



BAME VOICES PROJECT REPORT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Education is a sector in which there remain entrenched racial inequalities and discrimination for both staff and students. Recent events have brought these issues to the forefront of public consciousness like never before and have helped to foster recognition within Further Education of the need for concerted attention and action.

The 'BAME Voices' programme is intended to serve as a means to develop greater understanding of BAME learner experiences at the Chichester College Group (CCG), positive and negative, and to identify actions that CCG should take in order to make the group not only more inclusive, but actively anti-racist. It was implemented across all five CCG colleges, allowing 37 students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to spend an hour a week, for five weeks, discussing their experiences of college as BAME learners. The contributions were transcribed and analysed and are the basis of the recommendations made in this report.

Findings

The research found a wide range of experiences, opinions and ideas amongst the participants. It found consensus on issue such as images and representations; participants felt that these should feature racially diverse cohorts. It also found a high level of enthusiasm for introducing more proactive celebrations of the diverse cultures of our colleges and communities. In particular, there was agreement that events such as Black History Month should be more prominent in the college's calendar of events.

All who said that they had been taught by a teacher of colour reported that it had impacted them positively, reporting benefits such as their teacher being able to better relate to them and having a positive role model in a position of authority. When individual teachers took it upon themselves to teach about important or inspirational people of colour in their lessons this was remembered and appreciated. The participants in the group who had experience of a BAME teacher at college were, though, in the minority.

Alongside a lack of teachers of colour, there were other troubling findings. Chief amongst these findings was the prevalence of resignation and desensitisation to issues of inequality. When asked if they saw or expected to see inspirational, important or respected people of colour in their teaching and learning, and what could be done to recruit more BAME teachers, participants tended to express a feeling that this was unrealistic or unachievable for CCG. When discussing these topics, several used the phrase, or agreed with the sentiment, 'it is what it is'.

Many of our BAME learners are resigned to living in a world with an absence of people of colour in important roles like teaching and to rarely seeing people who look like them in positions that might elevate them to the status of a role model. Resignation in the face of entrenched injustice or inequality is not a quality that the Chichester College Group should expect or accept amongst its learners.

Recommendations

In response to these findings, the report's authors recommend eight key actions for the group. These are detailed on pages 20-21. The recommendations cover ensuring that images and displays in teaching areas feature important and accomplished people in their discipline; actively celebrating the diverse communities in our colleges; ensuring participation by BAME learners in enrichment activities; identifying the best means to install staff and students in positions of responsibility from where they can act as champions for BAME cohorts; decolonising the curriculum; providing relevant continuing professional development for staff in order to increase racial literacy; recruiting, retaining and developing BAME teachers and other staff members; and instituting annual surveys to measure the impact of these measures and the extent to which learners expect and believe their college to be working to address issues of systemic racism and inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Learners from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are overrepresented in further education in England. Analysis of cohorts during the 2018/19 academic year by the Department for Education found that while 3.8% of the population are black, black learners made up 6.8% of learners in FE institutions.¹ Asian, mixed race learners, and those from other non-white backgrounds were also overrepresented. The Black FE Leadership Group (BFELG) have recently calculated that by 2028 almost a quarter of 16-18 year-olds in FE will be from a BAME background.² This places a particular responsibility on FE colleges to understand and work to address the inequalities that exist within the sector, and in education and society more broadly.

Key amongst these inequalities is attainment. There are evident disparities nationally in A level grades: in 2019/20, 12% of black students, 15% of students from a Bangladeshi background, and 12% from Pakistani backgrounds were awarded three or more A grades, compared to 20% of their white peers.³ While there have been few attempts to research racial inequalities in vocational qualifications, there is emerging evidence of disparities in apprenticeships. In 2018/19 there was a 61% achievement rate for BAME apprentices, compared to 65% for white apprentices.⁴ The achievement rate for BAME students has been decreasing since the Department for Education started to record this data in 2016.⁵

An area where progress has rightly been celebrated is BAME participation

in higher education (HE). Recent years have seen a steady increase in the proportion of BAME people entering HE; in 2019, however, the rate, nationally, of black British students starting an HE course by the age of 19 fell from close to 60% in 2018 to 59%, the first reverse after a decade of progress. Once enrolled on a higher education course, there is a 22% gap for black students, 11% for Asian students, and 14% for students of other non-white ethnicities in terms of attaining a first or 2:1 grade when compared to white cohorts.⁶ Recently, the BFELG have also expressed concern that BAME students are underrepresented at high-tariff Russell Group universities.⁷

These figures highlight just one part of the entrenched racial inequalities that exist in education and wider society, and illustrate the precariousness of progress in this area. They also demonstrate the need for sustained focus and action. The 'BAME Voices' project was a programme of student discussion groups, which grew out of a recognition of the need for such a focus on issues of race and equality and an imperative to avoid complacency in this area. It involved BAME students from all five of the Chichester College Group's campuses. This report outlines the aims and objectives of the project, details how the programme was delivered, and summarises the key contributions to the discussion groups. It discusses the key themes that emerged from the group discussions and ends with eight recommendations for actions and activities that arose from the project. ■

THE PROJECT

The 'BAME Voices' project was commissioned by the Sussex Learning Network and developed by John Lynch and Beth Thomas-Hancock of John Lynch Consultancy & Training and BTH Consulting. Lynch and Thomas-Hancock have previously worked with Crawley College, the group's most racially diverse campus, to deliver projects aimed at providing role models and to encourage progression to HE amongst BAME cohorts.

