BME Student Voices Project
A report on the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students at The University of Kent

July 2016
Foreword

In 2012, Kent Union created its first Liberation Strategy, which set out Kent Union's organisational priorities regarding marginalised groups. Each group is led by officers responsible for representing groups of students who define within them, and by the Vice-President (Welfare). The Liberation strategy is a key strategic aim of Kent Union and therefore it is important to ensure each of these groups has a voice.

During 2015/16 we secured funding from the University to undertake a research project to understand our members’ views on Kent Union which has culminated in this report. This report will shape our work and help us further engage and develop the student experience of our BME members.

This student led two year project will look to embed initiatives that result from the recommendations of this research throughout the 2016-2017 academic year, in parallel with the Student Success (EDI) Projects within schools. It is Kent Unions wish that BME students at the University of Kent, are empowered and supported to achieve their full potential whilst studying and into their graduate lives and that all students experiences are enriched by one another’s cultures and histories, to create a world were all narratives are equal.

We’d like to thank all our members and participants who engaged in this project for their input, your contributions are truly invaluable.

Rory Murray President, Clara Lee Vice President Welfare, Hillary Juma, Ethnic Minorities officer
## Contents

1. Introduction.................................................................................................................................................. 3  
   1.1 Summary................................................................................................................................................ 3  
   1.2 Background......................................................................................................................................... 4  
   1.3 Methodology........................................................................................................................................ 7  

2. Research.......................................................................................................................................................... 9  
   2.1 Interview Findings................................................................................................................................. 9  
   2.2 Conclusion.......................................................................................................................................... 24  

3. Recommendations.......................................................................................................................................... 26  

4. Appendices.................................................................................................................................................... 28  

5. References..................................................................................................................................................... 28  

6. Glossary.......................................................................................................................................................... 35
1. Introduction

1.1 Summary

The research aims to explore the link between social experiences and academic performance of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students and furthermore to identify barriers which prevent their engagement in Kent Union activities. This was explored through the use of qualitative interviews and focus groups. Research by the National Union of Students (NUS), found that BME students are more likely to feel isolated at university which affects satisfaction and attainment. The project believes it is important that students feel able to access and engage in social and extracurricular activities and therefore believes that Kent Union has a key role to play in increasing feelings of belonging for BME students at university whilst also helping to increase academic success and close the attainment gap.

Through interviews with students, the research explores the expectations, motivations and experiences of BME students and their engagement with Kent Union and their university experience more generally, the work highlights some of the reasons that students may feel excluded socially and also explores links between social engagement and academic performance.

Several themes were explored throughout the research and the data collected was analysed using a thematic framework approach. Underlying themes that arose included:

- motivations and barriers to engagement
- racial composition of friendship groups
- improvements to support and representation for BME students
- complaints and reporting of racism
- events
- advertisement
- Afro-Carribean Society (ACS)
- racism
- aspirations
- learning and learning differences
- BME students in positions of leadership within Kent Union

It is clear from the results of the research that many improvements could be made to enhance the student experience for BME students here at Kent, recommendations range from more operational changes within Kent Union such as reviewing the messaging around its specific support services offered for students to ensure hard to reach groups are familiar with them to more long term changes within both the Union and university including Kent Union working in conjunction with the University to ensure that academic based societies are established within each school and are supported to facilitate opportunities for social and academic growth.

The research highlights the complex nature of both barriers to social engagement of BME students within Kent Union activities and the many reasons which may account for the attainment gap. It is important to note that 45% of participants were Black African, and the Black Minority Ethnic

\(^1\)Rupra-Daine and Neave, 2011, p5
(BME) student population at Kent is a highly heterogeneous group with different needs, however our research has uncovered common concerns amongst the BME students that took part.

The research confirms a lack of understanding from participants regarding the function of Kent Union and the services it offers, so it is imperative that future work looks to both facilitate meaningful engagement of BME students whilst also building their trust with opportunities for targeted advice, support and guidance on the different services offered.

With regard to students’ university experience more generally, the need for the Union and the University to work in partnership to address the deep rooted social justice issues that manifest themselves throughout the whole of the educational system is clear. Students have highlighted the importance of taking part in a university experience which reflects diverse thinking and perceptions both inside and outside of the classroom, this will require an institutional approach from both the top down and bottom up, in partnership with staff and students in order to ensure that students’ feel fully engaged and empowered within their educational experience.

1.2 Background

Within Higher Education (HE), it has been found that there is an attainment gap between black students and their white counterparts, with a larger proportion of white students achieving a first-class degree than black students. According to the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), in 2012/13, 57.1% of UK-domiciled BME students received a top degree, compared with 73.2% of White British students – a gap of 16.1%. NUS suggest that this is an issue because the attainment gap is a statistical indicator of inequality, therefore institutional wide measures must be put in place to tackle it.

The need for institutional measures has been supported by a growing number of research projects looking into Black and Minority Ethnic student attainment in Higher Education. Since the implementation of £9,000 tuition fees, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) has outlined that Higher Education institutions must outline how they will improve access to a diverse body of students and encourage student success. At the University of Kent, the Student Success (Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity) Project focuses on understanding the issues which affect student success and the development of measures to be put in place to ensure all Kent students fulfil their academic potential.

Research into the attainment gap at Kent found that a higher proportion of BME students are confident of achieving a 1st class degree than white students, however their performance does not align with this. Out of these students, 60.9% of BME students are achieving a 2:1 or above, compared with 74.5% of white students and the Student Success project is working to identify the root causes and address them successfully.

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2 (Berry and Loke, 2008)
3 (NUS Connect, 2016)
4 (OFFA, 2016)
5 (University of Kent, 2016)
6 (Mitton & Hensby, 2015)
To expand on this recent research Kent Union will also explore barriers to social engagement and the attainment gap, with a focus on the links between social success and academic success. Kent Union wishes to see the attainment gap closed for the benefit of its members and believes that every student should be supported and enabled to achieve their full potential regardless of race. Through understanding the BME student experience at Kent, barriers to social engagement and participation within Kent Union activities, the project aims to make recommendations and launch initiatives to address previous research findings highlighted above. Research shows that BME students are more likely to feel isolated at university which affects satisfaction and attainment\(^7\) therefore Kent Union believes that this project has the potential to improve the overall BME student experience and contribute towards the institution wide goal of reducing the attainment gap.

The annual HEPI-HEA (Higher Education Policy Institute – Higher Education Academy) Student Academic Experience Survey seeks to provide a valuable insight into the nature of how undergraduates rate their time in Higher Education and their attitudes towards relevant policy issues which have impacted upon them.\(^8\) This research has shown that BME students are consistently the least likely to be satisfied with teaching quality and meeting expectations, aspects of the student experience that have the greatest impact on satisfaction.\(^9\) The most cited reason for expectations not being met by all students was the lack of effort they had personally put in, with a higher proportion of BME students in particular citing this reason, this may show how students recognise the importance of playing a role in a fully rounded university experience.\(^10\)

These findings are also said to reflect the findings of additional studies into student engagement that outline the importance of universities communicating the benefits of a more involved and rewarding experience to its students, the project believes that engagement with Kent Union can contribute to such an experience.

