaint were dissatisfied with how their complaint was handled. Respondents were unhappy with the complaints procedure at their college or university for a range of reasons, including: the procedure being too time-consuming; no action being taken as a result of the complaint; and the complaint being ignored or dealt with insensitively. Qualitative data further highlighted that for some students, making a complaint was difficult if it meant complaining about a tutor or lecturer who was teaching them and marking their work. There was a perception among some respondents that academic staff "stick together" and support one another, and thus making a complaint could jeopardise their overall attainment. A minority of

the respondents who were disappointed with how their complaint was managed also reported that they had lost confidence in the complaints process and had been discouraged from making further complaints.

"It's staff against you and your degree is on the line so you feel like doing anything further would rock the boat, especially when the person is responsible for marking your work and arranging your placements. What do you do? I found other senior tutors talking me out of things and kind of gatekeeping because no matter how they portray as if you have a right, they are against you as an academic staff team." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

"The teacher was so racist and I told another teacher who said they had heard the same complaint before, but nothing was done."
Black African respondent, HE

Racism

Throughout the survey and focus groups, respondents touched upon both institutional and personal racism, and how these forms of racism must be acknowledged to fully understand Black students' experiences of further and higher education. It was evident from the qualitative data that the possibility of experiencing racism was a factor some Black students consider when thinking about which institution to attend. For example, some respondents stated that they specifically chose to attend institutions that were ethnically diverse to minimise the chances of experiencing racism. There was also a perception among respondents that the probability of experiencing racism in a Russell Group institution would be higher as there would be fewer Black students in these institutions, making the Black students who study there more vulnerable.

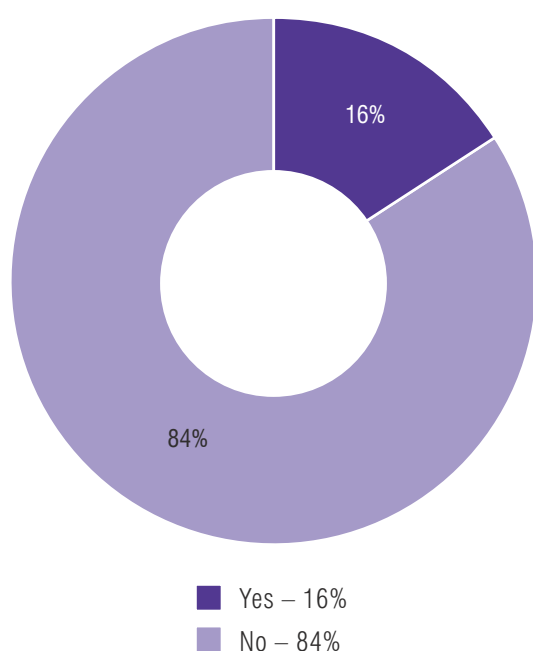
"I chose my university because I was comfortable enough that the racism I'd experience would be minimal/very low threat." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

"I think you'll find that Black students in Russell Group institutions probably have a worse experience than Black students in other institutions that probably

have a lot more Black lecturers and a lot more Black students that go there. The social element helps the university experience. The experience would be probably worse for Black students at institutions with less of a Black culture.” Black African focus group respondent, HE

We asked survey respondents if they had any experience of racism in their current educational institution, and we asked focus group respondents what racism meant to them. Nearly one in six (16 per cent) of survey respondents reported that they had experienced racism in their current educational institution, and focus group respondents provided a range of examples of either experiencing or observing racism while at college or university.

Have you had any experience of racism in your current educational institution?



Through further analysis of the survey data, we found that perceptions of the academic environment as racist, as well as first-hand experiences of racism, increased with the age of respondent. Only 3 per cent of survey respondents aged 20 and under believed their teaching and learning environment to be racist; this increased to 6 per cent for those aged 21–24, 8

per cent for those aged 25–39, and 12 per cent for those aged 40 and over. Similarly, 14 per cent of those aged 20 and under stated they had experienced racism at their institution. This increased to 17 per cent for Black respondents aged 21–24, fell slightly to 15 per cent for those aged 25–39, and then rose to 29 per cent for those aged 40 and over.⁴⁹ We also found that international students were more likely to view their academic environment as racist than home students (discussed in Chapter 4).

This finding is not surprising considering the *NUS Hate Crime Interim Report (2011)*,⁵⁰ which explored nearly 10,000 students' understanding, awareness and experiences of hate incidents, found racial bias to be a motivating factor in 30 per cent of all hate incidents reported in an online survey. Furthermore, the hate crime survey found that Black students were much more likely to be victimised by racial prejudice, with 18 per cent of Black students experiencing at least one race hate incident during their current studies, compared to only 4 per cent of White students. According to the research, those of Chinese descent were most likely to be victims, with 30 per cent reporting a race hate incident. However, significant levels of other Black groups reported victimisation, with 19 per cent of Asians, 15 per cent of Black (African or Caribbean) students and 13 per cent of Mixed race students also reporting at least one race hate incident.

In a study of racism in six FE colleges in Northern Ireland it was found that 45 per cent of Black students who participated in focus groups and a survey had been subjected to some form of racial harassment, and one in five Black students had experienced racism on a weekly basis.⁵¹ The study also found that 36 per cent of full-time Black students had felt the need to hide elements of their ethnic background to fit in.

Moreover, a separate survey of 54 HEIs, which explored the topic of ethnicity, gender and degree attainment found that “nearly all informants felt that BME students might face discrimination and that, even if unwittingly, it was possible for this situation to be replicated within higher education.”⁵²

Our survey and focus group respondents cited various forms of racism that had been perpetrated by fellow students. The examples ranged from verbal abuse, comments based on crude racial stereotypes, deliberate social exclusion and destroying property to ridiculing a student's use of language other than English.

"I did [experience racism] from a student, but they didn't know that I could hear them. They were saying stuff about my culture and one of the things they said which really hurt me was, 'Why can't she go back to her savage country' or something like that. I just ignored them, turned my computer off and went to cry in the bathroom." Black African respondent, HE

"A group of boys began making their racist beliefs clear shortly after release of This Is England. One attacked me in a class, shouting "you brown bitch" etc ... he [later] claimed he had previously called friends things along those lines and didn't think anything of it. Well, he was lying because he had previously drawn pictures of me with a blacked up face and I [had] made it very clear I did not find this funny and my anger at his behaviour. The incident wasn't reported to the head of year or sixth form – I feel the teacher was saving herself the trouble. Instead I had to spend my maths class and history class with this boy for the rest of the year... [However, there were] a number of boys who had been reported for possible racist beliefs and causing offense and admitted they were doing so and had no intention of hiding it. [And because] they were mostly high achieving boys, they weren't removed from the school because they gained some of the best grades – so why would the school remove them!" Indian survey respondent, HE

"I've been called 'nigger' more than once by fellow students, amongst other things." Black African respondent, HE

"We had a group presentation. I asked a group of White girls if I could join their group. They said one other person who had never even been to class was one of their group members so basically I couldn't. After that, they said something I didn't quite get and

just laughed really loudly. I ended up doing the presentation with another intentional student from Pakistan." Black African respondent, HE

"On my way back from uni, a guy in his car coming out of the uni car park shouted the words 'Black whore' at me for no reason whatsoever, just because I was there and I'm Black." Black African respondent, HE

"Flatmates isolated me, destroyed my multicultural poster and left a picture of the word 'racism' and a picture of Hitler." Black British respondent, HE

In addition to experiencing racism from students, respondents to our survey also gave examples of direct and indirect racism from academic and non-academic staff and visitors to their institution. Respondents provided a range of examples where they believed their tutors, teachers and/or visitors to their college or university were prejudiced towards Black students, all of which directly impacted on their satisfaction levels with their educational experience. For instance, respondents gave examples of: Black students' contributions being ignored during classes or seminars; teachers making derogatory comments towards Black students; Black students being reprimanded for behaviour that White students had also shown and were allowed to continue; and teachers frequently getting the names of Black students wrong when there were only a handful of other Black students in the class. One survey respondent reported that during a careers fair aimed at employment in the nuclear industry, they were treated with hostility by an industry representative. The respondent described how the representative they spoke to was not only reluctant to share information with them but was also far less enthusiastic than when they spoke to the respondent's White friends.

"This one lecturer always behaves like the foreign students are stupid or something. I ignore him though; I know what I'm made of. He makes derogatory statements in class too." Black African respondent, HE

"I have experienced racism from teaching staff in my FE institution. Especially from the same person."