'BAME Voices' allowed students from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds from CCG colleges to share their experiences and perspectives on multiple aspects of college life. The project was designed to be deployed across Sussex; the same programme of focus groups has also been delivered in the East Sussex College Group and Greater Brighton Metropolitan College Group. The aims and objectives are as follows:

Aim:

To deliver a series of five weekly discussion groups for BAME learners across the college group to discuss their experiences of college.

Objectives:

1. To record insights shared by participants, in order to develop greater understanding of BAME learner experiences at the Chichester College Group, positive and negative.
2. To identify means to support BAME cohorts.

3. To identify areas for action and improvement in making the college group not only more inclusive, but actively anti-racist.

The programme consisted of five weekly small-group sessions. Participants were recruited using text messages and emails to BAME learners who had opted in to contact by these means. A £50 Amazon voucher was provided as an incentive for participants who attended and contributed to all five sessions. Across the group, 37 learners from BAME backgrounds participated (see Table 1). Participants were divided into four small groups and the sessions were conducted over Microsoft Teams, with learners joining from home. Due to the differences in size of the five CCG colleges, and the small number of BAME students at Brinsbury and Haywards Heath colleges, some groups had representatives from multiple colleges. Worthing learners were overrepresented in the focus groups due to a higher number of sign-ups from these students (see Tables 2 and 3).

The Crawley sessions ran from May-June 2020, with the other groups following in May and June 2021. Colleagues from Uni connect (Ashley Crowson, Sally Evans, Alistair Mason), Higher Education (Samia Azam), and library teams (Stella Hine) facilitated the sessions and took notes of all contributions. These notes represent a record of 20 hours-worth of group discussions. Each session had a theme, which participants were made aware of and asked to think about in advance.

The themes and focuses of the sessions

were as follows:

1. Perceptions of your college before you arrived

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

2. The environment at your college

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

3. Being in the classroom at your college

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

4. Role models

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

5. Opportunities for students of colour at your college

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

Within each session, participants were asked to discuss and share their opinions and experiences in response to five pre-determined questions. The role of the facilitators was to prompt, keep the participants on topic, and encourage them to speak to each other. ■

College	No. of Participants	No. 16-18 Participants	No. 19+ Participants
Brinsbury	2	1	1
Chichester	8	6	2
Crawley	8	3	5
Haywards Heath	3	3	0
Worthing	17	15	2

Table 1: Participants across the college group

College	No. of BAME learners	Proportion of learners recorded as BAME
Brinsbury	34	3.2%
Chichester	426	6.5%
Crawley	589	19.1%
Haywards Heath	16	5.3%
Worthing	199	13.1%

Table 2: BAME learners across the college group

Group	Colleges Represented
Group A	Crawley
Group B	Chichester & Brinsbury
Group C	Worthing
Group D	Worthing & Haywards Heath

Table 3: Focus group make-up

FINDINGS

A Note on Terminology

This project is called ‘BAME Voices’. BAME is an acronym used to refer to people of non-white ethnic groups who are minorities in the countries in which they live. It is often used when making comparisons with the white population in the UK, particularly for statistical purposes by organisations such as the Office for National Statistics. The majority of students in the focus groups, though, used ‘person of colour’ – or terms like ‘students of colour’ or ‘teacher of colour’ – when referring to themselves and others. This term is widely used in the USA and is becoming more popular in the UK. Some people argue that it is a more positive term than BAME as it does not refer to a majority white race.

The remainder of this report uses the two terms interchangeably.

Perceptions of your college before you arrived:

During this session, participants were asked about photographs and representations of cohorts in promotional material and displays around college when they visited on open days: Were students of colour appropriately represented? How did the images make you feel?

There were a range of responses to these enquiries. One learner commented, “In the posters there was only, like, one black person, one brown person, and ten white people.” There were a range of comments agreeing with this sentiment. Others, though, felt that

the majority of visual representations were appropriately diverse. One participant commented that they felt that there were a lot of images in the prospectus of people of colour; another said that the prospectus made the college look very diverse.

Where there was consensus, was in that providing images of diverse cohorts in promotional material was not the most pressing issue for participants:

“I don’t care that there are people of colour in the brochure. This does not necessarily reflect the reality of the college.”

“All places that try to do promotional leaflets tend to have a diverse range of people in the photo.”

“I’m pretty sure it [the website and prospectus] did [contain diverse images] but it didn’t really pop out to me; I didn’t really think too much of it.”

“Representation should be natural. It can easily become tokenistic.”

