Listening to *Black Student and Staff Voices

Findings & Recommendations from Commissioned Action Research Studies in 10 FE Colleges

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Black Leadership Group (BLG) is pleased to share this report arising from Black* Student & Staff Lived Experienced Action Research studies, conducted in partnership with ten FE and Sixth Form Colleges located in various regions across England and Wales. The research studies, commissioned individually through the BLG, were undertaken between 2022 and 2024. All the colleges** that contributed to this research are affiliate organisations of the BLG.

The intention of this report is to enable system leaders, boards, senior teams and staff in the post-16 education sector to gain greater insight into the lived experiences of Black* students and staff studying and/or working within the sector - and use these to identify those actions that would make a difference to their sense of belonging, aspiration and progression, as students and employees.

In presenting our findings, considerations and recommendations, we have been deliberately selective in presenting 'new insights', rather than mirroring previous research undertaken in this field.

Through our analysis and the five recommendations arising from it, we present choices available to those responsible for harnessing the full potential of all communities FE seeks to serve.

It is not our intention to comment on the relativities of the challenges faced by different groups of students and staff studying and/or working at any individual college. Rather, we focus solely on the actual and perceived opportunities and barriers faced by *Black students and staff, within the context of increasing ethnic diversity across the UK, as highlighted in our inaugural Annual Conference in 2021: 'Making the Most of an Ethnically Diverse Britain'.

As part of our contribution, the BLG presents our findings in accordance with our purpose, mission, and vision, and with a view to assisting leaders and their Boards to initiate action that leads to positive and sustainable change across their organisations. We do so by acting as a resource, enabler, and critical friend.

The courage and foresight displayed by leaders of the ten colleges, in taking the step of inviting BLG to assist them to understand the extent to which their organisations enable or inhibit opportunities or progression for its Black* students and staff, cannot be overstated. We believe this represents the necessary 'first step' towards a repurposed leadership, which recognises anti-racism as a bedrock for a truly inclusive, equitable and prosperous society.
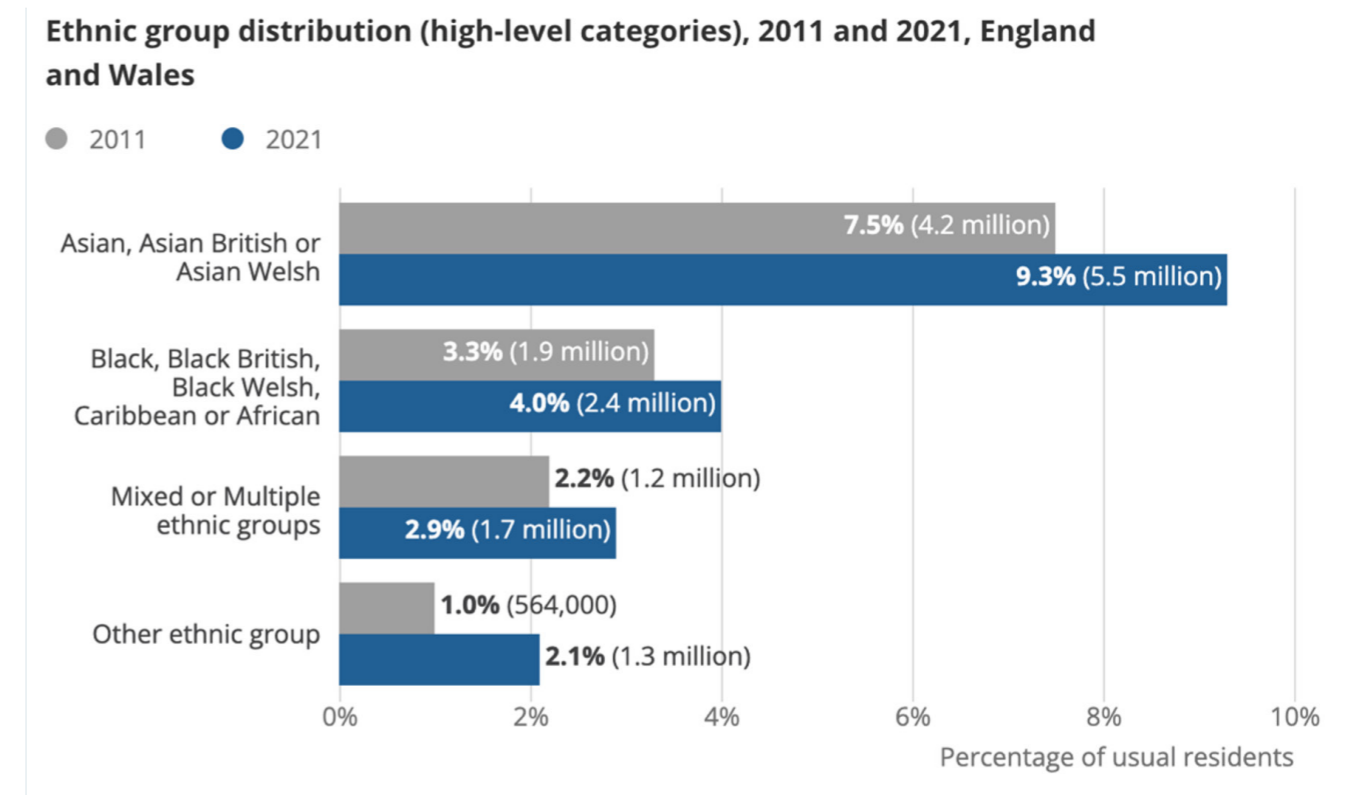
We wholeheartedly thank them and all the participants, who so openly supported us in this research and for the confidence and trust placed in us.

**We have kept the identity of the colleges contributing to this report confidential as we believe the faith and honesty of governors, senior leaders, staff and students was pivotal to the success of each action research study.
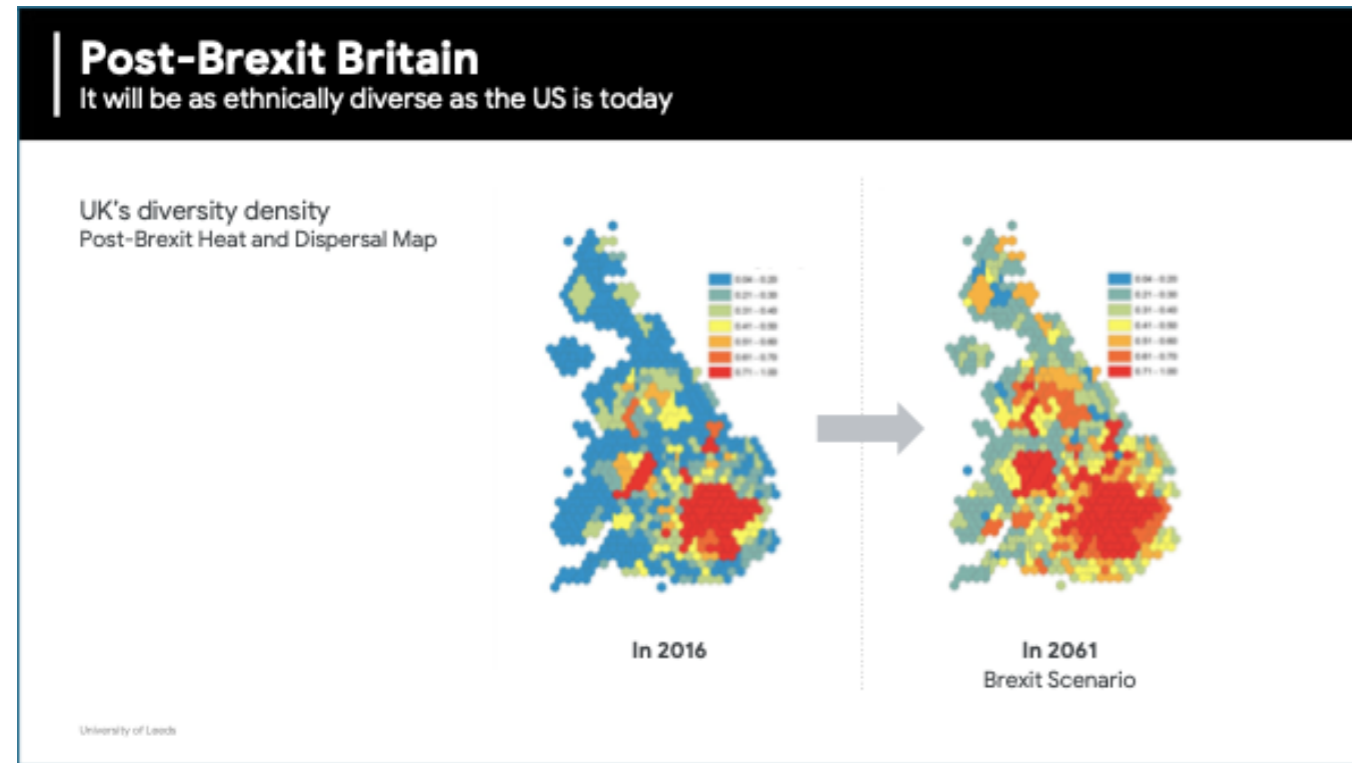
2. BACKGROUND

The Black Leadership Group (BLG) has been instrumental in challenging the post-16 education sector in addressing systemic racism and has provided unique evidence and insights into the impact racism has on individuals, organisations and society at large. This section provides a background context for this report.

Through our 2021 Inaugural Conference: 'Making the Most of an Ethnically Diverse Britain', we highlighted significant projected changes to the UK's demography between now and 2060. The chart below shows the increase in the Black* population in the UK from 2011 to 2021. (ONS)

Ethnic group distribution (high-level categories), 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

BLG uses *'Black' as an inclusive definition for people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who share a lived experience of the effects of racism.
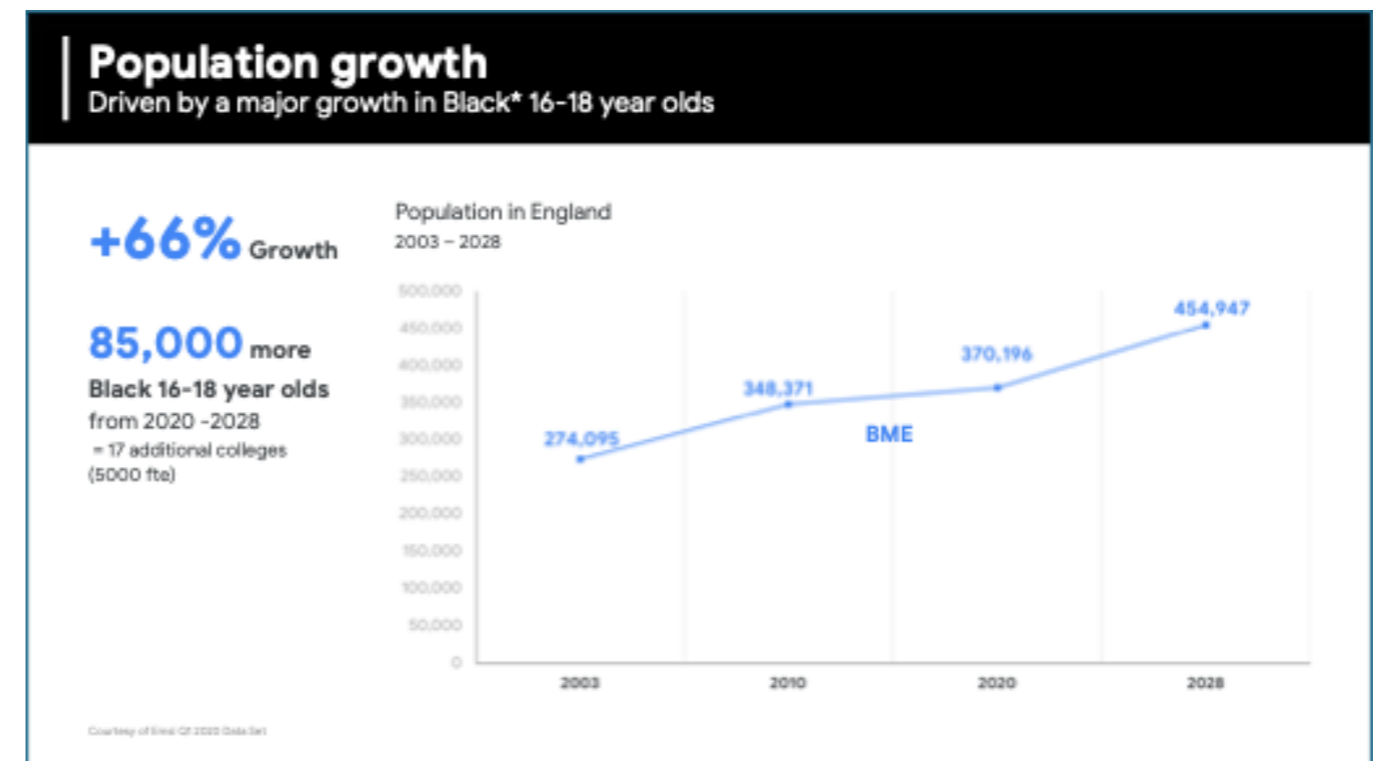
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We referred to future demographic changes to the UK ethnic population between 2016 to 2061. The chart below shows every region across the UK will become more ethnically diverse, and for concentrated areas of the UK, the implication is a significant increase in 'majority minority' cities and towns. (University of Leeds)

Post-Brexit Britain
It will be as ethnically diverse as the US is today

UK's diversity density
Post-Brexit Heat and Dispersal Map

In 2016

In 2061
Brexit Scenario

University of Leeds

We pointed to projected changes to the ethnic profile amongst UK's young population. It is this group that will form an increasing proportion of the UK working age population over coming decades, so it becomes increasingly critical that we ensure young Black* groups achieve their full potential, in terms of education, employment and earnings to maximise their contribution to the UK's future economic prosperity.
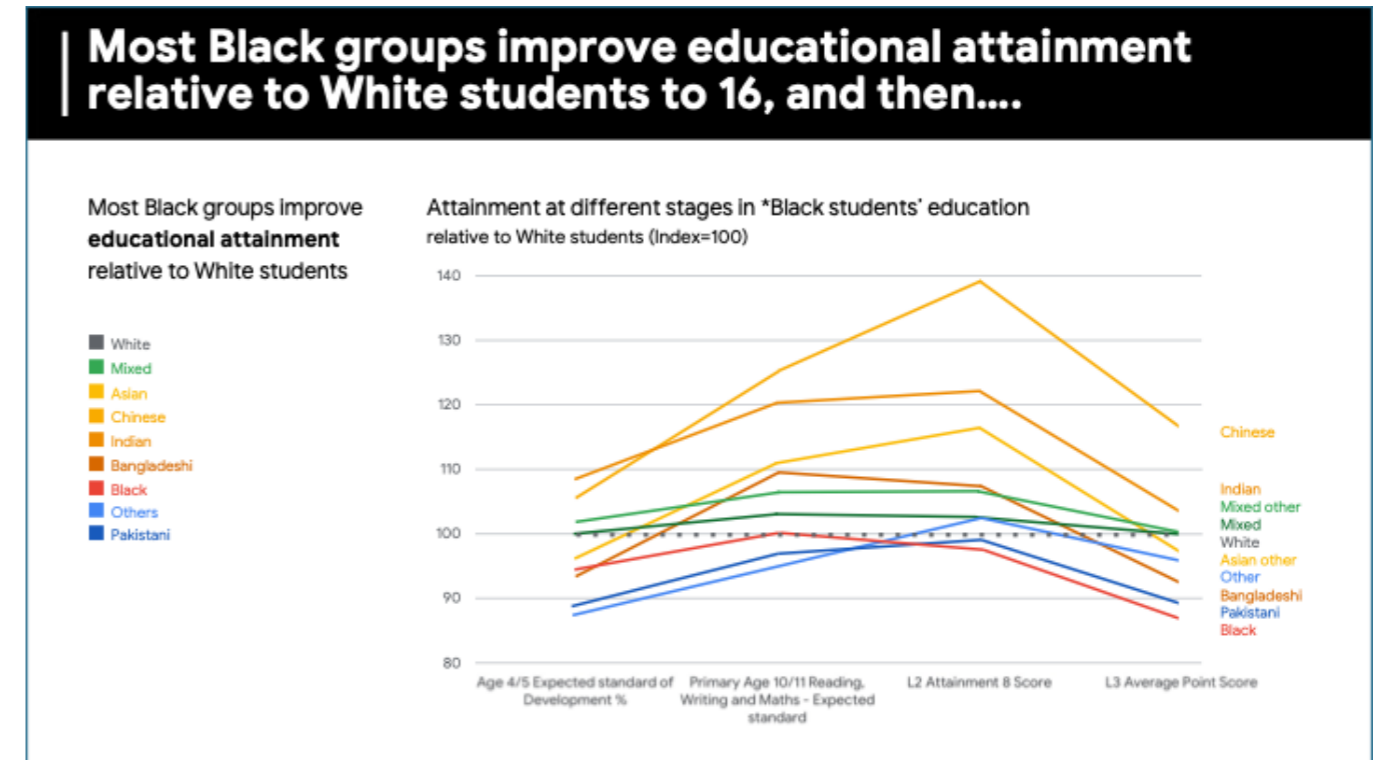
The chart below shows the projected increase in the young Black* population on the post-16 sector during the current decade. Black* students will form a greater proportion of school, further and higher education communities over the coming years. (EMSI)