Black Caribbean respondent, FE

"There are many racist teachers working in the education system. Some of them have the mindset that students from Black or Asian ethnic backgrounds are in the classroom to make trouble. Others do not want us to develop ourselves and reach equality with them. Some try to pretend that we do not exist. Some simply do not even want to know ... Students specifically target me, throw[ing] bottles or pieces of paper at me from the back. Teaching staff watch but do nothing about it. If something like this happened while I was teaching, I would have suspended that student from that class if s/he was a persistent offender. Nothing like this is ever done." Bangladeshi survey respondent, HE

"The racism I have felt from teachers is very indirect. You will not be able to put a finger on it, but you can definitely feel it. The lack of information and the unwillingness of wanting to help or go the extra mile for students says it all." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

"I was spoken to for speaking on my mobile phone, while a White student on his phone right next to me was ignored." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

"God knows how many times I've been called by another Black girl's name (whether she was in the room or not) but they can remember Bill, Bob, Tom, Richard, and Harry, who are all White."

Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Many respondents commented on the existence of institutional racism and gave examples of Black students being given lower grades for assignments. Respondents also reported that there was a lack of commitment to embrace and celebrate the ethnic and cultural identity of Black students at their college or university. The absence of Black History Month events was particularly highlighted by some respondents. Some respondents also questioned the level of IAG Black students received compared to their White peers, and the general admissions procedure in their

institution, often because they were either the only Black student, or one of a very small number of Black students, on their course.

"Not open racism, but I am experiencing institutional racism which is a much more dangerous and cancerous type of racism." Black African respondent, HE

"There is still institutionalised racism in the education system. White students will always be given preference in terms of support (like contacts for work experience would be handed out to White students and Black students were told to just get on with it!)." Black British respondent, HE

From the qualitative data, it was clear that for some respondents racism was often hard to quantify, as it was more subtle and covert. Nonetheless, it was evident that this type of racism had a negative impact on students' attainment and overall satisfaction of their course.

"These days, racism has evolved... it has become not so obvious and hard to prove so it is hard to even call it racism. The major thing I have noticed is the difference in treatment, attitude, and mannerisms I get from teaching staff and students. With the teaching staff, some would be rude for no reason or look down on you for asking questions... With the students, it would be like not wanting to pair up with you, or being a bit distant." Mixed race respondent, HE

"There is a certain treatment we receive, that only a minority ethnic person can see for some reason. It's like certain things said or done are for the reason that you are Black and no other. It's felt, not seen or heard." Black Caribbean respondent, HE

Challenging and addressing racism as soon as it occurs inside or outside of the classroom was viewed as extremely important as a way of promoting social cohesion. Respondents emphasised how essential it was for students to be able to report racism to staff in their college or university, as well as having structures in place to provide students with support during this process.

“During a business enterprise day, one of the business advisors made some racist remarks. I informed two senior members of staff and the situation was immediately defueled. Had I not been able to approach those members of staff, it would have been a real problem. Racism is everywhere but as long as it can be dealt with swiftly, we can help eradicate it.” Black British respondent, HE

Some respondents reported instances where they attempted to address and challenge racism, only to be ignored or for the incident to be dealt with inappropriately by academic staff.

“I experienced ongoing problems with a few ... members of non-teaching staff. Senior staff did not take my complaints forward and there was no formal structure for me to appeal to at the time. To my knowledge there is still no structure in place.”

Mixed race respondent, FE

“When teaching staff do not address the racist attitudes of White students, the only conclusion Black students can draw from this is that staff are complicit.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

While survey and focus group respondents were not specifically asked to comment on the impact of the racism they had experienced, our survey’s qualitative data clearly highlighted the profound emotional impact these experiences had, and how they can hinder Black students in fulfilling their educational potential. This finding is supported by ECU and HEA’s 2008 report on ethnicity, gender and degree attainment.⁵³ The report highlighted that experiencing or feeling vulnerable to racism and ethnic discrimination not only has an impact on the social and intellectual well-being of students, but may also affect progression and achievement. The NUS Hate Crime Interim Report also found that nearly one in four hate incidents resulted in mental health problems.

Many survey and focus group respondents linked their experience of racism with a drop in their self-esteem, confidence, motivation and desire to continue their education, reporting that they felt marginalised and socially excluded. Our research strongly suggests that

experiencing racism or feeling vulnerable to the possibility of racism will not only affect the emotional and intellectual well-being of Black students, but also adversely affect their satisfaction levels and overall attainment.

“If you get called names and you get told every other day to go back to your own country, or you’re being spat on, or you’re being told these stupid comments saying that because you’re ethnic you’re probably a thief ... This kind of [behaviour] has a psychological effect on students. And from students going through this, they think, ‘What’s the point if I go to university and get a degree? I might face the same racism I faced at university when I get a job.’” Mixed race focus group participant, FE

“It affects me because someone is saying something about my skin colour like it’s a bad thing, it’s a negative thing. So I think to myself, ‘Is there something wrong with me?’ You question who you are as a person. You question your culture. You become ashamed of it.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

For some respondents, there was a belief that because they were from an ethnic minority background, racism would be an inevitable part of their life. Consequently, they accepted and normalised experiencing or observing racism in college and university as a part of life.

“I have come to accept and ignore this [racism] as this seems to be the way of life here, inside and outside the university campus.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“You just feel it’s got to be racism but there is little evidence to prove so you just accept it’s normal.” Black African respondent, HE

Social inclusion

When asked to try to account for why Black students are less likely to be satisfied with their educational experience and are less likely to attain first-class degrees than their White peers, both survey and focus group respondents discussed how Black students at college or university are more likely to feel isolated and

struggle with greater financial burdens, all of which affect their overall further or higher education experience.

A significant minority of survey and focus group respondents highlighted issues around social inclusion in their qualitative responses. Respondents commented that for many Black students, attending a college and especially a university can be an isolating experience, as they are entering unfamiliar environments, many of which do not appear to cater for Black students. Respondents also discussed the impact of attending institutions where Black students were in the minority, and how this contributed to feelings of being displaced.

“Some people just don't feel at home or comfortable in a place with less ethnic minorities, which is a lot of UK universities.” Black British respondent, HE

“I feel like I am the odd one out and that I don't have anything in common with anyone around me!” Mixed race respondent, HE

“They [Black students] feel that they are under-represented and their views are not incorporated into uni life.” Black British respondent, HE

In addition to adjusting to an environment dominated by White students and staff, respondents also commented on a range of other challenges they and other Black students faced, such as finding it difficult to integrate with other students and develop personal relationships, as well as not being able to identify with peers and teachers. The lack of social inclusion among Black students was also highlighted in the 2010 HSBC Student Survey. The survey found that 33 per cent of Black (African and Caribbean) students, 24 per cent of Asian students and 23 per cent of Mixed race students did not believe they were integrated in university social life, compared to 22 per cent of White students.⁵⁴

“Sometimes I feel that people do not like me, due to my religion or skin colour, and I may sometimes prefer to work at home.” Pakistani respondent, HE

“I do not like attending my institution. I have few friends there, and the friendships that I make there

are not strong. I feel I am wasting my money by going to a place where people do not want me. It affects my academic performance negatively.”

Bangladeshi respondent, HE

“Sometimes it's quite hard to fit in when no one wants to work with you, eg. during a practical session.” Black African respondent, HE

“Sometimes it makes me feel I don't belong anywhere, and that people on my course dislike me due to my ethnicity.” Bangladeshi respondent, HE

Being in the minority in an institution or on a course left many respondents feeling that their views and experiences were unappreciated and unwelcomed. Consequently, some felt unable to share and discuss aspects of their ethnic and cultural identity.

“[There] are not that many ethnic students that attend [university] outside London. For example at my university I am the only Black student in the class. I'm surrounded by other students and staff who are judgmental and uneducated about students from ethnic groups.” Black British respondent, HE

“[Black students] have less people to interact with and talk about their culture and feel left out.” Indian respondent, FE

Through exploring the qualitative data, it was evident that the lack of social inclusion has a negative impact on Black students' emotional and intellectual well-being. Respondents expressed feelings of alienation, depression, frustration and disillusionment, as well as feeling misunderstood. For some respondents this caused a great deal of stress and even led them to question whether they should continue with their education.

“I feel alone. I wonder, ‘Should I be here?’ and ‘Do I have a right to be here, even though I'm not an international student?’” Black British respondent, HE

“It made me feel withdrawn and not very confident. I also felt, toward the end of my course, jaded.”