Participants agreed that images of their college ought to be diverse, but that this represented a low bar in terms of actions that should be taken to foster a more inclusive and anti-racist college environment. When asked to provide examples of ‘something that spoke to you as a BAME person’ before you started college, there were few provided:

“The main thing that attracted me to Brinsbury was the animal courses, nothing BAME-related.”

“I can’t remember anything BAME-related that spoke to me.”

“The website could be designed so it has more information about what the college is offering for BAME students.”

One student recalled searching the college website to find out what was done to celebrate Black History Month but could not find any information.

When students did provide examples of what ‘spoke to them’, it tended to be around opportunities to actively celebrate and learn more about a diverse range of cultures. One participant recalled learning about Chichester College’s international festival; opportunities to learn about other cultures were important in attracting them to the college. Another said that opportunities to make friends with people from varied backgrounds was important to them, particularly as they had come from a very small local school. They particularly recalled learning about, and being excited by, the fact that there were halls of residence for international students. Another said that small things, like seeing Asian foods in the shop and cafeteria, made them feel included.

When asked about the presence of staff members of colour at open events, there were positive comments from participants from Chichester and Crawley colleges. One learner from Chichester said, “I felt that having people of colour in the department made me feel settled.” One participant from Crawley and another from Chichester recalled seeing that they would be

taught by a teacher from the same ethnic background as them and feeling very positive as this was likely to lessen cultural barriers. One student said that they saw a teacher of colour “as a possible role model for me.” This was not a universal experience at these colleges but in the instances when the then prospective students encountered staff members of colour, prior to making an application or enrolling, they felt positively about it.

At the other three campuses, participants recalled few or no encounters with staff members of colour:

“You look around and everyone looks the same.”

“I don’t think I saw any staff of colour.”

“When you go in for your college admissions, all the staff are almost all white. That diversity that you are told about just isn’t there... Rather than saying that they are really diverse already, they should say that they want to become more diverse.”

There was a contrast in the perspectives of those who had experience of teachers of colour and those who had not. Those who had not tended to express feelings of resignation to that fact, or of being ‘desensitised’:

“I have become desensitised to being surrounded by white people. There aren’t as many people around me that I can relate to. There were less people to identify with.”

“I’m definitely desensitised to it, but I guess it [the lack of BAME representation amongst staff at

open days] kind of just reinforces the fact that you're most likely going to be the only non-white person in the room at any given point."

In regard to the issue of a lack of BAME representation amongst the staff at college open events, an attitude of 'it is what it is' was prevalent. There was one interaction between participants, though, in which one student pushed back against this view:

Participant A: *"Most staff [at the open event] weren't people of colour but it kind of makes sense since Worthing and the surrounding area is mostly white, so I guess it is what it is."*

Participant B: *"I agree as the college can't control who joins the college."*

[3 'thumbs up' emojis from other participants]

Participant C: *"Yeah, but are the college actually trying to do anything to increase employment for ethnic minority teachers? They should offer somewhat of an incentive or something. I don't know."*

Alongside issues of representation, the more practical issue of language barriers was also identified. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students across the group reported feeling frustration that the college website and brochures were only available to them in English. They felt that, when applying for an ESOL course, it was unreasonable to receive admissions information only in English.

The ESOL students in the group reported

needing friends and family members to provide informal interpretation at college open events and bilingual members of the group reported having provided informal translation and interpretation for their friends and family at these events.

One student noted that BAME learners were more likely to have parents who were migrants to the country. They suggested:

"There should be slightly simplified information on how the college works as my parents didn't fully understand how education works after high school since they are first generation immigrants."

The Environment at Your College

In these sessions there was, again, consensus that images, posters, and displays, while important, were not what participants cared about the most. Participants tended to feel that there were more images and displays featuring people of colour in social sciences, humanities, and arts areas, and fewer in STEM areas. Many expressed a feeling that this disparity was somehow natural or understandable:

"In mechanical engineering I haven't seen anything like that [displays of BAME role models in the field]."

"STEM and maths do not have any means to include diversity as you are talking about facts and it is stat based, so you would not expect this to be included."

"If you are studying sociology, you see people of colour because you are studying things like race."

When asked to recall examples of people of colour being represented in the library or other learning resources, similar assumptions about the differences between subjects were present. The responses offered tended to emphasise that people of colour were either absent or included primarily as populations to be studied:

“The books I use [in engineering] don’t really have people, just pictures of cars or buildings.”

“I think it’s about subjects; if you go into social sciences, you will see lots of [images of] people of colour but not in STEM.”

“I agree that it depends on the subject.”

“We don’t study any literature by people of colour.”

“For the British empire book there are pictures of India.”

“I study history, so I obviously learn a lot about people of colour around the world from the past.”

There was one instance of a participant highlighting a display with which they were uncomfortable:

“In my media class there is a front cover from The Sun. There’s a bunch of people holding up derogatory signs. It’s meant to teach us about racism and peoples’ different opinions. It’s not put there to make people feel bad, but I didn’t really like looking at that in that lesson.”