The provision of opportunities for students to engage with both peers and staff can be an important aspect of feeling supported and engaged in studies and social experiences. Therefore it is important to explore social experience to find out the extent to which students feel supported currently and how support provision can be increased. This need for increased levels of support is also alluded to in a report carried out by the Higher Education Academy, which found that BME students believe there is a failure by institutions to integrate BME students successfully.\(^11\) It is important for students to feel integrated because all aspects of academic experience can influence academic success. An important point to consider is that BME is an umbrella term which incorporates a range of communities. This research is significant toward these communities, however they will all have socio-economic, cultural and personal differences which skew the outcome of student experience.\(^12\)

The NUS report titled ‘Race for Equality’\(^13\), explored the experiences of BME students through the use of quantitative surveys and focus groups. This report provided an account of the experiences

\(^7\) (Rupra-Daine and Neave, 2011, p5)
\(^8\) (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2016)
\(^9\) ibid
\(^10\) ibid
\(^11\) (Stevenson, 2012, p16)
\(^12\) (Elevation Networks Trust, 2012)
\(^13\) (Rupra-Daine and Neave, 2011, p3)
of black students and found that there is no simple explanation for the attainment and satisfaction gap of BME students. Furthermore, Elevation Networks\textsuperscript{14}, also used quantitative methods to research into the experience of BME students in Higher Education. They found that experiences differ significantly between students from different ethnic backgrounds, and propose that the government should develop a strategy to tackle these inequalities.\textsuperscript{15} These studies have highlighted that the student experience of BME students differs significantly to that of their white counterparts, however although complexities exist when looking to combat these inequalities amongst BME students as one demographic, it is important and necessary to carry out research with a view to make and implement recommendations within institutions and their unions.

The NUS recommendations aim to address the challenges and concerns BME students face, in order to reduce the attainment gap. The recommendations include increasing awareness of the issues of the attainment gap through initiatives such as staff training, challenging racism and discrimination, embedding equality throughout the curriculum and encouraging student involvement in tackling the attainment gap, which Students’ Unions have been encouraged to follow.\textsuperscript{16} The above research projects lack qualitative data and research which provides a first-hand account of the experiences of BME students. Therefore it is important to fill this gap, in order to capture the vital views and rhetoric of students. ECU and Higher Education Academy have described the value of qualitative data as “enabling depictions of the circumstances students face, and the range of explanations, interpretations, arguments and rhetorical strategies they employ to support their views of such circumstances.”\textsuperscript{17} therefore the BME Student Voices Project research will take a qualitative approach.

Racism is an important theme that will be explored within this research as it has the potential to have an adverse effect on students’ learning and overall experience. Institutional racism can be considered “the failure to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.”\textsuperscript{18} Within Higher Education Institutions, institutionalised racism may manifest itself in biased marking, the content of the curriculum and the ways in which the curriculum is taught, and negative stereotypes toward BME students.

NUS have suggested that these issues may be addressed through educating students starting from the curriculum. ‘Why is My Curriculum White?’\textsuperscript{19} is a campaign launched at University College London (UCL) to uncover and challenge the lack of diversity found on reading lists and course content.\textsuperscript{20} It champions the viewpoint that education must be holistic, allowing for a rounded education and allowing BME students to feel represented and their history and cultures included within the curriculum. The campaign and its supporters call for changes in the current education system, that has been largely shaped by colonialism and that places white, Eurocentric thinkers and writers above others. It has highlighted that there are vast amounts of black literature missing

\textsuperscript{14} (Elevation Networks Trust, 2012)
\textsuperscript{15} ibid
\textsuperscript{16} (Rupra-Daine and Neave, 2011)
\textsuperscript{17} (Stevenson, 2012, p10)
\textsuperscript{18} (Guardian, 1999)
\textsuperscript{19} (UCL, 2014)
from the curriculum. The Times reported a case in 2014, where Dr Coleman of UCL proposed a course on ‘critical white studies’, which was rejected. The aim of the course was to engage students and promote debate around prominent racial issues.\textsuperscript{21} Incidents such as these are striking and it is perhaps unsurprising that finding almost half of BME students surveyed felt that the curriculum on their course does not reflect issues of diversity, equality and discrimination.\textsuperscript{22} In order for students to feel engaged in their learning, they should be taught a range of different topics from different scopes.

University campuses both in the UK and further afield lack black academics, currently there are just 85 black professors in the UK\textsuperscript{23}. Kent Union’s staff profile, reflects the academic outlook and consists of a mainly white demographic and furthermore the Union has identified that White students are slightly over-represented in the \underline{Union Participation} population and Black/ Black British African students are under-represented, with 6% participating in Union life, 3% less than the 9% total population of University of Kent students.\textsuperscript{24} The project will look to ascertain whether students feel that a lack of diversity within both staff and leaders of the University and the union impacts their academic performance, their career aspirations, and also the likelihood of the take up of postgraduate study and/or a career in academia and/or positions of leadership within the Union whilst studying.

Kent Union’s ‘A Better Future’ is the strategic plan for the period 2014-2017\textsuperscript{25}. It outlines the major goals and impact that the organisation strives to achieve. Importantly the first theme is to empower students to have a voice. This goal is to be achieved by running effective and highly visible campaigns, which will focus on empowering those marginalised groups. The BME Student Voices Project hopes that through conducting this research BME students voices will be heard, recommendations can be made and initiatives implemented that will improve the student experience; namely in identifying barriers to engagement and ways to overcome these, providing an environment that fosters a sense of belonging which in turn will contribute towards decreasing the attainment gap at the University of Kent.

**Methodology**

The main aims of the BME Student Voices research project can be summarised as follows:

- To explore the links between social experiences and academic performance of UK domiciled BME students.
- To identify the barriers which may prevent BME students from engaging in the extra-curricular activities Kent Union offers and make recommendations which will tackle the BME participation gap and in turn make positive steps to address the attainment gap at Kent.

\textsuperscript{21} (Times Higher Education, 2015)
\textsuperscript{22} (Stevenson, 2012)
\textsuperscript{23} (Times Higher Education, 2014)
\textsuperscript{24} (Kent Union, 2016)
\textsuperscript{25} (Kent Union, 2014)
To explore and conduct an audit of Kent Union and University of Kent policies and procedures relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination from BME students’ perspective and to ascertain the use and delivery of these policies within Kent Union, in schools and across the institution. (This particular aim is addressed in the BME Student Voices Policies and Procedures Audit, which compliments this research project).

Research began in March 2016 and was carried out over a 5 week period, finishing in May 2016, having been approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The research consisted of interviews with UK domiciled, Kent Students who self-defined as BME. Participants filled out a ‘Participant Profile’ which allowed data regarding the participant’s course, level of study, ethnicity and levels of engagement within Kent Union to be captured (See appendix 1). Students were recruited through the advertisement of the project via social media, the Kent Union website and through promotion within schools. 30 students were interviewed and 11 students took part in the focus group discussions.

The interviews were based on semi-structured questions to allow for the ease of the participant and for conversation to flow. Questions were developed through consideration of the findings from the review of relevant literature, with a focus on the NUS ‘Race for Equality’ research.

The interview questions had a wide scope and included the following topics:

- Extra-curricular activity involvement
- Social experiences
- Events
- Support
- Discrimination policies
- Experiences of racism
- Learning

The responses from the interviews were used to design the questions for the focus groups. The focus group questions were based on:

- BME students in positions of leadership
- Students’ perceptions of the effect of social engagement on the attainment gap

The full set of questions can be found in appendix 2.

The interviews were analysed using a ‘thematic framework’ analysis technique. This allowed for trends and links in the large data set to be seen through the different key themes. The findings in the research were based on a cross analysis of the data drawing patterns from responses. This method was chosen as it allowed for handling the vast amount of data. It was considered important to use the qualitative research method because previous research in this area has focused on quantitative data.

