

BAME INSIGHTS REPORT 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of a multi-college initiative, Greater Brighton Metropolitan College took part in a programme to engage with students of colour and discuss their experiences in college. The programme was led by the Sussex Learning Network, Uni Connect, John Lynch Consultancy and Training and BTH Consulting and delivered by the BAME Ambassador and Widening Participation Coordinator at GB Met. The purpose of this project was to ascertain how the college could create and nurture the best learning environment for all students. Following interviews and structured sessions with the students of colour the following recommendations have been suggested:

- GB Met should start looking at anti-racism training regarding racial literacy for staff and students.
- GB Met should consult the BAME student body regarding a new inclusivity statement.
- There should be a regular group session held for BAME students where they can feel safe to discuss concerns and talk to each other so that feelings of isolation are addressed and alleviated.
- Diversification of resources in the curriculum: are they representative of the diverse student body?
- More visible celebrations of cultural holidays and events such as Black History Month that are coordinated across the campuses.
- Easier access to more diverse food in canteens such as halal, kosher etc. Especially in the more outer-lying campuses where there are less options available in the local area.
- Clear procedures communicated to the student body regarding reporting incidents of racism.
- Carry out a larger scale questionnaire across all campuses for BAME students.

BACKGROUND

GB Met College is spread across 5 campuses in West and East Sussex including central Brighton and central Worthing and as such are based within communities which are seeing increasing levels of diversity. The most recent census data (2011) (1) shows that the ethnic composition of those living in Brighton are 89.09% white, 4.13% Asian, 3.81% Mixed Race, 1.53% Black and 0.80% Arab. For Worthing, the breakdown is 93.8% White, 3.2% Asian, 1.7% Mixed Race, 0.9% Black and 0.4% Arab. It is important to note that this data is over a decade old and there have been vast shifts in terms of population diversity in that time(2). Even with this current data set, the communities where all 5 campuses are situated show a significant Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population (Brighton 10.27%, Worthing 6.2%) and some of this diversity is reflected within the college environment. BAME students face specific challenges and barriers within further education especially within environments that are more ethnically homogenous(3) and so in early 2021 GB Met participated in a programme led by the Sussex Learning Network (SLN), Uni Connect, John Lynch Consultancy and Training and BTH Consulting to discuss and ascertain the specific experiences of students of colour at the college and create recommendations to help nurture the best learning environment for all students to thrive and feel part of the college community.

This report outlines the aims and purposes of the BAME Insights Project, discusses how the project was delivered, looks into some of the discussions had, highlights some of the key findings and makes recommendations for how best the college can proceed in terms of actions and activities to help BAME students and create a more inclusive college community.

1. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

2. <http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/HousingandGrowthinSuburbia.pdf>

3. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims

To deliver 5 group sessions via Google Meets online with questions structured around specific categories to inspire conversation and sharing of experiences.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to create a safe space where students could meet each other and discuss issues and concerns specific to their experiences as students of colour. This would then help elevate voices of colour within the college environment; help the college understand what it could do to make a more welcoming, supportive and inclusive space; celebrate good examples of practice that could be shared across the college; and learn from unhelpful practices to ensure change is enacted where required.

IMPLEMENTATION

Recruitment of Students

Emails were sent out to all students who had identified themselves as BAME asking them to participate in a series of 5 online sessions regarding their experiences. They were told that the series would be facilitated by the BAME Ambassador who was a person of colour and an alumnus of the college. They were incentivised to participate with a £50 Amazon voucher which would be given to every student who took part in all 5 sessions. 23 students applied to take part and out of that 23, after shortlisting to ensure a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, age, campus and course, 11 took part in the first session. An overview of the students can be seen below.

	Age	Ethnicity	Curriculum Area	Sessions Attended
Participant 1	22	Other Mixed /multiple ethnic background	Psychology	5
Participant 2	20	Any Other Ethnic Group	Business Studies	5
Participant 3	16	Any Other Asian Background	Uniformed Services	2
Participant 4	33	Any Other Ethnic Group	Mental Health	5
Participant 5	17	Any Other Ethnic Group	Engineering	1
Participant 6	25	Other Mixed /multiple ethnic background	Health Sciences	5
Participant 7	18	White and Black African	Art	1
Participant 8	16	Arab	Prince's Trust	5
Participant 9	25	Any Other Ethnic Group	Music	5
Participant 10	22	Any Other Asian Background	Computing	1
Participant 11	39	Arab	Esol	1

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Session Structure:

The sessions were structured by John Lynch Consultancy and Training and BTH Consulting to better understand the student experience of the BAME community and ascertain and highlight where there were concerns. These were broad questions and during the sessions some additional questions were asked to help facilitate conversation or to explore topics that arose, as well as to ensure conversation topics were appropriate for the age groups taking part.

