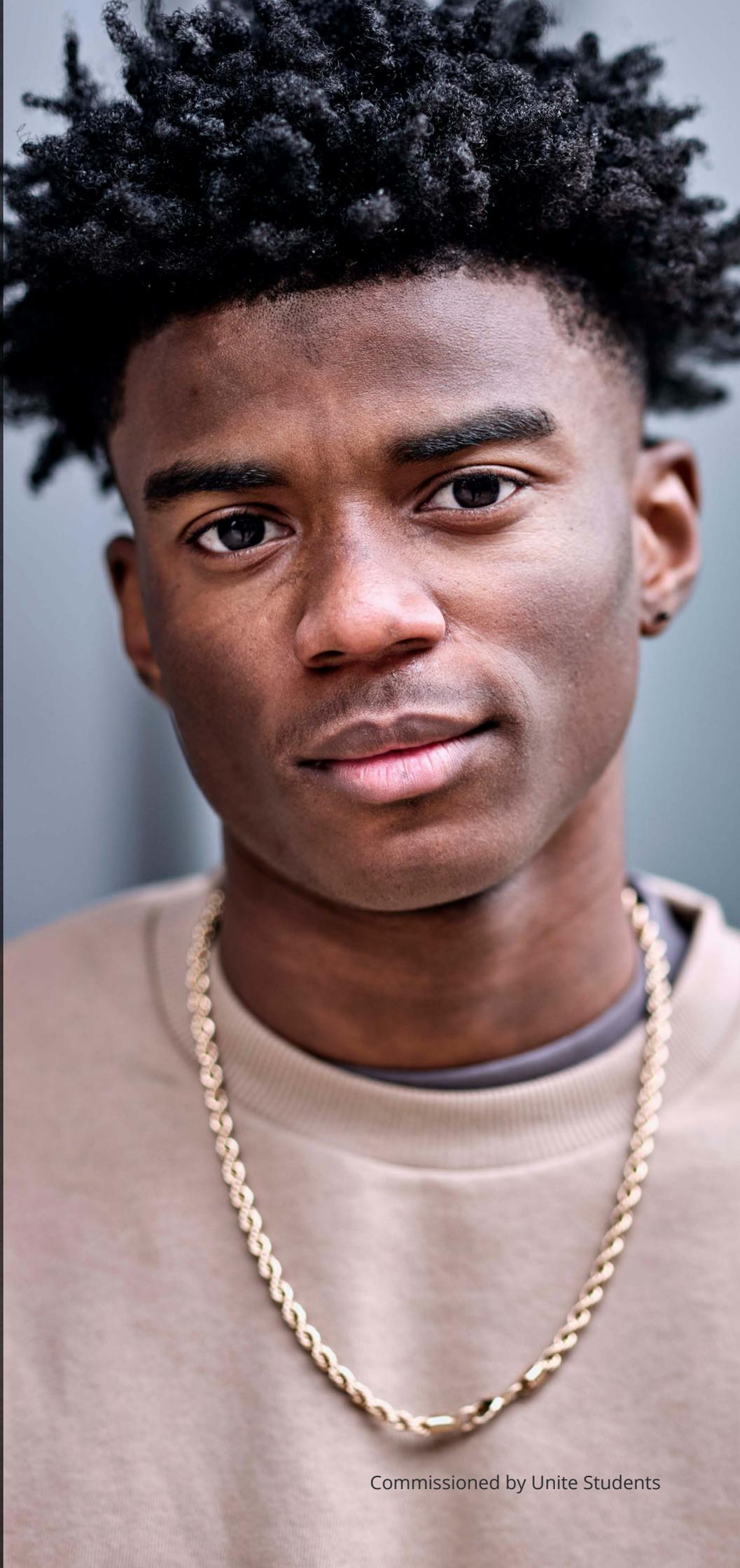


# LIVING BLACK AT UNIVERSITY

Research into the  
experiences of  
Black students  
in UK student  
accommodation



Commissioned by Unite Students

## **LIVING BLACK AT UNIVERSITY**

Research into the experiences of Black students  
in UK student accommodation

*A research report commissioned by Unite Students  
and undertaken by Halpin*



*Research carried out May – August 2021, published February 2022.*

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Finally, this report would not have been possible without the participation of students and accommodation staff, and especially those who shared their often difficult stories with the research team through the focus groups. We hope that we've done justice to your views and experiences, and that through this research we will be able to improve the experience for other Black students.



## INTRODUCTION

- 1.0** Foreword

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### 1.0 FOREWORD



Time spent living in student accommodation is important and memorable. It is a place to make friends, to study, to develop an adult identity and to learn how to live independently.

At its best, it is a community of students that offers a sense of safety, comfort and belonging. Each of these have been linked to improved academic achievement, retention and mental health. What happens in student accommodation really matters.

Our research programme has touched on these themes in the past. In 2017 we found that non-White students felt less integrated in their accommodation than White students, and in response we worked to diversify our events programme. In 2019 we found that non-White students on average considered themselves less successful than their White peers.

But it was events in 2020 that really brought to the fore the racism that Black people face in day-to-day life, not just through isolated incidents but in a systemic way. In May that year, I sat trying to make sense of the video footage of US police brutally restraining and ultimately murdering George Floyd. Having already set out on a refreshed approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, this incident and the subsequent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement prompted us to commission this research that specifically looked at the experience of Black students. We especially wanted to listen to Black students talk about their experiences in accommodation in their own words, and this has been a central feature of the research which covers students in a wide range of purpose-built student accommodation.

This report makes very uncomfortable reading at times, but that makes it even more vital that everyone providing student accommodation commits to action.

We have built the findings and recommendations of this research into our ED&I Strategy and I look forward to sharing our commitments to Black students, which will include improved policy and process, more visible commitments to tackling racism and improved training and development for our teams.



This report makes very uncomfortable reading at times, but that makes it even more vital that everyone providing student accommodation commits to action.

Some of the recommendations can only be addressed in partnership, and we have been overwhelmed by the response from universities and sector bodies even prior to the completion of the final report. There have already been some promising conversations about building some of the recommendations into codes and standards, and being proactive in ensuring that Black students understand their right to escalate complaints if not resolved. We are committed to facilitating these conversations further and lending our support to subsequent actions.

For universities, I hope this research will help to extend Universities UK's excellent work on tackling racial harassment into students' living space, with a genuine contribution to knowledge and actionable recommendations. We are already working with Newcastle University to support their own work towards AdvanceHE's Race Equality Charter, drawing on the draft findings of this research.

For private accommodation providers, I hope it will be a learning experience for you as it was for me, and a practical support to your ED&I strategies. It is important that we take every opportunity to work together as a sector on this important issue.

But above all, this report is a commitment to Black students to make student accommodation a more safe, inclusive and welcoming home for you, creating room for everyone to thrive at university.

Richard Smith  
Chief Executive,  
Unite Students Group



## 1.1 SETTING THE CONTEXT

It is now so widely accepted that higher education institutions need urgently to address prejudice on campus that even their own formal representative body has called for action. Universities UK have said they want to tackle 'the institutional racism and systemic issues that pervade the entire higher education sector'.<sup>1</sup>

There has sometimes been a common tendency among those of us working in higher education to assume our sector is more progressive, more enlightened and more welcoming than other parts of UK national life. In fact, universities are generally a microcosm of the society in which they sit and, as such, they are likely to contain that society's flaws.

Recent success in widening participation is perhaps nowhere more clear than among Black pupils: between 2006 and 2020, Black pupils had the biggest entry rate increase of all ethnic groups, up from 21.6% to 47.5%.<sup>2</sup> So what is the problem?

There are two big ones. First, the opportunities are not equally distributed: for example, just 5% of Black Caribbean pupils progress to high-tariff institutions, which is under half the national figure of 10.9%.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, after entry, Black pupils are more likely to be left behind: Black students outside those higher tariff providers have the lowest continuation rates of any ethnic group.<sup>4</sup> It seems they are getting in but they are not getting on, at least not as often as other students.

The question which we must address is: how can we tackle these challenges quickly and effectively? On the teaching side, one way is by diversifying the curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, schemes like Advance HE's Race Equality Charter Mark are beginning to make a difference for students and staff.<sup>6</sup>

But the impact of racism on the non-academic aspects of student life has been largely ignored. That is why this new report is so vitally important. Where you live, who you live with and how safe you feel in your accommodation are crucial to student success. Anyone who looks back on their own time at university knows this almost instinctively.

No one can perform at their highest level if their term-time address, where they live for the majority of the year, does not feel like a home from home. As the following pages make clear, things that are often forgotten about in higher education can be very important to someone's quality of life, such as appearance (including the availability of the right hair care) and diet (such as access to certain foods).

<sup>1</sup> Universities UK, *Tackling racial harassment in higher education*, November 2020, p.4

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, *Entry rates into higher education*, 16 February 2021

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, *Widening participation in higher education*, 14 October 2021

<sup>4</sup> Office for Students, *New OFS analysis examines differences in higher education access and continuation between different groups of students*, 16 December 2021

<sup>5</sup> Mia Liyanage, *Miseducation: decolonising curricula, culture and pedagogy in UK universities*, HEPI Debate Paper 23, July 2020

<sup>6</sup> Kalwant Bhopal, 'Race matters: Addressing competing inequalities in higher education', in Hugo Dale-Rivas (ed.), *The white elephant in the room: ideas for reducing racial inequalities in higher education*, September 2019, pp.11-16

“

The impact of racism on the non-academic aspects of student life has been largely ignored. That is why this new report is so vitally important.