The focus group analysis has been carried out in a similar way to that of the individual interviews; using the same themes to carry out a thematic analysis.
The report aims to explain the findings from the research and provide a discussion based on the background literature. From the conclusion, it then aims to provide recommendations based on students responses.

2. Research

2.1 Interview Findings

The interviews provided vast amounts of dialogue concerning the experiences of BME students studying at Kent, the results have been cross analysed and key dimensions and themes have been drawn out. Resulting themes include: motivations and barriers to engagement, racial composition of friendship groups, improvements to support and representation for BME students, complaints and reporting of racism, events, advertisement, Afro-Carribean Society (ACS), racism, aspirations, learning and learning differences and BME students in positions of leadership within Kent Union. Each dimension will be discussed in detail with recommendations listed at the end of each section and at the end of the report as a complete list.

Motivations and Barriers to Engagement

Participants that did engage with Kent Union activities cited a main motivator was to meet new people. Students often commented that they wanted to make new friendships and connections and encounter new ideas and cultures therefore joining student groups was a way to do so. The desire to further academic knowledge and networks came across in several interviews as important for participants who were involved in academic societies. Involvement would frequently follow encouragement from friends who were involved in societies, and participants often felt that if their peers were engaged in an activity it would encourage them to participate also. Shared interests with other students was another reason for many to get involved with student groups.

It was repeatedly suggested in the interviews that a key motivation for joining a student group was the interest in experiencing something new. For example some students felt that university may be their only chance to try a new sport, to be pushed out of their comfort zone and as one participant commented “to participate in a sport predominantly not played by black people or BME people”. A wider love for sport itself and the feeling of wanting to be part of a sports team also played a factor in students participating in sport.

One participant that had come from a secondary school with a mainly white demographic mentioned the motivation for engagement to be to specifically to meet students of the same ethnicity, which demonstrates the personal nature of students’ motivations for joining clubs and societies.

Several participants reported that a key barrier to initial engagement was the noticeable lack of diversity of membership and leadership within clubs and societies. Many added that they would feel more comfortable if there were more BME students involved, and it may also attract others to join, because they would feel as though there is a place for them within student groups.

“If societies are full of white guys people would be put off by it. I’m the only black guy and you look for someone that looks like you”.

(Final Year, Sports Club member)
"It is down to me, obviously, to join a sport but I would have been more open to joining a sport if it felt like I wasn't going to be - I'm not going to say the only black girl - but, in a minority."
(Second year, non-engaged student)

A lack of diversity in terms of the content and steer of activities was referenced by one participant, who felt as if they weren't able to join a performance society specifically because of a focus on specific demographic.

"It’s not racism if you don’t get chosen to be in plays it’s just because it’s about what you’re looking for. If you’re doing a play about white, middle class, English people, I’m not saying that I can’t be in it, but I’m saying that someone who is white and who is middle class is more likely to get the role, because you’re always going to fit better to that character. (....) Why would I attend a society where I’m going to continue to be back stage when I want to be on stage?"
(Second year, society member)

Barriers to long lasting engagement within student groups, included frictions between members and the perception of cliques existing within leadership of societies and sports club, with several participants recounting examples of favouritism within teams that was considered to be detrimental to the development of the teams and their members. A large proportion of students commented that they felt excluded and as though they didn’t fit into student groups. Clubs and societies were described as not being ‘cohesive’ and some socials weren’t considered to be ‘welcoming’ leaving students to feel isolated and as though they should no longer participate.

"I don’t feel like I couldn’t join a society because I’m not white, but I also feel like there’s quite an insidious white culture within those societies where it’s mostly run by white people and that’s not as inclusive as it needs to be."
(Final year, sports club member)

Social meetings and nights out were often considered to revolve around the consumption of alcohol which is a barrier highlighted by many participants who do not drink alcohol and therefore find it difficult to get involved.

"The reason I’ve hated it here so much, is that I don’t want to change who I am just to fit in, so first year was awful for me as I felt I had to drink and go out a lot and do all these things that are not my character in order to fit in some sort of circle. I don’t want to change who I am”.
(Final year, previously engaged student)

Another barrier to engagement that was repeatedly raised by participants was the lack of student groups and activities that focus on improving the academic experience. A cause of participants dropping out of their respective societies was that the activities hadn’t met their initial expectations in terms of the types of interaction and events on offer. Students repeatedly mentioned that they were looking for opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities that involved new and interesting ideas, and supported academic development which would in turn encourage them on their course.

"I was looking for more activities related to restaurants or visiting museums, anything that would bring people together in an intellectual sense, going to the
Time management was another barrier (both perceived and experienced) to many participants becoming or staying involved in student groups. Students often reported that they found it very difficult to manage both their workload and extra-curricular activities.

“No matter what activities are available, or whether my social skills are developing or not, the only thing that matters to me is that I’m doing academically well, and that’s all I really care about if I’m being totally honest with you.”

(Second year, non-engaged student)

Personal barriers made it difficult for some students to get involved with extracurricular activities. Whilst not necessarily a race specific barrier, issues such as being shy, finding difficulty in making friends, being uncomfortable and feeling intimidated all contribute to impeding their experience.

**Recommendations**

1. Kent Union should develop an organisation wide approach to diversifying its active membership and removing the barriers that currently may prevent BME students from engaging with its activities. This may include actively encouraging student groups to recruit a diverse body of members, increasing diversity of student committees and actively supporting BME students to get involved in the social activities that Kent Union offer.

2. Kent Union should embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) throughout all of its training and offer an element of conflict resolution training for groups as part of its student leader training.

3. Kent Union should encourage student groups to include events and activities that don’t focus on alcohol, through training and ongoing support.

**Racial Composition of Social Groups and Cultural Understanding**

When asked about the racial composition of friendship groups, participants often explained that their friendship groups were a mixture of races, however several participants explained that in addition to their mixed friendship circles, they had separate friendship groups specifically of students from a similar BME background. Often participants suggested that they were able to identify more with a similar race because of an automatic cultural understanding and similar interests.

“All the friends I have that are a different race from me, I think we are close, but it kind of has a ceiling, because of cultural differences.”

(Second year, sports club member)

Some participants recalled feeling isolated due to a lack of understanding of experiences of behaviour from their peers which they felt may be due to cultural differences. In addition some participants felt that they were drawn to people of a similar race to them to avoid standing out.
It was frequently noted that often there were very low numbers of BME students involved in some student groups, and this often resulted in feeling part of a smaller minority than the wider student population. Participants suggested that Kent Union could do more to encourage BME students to get involved with a range of groups which would improve diversity. Participants who engaged in cultural societies cited that conversely being a member of the society provided them with a sense of belonging which they may not have in their academic cohort.

"For me, it [student groups] gives me a sense of belonging, because no matter how integrated I am, I could go to a law seminar and it's all white people, and the reality is, once we leave that seminar and we hang out and we're talking, it's clear that I'm not like you. We're different."
(Third year, society member)

Awareness of being a minority within groups didn’t necessarily make students feel uncomfortable, but they were aware of their differences, and would feel more comfortable if there were more BME students involved. Interestingly some participants hadn't ever considered the racial composition of their society until they were asked, and other students suggested that their societies were mixed ethnicities. Students sometimes felt isolated, not necessarily due to their race, however felt that actively encouraging integration and a diverse body of members would allow students to find a range of different types of people within extra-curricular activities, and minimise feelings of being an outsider.

"You mostly tend to stay with the people you know when you’re at events. So there should be a way to integrate."
(First year, sports club member)

Participants felt that Kent Union was very active in supporting and championing and promoting different cultures to the student body, and that it had a key role to play in increasing understanding between cultures, creating more cohesion around campus and allowing students to see things from new perspectives.