Black African respondent, HE

“It makes me feel a bit out of the group, like I have to make some extra effort and it adds stress to my student life.” Black African respondent, HE

“I feel isolated, misunderstood, frustrated and have considered leaving the course.” Mixed race respondent, HE

As a result of feeling socially excluded or to counter the possibility of being excluded, both survey and focus group respondents touched upon the fact that some Black students tend to select friendship groups, within and outside the classroom, which are based on ethnicity.

“Race and class defines who you are and who you should sit with in most classes.” Black British respondent, HE

“I think Black students aren’t as happy as White students because they’re not integrating. I think Black students prefer to hang about with Black students.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

Social exclusion was compounded for some respondents by a perceived lack of access to support systems and networks in their current educational institution. Respondents believed that Black students are more likely to feel isolated as they are not informed about services to help them adjust to college or university life.

“There are not enough services offered to support minority groups, thus most students believe they are alone and feel isolated.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“Whilst everyone seems to be friendly, I find that due to the lack of supportive systems I feel isolated most of the time and never really know where and who to turn to.” Black African respondent, HE

“Not having the same support network as White middle class kids. It’s like yet another problem on top of everything else, you have to juggle being Asian and British. Teen years are tough enough anyway without more pressure to find your little slot in society.” Indian respondent, HE

Finances

Financial worries and constraints were identified by survey and focus group respondents as another factor hindering the experiences of Black students. Respondents believed this was a significant issue for Black students as they are more likely to come from low socio-economic backgrounds and are therefore unable to ask parents for financial support.

“Most of my White friends do have a student loan but their parents will ‘top up’ their money if they need it. I wouldn’t ask my parents to do so because I know it’d be a real burden for them.” Mixed race respondent, HE

“We have to fund ourselves as our parents are not in the financial position to support us through education and this has a knock-on effect on my studies. Most of my minority peers have to work longer hours to pay for tuition rather than work longer hours to get high grades.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

A minority of respondents reported having to work part time to pay for their fees, accommodation, and resources or to support their children. This was especially pertinent for international respondents, who have to pay particularly high fees. Furthermore, some respondents reported that they worked far more than the recommended time suggested for students. In general, financial survival during college or university was acknowledged as an additional stress factor for Black students as it limits the time they are able to spend studying and affects their participation in college and university life.

However, working during further and higher education is not solely an issue for Black students. For example, the 2010 *HSBC Student Survey* found that a significant proportion of students, Black or otherwise, work during their time at university. The survey found that 33 per cent of White students, 35 per cent of Black (African and Caribbean) and Mixed race students, and 20 per cent of Asian students worked during term time. This increased outside of term time, with 42 per cent of Black, 31 per cent of Asian, 47 per cent of White and

56 per cent of Mixed race students reporting they were in paid work during university holidays. Moreover, when asked if they considered their time at university to represent good value for money, Black, Asian and Mixed race students were less likely to reply in the affirmative than White students.⁵⁵

“Black students are more likely to be in debt, take out a student loan, or be working part time while they’re studying. The last day of every kind of university holiday I was back at work doing my summer job for three months. Over Easter, I was working for the four weeks that we were off to make money to take me through the year. And that was something I absolutely had to do.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

“The cost of tuition reduced my ability to properly experience student life and develop more in my first and second year. I worked many hours just to pay fees whilst sacrificing hours that could have been spent researching.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

“I’ve never bought a book because I can’t afford it. Money plays a big factor in education. There are certain books that aren’t available at our libraries, some of them that you need and our middle class counterparts can afford it.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

“We also have to work harder, because in my case, I have to work, go to university and still manage a household. There are times you can feel jaded and frustrated.” Black African respondent, HE

“Lots of Black students, in a bid to offset their outstanding school fees, work rigorously and have so much on their minds. This does not aid their studies.” Black African respondent, HE

Students’ unions

The role of students’ unions and Black representation were identified by respondents as crucial elements in both ensuring that Black students were satisfied with their FE and HE experience and in combating the difference in degree attainment between White and Black students. A significant minority of respondents in

the survey and focus groups expressed a belief that students’ unions were uniquely positioned to meet the needs of Black students. These respondents stressed that the Black students’ officer role was essential to this process, believing that such a position would ensure that the needs of Black students are put on the student union’s agenda for support, networking and overall inclusion.

Anecdotal evidence shows that where Black students’ officer posts have been created and supported, the participation of Black students in their student union increases – and campaigns such as anonymous marking, a prayer room in every college, recognising Black history and fighting racism are all prioritised.

“The students’ union plays a pivotal role. The existing Black Student Union Representation provides a HE social network for BME students and access to guidance and support.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

However, many respondents also argued that Black representation needs to go further than merely having Black students’ officer roles, emphasising the necessity of Black students being represented in all aspects of the work of a students’ union and NUS.

“BME student representation on the board of governors to help develop participation strategies and recruitment at all levels.” Mixed race respondent, FE

“I think it’s a good thing that we have Black student officers and stuff like that. But the only way we will really make a proper breakthrough, to really progress, is to have Black presidents of student unions, and the NUS President.” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

There were mixed feelings among respondents regarding whether students’ unions provide adequate support for Black students. The qualitative data showed that respondents felt mostly positive about the role of students’ unions in involving international students, but less so with Black UK-domiciled students and creating general social inclusion. Some felt there was a lack of political will to put Black representation

on the agenda; others recognised that students' unions did not receive enough funding to undertake such work.

"I think student unions and clubs need more funding to reach out to students at risk of isolation and depression. As an international student, I do feel a bit alone in this country, but making friends through the clubs and societies really helped me connect with others going through what I was going. I've made some good friends that way." Pakistani respondent, HE

Despite these positive examples, some respondents believed that Black students often feel that their students' union doesn't cater for their specific needs and interests, and speculated this might be why some students' unions do not have many active Black members. Both survey and focus group respondents reported that events such as Black History Month either don't exist or are given a low profile at their institution and believed that students' unions need to create an environment where, for example, Asian and African-Caribbean societies can be easily set up, supported and maintained.

"The majority of higher education institutions are dominantly overseen by 'White people' who are less aware [as to] how they can make higher education a more positive experience for ethnic minority students. For example, at my university they do not celebrate ... and advertise events such as Black History Month as much as 'White' events like St George's day." Black British respondent, HE

"Often, students from ethnic minorities remain in the background of most in university [activities]. There are measures taken to reduce this, such as African-Caribbean societies, however not every university has one. I think more needs to be done firstly to encourage students from minority groups to attend university, therefore making them no longer the minority at university campuses, and to incorporate these students into the university's structure such as the student unions." Black British respondent, HE

"Student unions don't care about their Black students and include very little diversity in terms of income background and ethnicity in their active members." Mixed race respondent, HE



Student-led solutions

Increase diversity of staff

“Through my experience, a lot of my teachers have been Caucasian which I think can make it hard for students to relate to [them]. The lack of ethnic diversity in the teaching system means that some pupils may find it hard to approach members of the teaching team because they will feel that they won't understand a student's situation.” Indian respondent, FE

Increasing the ethnic diversity of staff throughout an institution was identified by respondents as important. For some respondents this included having frontline staff that were Black, as well as staff in higher positions. By having staff from a range of ethnic backgrounds in an institution, respondents believed that Black students would be more likely to have their needs acknowledged and supported.

Promote social inclusion

“Encourage mingling, like in science we do experiments so we move around and socialise more than we would just sitting down in a lecture which is restricted.” Mixed race respondent, HE

Respondents stressed the need for students to be given opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom, to get to know their peers, which will in turn break down barriers and promote cohesion.

Increase financial support

“Minority ethnic students should be given proper financial help.” Black African respondent, HE

Providing financial support was viewed as extremely important in ensuring that Black students have the opportunity to achieve their educational potential.

Challenge racism and promote equality

“Personally, I feel it is a race issue, and so as long we have racism, it will be a cycle. We need to try tackle racism first in order to have a fair chance in

life and that's just the way it is. Let's talk about racism more often and stop pretending like everything is fine.” Black African respondent, HE

Respondents felt that educational institutions should employ various strategies to challenge and prevent racism in all its forms and that Black students should also be able to access support if they experience racism at college or university. In addition to challenging racism, institutions should actively commit to ensuring that Black students have equality of opportunity in all aspects of student life.

Promote Black representation and engagement in students' unions

“Greater support and diversity in the events conducted by the student unions.” Black Caribbean survey respondent, HE

“Representation, representation, representation! We need representation!” Black Caribbean focus group participant, HE

Respondents stressed the importance of students' unions engaging with Black students to provide support and opportunities for them to network with peers and create friendships. Hosting events during Black History Month and organising multicultural days and intra-society football matches were all highlighted as ways to engage Black students. Having Black Students' and International Officers in every students' union was also identified by respondents as very important.