You can receive a lot of pushback when you raise the sorts of issues covered in this report. Very many large listed companies would shy away from them and let others take the lead. But Unite Students has never done that, and I pay tribute to their boldness in commissioning this important, and at times unsettling, report from which others can now learn.

They are right to have done so because of the intrinsic importance of the issues covered but also because we are at an important moment in public debate, when real change is possible. For example, the Office for Students is putting a new level of pressure on universities to reduce their non-continuation rates and improve the labour market success of their graduates. This report will help them do that.

We are also at a tipping point in terms of student accommodation because of the sharp increase in the proportion of students who now spend some time in privately-owned Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA). Now that such PBSA is the norm, providers of this sort of accommodation, like Unite Students, have added responsibility to ensure their residents meet their full potential.

This does not mean that universities can leave any worries about accommodation to others. As well as still providing hundreds of thousands of student beds themselves, they get the blame when things go wrong at any type of accommodation used by their own students.<sup>7</sup> The solutions to the challenges posed in this report are therefore likely to come only from partnership working.

Despite the challenging findings, this report is not an attack on our sector. Like Universities UK's own report, it shows how the sector can better deliver for all students and become a beacon by which other parts of our society can judge their own actions.

Just imagine how more successful and harmonious our country would be today if racial prejudice had never been allowed to hold back individual talent.



Nick Hillman  
Director,  
HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute)



<sup>7</sup> Sarah Jones and Martin Blakey, *Student Accommodation: The Facts*, HEPI Analytical Paper 2, August 2020



**75%**  
of Black/Black British students reported some level of impact on their mental health due to racism, with some feeling distressed in their accommodation.

## 1.2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have known for some time that there is clear evidence of systemic disadvantage for Black students within UK Higher Education (HE). The 2019 report Closing the Gap<sup>8</sup> by Universities UK highlights a long-standing and well known “attainment gap” which, at the time of publication, stood at just over 23 percentage points between the proportion of White and Black students achieving a first or upper second-class degree. To put this more starkly, more than 8 in 10 White students achieve these higher grades compared to fewer than 6 in 10 Black students.

The rationale for this research came from two separate understandings. Firstly, that the experience students have in their accommodation has an impact on their overall student experience and their academic attainment.

Secondly, while we may hear stories about the experiences of Black students in accommodation through word of mouth, social media, articles and news interviews, the research team were unable to find any existing research in this area. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)<sup>9</sup> and Universities UK (UUK)<sup>10</sup> reports demonstrate the wider context of racial harassment in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) yet Halpin’s research team were unable to find substantive research on the lived experiences of Black students in halls of residence or Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA).

The research team adopted a mixed methodology, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative field research with students and accommodation staff. The research spanned both university halls and the breadth of the private PBSA sector, with the majority of respondents having lived in university halls; however, we acknowledge that where there are nominations agreements<sup>11</sup> in place students may be unclear about which organisation runs their accommodation.

A crucial aspect of the research design was to listen to, understand, and amplify the day-to-day lived experiences of Black students in their accommodation, and use these as a basis through which to present key findings and to propose recommendations to the sector. It is a goal of this report to give a platform to those voices and let them speak for themselves, alongside presenting conclusions and recommendations drawn from the research as a whole.

These are challenging findings, though they will probably come as little surprise to those in the HE sector. A summary of the key themes, findings and recommendations is set out on the following pages.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-student>

<sup>9</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, *Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities Challenged* (2019, EHRC)

<sup>10</sup> Universities UK, *Tackling racial harassment in higher education* (2020, UUK)

<sup>11</sup> Nominations agreements are contracts between universities and private accommodation providers for the provision of beds to the students of that university. In some types of nominations agreements, students book rooms in private accommodation through their university.

<sup>12</sup> While accommodation providers are not responsible for external food outlets, this is something that affects Black students and therefore is worthy of attention.

### Safety and belonging in accommodation

Black/Black British students reported a less positive experience in their accommodation on average compared to White students, in terms of a lower sense of belonging, comfort, safety and security. Only 44% of the Black/Black British students we surveyed feel a sense of belonging in their accommodation compared to 61% of White students. Black students spoke about feeling that they are seen as out of place, and how White peers appear to have a right to speak and act in a racially discriminatory way. Black/Black British students feel that there is little support available for them when they feel distressed about these issues, and they describe the long-term impact on their mental health and wellbeing from feeling this way. Incidents reported include racial slurs and name calling, being excluded in social situations by White flatmates and being disproportionately challenged by security on-site. Cumulatively, these can have a significant impact on the everyday lived experiences of Black.

### Environment

Over a quarter (28%) of Black/Black British respondents indicated that they cannot access culturally relevant services close to where they live. Examples given included a lack of availability of culturally relevant food.<sup>12</sup> While half of all students believed that there were positive images of other cultures in their accommodation, Black students in particular were more likely to have expected to see more people who look like them in their accommodation. Where staff diversity doesn’t reflect student diversity, this can lead to Black students not coming forward for help or support.

In some cases, the accommodation felt as though it had been purposely segregated. A quarter of Black students in the survey agreed with the statement “My accommodation needs to be decolonised.”

### Policies and procedures

Almost a quarter (23%) of Black/Black British students disagreed with the statement “There are clear and accessible policies promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in student accommodation” compared to just one in ten (11%) of White students. They were largely unaware of policies and procedures to tackle racism and felt that this is was not a priority for those making policy. There was a gap between having policies and procedures and putting them into practice. Most Black students said they would not report racism, and some reported a poor response in which incidents were not taken seriously or dealt with. In some cases, this was attributed to staff being predominantly White. Some students were concerned about reporting incidents, fearing that they would not be believed and the impact this would have on them.

### Experiences of racism

Half of all survey respondents and 40% of Black/Black British respondents have witnessed staff positively confronting racism. Not all of these incidents were from fellow students; some were from staff. Experiences discussed in the focus groups included the use of racial slurs and racist language, and micro-aggressions such as invading personal space to touch hair. Casual racial discrimination was more common than explicit racism, but all of these incidents had a serious impact on students. The positive findings within this theme are

that there are instances in which racism is being confronted. Half of all survey respondents and 40% of Black/Black British respondents have witnessed staff positively confronting racist Two-thirds of students and 57% of Black/Black British students have witnessed other students positively confronting racist attitudes. This is something to build on.

### Mental health

Three-quarters of Black/Black British students reported some level of impact on their mental health due to racism, with some feeling distressed in their accommodation. This is compounded by a lack of support and difficulties in finding counsellors with either the lived or professional experience to understand the impact of racism on mental health. As a result, students are turning to family and Black peers for support.

Black/Black British students report relying on their friends and family for support, with home students often going home at the weekend rather than finding support structures within their accommodation. Many students rely on the Afro-Caribbean Society or similar ethnicity-based networks for support, even when they are not formal support organisations. Black/Black British students feel that the distress caused by racism is not given due consideration by non-Black counsellors who do not have either lived experience of their own, or professional experience in supporting those affected by racism.

### 1.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Findings

- 1** Black/Black British students have a less positive experience than average in their accommodation in terms of sense of belonging, feeling comfortable in being themselves, and sense of safety and security.
- 2** Black students are impacted by micro-aggressions in accommodation.
- 3** The accommodation environment leaves some Black/Black British students feeling uncomfortable.
- 4** Some Black students feel staff have enabled micro-aggressions and other forms of racism to thrive.
- 5** The diversity of accommodation staff does not reflect the diversity of the students in accommodation.
- 6** Some students report that accommodation is allocated in a racially segregated way.
- 7** Black/Black British students are not always aware of policies and procedures relating to racism in their accommodation, or these policies and procedures do not exist. There are low levels of trust among Black/Black British students in the processes that sit behind anti-racist strategies.
- 8** The majority of Black/Black British students surveyed have been the victims of racism in their accommodation.
- 9** Black/Black British students are relying on their friends, relatives and ethnicity-based networks for emotional and psychological support because culturally relevant support isn't available within mainstream services.

#### Recommendations

- 1** Universities and accommodation providers should collaborate to eliminate racism from all areas of the student experience, including student accommodation.
- 2** Improve acclimatisation and integration activities for all students and extend the period over which these activities take place.
- 3** Introduce meaningful race training for peers and staff.
- 4** Accommodation providers should confirm a commitment to tackling racism, both in their internal policies and in their student behavioural agreement or charter.
- 5** Purposely recruit staff in accommodation that reflect the diversity of the student body.
- 6** Universities and accommodation providers should work together to intentionally create diverse and inclusive student accommodation.
- 7** Universities and accommodation providers should collaborate to ensure mental health and wellbeing support is available, accessible and appropriate for Black/Black British students.
- 8** Ensure there are clear and accessible policies and procedures (including anonymous reporting) to deal explicitly with racism.
- 9** Accommodation providers should routinely collect, analyse and publish relevant data on the racial diversity of their residents and employees, as well as outcomes of reporting and investigation of complaints.
- 10** Accommodation providers should work to build a relationship of trust with Black/Black British students.



