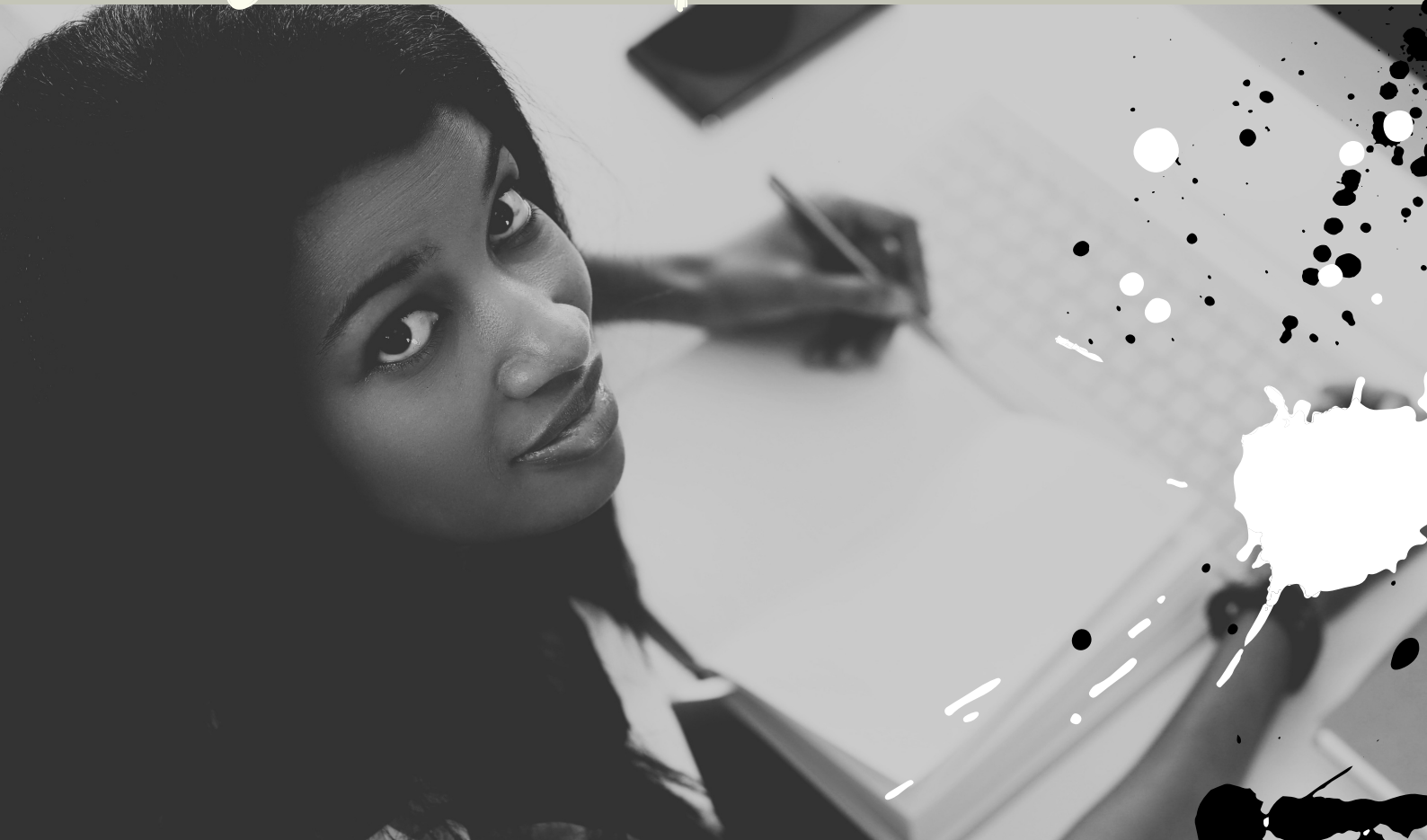


'BAME Voices' Project Report



East Sussex College

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'Bame Voices'

STUDENT CONTENT

01.

Background. P3

02.

Cohort data. P4

03.

Aims & Objectives. P4

04.

Structure. P4

05.

Findings. P5

06.

Perceptions of the college
before you arrived. P5

07.

Communication home. P5

08.

The environment at college. P7

09.