**Recommendations:**

4. Kent Union should provide greater opportunities for cross student group working with increased reward and recognition, to increase cultural understanding amongst the student body.

**Improvements to Support and Representation for BME Students**

When participants were asked about the level of support received from Kent Union, some suggested that Kent Union was very supportive, listing positive examples of support they had received, whilst others believed that the support on offer was very limited. Several students were unsure of the support and services that Kent Union offers to students, whilst others recognised that they had not been proactive in seeking support from Kent Union during their time as a student. There also seemed to be some confusion from several participants as to the independent nature of the Union to the University. One participant considered university to be "an independent place, where you don't ask for support."
It is worth noting that none of the specific support services Kent Union offers to students (the Advice Centre, Jobshop, Homestamp or the Buddy Scheme) were mentioned explicitly in the interviews. The Ethnic Minorities Part Time Officer was referenced in only a few interviews.

When asked how they might like to see Kent Union make improvements to the support available for BME students, responses varied from logistical support focussed on student groups, recognition for societies, greater advertising of events and services, motivational events for BME students to encourage their academic achievements and the offering of products that appeal to Black students in Essentials.

Improvements to support for student groups suggested by participants included:

- Holding committees of sports clubs and societies accountable to Kent Union values by taking a closer look at the way they are run
- Having regular meetings with the committees of sports and societies, with opportunity for continuous interaction and dialogue
- More recognition of achievements of smaller societies, and more support to help to expand them
- For societies and student groups to have greater help and support from Kent Union to advertise events through their channels and networks, improving the promotion of all societies, to ensure that events reach a diverse body of students from different backgrounds, as well as tailoring emails to send to specific groups
- Encouragement from Kent Union for societies to have a broad set of members, making sure groups are enriched and diverse
- Kent Union helping to create links between societies to enrich them
- Encouragement from Kent Union for more BME students to get onto the committees of clubs & societies

Participants also made several other suggestions which although not directly linked to improving support ‘services’ (these points refer more to representation both within the student body and the Kent Union workforce) are important to note as these suggestions may contribute to increasing the feeling of belonging for students and the levels of support they perceived to be receiving from Kent Union.

- Hire more BME staff into full time positions
- Seeing BME students represented in positions of leadership
- Have a representative to ensure that campaigns are being carried out, and that societies are accommodating a range of students, particularly ensuring they are providing for BME students
- The BME officer could be better promoted, and have an office hour so that students can approach them personally with queries
- Campaigns about respecting differences, encouraging cultural understanding

Many students felt that there was a lack of representation within Kent Union, because the staff and student leaders do not reflect the diversity of the student body at the University of Kent. Students suggested that the Union should actively encourage BME student to run for and take up these positions of leadership and did not feel that this happens currently.

**Recommendations**

5. Kent Union should review the messaging around its specific support services offered for students to ensure it is getting through to hard to reach groups.
6. Kent Union should evaluate and streamline society and student group support to ensure that all groups are receiving a minimum level and that students understand what this entails.

7. Kent Union should work to raise the profile of all Part Time Officers on campus.

8. Kent Union should put more resource behind campaigns focusing on cultural understanding giving BME students the opportunity to lead on these.

9. Kent Union should actively encourage BME students into positions of leadership and student staff roles and take positive steps to increase diversity in these positions and within career staff roles.

_African Caribbean Society (ACS)_

The ACS was repeatedly referenced during interviews. Students believed that this society was a vital part of the Black students’ experience. The dialogue surrounding the society was particularly interesting because of its large network and the potential impact it has on a large proportion of BME students.

Black students felt the ACS was important because of the network it has with Black African and Black Caribbean students, however the importance of the society being able to extend and diversify its membership was stressed upon by several participants. Students’ believed that the ACS should be opened to all students regardless of race, and should receive support from Kent Union to encourage a mixture of ethnicities to join.

Participants (both members of ACS and non-members alike) repeatedly suggested that the ACS does not have enough support from Kent Union. A damaged relationship was perceived between the two and many of the participants would like to strengthen and improve this moving forward. Increased support for the society was seen as vital in order to strengthen the relationship. Participants felt that Kent Union is looking for ways to increase support for BME students and the ACS also has a vision to do this, therefore by working together both parties have the potential to increase support and provision for BME students.

"The ACS cannot support the entire black community alone."

(Third year, society committee member)

**Recommendations:**

10. Kent Union should work with ACS to increase communication and improve the working relationship over the course of the next academic year.

_BME Students in Positions of Leadership within Kent Union_

In focus groups the themes of BME students within leadership (and potential barriers) were discussed. Participants believed that it is important for students to have role models within positions of leadership. The participants were particularly influenced by their peers, and seeing people from a similar background in positions of leadership. Participants noted that this encouraged them to also stand for leadership positions, and feel represented within the Union.

"If I run in the elections, will my voice be heard?"

(Second year, society member)
Participants highlighted a lack of BME students at Kent Union events run by lead volunteers e.g. the Sports and Societies Fair and Welcome Weekend.

This was further expanded upon when participants recalled last year’s Sabbatical Officer elections, the impact of seeing another BME student running in the pool of candidates could be seen in that students noted that it made them more determined to take up leadership positions themselves and consider running in future.

“I definitely think there should be a lot more minority students in leadership roles, cos it made me feel a bit better, a bit more determined.”
(First year, unengaged student)

“If we see more diversity within Kent Union itself, it will make us feel like we want to get involved, seeing someone (…..) like yourself campaigning, it’s motivating…”
(First year, unengaged student)

As one student pointed out there is a cycle that needs to be broken, currently the lack of diversity may be viewed as a barrier by some BME students for taking positions of leadership, however engagement needs to happen for this barrier to be removed.

“It’s a cycle, if you’re not seeing enough Ethnic Minorities, you’re not gonna to stand, but if you don’t stand there’s not gonna be any Ethnic Minorities. So it’s a cycle that keeps going on and on because nobody wants to put themselves forward.”
(First year, society member)

Some participants alluded to feelings that they didn’t feel good enough against their white peers and that there was a lack of self-confidence, whilst other barriers were considered more personal, with one student adding that they faced barriers in seeking out opportunities or seizing them when they are there for the taking.

The theme of institutionalised racism as a barrier arose, as well as racism within wider society. It was highlighted by some participants that BME people are not represented politically within society, which also reflects into university and union life. Students who feel that they do not have a political voice outside of university, may feel that they also do not have a political voice within university and therefore may not get involved or stand in elections.

There was a mixed reaction to the suggestion of positive discrimination. Some thought that there should be a quota in place for BME students within positions of leadership within Kent Union because the current representation amongst student leaders is not representative of the wider student body. On the other hand, some students thought there could be a negative response to this as these positions may be viewed as tokenistic by both White and BME students resulting in tensions and BME students may question their worth in these roles.

It was also very clear from the discussion that the participants were aware of the low level of BME staff and leaders within Kent Union, which may be viewed as a barrier to engaging BME students within leadership positions.
There was a resounding feeling from participants that students were unaware of the role of the Part-Time Officers. Participants believed that these officers must be supported to be more active on campus to raise their profile and increase overall impact.

**Recommendations:**

*See 7 and 9.*

**Complaints and Reporting of Racism**

As well as being asked about support received from Kent Union, participants were also asked about experiences of racism, whether these incidents were reported and/or complaints made and how they were handled.