# 2

## METHODOLOGY

### 2.0 Methodology

#### 2.1 Definitions and stylistic choices

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## 2.0 METHODOLOGY



Research was conducted by Halpin Partnership Ltd between March and August 2021 and consisted of the following stages:

- Pilot student survey
- Pilot staff survey
- Main survey of students
- Focus groups with Black/Black British students

The pilot surveys surveyed students currently studying at UK HEIs, or those who had recently graduated, and staff who either worked in student accommodation or supported students living in accommodation. There were 369 responses from students in total; 260 complete responses and 109 partial responses. The quantitative data indicated that there may be differences in experience of halls of residence and PBSA for Black students, but the dataset was too small to draw conclusions with a sufficient degree of certainty. The qualitative data collected through free-text questions indicated that there were areas of concern for Black students that required further investigation. The pilot survey informed the survey questions and focus group themes for the main study.

There were 138 responses, 60 complete and 78 partial, from the pilot staff survey which provided both validation and an organisational perspective on the student findings.

The main survey drew on the Youthsight panel to collect data from both home and international students studying at UK HEIs, requesting that only those that lived in halls of residence or PBSA participate. There were 1055 responses, all of whom responded that they either lived in university halls of residence (72%) or PBSA (28%). Quantitative results were tested for statistical significance, and qualitative (free text) findings were themed and categorised for analysis. We acknowledge the limitations that arise from a sample of this size. The report focuses on the items in which there was a statistically significant difference to a 95% confidence level between responses from White and Black students, but the full question set is provided for reference in *Appendix X*.

The team conducted 16 focus groups with 47 self-selecting Black students and Black graduates, all of whom had lived in university halls of residence or PBSA. This provided an opportunity to gain a greater depth of insight into the survey findings and to understand them within a wider context. Each focus group lasted between 1-1.5 hours and discussed themes identified in the surveys. The results were again thematically analysed.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide>



This research focuses on the impact of being Black on the student experience in accommodation.

## 2.1 DEFINITIONS AND STYLISTIC CHOICES

This research focuses on the experiences of Black students, to avoid the homogenisation of non-White groups, which can hide significant differences between the experiences of those from different ethnicities. For the purposes of this research, the term 'Black' is used to include all those who are racialised as 'Black', whether home/EU or international students. Whilst there are differences between the experiences of Black home/EU students and Black international students, this research focuses on the impact of being Black on the student experience in accommodation. For further information on the definition of Black used in this research please refer to *Appendix X*.

Throughout the report, we have chosen to capitalise direct references to ethnicities in line with the Government's ethnicity facts and figures style guide.<sup>13</sup> Where the use of the term for an ethnic group is not in direct reference to a person's ethnicity or an ethnic group, for example 'white space', the ethnicity is not capitalised.

Where student or staff free text responses are quoted, we have left all typos and spelling mistakes in the quote, so as not to alter meaning unintentionally, and to maintain authenticity of voice.



# 3

## SAFETY AND BELONGING IN ACCOMMODATION

### 3.0 Safety and belonging in accommodation

#### 3.1 Belonging

#### 3.2 Comfort

#### 3.3 Feelings of safety and security

#### 3.4 Summary and key findings

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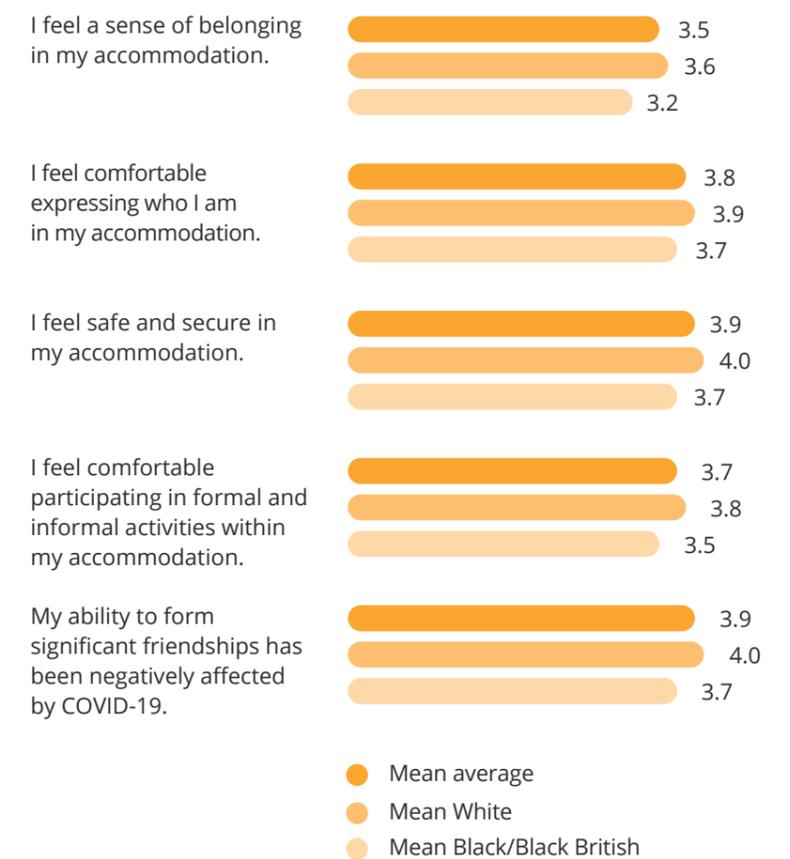
I just think because I am of a different culture and religion, I'm not invited to a lot of activities they do together, so we are less close.

### 3.0 SAFETY AND BELONGING IN ACCOMMODATION

Compared to White students, Black students felt a lower sense of belonging, personal safety and comfort within their accommodation. In free text responses and in the focus groups, students gave examples of not feeling accepted or fitting in, isolation and exclusion, and at times a lack of respect from accommodation staff.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

#### Statement



### 3.1 BELONGING

A sense of belonging has been recognised as a significant aspect of the student experience which has an impact on both retention and success. It is also recognised as important among prospective students; in 2021, 92% of applicants said that they wanted to feel like they belong at university; moreover 59% were afraid that they would not fit in .

From this survey, it seems that these fears were realised more frequently for Black students than White students within their accommodation setting. In response to the statement "I feel a sense of belonging in my accommodation" around a quarter of Black/Black British respondents indicated that they did not feel a sense of belonging (Figure 1) and less than half considered that they felt a positive sense of belonging compared to 61% of White respondents.

International Black students expressed that they would like welcome information to be drip-fed over a longer period of time to help them settle in. The students in the focus groups reported feeling that White peers had a right to say and act however they chose, including in ways that were racially discriminatory, but that they, as Black people, were seen as out of place and that their presence raised suspicion and discomfort. Some students felt that staff enabled these behaviours.

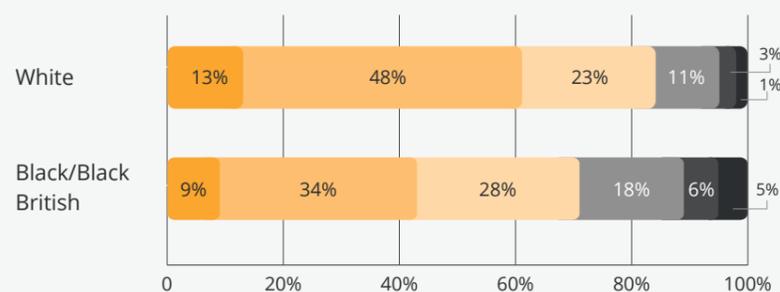
Sometimes this was experienced directly in relation to staff behaviours, for example some Black students in the focus groups reported that they were over-policed as a consequence of their ethnicity.

"There are lots of incidents where they would stop Black students and ask them for ID."

At other times it was felt through more subtle exclusions, also known as micro-aggressions:

"I just think because I am of a different culture and religion, I'm not invited to a lot of activities they do together, so we are less close."

Figure 1: I feel a sense of belonging in my accommodation



Key for Figures 1, 2, and 3

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A

<sup>14</sup> For example, Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (2010). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unite-group.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Applicant-survey-June-2021-published-version-images.pdf>

### 3.2 COMFORT



Differences can also be seen in the extent to which Black students feel comfortable in being themselves in their accommodation, and their level of comfort in participating in activities.

White students felt more comfortable than Black/Black British students participating in activities in the accommodation, with 22% of Black/Black British students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement "I feel comfortable participating in formal and informal activities within my accommodation." (Figure 2).