Population growth
Driven by a major growth in Black* 16-18 year olds

+66% Growth

85,000 more
Black 16-18 year olds
from 2020 –2028
= 17 additional colleges
(5000 fte)

Population in England
2003 – 2028

274,095 — 348,371 — 370,196 — 454,947
BME
2003   2010   2020   2028

Courtesy of Emsi Q1 2020 Data Set

We presented the paradox of exponential increases in Black* students across all phases of education not being reflected in the staffing, leadership and governance profiles in schools, colleges and higher education (see chart below). (ONS)
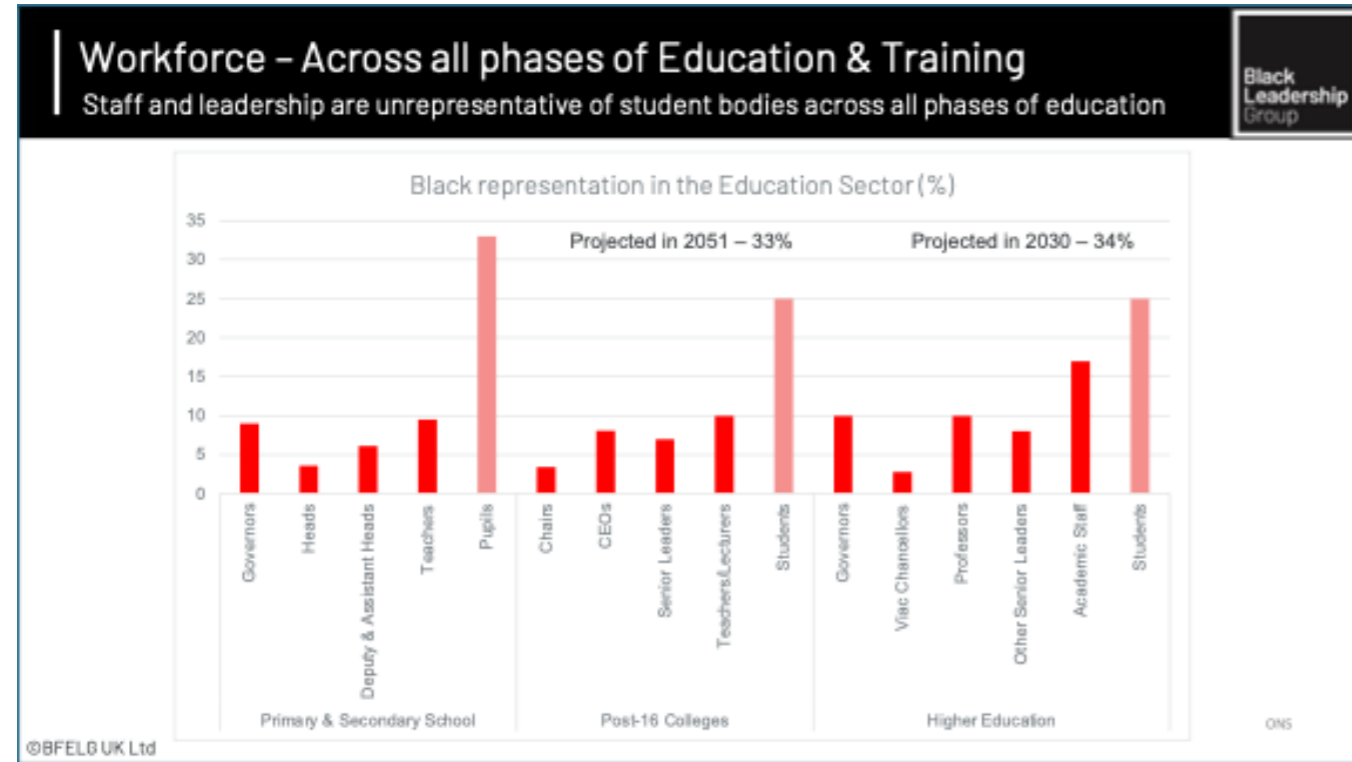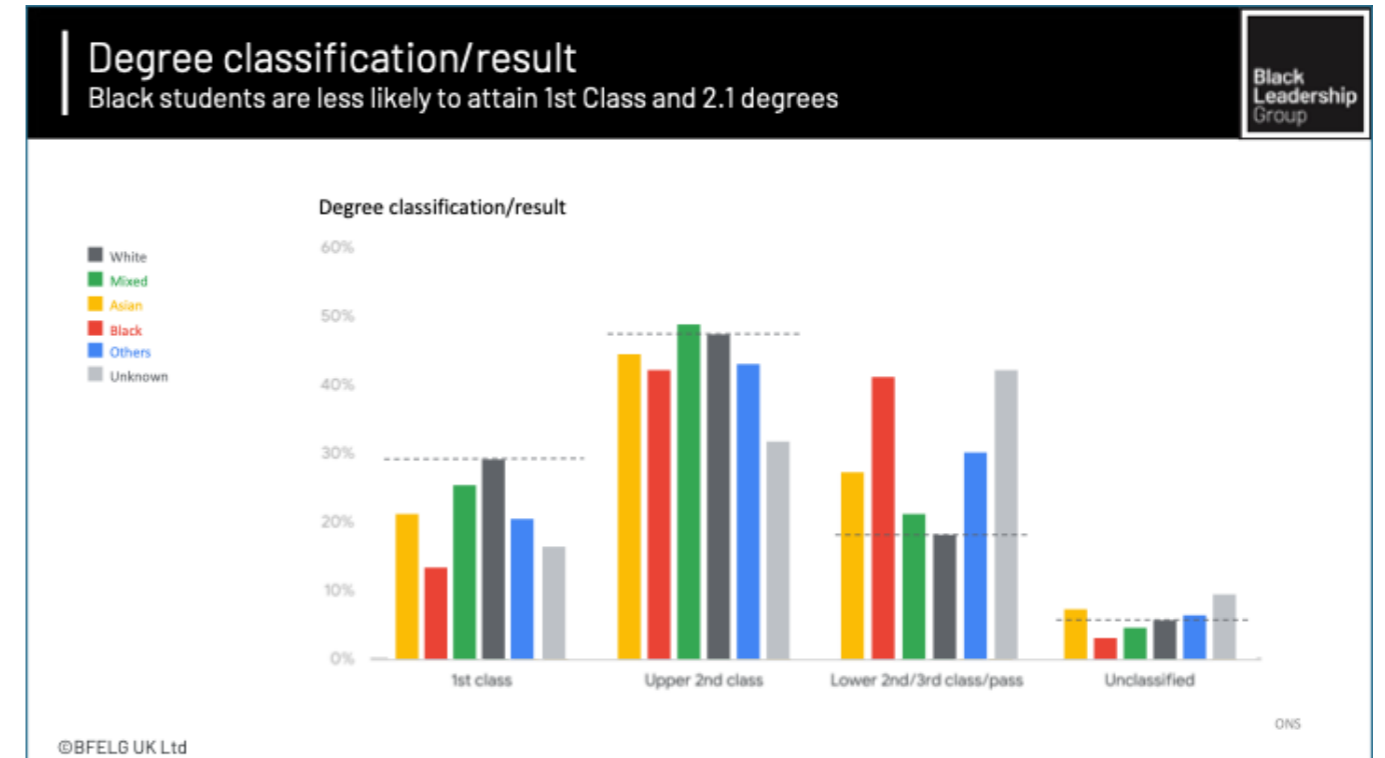

We demonstrated that most Black* groups, based in English state-funded schools, improve educational attainment relative to their White counterparts at each stage of their compulsory education up to the age of 16. But then at Level 3, all Black* groups perform less well relative to their White peers, with attainment rates for many groups (i.e. African, Bangladeshi, Caribbean and Pakistani students) falling below their White counterparts. (see chart below). (DfE)

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We identified that with the notable exception of students from Mixed Heritage backgrounds, Black* students were less likely to gain places at high tariff (Russell group) universities, when compared with their White peers (see chart below). (ONS)
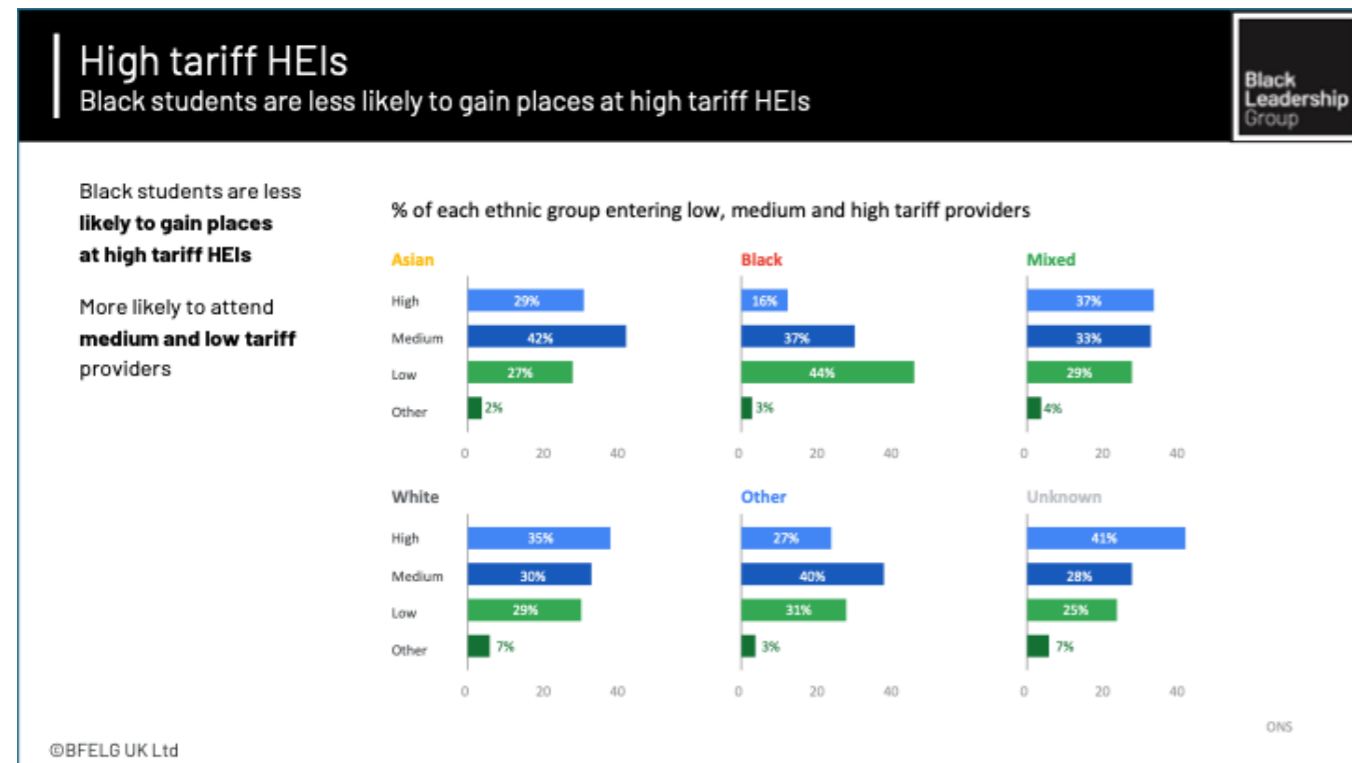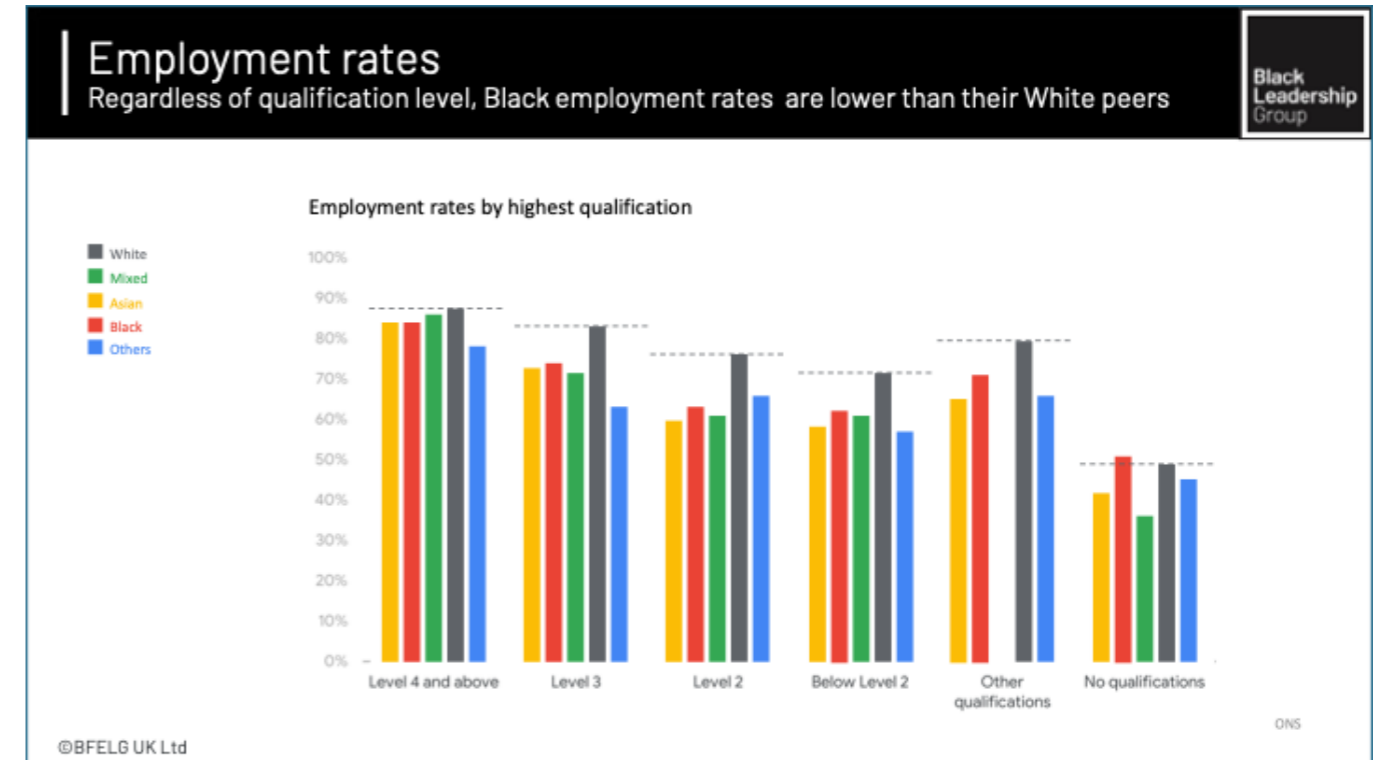
We spotlighted attainment gaps for Black* students in higher education (see chart below). Some gaps were greater than 10% and had persisted for more than ten years. (ONS)