Most participants had not experienced incidents of racism directly but a large proportion of students were worried that if they had and tried to report it their complaint/report may not be dealt with in the correct way or the complexity of the issue would not be understood even if there is an existing policy or procedure to deal with incidents of this nature. Several students had approached Kent Union with complaints after incidents within student groups (not relating to race) and felt that the issues had not been handled correctly, or that they were listened to but nothing was done to solve the issue. This seemed to lead to a lack of trust in Kent Union dealing with issues relating to racism by these participants. Nearly all participants confirmed that they would still report their complaint or reporting of an incident, in order to make the issue known to Kent Union, to flag up the problem, or simply because they had no one else to tell their issue to.

“I feel like they’d know it was an issue which needs to be addressed, but say someone did something to me because of my ethnicity, I might tell KU and they might understand it’s bad, and have a word with them, but I don’t know if they’d understand how it’s actually affected me deep down.”

*(First year, society member)*

The recent incident at Warwick University where racist remarks were written on a bunch of bananas in a flat in student accommodation, was referenced by several students, who acknowledged the importance for organisations to show that they are serious about handling complaints and the reporting of racist incidents by students in a timely and proper manner.

“Kent need to have a strategy in place in case something happens. It’s key. If something flags up tomorrow, are you guys ready to deal with it? Who’s the person appointed to addressing this? Who’s the person that’s going to liaise with those involved? How is it going to be handled?”

*(Second year, society member)*

Some participants felt that they would not make a complaint or report a racist incident because they were afraid a fuss would be made, that there would be repercussions on them academically or socially, or because they find it easier to walk away from the problem.

**Recommendations:**

11. Kent Union should ensure that processes surrounding reporting of incidents of discrimination within student groups is clearly communicated during committee training and available to all students through the volunteer resources pages.
12. Kent Union should ensure that all staff are aware of the processes for reporting incidents of discrimination and student facing staff are confident in supporting a student reporting such incidents.

Events

Most participants believed the events which Kent Union currently offer could be hugely improved in order to accommodate BME students.

The celebration of Black History Month was seen to be too small with not enough done by Kent Union or the University to make all students aware of it. It was felt that Black History Month celebrations have not previously been significant on campus and there was a lack of awareness of any events which had been carried out in the past.

Students felt that often Black History Month concentrated on American culture, and there is often a focus on the slave trade. Participants commented that they wanted to see British artists celebrated, focusing on British achievements, and looking at pre and post slavery history.

“With Black History Month they put on small events, which is good, but I just think, that’s nice but what else? (...)”

(Third year, previously engaged student)

“I think sometimes Black History Month can focus on the negatives. We need a reminder of the achievements, not just the suffering, because we are more than that.”

(Final year, society member)

All Black participants suggested that they think Black History Month is significant, however they did not necessarily participate in celebrating it. This is because there were no events on offer to allow them to do so, but also, several participants explained that they felt that the celebration of Black history should not be limited to one month. Black students wanted there to be a consistent awareness of their culture and history, not just during the month of celebration.

“...And BHM is just one month of the year. It’s good to celebrate the history, but for black people, Black History Month is your whole life.”

(Third year, society member)

“If Kent Union put on events (during BHM) it would send the message that you are not forgotten”

(First year, society member)

“If there’s one month for black history, who do the other eleven belong to?”

(Third year, society member)

It is important to note that some groups do not feel catered for in Kent Union events more generally. Some Caribbean students felt that Black African culture was celebrated much more than Black Caribbean. Asian students also mentioned that they would like to see celebrations for events such as Diwali and a range of Asian culture. For Chinese students Chinese New Year is extremely
significant and therefore celebrating this would send positive messages to these students that their cultures are equally as important to celebrate and would provide a platform for all students to be educated about other cultures.

The Venue previously ran ‘urban’ nights which had a high number of Black students in attendance. Black participants noted that these events often have negative stereotypes, and felt that they were often associated with rowdy behaviour. Black participants felt that any event which attracts lots of Black people is automatically viewed to be a problem and did not feel that these nights were any more uncontrollable or unmanageable than a regular Venue event. They thought that these nights were well planned, and felt as if the remaining Venue nights on offer to them were not as engaging or enjoyable.

Many of the participants highlighted that Venue nights such as Soap and Vensday, and events such as Keynestock and the Summer Ball cater to just one audience and do not cater to a diverse range of students or genres of music, there were several requests for line ups to include more varied artists and music. Cultural themed Venue nights which integrate all races (suggestions were Reggae, Indian, Bhangra and K-pop) were suggested along with DJ competitions, events that make use of venues other than Venue e.g. B-Bar and Woody’s.

“If you’re in a position of privilege, you don’t understand what it’s like not to be in a position of privilege. If you’re in a predominately white area, you’re not going to think ‘how can I accommodate for ethnic minorities or marginalised groups?’”

(Second year, society member)

There was a suggestion that Black culture should be ingrained into university life and events and not just found within societies. Furthermore it was suggested that events should be run which dispel stereotypes of other cultures.

There were also many suggestions of events that were based around music or alcohol, suggestions included;

- Events targeted specifically for BME students to improve their employability
- Motivational and inspirational talks
- Open talks, allowing more mediums for discussion
- Guest speakers, including Black British speakers
- Events to dispel stereotypes and myths, and to open the eyes of fellow students
- Dance classes
- Outdoor film screenings
- Sports events, open to people of all abilities
- Meet ups at cafes and restaurants
- Food stalls on the plaza
- Making use of venues such as B-bar, Venue and Woody’s
- Cultural shows allowing students to wear traditional dress and try them on
- Events that include the local community
- Dragon dance for Chinese New Year
- Kent Extra sessions on Black history before slavery
- Showcase of BME talent of students at the University, and history of BME students from the University

Recommendations:
13. Kent Union should commit to resourcing more cultural events in which students can showcase their heritage and culture.

14. Kent Union should mark significant dates in the yearly calendar e.g. celebration, memorials and religious holidays and support students to recognise these.

15. Kent Union should work with the University to organise motivational and inspirational talks from BME people as well as events focussed on improving employability.

Advertisement
Advertisement and the perceived lack of it by participants was a topic which was recurring throughout many of the interviews. Participants felt that advertisement was very important as it is the way that students get to know what is going on around campus. Participants were often not aware of the events that are being run either by Kent Union or societies. Several participants highlighted their desire for Kent Union to help promote society organised events across the student body to ensure that a diverse body of students are aware of the events that are on offer and felt that this way key in diversifying the membership of societies, especially cultural ones.

Students suggested that email, social media, and the Kent Union website provided the most important platforms for advertisement, however many did not feel like Kent Unions presence was large enough on these mediums. One participant suggested that the University of Kent’s ‘Student Guide’ page, should be used to advertise a calendar of all events available that week, to make all student events available to view in one place.

Recommendations:

16. All Kent Union events on offer need to be put in one place, to increase accessibility, visibility and opportunities for students to engage.

17. Kent Union should work with the University Student Communications Department to promote student led events.

18. Student groups should be encouraged to advertise their events through Kent Union channels.

Racism
When participants were asked if they had encountered racism either on or off campus, more often than not they explained that they could not think of any examples when they had directly experienced any incidents of racism. They did however, suggest that they had encountered racism in more subtle forms. This included microaggressions. Participants believed that ignorance formed a large part of any racism experienced and that combined with a lack of understanding may lead to offensive comments, due to peers not realising that they are being offensive to others.

“If you speak to people on my course, I think you will find those typical ignorant people. (...) There’s also people that sometimes make comments and you think, that’s actually really offensive, you can’t say that.”

