

Halpin

UK Universities' Response to Black Lives Matter

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November 2020

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1. Executive Summary

The murder of George Floyd on May 25th 2020 triggered a worldwide response and boosted the momentum of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Society was asked to acknowledge that it is not enough to be non-racist; everyone has a part to play to help society become actively anti-racist.

As with other key sectors, higher education is being held to account by its core constituent groups, with students, staff and the wider community all asking universities to consider their part in systemic racism, and what they can do to be truly anti-racist.

Our research project has assessed UK universities' responses to the Black Lives Matter movement from the perspective of university leaders, students, staff, and alumni. We have also gathered feedback from representatives, experts and researchers from outside of the higher education sector for a valuable external perspective.

This project aims to provide the UK higher education sector with recommendations for best practice on how to better support Black lives within their institutions and beyond.

To effect meaningful, long-term change, the UK higher education sector will need to acknowledge the part it has played in systemic racism up until now. And then it must take action.

One of the key findings from our research is that only 26% of survey respondents felt that their university's response to Black Lives Matter was appropriate or sufficient. One of the main challenges for those we interviewed was figuring out 'what next?' - how do institutions and individuals work to ensure BLM and anti-Black racism stays as one of the top priorities in the sector?

There is clearly work to do and our report intends to serve not only as a means of continuing the conversation but also as a means of providing the sector with a checklist – via 31 recommendations - to turn the conversation, and a search for answers, into action.

1.1. A note on COVID-19

“...during COVID we have seen there is a different impact on different racial groups. They are not represented in the NHS, nursing, administrative positions, and the focus is not on managing the risks to those [BAME] groups. Equally in law, there is unequal treatment of ethnic minority groups and whites.”

– Pro Vice-Chancellor, English university

At the time of writing this report we are in the middle of a global pandemic. Inequalities that were already present have been exacerbated, and this is reflected in the number of deaths in the UK BAME (and especially Black) communities and the number of BAME (and especially Black) people at risk in low-paying key worker roles.

Campuses across the UK were closed for months and reopened in September for new and returning cohorts of students. A considerable amount of time and resources have been

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dedicated to the COVID-19 response in universities – a response that will be ongoing until a vaccine is available.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted the availability of many people in the sector for non-essential activities, in particular leadership. Our interviews and the survey were conducted during a period where students were returning to university and staff were managing conflicting priorities. COVID-19, combined with the start of the academic year, made it a challenging time to conduct this research. However, we felt that this research could not wait.

We are grateful for and appreciate the time that the interviewees and survey respondents gave us for this research project.

Editorial Note:

Throughout our report, we have chosen to capitalise 'Black' but not 'white'. This decision was based on advice sought, and further reading supports this.¹

¹ <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php?fbclid=IwAR0hKiCsDm-asjPtNO4Hm2m2DEjfhmmpRo9piWoiDuLbztzF-QuVha8JRX8>

https://apnews.com/article/7e36c00c5af0436abc09e051261fff1f?fbclid=IwAR0R0Aoyt_T7I930escW-aEEen8huXD5ZUEddVimZWFSnLdIM8euO8Vmw9os

2. Introduction

“Most open people have been talking about race. I have mixed feelings. It was bittersweet. It took someone to die but now conversations are being had”

– Education Officer, Welsh students' union

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was reinvigorated in May 2020 after the murder of George Floyd in the US. The recording showing his death at the hands of the police circulated worldwide whilst millions of people were locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These unique conditions provided the catalyst for a global eruption of activism for Black lives and led many individuals and organisations to reflect publicly on the responsibility they have for challenging anti-Black racism in our society.

Many universities made public statements in May and June 2020 in response to the BLM movement to show support. Some of these statements were met with strong criticism. Many believed that the statements were hollow because anti-Black racism is not a new phenomenon – over the decades, students, staff and activists have been raising these issues – yet it appeared that only now universities were prepared to talk about their support of Black lives publicly. Many Black lives have been impacted and damaged due to racism that had previously gone unchecked within universities, and seeing a university suddenly show support without reflecting on their past failings has been a source of frustration for many.

Our research explores how UK universities have responded and how their responses have been received by staff and students.

Through a survey and interviews we asked staff, students, student officers, and activists to share their views on anti-Black racism within the sector. Their responses provided a wealth of insight into the challenges faced, and the ongoing work and aspirations they have to effect meaningful change for Black students and staff.

We hope that our report will help the UK higher education sector to reflect and take action to become anti-racist, and do more to make Black lives matter.

2.1. Black Lives Matter: The Organisation vs The Phrase

“[We are] supportive of the issues brought forward by the BLM movement. We have been careful to separate out from any political situations in terms of supporting the BLM organisation for a number of reasons. There are people who worry about the BLM organisation itself, and we don't want the issue to be lost with that worry. We need to separate that from the BLM organisation and talk about the issues.”

– Pro Vice-Chancellor, English university

Across the world, there has been a lot of discussion about what we mean when we say, “Black Lives Matter”. Some do not know anything about the BLM organisation and have expressed concerns about the political nature and transparency of the organisation. These

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concerns have led to some people being reluctant to say 'Black Lives Matter' even if they agree with the sentiment.

What is Black Lives Matter?

Black Lives Matter is an organisation that started in 2013. It was created in response to racism and anti-Black violence, mainly in the form of police brutality. It started in the US after the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager, carried out by a neighbourhood watch volunteer who subsequently did not get sentenced to prison. This event led to the birth of the #BlackLivesMatter movement on social media.

Black Lives Matter, the US organisation, has chapters across the world. Black Lives Matter UK (UKBLM) is endorsed by the US organisation however it is not yet an official chapter. BLM organisations (both official and unofficial) talk about police brutality and politics, and are seen by some as radical political groups. This, alongside the lack of transparency around the UKBLM group, has led to concerns by some about supporting the organisation.

On the whole, when people say "Black Lives Matter" it is meant as a statement, whether or not they support an official or unofficial BLM organisation – this is important to understand.

You can and ought to be in support of Black lives by saying "Black Lives Matter". By saying Black Lives Matter it does not mean that other lives do not matter, it means that Black lives matter *too*, and that Black lives are in great need of support right now because of the devastating racism that Black people face every day.

Throughout this report when we say "Black Lives Matter" we are referring to the statement, not the organisation.

3. Methodology

Interviews

In August 2020, we contacted 20 universities, specialist academies and students' unions in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England to request interviews with members of leadership and the staff who worked directly on institutional responses to BLM.

We contacted a mixture of post-92, pre-92, Russell Group and specialist institutions and, in England especially, made sure that we sought representation from all regions.

Of the 20 contacted, 11 institutions in Northern Ireland, Wales and England accepted our request (ten universities and one specialist academy). From this cohort, we interviewed 21 individuals between 7th September and 8th October 2020.

We also reached out to interview those who are not employed by universities but have either carried out work towards supporting Black lives in higher education or are leaders at higher education organisations that affect or regulate policy. 14 people were approached in this cohort and 4 interviews were conducted.

In total we held 25 interviews.

Survey

We conducted a public survey open to anyone who either has or used to have a relationship with a UK higher education institution, e.g. current/former student, student officer, university staff, students' union staff, board member and alumni.

The survey was circulated on Halpin's social media channels and via email. It was open from 16th September to 5th October 2020.

In total, there were 79 survey responses, broken down as follows:

Fig.1: Survey Respondents by Relationship to HE

Type	%	Number
University staff	69.2%	54
Student	15.4%	12
Alumni	7.7%	6
University Leadership Team	6.4%	5
Students' Union staff	3.8%	3
Board Trustee/Council Member/Governor	2.6%	2
Other	2.6%	2
Student Union Management Team	1.3%	1
Full-time elected Student Officer	0.0%	0

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Desk Research

Desk research was carried out to identify how universities and students' unions publicly responded to BLM. Public statements available on university social media channels and websites were assessed from the selection of universities we contacted for an interview, as well as additional universities outside that group. These universities were a mixture of post-92, pre-92, Russell Group and specialist institutions in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. BLM statements from universities and students' unions were often published as news articles on their websites and then shared as a link on their social media channels.

Additional information about the work universities and students' unions do relating to equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) was also reviewed. These projects were often student-led or student officer campaigns for students' unions. For universities it was found on their dedicated pages for governance and EDI.

4. Emerging Findings and Recommendations

4.1. The response from UK universities

The majority of UK universities responded publicly to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement - 83.3% of survey respondents stated that their university responded publicly. Universities responded in a range of ways. Many put out a show of solidarity by releasing a statement on their website and then sharing that on their social media as they took part in the #blackouttuesday social media trend (which had organisations and individuals post a black square and stop using social media for 24 hours to show support). Blackout Tuesday took place just over a week after the killing of George Floyd.

The majority of universities issued an institutional statement. Some decided to take a more personal approach with messages from leaders, including Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Student Officers.

The statements varied in length and content. Many used it to show that the values of the university do not support racism. Some directly referred to 'Black Lives Matter', some referred to racism, others spoke about BAME communities and some referred to diversity generally.

A few universities immediately outlined the specific actions that they were going to take to fight racism. Only 43.6% of survey respondents said that they were aware of concrete actions and commitments that their university would be taking moving forward.

Some university senior leaders decided to post an institutional response. Some posted it as a result of staff and students' feedback.

"We did not plan a response but our staff members wanted us to – we wanted to get the tenor of the response right" – Vice-Chancellor, English university.

"There was a period of time when the senior leadership was inundated with messages from students asking them what they are doing" – Head of HR, English university.