Figure 2: I feel comfortable expressing who I am

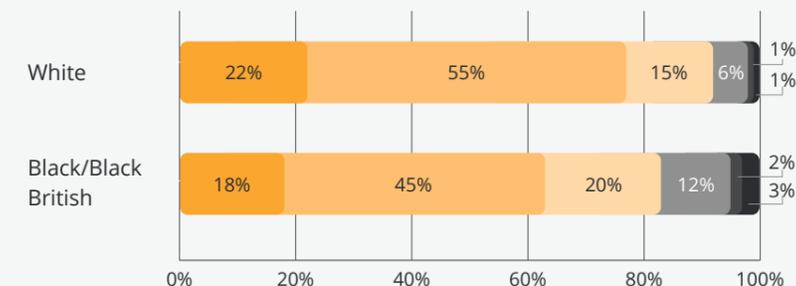
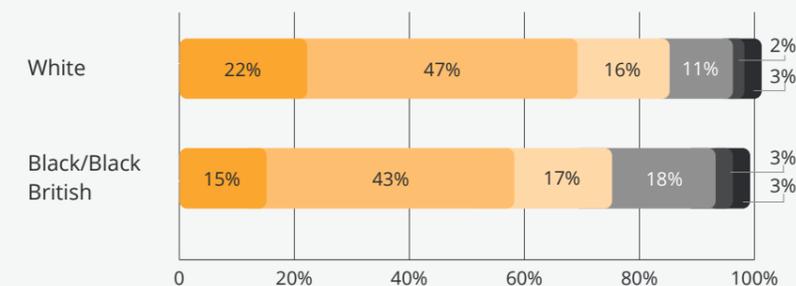


Figure 3: I feel comfortable participating in formal and informal activities



In the focus groups and free text comments, students spoke about feeling unable to be themselves, and being self-conscious about the things that they had previously taken for granted. For example, some felt uncomfortable cooking in shared kitchens because their peers had complained about the smells of 'different' foods.

---

"Being the only black girl in my house makes it difficult to cook the way I would prefer to or do some other things like hair care how I like."

---

Some students said that when they socialised with other Black students, White peers would find a reason to complain.

---

"I would have liked to have my friends over more often. When I invited them, my flat mate would complain about noise. I was the only Black person in my accommodation and so went to my friends rather than have them come over to mine."

---

Where there was a lack of facilities for those with different cultures - for example, a space for Muslim prayers - this could also contribute to a feeling of exclusion.

Sometimes feelings of discomfort arose directly from the actions of other students. Focus group participants discussed experiences in which White students said or did things that made students of colour feel uncomfortable. They attributed this to their perception that White students have an attitude of comfort within the environment, and do not feel the need to check their behaviours or think about how their ethnicity affects others. This is an example of what is sometimes termed "White privilege" and is sometimes unconscious. Black students reported that when they mixed with other ethnic groups, in the absence of White students, this discomfort was not present.

---

"We had an ACS meetup for Freshers Week and one of the white guys there was like, 'Oh, is this a gang photo?'"

---





I just think because I am of a different culture and religion, I'm not invited to a lot of activities they do together, so we are less close.

### 3.3 FEELINGS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

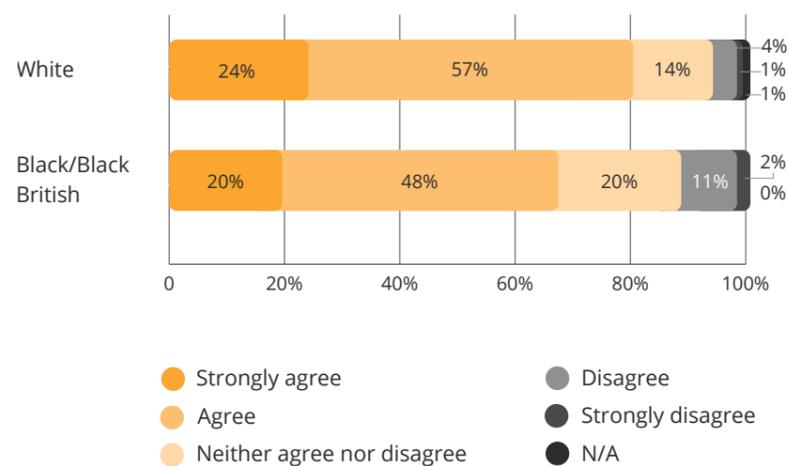
With regard to feelings of safety and security in their accommodation, 80% of White respondents felt safe compared to 67% of Black/Black British, and 12% of Black/Black British felt unsafe compared to 5% of White students (Figure 4).

While a lower sense of safety may be linked to the impacts of several of the other themes explored in the report, there were instances in the focus groups and free text responses in which it was attributed to the actions of accommodation staff themselves. Some of the Black/Black British students in the focus groups had experienced racist attitudes from staff working in their accommodation.

“Some [of the wardens] were really nice however there were some instances where they turned off their cameras to harass us.”

These feelings were compounded by the belief that their experiences and concerns about racism would not be taken seriously or acted upon, something that is explored in more depth in the section **5. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Figure 4: I feel safe and secure in my accommodation



### 3.4 SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

Black students reported a less positive experience in their accommodation on average compared to White students, in terms of a lower sense of belonging, comfort, safety and security. The causes appear to be multi-faceted, involving racial name calling, exclusions, micro-aggressions and specific acts of racial profiling. Cumulatively, these can have a significant impact on the everyday lived experiences of Black students, and these impacts are explored further in the section **7. MENTAL HEALTH**

- 1 Black/Black British students have a less positive experience than average in their accommodation in terms of sense of belonging, feeling comfortable in being themselves, and sense of safety and security.
- 2 Black students are impacted by micro-aggressions in accommodation.
- 3 The accommodation environment leaves some Black/Black British students feeling uncomfortable.
- 4 Some Black students feel staff have enabled micro-aggressions and other forms of racism to thrive.



# 4

## ENVIRONMENT

### 4.0 Environment

#### 4.1 The environment around the accommodation

#### 4.2 Representation

#### 4.3 Decolonisation

#### 4.4 Summary and key findings

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People of the same backgrounds often stick together as it seems socially unacceptable to mix with other groups of people.

## 4.0 ENVIRONMENT

Black students are less likely than White students to be able to access culturally relevant services close to their accommodation, more likely to have expected there would be more people like them in their accommodation, and to agree that their accommodation needs to be decolonised. Students in the focus groups talked about the impact of poor representation in terms of Black peers and staff, and experiences of racial separation in the provision of their accommodation.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Statement



- Mean average
- Mean White
- Mean Black/Black British

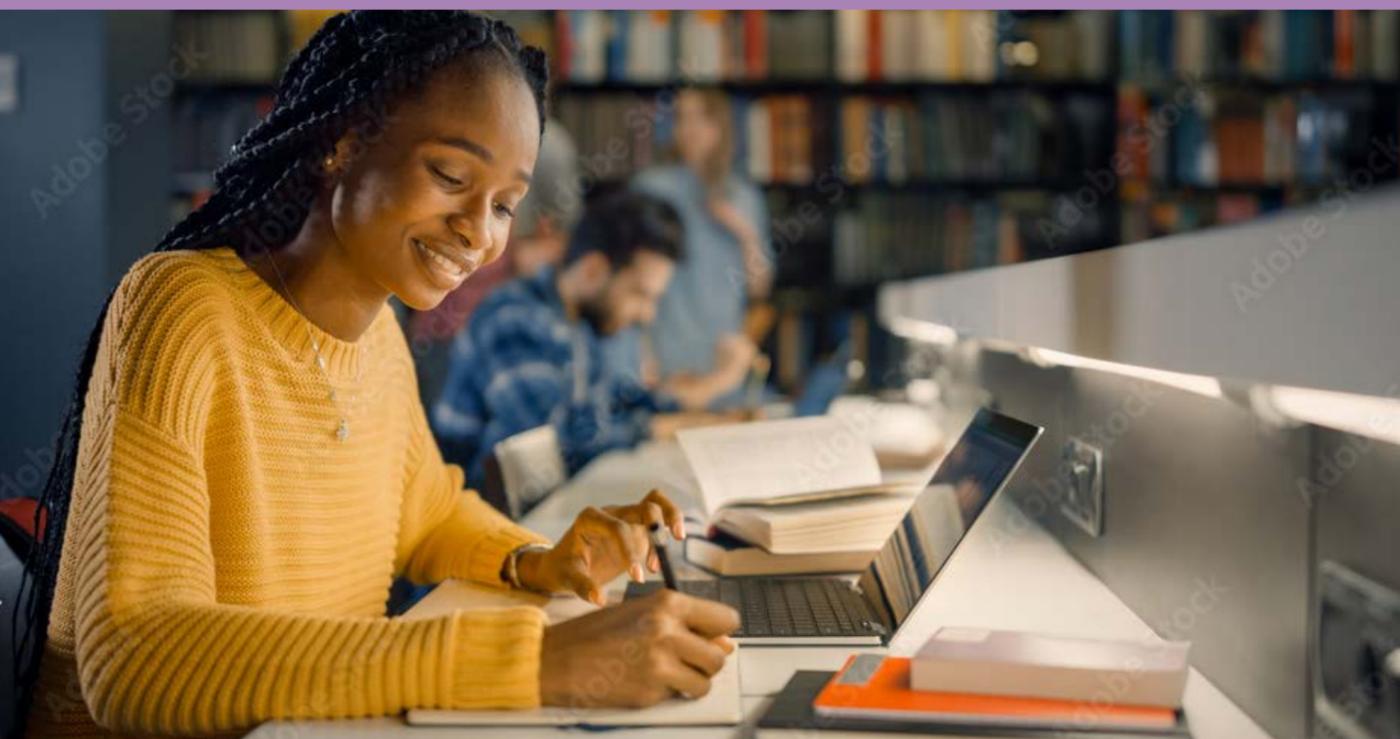
### 4.1 THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND THE ACCOMMODATION

In response to the statement “I can easily access culturally relevant services like hair care, food and makeup close to where I live”, there was a mean score of 3.8 indicating that most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. This was lower for Black/Black British respondents at 3.4, with 28% of Black/Black British respondents indicating that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

“It was definitely a white space, but more due to the location of the university rather than the university itself.”