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We questioned underrepresentation of Black* students on Apprenticeship programmes (see chart below). Where they were engaged in paid work-related training, Black* groups were mainly enrolled at lower-levels and concentrated in a narrow set of sectors. (ONS)
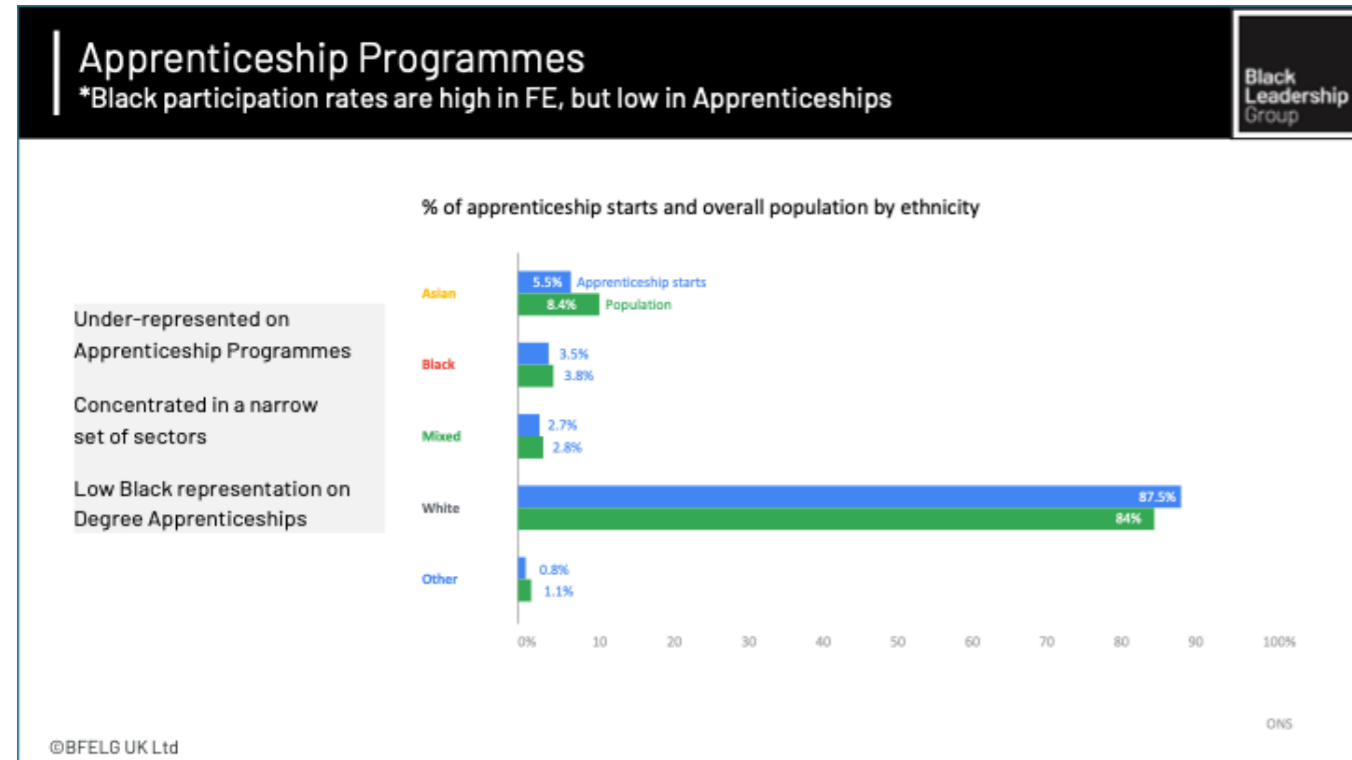
We emphasised that, for all levels of qualifications held, Black* groups were less likely to gain employment when compared with their White counterparts. The notable exception related to employment levels amongst groups holding no qualifications (see chart below). (ONS)

Apprenticeship Programmes
*Black participation rates are high in FE, but low in Apprenticeships

% of apprenticeship starts and overall population by ethnicity

Under-represented on Apprenticeship Programmes

Concentrated in a narrow set of sectors

Low Black representation on Degree Apprenticeships

Asian — 5.5% Apprenticeship starts / 8.4% Population
Black — 3.5% / 3.8%
Mixed — 2.7% / 2.8%
White — 87.5% / 84%
Other — 0.8% / 1.1%

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Employment rates
Regardless of qualification level, Black employment rates are lower than their White peers

Employment rates by highest qualification

White / Mixed / Asian / Black / Others

Level 4 and above, Level 3, Level 2, Below Level 2, Other qualifications, No qualifications

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We underlined that, with notable exceptions, post-graduate earnings were lower amongst many Black* groups, one, three, five and ten years following graduation (see chart below). (ONS)

We introduced data that made the link between the significantly higher rates of educational suspensions and exclusions amongst Black* students, and the changing profile of UK youth custody rates. The chart below shows a significant increase in the proportion of Black* young people in youth custody over the past two decades. (Lammy Review)
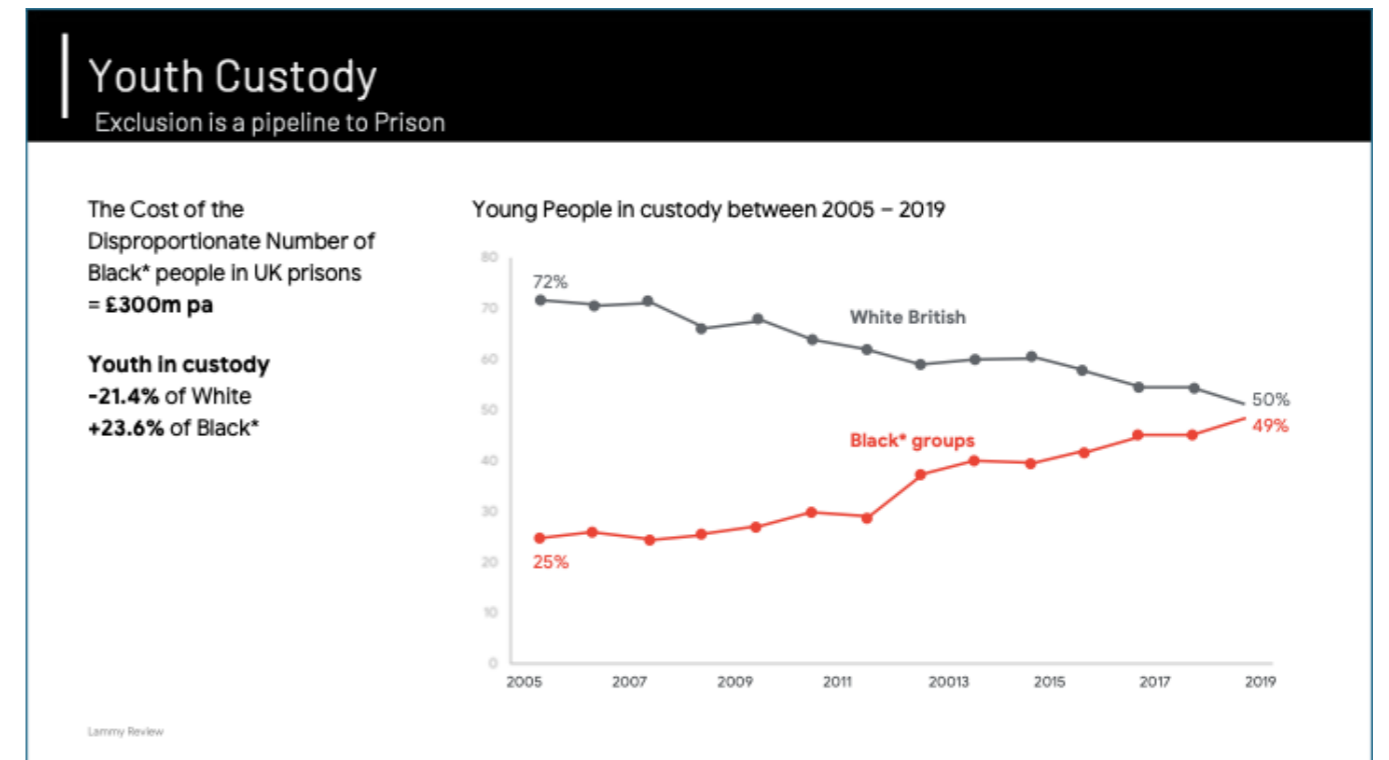
For further background context, the full version of the 'Making the most of an Ethnically Diverse Britain' Conference Report can be obtained via the Black Leadership Group website using the following link – www.blackleadershipgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BFELG-ConferenceReport-2021_Double-final-1.pdf

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3. METHODOLOGY

In 2020, the Black Leadership Group (BLG) issued its 'Open Letter' inviting sector organisations to 'step up to the plate' by adopting its ten priorities for action to ensure greater racial equity across the post-16 education sector. Following many meetings with system and sector leaders, the BLG was invited to support organisations to make commitments and progress towards redressing the race disparities outlined in the previous section of this report.

This directly resulted in the conception of BLG's 10 Point Plan and its Affiliated Organisation model, through which we offered to support organisations committed to meaningful and sustainable cultural change to build their capacity and contribution towards advancing anti-racism across all aspects of their work.

As a result of their engagement with the 10 Point Plan, supported by customised training to enable organisations to determine their unique set of priorities, ten colleges independently sought assistance from BLG in asking us to undertake confidential research studies to elevate their insights into the lived experiences of their Black* students and/or staff.

Whilst each college requested different research foci, there were three common strands that ran across the research undertaken:

1.   Student and/or Staff Interviews and/or Surveys***
2.   Analysis of Workforce Data
3.   Analysis of Student Data.

*** Whilst the primary focus for student and/or staff interviews and/or surveys was to listen to Black* (student and staff) voices, three colleges chose to invite White British staff and/or students to contribute to their research. The number of White British participants was too small to influence this study, though relevant contributions are incorporated.

4. SCOPE

The research studies comprised several distinct elements:

STUDENTS
Black* Student Interviews – Detailed, confidential, 1:1, interviews with current students, resulting in aggregated, anonymised data analysis. All interviews were conducted with BLG researchers.

The Interviews explored five themes:
1.   Influences (on choice of course and/or institution)
2.   Aspirations (education and/or career)
3.   Sense of belonging & support (at their current institution)
4.   Ethnicity & Racism (at college and beyond)
5.   Antiracist Culture (advice to their current institution).

Black* Student Online Surveys – Confidential online surveys with current students exploring the same themes as above.

In total, 108 college students contributed to research studies.
Black* Student Data Analysis - Analysis of student participation, achievement and discipline/exclusion data using a 'critical friend' approach.

The Data Analysis explored three themes:
1.   Participation
2.   Achievement
3.   Discipline, Suspensions & Exclusions

STAFF
Black* Staff Interviews – Detailed, confidential, 1:1, interviews with current, self-selecting staff resulting in aggregated, anonymised data analysis. All interviews were conducted with BLG researchers.

The Interviews explored five themes:
1.   Influences (on choice of vocation and place of work)
2.   Aspirations (short and long-term)
3.   Career Goals, Barriers, Support (in current role)
4.   Impact of Ethnicity and Racism (at college and beyond)
5.   Antiracist Culture (advice to their current institution).

Black* Staff Online Surveys – Confidential online surveys with current students exploring the same themes as above.

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In total, 414 self-selecting college staff contributed to research studies.

Black* Workforce Data Analysis – Analysis of workforce (including governance) data using a 'critical friend' approach.

The Data Analysis explored six themes:
1. Governance, Management & Staffing
2. Curriculum & Business Support Functions
3. Job Applications & Recruitment
4. Staff Starters & Leavers
5. Staff Discipline & Redundancies
6. Discipline, Grievances and Redundances

Note: For our data analysis, we have tried to retain consistency in reporting the outcomes for different ethnic groups but we were dependent on college data which was collected and collated in different ways. For example, in referring to 'White' we have assumed that this combines data for White British, White European and White Other cohorts. In some cases, especially for college staff data, there were a significant number of 'Unknowns' for ethnic identity.

PARTICIPANT COLLEGES

The following table provides a breakdown of the ten colleges that independently commissioned the BLG to conduct action research studies over the past two years. Eight were General Further Education Colleges (GFEC) and two, Sixth Form Colleges (SFC). These varied in size (income and student numbers), geographical spread (distributed across England and Wales) and their local population breakdown. For instance, the Black* populations in the cities/towns they served ranged from 6% to 59%, as per Census 2021.

College No.	College Type*	Geographical Location	No. of Students Contributing to Research		No. of Staff Contributing to Research		Additional Data Analysis carried out	
			1 to 1 Interviews	Online Survey	1 to 1 Interviews	Online Survey	Student	Staff
1	GFEC	North	38		14	24	Y	Y
2	GFEC	Midlands			34	100	Y	Y
3	SFC	South	10		11			
4	GFEC	Midlands			20	66		
5	GFEC	Wales			16	30	Y	Y
6	GFEC	South				60		
7	SFC	South	20					
8	GFEC	North	23		13		Y	Y
9	GFEC	North	9		10		Y	Y
10	GFEC	South	8		16			
			108		134	280		
		Total	Students - 108		Staff - 414		5	5

*College Type: GFEC = General Further Education College   SFC = Sixth Form College

5. KEY FINDINGS

5.1 STUDENT AND STAFF INTERVIEWS AND/OR SURVEYS

The summary below presents selective themes we believe will assist system and sector leaders in elevating the importance of race equity across their spheres of influence and responsibility.

Throughout this section, we use aggregated quantitative and qualitative data gathered though interviews and surveys involving Black* students and staff in the ten colleges.

THEMES:
1. Sense of belonging
- The overwhelming majority of students (83%) possessed a sense of belonging in college. 11% did not and 6% were unsure.
- 52% of staff felt a sense of belonging in college, 21% did not and 26% were unsure.

Students
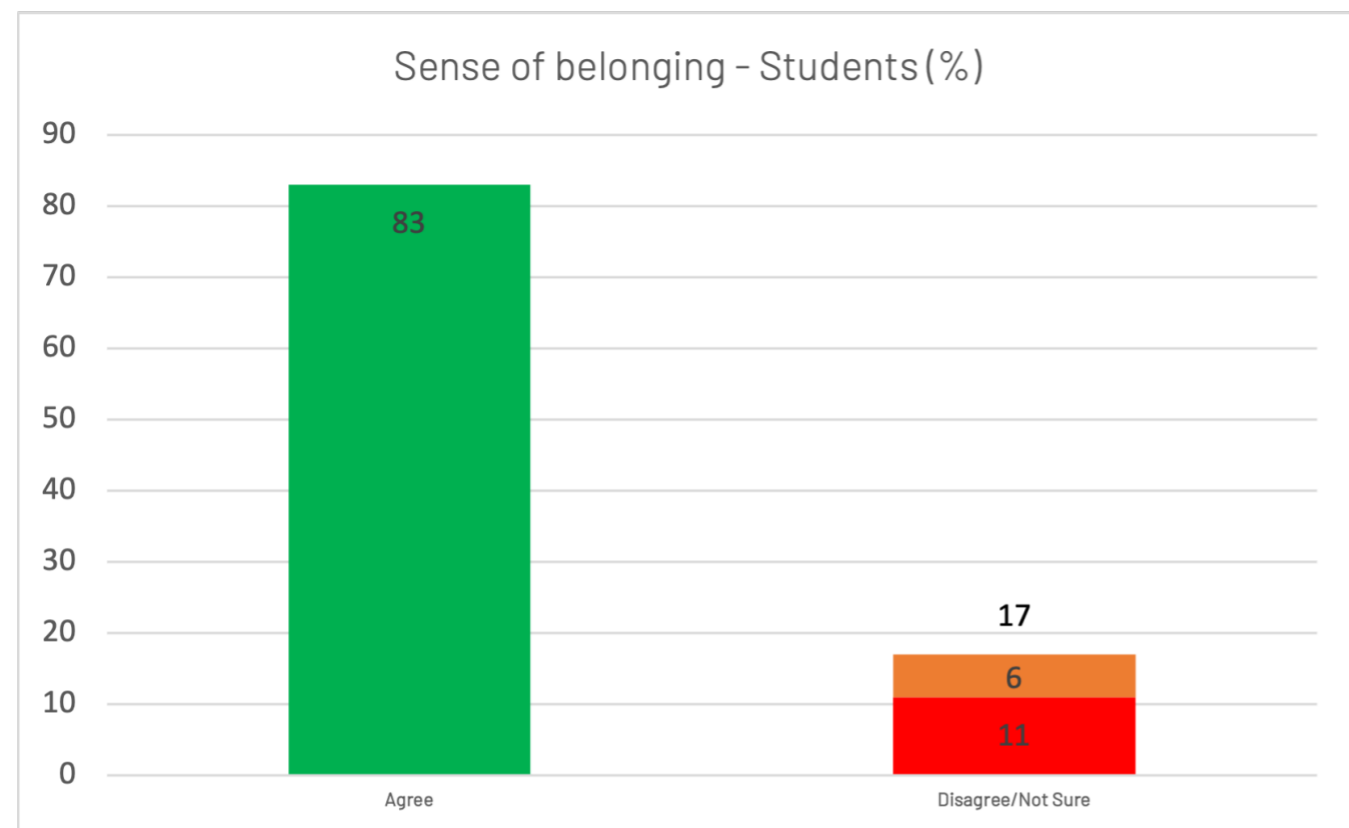
Student Comments:
"There are so many different cultures here that… you can find the group that you resonate with. I feel the most 'me' I've ever felt."

"I see all ethnicities mixing well together. It doesn't matter that the majority of my class are White. I feel respected"

"I feel I belong because of the support from my Progress Leaders and tutors who believe in me in my classes. I also have a mentor outside of the College."

"At…, I feel I can achieve anything, but I don't feel I can do or say certain things due to my colour. This makes me feel uncomfortable at times. It's nothing specific – it's about feelings."

"I sometimes feel like an outsider because English is my second language, and I can't join in conversations and the body language of others makes me feel uncomfortable at times."