(Second year, society committee member)

Further to this, participants recalled that they often experienced racism on social media, particularly ‘Yik Yak’. They explained that they felt this showed that racism was present on
campus, however often people hide behind anonymous means to make their opinions known. It was suggested that racism can only be identified if a person explicitly expresses it. Several participants believed that racism was indirect or sometimes inferred and that racism is not always expressed outwardly as people tend to keep their opinions to themselves.

"Racism does exist in university settings because all institutions are microcosms of wider society, and if society is racist then what is stopping university from being racist?"

(Third year, society committee member)

There were a few examples of racist incidents which were encountered, although most participants noted that they had not experienced racism on campus. The highlighted incidents included racist comments, directed either directly at participants, or witnessed by participants, being treated differently in clubs due to race and receiving negative and disapproving looks from others. Participants found that they were more likely to encounter racism from people within the local community than their peers. They gave examples of incidents in town, where cab drivers would not pick up a group of black male students, locals making a decision whether to sit next to someone on the bus and the recent situation of Britain First coming to the University campus was also referenced. These incidents make students feel aware that racism exists within society, and particularly Canterbury’s wider community.

On campus, participants recalled experiences including Campus Watch approaching a group of black students hanging out in public to find out what they were doing. They have recalled seminar leaders who confuse names of black students in the class, or just don’t know their name at all.

The racist incident at Warwick University which occurred earlier in the year was repeatedly referenced and participants explained that incidents such as this show that racism is alive on university campuses. Furthermore, they thought that the situation had been handled badly and highlighted the need for a clear and straightforward process to be followed by institutions following such incidents as the recent example shows that some institutions do not know how to handle incidents of racism.

Students felt that discussions about race and racism may be avoided due to levels of nervousness and fear around the sensitive topic. This seemed to be often taken into account when students approach situations of ignorance or misunderstanding. When students were asked what they would do if they experienced racism, most students said they would either brush off the incident and try and forget about it, or, if they did decide to address it, they would do it in a way where the offender understands the significance of his actions, can be educated and feels comfortable.

It was also suggested that racism had become embedded into the education system, institutionalising it, which needs to be addressed in order to make BME students feel welcome and represented on campus.

**Recommendations:**

19. Kent Union to work closely with local community groups to challenge racism both on and off campus.

**Learning and Learning Differences**

There are profound differences in experiences between BME and White students, especially within educational institutions, this highlighted by the attainment gap. Participants suggested that
there are several reasons which account for the differences between the experiences of White and BME experiences that may contribute to differences in learning.

Curriculum at the University is centered on Eurocentric ideals, with a lack of BME authors within literature. Students felt this had an impact on their studies because both BME and White students are missing out on a discourse.

“Our history is not put into the curriculum. Black feminists are the people that started the movement, but I didn’t know this until Women’s Conference, we started the whole movement but we are put on the side and people don’t know this kind of stuff. Every year I’ve learnt something new about Black history, which is great. As a Black person I’m still learning myself so how much more can the rest of the University learn about Black history?”
(Second year, engaged student)

“Why do I have to study a module called Black Literature before I see black content? Why is it not integrated within the curriculum?”
(Third year, committee member)

Institutionalised racism was a topic that was repeatedly brought up by participants, student believed that this existed in society and that if this was embedded within the institution it would impact studies negatively. Almost all students also suggested that racism would impact studies negatively, because being unhappy would have a negative impact on performance. Also participants suggested this would lead to students feeling that they do not belong, be demotivating and affect their state of mind making it difficult to concentrate on work. It was also suggested that incidents of racism may cause students to isolate themselves from their peers, causing cliques and segregation of students, further causing a lack of diversity and cultural understanding on campus.

“I am of the view that it’s something that should be continuous [Black History Month], I find that quite patronising... What you’re doing is reinforcing the idea that Black people are separate, whereas if we say we’ve moved on, we shouldn’t need to keep reminding everyone of the famous people that went before, it should be integrated in the educational system, in the universities right from primary school, the understanding of the contribution that Black people have made, in society and throughout history, it should be integrated naturally and the very fact that it’s not is a racist thing”
(Third year, society member)

Students felt that there were negative stereotypes toward them which meant they were restricted in their learning compared to white students, and that they had to make sure that they do not give a bad image. They wanted their lecturers to understand that the differences in difficulty for Black students. They also felt there was a bias in marking and sometimes felt censored or unable to write on topics they wanted to.

“You can’t tell me the difference between Black people’s experience is because their trousers are sagging or they didn’t work hard enough. No, there are barriers that are put in front of certain kinds of people, and I’m very aware of that. Just because you don’t see it, doesn’t mean it’s not there.”
(Third year, committee member)
There were several reasons suggested for the attainment gap in the interviews which included:

- Cultural differences
- Stereotypes
- Integration
- Contacts
- Pressure from parents
- Exam pressure
- Lack of sleep
- Entry qualifications
- Lack of skill compared to others
- Low engagement
- Lack of feedback
- Falling behind and finding it difficult to catch up

In the focus group students' opinions on the causes of the attainment gap were explored more thoroughly, it was clear that there was a mixture of opinion between the students and that participants believed there to be a combination of factors responsible. Firstly, there was a suggestion that the interplay of racial composition of friendship groups had some bearing and that by restricting friendship groups to similar races may not expose students to a range of different people and varied conversation topics and styles; in turn language skills may be prevented from progressing to a high level, because they would not have the opportunity to learn new words through conversations with peers. Participants believed that the practice of using varied and academic language is a very important influencer of the attainment gap, because it allows students to advance their language skills and helps them to avoid grammatical mistakes within work.

“When you hang out with people from your own country, there is a certain level of language that is maintained when speaking to each other. You may not be exposed to new words and new languages which could prevent you from getting a certain grade”.

(Final year, society member)

Participants also believed that staying limited to one race within their friendship groups restricts their learning, because they stay within their comfort zone and do not get exposed to new and different ideas. Participants noted that approaching others from seminar groups at times could be difficult for students as they were scared of how their peers may react to them.

“I can talk to people in my seminar group even if not same race as me, I might learn something from them, they might learn something from me, but I think people are scared”

(First year, society member)

Participants agreed that high levels of social engagement are important to the student experience, however, the balance between social engagement and studying was viewed as important, with some more social based activities event considered a hindrance.

Extracurricular activities which benefit academia (academic or political societies) were seen as an important way to discuss work with peers and achieve high grades. Nonetheless, students also thought that sports clubs and societies which do not focus on academia were also important, as they encourage members to be build a social network and membership to these groups are often
esteemed by employers. It is however important that there is a balance, because extracurricular activities can be time consuming and grades may suffer as a result of this.

The expectation gap between BME and white students, that is the expectation to achieve a 2:1 and above, was suggested to be caused by cultural differences. Students suggested that there may be extra pressure from parents from certain cultures which causes them to aim high, when it may not be a realistic expectation, resulting in overworking and failing to achieve the grades. They also felt that there were expectations to study particular ‘practical’ courses, such as Law, Accounting and Finance and Business, as opposed to other courses such as History, Sociology and other Humanities, which student may enjoy more or feel more passionate about.

‘I know some people who are in university and they are doing courses that their parents think is best for them and with that they don’t have the passion to get the best they could, like, even if it was sociology that they would be really good at, their parents say no you should study medicine.’
(First year, society member)

“I study history, it’s quite difficult, when people ask me ‘oh what do you study?’ and I say history, they say – ‘why do that, why not do law?’ it’s expected of a typical Black girl to do law or sociology or something like that.”
(First year, society member)

Further to this, it was suggested that the lack of BME academics is also a cause of family pressure to encourage students into other professions, because academia may be seen as a career path taken if you don’t succeed.