This is usually outside the direct control of the accommodation team, nonetheless this is a context which affects the daily lives of Black/Black British students.

Some focus group respondents said the whole university, including their accommodation, feels like a ‘white space’ because of the lack of racial diversity of academic and support staff. This can be seen in areas like catering, where provided, with some students reporting a lack of culturally relevant food and Halal options.



### 4.2 REPRESENTATION

About half (50.9%) of all demographics felt that there are positive images of diversity in their accommodation, and there were no differences in scores between White and Black students. However when it came to the statement

“I expected there to be more people that looked like me.”

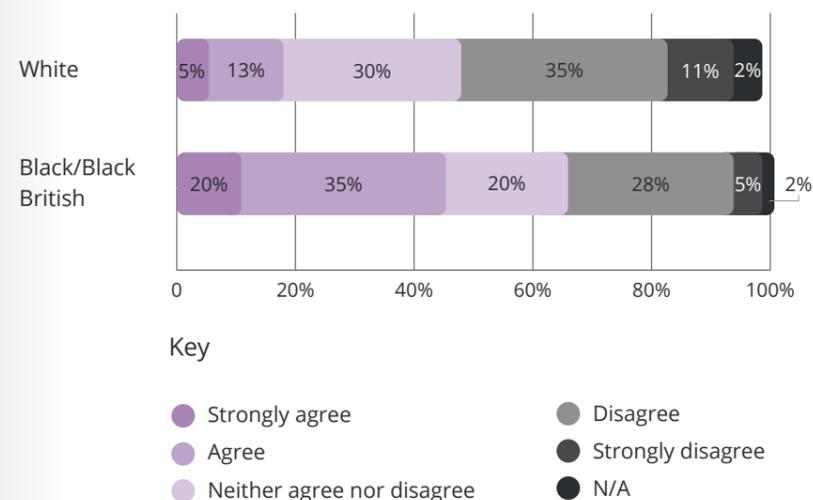
there were significant differences in mean scores between White and Black students, and 46% of Black students expected there to be more people that looked like them (). This suggests that, for Black students, the reality is not living up to the image presented when it comes to representation in accommodation. Some students in the focus groups said that they chose universities that they knew had a high population of Black students, and we have seen examples on The Student Room of Black students trying to find accommodation in which there were other Black students

A lack of staff diversity was discussed in the focus groups, and some of the students did not seek support because they felt uncomfortable having no-one who looks like them to discuss issues with.

“There needs to be a more diverse, easily accessible group of staff. In accommodation, it is vital that people feel comfortable and have someone who is equipped to handle these situations.”

This is discussed in more detail in section **5. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Figure 5: I expected there to be more people that looked like me in my accommodation





Some students commented that there was a culture of limited mixing between students from different ethnic backgrounds within their accommodation.

---

“People of the same backgrounds often stick together as it seems socially unacceptable to mix with other groups of people.”

---

Moreover, several respondents commented on segregation within halls. Within the free text comments, three students commented that they felt that there was an intentional policy to segregate students by race or nationality; this is a theme that also emerged in the focus groups.

---

“Seems that there is segregation in the different blocks of the campus, all people from Asian backgrounds have been grouped together.”

---

“Different blocks were slightly segregated, I’m not sure it was intentional. My block was known as the block for Black people from London. I think it was probably intentional because there was also a block with mainly White students.”

Separate blocks for Asian (usually Chinese) students do exist in the UK, and while they may have been created to meet the needs and preferences of Chinese students, consideration may need to be given to how this might be perceived among other parts of the student community.

Outside of this specific example, it seems unlikely that universities or accommodation providers would deliberately segregate students by ethnicity. However this could be an unintended consequence of other allocation strategies, whether by time of application, qualification for guaranteed accommodation, or student needs and preferences.

Whatever the reason, the students we spoke to felt that there existed an intentional policy of racial segregation. Historically racial segregation has always been used to oppress Black people, so this can lead to feelings of discomfort and in some cases distress and trauma.

**26%**  
of Black students were more likely to agree that their accommodation needed to be decolonised.

**4.3  
DECOLONISATION**

Decolonisation is a term that describes the undoing of colonialism, in which one nation asserts economic, political and cultural dominance over another, exploiting it economically and often suppressing its culture. As such, it is often applied to efforts made to create a more inclusive and representative environment. Many universities are currently engaged in decolonising the curriculum by broadening their curriculum and teaching methodologies to be more inclusive of other cultural perspectives. 'Decolonising accommodation' therefore suggests projects and initiatives to create a more inclusive culture within accommodation, both in terms of the physical environment and the activities and services that take place within it.

The survey tested student responses to this term. Black students were more likely (26%) to agree that their accommodation needed to be decolonised, although there was also some agreement with this statement (17%) among the White students surveyed.

The survey also tested the level of agreement to

"There are references in my accommodation to historic figures or events, i.e. slavery, that are offensive."

There was relatively low agreement with this statement overall, though White students disagreed more strongly with the statement than Black students.

**4.4  
SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS**

While half of all students believed that there were positive images of other cultures in their accommodation, Black students in particular were more likely to have expected to see more people who look like them in their accommodation. Where staff diversity doesn't reflect student diversity, this can lead to Black students not coming forward for help or support. In some cases, the accommodation felt as though it had been purposely segregated, which had a negative impact. A quarter of Black students in the survey agreed that their accommodation needed to be decolonised.

- 5** The diversity of accommodation staff does not reflect the diversity of the students in accommodation.
- 6** Some students report that accommodation is allocated in a racially segregated way.



# 5

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

5.0 Policies and procedures

5.1 Policy effectiveness

5.2 Confidence in policies and procedures

5.3 Summary and key findings

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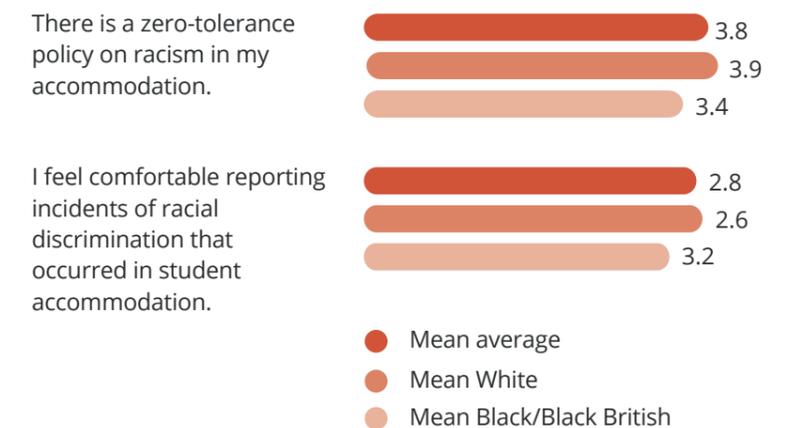
I find that my accommodation is seeking neutrality, therefore it tends to omit things like positive racial messages in order to avoid offence.

### 5.0 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Compared to White students, Black/Black British students are less likely to believe that there is a zero-tolerance policy towards racism, and feel less comfortable reporting incidents of racial discrimination. In the focus groups, students discussed the gap between policy and practice, and their lack of trust in the process.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Statement





The breakdown of responses is shown in Figures 6 and 7 right. White students have more belief in a zero-tolerance policy with 67% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement

“There is a zero-tolerance policy on racism in my accommodation.”

compared to 45% of Black/Black British. White students also felt more comfortable in reporting incidents of racial discrimination.

There were also some variations that were statistically significant in terms of the degree of feeling in two other statements. 23% of Black/Black British students responded negatively (disagree or strongly disagree) to the statement “There are clear and accessible policies promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in student accommodation” compared to 11% of White students. 46% of White students agreed compared to just 32% of Black/Black British students.

“If I reported a concern about my accommodation, I am confident it would be taken seriously and dealt with.”

Figure 6: There is a zero tolerance policy on racism in my accommodation

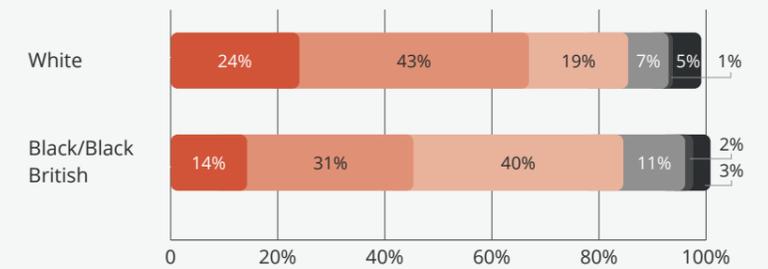
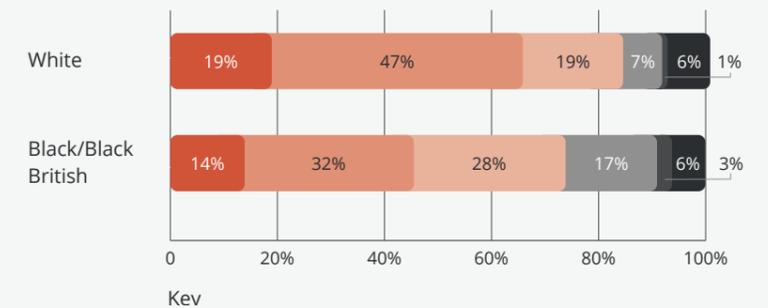


Figure 7: I feel comfortable reporting incidents of racial discrimination that occurred in student accommodation



Key

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A

## 5.1 POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

Most of the students in the focus group reported that there were no effective policies and procedures to promote racial diversity and inclusion and to tackle racism, and that this was because it is not a priority for those making policies. "There aren't many policies or procedures in place in my accommodation promoting racial diversity, apart from posters in the common room"

Together with the free text comments in the survey, their analysis sheds light on the limitations of current policies in practice within the accommodation setting.