Staff
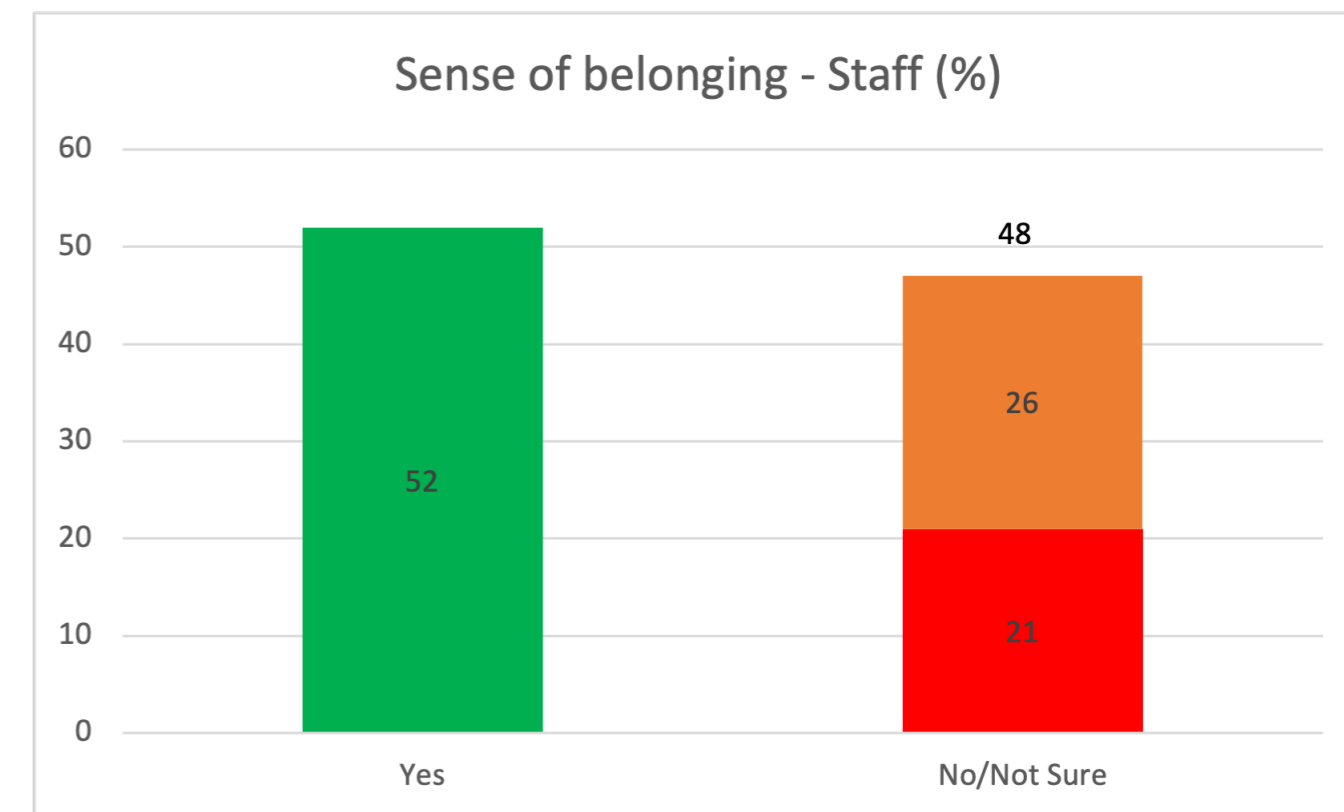
Staff Comments:
"I was a bit sceptical when I applied for a job at ……. However, since I started working here, I gained support from colleagues and have made some good friends."

"I think White colleagues get a better rub of the green, especially where management is also White. This can be unconscious bias."

"There are still attitudes that exist among staff which make me feel uncomfortable and wonder if they are deliberate actions."

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"It does feel that there are cliques with certain colleagues so that can cause the feeling of exclusion."

2. Career Progression
- 58% of staff held career aspirations and wished to progress to the next level or into management, whilst 11% wanted to refocus or retrain and 32% did not wish to progress.

Staff

Career Progression – Staff (%)

58	11	32
Wish to Progress	Refocus/Retrain/Not Sure	Do Not Wish To Progress
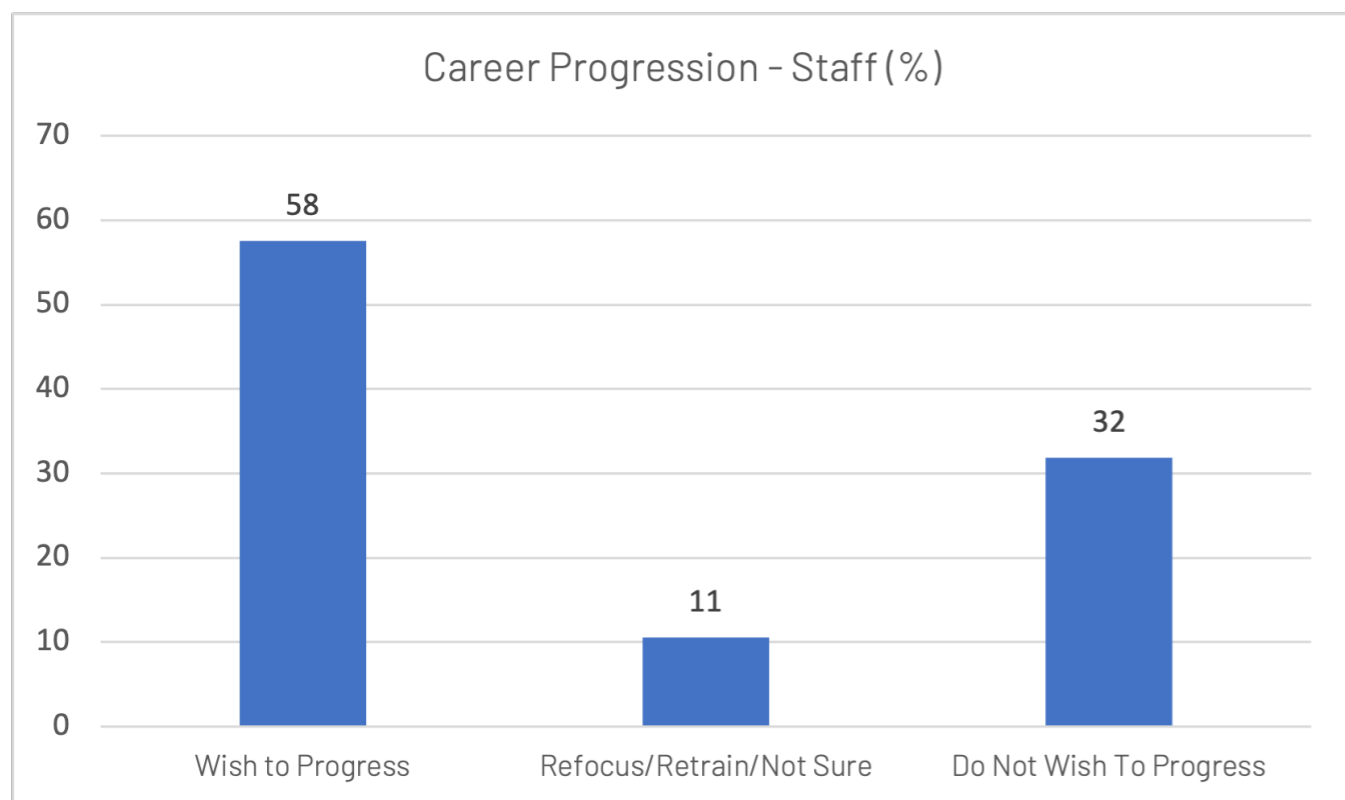
Staff Comments:

"I want to be in a position to have a say in the College, to become a Department Head or Assistant Principal. A role with authority and influence, to make changes for the benefit of everyone."
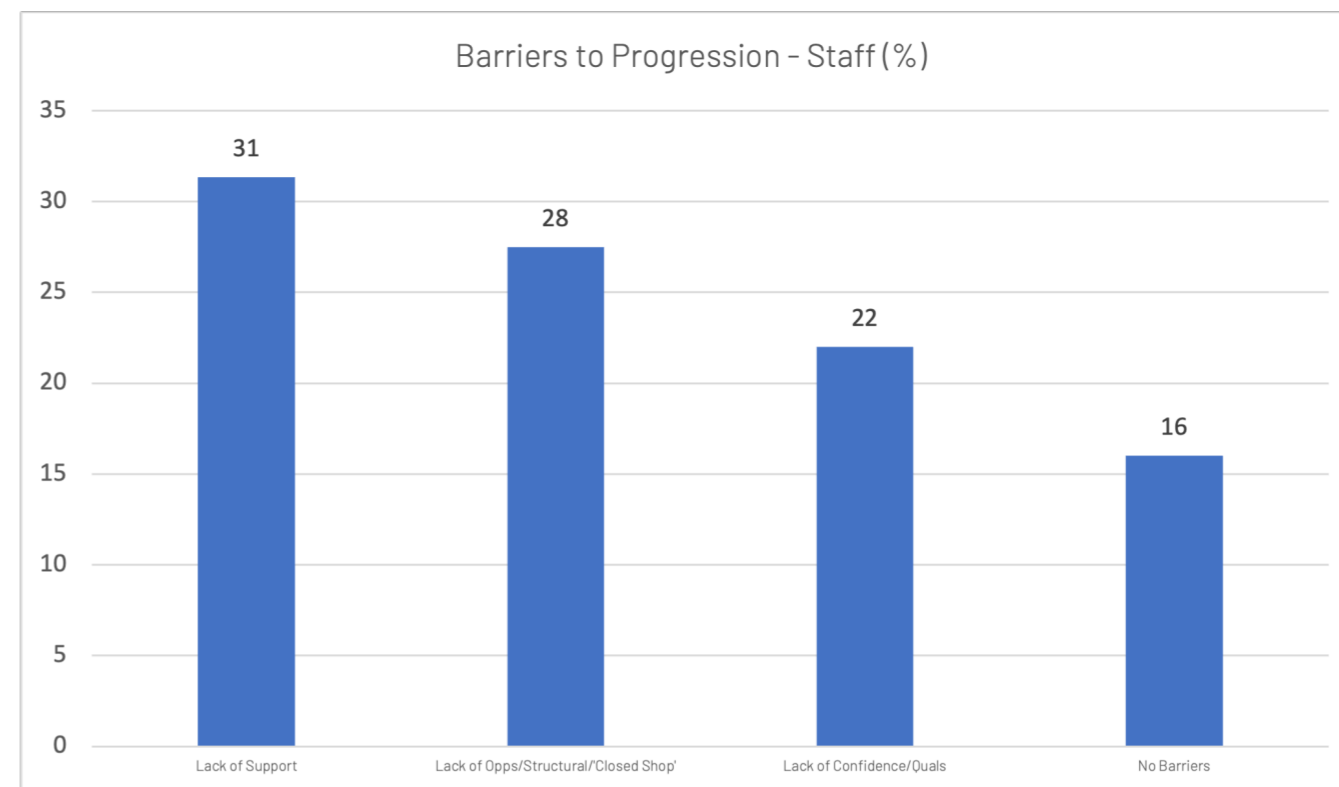
"My goal is greater involvement in helping [the College] move forward on Anti-racism. I'd love the opportunity to use my lived experience through my work. I feel I can help to effect positive change."

"There are opportunities for me to develop i.e. attend courses within my role, but it leads to no financial reward or title change…"

3. Barriers to progression
- 31% felt they were not supported in progressing in their career.
- 28% identified a lack of opportunities, structural barriers and/or a 'closed shop'.
- 22% stated the lack of qualifications or confidence prevented their career progress.
- 16% indicated that there were no barriers to progressing their career.

Staff

Barriers to Progression – Staff (%)

31	28	22	16
Lack of Support	Lack of Opps/Structural/'Closed Shop'	Lack of Confidence/Quals	No Barriers

Staff Comments:

"I want to move into management, but I feel that this is not for people like me. When opportunities have come up, nobody has encouraged me to step forward, so I don't bother anymore."

"I'd like to revert to the career I embarked upon in my country of origin, but my competency, passion and potential aren't recognised nor encouraged. I'm wasted."

"Progression, personally, has been when a manager has had a genuine interest in promoting and encouraging progression and giving guidance. This hasn't been the case for many years."

"I've noticed people progressing without prior knowledge of the vacancy or opportunity being publicised. It seems some staff who are more 'pally' with management get the opportunities."

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4. Recruitment & Selection

- 52% of staff believed their college's recruitment and selection processes were fair and transparent. 18% disagreed and 30% were unsure.

Staff

Recruitment & Selection is fair and transparent (%)
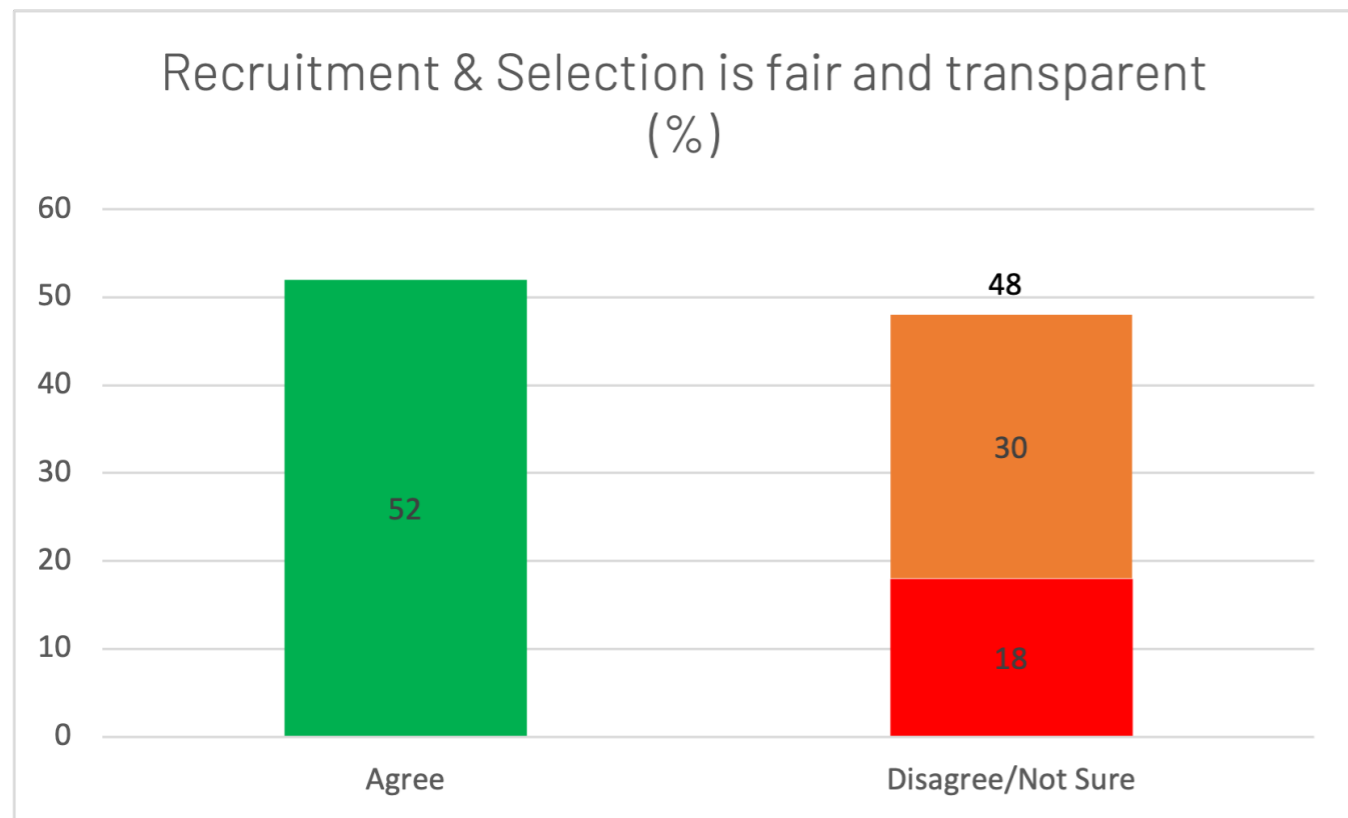
Staff Comments:

"…….. College has rigorous recruitment process."

"There are many examples of it's 'not what you know, but who you know' There are many people who have been recruited because they are family or friends. It is not uncommon for promotion to take place for this reason too."

"Encouraging Ethnic diversity …" is purely a description and usage of words to fulfil a tick-box exercise. In theory, this is a desired notion however in practice this is often not the case."

"I feel the College's recruitment and selection process is biased, as most people hired reflect the same skills as the interviewers…. I feel if the College's HR Team was more diverse, more people may apply for jobs and be interviewed and they would feel more comfortable and more inclined to open up."