Being in the classroom at
college. P8

10.

Role Models. P10

11.

Opportunities for students of
colour. P11

12.

Services within college to
support my employability. P12

13.

Conclusions and Key
points. P13

Background

The BAME voices programme was designed by experts specialising in BAME and diversity issues from Brighton University. The purpose of the programme was to enable us to capture a true understanding of our BAME learners experience at East Sussex College Group which could then inform recommendations to enable East Sussex College Group to become a more inclusive and equitable college for learners from BAME backgrounds.

The programme consisted of five focus groups delivered online via Zoom. The groups were provided with a structured list of questions, by BTH Consulting and John Lynch Consultancy and Training. Each group was overseen by a designated facilitator who had attended two mandatory one-hour training sessions prior to running of the programme.

The college MIS team were able to provide lists of learners identifying as BAME on enrolment forms. This enabled us to recruit learners via a targeted email drive with an offer of a £50 voucher for those who attend all five focus groups. With over 20 applications from the initial recruitment campaign, it was decided that the priority should be to focus on the experience of under 19 BAME learners at East Sussex College. This decision was made to ensure that the learners taking part felt comfortable to voice their opinions in a smaller group with their peers. Each focus group consisted of five learners from different course backgrounds, including A-Levels and vocational courses and each had a representation from all the ESCG campuses (Eastbourne, Lewes, Hastings and Ore).

Cohort data

- 2 x Students Hastings A Levels.
- 1 x Ore T Level
- 1 x Eastbourne Vocational
- 1 x Lewes Vocational

Due to the sensitive nature of what was being discussed, facilitators were made available after each session for any of the students who may require additional support. All participants were also provided with a contact email if they felt they wanted to discuss something further beyond the session.

Aims and Objectives

- To gain the voice of students of colour
- To have clear information on what the college can do to create a welcoming and supportive and inclusive environment for students of colour.
- To have clear information and examples of good practice that can be celebrated and/or shared across the college.
- To have clear information and examples of practices that are unhelpful or problematic.

Structure

Each of the 5 sessions had a specific focus:

1. Perceptions of your college before you arrived.
2. The environment at your college.
3. Being in the classroom at your college.
4. Role models.
5. Opportunities for students of colour at your college.

Findings

Within the focus groups, the participants explored shared experiences. Below is a summary of key findings that were identified within the sessions. These are the initial areas that are proposed to be worked on to improve the college experience for BAME learners at East Sussex College.

Perceptions of your college before you arrived.

During this focus group, participants explored key points in the application journey. This included their research of the college before making an application. Their interview day, the method of communication before starting and any pre-course taster sessions/open evenings.

Overall, the students that took part were positive about the website and brochure. They felt that they were able to identify with other learners that were featured on the website and included in the brochure. However, one of the participants felt that although the website showcased diversity, it was misleading, as their experience of their campus, is that the college is not diverse at all. They had expressed that they felt like the only black person on campus, which has had a negative impact on their experience at college.

Another participant shared their concerns around racism before they started college, due to a negative experience at school. They expressed the need for the college to provide reassurance around the zero-tolerance policy around racism. Their experience to date was a positive and their comments were based on suggestions for making changes the future.

Communication to home

Most of the participants in the group confirmed that English is not their first language at home, and they must translate any letters or emails that they receive from college for their parents. Suggestions for improvements to be more inclusive of BAME parents and careers included offering a translation of letters and providing accessible English classes to support parents own learning.

The environment at your college.

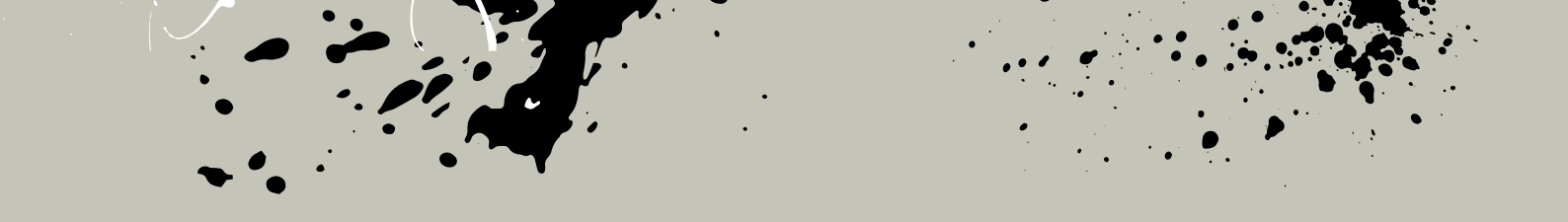
During this focus group, participants reflected on the college environment and asked whether it promotes inclusion. We explored the following areas :

- Displays around college.
- Religious observance.
- Celebrations and food outlets.