The Muslim members of the group noted that they could not recall having

seen displays around their college to celebrate festivals such as Eid and noted the contrast to Christmas in this regard. There was consensus in all groups that they would like to see displays and events celebrating Black History Month. One participant recalled a demonstration of African drumming in Crawley College’s Student’s Union; this was well received, and participants commented that such celebration of black culture helped improve feelings of inclusivity at the college.

There was agreement that the wider college population was generally unaware of events such as Black History Month. One participant noted, “I remember my law teacher talking about a BHM [Black History Month] talk, but it wasn’t promoted at all. Barely anyone in my class knew about it.” Another said, “I don’t recall seeing anything about Black History Month... Nothing was advertised.”

Being in the Classroom at your College

In this session, students were asked to comment on what was good in the classroom, what was not so good, and to make suggestions for improvement. The students who shared their experience of being taught by a teacher of colour agreed that there were benefits to having teachers who were from the same ethnic or racial background, or from other non-white backgrounds. Most of these students said that in these circumstances there was often a shared understanding of each other’s culture. One participant, for example, noted that, when their teacher was also from a black ethnic background, that teacher was less likely to mistake their directness for rudeness. Most participants at Crawley reported that they appreciated the relative diversity of the college’s teaching staff, although noted that this did not seem to be replicated in other

areas of the college and that addressing this should be a priority. Outside of Crawley, there was agreement that there are few people of colour on site. Some attributed this to local demography:

“Staff are not very diverse, which may represent the population of Worthing”.

“As I have said before, the staff in the college are not very diverse or representative of differing ethnicities, although I don’t think this is that much to do with college as it’s to do with the low diversity rate of the town Worthing.”

Alongside their teachers, participants were also asked, in this session, to consider the teaching resources that were used in their lessons. One student said that they had not seen any people of colour in any of their textbooks and expressed a sense of powerlessness:

“They [people represented in learning resources] are all white but there isn’t really anything they can do about that”.

Most STEM students felt that the issue of people of colour in the classroom was not relevant to their disciplines:

“[B]eing someone who just studied STEM subjects there isn’t much room for representation as it’s very much all content to learn from textbooks.”

“They don’t really apply to my courses [Maths and Science]. The resources I use such as videos etc

are generally made by white people but I don’t think anything of it.

“...They don’t show POC [people of colour] because it’s mechanical stuff.”

“For Biology and Sciences, I don’t see POC or anything like it. Essentially almost all of my texts are European or American.”

“The Psychology experiments we learn sometimes have POC such as a video on Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison experiment but maths and computer science don’t really use images or talk about any figures.”

History students varied in their opinions about representative resources in class, most students taking arts, humanities and social sciences subjects reported studying some BAME people and populations:

“In History we learnt a bit about Caribbean and South Asian immigration to the UK and the discrimination they faced.”

“All of my subjects are humanities based, so it’s quite international looking at the world. When we learned about History the teacher does bring in voices and perspectives from POC.”

“I guess only in History [do we learn about any people of colour]; it’s about the history of the British Empire... There’s stuff about the slave trade and how they were treated.”

“... decolonisation of the curriculum would be a valuable discussion”

“I think we are heading in that direction. Looking at History

there is definitely a move towards diversifying the curriculum.”

“I also study Geography and I can say that it is diverse. The people we see in textbooks are from developing countries.”

“In my class we don’t use photos in textbooks of people but [what] they do show are videos of people but they are all white but there isn’t really anything we can do about that.”

“There are so many people on social media who highlight people who should be studied. I guess I’ve never really studied them because I don’t know about them. Because we don’t study them I don’t have a chance to learn more.”

Some students experience people of colour being portrayed in a negative light in their classes:

“In Psychology we learned about how cultural differences can affect people in a negative way. They were saying about how people in Pakistan eat with their hands and mistreat women. I felt quite attacked. There was nothing about the positives of Eastern culture.”

“My teacher showed a video of black people wearing inappropriate clothes. When we learn about POC we don’t see good examples. In English, we were studying different types of culture, how people marry and what they do. The teacher said that in Africa when they get married, their family like them to be fat. She was showing a video where a lot of black people were wearing inappropriate clothes. This was from a long time ago. I felt

uncomfortable. People were like ‘Wow! Do they really do that?’”

“I mean it’s ok to show some negativities but it’s sad when you show more negatives when there is also some positives.”

There was a discussion about classroom practices that could give rise to positive or negative experiences. Many students shared positive experiences in the classroom, with the majority agreeing that they were valued and treated the same. On the whole, classmates were reported as being ‘nice’ and also interested in where others have lived before. One student was invited to talk about their home language by their teacher. Several students mentioned the positive impact of particular black teachers :

“It is good hearing about his experiences in the industry”, “I love hearing about his experiences in the industry and his athletic career” and “Yeah [he] is a huge inspiration seeing that someone similar to me can get so far.”

“I feel very welcome in the classroom. The teacher gives me the impression that she feels very comfortable with anyone, regardless of colour.”