Provide support networks

“More support from within the university. I know it's there but a lot of people don't because it is not well advertised.” Mixed race survey respondent, HE

Respondents emphasised that institutions and colleges should promote the support available for students. This includes mentoring schemes, skills building workshops and social groups.

Black international students

“[We] have to cope with a lot of things in addition to the coursework such as adapting to a new culture, environment, studying in a different language, and new study patterns. For example, I am used to having lecturers explain and do most of the teaching [so] having to prepare for the lectures and do presentations is quite new. Also, writing so many essays and reports, using the computer for searches, and typing up assignments – it’s quite new.” Black African international student, FE

Black international students make up a significant proportion of all international students studying in the UK, with eight of the top 10 non-EU countries sending students to the UK located in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.⁵⁶ A large number of international students studying in FE are also from Black backgrounds.⁵⁷

Some 144 international students completed our online survey, constituting 15 per cent of the overall sample. This is consistent with wider student population demographics, with HESA data collected in 2008–09 indicating that the same percentage of students studying in the UK are international.⁵⁸ The majority (57 per cent) of international students surveyed were Black African. 18 per cent were of an Asian background, with 10 per cent respondents self-identifying as Indian, four per cent as Pakistani, and four per cent as another Asian background. 13 per cent described themselves as Black Caribbean, four per cent as Chinese, and four per cent as from an 'other' ethnic group. The remaining five per cent was spread across other ethnic groups in very small numbers. In addition, five of the twenty students who partook in our focus groups were international.

Forty one per cent of international student respondents to our survey were undertaking a bachelors degree and a further 49 per cent were studying for a masters or PhD. Only 2 per cent of the international students surveyed were studying at Level 1 (basic skills or

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and 1 per cent undertaking Level 2 studies (GC SEs or NVQ2). The remaining 7 per cent of international students surveyed were in Level 3 studies (A-Levels or Advanced apprenticeships). This is again fairly indicative of data collected on the broader international student population: UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) data shows that the majority of international students come to the UK to study at Levels 4 and 5, with a large proportion undertaking postgraduate studies.⁵⁹

There were few statistically significant differences between international students and home students in terms of the quantitative data gathered on their experience, but it was clearly evident from the qualitative data that this cohort faced many unique difficulties. The sharp cultural and environmental changes, compounded with unfamiliarity with the UK educational system and frequent language barriers and financial concerns, presented further challenges to Black international students. Although some Black international students surveyed were positive about their experiences in HE and FE, these respondents emphasised that this was the result of having access to additional academic support, having caring and understanding lecturers and tutors, and being in an inclusive and welcoming environment.

“I go to school in an area where the only ‘non-White’ members of the community are boarders. Regardless of this, I was given an equal opportunity, and now I am Head Boy of my school after only seven months.” Black African international student, FE

For other Black international students, this supportive environment was not always present at their institution, exacerbating the challenges they already faced in coming to study in a foreign country.

“My issues as a student of color have been compounded by the lack of support for international students in general.” Indian International student, HE

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

“It took many attempts to receive a sensible response about the course I wanted to apply for.”

Black Caribbean survey respondent, international student, HE

Both survey respondents and focus group participants alike wanted IAG to be more easily available, pointing out that as international students they were often unable to seek face-to-face information from knowledgeable advisors, and thus had to seek out IAG themselves. Many drew particular attention to the lack of support and guidance in the student visa application process. Some also commented that institutions needed to consider the potentially limited ability of prospective international students to access this information while abroad. This places additional importance on pre-induction and induction phases at university once international students have arrived.

“I was still in Africa when I lodged my application and you can only access the internet to get to know about these universities. That’s for just 15 minutes per day, and that’s if the electricity is there.”

Black African international student, FE

Additionally, many Black international students cited the potential for IAG to address concerns specific to international students prior to, and during, the enrolment process. This was seen as a way to: help manage expectations of the course; signpost available services that international students might require during their studies; inform them of how to become involved in extracurricular activities; and generally assist easing them into student life in the UK.

“The discrepancy likely comes from a heightened sense of expectation about the programmes one is pursuing and not the realities. There could definitely be more information shared as far as what students should be doing while in school to make use of the experience upon completion.” African American international student, HE

Teaching and learning

Cultural differences

Black international respondents in both the survey and focus groups often discussed the cultural differences they faced and the impact these had on their ability to perform academically and on their overall satisfaction with their course. The cultural differences most commonly cited by international students participating in our research were language and communication barriers and difficulties in adapting to an unfamiliar teaching and learning style.

“I do have some trouble understanding many topics in lectures, and I need to read through notes several times before I get a good idea. Essay writing is also a problem, and the language used may be regarded as colloquial to examiners, even if they seem normal to us.” Other Asian respondent, HE

These problems were compounded in cases where the respondent did not feel adequately supported by their teachers or lecturers. International respondents frequently emphasised that cultural awareness was crucial in the academic support on offer in their institution. There was a perception among many Black international students that lecturers and tutors did not always understand these differences. Some felt that tutors and teachers assumed that Black international students could seamlessly adapt to study in the UK without any support.

“I think they just don’t understand our culture and our differences. I was once told to do over a paper – not because the facts were wrong but because my ‘writing style was different than how English people write’ which I thought was unfair. I was also given a failing grade once on a placement and my placement partner, a White female, given a pass grade after she could not answer a question that we were both asked when I answered correctly. Examples like these frustrate Black students and [it] requires a lot of patience in order to make it to the end.” Black Caribbean international student, HE

“You can see lots of examples of [international] students who are a lot better than local students in terms of knowledge that they have from that specific subject or specific module. But they get lower grades compared to local students. They just express [themselves] in a different way, which is related to their own culture. I think it’s the responsibility of the lecturers to have an awareness of that culture, of the way his or her students [are] trying to express his or her opinion.” Asian international student, HE (focus group)

“To be honest, ... here in the UK everything seems to be different and sometimes the attitude of some staff does not help [the] issue. They failed to realise that we came from different backgrounds as such with different orientations! Most of us think that there is a real element of prejudice on our part as minority students!” Black African international student, HE

Curriculum

Some international students also expressed frustration with their course curriculum. At times, this was because of unfamiliarity with the material covered: many of these respondents were studying at postgraduate level and felt that there was an assumption that they had studied the same subject in the UK and were acquainted with the content covered at the undergraduate level.

“When it comes to masters courses in particular, I’ve noticed that it’s almost the same curriculum as the final year and the teachers also assume that international students already know the curriculum and are acquainted with the tools being used. It’s very difficult adapting to a different learning environment.” Black African international student, HE

Others felt their curriculum had a narrow focus, with some expressing their dismay at how their country of origin was portrayed, or their fear that the course did not cover material relevant to life outside the UK.

“I think treatment in class is often prejudiced and references to Africa by some of the teaching staff tend to be dismissive and, in some cases, ignorant – because they are experts of a place where they have

never been. It is offensive to have your birthright dismissed just like that in ways that are often stereotypical and untrue. The whole experience puts you off.” Black African international student, HE

“Minority students are not considered when making the syllabus, I think. We don’t feel like we are being taught in a way that when we return to our respective countries we can apply certain teachings to a culture that is so different to the UK.” Black Caribbean international student, HE

Academic environment

“[International] students (especially those of colour) often feel like outsiders and are probably not paid as much attention to than other students. There is often the perception that they are going to fail at whatever they try and therefore they aren’t encouraged.” Black African international student, HE

International respondents frequently expressed feelings of isolation and alienation at their institution, both in their academic and social environment. This played a role in their sense of well-being; those who felt excluded often explained that this negatively influenced their motivation and overall desire to attend their course.

“As a Black student, you can feel a sense of isolation. As a Black international student that isolation is worse than alienation. You feel like an alien. You are treated like an alien ... sometimes like a fool.” Black Caribbean international student, HE

Some survey respondents and focus group participants provided examples in which they felt deliberately marginalised in the classroom, particularly during group work. As one respondent pointed out, the de facto segregation between international and home students was not only hurtful, but also often resulted in a collective lack of knowledge or experience within the international students’ group, negatively affecting their ability to succeed academically.

“I find that most of the time because you’re simply Black, other White students and tutors just can’t be bothered. When you have group presentations, White students get into their own little groups. It would help

if they widened out more and it would probably help more if they showed more interest because they were fortunate to do more of these things as A levels. Sometimes you just don't have a clue and it would really help if they would share some ideas."