Displays around college.

The feedback received was varied due to students coming from different campuses and curriculum areas. Some participants felt that the displays included people of colour and highlighted positive role models. These comments came mainly from students studying vocational courses, where learners predominantly spend their time in specific campus areas or workshops. One participant from a vocational course praised their tutor, who was also a person of colour, for ensuring that the displays in their classroom highlighted positive role models in an industry that has a large underrepresentation of people of colour.

The participants on mixed A-level programmes agreed they had a varied experience with regards to displays. They stated that in one classroom there will be inclusive displays with positive images, but in another, there will no images at all. The students said this made it hard to comment as the college does not demonstrate a consistent approach to displays across campuses and classrooms. One A-level student spoke fondly of a tutor who had made an additional display during 'Black History Month' recognising the people of colour who had influenced that subject. They had also said that the display is now a permanent feature in that classroom.



Religious observance and celebrations

There was a significant majority of negative experiences around this topic. None of the students were able to speak positively about their experience of college with regards to religious practices and celebrations.

Three students highlighted that they had only recently been told about the prayer room on campus, and this information had been given in a passing comment. This made them feel like their faith and religious practice was not recognised as being important and was not valued by the college. The participants commented that when the college failed to recognise the religious festival of Eid, that their feelings of their faith being undervalued and that significant religious festivals were being ignored were reinforced. This was exacerbated by the college visually celebrating the Christian festival of Christmas by having a large Christmas tree up in the central foyer throughout December.

The learners felt that this did not support the feeling of a celebration of difference. During the time that focus groups were held, some of the participants were observing Ramadan. They provided real-time insight into their experiences at college and the limited recognition of what they were going through. Some participants were also undertaking assessments and commented on how the college had not taken this into account.

Canteen / Food outlets

When covering this topic, most participants across all campuses agreed that the canteen does not recognise or cater for different cultural groups. The participants discussed the importance of food in their own culture and how they would love to see this reflected in the college's food outlets. Some of the participants revealed that had not been able to purchase anything from their canteen as their dietary requirements were not catered for.



Being in the classroom at your college.

In this focus group participants discussed the in-class experience, reflecting on the resources, and classroom practices.

Class Resources

Comments around class resources varied, but there was an overall sense that there was a limited representation of people of colour depicted in resources provided and used within lessons.

One participant on a construction-based course commented on how their course led to a common and globally recognised vocation, yet there was a limited representation of people of colour with the resources used to support teaching. They also highlighted the lack of diversity when looking construction methods, for example exploring the techniques and architecture used in other countries across the globe. This participant provided suggestions for helping to create a more diverse curriculum, such as undertaking student projects that aid construction in other countries or exchange programmes to help build schools. When discussing the underrepresentation of people of colour in the sector and how they participant feels about it. They commented on how this has at times made them doubt their ability and suitability for the vocation.

Another vocational participant pointed out that only time they see people of colour in recourses is when they are famous. Exploring this further, the participant said they felt this could be a positive influence when highlighting successful people of colour, but also had a negative connotation as it may be perceived that they were only included because they were famous, not because they were a person of colour.

Classroom Practices

What stood out in this section of the focus group, was how common it was for most participants, during school their or college lives, to have had their names pronounced wrong, shortened, or changed. The participants talked about how this has been something they have had to deal with most of their lives and to point where it has become commonplace or even expected. They reflected together and shared examples of when they have been asked by a teacher or peer if they can call them something different to their name. Some participants also shared positive examples of how some teachers had approached them to clarify the correct pronunciation of their names and stated that this made them feel respected.