5. Best candidates are appointed

- 40% of staff believed the best candidates were appointed. 22% disagreed whilst 38% were unsure.

Staff

Candidates are appointed due to best practice (%)
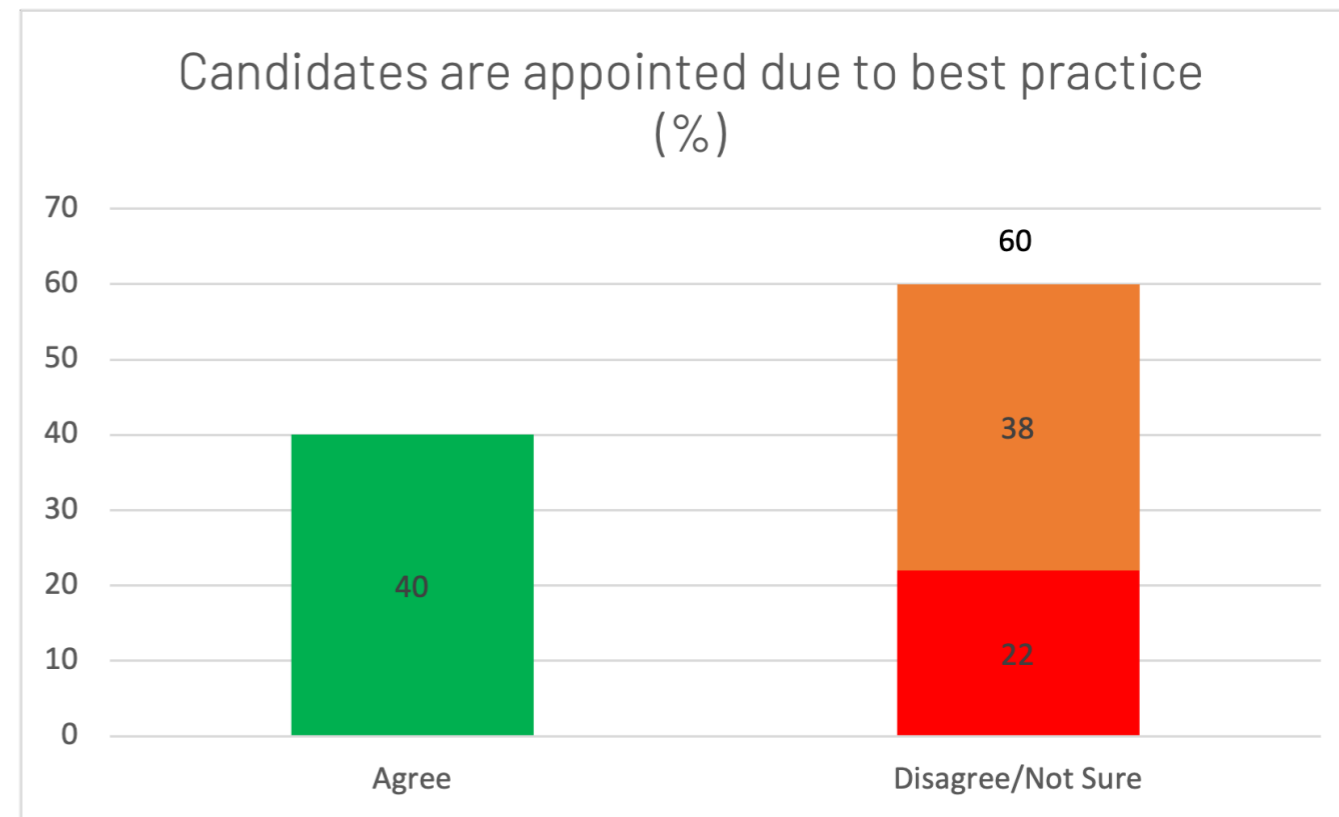
Staff Comments:

"Blind shortlisting takes place at ……., but there is no examination of the recruitment process which is failing to achieve racial diversity in staffing. e.g. lack of a diverse interview panel."

"I feel they know who they are going to give the job to, and interviews are a tick box. I've seen some terrible injustices done to ethnic minorities when it comes to recruitment… but no one seems to care, and you can't exactly cry out else you can be ostracised for having opposing views."

"During the recruitment process the interview panel does not represent a diverse background. It's usually the Director and Programme area manager. It really should have a more diverse interviewers, so the process is fair and transparent."

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6. Appraisals
- 64% of staff said they had regular appraisals. 17% disagreed and 20% were unsure.

Staff

I have regular appraisals (%)

Agree: 64
Disagree/Not Sure: 37 (20 orange, 17 red)
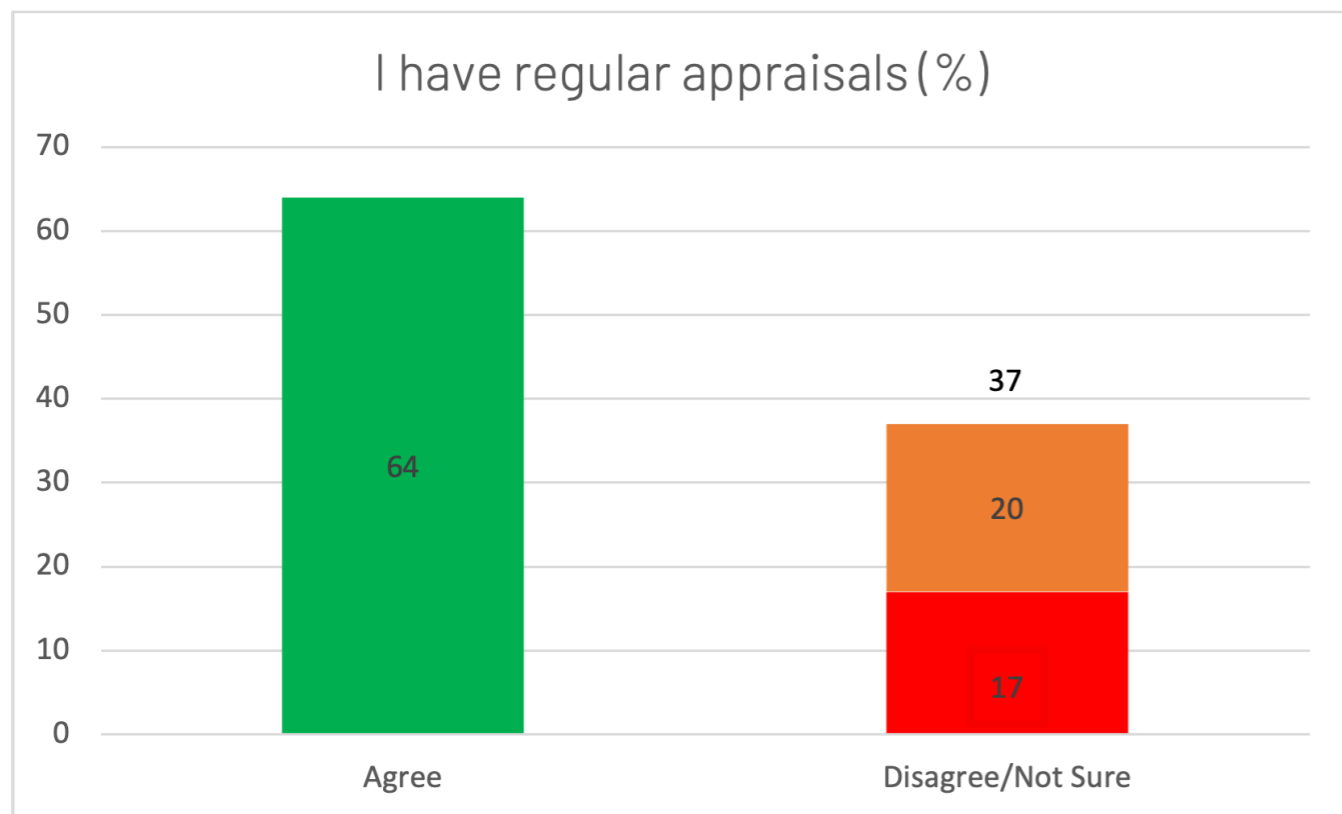
Staff Comments:
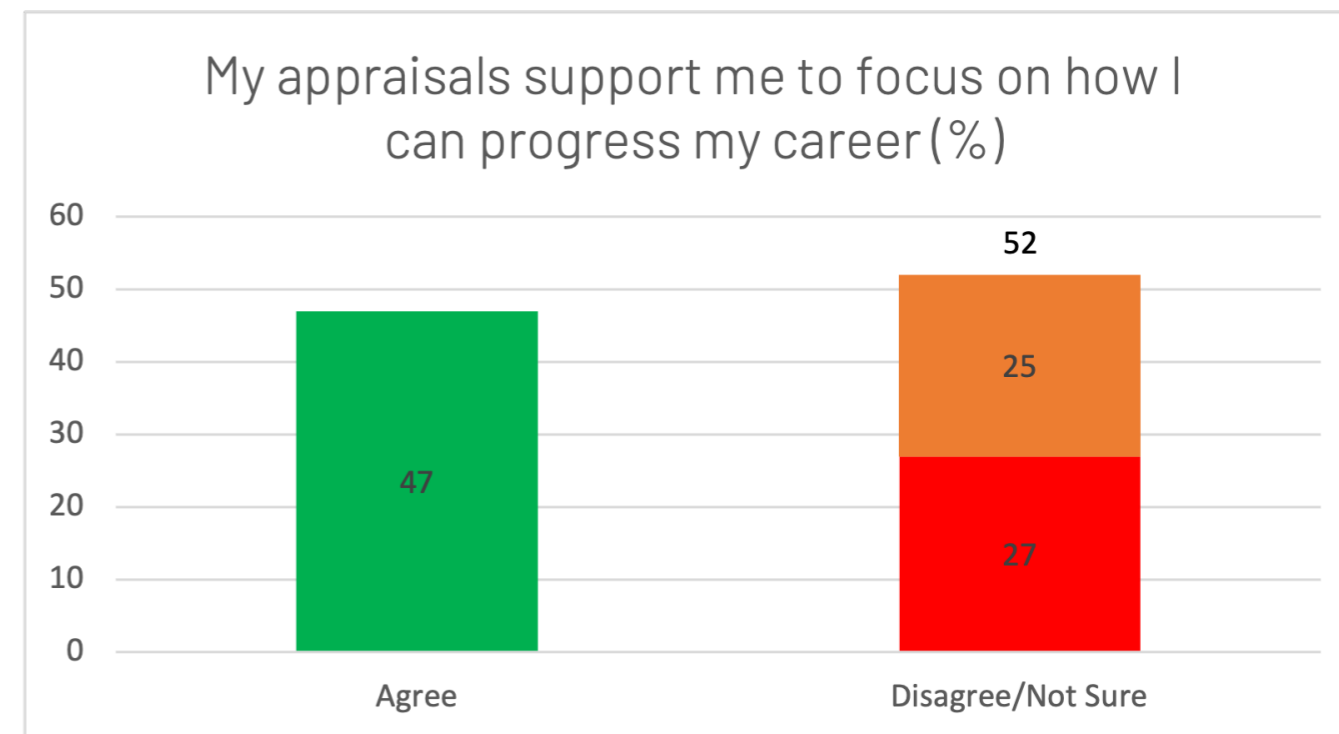"Appraisals are completed but most of the time because it is something we have to do."

"Appraisals only happen once a year as it's a mandatory exercise and a requirement for OFSTED. The appraisals are not necessarily evidence based."

"I have had two appraisals in my five years at.... "

7. Appraisals support Career Progression
- 47% of staff believed appraisals did support them in their career progression. 27% felt they didn't whilst 25% were unsure.

Staff

My appraisals support me to focus on how I can progress my career (%)

Agree: 47
Disagree/Not Sure: 52 (25 orange, 27 red)

Staff Comments:
"My direct line manager is a Black female. She supports and encourages me. Higher managers are not interested in anyone else's career or progression unless your face fits and is generally white."

"Managers have usually encouraged me when I have mentioned certain skills I would like to offer in my workplace. Never been encouraged towards any progression advice or support."

"They have been fair, but I would stop short from saying that appraisals act in a way that look to positively progress my career ambitions. "

8. Experience of Racism

- 39% of students had experienced racism in their college whilst 61% had not.
- 48% of staff had experienced racism in their college with covert racism more prevalent.
- 42% had not experienced racism whilst 10% were unsure.
- Students and staff were much more likely to have experienced racism beyond college.

Students

I have experienced or witnessed racism at the College - Students (%)
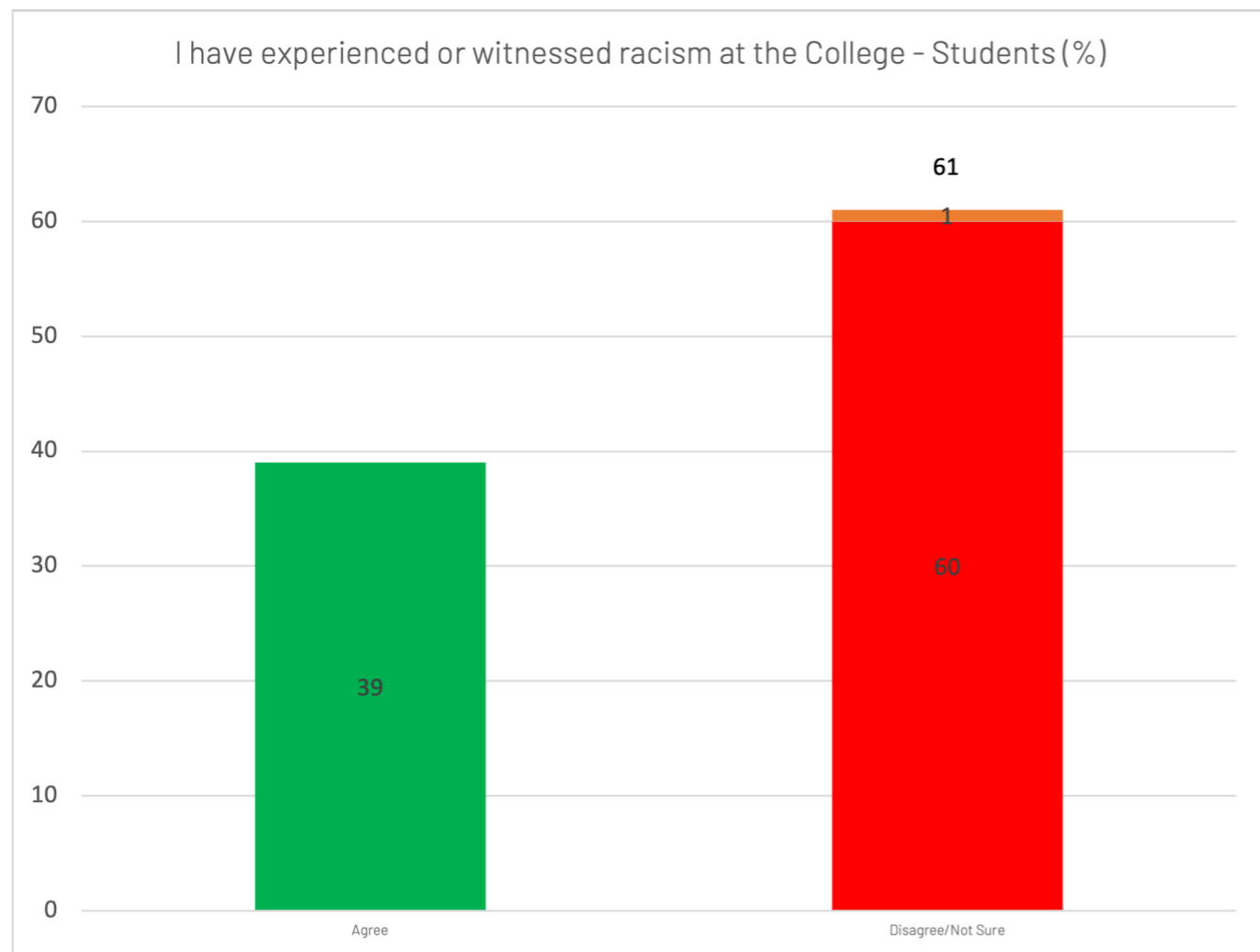
Student Comments:

"Yes, I have experienced racism at ......, and I'm still exposed to it -it's mainly between young female students."

My experiences have affected my self-esteem and relationships. I tend to only mix with people who understand my dual identity and I am careful in who I choose to build a rapport with. It sometimes affects my concentration in class."

"It depends on who I'm around. My friends are very open, but it's not always easy to share everything with other people. You know your experiences would be so different if you were White."

"Some teachers ignore my questions. In my class, only black students were given a Pass, while White students were given a Merit or Distinction. When we asked the teacher, we didn't get an explanation."