In the Crawley sessions, two participants noted that ethnic or racial ‘cliques’, i.e. a small group of people who spend time together and demonstrate exclusive behaviours, often form in the classroom, with white and non-white learners tending to form into separate groups. Others reported that this had not been their experience. All agreed that efforts to ensure the mixing of classes would

be useful. One participant recalled an event in which their name had been mispronounced by a teacher which prompted a section of the class to laugh. The teacher took no action to reprimand those who had laughed. This student felt that there should be zero tolerance, by teachers, towards incidents like these which might be considered minor by some but have racial implications. Several other comments about the wrong pronunciation of names and words were made:

"I willingly gave myself the nickname Nikki... if people could pronounce my name and it didn't affect how easily teachers could remember my name I wouldn't have introduced the nickname."

"I have had an experience whenever we learn about eastern or Arabic stuff, people would say stuff how they think it should be said, but I actually know how to say it. When I say it correctly, I get picked on and people giggle. Now, I'm kind of shy to pronounce things correctly."

Two students expressed shock at the lack of knowledge and awareness of college students regarding cultural differences. One said:

"I find myself having to explain my beliefs and cultural differences a lot."

"As a POC, I am used to explaining aspects of my religion, culture and explaining the reasoning behind certain things (such as fasting and wearing a hijab)... I assumed people were more educated."

Discussions in the classroom around race may be uncomfortable for some as evidenced by the following anecdotes:

"Every now and then there is a teacher who hesitates when saying the word black and I sometimes feel self-conscious when that happens as I am the only non-white person"

"I'm from South Africa and there are times where certain people in one of my classes often tend to generalise and make very disrespectful comments about Africa, which aren't even true and it makes me quite upset because it's really sad to hear. One time my teacher even had to tell them to be careful with what they say."

Students made some positive suggestions for creating a more inclusive classroom. Some students felt that 'there was not much you can do'; others suggested that teachers "should show students that there are successful POC in the subject." Two students felt that it would be good to put up posters and/or a calendar to celebrate a range of religious/cultural events. Many students thought teachers should teach about important people of colour in their curriculum area whether on the exam syllabus or not and some gave examples.

Role Models

In session four, role models were discussed, including their influence on student aspirations. Participants from Crawley College noted, again, their appreciation for BAME members of teaching staff. Three participants cited specific black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers as role models, commenting that they appreciated having a teacher from a background that they could relate

to. None, though, of the participants at Crawley could recall having learned about an inspirational person of colour as part of a class, ACES session or extra-curricular activity. When asked who they thought that they and their peers should be learning about, there were a range of responses. One participant suggested the Guianese poet John Agard, celebrated for his writing about mixed race identity; another suggested a range of anti-colonial political leaders; a third cited BAME scientists and inventors such as Alberto Santos-Dumont, whom Brazilians recognise as the inventor of the aeroplane. One member of the Worthing group argued that their classmates should learn that “it’s not just people like Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher who have great achievements.”

In the Brinsbury and Chichester group, several students said that there were no people of colour in their department/class but did not consider that problematic. Most said that they did not personally have teachers of colour and that there seemed only to be a few staff members of colour at the college. Six of the Worthing and Haywards Heath students said, emphatically, that there were no teachers of colour of whom they were aware on the college staff. Other students said that they had seen a few staff members of colour around but most had not interacted with them. One student at Brinsbury and one at Haywards Heath said that they believed that there were no teachers of colour on their campus. One Worthing student said, “We don’t live in the most diverse of areas so it makes sense.”

When asked if the college should make efforts to recruit more staff and teachers of colour, several participants agreed that this would be a good idea:

“It might increase some sort of personal connection to them being the same race as me.”

More of the participants who expressed a view on this topic felt, though, that increasing BAME representation amongst staff was not important:

“Does not make a difference as they are there to work.”

“As I’m a bit older than everyone else here, I’m just used to it. I just put up with it; it is what it is.”

“I don’t mind too much, all my teachers are pretty good as it is.”

“This is difficult as there are not many people of colour [in the local area].”

Finally, we discussed whether there were any people of colour in other areas of the college, i.e. non-teaching staff. Almost all the students agreed that there appeared to be very few staff of colour at any of the campuses. One said, “Would not expect to see that down here in Worthing.” Another Worthing student said that they had seen some “coloured [sic] staff members, however I have only started noticing this recently and after these BAME meetings because the topic has been on my mind.” One Chichester student had not thought about the lack of people of colour amongst the staff before and thought it would be good to encourage applications from BAME individuals. Another thought that having more BAME adults around college might be positive but “I think people should be hired based on skill. Although, I do feel more comfortable with BAME staff in general.” Another said: “If BAME students experience race-related issues

there isn't someone who can sympathise with them as easily. [There are] not many BAME adults around college in general."

Opportunities for Students of Colour at your College

The final session concerned opportunities for students of colour to participate in extra-curricular activities. Research has shown a strong link between participation in extra-curricular activities and favourable academic, psychological, behavioural, and employment outcomes.⁸ There is also emerging evidence of barriers to participation for BAME cohorts in extra-curricular activities in UK educational establishments.⁹ With this in mind, the extent to which our students of colour actually participate, feel able to participate, and feel that the activities on offer meet their needs is of key importance.