The 5 sessions ran from March to April 2021 and were conducted over an hour once a week via Google Meets. Prior to every session the group were informed that everything mentioned would be kept anonymous unless there were safeguarding concerns, they were given trigger warnings and told that support was available after the meeting if needed. All discussions were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent.

The theme and session plan for each meeting were provided to the students the weekend before the session so that they had the opportunity to prepare their answers and note down any questions they may have. The session themes were as follows:

Session 1: What were your perceptions of GB Met before you arrived?

What was good, what wasn't good and what ideas do you have for improvement?

Session 2: The environment at GB Met.

Is it diverse? Does it promote inclusion? What is good about the environment and what ideas do you have for improvement?

Session 3: Being in the classroom at GB Met.

What is good, what isn't good and what ideas do you have for improvement?

Session 4: Role models.

Positive role models can influence students' aspirations and help uncover true potential. Where are the role models in your college and what ideas do you have for improvement?

Session 5: Opportunities for students of colour at GB Met.

What is available and accessible, and what ideas do you have for improvement?

Each session had structured questions but participants were encouraged to have open dialogue regarding experiences and examples. With any examples given students were asked to pinpoint specific occurrences of positive or negative actions and were asked to talk about how these made them feel and how they thought things should be handled in the future. This was following the "Keep, Stop, Start" methodology where students were asked what the college should keep doing, stop doing and start doing.

FINDINGS

Session 1: Perceptions of GB Met

During this session it became apparent that there was a stark contrast in experiences between those who studied at the central Brighton campus and those who studied at the more suburban campuses. Those who studied in central Brighton mentioned the diversity of the student body and how it made them feel welcome and comfortable during initial college visits:

"It definitely made me feel comfortable and happier to be honest. It's not an issue for everyone to just get along and just do what they need to do, study where they need to go, you know, I feel like it's really encouraging."

However, this was not the case for students outside of central Brighton. Many felt that they didn't come across people that "looked like them" during those early perceptions of the college. The diversity of the college did not play a part in their choice of attending GB Met but they were aware of it:

"I've never actually seen that [other students of colour]. I've not actually gone into college and seen that wide variety of people. And I think if I had seen that, I would make me feel really comfortable."

All the students said that seeing a diverse student body or the promotion of a diverse and inclusive student body would make prospective students of colour feel more inclined to study at GB Met.

Following on from this, students were asked about the college's promotional material such as brochures, prospectuses, websites and imagery. Comments were made by several of the students that the inclusion of just 1 student of colour in some images felt "tokenistic". With regards to how imagery could better appeal to BAME students one student suggested:

"Representing them [POC] on the adverts. So, you know, if there's a brochure for the college, don't just have one tokenised person of colour. There's a variety and it should be shown."

Students also suggested that having a more diverse faculty would make students from BAME backgrounds feel more seen and therefore appeal to a larger variety of students.

"There are no visible members of staff of colour. It makes me feel like I can't raise an issue regarding race to a member of staff as I might be offending them."

Suggestions that the BAME Ambassador should be available on open days and induction weeks were suggested so that students of colour could be made aware of a member of staff they could discuss issues regarding race with.

Session 2: The Environment at GB Met

A lot of this session centred around the idea of inclusion and diversity with relation to the GB Met inclusivity statement. None of the students asked had come across the statement and after they were made aware of it, many felt as though it felt quite dated and did not feel like it was promoting diversity or equality for race or LGBTQ+ students.

"Sounds like the college isn't making any effort to create a diverse environment, more like it's cashing in on the diversity of the area to say that it's diverse."

Some felt the statement was more about class than race and that actively not mentioning race or LGBTQ+ students felt off-putting and negative.

None of the students felt that the college actively celebrated other cultural holidays (such as Eid, Diwali and Hannukah) and mentioned that they hadn't seen displays for events such as Black History Month. All students said they would love to see more of an effort from the college to acknowledge holidays other than those in the Christian calendar.