**Recommendations:**

20. The University should aim to diversify the content of its curriculum and make it more inclusive, starting with reviewing curriculums to ensure that a range of ideas and academic thought are represented.

21. Kent Union should work in conjunction with the University to ensure that academic based societies are established within each school and are supported to facilitate opportunities for social and academic growth. Extra focus should be given to smaller subjects to encourage students to join, and to ensure they have support available for running these societies.

**Aspirations**

Participants explained a variety of different reasons that they believe role models to be important. They thought it was important to encounter BME academics during their time at university as may encourage them to aspire to achieve the same and that seeing one’s-self reflected in higher levels of academia would result in students seeing themselves in similar positions. Participants did not believe that being BME was necessary to be considered a role model by BME students, however were more inspired by BME academics and professionals as they would be able to identify more with them.

“If you’ve been through the same experiences, you’re more likely to have a greater understanding and hopefully a greater impact on their development whether that be educationally, socially, or otherwise”
(Second year, society member)
“I sometimes feel race is important in someone being a role model because you need sometimes, to look up to someone. And if you feel like the people you’re looking up to wouldn’t really understand what you’ve gone through, you don’t feel a relationship with them”
(First year, engaged student)

“Things that I find to have an issue with, someone who isn’t BME might not think it is an issue, so it’s important I have someone to empathise with me”
(Second year, society member).

As highlighted in the research there is a lack of diversity within the workforce of higher education institutions, this lack of BME representation amongst staff resulted in some students feeling hindered due to their race and unsure that there was a place for BME figures within high positions inside academia. This lack of representation made some students more motivated to achieve and aspire to high level roles, to represent the BME community and show others that there was a place for them within these positions, but for others it was completely off putting.

“If I don’t see myself represented in professors and PHD students then I won’t feel inspired to do the same”.
(Third year, previously engaged)

“I would consider a career in academia, but I feel like I’d just do it so that there was more representation. It shouldn’t be that I have to learn about feminism solely from a white male. That just doesn’t make any sense to me”
(Third year, sports club member)

Recommendations:

22. The University should encourage BME students to progress throughout academia through targeted opportunities and funding, this will lead to increased levels of BME academics at University of Kent.
23. The University should also actively aim to employ more BME staff, both academic and professional.

2.2 Conclusion

The research shows that BME students feel it is important to get involved with Kent Union activities to make new connections and expand their friendship groups. However, at times they felt excluded and like they don’t fit in because of a lack of diversity. Some BME students feel uncomfortable due to the fact that they are even more of a minority in union activities while some reported that they felt as though they stood out and would feel more comfortable if there were more students who look like them, therefore encouraging diversity within social activities should be a top priority for Kent Union moving forward. Students have highlighted a need for the Union to facilitate integration of different demographics of students which allows cultural understanding and will prevent ignorance that students sometimes encountered.

Students expect a certain level of support from Kent Union but it was clear from their responses that there was often a barrier in communication, students are often unaware of the events and activities of the Union and are not clear regarding the Union’s independence from the institution and exactly what it can do for them. This was also an issue when they had a complaint because they were unsure what kind of help they could expect to receive. Satisfaction with the way in which complaints was handled was low, because students felt that their complaints were not dealt
with correctly. There were several examples when students put their trust in Kent Union but did not see any results, which has caused distrust between students and Kent Union. It also means that if a complaint were to be made about racism, there was an uncertainty as to whether it would be handled correctly. Ensuring all staff are familiar with reporting processes and are confident in supporting students should incidents occur will help build trust between BME students and Kent Union.

Representation is a key issue because BME students do not feel represented by Kent Union. Staff, course reps, part time officers, sabbatical officers and committee members were not seen as diverse, which could lead to students feeling isolated. More needs to be done to diversify these roles. It is important that students have role models to ensure they have a feeling of belonging to the institution. Similarly, the curriculum must also represent students so that education is well rounded. Students found the curriculum too Eurocentric, echoing the viewpoint of the 'Why is My Curriculum White' campaign, this further adds to the feeling of being unrepresented within the institution.

Students have outlined the positive impact that they believe taking part in social activities can have on the academic performance, academic societies provide an environment whereby students are encouraged to take part in academic conversations, exposing them to a wide array of language, ideas and encouraging them to step out of their comfort zone in a developmental way.

The ACS has access to a large proportion of Black African and Black Caribbean students. The relationship between the ACS and Kent Union appears to be fragmented, and this needs to be improved. If the two were to work collaboratively, it could significantly improve the experience of Black African and Caribbean students. Members of the ACS also appeared to have a vision to involve students of all demographics, which would result in a positive experience for BME and White students, as it would provide increased opportunities for cultural understanding.

There were few examples of racism, which runs counter to previous research by the NUS. The most prominent forms of racism encountered were microaggressions, culture difference and institutionalised racism. An institution wide approach as laid out by the recommendations to increase diversity in terms of social events, diversifying of the curriculum and encouragement of BME students into leadership roles and increasing BME representation within staff at the Union and the University should provide a framework for overcoming and preventing these issues.
3. Recommendations

The following is a list of all of the recommendations made in this report, the project believe it is important that these recommendations which are based on the research findings are carried out, a working group has been set up to monitor progress and will report to the Kent Union BME Student Voices Steering Group and Campaigns and Policy Committee.

Motivations and Barriers to Engagement:

1. Kent Union should develop an organisation wide approach to diversifying its active membership and removing the barriers that currently may prevent BME students from engaging with its activities. This may include actively encouraging student groups to recruit a diverse body of members, increasing diversity of student committees and actively supporting BME students to get involved in the social activities that Kent Union offer.

2. Kent Union should embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) throughout all of its training and offer an element of conflict resolution training for groups as part of its student leader training.

3. Kent Union should encourage student groups to include events and activities that don’t focus on alcohol, through training and ongoing support.

Racial Composition of Cultural Groups and Cultural Understanding:

4. Kent Union should provide greater opportunities for cross student group working with increased reward and recognition, to increase cultural understanding amongst the student body.

Improvements to Support and Representation for BME Students:

5. Kent Union should review the messaging around its specific support services offered for students to ensure it is getting through to hard to reach groups.

6. Kent Union should evaluate and streamline society and student group support to ensure that all groups are receiving a minimum level and that students understand what this entails.

7. Kent Union should work to raise the profile of all Part Time Officers on campus.

8. Kent Union should put more resource behind campaigns focusing on cultural understanding giving BME students the opportunity to lead on these.

9. Kent Union should actively encourage BME students into positions of leadership and student staff roles and take positive steps to increase diversity in these positions and within career staff roles.

African Caribbean Society (ACS):

10. Kent Union should work with ACS to increase communication and improve the working relationship over the course of the next academic year.

BME Students in Positions of Leadership within Kent Union:

See 7 and 9.
Complaints and Reporting of Racism:

11. Kent Union should ensure that processes surrounding reporting of incidents of discrimination within student groups is clearly communicated during committee training and available to all students through the volunteer resources pages.

12. Kent Union should ensure that all staff are aware of the processes for reporting incidents of discrimination and student facing staff are confident in supporting a student reporting such incidents.

Events:

13. Kent Union should commit to resourcing more cultural events in which students can showcase their heritage and culture.

14. Kent Union should mark significant dates in the yearly calendar e.g. celebration, memorials and religious holidays and support students to recognise these.