Some Chichester and Brinsbury students said that they did not know anything about extra-curricular activities, others that they were not concerned because of Covid restrictions affecting everybody and everything. Two student reps who participated in the programme said that everything was accessible to students of colour on the Student Executive Committee. Another student said they had done badminton and yoga, which were both accessible. At Worthing and Haywards Heath, most students said they had not really heard about extra-curricular activities. Most seem to have heard of the Student Union but not much else. One said they would have loved to see alternatives to sports clubs. Several spoke of the impact of Covid:

"I know there is student services but I never received any of their information, let alone location in college."

"Yeah, I don't see why they [clubs and activities] wouldn't be accessible [to people of colour] but I've never been interested."

"Personally, for me, with the disruption of Covid, joining extra-curriculars wasn't my priority this year. It was very much getting my grades up and maintaining them. So, whilst I haven't personally tried to join any extracurriculars or go into positions of responsibility, I am aware that there are many and from what I've seen from friends they all seem to be available to everyone."

Next, the issue of whether students of colour used college services (e.g. Progression+, Student Union) to translate their extra-curricular activities and responsibilities for their future employability was discussed. One Crawley College participant, an adult learner, said:

"I wish that there was somewhere we could go to get support with finding a job and CV writing."

The other two adult learners in the group agreed. They were surprised when the facilitators informed them that such a service did, in fact, exist. The participants aged 16-18, however, were aware of the service. It appears that age may have been a more important determining factor in awareness of college services, rather than race or ethnicity. (It may also be that a combination of ethnicity and age are important factors here; more research in this area may be valuable). In the Chichester and Brinsbury group, two students said they had not used the

service. One student said they went to Progression+ for help with their CV and an application to an overseas school. The same student plus another said that they used club time to add to their CV as well as for social reasons: "It's nice going to those clubs because you get the experience of being with a diverse group of people." Others said they knew of the service and would use it when needed. In the Worthing and Haywards Heath group, five of the participants said that they had used Progression+, or planned to, for careers advice, writing a CV or for developing a personal statement. Another four said they had not used the service and/or did not know about them. Some students at other campuses were similarly unaware of the services available:

"As an adult student, I felt that I signed up for a course – paid money but did not find out about any other activities or knowing about Student Services or where it is in college. Progression Plus support would be really helpful to know about, would have loved to have support on how to write a CV. Would be good to let the Adult students know about these services."

"The only services within the college I've used (and found extremely helpful!!) is tutor meetings and advice from Progression Plus. Especially as the first person from my family entering HE, tutor meetings and emails between me and my tutor have proven so helpful in understanding the process and making sure I'm doing the right thing."

The final question in this session discussed ideas for new extra-curricular

activities, roles and responsibilities relevant to students of colour. In the Worthing and Haywards Heath group several participants suggested that there should be a BAME society and/or a role for a BAME representative within the student union:

"I'm unaware if this is already a thing but I think students of colour would really appreciate if there was a union for students of colour (like there are at Unis) to promote inclusiveness and a sense of community especially considering Worthing College is based in a primarily undiverse [sic] area. From speaking to friends in other colleges, I'm aware of something similar taking place somewhere else. It would also introduce areas of roles and responsibilities specifically for students of colour which I think would be appreciated."

"[I] would like to see a BAME representative position in the SU to show that they are being proactive about BAME representation."

"[I] would like to be part of BAME representatives."

These students, though, were in the minority with most of those who expressed a view on this question feeling uncomfortable with or opposed to the idea of a BAME representative position within the SU:

"... it feels like racial separation. And it's impossible to have someone to represent all the views of BAME people; there are a wide range of views within the community."

"I think it would be good to make

sure the people with higher responsibility [e.g. in the SU] are diverse but then it just seems like the diversity hire."

"Instead of having a BAME position they should more encourage people from loads of different backgrounds to join the SU and make it clear they want more diversity and want you to give your perspective. Someone who can represent what others would want."

"Also BAME means so many different people, like, I don't think people realise white people are a minority in the rest of the world so one person would have to represent so many different groups and that doesn't seem fair."

"This is a tricky situation; would be good to see more encouragement of BAME participation in the SU rather than a specifically BAME role."

All participants agreed that they would like to see events that showcased specific minority cultures within the college community and/or the multicultural nature of the college as a whole. Several Chichester students said that they had heard about the international fair and were disappointed that it could not go ahead due to Covid. At other campuses, many felt that an international or cultural fair would help to make the college more inclusive. They said that they would welcome the opportunity to share foods, music and other parts of their culture with the wider college. In the Brinsbury and Chichester group, three students said they could not think of anything. One noted that at Brinsbury nothing was going on after 5pm. One student suggested a foraging walk. Another suggested a lunchtime activity:

"Half an hour or twenty minutes for people to get together. 1 hour for lunch is loads. It'd be great to have something to do in that time. Even if it's online it'd be great to be able to talk to a range of people."

"Us receiving books by people of colour was a really cool idea. [It would be good] if there was a book club involving books such as the ones we are getting."