In some cases, the lack of effective policy was attributed to a perceived organisational need for neutrality, or what is sometimes referred to as 'institutional colour-blindness'.

"I find that my accommodation is seeking neutrality, therefore it tends to omit things like positive racial messages in order to avoid offence. Consequently, it feels like there's no support to students like me who worry about experiencing such things."

Some pointed to specific gaps in policy and procedures in terms of their focus on specific issues (such as bullying and harassment) or that the policies do not apply to accommodation.

Others reported a gap between policy and practice.

"Although there are policies and procedures in place on how to deal with racism and action against it, it feels like they are just advertising those policies and procedures and not practicing what they are preaching."

## 5.2 CONFIDENCE IN POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Some students felt reluctant to make use of the reporting procedures because they feared they would be judged as overreacting.

Sometimes this was informed by witnessing poor experiences of using the procedures, leading to a low level of trust in their effectiveness.

"In the incidents where I have felt racially targeted, it was very difficult to make a complaint without feeling like I'm crazy or making a big deal out of nothing."

"I witnessed a number of incidents that did involve race and the reaction was to gaslight<sup>16</sup> the victim."

<sup>16</sup>'Gaslighting' is defined as manipulating someone psychologically to cause them to doubt their own sanity. It derives from the 1944 film Gaslight in which a man tricks his wife into believing she is delusional.

"Students who were caught smoking weed was taken much more seriously [than racism]. I don't think there were any good policies in place."





Reporting a traumatic experience takes courage and having to repeatedly retell stressful events is itself another form of trauma.

Where there was low confidence in the competence of staff to deal with issues of racism, this affected trust in the policies.

“There are no real policies, I know there was an email address to contact but I’m not sure they would work because I feel the staff are not well-versed with dealing with issues like that.”

This was particularly believed to be the case where staff diversity did not reflect student diversity.

“It’s hard to take indirect racism seriously when most members of staff are White. They don’t understand the gravity. There is also the problem of relying on proof to address situations. Even if they say they would chase it up, you don’t hear back.”

Reporting a traumatic experience takes courage and having to repeatedly retell stressful events is itself another form of trauma. The lack of trust that Black/Black British students have in reporting mechanisms is not of their making; they have direct and sometimes intergenerational knowledge of peers who have been worn down and ultimately defeated by racism, withdrawing from or failing academic courses.

### 5.3

## SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

While the survey shows a reasonable overall level of awareness of policies and procedures, Black students trust these procedures less than White students. There is a gap between having policies and procedures and putting them into practice. Students identified limitations relating to specific gaps in policy. There were also examples of poor responses to students who used the policies, suggesting a need for greater training and awareness among staff.

# 7

Black/Black British students are not always aware of policies and procedures relating to racism in their accommodation, or these policies and procedures do not exist. There are low levels of trust among Black/Black British students in the processes that sit behind anti-racist strategies.





## EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

- 6.0 Wider HE sector context
- 6.1 Experiences of racism in student accommodation
- 6.2 Summary and key findings

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# 8%

of students who had experienced racial harassment reporting that they had felt suicidal as a result.

<sup>17</sup> Universities UK, *Tackling racial harassment in higher education* (2020, UUK)

<sup>18</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, *Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities Challenged* (2019, EHRC)

## 6.0

### WIDER HE SECTOR CONTEXT

According to the report on racial harassment conducted by UUK<sup>17</sup>, there is very little consistent data collected on the nature, scale and prevalence of racial harassment; however, the report found that almost a quarter of students from minority ethnic backgrounds reported experiencing racial harassment at university. In the study, half of staff who had experienced racial harassment described incidents of being ignored or excluded because of their race, and nearly a third had experienced racist name-calling, insults, and jokes. Both staff and students report regular experience of micro-aggressions, i.e. subtle, less 'overt' forms of racism. Racial harassment occurred in a wide variety of settings and from multiple harassers. Whilst this does not specifically relate to student accommodation, it does provide evidence of the scale of racism that takes place within the higher education sector.

The EHRC 2019 inquiry into racial harassment in Higher Education Institutions<sup>18</sup> found an underreporting of incidents of racial harassment. The reasons cited are a lack of trust in institutions to listen, to take the reports seriously, to investigate and make appropriate changes, and fear and concern that the victim of the racial incident may face severe personal consequences for reporting it. This mirrors the findings of this research as set out in the section **5. Policy and procedures**

The failure of the sector to support victims contributes to the severe physical and psychological effects of racial harassment on both students and staff. The EHRC recognised that racial harassment affects mental health, wellbeing, sense of belonging, educational outcomes, and career progression. The report showed that depression and anxiety were widespread, with 8% of students who had experienced racial harassment reporting that they had felt suicidal as a result. The impact was similar among staff where three in 20 members of staff left their jobs because of racism.

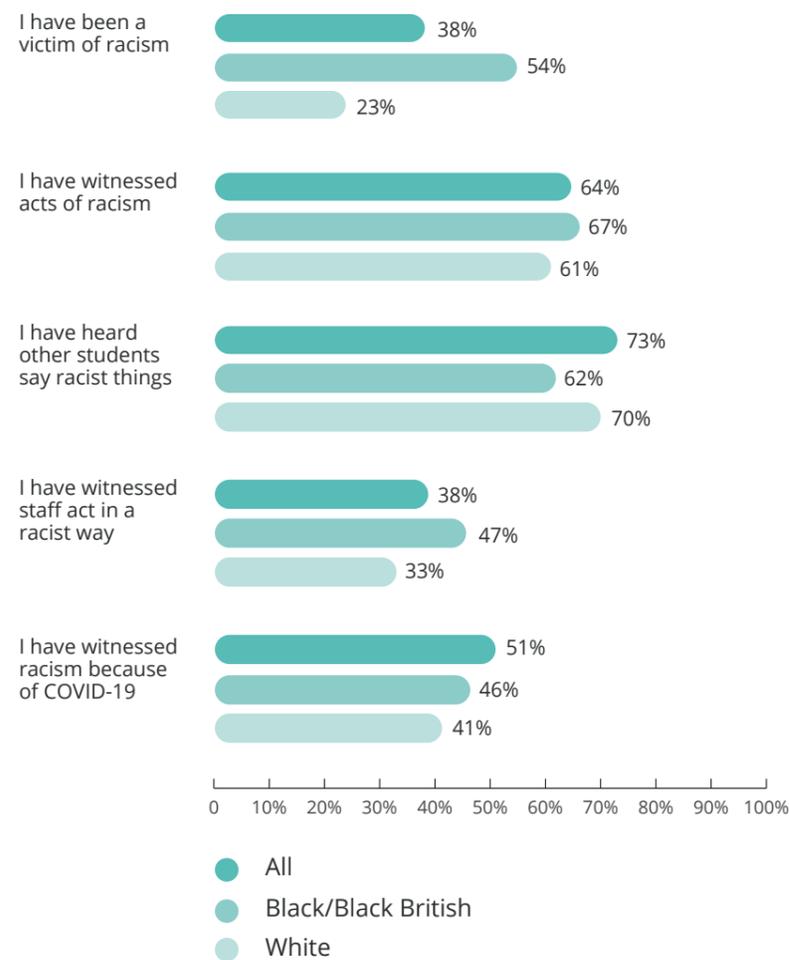
## 6.1 EXPERIENCES OF RACISM IN STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

In this survey, most students felt that racial diversity was celebrated in their accommodation, but White students felt this happened more often than Black/Black British students to a statistically significant level.

Figure 8 shows the difference between Black/Black British respondents plotted against White students and all respondents in relation to each of the 5 questions asked about direct experiences of racism. The questions are paraphrased for Figure 1; the full text is in the appendices available online. The % score relates to all those who report experiencing the issue so includes 'always', 'often', 'sometimes' and 'rarely'.

More than half (54%) of Black/Black British students we surveyed reported having been the victim of racism in their accommodation and 67% of Black/Black British students reported having witnessed acts of racism. This indicates that acts of racism are commonplace within student accommodation, and is confirmed by the 64% of all respondents who reported having witnessed acts of racism.

Figure 8: Negative experiences of racism





Most students who took part in the focus groups had direct experiences of racism in their accommodation and felt that this had not changed with the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement. These experiences ranged from insensitivity around things like hair or food, to the use of racial slurs, to spitting, shouting and physical violence. Students spoke of all types of incidents as something that seriously impacted them, not differentiating between the effects of insensitivity, for example, and physical assaults.

“I had a friend who had an afro which students would always touch, and she really hated it. It made her go into her shell.”