In a previous focus group participants had discussed the lack of communication and support from college around praying. Within this session, they expanded on this and spoke of how they felt their religion and its practices were not recognised. They said that even if they had known about the prayer facilities, they would not have felt comfortable asking to leave a lesson to pray. They discussed how the lack of understanding around their culture and religion was highlighted again by the fact that college only has one prayer room on campus with no washing or cleaning facilities. They commented that this demonstrated that the college did not understand or acknowledge prayer rituals and how some Muslims may not feel comfortable or be able to use a multigender prayer room.

Role models.

In this session, the participants explored their experience of staff and role models within the college campuses. They reflected on the core teaching staff in their subject areas as well as other college support teams.

The majority of the participants agreed that teachers of colour were under-represented within the college group. Two participants said they had a teacher that was a person of colour, one of whom identified that the wellbeing team within the college were all white women. They expressed that this had prevented them from accessing support from this team. They said they felt that they could not relate to them and would be more comfortable talking to their tutor. Three participants said they had no direct experience with teachers of colour in their subject area, with one adding that they had been aware of other teaching staff of colour within the on campus. When exploring this in more detail, they explained that the lack of BAME teaching staff was not unusual as they had experienced similar at school.

Within this group, one student spoke about a BAME mentoring project they had participated in at school, where they met with university students regularly throughout an academic year. They shared how this experience helped with them reflect on their identity and had influenced them to consider going to university. They suggested that having a project similar within the college group could help BAME students realise their potential.

When discussing non-teaching staff within the college the participants said they felt there were little or no staff they could see that looked like them. One student commented, "not that it matters that the canteen staff are all white, but it would be nice to see a friendly face I can relate to".

Opportunities for students of colour

During this final focus group participants explored the enrichment opportunities available to them at the college. They shared their thoughts on the opportunities available to them and made some key suggestions to improve the accessibility of enrichment activities for BAME students.

Extra-Curricular activities / Enrichment

Most participants felt there was little or no extracurricular activities at college. When exploring if this was due to a lack of provision in general, or that those activities were not inclusive, it was unanimously agreed that there was very little on offer for all students. The participants (4 out of the 5 of whom are 1st year students) recognised that this year there had been major disruptions to student activities due to the restrictions caused by the pandemic. All participants were keen to see more activities for the next academic year.

One participant, who took part in a sports enrichment group which was associated with their course, emphasised that only felt able to do this because the tutor running the group was a person of colour and that they had personally encouraged them to take part. The participant reflected again on the importance of seeing a friendly face that students feel they can relate to, especially when trying something new.

Marketing of activities and events

Most of the participants were aware of the 'My Student Life' site, which is a key enrichment tool at East Sussex College. Most confirmed that their parents had not received information about events or opportunities at the college. Those that had, had to translate the emails for their parents. They also highlighted that some of their parents did not want to attend events as they would have had difficulties understanding.

Services within the college to support employability.

One participant who was undertaking the role of student rep for their course area, said that this was a great way to encourage BAME students to have a voice and that the other BAME students on his course felt able to talk to him and put ideas forward. Another participant suggested that to improve the BAME perspective in terms of 'Student Voice', the college should ensure that there are BAME students represented within Student Union and acting as Student Governors.

The participants felt that, due to the pandemic, the Student Union was not visible to them. They could not however confirm if this were due to a lack of physical presence on campus or if this were because of a lack of general engagement this academic year.

All participants were aware of the core careers services within the college group, but most felt that they did not need to engage. This was due to being in the first year of their course. Some participants shared that they would prefer and feel more comfortable talking to their tutor than seeking support from the Careers Team in Student Services.

Conclusions / Key points

It is important to recognise that from the above summary, that the college has some changes to make to ensure that it can provide a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive environment for students of colour. Participants throughout the sessions made some key suggestions to support their voices being heard and to make a positive change within their college environment. Not only for them but other BAME learners.

Suggestions that participants made:

- Prayer rooms, to be included in inductions and better recognition of religious practices of all learners.
- Improve parent communications, ensuring that there is the option for parents to access translated correspondence.
- Having free English lessons available to parents of students.
- Provide BAME student voice at governor level.
- Enrichment activities that celebrate all cultures, religions, and beliefs.
- Food outlets to provide a wider range of meals and be more transparent about sources of food.
- Provide a BAME student testimony on the website.
- Provide a zero-tolerance racism policy for new students.