Although many universities took just over a week to respond, some decided to take longer so that they could share something more substantial in their view.

"We wanted to put something together to prove to the university, the city and the stakeholders that we weren't just saying we were worried and then doing nothing about it" – Chief People Officer, English university.

Few universities have posted subsequent updates since then.

Throughout our research, we have explored how universities have reacted, the challenges they face, and the actions they have taken. Our case study section (Appendix 2) explores this further.

4.2. Challenges

Our research identified a series of common challenges faced by universities as they respond to racism and inequality, which we have summarised below. In Appendix 2, detailed case studies outline all of the challenges and (ongoing or upcoming) actions each university and students' union informed us about.

Finding the right words and actions

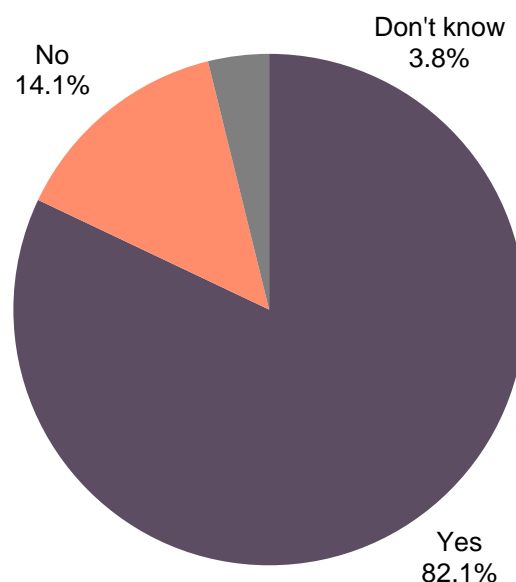
"We have things in place to have students feel comfortable enough to talk to us. One thing we've come across is that people don't feel comfortable enough to do that as they are unsure of what to say. From both sides of it. I feel sometimes the BAME community don't want to feel like they are pushing things on people. And then the other side of it who are the people who should be supporting feel like they are going to get caught out on the smallest of things. We need to create an atmosphere where you feel comfortable enough to say something and not have your head ripped off, so they can learn." - President, English students' union.

"Me and my officer team admitted to ourselves that before this happened, we weren't as educated as we should have been. So we decided to change that."

– President, English students' union.

University and students' union staff expressed that they were afraid of saying the wrong thing and worried about what the consequences to that would be. Some people in leadership roles are not well-versed in anti-racism work and so have struggled with conversations and taking action towards it.

Fig. 2: Do you feel you would benefit from more education about racism?

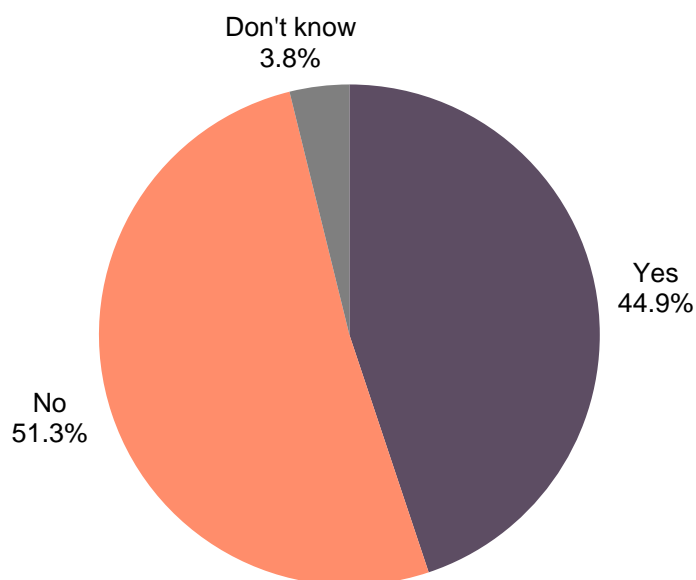


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To have an anti-racist university you need to have anti-racist individuals. This needs to be done through education for all, in the form of training. We **recommend** that anti-racism training is mandatory for all staff, students and student officers at UK universities (**R1**). This should be disseminated centrally by departments that handle people development and student development e.g. HR.

Fig. 3: Has your institution provided any form of anti-racism training to you?



Black and BAME

“Others felt that I wanted to just focus our response to Black people and they felt it should be a BAME response. I said it can’t be a BAME response because you set up this working group because of BLM. Why are you now trying to put us together with BAME? The racism I face is different to an Asian person. If you put us in that spectrum you are just sweeping our issues under the carpet” – President, English university SU.

“Talking about Black staff as oppose to BAME staff. [We] need to appreciate that it is not a homogenous group” – Head of HR, English University.

When handling the BLM response some universities have used ‘BAME’ in place of ‘Black’ in their statements and in actions for their anti-racism work.

All anti-racism work is important. However, it is also important to remember that ‘Black’ and ‘BAME’ are not interchangeable. When talking about your BLM response you should make sure you refer directly to Black lives and remember that Black lives need a lot of support right now.

The term BAME can be useful when talking about a shared experience. However, the experiences are not the same. When you talk about BAME communities make sure you have the granular data behind each group. When you talk about an ethnic group you should specify who you are talking about. The higher education sector needs to limit its use of the

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term. Groups often get lost and we **recommend** that universities use 'Black' when referring to Black people, not 'BAME' (R2).

Black Intersectionality

"The students in particular wanted us to take a broader perspective when talking about BLM because our Black students are from Africa. They said they wanted a broader perspective because it was their experience. You have to look at the whole Black experience. You need to look at BLM in your own particular context" – Pro-Vice-Chancellor, English university.

"OfS definition of Black students within their widening participation document is always looking at the Black British student doing undergrad. The reason why it is undergrad is [it's] what the league tables look at." – President, English university SU.

Some of our interviewees have expressed the complexity that is needed when responding to the BLM movement.

The experiences of Black British students are different from Black international students. The experiences of Black men are different from Black women. The experiences of a Black trans person are different from a Black cis person. The experiences of racism will be different. The interventions that institutions take need to reflect that Black is not a homogenous group and we **recommend** UK universities assess the intersections within to cater for each group in the optimal way (R3).

Partnership Working

For many institutions, working with their student's union (SU) was a key part of handling their BLM response.

In some instances, there has been a disconnect between how the student union and university see the response that the institution has taken towards the BLM movement. Some students and student officers have felt that their ideas have not been considered. Some SU officers find it difficult to work with the university at the same time as holding them to account.

Many SUs are carrying out their own impactful work to support their Black students. Due to a lack of financial support, some SUs have had to limit their work on this issue.

"The problem with institutions is that they guess what people want and often it does not work" President, English students' union.

We **recommend** that universities review their governance and communications practices to ensure that they treat students' unions as partners and critical friends (R4).

Authenticity and Credibility

"Some people are used to the tokenistic and PR response that they give. So some of us just thought of it as another statement that they are issuing to make it look like they understand and that they share the pain Black students are having" – President, English students' union.

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“As a Black person it didn't mean anything to me but maybe to a white person it would mean something to them as it is seen as a bold step” – President, English students' union.

“Students have said that you celebrate us in October but then you forget about us for the rest of the year” - President, English Students' Union.

Despite the good intentions behind the statement to help Black students and staff, if it appears to be something that is not a continuous action or a sudden action then it is hard for students and staff to believe in it. Also, if an institution has had issues with or historical problematic links to racism, and has not addressed it and made amends, then it has limited credibility with any anti-racism work it may undertake. If statements don't have substance to them and look like a textbook PR exercise, then it won't have meaning.

We **recommend** that universities publicly acknowledge past failings in dealing with racism and outline their plans and timetable to make amends **(R5)**. Similarly, we **recommend** universities communicate their anti-racism activity clearly to students, staff, and the wider public, publishing their anti-racism statements online accordingly **(R6)**.

Setting Priorities and Taking Prompt Action

“It is resource that stops us, rather than intent or desire” – Chief People Officer, English university.

“[We are] trying to respond to demands systematically ...we are trying to give a robust response but being a university, obviously that takes a bit of time” – Deputy Vice-Chancellor, English university.

Race equality is seen as an important issue; however, many university leaders have expressed that they have had other issues that were seen to be more pressing and needed to be dealt with urgently.

Certainly, the ability of universities to respond during this time will have been affected due to the immense pressures brought on by COVID-19, and this has limited their ability to dedicate time and resources.

“COVID is a pandemic. Well, racism is the biggest pandemic ever. They need to treat this issue in the same way they treated the pandemic.” – Education Officer, Welsh SU.

Responding to COVID-19 does not mean that anti-racism can't be focused on. This pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, so it is even more critical for anti-racism work to be done. Anti-racism and COVID-19 responses are intertwined. We **recommend** that UK universities recognise that anti-racism work needs to underpin their institutional COVID-19 response **(R7)** and suggest publishing their anti-racism plans *alongside* the COVID-19 response plans.

Universities control their own budgets; they can decide whether funds are allocated towards anti-racism and whether they see it as an essential area for investment. We **recommend** that universities include anti-racism funding as part of their annual budgetary review and set aside dedicated funds for anti-racism activity **(R8)**.

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Limited Data on Black Students

"We all walk around in our own realities. We need a tool to stop people from doing that... If you can't demonstrate things quantitatively then you need a different approach" – Pro-Vice-Chancellor, English university

University leaders that have very low proportions of Black students have expressed that the limited amount of data can't give them a story. Some subjects show the outcomes of one or two students so using that can be hard to inform their work. Some have said that applying for the Race Equality Charter with that type of limited data would have made the university look bad.