Some respondents reported a lack of awareness amongst the about being looked down on because of ethnicity, and in some of these comments, respondents were clear that this was different from explicit racism. The descriptions fit with the definitions of micro-aggressions or micro-exclusions used in the UUK report on racial harassment, i.e., subtle, less ‘overt’ forms of racism.

“White people say a lot of racist things without even thinking it through.”

“

I had a friend who had an afro which students would always touch, and she really hated it. It made her go into her shell.

It is also commonplace for racist things to be said with 73% of all respondents reporting having heard other students make racist remarks.

“People justifying using the N-word.”

“I found out that one of my flatmates was quite racist. She said a lot of racist things behind my back which showed that she was conscious of what she was doing.”

Not all these incidents were from fellow students, and students in the focus group spoke of racism from staff as well. Nearly half (47%) of Black/Black British respondents have witnessed acts of staff racism, and 38% of all respondents report witnessing the same.

“The two black girls in the accommodation felt uncomfortable to make any complaints to res life staff as we felt victimised and we were called aggressors, hostile & confrontational. They did this in front of the other students in our accommodation & they realised they would get away with a lot. This demotivated us from making any complaints & felt obliged to deal with issues and situations our self (which in effect got us in more trouble).”



The global pandemic has fuelled some of these acts of racism, with 51% of respondents and 46% of Black/Black British respondents reporting having witnessed instances of racism because of COVID-19.

Where institutional actions were discussed, it was felt that they were paying lip service. Even though students recognise the seriousness of racism, with some describing it as a hate crime, they still feel that there is no point in reporting the issue as they do not feel there would be an appropriate resolution.

These experiences of racism are generally unreported by Black/Black British students and unacknowledged by accommodation providers and universities, they are however commonplace amongst respondents in this study. The under-reporting is due to a lack of trust as discussed above. The failure to acknowledge may arise from poor processes and training, or because the issue is not prioritised.

The positive findings in this section are that there are instances in which racism is being confronted. Half (49%) of all respondents, and 40% of Black/Black British respondents, have witnessed staff positively confront racist attitudes, and two thirds (67%) of all respondents (57% of Black/Black British respondents) have witnessed other students confront racist attitudes.

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“I have witnessed other students confront racist attitudes positively.”

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Others, including one Black/Black British respondent, felt that ‘woke’ or anti-racist positions were an overreaction to what they perceived as a non-problem. In the free text responses to the survey, four respondents referred to anti-White racism. While this is not the focus of this study, the presence of these views needs acknowledging.

## 6.2

### SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

The survey data shows that the number of racist incidents within student accommodation is higher than the reported level would suggest, with over half of Black/Black British respondents having been the victims of racism and almost three-quarters of all students having heard racist remarks. Perhaps most disappointingly, some of this racism originates from staff. While most of the incidents appear to be more subtle forms of racism or exclusion, nonetheless students report that this has an impact on them, a finding which is supported by the EHRC study.

# 8

The majority of Black/Black British students surveyed have been the victims of racism in their accommodation.



## MENTAL HEALTH

### 7.0 Mental health

#### 7.1 Summary and key findings

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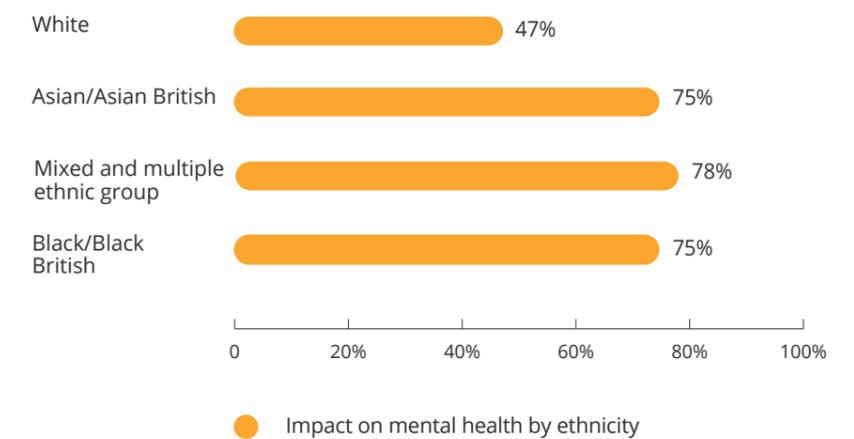


I was having really bad mental health, and so I'd gone to a university GP, right on campus. I told her my mental health was crap. It felt like the most rushed situation ever, she literally just shooed me off.

## 7.0 MENTAL HEALTH

The impact of racism is contributing to poor mental health amongst non-White students, with 75% of the Black/Black British students surveyed reporting some level of negative impact on their mental health because of racism. There were similar levels of agreement among other non-White ethnic groups, and nearly half of White students agreed with the statement. In addition to the specific impacts on Black/Black British students, which is the focus of this report, racism seems to have a wider negative impact on the mental health of students within the context of student accommodation.

Figure 9: Racism affects my mental health in a negative way



In the focus groups, students spoke about the impacts on their mental health using words like “distress” and “vulnerable” to describe living in their accommodation. They spoke about the long-term impact of continually feeling this way, leading to them feeling “withdrawn” and “drained”.

Black female students particularly reported that this was exacerbated by them always having to present a demeanour of cheerfulness for fear of being stereotyped as the ‘angry Black woman’. Most of the students in the focus groups had experience of Black peers withdrawing from university because of these feelings.

Some identified explicitly that their accommodation was negatively affecting their mental health and wellbeing, or that of others they know.

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“My friend left the halls even after paying. He would literally run to his room because of the bullying. The only option was to leave.”

---

This can be compounded by a perceived lack of support and feelings that their experiences were not taken seriously.

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“I was having really bad mental health, and so I’d gone to, we had a university GP if that makes sense, right on campus. I told her my mental health was crap. It felt like the most rushed situation ever, she literally just shooed me off. Then I had a friend like a month later, a white friend that I’d met at university who had had the same situation as me and she explained her process. She had a total different experience. Yes so that’s me like in the same space and time. We’d seen the same GP and it took me almost 3 years to get in the same position that she got in in like the same week.”

---





When racism impacts student health and wellbeing, Black/Black British students have been unable to find inadequate support for these issues.

The majority of students in the focus groups reported that they knew of no formal support structures for mental health and wellbeing in student accommodation. More widely, it was generally felt that the distress caused by racism was not taken seriously by the counsellors they had access to. Instead they indicated that they have had to rely on friends or family for support. They also expressed a preference for seeking support from peers who had similar lived experiences. Many of the students taking part in the focus groups reported finding support from the Afro-Caribbean Society or other groups of peers with similar lived experience, even though these were not formal support organisations. Some students highlighted that they preferred to go home over the weekend to get support in a positive environment.

There has been a widely recognised student mental health crisis over recent years. This crisis is exacerbated amongst Black/Black British students by their experiences of racism. When racism impacts student health and wellbeing, Black/Black British students have been unable to find inadequate support for these issues. This compounds a lack of trust in those in positions of power to resolve any issues relating to experiences of racism, and they are left feeling that they have no choice but to resolve issues themselves. Students in the focus groups discussed the need for things to change but felt too exhausted to be the force for change themselves:

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“We feel defeated.”

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## 7.1

### SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

Three-quarters of Black/Black British students reported some level of impact on their mental health due to racism, with some feeling distressed in their accommodation. This is compounded by a perceived lack of support and difficulties in finding counsellors with either the lived or professional experience to understand the impact of racism on mental health. As a result, students are turning to family and Black peers for support.

Although these findings make for difficult reading, it demonstrates the potential impacts that accommodation teams can have on the mental health of Black students by implementing effective anti-racist strategies in accommodation.

# 9

Black/Black British students are relying on their friends, relatives and ethnicity-based networks for emotional and psychological support because culturally relevant support isn't available within mainstream services.





## EXPERIENCES OF ACCOMMODATION STAFF

### 8.0 Experiences of accommodation staff

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Along with no training for staff, we lack procedures & resources for addressing racist bias incidents and hate crimes.

### 8.0 EXPERIENCES OF ACCOMMODATION STAFF

The experiences and observations of accommodation staff provide a valuable analysis of the organisational issues that underpin the experiences of students described above.

60 staff completed responses to the staff survey, of which only 4 identified their ethnicity as Black (including mixed-race Black respondents). This was explained in the free-text comments. One respondent commented: “100% white workforce”, whilst three commented on the difficulties in recruiting staff of colour. One said:

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“I feel that we struggle to recruit a diverse and inclusive team. We have good representation from the trans and LGBT+ community, but we do not see many applicants from communities of colour, religious diversity, Neurodiverse, disabled communities and we have a huge gap in the socioeconomic diversion in our teams.”

---



My manager has been openly racist and keep stating she's hates international students as they make her life harder because the lack of English.

Two respondents made comments directly referencing colleagues who had racist attitudes, or did not confront them in others.

"My manager has been openly racist and keep stating she's hates international students as they make her life harder because the lack of English."

and:

"I have seen and supported colleagues of colour experience hostile work environment and have their experiences dismissed by HR and our management. When one case was brought to mediation, the management and HR determined that the victim should "just wait it out" as the perpetrator was on a fixed term contract ending soon. Along with no training for staff, we lack procedures & resources for addressing racist bias incidents and hate crimes. These occur regularly in our community and are perpetrated by other students, staff, and broader community members. Students who try to report hit many barriers. I have heard upper management dismiss students' reports repeatedly. I have been labelled argumentative for pushing this and for pushing for protocol/resources."