Black African international student, HE

Nine per cent of Black international students involved in our research described their current teaching and learning environment as 'racist', compared to 5 per cent of UK-domiciled students – a finding that was frequently featured in the qualitative data from both the survey and focus groups.⁶⁰ Worryingly, some international students viewed discrimination against themselves as a matter of course.

"Obviously [the] UK will give preference to their students first. Their biased decisions are somewhat predictable." Indian international student, HE

"Of course there is discrimination against Black students. A large part of the Black student population are international students and their first language is not English." Other Asian international student, HE

"[We] are not British and so the British lecturers stick to their own. I think British people generally don't like foreigners living here when they finish their education, so if they don't get good enough qualifications it would be difficult for them to get a job so they will be forced to go back to their own country." Black African international student, HE

Academic feedback

"Feedback should be given and written in plain language so it can be easily understood by all students, enabling them to engage with it and support future learning." Black African international student, HE

Although academic feedback was a concern among all survey respondents and focus group participants it was particularly important to international students, who may not be familiar with the UK's educational system and the standard of work required of them. Many pointed out that without information from their teachers

on how they were assessed, they were left puzzled about how to improve their marks. Teachers and lecturers need to recognise that international students may not be accustomed to the types of assessment used in their course. Academic staff should allow for cultural differences when possible, and provide constructive feedback to enable students' progression.

"The treatment and opportunities provided are mainly aimed at home students at large and there's not a lot done for the international students. For example, I am from Nigeria and we tend to adopt the American writing skill ... these are mistakes students make which is not necessarily their fault as they do not realise the difference and are losing marks for it [in] assessment." Black African international student, HE

Furthermore, many respondents stressed that a lack of cultural awareness of standard assessment procedures should in no way suggest a lack of intellect, which some respondents felt had been implied by their teachers and tutors.

Academic support

Because of these cultural differences, international students believed it is vital that they receive adequate academic support. There was a perception among some international student respondents that their needs were not on the agenda for many teachers and tutors.

"Black students generally feel a sense of isolation and there is the general perception that access to some personal tutors or some extra coaching is limited, especially if you are an international student." Black African international student, FE

"It's unfortunate that most of the tutors are White and can't seem to identify with students of other ethnic groups, especially in terms of speech. The accent is sometimes heavy ... it doesn't mean we don't understand, it's just that if patience was taken when speaking, we'd all understand better and not look 'stupid'. People must understand that English isn't everyone's mother tongue." Black African international student, HE

Social inclusion

The qualitative data gathered in our survey strongly suggested that Black international students had difficulties interacting with their peers and often found themselves sidelined in college and university social life. Whilst this is often an issue for international students in general,⁶¹ but many Black international students felt that the combination of their ethnicity and country of origin posed additional problems in their social life at their institution.

“It’s not very easy to get along with the other students considering the different backgrounds we come from, especially Black Africans who did not grow up in the UK but came here for university.”

Black African international student, HE

“Minor ethnic groups cannot be as active as they were in their home country. It may be difficult for them to adapt [especially] for a short period of time. People like me keep themselves away from the home students and their activities.” Indian international student, FE

Several respondents described how integral the students’ union had been in introducing them to college and university life and in helping them to become involved in extracurricular activities.

“I think the students’ unions do try a lot in the sense that they always organise various events throughout the academic year – and some instances during the summer breaks as well – to make the international [student] community more involved and to feel more at home... The more students are comfortable with the White learning environment, the better their chances in getting positive results in achieving their goals.” Black African international student, HE

The students’ union was also seen as well-placed to address their concerns in, for instance, helping to identify sources of support or providing information on institutions’ policies and procedures – although this was sometimes because they did not feel college or university services were adequate or approachable.

“It’s OK for the university to provide a myriad of services to help students, but I think this should be delivered by students’ unions and the like. I don’t feel comfortable going to the administration and talking to them about my problems. They mean well, but they just don’t understand.” Pakistani international student, HE

Finances

According to UKCISA, non-EU HE students typically pay fees of £8,000–£15,000 with no subsidies, compared to just over £3,000 for UK and EU students (though tuition fees for home-domiciled and EU students will increase to a maximum of £9,000 for the 2012 intake at English universities, with other rises elsewhere in the UK).⁶²

This disparity in fees was a source of real frustration for most of the Black international students surveyed. Some stated that they had not received adequate IAG about finances and were taken by surprise by the hidden and unexpected costs of their courses, such as course materials or specialist equipment. Others simply believed that the fees were not good value for money, in terms of the quality of education and support services they received.

“When you are applying for university, are you told that in addition to the £9,000 they charge you as an international, in addition to the £300 you are going to need every month, you are also going to need all this equipment and about how much it is going to cost? Obviously preparation should be made and you should know what you’re getting into, but if you don’t know what you’re getting into, you can’t plan for it. They don’t put it in the prospectus, you know.” Black African international student, HE (focus group)

“Each year, prices go up, but the quality of education has stayed the same or declined. As an international student, I don’t feel that I am getting what I paid for.” Pakistani international student, HE

Meeting these high fees was a huge source of worry for many of the Black international students who were surveyed or participated in focus groups. A significant number additionally spoke about how these financial worries strained their ability to study.

“For international students, we have to work night and day to sustain ourselves and pay the higher fees... The anxiety is frightening and a huge source of mental illness!” Black Caribbean international student, HE

“The stress of being away from home, having to adapt and cope with a new culture and environment, and money worries... A lot of students may not be financially able to cope with life in the UK.” Black African international student, FE

As a result, a large number of Black international students surveyed indicated they did part-time work to fund their education. However, current laws limit the paid work they could undertake during their studies: those on courses of more than six months can only work up to 20 hours per week during term time, and can only work full time during holidays – a limitation which caused some respondents frustration.

“[International] students are only allowed to work 20 hours a week in the UK, which is nothing compared to the expenses that they have. It’s very difficult for them to find a job in the first place, because employers prefer to have locals over internationals – because they know the culture better, they prefer the local ones. And when you do find a job, you are only allowed to work 20 hours a week, which is nothing compared to the expenses you have and other things. For example, the country that I come from, with the amount of money I’m spending in this country [for education] I could run my business there.” Asian international student, HE (focus group)

Several survey respondents and focus group participants described the major financial sacrifices their families made for them to study abroad and the enormous pressure this put upon them to succeed academically, while having to juggle part-time work at the same time.

“Most people coming to the UK or US or Australia are from Asia or from African countries. They come here because they find the necessity of getting a degree from here. So they end up paying eight or nine grand for a degree, and the families sometimes

have to sell land or buildings or things to send their kids to study here because the education is so important. And then they come here and they struggle to pay their rent and food. So the overall confidence is lost because they don’t get enough support from the university and then they’re working and then working at night, trying to also study – it’s just hard for them to concentrate with all of those things.” Asian international student, HE (focus group)

At the same time, some respondents recognised that they received, theoretically, the same quality of education as home students and that paying high fees was part of the choice they had made to study in the UK .

“We pay very heavily for education and expect to get a well-rounded package. Most times, however, in my opinion, we forget that it’s the regular package that everyone gets, irrespective of fees that we would get. It’s left to us to make the most of the time spent here.” Black African international student, HE

Student-led solutions

While the Black international students we surveyed recommended many possible improvements described in previous chapters, they also highlighted areas specific to international students that could be developed to enhance their educational experiences in the UK.

Tailor IAG for international students

“I was not told everything I needed to know, being in a new country and all.” Black African international student, HE

- institutions should provide IAG for international students catered towards their needs, recognising that additional IAG will be needed to ensure they are sufficiently familiar with the educational system and life in the UK (particularly important during the pre-induction and induction phases to help students understand the structures and systems in place, as well as any support they may require)

Use approachable and positive teaching approaches

“They need to believe more in us as international students and not just categorise us with a stigma as if we do not know differences.” Black African international student, HE

“Tutors should try reaching out more, giving appropriate, specific and targeted feedback.” Black Caribbean international student, FE

- teachers, lecturers and tutors should understand the cultural differences that international students may have and use positive, non-judgemental and accessible teaching approaches
- constructive and prompt feedback should be provided to enable students to develop their skills and improve their work.