"I think it would be nice if there were more events in the college. Something that brings everyone together. There isn't really like a community beyond your own class. It would be nice if there were events more often and it would be brilliant if it came from lots of different cultures because then everyone gets to learn something new and then it opens up for people to see themselves in these events."

When asked about the canteen students felt that there was more of a need for diversity in terms of both ethnically diverse foods but also food that caters for different dietary requirements such as halal, kosher, vegan etc. Those students in Brighton had come across more options in the canteen but the ones in more outer-lying campuses had rarely, if ever, come across halal options.

Session 3: Being in The Classroom at GB Met

When it came to the diversity of resources available to students at the college this varied greatly depending on what was being studied. Those in Psychology and Uniformed Services found that diversity was embedded into the structure of the course whether through units studied or resources provided. Those in the Arts however, noted a distinct lack of variety from options provided for research. One student in the Arts mentioned that in a unit on modern artists, all options provided for further study were male and white.

Due to pandemic restrictions over the last academic year, not many speakers were brought in (in person or online), however of those brought in, only Uniformed Services had speakers of colour. The student in Uniformed Services felt having a person of colour visit was "really beneficial and I think it would probably push a lot of people to, to go for that kind of career."

Of all the students questioned, there were several examples where students had experienced or witnessed something to do with race that had made them feel uncomfortable. They felt the best course of action would be to have the BAME Ambassador introduced during induction week so that students of colour could know who to speak to and to have some form of anti-racism training for all students that followed on from the Prevent training. In terms of steps forward, students suggested that there could be a class contract created in every class which included elements regarding race; more availability of diverse resources; having voices of colour from industry amplified; and clearer rules about reporting racist incidents.

Out of all 5 sessions, this was the most difficult in terms of subject matter but I feel that having a person of colour lead these sessions was invaluable to creating a safe space for these difficult conversations.

Session 4: Role Models

Of all the students who participated, only one had a teacher of colour. The others agreed that it would be great to see more teaching staff of colour:

"I think it would be a positive thing. I think it would show that there's diversity within the college, and I might also feel maybe a little less of an outsider if there was somebody teaching me who was of colour, probably make me feel a bit better about being in that kind of environment rather than being a minority in the classroom."

It had been noticed by the students that most BAME staff members were in catering or janitorial services and they felt this made a "negative statement".

Session 5: Opportunities for Students of Colour

Students were not aware of any clubs or societies aimed at the BAME community but were very keen that one should be set up.

"I think it'd be quite interesting. I think if you give us all a safe space where people could actually sort of discuss their experiences and talk about things from our perspective without fear."

They were keen, at these initial stages, to have one facilitated by the BAME Ambassador so that if there were problems, they could be raised with the relevant people within the college.

DISCUSSION

Although there were areas of concern discussed by the participants, overall the students felt that GB Met was an inclusive space that could become even better. The largest concern was the sense of isolation from a lot of the students, not just in the outer-lying campuses, but also those in town centres. Students expressed a desire for a safe space where they could meet each other and not feel isolated in their experiences. All of the students were shocked to hear that there were over 1,100 BAME students across the college and were very keen for the college to promote this as a huge positive.

Where there were concerns raised, a lot were regarding language used by both students and staff and therefore a clear need for some form of racial literacy training became apparent.

In terms of visibility, the participants expressed a desire to see more of themselves within the curriculum through visiting speakers, resources provided, other students or staff and in imagery around the college. Celebrations of both cultural holidays but also achievements of students of colour would help create a more inclusive community.

It is of note that the sample questioned was small compared to the number of BAME students in the college but a concerted effort was made to ensure that a variety of voices from many of the campuses and courses were chosen, as well as a range of ages and an equal split of genders. Although recommendations can be made from this study, a larger group of participants across all campuses would be recommended for a more accurate look at the experiences of BAME students at GB Met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- GB Met should start looking at anti-racism training regarding racial literacy for staff and students.
- GB Met should consult the BAME student body regarding a new inclusivity statement.
- There should be a regular group session held for BAME students where they can feel safe to discuss concerns and talk to each other so that feelings of isolation are addressed and alleviated.
- Diversification of resources in the curriculum: are they representative of the diverse student body?
- More visible celebrations of cultural holidays and events such as Black History Month that are coordinated across the campuses.
- Easier access to more diverse food in canteens such as halal, kosher etc. Especially in the more outer-lying campuses where there are less options available in the local area.
- Clear procedures communicated to the student body regarding reporting incidents of racism.
- Carry out a larger scale questionnaire across all campuses for BAME students.