Numbers do not always tell the whole story. For example, if an institution has one recorded racist incident it may be easy to disconnect from the reality of what happened to that one person. 'One' incident might not look too bad on paper, but it can have devastating consequences for the victim of racism.

If an institution has only one or two Black students on a course, use that as an opportunity to talk to them directly about their own experience. You may be surprised about what you learn from their stories.

Using qualitative data alongside numbers helps people understand what racism looks like in higher education and why anti-racism work is important. We **recommend** universities use stories and lived experiences alongside quantitative statistics **(R9)**.

Monitoring Success

There are other ways to measure success on anti-Black racism work that are overlooked. Because an institution may have a metric that looks relatively good, e.g. Black Awarding Gap, they may think racism isn't that bad there.

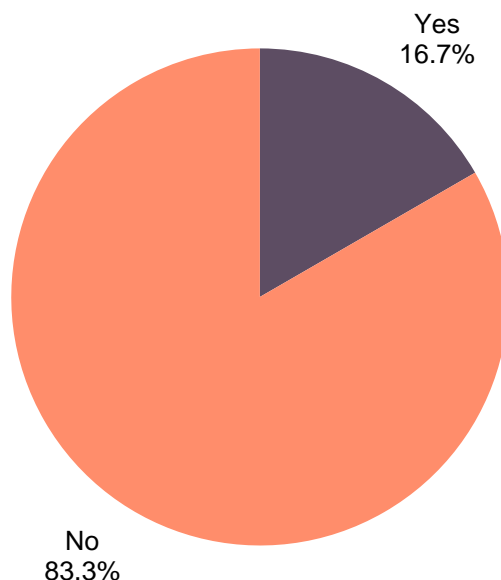
In addition to the standard ways that success is measured (like the Black Awarding Gap), look at other ways to monitor progress. A measure of success that universities may not have thought of is measuring how many Black students regularly run for elected positions in their SU. If there is a toxic culture in universities for ethnic minorities, they may not run for leadership positions. Another measure could be the number of Black alumni who are happy to speak highly of the institution after graduating. If they had a terrible time with racism, then they probably won't want to be positive ambassadors for the university.

We **recommend** universities identify additional ways to measure and monitor success against anti-racism **(R10)**.

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Fig 4: If your institution collects data on racial inequality, do you know how to access this information?



Racism in the Students' Union

It is easy to focus all the attention on structural racism that can persist in universities and to forget to look at SUs too. Although SUs are inherently more progressive, racism still exists there and it can be seen in many ways, for example in the low number of Black SU presidents that have been elected to lead SUs over the past decade, or the number of Black SU CEOs present today.

We **recommend** that universities and students' unions recognise that racism exists in both the university and students' union structures and that it becomes standard to review racism as part of existing university and SU governance review practices **(R11)**.

Racism in the UK

"When you say that you can't believe that it is still happening in 2020... you are making out that we are living in a non-racist society and that these things happening are anomalies" – President, English university SU.

Some Black people have expressed frustration when institutions say that they are shocked by racism that happens today. This leads people to think that the institution is not truly aware of the realities that Black people face here in the UK.

Some people have compared racism in the UK to that in the US and have expressed that it is "not as bad here". This can be disheartening for Black people to hear. Don't compare the racism that happens in the UK to the US. Any form or amount of racism should not be tolerated.

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Some institutions have faced backlash for supporting BLM. Some listed out educational resources and some people got upset as they felt they were being accused of being racist. Students or staff who openly post racist content online reflects badly on the institution. Many institutions have had to act quickly to tackle such incidents.

We **recommend** that universities publicly accept the existence of racism in the UK and adopt a zero-tolerance approach to it **(R12)**.

Ownership of Anti-Black Racism Work

*"I have a problem with movements being driven by champions... It doesn't feel it can lead to any systematic change... it doesn't strike me as institutional culture change."
– Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Welsh university.*

For the whole institution to change, racism needs to be everyone's responsibility. It won't work if there are pockets of good practice. If someone who is doing good work on anti-racism leaves then there is a danger that work may be lost.

Anti-racism needs to be built in all strategies if it will be truly institutionalised, however for an organisation to be anti-racist, everyone should know exactly how the university plans on doing that. With a clear anti-racist strategy or manifesto, everyone will know where you stand on racism.

There should be anti-Black racism targets set at the institutional, faculty, department, and individual staff level. This way, the responsibility for setting and meeting targets can be spread across the institution.

We **recommend** that universities do not leave racial inequality work to specific individuals, EDI committees, or HR departments **(R13)**. In addition to a dedicated anti-racist strategy **(R14)**, we also **recommend** that universities build anti-Black racism work into all strategies and plans – long and short term and adopt clear targets at all levels **(R15)**.

From the start of the student and staff journey at your institution, an individual must be clear on your values and stance against racism. If they don't abide by the conduct, there should be a zero-tolerance approach to racism. Unfortunately, in some institutions this has not been made clear. We **recommend** that universities include anti-Black racism expectations for students and staff in a code of conduct that is communicated at the recruitment and enrolment stage **(R16)**.

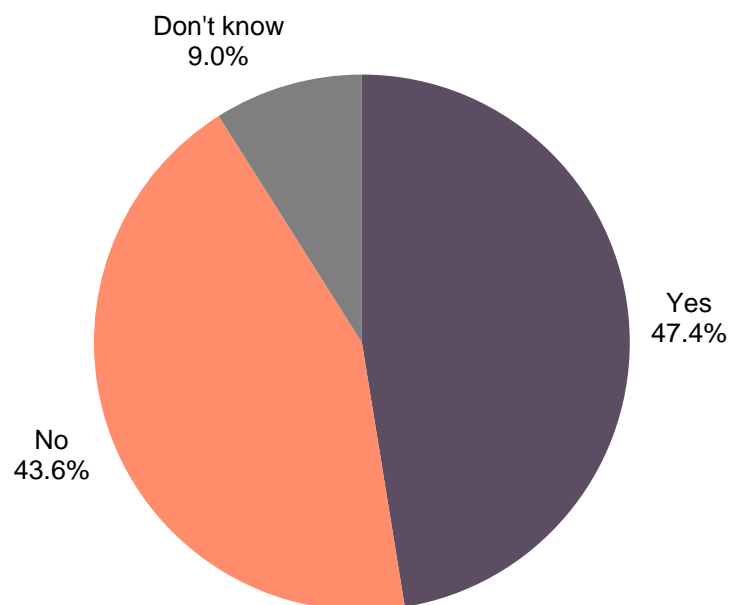
Senior leadership roles already have huge portfolios of work. Adding the massive area of anti-racism to an established role does not allow the appropriate focus to be paid to that area. We propose that there is a dedicated member of staff that can report to the Vice-Chancellor directly and **recommend** that institutions create a new senior leadership role to focus on anti-racism **(R17)**.

The Board sets the strategic vision of the university. Anti-racism should be a standing item on the agenda. The Board should be aware of the issues around racial inequality at the institution. They should actively hold senior leadership to account on this topic. With the university Board an integral part of the university anti-Black racism mission, we **recommend** that anti-racism is a standing agenda item at meetings of Council/the Board **(R18)**.

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Fig. 5: Are you aware of methods to better support Black students and staff through your own role?



Safe Spaces and Allies

BAME staff must have a space where they can talk about their experiences. Black staff should also have the opportunity to meet separately from the rest of the BAME staff to have a safe space to talk if needed. Other ethnic minority groups should also have the opportunity to talk about their specific issues if needed too.

Many institutions have BAME networks and unfortunately, some have not had appropriate support financially, operationally, or through senior leadership backing. Some have found it difficult to book rooms, and some have not had enough money to run events for BAME staff.

For the ideas of Black and ethnic minority staff to progress and result in institutional change, it is critical that allies can help. This can be done by making sure that ideas are passed on to the highest level. This can also be done by having the Vice-Chancellor present at an ally meeting.

Senior leadership buy-in from the Vice-Chancellor and the rest of the university senior leadership team is key. BAME networks need to be supported financially and operationally and we **recommend** that senior leadership participation is a means for white allies to support networks and groups in a suitable way **(R19)**.

Race Equality Charter

“The Race Equality Charter is the beginning but not the end.” – Shakira Martin, Halpin Fellow and Head of Student Experience at Rose Bruford College

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The Race Equality Charter (REC) may show a commitment, but institutions must be careful that it is not used as a tick-box exercise. Unless institutions embrace implementing meaningful change throughout, then a charter mark does not equate to much. Anti-racism work needs to go beyond the REC, and we **recommend** that best practice should be considered to be those institutions that do more than just comply **(R20)**.

“if we keep waiting until our numbers are good enough then we’ll never get anywhere” – Pro-Vice-Chancellor, English University.

Some have argued that if an institution is happy to have a REC mark then it should also be prepared to be transparent on all things to do with racial inequality including the ethnic pay gap, Black Awarding Gap, and the number of Black professors present. Even if an institution does not have the REC, we **recommend** that they are transparent with their data on racial inequality and how they monitor impact **(R21)**.

Some figures in the sector believe that when the Athena Swan Award got linked to university research funding it raised the profile and many people took it more seriously. For the REC or anti-racism work to be seen as more critical to an institution, it may need to explicitly relate to income and financial performance. We would therefore **recommend** that the Race Equality Charter (or progress of anti-racism work) is tied into funding for UK universities **(R22)**.