"I think these meetings have been really nice. Maybe continuing them and maybe trying to get more people to join. Alongside answering questions also coming up with goals and solving problems within the college."

Two other students agreed with this comment. One student from the Worthing and Haywards Heath group said:

"A BAME discussion group to talk about experiences good and bad. If I met someone of my culture, they would have another level of understanding. There is a similar club for LGBTQ students."

This student followed up with:

"Thank you for running these sessions. It's been nice to start thinking and talking about issues I didn't realise were faced by all students of colour and not just by me individually."



KEY THEMES

The participants in the 'BAME Voices' programme were generally positive about their experience at college; they were enthusiastic about the 'BAME Voices' programme and being able to share their experience and having a voice in ongoing processes of improvement. Unsurprisingly, in such an exercise, with several dozen students each spending five hours discussing their college experience, there was a wide range of views, opinions and ideas expressed. The authors of this report have, though, been able to identify five key themes that emerged from this research. The themes are: images and representations; active celebrations of diverse peoples and cultures; decolonising the curriculum; teachers of colour; and raising expectations. Each of these are discussed, in turn, below.

Images and Representations

There was broad agreement amongst participants that they expected representations of and around college (websites, prospectuses, posters, displays, etc.) to feature a diverse range of people. There was also agreement that this was something of a minimum expectation; they indicated that they would be concerned if images contained only or mostly white people but were not inclined to declare 'mission accomplished' upon the attainment of simple representational inclusion.

Active Celebrations of Diverse Peoples and Cultures

Instead of this simple visual representative inclusion of BAME

people, learners tended to be much more enthused by the prospect of proactive celebrations of diversity and of specific BAME cultures and peoples. There was disappointment that Black History Month and Eid were not given more significance in the college's offering of events. There was also appreciation for teachers who took it upon themselves to teach about important or inspirational people of, or of relevance to, BAME communities, even when such topics were not mandated by their specification. The majority of students, though, reported that they had never or typically did not learn about any non-white people of significance. This would suggest that there should be a change of emphasis in the college, away from simply ensuring that BAME students are 'included' and towards proactively celebrating, showcasing and highlighting BAME contributions, cultures and achievements. Currently, the extent to which students learn about people and cultures that are not white depends largely on individual teacher's commitment to diversifying or decolonising what they teach to their students. Participants felt strongly that there should be significantly more opportunities for all students to broaden their knowledge and appreciation of important and inspiration people of colour.

Decolonising the Curriculum

Arguably the most concerning finding in the whole undertaking was the consistent split in responses between students from different subject areas. When asked whether they saw positive representations of people of colour in

classrooms for their particular subject, learned about people of colour in their lessons, or found people of colour in their learning resources, responses tended to fall, broadly, into one of two categories: “Yes, I study a social sciences or humanities subject so we learn about different cultures,” or “No, I study a STEM subject or vocational qualification so it is not relevant.” Both of these are problematic.

Our research suggests that when people of colour are present in teaching and learning they are often there, primarily, as subjects to be studied, frequently in a way that suggests difference or otherness. A useful example of this is the student who, when learning about eastern cultures, was taught of ostensibly unhygienic and misogynistic cultural practices. In this scenario, people of colour are denied any kind of meaningful agency; they are not creating knowledge or contributing to societal advancements. Instead, they are entities to be examined and categorised.

The BAME STEM students who believe that race and racism have nothing to do with their subject have been denied the opportunity to learn about the myriad advances in practical and theoretical knowledge that emerged outside of Europe and underpin a huge swathe of our mathematical and technological understanding. Likewise, they have not been given the opportunity to think critically about how scientific and technological ‘advances’ have been or are used as tool of systemic racism, or about the intellectual shortcomings of disciplines that rely on the insights of people from a very narrow set of backgrounds.

5.4. Teachers of Colour

Another observable split amongst the participants was between those who had experience of being taught by a

teacher of colour and those who had not. Students who were taught by a teacher of colour, particularly at Crawley where this seemed to be more common, were enthusiastic about the experience, reporting that they had felt particularly understood by these teachers and often saw them as relatable role models. This was particularly true when their teacher was from the same ethnic background as them. Those who had no experience of being taught by a person of colour commonly, although not universally, expressed a sentiment of “it is what it is.” This phrase was used by multiple participants.

5.5. Raising Expectations

In relation to the topic of teachers of colour, students commonly argued that their town – this was particularly the case for Worthing students – is not particularly diverse so it would be unrealistic to expect diversity amongst teaching staff. At Worthing College, 13% of the student population is recorded as coming from a BAME background; it is concerning, therefore, to find that students do not have a belief or expectation that a similar figure could be reached amongst the teaching staff. The word ‘desensitised’ was widely used in the context of this conversation. Similarly, as discussed above, participants commonly argued that an absence of representations or teaching content featuring people of colour in their particular curriculum area was entirely natural and understandable.