"A teacher asks random questions at the end of lessons but misses me out, it affects my willingness to attend or contribute. My confidence has reduced and may affect my grades."

Staff

I have experienced or witnessed racism at college - Staff (%)
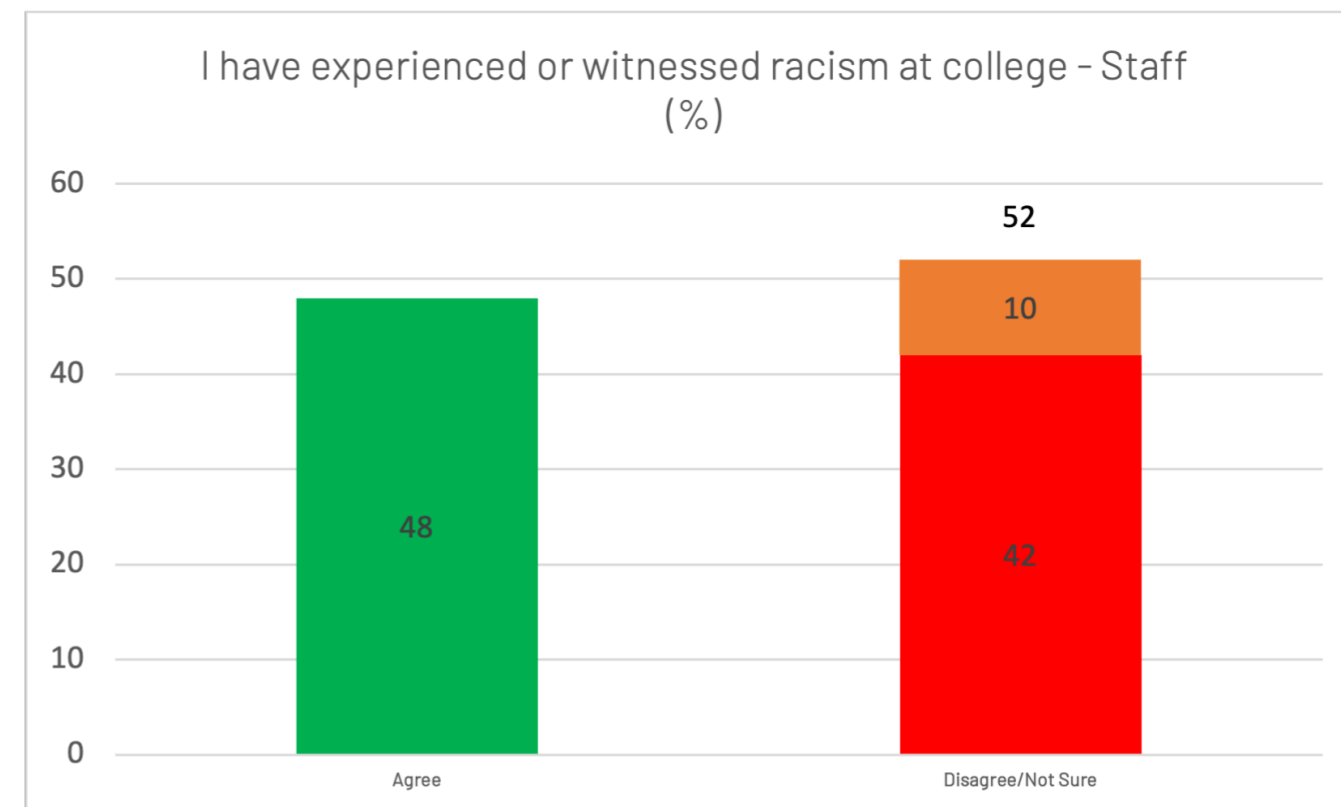
Staff Comments:

"An influential manager stated no foreigner should teach English. As we shrunk as a department, it made me fear for my job. A colleague advised me to say I had English family links."

"Some lecturers organise students into ethnic groupings and then leave the BAME students to their own devices......BAME staff are also put forward to deal with BAME students."

"The management of the College is mostly White, and I cannot trust that they will help anyone with a genuine grievance as they haven't lived experiences to comprehend the feelings of the individual who has been subject to discrimination."

"Racial discrimination is rife within departments from admin staff to teachers. We tend to be given disproportionate more work, less support and made more answerable. Look at the pay award, staff can have the same job title but be paid less."

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9. Confidence in reporting Racism

- 73% of students said they have confidence in reporting racism in their college. 25% did not and 2% were unsure.
- 61% of staff stated they had confidence in reporting racism in their college. 26% did not and 13% were unsure.

Students

Confidence in reporting racism – Students (%)
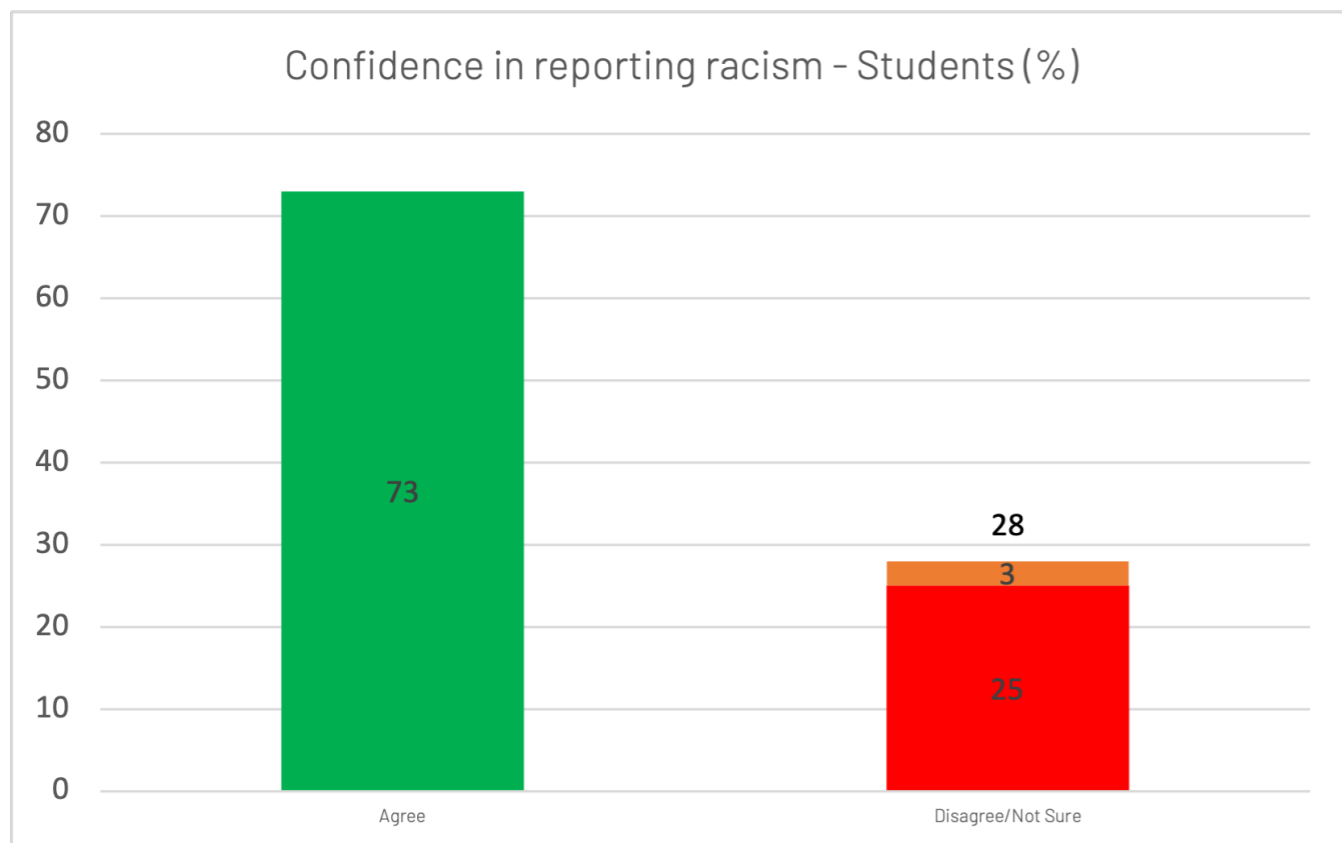
Student Comments:

"There are loads of people I could go to. I can go to the Principal and VP. I could speak to one of my teachers or support staff. It would get resolved in a couple of days. The fact that I've a positive relationship with staff makes it easier to speak up."

"Yes, but it would be better if there was a way to connect with someone more specifically about racism – speak to someone. The current options don't help – people overthink it and then don't report things."

"No, I'd be scared of going to White teachers/staff because of what may happen if everyone knows and the atmosphere it may cause. I was once told that I was a stereotypical, loud black girl who shouts at others, when that's not the case."

"I did not report it, but I think it was recorded - the different dashboards make it easier to report it."

Staff

I have confidence in reporting racism without personal consequeses – Staff (%)
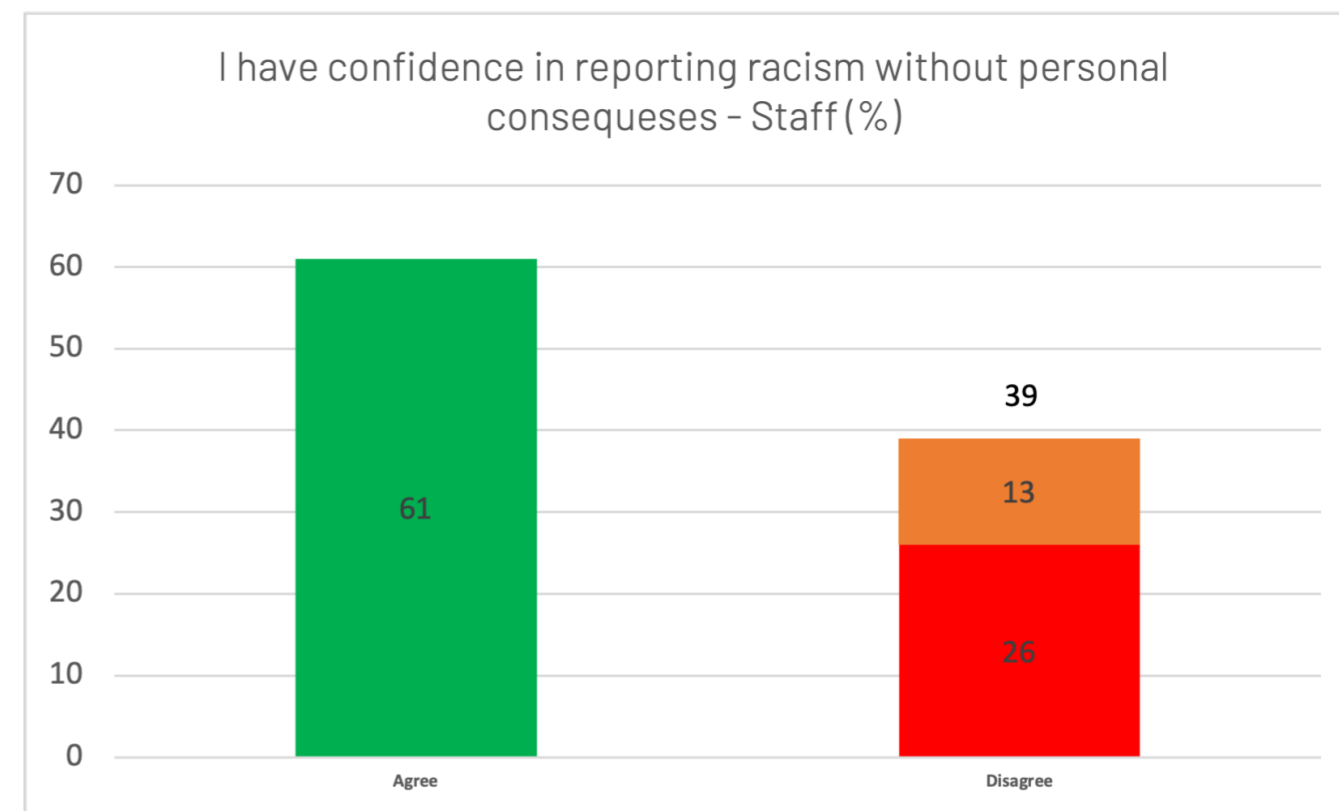
Staff Comments:

"I'm 100% sure that my line manager would take my observations seriously and listen, support and, if necessary, take it higher. I trust them implicitly."

"I would report on behalf of others, but not for me – I wouldn't want to stir things up. The stakes are too high."

"I wouldn't go to HR, nothing would happen – its focus is HRM, it's not culturally-led. It's also too high up the 'food chain' for me to challenge its processes."

"If I reported an incident of racial discrimination, I'm confident a thorough investigation would be undertaken. However, I am not confident that appropriate steps or actions would be taken as I feel staff/students are not challenged enough."

"I was verbally racially abused by two of my work colleagues. When I reported the racial incident to my line manager and their line manager, I was told the language was old school and "you should hear how my grandmother refers to ethnics". HR was informed but I felt totally let down from the lack of support and there was no resolution or action taken."

10. Antiracist Culture

All participants contributing to the research studies were invited to share suggestions and/or considerations relating to their college's commitment to advancing its organisational culture on race equity. The following presents a synopsis of student and staff feedback.

Students:

1. "Greater awareness in the college of the negative impact of racism on individuals and groups."
2. "Engage diverse groups of student body in conversations around racism."
3. "Review the content of the curriculum to have anti-racism as integrated into the core subjects."
4. "Integrate diverse student bodies into the mainstream rather than segregate or marginalise."
5. "Create momentum in this area of anti-racism so that all people are involved."
6. "Influence racist attitudes encountered by students within local schools."
7. "Influence universities of the negative impact of racism and promote anti-racism."
8. "Influence employers on the code of behaviours to racism and move to anti-racism practices."
9. "Have cultural parades and celebrations and serve food which is culturally sensitive."
10. "Leaders need to walk around college and be more visible."

Staff:

1. "Meaningful actions via honest reflection based on accurate reading of data and other evidence."
2. "Set targets for recruitment of middle and senior leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds."
3. "Information needs to be transparent."
4. "Strengthen the work that has taken place by allocating funding."
5. "Top-down approach on anti-racism training."
6. "Training to make staff aware of different cultural issues."
7. "HR Team needs to be more diverse."
8. "All staff need to maintain a zero-tolerance to workplace discrimination especially microaggressions."
9. "Cultural inclusion within the curriculum is key."
10. "Booking of time off for religious festivals not to differ depending on the religion."

5.2 ANALYSIS OF WORKFORCE DATA

As part of the commissioned research, five colleges asked BLG to analyse their Workforce (including Governance) data from a 'Black* lens'. In each case, we worked with respective college data teams to ensure data accuracy and ownership.

The following section provides a summary of key findings from our data analysis.