There is an argument that this may lead to people doing it for the ‘wrong reasons’, however, Black people can’t afford to wait until their institution decides to work on anti-racism for the ‘right reasons’.

Transparency, Accountability, and Robust Processes

Some institutions have said they don’t receive many complaints about racism. If you don’t receive many formal complaints about racism it may mean that your system is not safe and accessible to use.

We **recommend** that the higher education racism complaints process is reformed to be more robust **(R23)** and that universities should ensure people have the option to complain anonymously if they want to. Complaints should be investigated promptly and the whole process should be documented each step of the way to allow transparency and accountability. Complaints should have a clear outcome that is communicated back to the person who submitted it.

An annual reflection in the form of an EDI report is not enough. Some have expressed that institutions don’t proactively seek regular feedback from Black staff and students - for some that only happens in Black History Month.

We **recommend** that institutions allow for regular reflection and feedback from staff and students **(R24)** and build in a mechanism whereby individuals can provide feedback on anti-racism progress at the institution. For example, this could be done through having online feedback forms that allow individuals to tag which area the feedback is about, or it could be done through having regular anti-racism committee meetings.

Work is being done in some universities, but if students and staff don’t hear about it then it looks like nothing is happening. Share your progress, no matter how small it may appear to be. As mentioned before, we **recommend** universities communicate their anti-racism activity clearly to students, staff and the wider public **(R6)**.

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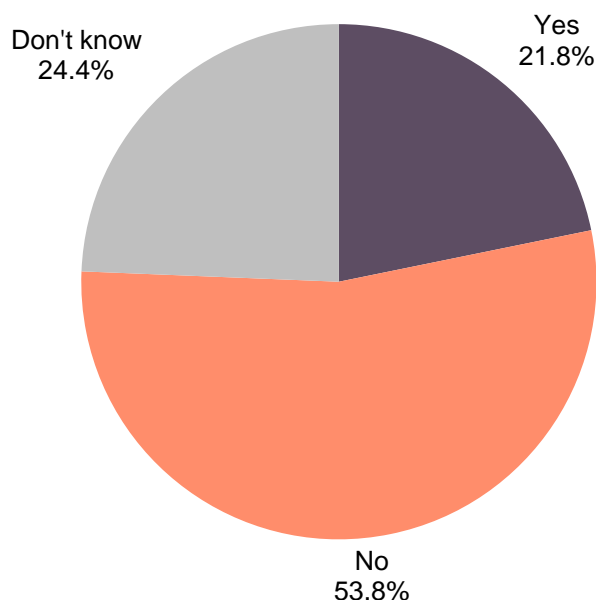
Replicated Work and Lack of Collaboration

So many organisations and institutions are doing work towards anti-racism. There needs to be a home for anti-racism work in higher education so that no one is duplicating each other's efforts. This will allow for resources and time to be focused better and for increased collaboration. For example, two organisations may run a similar national survey to get feedback from the same pool of students at the same time. When we work together we can move closer to reaching the goal of having a truly anti-racist sector.

We **recommend** that the whole HE sector needs a collective way to work on anti-racism. We suggest that there should be a collective body where membership bodies, consultancies, and other organisations within the sector can come together and collaborate on anti-racism projects (R25).

Decolonisation

Fig. 6: Do you believe the curriculum and broader educational offer are reflective of diverse student backgrounds?



“The system is not broken, it benefits who it was built to benefit. It about breaking things down and rebuilding with the students that you have at the moment, with their voices – ask them what they want” – Education Officer, Welsh students’ union.

Some people have struggled with the use of the term ‘decolonisation’, as it can make them uncomfortable. Some have opted for the word ‘diversify’ instead, but the two terms don’t mean the same thing.

Understand what ‘decolonisation’ means. It does not mean omitting people out of structures, or just adding to the structures we already have, it means starting from the foundation to

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build alternative structures that represent the people of today. To start from the foundation, decolonisation involves acknowledging and confronting how colonialism shaped our current educational structures. Today, colonialism in education is often perpetuated through the curriculum, power dynamics, and institutional structures. Historically, university scholars were white, so education systems put them at the centre and education content was written from their perspective. To fully support Black lives, we **recommend** that institutions decolonise **(R26)**. For this to be done right, institutions need to use external decolonisation education experts to work on this. Decolonisation involves giving students and staff the tools to empower them to challenge existing structures, therefore it is not possible for university leadership to solely undertake decolonisation work themselves.

Brexit

“You can have your student visa, you are able to be here but if you don’t have an accent like mine, or a skin colour like mine you are more likely to be [targeted by the police]. It is a massive fear for students, especially with Brexit happening... if they go home for Christmas and then come back, would they be able to go to [the city] without getting harassed for paperwork? Profiling is such a big issue here.” – President, Northern Irish students’ union.

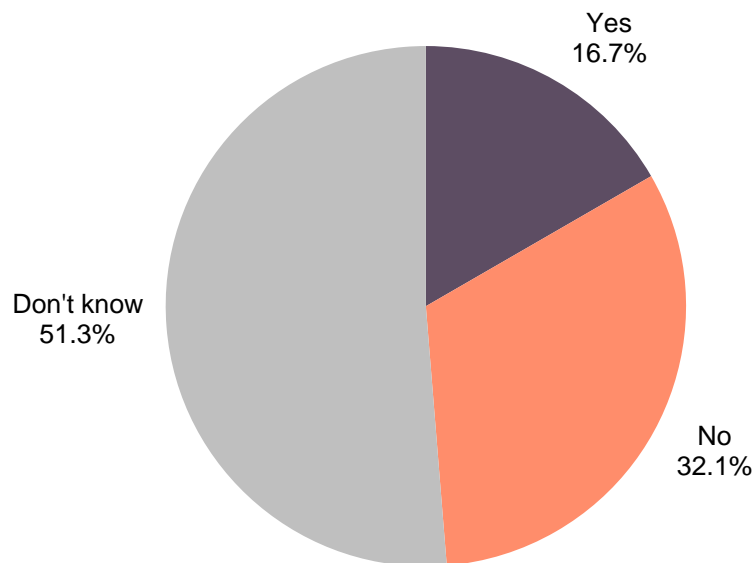
Brexit has already been linked to a higher rate of hate crimes since the referendum took place. Some student leaders have expressed concerns for their BAME students, both UK and international. We **recommend** that universities undertake risk assessments into the impact of Brexit on Black lives **(R27)** and prepare students for when the UK leaves the EU at the end of 2020. This protection could come in the form of proactively working with local police to flag these concerns and ensure their international students and BAME students will be treated fairly.

Student Recruitment

“The VC and PVCs moved here for the job. We can’t blame our surrounding area for being too white. We need to attract Black students here” – President, English students’ union.

For institutions that are not in big cities like London or Manchester, university and SU leaders often cite that a lack of racial diversity in the surrounding community impacts on both staff and student recruitment. This then translates to the lack of racial diversity in their workforce and student cohorts.

Fig. 7: Is there a strategy in place to improve the recruitment of Black staff?



People move to cities for better career opportunities. Black students and staff will go to an institution if the offer is attractive enough to them, no matter how many white people may be in the city. We **recommend** universities resist shifting the challenges around recruitment onto the 'whiteness' of their region and instead work on creating an environment that will pull in and support Black students and staff while they are with you **(R28)**.

Self-Assessments

When an institution carries out a self-assessment of their services and departments in relation to anti-Black racism, they are likely to miss out on important areas for concern. We **recommend** all parts of the institution are assessed by an external consultant in the same way the university appoints an independent council or board effectiveness review **(R29)**. This will help set a less subjective baseline in the journey to becoming anti-racist.

Mental health services

"I don't go to wellbeing sessions because you only get 10 and I'll have to spend the first 4 sessions explaining why racism impacts on my mental health" – feedback from a student given to an SU President, English University.

"Black people live a racialised existence all the time and their mental health reflects that. So whenever you don't have adequate mental health services that reflect that, that in itself is an inequality and injustice" – President, Northern Ireland SU.

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Some institutions struggle with low numbers of Black students accessing their mental health services. Some student officers and students have expressed that their university's mental health services aren't effective for Black students.

We **recommend** that universities ensure that all student wellbeing staff know how to deal with anti-Black racism. The services offered need to be culturally competent which may include increasing the number of Black wellbeing advisors and counsellors employed (**R30**).

4.3. The reaction to the universities' responses

"There were a lot of students that were unhappy and having conversations together about this – you could describe them as demands... They wanted the [university] to look at a range of areas for example the degree attainment gap. They say what are you doing as an institution about this. They used it as a good opportunity to highlight issues we have as an institution" – Head of HR, English university.

Our survey was shared online and through email. It was open to everyone that had a connection with higher education.

- Only 25.6% felt that their university's response to Black Lives Matter was appropriate or sufficient.
- 38.5% said that their university has responded to racial inequality before.
- 82.1% said that they would benefit from more education about racism.
- 24.4% think that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is embedded in all aspects of the university.

The overall feeling from the survey was that people were sceptical of their university's response to Black Lives Matter. Many wanted to see words backed up by action. Many were also fearful about tokenisation. Some sample comments:

"A coordinated and real response where universities work to tackle the issues at hand and are transparent on their failings as well as successes would be welcome."

"I am extremely concerned that this will be a very temporary conversation which will both devalue the movement and its aims, and also risk tokenising Black students and staff. Systematic change is slow to happen in any industry, so will this conversation still be in the minds of SLT [Senior Leadership Team] in a year, 5 years, 10 years?"