One staff member highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on racism:

"lots of [staff] conversations around Black & Muslim communities' contribution to covid rates/spreading, often very negative and critical."

The lack of cultural understanding was highlighted as a key issue.

"I sometimes feel in some sites there is a lack of understanding of cultural differences, such as with Chinese/other international students sometimes people don't take into account just how different some aspects of culture can be and they find it difficult to understand that things are just done differently in different places and there is always a period of adjustment when moving to a new country. Things are never said out of malice but just out of ignorance/lack of awareness. We need to be a bit more open minded about our differences and also allow for adjustment periods when people come to live in our country."



There were also reflections on the level of staff training available.

"In my experience, we do not train, empower, or support students or staff in confronting overt bias or in thinking critically about our institution/policies/procedures toward antiracist action. When students have challenged the university around this, it has focused more on trying to quash the comments than on the real issues raised. Outside of other union members (Unison, UCU), I have not met staff who feel capable or confident in addressing issues."

On the positive side, there were examples of anti-racist policies and procedures being used effectively.

“Following an incident, a colleague was dismissed for offensive racist remarks made to another colleague. He felt he was “just joking”, I am glad to know this was taken seriously enough to warrant a thorough investigation and subsequently he was dismissed. This demonstrated a zero- tolerance acceptance to racism in our business and made the person who was verbally attacked feel more secure in the workplace.”

The staff survey supports the findings from the student survey in showing that there is more to be done to improve the experience for Black students and to tackle racism. It suggests that there is currently an inconsistent approach across the sector, with examples of both good and poor practice. There was a clear theme that staff feel that there is insufficient training around equality, diversity and inclusion within an accommodation setting. Through the incidents and experiences shared, it provides a sharper focus on issues of staff diversity, cultural awareness and policy effectiveness that have been helpful in generating recommendations.



# 9

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 9.0 Recommendations

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## 9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1 Universities and accommodation providers should collaborate to eliminate racism from all areas of the student experience, including student accommodation.**

Currently, HEIs are responding to the Rhodes Must Fall, Liberate My Degree and Black Lives Matter movements with a focus on addressing aspects of the learning environment that may be detrimental to Black students, and decolonising learning, teaching and assessment. However this work does not address racism in all areas of the student experience, and decolonising education must involve removing experiences of racism from all areas of the student experience, including student accommodation.

It will be especially important for universities and private accommodation providers to work in partnership on a joint approach, in light of the high and growing proportion of student accommodation provided by the private sector. Consideration should also be given to the role of relevant codes, standards and charters and their potential to incorporate the findings and recommendations of this research.





## 2 Improve acclimatisation and integration activities for all students and extend the period over which these activities take place.

International students in the focus groups expressed a wish for a longer acclimatisation and integration period. This may also be helpful for Black British students who are disproportionately the first in their family to go to university. They have less experience of the UK HE system and therefore may take longer to acclimatise and find it more challenging to integrate. Improving acclimatisation and integration activities would be beneficial to not only Black/Black British students, but to other students from under-represented or marginalised groups and, ultimately, to all students.

## 3 Introduce meaningful race training for peers and staff.

Over half of Black/Black British respondents reported being victims of racism in their accommodation. Those we spoke to described unintentional or thoughtless behaviours from White peers leading to feelings of discomfort and even distress. There is therefore a clear need for explicit race training for staff and students which references the accommodation context specifically. The training needs to also reach those who would not usually volunteer to participate and be meaningful and effective.

The literature surveyed in the preparation for this report shows that a better understanding of the experiences of peers and colleagues improves the experiences for all, not just those from marginalised groups. Further, many of the students in the focus groups felt that some incidences of discrimination were unintentional or founded in ignorance. Meaningful training that promotes the value of diversity, increases cultural competence, and equips all those living and working at universities to better relate to one another will improve the experiences of all students.

## 4 Accommodation providers should confirm a commitment to tackling racism, both in their internal policies and in their student behavioural agreement or charter.

Accommodation providers need to ensure that racist misconduct is treated seriously, and reflect this clearly in internal policies and in their student behavioural agreement or charter. Staff also need to be aware that their actions may be hate incidents or crimes, as well as disciplinary offences.

Students come to purpose built student accommodation from many different countries, cultures and family backgrounds. It is helpful to make clear to students from the beginning of their tenancy exactly what is expected of them in relation to their conduct regarding any form of discrimination, including racism. Clear expectations of what is or is not appropriate behaviour need to be set so that all students know what is unacceptable and no one can hide behind their ignorance. This should be included in policy and the behavioural agreement or charter for students in the accommodation.

## 5 Purposely recruit staff in accommodation that reflect the diversity of the student body.

Students reported a lack of racial diversity in academic, professional services and support staff. This leads to feelings of isolation, and Black students having no one who looks like them that they can talk to about their concerns. Some students say they rely on the Students' Union for support or the student groups they were part of (e.g. Afro-Caribbean Societies). Concerted efforts need to be made to recruit and retain racially diverse staff at all levels including at management level, whilst being sensitive to the fact that bringing someone into a junior position in a racist environment is itself an act of harm.

When recruiting accommodation staff, it is recommended that there is also diversity in their professional backgrounds and that they don't all come from one particular background as they may bring with them a singular approach to interacting with students that is inappropriate in student accommodation, for example a culture of racial profiling.

## 6 Universities and accommodation providers should work together to intentionally create diverse and inclusive student accommodation.

Current practices in some institutions have led to the appearance of ghettoization. Universities and accommodation providers should be intentional and transparent about how they allocate rooms, and be aware of unintended consequences. A lack of integration harms inclusion and does not expose students to diverse perspectives. Where allocations are made based on student preferences, for example alcohol-free flats, this should be made clear to all students.

Segregation also has historic links with traditions that are racist and reflecting this is negative, especially for students of colour. Ghettoization should be prevented, and conscious efforts made to reflect the diversity of the student body in all areas of accommodation. A more thoughtful process in assigning flatmates should be created to foster a more diverse and tolerant space.

## 7 Universities and accommodation providers should collaborate to ensure mental health and wellbeing support is available, accessible and appropriate for Black/Black British students.

The student mental health crisis is well documented within the sector and in the media. For Black/Black British students this is exacerbated because they rarely get the opportunity to be supported by someone who looks like them and understands their lived experiences. Improving mental health support for all students would positively impact Black students, however there also needs to be targeted interventions aimed at improving the provision for Black students and those who have been traumatised by experiences of racism.

## 8 Ensure there are clear and accessible policies and procedures (including anonymous reporting) to deal explicitly with racism.

All those operating student accommodation need to have in place specific policies and procedures that directly target racist behaviours. These policies and procedures should be developed with input from Black communities including students and staff. Visibility of the policies and procedures is key here, as some expressed that they were unaware of them, the processes surrounding them and how to use them. Visual reminders such as posters go a long way towards building Black people's confidence that their accommodation has zero tolerance for any form of racism.

Clear and accessible ways of being able to report racist issues in accommodation (including anonymous reporting) need to be established by universities and accommodation providers, so every student knows how and where to file a report if they need to, and that all reports will be taken seriously, investigated and outcomes reported swiftly.

Not only do students need to be made aware of their ability to make complaints, but they also need to know how to escalate complaints to the appropriate body, for example to the relevant National Code for student accommodation, and to the Independent Adjudicator where appropriate.

As a sector, we are coming to terms with how to approach sexual harassment and violence from a position of believing and not re-traumatising victims, and we need to extend this to all hate incidents. Only when the Black student community has experience of being believed and complaints being treated seriously will relationships of trust begin to develop.

## 9 Accommodation providers should routinely collect, analyse and publish relevant data on the racial diversity of their residents and employees, as well as outcomes of reporting and investigation of complaints.

In order to make meaningful change, accommodation providers should collect data on the racial diversity of their residents and employees in a secure and compliant way, and analyse it to identify areas of weakness in their current policies and practices. This will help providers to assess, for example, whether their accommodation is attractive to Black/Black British students and whether satisfaction levels are equal. It can also be used to assess the uptake of individual services within the accommodation setting. In order to measure the robustness of policies and procedures and measure their effectiveness, records should be analysed and reviewed regularly.

Universities and accommodation providers should also measure how many reports of racism are made and the number of times the reports are upheld and end up leading to a positive outcome for the complainant. The data should ideally be published to ensure openness and transparency.

It is recommended that this should be done by all who are providing student accommodation, though it is more likely that this is already being done by university accommodation teams.

## 10 Accommodation providers should work to build a relationship of trust with Black/Black British students.

Finally, there needs to be a conscious effort to build meaningful relationships of trust with Black students. This is the responsibility of accommodation providers and HEIs who are responsible for the historic and ongoing behaviours that have destroyed trust. This involves demonstrating that we trust our Black students by listening to them, believing them and taking their concerns seriously through meaningful and sustainable action.



For further information on anything found within this report, please contact the xxx team by emailing: [xxx@unitestudents.com](mailto:xxx@unitestudents.com)