The chart below provides an overview summary of Black* representation within each of the five colleges. For each college, the data covers Black* representation in terms of their local city/town and schools populations, their workforce profile (governing body, SLT, managers and staff) and learner profile (including those following apprenticeships).
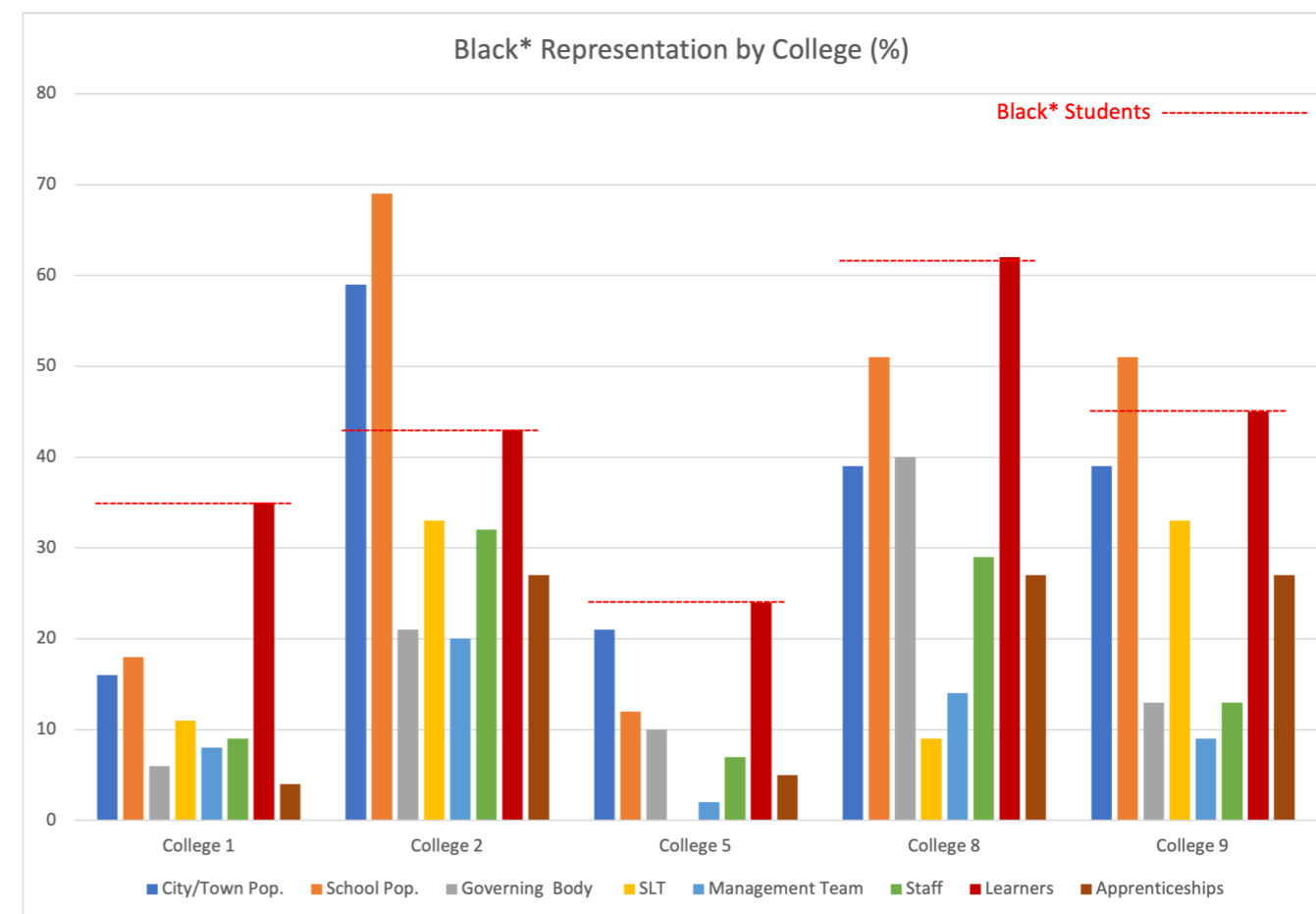

1. In all five cases, the college workforce was unrepresentative at all levels, when compared with student and local populations.

2. Governing bodies were significantly unrepresentative of their student bodies, in relation to ethnicity. Across the five colleges, an average of 18% of governors were from Black* communities and there were no Chairs. Chairs of committees were even less likely to be from Black* communities.

BLG uses *'Black' as an inclusive definition for people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who share a lived experience of the effects of racism.

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3. Black* senior leaders and middle managers were significantly underrepresented within each of the five colleges.

4. In all five colleges, Black* students were underrepresented on college apprenticeship programmes.

5. In combining the data for the five colleges to provide an 'overall picture' of representation, we can show that college workforces were neither representative of their students nor the local communities they served. On average 18% of staff were Black* when compared with an (average) Black* student body of 42%. This compared with average ethnic breakdowns in local population and school population of 35% and 40%, respectively (see chart below).

Average Black* Representation of 5 colleges (%)
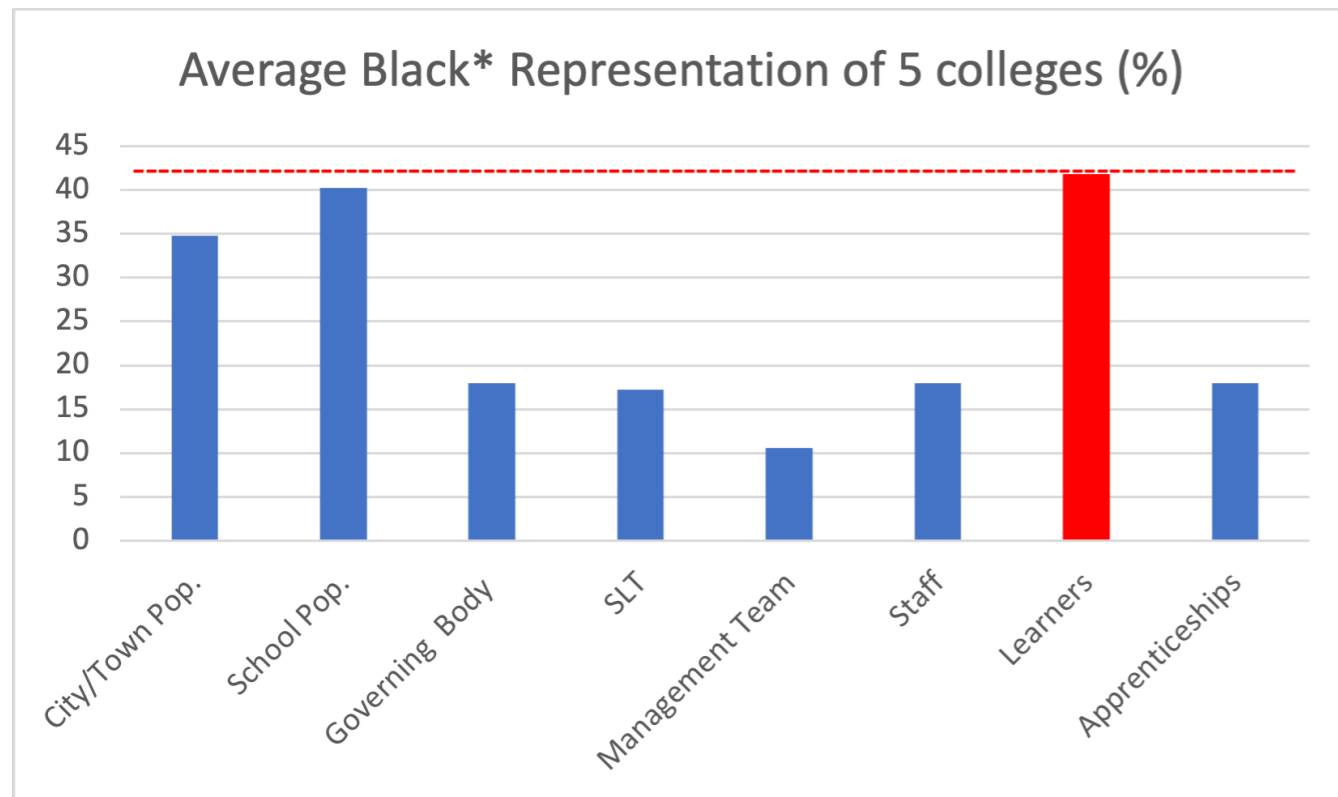
6. An analysis of workforce recruitment & selection data for each college indicated a significant 'loss' in Black* applicants at each stage of the recruitment and selection process, even when there was a significant proportion of Black* applicants. The chart below shows an analysis of the combined recruitment data for participant colleges.

7. On average, 28% of all job applicants were from Black* communities, 21% were shortlisted (1 in 5), 23% were appointed from those that were shortlisted (1 in 4) with only 5% appointed (1 in 20) based on those who had applied.

Average Black* Representation at Each Stage of Recruitment & selection (%)
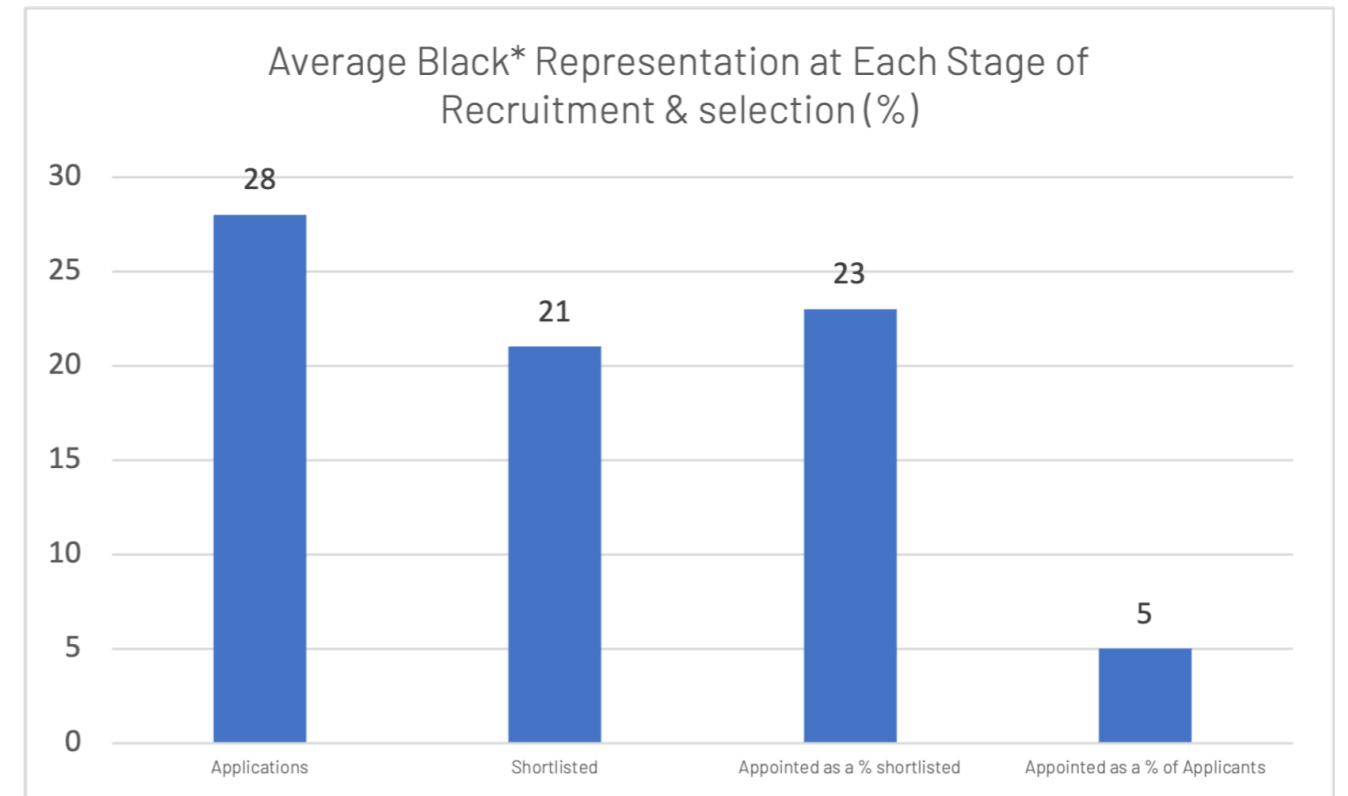

8. An analysis of staff starting and leaving their employment was undertaken in the five participating colleges to estimate how long it would take each college to increase their Black* staff to a level that was commensurate with their student body. For each college, we projected the number of years it would take to improve Black* staff representation to a level that reflected their current Black* student population. The individual projections were:

College 1 – 9 years
College 2 – 7 years
College 5 – 100 years
College 8 – Difficult to estimate due to a significant redundancy programme
College 9 – 15 years.

It is important to note that the above projections were generated using a number of crude assumptions. These included assuming: i) each college continued to employ Black* staff at the same rate as currently ii) negligible future increases in the appointment of White staff and iii) the proportion of Black* students would not change. BLG has already highlighted that Black* student representation will increase due to demographic changes in the population, particularly young people. It should also be noted that recruitment of staff is particularly difficult as post-16 funding is reducing and managing finances is challenging.

9. We also undertook analysis of staff discipline, grievance and redundancy data. However, it was too difficult to combine college data as information was collected and collated using different formats. From our review of individual colleges' data, Black* staff were more likely to be involved in formal disciplinary processes in two colleges. A further two colleges reported Black* staff disciplinaries on a par with overall profiles and one college had proportionately less Black* staff being disciplined. In the cases of the two colleges reporting 'high' Black* referrals to formal processes, one reported referrals at 150% above profile and the other at 200% above the norm.

Example - College:

**Comparison of Disciplinaries, Grievances and Redundancies against Staff Profile (%)**
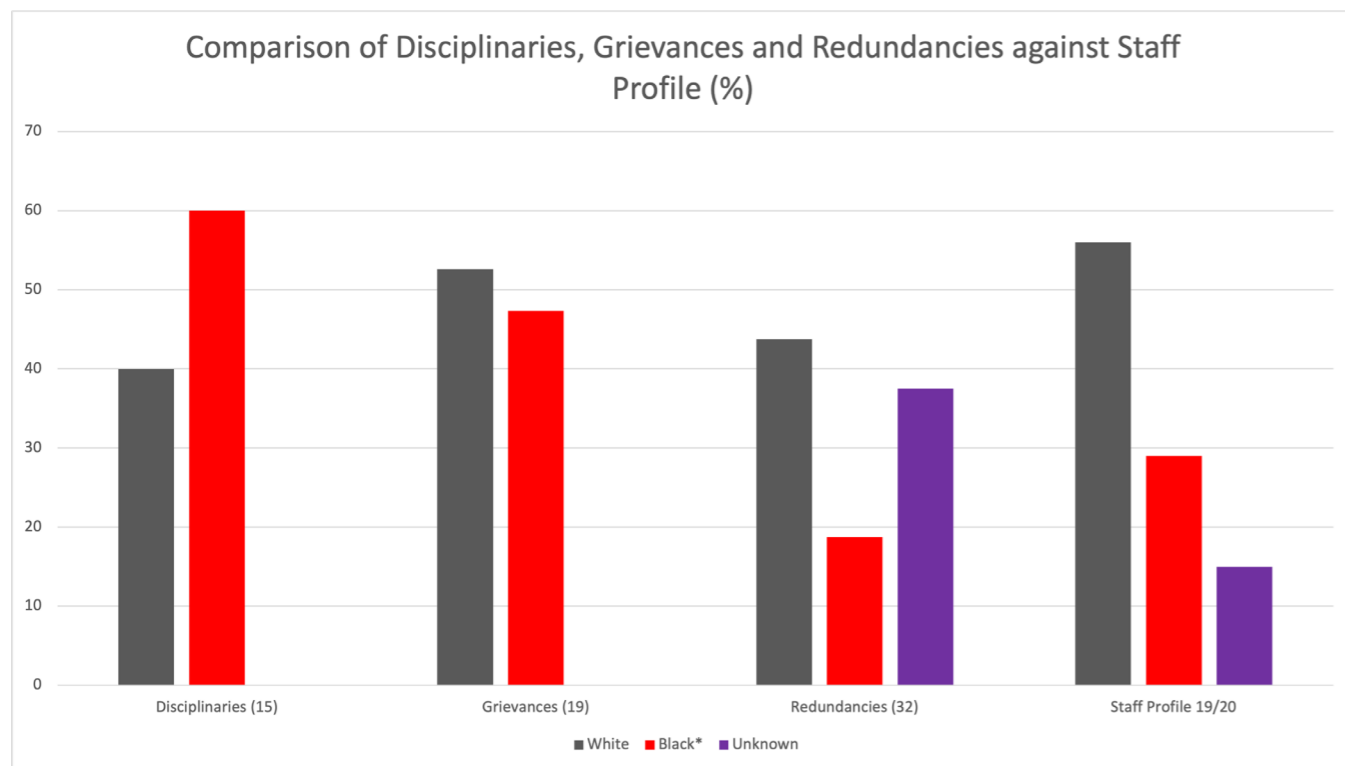
10. In terms of staff grievances, four colleges collected this data with three reporting higher rates of Black* staff involved in grievances than expected.

11. Of those colleges that underwent redundancy processes, total numbers were too small to analyse but, as illustrated in the example above, Black* staff were less likely to be made redundant, though there were a significant number of 'unknowns', in regard to declared ethnic identity.