One white male student in support of BLM alluded that a financial reason might be the reason why their university may not be strong in advocating for Black lives: *"My university does not have a particularly strong financial incentive to include Black students into their cohorts. This is mainly due to Black students being from the UK and the chance for profit is lower than from international students from China etc."*

One white male university staff member did not feel that there was an approach needed for BLM: *"I don't feel that my University needs to have a specific approach to BLM. I feel that we are addressing any historical inequality in the right way and have a focus on increasing diversity going forward. I understand why we addressed BLM directly due to its current media spotlight, but our ongoing internal strategies to combat racism continue to be successful and I don't believe they require revision."*

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One Black female university member of staff who did not feel a sense of belonging at her institution said: *“more work needs to be done, because the issues are not going to go away. Diversity is a strength and it benefits society. If we don't address it in 2020, then when?”*.

4.4. Activism

“Universities have known about racial inequality for a very long time. It is something that student activists have flagged. It is something that has come up in report after report with awarding gaps and with all sorts of things we have seen. It is not a new issue. So I think universities are making commitments that we haven't seen fulfilled before... I know universities all have good intentions but I really want to see those good intentions become something that we can actively see in coming to life.” - Hillary Gyebi-Ababio, NUS Vice President.

When responding to improving life for Black people in the higher education sector it is imperative to not only look at other universities but also to learn, support, and work with people making a change outside of traditional structures.

Since May 2020, many more people have found the confidence and strength to speak up about anti-Black racism. Student groups have coordinated open letters to Vice-Chancellors, students and activists have started viral petitions and both new and existing projects have found new life.

Social media campaigns like #abolishBAME were created to highlight the problems that come with grouping all ethnic minorities under one umbrella term. #makediversitycount was created by the author of this paper to change the 2010 Equality Act, ten years on, for organisations to have a more robust anti-discrimination which includes better discrimination and racism reporting mechanisms. Some see the education system as so deeply flawed for Black people that they have created a liberating education space outside called the Free Black University².

Projects that were created years before May 2020 are still relevant now. A project called the Black Women's Project (BWP)³ highlights a group that often gets overlooked in higher education: Black women. It was created by Jessica Agboola whilst she was a student after becoming aware of poor statistics for Black women in the UK, through the research of Dr. Victoria Showunmi, concerning their wellbeing especially in High Education. BWP has chapters in different universities. BWP offers support for Black women throughout the year and they run annual leadership programmes for where they feel universities are lacking in upskilling Black women on leadership, academic pathways, and workplace readiness. Jessica will be releasing a report for the Winston Churchill Fellowship, where she is researching how universities in different countries support Black students and what their experiences are.

“You claim to care [now] but our experiences were not like that, it was self-resourced... the work that we are doing is the work that universities should be doing, we are creating our own safety nets. It is additional labour to the educational career we have invested in. we get short-changed in the process because our attention and energy is split between trying not to fall through any institutional cracks and trying to

² <https://www.freeblackuni.com/>

³ <http://theblackwomensproject.contactin.bio/>

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get the degree that we had faith in the institution to get to us.” – Jessica Agboola, Black Women’s Project.

An organisation called Black Impact⁴ was created by Ceewhy Ochoga from her lived experience of racism as a student and a first-time Black SU president. Black Impact represents and supports Black students and Black Student Officers. This is what students have told her about Universities responses to BLM:

“Black students are largely dissatisfied with the response from universities across the country. They have said that it seems no more than a PR stunt for universities and that beyond the statements of solidarity, nothing is being done on the ground to ensure that Black Lives truly matter. Universities responses to BLM also shone the light on the refusal of institutions to acknowledge Black people as a race and not a homogenous group with other minority groups because a number of universities in their BLM statement header would say Black Lives Matter and then in the body of the statement, say BAME. This caused a lot of outrage from Black students and Black student groups across the country.”

‘Decolonisation’ is becoming a more widely used term. The NUS has stated “Decolonising education” as a priority campaign in their 2020-2021 campaign plan. One of their targets is to establish ‘decolonising’ as an understood and preferred response to racism.

Research has been carried out by Mia Liyanage⁵ for HEPI, published in June, on how decolonisation is integral to higher education. It puts forward five key policy recommendations for the sector.

“My report was about decolonisation, this [report] is about advocacy for Black lives, but in my opinion, they fall under the same remit and that action is actually integral to the integrity of your institution. If you are not doing this then your work is less academically sound, your pedagogy is less rigorous, and your culture is inherently violent to a lot of people. It is not a passive thing, it is an active choice” - Mia Liyanage, Researcher.

We **recommend** that universities work with external experts and representatives, as well as organised student groups on anti-Black racism **(R31)**.

⁴ <https://blackimpact.co.uk/>

⁵ https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HEPI_Miseducation_Debate-Paper-23_FINAL.pdf

5. Conclusion

Since May 2020, there has been a noticeable change in public willingness to better support Black lives. However, months on, progress is varied and seems slow in many places.

From conducting this research project, we can see that student leaders and university senior leadership teams have been working to better support Black lives. Many have good intentions and are passionate about doing better. Some have been good at communicating that to their staff, students and the public, yet many have fallen flat on that front. This makes it look like no work is being done.

Serious questions need to be asked of the whole sector. Black Lives Matter should not be treated as a passing trend; it needs to be here to stay. Change may not happen overnight, but this is an issue that has been known about for decades and there are plenty of reports to back that up – Black people are tired of waiting.

Now is the time to place anti-Black racism at the top of the agenda. It underpins everything. If one part of your staff or student cohort is not getting appropriate support, aside from it being morally wrong, you are not only short-changing them, but you are depriving your university of unlocked talent and potential.

If higher education institutions do not step up for Black lives and there is no substantial progress, there may come a time where Black people coordinate to boycott particular universities – there are already trends of Black British undergraduates deciding to go to certain universities as they perceive the environment to be 'Black friendly'. Going a step further, Black people may even boycott traditional universities altogether in favour of new educational offers. What happened this year should be taken as a warning to university senior leadership; take this chance to do better for Black lives now, before it is too late.

Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations

Based on our findings, we have drawn up a list of recommendations for institutions to use and take forward. This should be viewed as a 'checklist' and revisited regularly to monitor progress. We have allocated each recommendation to one of five departments/institutional areas. Leadership in these areas should take responsibility for following these recommendations through.

R	Recommendation	Lead Department/Role
R1	Mandatory anti-racism training for all staff, students, and student officers	Vice-Chancellor Students' Union
R2	Use 'Black' when referring to Black people, not 'BAME'	HR Students' Union
R3	'Black' is not a homogeneous group: assess the intersections within to cater for each group in an optimal way	HR Students' Union
R4	Treat Students' Unions as partners and critical friends	Council/Governing Body University Leadership Team
R5	Acknowledge past failings on dealing with racism, and outline plans and a timetable to make amends	Council/Governing Body Vice-Chancellor Students' Union
R6	Communicate your anti-racism activity clearly to students, staff and the wider public	HR PVC Student Experience
R7	Recognise that anti-racism work needs to underpin your institutional COVID response	Vice-Chancellor
R8	Include anti-racism funding as part of an annual budgetary review and set aside dedicated funds for anti-racism activity	Vice-Chancellor
R9	Use the power of stories and lived experiences alongside statistics	HR PVC Student Experience
R10	Look for additional ways to measure and monitor success against anti-racism	HR University Leadership Team
R11	Recognise that racism exists in both the university and students' union structures	Council/Governing Body
R12	Accept the existence of racism in the UK and have a zero-tolerance approach to it	HR University Leadership Team
R13	Don't leave racial inequality work to specific individuals, EDI committees, or HR departments – it is everyone's responsibility	Vice-Chancellor

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R14	Have an anti-racist strategy	Vice-Chancellor Council/Governing Body
R15	Build anti-Black racism work into all strategies and plans – long and short term. Have clear targets at all levels	Vice-Chancellor
R16	Include anti-Black racism expectations for students and staff in the code of conduct	Vice-Chancellor PVC Student Experience
R17	Create a new senior leadership role to focus on anti-racism	Vice-Chancellor
R18	Make the Board part of the anti-Black racism mission and anti-racism as a standing agenda item.	Council/Governing Body
R19	BAME Networks need to be supported financially and operationally.	Vice-Chancellor/COO
R20	Go beyond the Race Equality Charter	HR University Leadership Team
R21	Be transparent with your data on racial inequality and how you monitor impact.	HR Council/Governing Body
R22	Tie the REC (or progress of anti-racism work) into funding	Government/OfS
R23	Make racism complaints process more robust	HR
R24	Allow for regular reflection and feedback from staff and students	HR Students' Union
R25	Consider a collective body where membership bodies like Universities UK, consultancy firms and other sector organisations collaborate on anti-racism projects	Sector-wide
R26	Decolonise the institution	Vice-Chancellor
R27	Be proactive on the effect Brexit will have on Black lives	Vice-Chancellor
R28	Avoid blaming recruitment challenges on the 'whiteness' of an area and instead work on creating an environment that will pull in and support Black students and staff	University Leadership Team HR Student Recruitment
R29	Have an external institution-wide anti-racism audit	Council/Governing Body
R30	Ensure the mental health provisions are culturally competent	HR Student services
R31	Work with external experts and representatives, as well as organised student groups on anti-Black racism	PVC Student Experience

Appendix 2: Case Studies - Interviewee Responses to BLM

Key:

- Size of universities and students' unions in relation to student numbers:
- Small – 0-14,000
- Medium – 14,001-20,000
- Large – 20,001-34,000
- Extra Large – 34,001-45,000