Many of our BAME students are resigned to living in a world with an absence of people of colour in important roles like teaching and to rarely seeing people who look like them in positions that might elevate them to the status of role model. Resignation in the face of entrenched injustice or inequality is not a quality that any educational institution should expect or accept amongst its learners. ■

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the findings of this research, the authors recommend eight actions for the Chichester College Group:

1

The Chichester College Group should ensure that all teaching areas contain displays featuring important and accomplished people of colour in their discipline. Particular attention should be paid to STEM subjects in this regard. Appropriate financing should be made available to facilitate this.

2

The group should ensure that there is a comprehensive calendar of events to celebrate the diverse cultures of our colleges and communities. These events should increase opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and understanding amongst students and feature inspiring representatives from BAME communities. Eid and Black History Month are prime examples of opportunities for more high-profile events and celebrations. These events should be discussed and promoted as part of all learners' regular teaching and learning. Financing should be made available to facilitate these events on an appropriately impactful scale.

3

An audit should be undertaken to ascertain whether learners of colour access enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities at the same level as their white peers. Appropriate action should be taken in response to the findings of this audit in order to ensure that BAME learners are able to engage with extra-curricular activities and that the offer meets their needs. Opportunities for learners to engage in activities such as BAME discussion groups, book groups, and mentoring programmes should be developed.

4

Further research should be conducted to explore opportunities to increase the representation of students of colour in positions of responsibility such as student reps and the student executive. The option of introducing a BAME representative on the student executive and employing a BAME student experience champion, with responsibilities for implementing extra-curricular activities aimed at BAME cohorts, should be considered.

5

A staff member in each curriculum area should be appointed to lead on identifying and implementing opportunities to decolonise teaching and learning in their area. This process should be undertaken with input from learners and should make use of existing curriculum audit tools (see Appendix 1). The identified colleagues should report to a designated member of the senior leadership team who will monitor the process group-wide. Evidence of best practice in this regard should be recorded and disseminated within the group and shared with other educational institutions.

6

A comprehensive review of the group's employment practices should be undertaken to identify potential barriers to people of colour gaining employment within CCG. A programme of BAME teacher training, staff development and recruitment should be implemented. The group should set itself aims for recruiting BAME teachers and senior managers, and for enabling the retention and progression of BAME colleagues within the group.

7

Annual surveys of student attitudes on race, diversity and equality should be implemented. These would seek to measure the impact of the above measures and the extent to which learners expect and believe their college to be working to address issues of systemic racism and inequality.

8

A programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), aimed at increasing racial literacy and equipping colleagues with the tools to address issues of race and racism in the classroom, should be implemented for all staff. Expert consultants and facilitators should be utilised and the group should draw upon the experience of colleagues from East Sussex and Brighton and Hove councils, where similar initiatives are in place, and West Sussex County Council. This measure is key to ensuring that the group, as a whole, has the ability to implement the necessary actions outlined in this report.

ENDNOTES

- 1) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/further-education-participation/latest>
- 2) Black FE Leadership Group (2021), *Making the Most of an Ethnically Diverse Britain: The Role of Further Education*
- 3) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/latest>
- 4) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874731/NARTs_statistical_release_201819.pdf
- 5) *ibid.*
- 6) <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-students/>
- 7) Black FE Leadership Group (2021), *Making the Most of an Ethnically Diverse Britain: The Role of Further Education.*
- 8) Fredricks, J. and Eccles, J. (2005) 'Developmental Benefits of Extracurricular Involvement: Do Peer Characteristics Mediate the Link Between Activities and Youth Outcomes?' *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34(6), pp. 507–520.
- 9) https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/3232/1/HEA_project_report_2007_8.pdf

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

Example of a decolonised curriculum audit tool from the Confederation of School Trusts.

CST Decolonised Curriculum Audit Tool

*This tool draws from the NEU Framework for Developing an Anti-Racist Approach and Show Racism the Red Card's Guidance for ITT.

**Decolonising the curriculum removes specific limitations in disciplinary knowledge reliant on the assumption of racial hierarchy in knowledge production. However, one should be aware that female and LGBTQ+ contributions are also victims of colonial limitations and key to opening up vital and illuminating fields of study.

Decolonising Criteria		Researching	Developing	Embedded
1.	Global influences on your discipline are reflected in the curriculum as powerful knowledge.			
2.	Positive contributions from BAME people are used to illuminate key concepts - both historical and contemporary.			
3.	BAME student identities are represented as diverse rather than singular / stereotypical.			
4.	Your discipline is presented as universal - used and adapted by a range of cultures in valuable ways.			
5.	Students learn how experts from different traditions and cultures borrow from one another.			
6.	Stereotypical or degrading representations of marginalised groups are explicitly challenged, e.g. statistical analysis of migration, stop and search methods.			
7.	Guest speakers from a range of traditions and cultures speak to your students.			
8.	Standard English / academic register is taught / modelled as appropriate to context rather than presented as 'superior' to students' non-standard dialects.			
9.	Students' self-awareness, empathy, and collaborative skills are developed as 'real world' currency.			
10.	Student voice and peer review feedback is used to ensure quality and inclusivity.			



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