Facilitate greater interaction inside the classroom

“More group work, trying to make everyone in the class mix – that way everyone in the class understands more. I find that I understand more when I’m talking to my peers than from the lecturer. I understand more when my friend or my classmate sits next [to me] and explains something to me. But if I were to sit next to a Black student and they don’t get it and we both have an issue approaching the lecturer and asking him, then we both are going to fail.” Black African international student, HE (focus group)

- where possible, teachers and lecturers should mainstream opportunities within the classroom so that students of all backgrounds are able to interact and work together – this could involve activities that help students get to know each other and understand different perspectives, cultural backgrounds and educational experiences.

Encourage international students to take part in extracurricular activities

“I think there needs to be more of a push from a uni or students’ union standpoint on not just educating, but getting people together and showing people the difference – because most unis have a lot of different cultures on campus, a lot of different people representing every country in the world, and I think unis need to do more, in terms of that kind of cohesion, that kind of appreciation for difference.”

Black international student, HE (focus group)

- students’ unions and institutions should work together to establish, develop and signpost support services for international students, actively encouraging them to take part in extracurricular activities and course representative systems, and international student societies should be established and developed, as well as international students’ officer positions within the union.

Provide clear financial guidance and support

“[I] was not really guided ... Not too much information about hidden fees, words ... sounded easy to the ears but once further education was chosen, [it] was too late too back out.” Mauritian international student, FE

- HEIs and FE colleges should be required to provide detailed information on what international fees cover and – within reason – what they do not. Clear guidance, tailored to each course, should include an estimate of any additional costs specific to that course (such as the average cost of materials needed) so that international students are able to budget for the cost of studying and living in the UK . Institutions should also be encouraged to provide financial literacy support for international students.

Broader issues

“It could be after years of being treated as a second-class citizen, some people believe that that is what they are. When you are judged on your colour or ethnic background, will it really matter how many qualifications you have?” Mixed race respondent, HE

While our survey focused on Black students' experiences within their current educational institution, respondents frequently spoke about the existence of racism and discrimination within society, and the long-term effects this had on their self-esteem and confidence in their current educational environment.

Although the majority of these respondents believed that the degree attainment and satisfaction gaps were primarily the result of specific failings at their institutions (such as assessment, feedback and support), they also speculated that these could be the result of life-long exposure to discrimination and racism.

Many pointed to negative media portrayals of Black people, suggesting that these perpetuated certain stereotypes that influenced others' perceptions of their ability to succeed, as well as their own.

“In general, the media perceives us as low achievers and it starts from a very early schooling age.” Black Caribbean respondent, FE

“The portrayal of black youth through the worldwide society in general seems of the stereotypical gangster, drug-taking rapper or poverty-stricken child who will never get a future in life. That notion needs to be broken. The NUS Black Student Campaign can break that notion by showing university lecturers and chancellors the achievements of many black students and more need to be done to raise the aspiration of black youth.” Other Asian respondent, HE

“I think that ethnic minorities do have the ability to achieve high grades like White students. However, due to stereotypical representations in the media, I think that the ethnic minorities have started to believe the representations themselves.” Black Caribbean respondent, FE

Others discussed the low expectations of their teachers and peers, explaining that from a young age they were made to feel as if, as one respondent put it, “failure was already predetermined”.

“If your teachers don't believe in you from then it is very difficult to then change your mindset as you get older and not feel like everyone is waiting to add you to the failing statistic.” Black Caribbean respondent, FE

“Years of being put down means quite often you come into further education or higher education with lower self-esteem and confidence. It takes a long time to eradicate this. We have to work twice as hard for the same grades.” Black Caribbean respondent, HE

The concept of an inferiority complex or self-fulfilling prophecy (also known as the 'Pygmalion' effect) was frequently cited, with many respondents suggesting that it was difficult not to internalise negative assumptions about their identity, particularly when these had been ingrained from a young age.

“Because people stereotype the minorities and put them in these boxes. Now, if you say to someone that you are stupid after a while they start to believe this and do not try and overcome this stereotyping.” Black British respondent, HE

“I think that they are so used to hearing that they aren't good enough and it has unfortunately come to that point where they are starting to believe this.” Black British respondent, FE

In addition, some respondents believed that even if they were able to achieve a good degree or qualification, existing discrimination within the workplace meant that their educational background would have little impact on their career and job prospects. This greatly affected their motivation to succeed.

“I think most students from ethnic communities believe no matter how well [they] do there is a ceiling on their career progression compared to Whites.” Black British respondent, HE

“The job prospects for minority people are limited as compared to their White counterparts. Therefore, they feel less encouraged because they know they will be struggling for jobs even when they get qualified.”

Black African respondent, FE

Many respondents argued that without addressing wider societal issues outside of HE and FE, it would be very difficult to improve the educational experiences and academic attainment of Black students. This meant addressing both discrimination and racism experienced at primary and secondary school and in job and career opportunities.



Conclusion

It is evident that a simple explanation for the attainment and satisfaction gap between Black students and their White peers does not exist, as it is a complex issue with a range of causal factors. Moreover, the Black student population is a highly heterogeneous group, with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and viewpoints, and there are a corresponding variety of interrelated factors that may affect Black students' experiences of FE and HE. However, our research identifies and highlights common concerns among Black students, which were clearly linked to their attainment and overall satisfaction yet often overlooked by institutions. For Black students to have equality of opportunity, it is essential that the range of barriers highlighted in this report are acknowledged and addressed by further and higher education institutions.

Current work in this area primarily focuses upon widening participation of Black students in education⁶³. While this is a vital component in improving the experience of Black students in education, widening participation alone cannot address issues such as the attainment gap, satisfaction levels, social exclusion, racism and insufficient access to IAG. Further and higher education institutions need to consider a more tailored approach to these issues. The outcomes of the HEA and ECU summit programme (detailed in this report as case studies on page 31) offer examples of best practice and models of working in relation to enhancing social inclusion and promoting cohesion in both FE and HE institutions. It is important that the work and momentum already established by HEIs involved in the summit programme continues, as they provide inspiration and examples of what can be achieved.

Improving the experiences of Black students and helping to close the attainment gap in education requires commitment and a willingness to critically reflect on current practices, perceptions and thinking. It is also important that the gaps in attainment and satisfaction levels are not conceptualised through a

deficit perspective. The deficit model attributes Black students' lack of educational success to inherent characteristics, often based on negative stereotypes and assumptions, and are seen to be rooted in their cultures and communities. Consequently, if educational institutions are to effectively address the barriers that Black students face, they cannot begin by locating the problems within Black students or negatively referring to their ability, aspirations and work ethic. The problem is a societal one, and an institutional one.

Instead, institutions need to examine institutional barriers to student achievement, developing trust with Black students and investing in their progress and achievement. This will require a whole institution approach to implementing change, including partnership between students and institution staff. Students' unions are in an ideal position to facilitate and promote this partnership, which has been shown by Birmingham City University and Birmingham City Students' Union's nationally acclaimed Student Academic Partners scheme.⁶⁴ Launched in 2009, the scheme aimed to integrate students into the teaching and pedagogic research communities of Birmingham City University. Through engaging in academic discussion about the nature and delivery of their courses, the scheme enhances students' learning experience.

It may take time to change everyday practices and adopt new policies and attitudes, but the satisfaction and attainment gaps will only be fully addressed by shifting the culture within an institution and tackling institutional racism. Institutional racism is defined by the Macpherson Report 1999 as:

'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.'⁶⁵

Improving the experiences of Black students and working to close the attainment and satisfaction gap is a matter of social justice that affects the entire student population and educational system. We hope this report will inform policy changes and, ultimately, help to create an inclusive learning environment where Black students feel able to succeed to the best of their ability. At the same time, we recognise that Black students'

experiences of education are influenced by a complex intersection of factors and that further research needs to be done into certain groups, in particular Black students' experiences and attainment in FE colleges. Additional research into the challenges faced by specific ethnic groups, as well as those experienced by international students, would also be very helpful in working towards these aims.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to address the challenges and attainment gap experienced by Black students in further and higher education, as outlined in this report. These recommendations are drawn from our qualitative and quantitative research findings as well as the student-led solutions provided by survey respondents and are chiefly aimed at education sector organisations, including further and higher education institutions. Not all recommendations will apply to individual organisations or institutions.

We hope that these recommendations will be considered by all education sector organisations and institutions, and that they will help in the development of a structured response to enhance the experiences of Black students in colleges and universities across the UK.