Name	University A
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-92 • Medium
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity on their website and social media. • Subsequent articles released about their support for Black Lives Matter. • Released one week after death of George Floyd. • Included information on how the university services can support Black students and staff e.g. online discrimination reporting tool.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The senior member of university staff leading the racial inequality response was new to the role just before the COVID-19 pandemic started. Campus was closed before they could settle into their role. • Setting institutional priorities. Race equality is seen as an important issue however they had other issues that were seen as more pressing that needed to be dealt with urgently. • There is a lack of racial diversity in surrounding community, so they feel that impacts on staff recruitment and therefore translates to the lack of racial diversity in their workforce. • Creating a cultural shift. Making everyone in the institution acknowledge they need to do more, and that tackling racial inequality is everyone's problem. Making everyone see the bigger picture. • Setting time and resource aside to facilitate the actions needed. • Staff feeling awkward having conversations around Black Lives Matter and racism.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with their Students' Union, they created a group for staff and students to hold them to account on issues relating to racial inequality. • Two internal senior-level posts are being advertised to carry out work to support the institution's efforts on tackling racial inequality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Executive Chair for EDI committee. The position was previously held by a senior member of staff however it was an additional role they held alongside their main job; they did not have any specific time in their contract dedicated to it. They will sit on the executive committee and report directly into the Vice-Chancellor.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Head of Race Equality Task Force. They will be the driving force behind the institution submitting for a Race Equality Charter Mark. • Created a Race Equality Task Force. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A student will be recruited to the group to allow for student representation. - The task force will be used to drive the REC submission • Working through actions that were informed by an anti-racism forum that was organised by the SU for staff and students to speak about racial inequality and what they want their university to focus on. • Recruited a trainer for staff and students to give them racial harassment training.
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Name	University B
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Small
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity on their website and social media. • Released one week after death of George Floyd. • No reference to “Black Lives Matter” in initial statement. • Referenced not tolerating racism or any kind of prejudice. • Mentioned the organisations they are working with on racial inequality. • Included information for Black students and staff to get in contact with the university or students’ union for support.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A public statement was initially not planned by senior leadership, however other members of staff pushed for one. Senior leadership wanted to ensure that whatever was put out was right. • After releasing the statement, some staff were not keen on it as they wanted to see what actions the university has committed to. • They did not get much feedback from students on their statement. • With the pandemic, they feel it has not left them a lot of time for reflection or analysis.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently signed up to the Race Equality Charter. They have a high-level executive sponsor for it; one of the Pro Vice-Chancellors. • BAME staff network has recently been created. There is also an option for white allies to join the network. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meetings are held every fortnight. - Students’ Union representatives are involved in the network - The network has themed discussions on topics that need change. • Awaiting UUK report in the Autumn for further action.

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Name	University C
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Small
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity on website and social media. • Made reference to "Black Lives Matter". • Published a week after the murder of George Floyd.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAME recruitment gap seen as a bigger problem than the BAME attainment gap. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small number of Black students and staff. Staff and student recruitment don't reflect diversity of surrounding area and the institution doesn't understand why. • Low number of Black students means the numbers/data can't tell a story. Some areas only show the outcomes of one or two students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem with getting the evidence to inform work. - A submission to REC would have looked bad because of low numbers. • Champions being used and it not translating to widespread action. • COVID-19 getting in the way of progress. • Some staff came forward to say they wanted the university to respond publicly when the university wasn't ready for a response. • Some staff don't feel comfortable talking to senior leadership team about this issue. • Some staff are worried about using the wrong terms, leading to stifled conversation. • No anti-racism training is in place. • Unions want to know what they are doing for black staff.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative data and stories are being used to drive their approach. They are valuing the power of lived experiences. This approach is being used to tackle the issue of low numbers. • Working group for racial inequality made up of staff and students (SU reps and student reps). • Work is being carried out by HR, staff and student policy and a PVC role. • Black recruitment gap is being discussed at Board level. • Discussions with staff unions are ongoing. • Library is making the book collection more inclusive & helping to decolonise the curriculum. • BAME staff network, which was already established, has more support.

Name	University D
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Small

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BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity on social media a week after the murder of George Floyd.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low number of staff and students from BAME backgrounds in main campus. • Smaller campus in London has a high proportion of BAME staff and students. • On the surface the university appears friendly however there are problems underneath that. • Some people don't understand why there is a need for a BAME network.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VC and PVC held Q&A sessions with departments and faculties • Took a proactive approach by making comments about BLM in meetings, and a newsletter to all staff before staff approached them about it. • Working closely with the SU to work on issues and projects including Black History Month and Race Equality Charter. • When doing press for student recruitment, they also talked about their support for BLM. • Will be signing up to the REC. • EDI committee feeds into Board subcommittee and so Board members are aware of the racial inequality work. • Shared EDI actions with staff and students. • Mandatory EDI modules for staff to complete each year. There is a test at the end to test understanding and results are fed back to line managers. • Created a target to increase applications from communities that they aren't currently attracting. • Integrating EDI with student recruitment to attract more BAME students to main campus. • The student code of conduct makes specific reference to EDI, human rights, racial inequality. All students must sign it. If they break the code it can lead to disciplinary action. • Development of a formal Black Lives Matter statement in collaboration with SU (this included consultation with staff and students and is in the final stages before release). • Exploring a Race Equality Charter (REC) submission. • Will be hosting a collaborative online conference about race. • EDI mandatory training, which includes explicit reference to race and discrimination (currently reviewing updates, which now includes increased focus on race equality, decolonising the curriculum and scenario-based videos showcasing how to be an active bystander). • Direct communications released about Black History Month with signposting to resources and good practice to raise awareness and develop knowledge. • Supporting SU liberation networks including the Black and Ethnic Minorities Network. • Introduced unconscious bias training with a focus that interview panel members must have completed to be selected for panel.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and Participation Plans have a major focus on a project to increase the number of BAME students at their main campus. • All their outreach work includes widening participation and targeting and working with particular schools and colleges. • Hate Crime tutorials and related signposting, with information on reporting for staff and students. • They monitor their diversity data of staff and students, reporting via our annual reports. The January 2020 report showcased that the transference of BAME candidates has improved by 5%. • Encouraging students to recommend books written by BAME authors. Recommended reading lists on race equality and decolonising the curriculum have been included.
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Name	University E
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russell Group • Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VC released a letter about the Black Lives Matter movement and being an anti-racist university 2 weeks after the murder of George Floyd. • On their website they responded to an open letter from students 3 weeks after the murder of George Floyd. • Subsequently they released an article giving an update on their work relating to Black Lives Matter.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with abusive tweets from people for talking about BLM. • Push back from members within the university community and outside of it that do not see BLM as a big priority. • Dealing with privilege within the university senior leadership. • Realising that they can't be the university they need to be if talent is not harnessed well. • Dealing with students publicly talking about racism and making demands to the university.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy for tackling racism is led by members of university leadership team. • Having conversations with BAME Staff, Student and Allies Network, African-Caribbean Society and organised group of students. Themes for discussions included recruitment and promotion, training and support for students, reporting mechanisms and support for victims; and ensuring an inclusive curriculum. • Ensuring quick initiation of disciplinary procedure for students that are accused of racism. • Created a new senior leadership role to focus on racial inequality and EDI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black students will be on recruitment panel. • A book club at senior management level was created to discuss readings and share reflections in a safe space. • Black attainment gap now being referred to as the Black awarding gap.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building racial inequality as a focus into the strategy & build it into the people. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Built into a wide range of strategies (e.g. education). - Build into professional services plans. • They have a dual assurance process where lay trustees are paired with senior leadership to hold them to account. There is a dual assurance lead on EDI. • Growing their own BAME leadership, representation within recruitment processes. • Developing an inclusive curriculum. • Establishing an education leadership EDI role. • Addressing hate crime and online harms. • Creating an anti-racist manifesto to showcase their values and commitments against racism. • Undergoing an independent review to evaluate their work on racial inequality. • Reviewing reporting tools, response to incidents, support for victims and wellbeing policies. • Launching online forum. • Aspiring to raise the profile of REC to the level of the Athena Swan. • Mandatory EDI training for students includes bystander Intervention training, and cultural competence. • Looking at other sectors locally with BAME networks to have regular meetings to help support each other and share learnings. • Collaborating with liberation groups to ensure intersectionality • Including their commitment to anti-racism in welcome talks with students
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Name	University F
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-92 • Medium
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint public statement with SU on website, social media and emails. • Statement made reference to Black people but not to “Black Lives Matter”. • Put out a response 10 days after the George Floyd death. • They had an internal response at first – something for staff and students. • VC, EDI lead, Director of Communications and SU officers were involved in writing the statement.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with racist posts on social media from students in response to their statement. • Trying to respond to demands systematically whilst students push for an immediate response and whilst dealing with a statement of demands from organised student groups. • Trying to balance taking action whilst navigating the university processes.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing this response with response to COVID-19 pandemic. • Dealing with what external advice and guidance to follow. • Great work is being done at the grassroots in a few subjects by individuals. but it has not been institution-wide. If one of those individuals leave then that good work may be lost. • Inequalities work is done within both HR and student services. Bringing them together is difficult when they work very differently and have different frameworks.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement was sense-checked with BAME staff network. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Network later put out their own response • Working in partnership with the SU. • Senior leadership sponsor for racial inequality work. • Recently signed up to REC. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a dedicated project manager to handle it. • Racial Harassment Committee within the University has been recently established.