15. Kent Union should work with the University to organise motivational and inspirational talks from BME people as well as events focussed on improving employability.

Advertisement:

16. Kent Union should commit to resourcing more cultural events in which students can showcase their heritage and culture.

17. Kent Union should work with the University to organise motivational and inspirational talks from BME people as well as events focussed on improving employability.

Racism:

18. Kent Union to work closely with local community groups to challenge racism both on and off campus.

Learning and Learning Differences

19. The University should aim to diversify the content of its curriculum and make it more inclusive, starting with reviewing curriculums to ensure that a range of ideas and academic thought are represented.

20. Kent Union should work in conjunction with the University to ensure that academic based societies are established within each school and are supported to facilitate opportunities for social and academic growth. Extra focus should be given to smaller subjects to encourage students to join, and to ensure they have support available for running these societies.

Aspirations

21. The University should encourage BME students to progress throughout academia through targeted opportunities and funding, this will lead to increased levels of BME academics at University of Kent.

22. The University should also actively aim to employ more BME staff, both academic and professional.
4. Appendices

4.1 Appendix 1: Participant Profiles

Participant Ethnicities

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<td>Total Participants</td>
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Participant’s year of Study

[Pie chart showing distribution of participants by year of study]
**Gender of Participants**

![Gender of Participants Bar Chart]

**Age Range of Participants**

The age range of participants who provided an age was between 18 and 51, with an average age of 19.

**Engagement of Participants**

37 of the 41 participants identified that they engaged in at least one type of Kent Union activity, these included:

- Society member/committee member of Society
- Sports club member/ committee member of Sports club
- Volunteer/ volunteer committee member
- CSR/KTV/Inquire member / CSR/KTV/Inquire committee member
- RaG Member / RaG committee member
- Societies Executive
- Team Kent Executive
- Part Time Officer
- Ran for Full-Time/ Part-Time Officer
- Course Rep
- Faculty Rep
- School Rep
- Board of Trustees
- Community projects (through Kent Union)
- Buddy volunteer
- Welcome helper
- Attending Kent Union events

4 participants did not engage in any of the above activities.

### Participants' Schools

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<td>Biosciences, School of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computing, School of</td>
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<td>Engineering and Digital Arts, School of</td>
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<td>Mathematics, Statistics and Actuarial Science, School of</td>
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<td>Physical Sciences, School of</td>
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<td>Sport and Exercise Sciences, School of</td>
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<td>Law School, Kent</td>
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<td>Economics, School of</td>
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<td>Politics and International Relations, School of</td>
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<td>Psychology, School of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, School of</td>
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<table>
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| Total students | 41 |
## 4.2 Appendix 2: Research Questions

### Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What extracurricular activities do you engage in? e.g. Societies, Sport Clubs, Volunteering, Course Reps and/or Part Time Officers from a BME Students perspective? If not, why is this?</td>
<td>Can you tell me about… Could you expand on that? Do you have further examples of that? Is it correct that you feel that…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you get involved with these? What impact does involvement on you? Could these activities be improved at all?</td>
<td>Why did you decide to join this club? Why didn’t you get involved in any? Did you go to fresher’s fair? What were your thoughts and feelings toward it? Is it something you’ve noticed before?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social experiences</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you’re involved in a sports club or society, are there people of the same or a similar race to you? Has the ratio of racial groups ever made you feel uncomfortable? In your friendship group, do your friends tend to be a same or similar race to you? Why do you think this is?</td>
<td>How does this make you feel? Do you ever notice that you don’t have friends of a similar race to you – is it a problem? Is it important to you?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What improvements do you think that Kent Union could make to enable you to enjoy your experience more? Are there any improvements you feel that Kent Union could make to improve the events they offer for students? What would enhance your engagement and involvement in the union? Do you celebrate Black History Month? What does Black History Month mean to you? How would you feel having to explain the significance of it to others?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel Kent Union does enough to support students? Could you list some of the ways that they support students?</td>
<td>Could you list the ways in which you feel Kent Union has supported you during your time at the University?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you aware of any particular support mechanisms provided by Kent Union for BME students?

Can you think of any ways Kent Union could increase support for BME students?

**Discrimination policies**
Have you ever felt at a disadvantage or uncomfortable engaging in Kent Union because of reasons related to your race?

Would you know what to do if you faced any kind of discrimination based on your race within the university?

Have you ever had to use any policies relating to discrimination whilst at the University of Kent?

Have you ever had to make a complaint?

Would you trust the integrity of Kent Union to fairly deal with your complaint?

**Experience of racism**
In your view, could incidents of racism impact on academic performance?

Have you experienced any forms of racism whilst at the university?

If you experienced or witnessed an incident of racism that was classed as a joke or ‘banter’, would you feel comfortable addressing it?

Does racism exist in university settings?

**Learning**
Have you ever come into contact with any teachers/academics of the same or a similar race to you?

Have you got any role models in higher education?

What factors could cause an attainment gap between black and white students?

Do you think Kent Union promotes a welcoming and diverse culture?

Focus Group Questions

**How social experiences affect the attainment gap**

Current research suggests that BME students have higher expectations of academic success, with a higher proportion of BME students confident of achieving a 1st class degree than white students. However, this runs counter to their academic performance, as only 60.9% of these students are currently achieving a 2.1 or above, compared with 74.5% of white students. The research so far, suggests that this attainment gap is caused by a range of factors, including family expectations.
We would like to explore student’s ideas and opinions on this attainment gap and whether social experiences at university can affect the attainment gap.

My first question will be – What do you think could be the causes of the attainment gap?

Sub-questions –

How do you believe levels of social engagement impact the attainment gap?

(Do they minimise the gap or make it larger?)

Does a high level of social engagement encourage high attainment or does it hinder it?

How do you perceive racism to affect attainment?

How would you describe a positive learning environment?

BME Students in positions of leadership

What are your thoughts on the number of BME students in positions of leadership within Kent Union? E.g. Course reps, Committee Roles, Part Time Officers, lead Volunteers etc.

Do you perceive there to be any barriers preventing BME students taking up leadership positions within Kent Union?

Sub-questions –

Some people have suggested that one way to improve the number of BME students in these positions is to use positive discrimination. This is where there is a certain quota of students which must be met in these positions. How do you feel about that?

Do you feel represented by Kent Union, in terms of student leadership positions and sabbatical officers? Staff?

How familiar are you with the Sabbatical Officer Leadership elections?

- Do you see there being any barriers to BME students taking part to run for a Sabbatical Position?

Are there other recommendations that you have, or suggestions you would like to make?
5. References


Elevation Networks Trust, (2012). Race to the Top. The Experience of Black Students in Higher Education. The Bow Group.


6. Glossary

Terms for further definition have been highlighted throughout the document and can be found in this section.

**BME** Black and Minority Ethnic

**Engagement** These activities include sports clubs, societies, volunteering, course and faculty reps and part time officers.

**Liberation** The term ‘liberation’ relates to national movements which seek to extend rights of people who have historically experienced persecution and discrimination and have suffered limited opportunities as a result.

**Liberation Strategy** The four liberation groups are defined as women, BME people, LGBT people and disabled people.

**Microaggressions** A comment or action which is unintentionally hostile or derogatory to a member of a minority group.

**Union Participation** Any student that takes place in one of the following activities with Kent Union count towards the Union Participation score; student reps, sports clubs/societies/volunteering group members, Buddy Scheme volunteers, students completing their KSCV, community volunteers, student media members, officer roles (part time and full time), student trustees and student staff.