Recommendation 1

Increase awareness and coordination

- 1.1 It is crucial that educational attainment and satisfaction gaps between Black and White students are recognised as a matter of great importance. Only through developing a greater understanding of the issues that Black students face across the education sector and within FE and HE institutions can there be a cultural shift in the way these challenges are addressed. Staff training, for example, can serve to highlight and break down subconscious racial stereotyping and provide a way to introduce new conceptual tools which promote inclusive and non-discriminatory attitudes and behaviour.
- 1.2 With the abolition of Aimhigher, the education sector needs to undertake greater, more co-ordinated work to support young Black people to enter further and higher education. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) and Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) should encourage educational institutions to do more and promote good practice in both FE and HE.

Recommendation 2

Challenge racism and discrimination

- 2.1 To gain the confidence of Black students, colleges and universities must demonstrate their commitment to challenging all forms of racism and discrimination. Colleges and universities should institute 'zero tolerance' policies regarding racist behaviour and comments from both staff and students. These policies should also be clearly visible and receive active support at senior levels.
- 2.2 All students should be aware of their institution's commitment to challenging and tackling racism and discrimination. Through student inductions, institution-wide and/or departmental handbooks, advice centres and students' unions, students should be informed how to report instances of racism and discrimination, how the complaint should be dealt with and the support that students should receive during any complaints process.
- 2.3 All FE and HE staff should be trained to ensure they are able to identify racism and are confident in dealing with incidents of racism.

Recommendation 3

Encourage student involvement

- 3.1 As highlighted in this report, Black students themselves are an invaluable resource in improving the student experience, but their perspectives and opinions may vary across individual institutions. Universities and colleges should therefore engage with their Black students to find out how they feel while studying at the institution, and to assess what areas of the Black student experience are problematic and how these might be addressed.

- 3.2 FE and HE institutions should adopt a variety of methods to engage their Black students in providing input and feedback on their teaching and learning experience. These methods might include workshops, focus groups, podcasts, video diaries, online surveys and working in partnership with their students' union.

Recommendation 4

The Equality and Human Rights Commission

- 4.1 All further and higher education institutions are required by law to protect students from discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity. These principles are vital in improving the experiences of Black students, though they are not always upheld. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) therefore needs to ensure that all further and higher education institutions comply with their race-specific duties under the Equality Act 2010. To enable this, the EHRC should, in association with ECU, provide support in the form of best practice guidance.
- 4.2 The EHRC should enforce sanctions upon further and higher education institutions that have not yet undertaken a review of, and consultation around, their duties outlined in the Equality Act, particularly those that are race-specific.

Recommendation 5

Degree attainment agenda

- 5.1 The work already undertaken by the HEA and ECU to improve the degree attainment of Black students in HE has been extremely beneficial to the sector. It is vital that this work continues, with an additional focus on social inclusion and the student experience within and outside the classroom. Furthermore, attainment levels of students from different ethnic backgrounds should be regularly audited to assess progress in this area.

- 5.2 HEIs should use the outcomes of the summit programme to gain ideas and inspiration for dedicated activity to identify and thereafter address differentials in the degree attainment of their students by ethnic group. A report outlining the work undertaken by the 15 HEIs involved in the programme can be accessed at [http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/improving-degree-attainmentbme.pdf/view?searchterm=improving BME attainment](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/improving-degree-attainmentbme.pdf/view?searchterm=improving+BME+attainment). Although the summit programme focused on HEIs, the lessons learned are still valuable and relevant to FE institutions.

- 5.3 To have a more coherent picture of the experiences of Black students in FE, research should be carried out to ascertain whether the attainment disparities between Black and White students in HE also exist in FE.

Recommendation 6

Funding

- 6.1 The Department for Education should evaluate educational funding systems to assess the impact they have on Black students, to identify any barriers that might prevent Black students from accessing FE and HE, and to ensure that adequate financial support is provided to Black students. This assessment is particularly important in light of the planned increase in HE tuition fees in England and elsewhere, and the abolition of EMA.

Recommendation 7

Information, advice and guidance

- 7.1 To begin their further and higher education careers, it is vital that Black students receive high-quality information, advice and guidance (IAG). Consequently, there should be greater investment and support in services for Black people considering further and higher education. The quality and level of IAG available to young people should be consistent across all local authorities, schools and colleges.

- 7.2 It is also crucial that all IAG practitioners involved in supporting students at FE and HE institutions are aware of the barriers that Black students may face and tailor IAG to meet Black students' needs. Increased signposting to advice and support services is also necessary, so that Black students are able to access these services.
- 7.3 A bespoke website should be created for prospective Black students and/or those working with them. This could include testimonies from Black role models talking about their experiences at college and university. It would ideally include information about specific further and higher institutions, such as their support systems, extracurricular activities, and guidance on the financial support (such as bursaries) available at individual institutions.

Recommendation 8

The curriculum

- 8.1 Universities and colleges should embed race equality in their curricula. The curriculum is an invaluable tool to help foster race equality and develop students' understanding of diversity and identity. This is critical, not only to demonstrate to Black students that their learning reflects their own experience, but to promote understanding among their White peers. Therefore, institutions must strive to minimise Euro-centric bias in curriculum design, content and delivery and to establish mechanisms to ensure this happens. Universities Scotland has published an excellent example of why and how this can be done in their race equality toolkit, *Embedding Race Equality into the Curriculum*.⁶⁶
- 8.2 The HEA, in association with ECU, and LSIS should develop materials for FE and HE institutions to promote race equality in the curriculum and improve Black students' educational experience. These materials should highlight the importance of being culturally inclusive where possible and also challenge cultural and racist stereotypes.

Recommendation 9

Delivery of teaching and learning

- 9.1 Further and higher education institutions must acknowledge the importance of having an inclusive approach to teaching and learning, which actively welcomes the views of all students.
- 9.2 Clear guidance on assessment procedures for both staff and students should be established and anonymous marking implemented. If a student has concerns about potential bias in assessment, the matter should be carefully considered and rectified if possible – for example by having the work re-marked by a different lecturer or tutor.
- 9.3 Academic feedback mechanisms should be consistently implemented to ensure students receive adequate information on their assessed work, and are able to improve in future coursework.
- 9.4 Information about the academic and pastoral care system within each educational institution should be provided so that students and staff alike have clear expectations. Policies should be put in place to ensure that tutors are trained to deal with issues related to diversity and culture, establish adequate channels of communication with students, and are willing and able to meet with their students regularly.
- 9.5 FE and HE institutions should establish teaching and learning committees, in which students can engage with staff and provide input to further develop the curriculum, assessment and feedback mechanisms, as well as the academic support available to students.
- 9.6 Institutions should provide skill-building workshops and training opportunities to help students improve academically. Peer-to-peer support, such as mentoring schemes, may also help Black students to adjust to the teaching and learning environment.

Recommendation 10

Diversity of staff and role models

- 10.1 Ethnic diversity among staff is important for both Black and White students, as it provides positive role models, as well as a range of perspectives that enrich learning and demonstrates an institution's commitment to diversity. Universities and colleges need to improve the diversity of their staff to better reflect the diversity of their student body.
- 10.2 FE and HE institutions should ensure that invited speakers and guests also come from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 11

Social inclusion

- 11.1 To promote social cohesion within and outside the classroom, universities and colleges need to consider how to better integrate their student bodies, particularly Black international students. This could be achieved by increasing discussion and interactive work within the classroom, as well as by organising events for students of all backgrounds that celebrate cultural diversity and encourage integration.
- 11.2 Institutions should encourage and support societies and clubs that celebrate diverse aspects of cultural identity. In addition, they should promote existing support networks for Black students.

Recommendation 12

Students' unions

- 12.1 Students' unions have a crucial role to play in supporting and meeting the needs of Black students. Representation through the creation of a Black students' officer position in every students' union is key. However, merely creating the position is not enough. Students' unions must support the work of their Black students' officers and provide access to training and networking at a regional and/or national level.

- 12.2 Students' unions should ensure their practice is inclusive and compliant with equalities legislation. To further explore what is meant by inclusive practice students' unions should refer to ECU's publication, 'Inclusive students' unions: equality and diversity in practice', which can be accessed at: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-students-unions-equality-and-diversity>
- 12.3 Students' unions need to improve the diversity of their staff, and in some areas their officers, so they better reflect the diversity of the student body.
- 12.4 Students' unions should support and develop societies and clubs that engage Black students, as well as provide opportunities for different cultures to mix, promoting race equality and social cohesion in the process.
- 12.5 At least one officer within every institution's students' union should sit on the institutions' teaching and learning committee to ensure the student voice is represented.