Name	University G
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tweet of solidarity a week after the murder of George Floyd using #blacklivesmatter and #blackouttuesday. • An article published 5 weeks after the murder of George Floyd showing the areas of focus for their action plan on tackling racial discrimination.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources to support work. • Poor degree-awarding gap. • Timing – it takes a lot of time to set these cultural initiatives in place. • Fear – people are frightened of saying or doing the wrong thing.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created an online space for people to discuss and share their thoughts. • The priority is on organisational development rather than just HR processes. They changed the department from HR to HR & OD. • Developing own programme to attract diverse leaders to the institution. • Looking outside of the HE sector for guidance and expert advice for other sectors that they view as further ahead. • Working closely with their SU. • Focusing on having an impactful Black History Month. • Reverse mentoring – 20 senior leaders working with a range of students that have been disadvantaged in some way. • Coaching, talent management, career planning, succession planning, development for all people. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Running programs for specific characteristics. • Focused on improving diversity in the curriculum and teaching resources. • Aiming to narrow the attainment gap that exists between white and BAME students.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying for chartered status through the Advance HE Race Equality Charter. • Developing a five-year race equity action plan, reflecting the latest research from the National Union of Students and Universities UK. • Forming cross-university forums to hold the University accountable at College level. • Working with departmental teams on targeted action to spearhead decolonising the curriculum, enabling safe placements for BAME students, and providing appropriate mentoring. • Working on ensuring there is regular staff development on racism and racial bias, producing bespoke activities and a range of online resources to broaden staff understanding.
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Name	University H
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Medium
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of commitment. • Various platforms used including all staff/student email and social media. • Statement acknowledged that there is much more that can and will be done. • Leaders within the institution also communicated directly with their own staff and students. • Senior Management Team provided an update on actions they are taking to address these concerns.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only black person on Council is a black student officer and they will be finishing their term at the end of the academic year. • Increasing staff and student confidence to talk openly and constructively with each other about race equality can be a challenge. There is a desire to want to make a difference but also an element of fear of offending, by doing the wrong thing, using incorrect terminology or causing offence. • Effective 2-way communication at all levels in and throughout the university can be a challenge. They feel they need to improve on communicating progress and engaging in feedback with our communities more effectively. • A lack of visible senior BAME leaders as role models is something that they are looking to address.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDI committee will focus on racial issues more now. It is chaired by a member of the senior management team. • Signed up to the REC. • Focusing on recruiting BAME members onto Council. • Race equality and progression is part of their University Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024. This was developed in consultation and engagement with staff and students from a range of different backgrounds. • Reporting on identified pay gaps.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing awareness of reporting bullying and harassment. • They aim to improve the diversity of representation on University Governance Committees – specifically increasing the % of BAME Council members to 10%. • Focusing on increasing the success rate for BAME applicants, in appointment to academic and professional services positions, to make this comparable to white applicants. • For all PVC, Director and Heads of College roles, they want 15% of those appointed to be BAME over the next 4 years. • Reducing the degree-awarding gap for BAME students. • Establishing leadership buy-in – University Equality Committee is chaired by a member of the University leadership team which oversees the strategic direction of EDI, inclusive of race equality. Another member of the leadership team chairs an EDI Advisory group which is focused on delivering policy into practice. • They have built positive relationships with their Student Union Officers.
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Name	University I
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russell Group • Extra Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two statements were released. One was a short statement of solidarity. The second was lengthier and from one of the PVCs. • First one was released a week after the death of George Floyd. • Both available on their website and shared on social media.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being careful to separate themselves from any political situations in terms of supporting the organisation BLM for a number of reasons. There are people who worry about the organisation and they don't want the issue to be lost with that worry. • Making sure their response was valid to the different types of Black students they have on campus for example the experience of Black British students is different to Black African international students. • Dealing with demands and expectations from students. • Senior leadership being inundated with coordinated messages from students asking them what they were doing. • Students wanted the university to give money to BLM • COVID-19 pandemic taking the focus and resources from this issue. • Poor Black awarding gap results. • Board is looking at presenting information based on specific ethnic groups across the organisation. • Seeing this work as not a standalone project. It is something they want to embed in their strategy, which is a 5/6-year programme, which will be renewed thereafter.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed up to the Race Equality Charter and action plan is linked to it.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving regular feedback from BAME staff network. • Focus on Black staff rather than BAME staff. • Making sure their work goes beyond the Race Equality Charter. • An area of focus is students' access to education and how they progress whilst they are there. Making sure there is no degree awarding gap between not just Black students but all the other minority ethnic groups and white working class too. • Board of Governors are on board with racial inequality being a top priority and are holding senior leadership to account. • Working with SU report they created highlight racial inequality • Quickly set up a task force with the SU to coordinate responses and work as a result of the resurgence of BLM movement in May. Chaired by PVC. • SU representation on each level of the institution. • Using the term 'awarding gap' instead of 'attainment gap' to show that the fault or burden should not be placed on students.
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Name	University J
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russell Group • Medium
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity published on social media. • Released a week after the death of George Floyd.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a high-profile Chancellor who has been known to impact the lives of Black people in a negative way in the past. • Not transparent with data. • Black academics pick up a lot of the racial inequality work. • ACS came out publicly with open letter explaining their experiences of racism at the institution and city. • Open letter sent directly to Dean of Medicine highlighting the students' experiences of racism studying medicine. • Need to get better at communicating about the work they are doing to the students. • Dealing with local MP not supporting the university standing up for Black Lives Matter.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VC met directly with members of the ACS. • Taking part in REC. • Using Black mannequins in medicine. • Met with ACS and SU reps and black staff network. • Working group established for this issue. Co-chaired by a staff member and a PVC. • Focus is on diversifying the curriculum rather than decolonising it. • Looking at mental health provisions for BME people. • Pledged to publish progression data for black and minority ethnic students and staff, including attainment, and to ensure appropriate diversity in the curriculum.

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Name	Students' Union 1
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Small
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two statements were released: one as an organisation and the other from a Black officer from her own personal perspective. • Statements were on their website and social media. • First one was released one week after death of George Floyd. • Made reference to "Black Lives Matter" in both statements. • Organisational response included a list of actions and resources for people to educate themselves and how to support causes through petitions.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees and representatives are not racially diverse. • Some employees and representatives don't feel comfortable enough to talk about this topic, for fear of either appearing to force an agenda or for fear of slipping up and saying the wrong thing. • BAME representation is unequal across courses e.g. high proportion in nursing and low proportion in events and film studies. • Institution is small so doesn't have as much resources as other bigger universities may have. • Some people are afraid to come forward to talk about racial diversity problems because it is a small university, everyone knows everyone. • There is a large divide between the minority ethnic societies and the SU, they feel it is hard to get them involved in plans. • The officer team is an all-white team, so they feel it is hard to have credibility when trying to get black students more involved in the SU. • There has been no discussion about BLM at Board level. • University is in a diverse area, yet the staff base does not reflect that. It is something the university has been aware of and they have tried to tackle it in their recruitment plan however it has not worked yet. • Staff turnover is low. Some staff have been at the SU for decades. Therefore, it is hard to recruit more racially diverse people in. • Students do not appear to be very political, so it is hard to get them involved in SU campaigns.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing work is happening to make sure each course throughout the university will now have a lecture for Black History Month in October and Black Futures Month in February, that explains the impact that the Black community has had in that particular subject field and in that industry. Officers want to make it part of the permanent curriculum. • Celebrating Black History Month in October. It will be SU-led. • As part of Black History Month, there will be focus group sessions that students can virtually attend anonymously (they don't have to turn the camera on, or have their name shown) to

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	<p>tell SU what they want done to improve racial inequality. The focus group will be open to all races.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating Black Futures Month in February for the first time. • SU focus group with BAME students and staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anything that is put out for the BAME community, like initiatives, will be shown to the group first so that it can be approved by them. • Designing a recruitment plan to improve the diversity of employees and representatives. • SU BAME officer proactively reached out to people to make sure they were managing okay. • Some members of the officer team attended BLM rally. • BAME mixers are being organised. • Each month they want to have a focus on celebrating different ethnicities. • SU talks about racial inequality regularly in meetings; with statements and/or campaigns. • Officers sit on EDI committee meetings. • Officer team looking at sessions to get them better educated on racial inequality issues.
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Name	Students' Union 2
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Small
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity on website and social media.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting black students involved because the staff and SU representatives are white. • University statement looked corporate and checking a tick box. It was sent out too soon without representation. • Getting students to interact and attend focus groups. • High proportion of white students on main campus. • High proportion of black students in London campus. • No clear student reaction to BLM. • BHM is usually not very well-organised. • No BAME officer. • Response from previous SU team was perceived as poor. One student commented on it saying it was not enough, but no one replied. • No discussion at board level and racial inequality. Not seen as the place to have conversations about race. External trustees are all old and white. • No mandatory EDI training given to officers and staff. • Small team, spending money on training sessions takes up a lot of their budget, they depend on university training offerings. • No money has been invested in BLM work.
Actions (ongoing and upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SU rep on EDI committee. • Joint statement with the University.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated statement that shows both the SU and University progression with actions. • Leading on getting student focus groups. • Set up a BAME student network. • Plans to get more black people into leadership positions • Book club to engage students. Currently reading "Why I Am No Longer Talking to White People About Race". • BLM issues being treated separate to BHM plans.
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Name	Students' Union 3
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russell Group • Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity released a week after the death of George Floyd. Officer emailed communications team to put statement out. • Posted on website and shared on social media. • Statement included how the SU and university can support students and gave information on how to help the movement if you are a person who is not Black.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SU officers feel unskilled to deal with BLM and racial inequality work. • Racist incidents happening on campus. • High proportion of privately educated white students. • University wanting to put out a joint statement but would weaken the stance of the SU. • SU wants to include Black people in our response but then not put the burden on them to act and say something. • Only one black member of staff in the whole SU. • University statement was seen as similar to previous statements in the past. • Black awarding gap is poor. • Money is put into a staff member to lead on EDI, but students want that money to be used to support them directly. • Black students not running for full-time officer positions. • Election process is not accessible to all students. It appears to favour middle class students. • More Black students are needed in full-time officer positions, but the election process is toxic for them. • Need to put money into the pockets of black students. Black students are less likely to get a high paying job compared to their white counterparts after graduating. Need a bursary to support their career efforts e.g. money for interviews, to support them in internship etc. • SU want BHM to be student-led but not put all the work burden on them. • No anti-black racism training is given. • Black students don't engage in democratic processes. • No black person has ever been elected as a full-time officer.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afro-Caribbean Society doesn't see themselves as part of the union. They don't feel like they belong. • Black students don't go to wellbeing sessions as the service does not feel well-tailored to their needs. • Problem with racism reporting system, it doesn't appear to be safe for victims of racism to use as the alleged abuser will be notified if there is a complaint about them and will have the name of the people that put it forward. • BAME students have been attacked by local members of the community.
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Name	Students' Union 4
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-92 • Medium
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint statement with the university on website, social media and emails.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with students creating and circulated racist posts about BLM. • Being unsure of what to do. • COVID-19. • Student societies feeling disconnected with SU. • Incident of racial profiling on campus. • Action plan created has not been budgeted for yet. • Not communicating the changes that have been made well enough to students. • Consulting students well but being slow in carrying out actions and managing expectations.
Actions (ongoing & upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stood up against University posting a black square for #blackouttuesday since they were not seen to have stood up for Black lives before. • Took part in student BLM protests. • Action plan created from list of student demands. • Organised Q&A event with senior university leaders so students can directly talk to them. • EDI training for Officers. • Compulsory module to help students understand issues of discrimination including racism. It aims to equip them with key skills in combating racism, supporting survivors and understanding how to report concerns. • Lobbied the University to expand its Zero Tolerance work beyond sexual harassment, to include racial harassment. • Discussed the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Racial Harassment in Higher Education report with the University's Executive Group and lobbied them to make changes based on the recommendations. • Lobbied the University to develop a Racial Harassment Committee. This is to ensure there is a formal structure within

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	<p>the University tackling issues at an operational and strategic level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting student groups in their work. • Campaign to highlight how to report racial discrimination. • Meeting with black cultural societies to talk to them directly on how they can support them. • Lobbied for a BAME mental health support advisor. • Pushing for EDI training for volunteers and other areas of staff like campus security. • Working on getting more Black students thinking about a career in academia.
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Name	Students' Union 5
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-92 • Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity and pledges for action on website, social media and email. • Released one week after the death of George Floyd. • Shared educational resources. • Shared ways to contact university and SU for support.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only Black officer felt pressure to put something out quickly to show support. • Not wanting to share ongoing work because of little progress. • Putting pressure on university to act and support SU efforts. • Making sure there was appropriate support for the black officer. • Backlash from white students. They felt accused of being racist because of educational materials that were sent out in the SU statement. • University currently has no clear strategy on tackling racial discrimination. • Officers feel that the University EDI team can be defensive when SU and students suggest ideas and actions. • Officers felt that the EDI training that the University had on offer was not appropriate. • Lack of BAME representation at senior management level at the University and the Students' Union.
Actions (ongoing & upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations were had with the University to tell them what Black students wanted. • Some officers attended BLM protests. • Working on some actions in partnership with the University. • Reviewing the new University strategy to hold them to account and tell them where there should be a focus on race where they feel it is not mentioned. This is done to make sure there is a commitment to anti-racism? in the strategy plan. • External consultant is coming in to assess institution-level EDI work. • Officers are going on department & faculty tours to talk about decolonisation.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BME advisory group, in partnership with the University, has been created. The membership will mostly be students. Establishing this as a permanent structure for work against racial inequality so that when officers that care about it leave, it carries on. It will focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewing university and SU policies and events. - Senior members of university staff being reverse mentored. - Being the voice for black students. • Providing mentoring for students.
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Name	Students' Union 6
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russell Group • Extra Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two statements given. One by previous student officer, the other by a current officer. • First one released a week after the death of George Floyd. • The latest article gives an update on work given.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students and staff were sceptical of the university response as they felt it could be tokenistic or a standard PR response. • Engaging with university but making sure that officer has a tokenistic role in it. • Making sure the university is listening to the ideas that officers bring. • Perception that the University looks at Black students as just Black UK undergraduate students. • The University acting slowly on demands or not acting on them at all. • Standing up to the University staff whilst trying to do the best for students. • Perception that the University uses BHM as a PR stunt. Visual things are done without meaningful action being put behind it. • Fighting the University to make sure there is a focus on Black separately to BAME students in relation to BLM. • One Black officer is finding it difficult to put pressure on university on this topic alone. • Dealing with this issue in a highly politically active city and institution. • No anti-racism training given to staff and officers. • Statement given by previous officer that is not Black without any consultation from Black colleagues or students because it was within their remit. • Diversity of officer team fluctuates which leads to different commitments to EDI work. • Getting a diverse group of students to run for leadership positions. No formal strategy currently exists.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment interviews are based on set answers which does not allow for people with different perspectives or diverse thoughts. • Lack of racial diversity in the lecturers on campus, students in certain courses. • Lack of representation of the black race in the curriculum. • Lecturer saying microaggressions to Black students. • Students want the option to request for a Black counsellor. • Students want clarity on the process of reporting issues, the actions taken by the University. Students want to be more supported and feel safer if they were to report issues. • Students want the SU to ensure its events are inclusive and cater to black students as well. Students want more support and resources when running their campaigns and events. • Students want the student officer team to do what they are asking them to do and not push their own personal agenda.
Actions (ongoing & upcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer representation on the EDI committee at Board level?. • Started a project with black societies to understand what their experiences were and not just make assumptions based on their own experience. • Involved course reps on racial inequality work. • Focus group discussions to create a report on issues black students face. • SU rep on University Response Task Force. • Made the SU position clear to the University. • Held forums to gather feedback from students and collated it in a public report which highlights student experiences and demands. These reports have been sent to senior university leadership. • One officer is proactively encouraging a diverse group of students to run for leadership positions. They are working on developing this into the formal strategy.

Name	Students' Union 7
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russell Group • Large
BLM & The Public Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of solidarity published on social media. • Released a week after the death of George Floyd.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population of area is predominantly white. • Locals aren't used to seeing many racially diverse faces • Senior management wants to use 'diversifying' rather than 'decolonisation' as they believe it goes beyond decolonisation. SU doesn't agree with that. • In the city there is a fear of using language like 'colonising' because of historical issues in the community. • The university has not openly acknowledged colonial past. • Mental health services not well equipped for Black students.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All white SU staff team. • Problems with hate crime happening to black and international students. • Students getting fined for going to BLM rallies. • Students report crime to police and feel like it isn't taken seriously. • Police treat BAME and international students differently.
<p>Actions (ongoing & upcoming)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushing for including the term 'decolonisation' in strategy. • Creating Terms of Reference for working group focusing on racial inequality. • Lobbying to get officer representation on the panel for the mental health support tender panel to get culturally competent services. • Working to improve how students can report racism and discrimination • Encouraging more black students to run for rep and officer positions. Working closely with groups like the ACS to achieve this. • Running decolonising the institution campaigns that focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curriculum - Discrimination - Progression - Awarding gap - Accessible language used in teaching

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Appendix 3 – Acknowledgements and further information

Halpin would like to thank all the University, Student Union leaders, the interviewees working outside of traditional structures to support Black people in HE, and Halpin Consulting Fellows who took part in our interviews, along with everyone who completed our online survey.

Webinar:

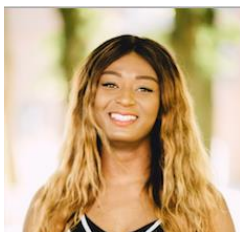
Halpin hosted a webinar to discuss the findings of our report, featuring Osaro Otobo and Selena Bolingbroke (Halpin Consulting Fellow) as co-chairs, and our panel:

- **Kwame Asamoah** – General Secretary, University of Manchester Students' Union
- **Sam Gyimah** – Senior Advisor, Halpin
- **Janice Kay** – Provost & Senior Deputy VC, University of Exeter
- **Ceewhy Ochoga** – CEO, Black Impact
- **Margaret Rioga** – Associate Head of School for Nursing & Allied Health, Buckingham New University

You can access the webinar recording here:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/4316015657818608646>

About the author



Osaro Otobo is experienced in leading changes in student democracy & governance and also in student equality, diversity & inclusion. While studying at the University of Hull she was elected for three successive years to work in the best interest of students at Hull; she was a postgraduate student trustee and a two-term President at Hull University Students' Union. From lived experiences, she created the Make Diversity Count campaign which is calling for all UK organisations to have a robust discrimination policy which sets out how they deal with complaints of discrimination more effectively and transparently.

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