Recommendation 13

National Union of Students

- 13.1 To understand its Black membership and to facilitate further work to address the attainment and satisfaction gaps between Black and White students, NUS should undertake an audit of the number of Black students' officers in FE and HE, as well as the number of cultural societies in educational institutions.
- 13.2 NUS is well placed to produce a Black students' activities pack with information and guidance to students' unions on supporting Black students in students' union activities. Advice on supporting Black students' officers, supporting cultural societies and promoting cross-cultural integration should be included in the resource.

Appendix 1 – survey design

Survey design

This survey sought to investigate Black students' experiences in further and higher education, examining various aspects of their academic experience, such as admissions procedures, academic attainment, campus life and support networks. Respondents were asked a range of questions to explore why they felt Black students were both less likely to be satisfied with their educational experience and less likely to attain first-class and upper second-class degrees than their White peers.

Data was captured through both quantitative and qualitative means, with survey respondents given the opportunity to elaborate on their responses in open text boxes, in addition to answering direct questions. The questions were initially piloted with a group of Black students who completed the survey and gave feedback. The questions were refined based on this feedback, and were then disseminated to the greater student population.

At the end of the survey, we gave respondents the opportunity to make comments or suggestions on how the experiences of Black students in further and higher education could be improved. Some participants also used this opportunity to provide feedback on the survey and the Black Students' Campaign. Many highlighted the value they saw in this research.

'Thank you for that wonderful chance to put my view across.'

'I think that this survey is a good idea and it will allow other black students to be able to express their feelings more about the diversity of blacks and other ethnic groups.'

'Keep on your good work.'

'Thank you for taking the time and it is appreciated...'

Questions

The following is a list of headline questions we asked in each section.

Background

- What factors influenced your choice of university/college
- How would you rate the information, advice and guidance you received when choosing to enter further/higher education?

Assessment and feedback

- In every *National Student Survey* since it began in 2005, students from minority ethnic groups are less positive about their course than other students, this includes areas such as teaching quality, assessment and feedback and personal development. Why do you think this is?

Academic Support

- Do you feel supported enough by the tutor system, i.e. academic tutors, in your institution?
- If you don't feel supported enough what could be done to improve it?
- Do you feel supported enough by your personal (pastoral) tutor?
- If you don't feel supported enough what could be done to improve it?

Attainment

- Research has shown that, in general, students from minority ethnic communities are less likely to achieve a better qualification relative to White UK and Irish students. Why do you think minority ethnic students, in general, do not achieve as well as their white peers?

- How do you think this could be improved?

Teaching and learning

- How would you describe your experience of your current teaching and learning environment? Tick all that apply.
 - a. Hostile
 - b. Supportive
 - c. Respectful
 - d. Cliquey
 - e. Tolerant
 - f. Isolating
 - g. Racist
 - h. Friendly
- What impact does this have on you?
- How could it be improved?

Curriculum

- Do you feel the curriculum on your course reflects issues of diversity, equality and discrimination?
- Are you able to bring in your perspective as a black student during lectures and/or tutor group meetings?

Culture

- Are you aware of any equalities policies in your institution?
- If you are aware of an equalities policy, what impact do you think they have had and why?
- Does your institution promote a welcoming and diverse culture?

Complaint structures

- If you need to make a complaint would you know how to do so?

- Have you ever made a complaint?
- Do you trust the integrity of the university structures/system to deal fairly with your complaint?

Course representation structures

- Do you know who your course representative is?
- Do you feel your views and experiences are fully represented by your course representative?

Racism

- Have you had any experience of racism in your current educational institution? Please explain your answer. For example did you experience racism from teaching staff, non-teaching staff and/or students? Was your experience in a HE or FE institution?

Appendix 2 – survey participant profile

The survey clearly stated it was open to Black students and defined those eligible to complete the questionnaire as 'students of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean descent at colleges and universities'. Only those who affirmed that their ethnic origin fell into this definition were included in the final sample of the survey.

Ethnic origin

The majority of students (71 per cent, 669) defined themselves as 'Black':

- 28 per cent of the survey sample self-identified as 'Black African' (264)
- 24 per cent described themselves as 'Black British' (221)
- 18 per cent defined themselves as 'Black Caribbean' (169)
- 2 per cent described themselves as having an 'Other Black Background' (15).

12 per cent (114) of the survey respondents were of an Asian background:

- 5 per cent defined themselves as Indian (51)
- 4 per cent described themselves as Pakistani (38)
- 1 per cent self-identified as Bangladeshi (10)
- 2 per cent (15) were from an 'Other Asian Background'.

A further 12 per cent (116) identified themselves as having a Mixed race background:

- 6 per cent of the total sample (57) were of Mixed White and Black African ethnic origin
- 3 per cent (25) stated that they were White and Black African
- just under 0.5 per cent described themselves as being White and Asian (4).

- 3 per cent (30) said they were of a Mixed background not listed in the survey.

Less than 1 per cent (8) of respondents were Chinese. The remaining 3 per cent (31) of survey respondents selected 'Other ethnic group'.

Country of study

- the majority of respondents (94 per cent, 879) were studying in England
- 3 per cent (24) were studying in Wales
- 2 per cent (20) were studying in Scotland
- just over 0.5 per cent (6) were studying in Northern Ireland
- 1 per cent of respondents (9) did not answer the question.

Some 81 per cent (759) were UK-domiciled students, while 15 per cent (144) were international. The remaining 4 per cent (35) did not answer the question.

Type of institution, mode and level of study

The bulk of respondents (72 per cent, 676) were in HE; 28 per cent (262) were in FE.

The vast majority of all survey respondents (87 per cent, 812) were studying full time, though one in 10 (91) were part-time students. Four per cent (35) did not provide an answer.

- more than half of the respondents (59 per cent, 553) were working towards Level 4 qualifications
- 22 per cent (209) were studying at Level 3
- 14 per cent (135) were studying at the postgraduate level
- 3 per cent (26) were in Level 2 education
- 2 per cent (15) were in Level 1 education.⁶⁷

Religion

- nearly two-thirds (63 per cent, 589) of respondents described themselves as Christian
- 13 per cent (123) stated they had no religion
- 1 in 10 respondents (94) were Muslim
- 3 per cent (27) were Hindu
- 1 per cent (12) were Buddhist
- 1 per cent (11) were Sikh.
- 1 per cent of respondents (10) identified themselves as either Bahai, Jain or Jewish
- 3 per cent (32) chose 'Other'
- 3 per cent (30) preferred not to state their religion
- 1 per cent of respondents (10) did not answer the question.

Age

- almost half – 46 per cent (427) of all respondents were 20 years of age or younger
- 23 per cent (219) were between the ages of 21–24
- 22 per cent (206) were between in age range 25–39
- 6 per cent (59) were 40 years old or older
- 3 per cent (27) of survey participants chose not to answer the question.

Gender

- the majority (69 per cent, 651) of respondents were female
- 29 per cent (269) were male
- just over 1 per cent (12) selected 'prefer not to say'
- 0.6 per cent did not answer the question.

Sexual orientation

- more than three in four (76 per cent, 716) described themselves as heterosexual
- less than 1 per cent (8) of respondents stated that they were gay
- less than 0.5 per cent (4) self-identified as lesbian
- 3 per cent (23) described themselves as bisexual
- 5 per cent (51) selected 'prefer not to say'
- 4 per cent (38) chose 'other'
- 1 in 10 (98) did not provide an answer to this question.

Endnotes

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- ³⁹ Some respondents felt the importance of their perspective was dependent on the type of course they studied – so, for example, one studying a pure science might not have as many opportunities to bring their perspective to the learning environment.
- ⁴⁰ Level 1 generally refers to Basic Skills or ESOL courses. Level 2 typically refers to GCSEs or NVQ2 and Level 3 to A-Levels or Advanced Apprenticeships. Level 4 generally consist of bachelor degrees or HNDs and Level 5 refers to masters or PhD courses.
- ⁴¹ *HSBC Student Survey 2010 data*.
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- ⁴⁹ P value = .059. While this figure does not meet the cut -off needed for a 95 per cent confidence interval, it is useful in light of the supporting statistically significant quantitative data received in the survey.
- ⁵⁰ NUS. (April 2011) *Hate Crime Interim Report: Exploring students' understanding, awareness and experiences of hate incidents*. Available from: http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/NUS_HateCrimeReport_web.pdf
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⁶¹ Fifty nine per cent of international students counted most of their friendships with co-nationals and other international students; only 7 per cent were friends mostly with UK students. UK Council for International Student Affairs. (2009) *Discussing difference, discovering similarities: a toolkit of learning activities to improve cross-cultural exchange between students of different cultural backgrounds*.

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