5.3 ANALYSIS OF STUDENT DATA

As part of our analysis of workforce data for five colleges, BLG also reviewed their student data. In each case, we used college student management information data (MIS) to ensure data accuracy and ownership.
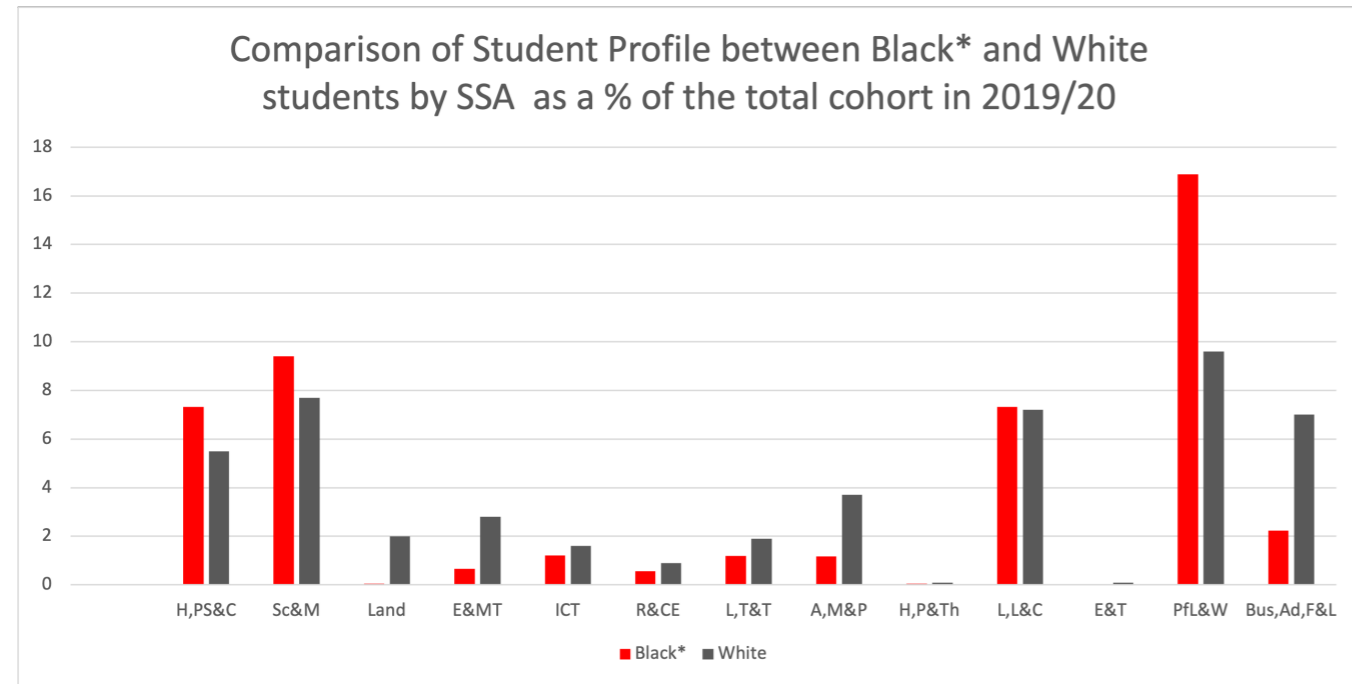
We have selected examples of data generated for individual colleges to illustrate our findings.

1. For each college, we generated Black* student participation rates in the curriculum by level and sector subject area (SSA). At these colleges, Black* students were more likely to study on lower-level programmes. Also, apart from Asian students, other Black* groups were less likely to study on Level 3 or HE programmes (see example below).
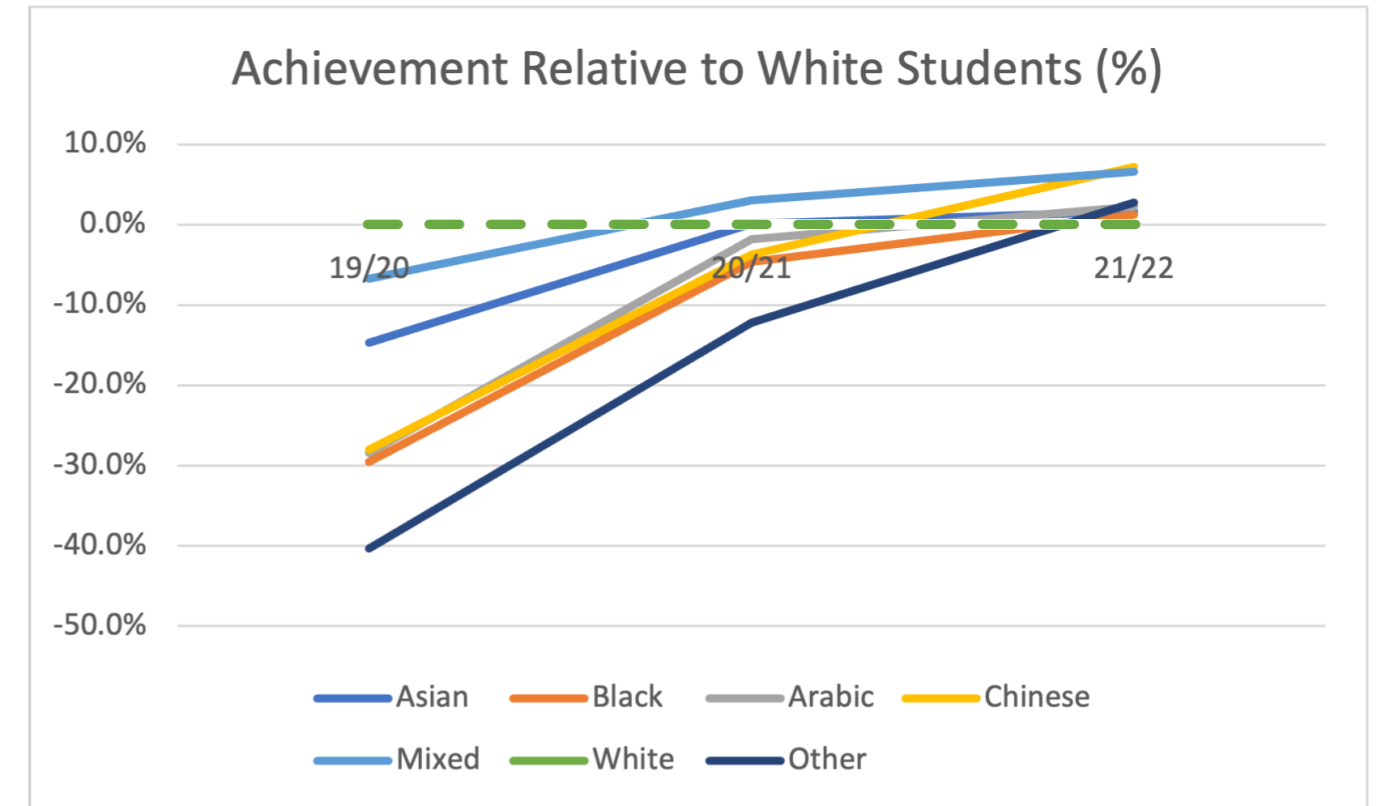

Participation Rate by Level & Ethnicity (%)
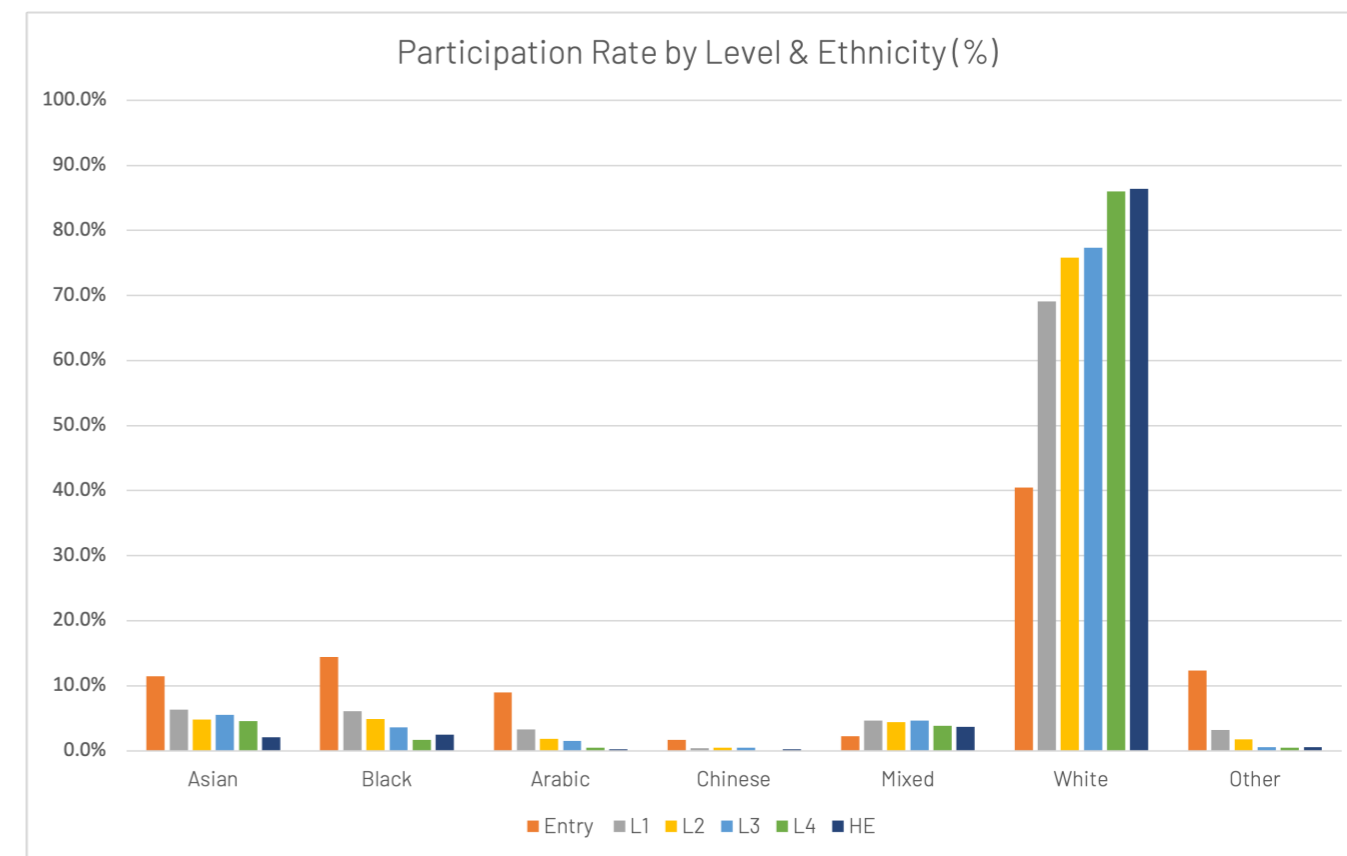
2. Black* students were more likely to follow entry and level 1 programmes e.g. English/ESOL, Maths/Numeracy and Foundation Studies Black* students were also more likely to study vocational areas where income levels were low. For example, Black* students were more likely to follow Health and Social Care, Childcare and Business Administration programmes.

3. Black* students were less likely to study in some sector areas e.g. agriculture, horticulture and animal care, construction and related subjects, and education training programmes (see the following chart).

BLG uses *'Black' as an inclusive definition for people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who share a lived experience of the effects of racism.

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4. We also found some differentiations within some subject areas. For example, Black* students follow IT pathways were less likely to study on programmes seen as high value e.g. Coding, Gaming and Programming and more likely to follow general IT Practitioners routes.
Example College:

Comparison of Student Profile between Black* and White students by SSA as a % of the total cohort in 2019/20

5. For each college, we generated achievements rates by level and three-year period, and also by level. At these colleges, overall achievement rates for Black* students showed improvements over a three-year period and were at or above levels of attainment for their White peers.
Example - College:

Achievement Relative to White Students (%)

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6. Relative to White learners, Black* learners achievement rates at Entry and Level 1 were lower. This is worrying given, as previously highlighted, a higher proportion of Black* students' study on Entry and Level 1 programmes. Black* students performed better at Levels 2 and 3.
Example – College:

Achievement Relative to White Students by Level(%)

Legend: Asian, Black, Chinese, Mixed, White, Other
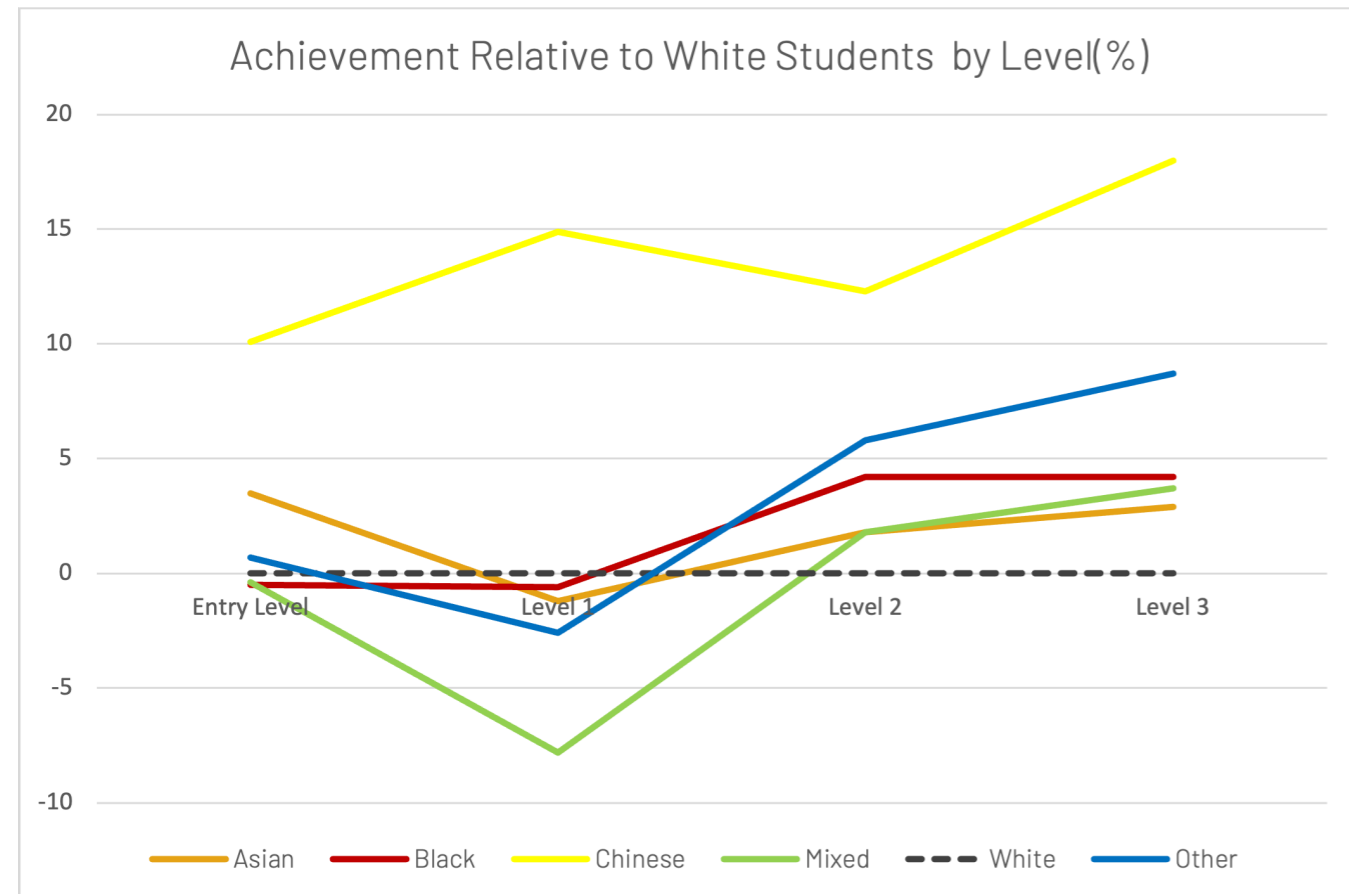
7. Student Discipline, Suspensions and Exclusions were not widely recorded in terms of ethnicity. Of the colleges that reported suspensions and exclusions rates by ethnicity, Black* students were more likely than their White peers to be referred to college disciplinary processes.

6. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following set of hypotheses were drawn from the research studies conducted:

From Black* Student and Staff Interviews and Surveys

1. For both Black* students and staff, their sense of belonging in college is higher than their sense of representation.
2. Most Black* students do not 'see themselves' at all levels of their college, both through their curriculum journey or through engagement with college support services.
3. Most Black* staff want to progress their career but feel a lack of opportunity, advocacy, and confidence as key barriers.
4. Most Black* staff engage in appraisals, but they do not see them as vehicles for career conversations with their line managers.
5. Most Black* staff perceive college recruitment processes to be fair, but most are uncertain whether the best candidates are appointed.
6. Black* students and staff welcome college action to raise awareness of the effects of racism but they feel 'culture shifts' are needed for colleges to become anti-racist communities.

From Analysis of Workforce Data

7. Almost all college governing bodies are not ethnically representative of student populations or local communities. Chairs of governance committees are also unrepresentative.
8. Curriculum staffing does not reflect student curriculum profiles, in terms of ethnicity.
9. Management and staffing across business support functions in colleges are not representative of student populations or local communities.
10. Comparatively high levels of Black* candidates apply for college roles but the chances of them being shortlisted or appointed diminish through formal recruitment and selection processes.
11. In instances where colleges report net increases in Black* staff, this is a more likely due to fewer Black* staff leaving the institution (compared with their White counterparts), rather than through increased recruitment.
12. There is sufficient 'cause for concern' for colleges to report the ethnic breakdown of staff referrals through formal disciplinary, grievance and redundancy processes.

From Analysis of Student Data

13. Most Black* students are more likely to be enrolled onto lower-level courses and concentrated within a narrow set of subject sector areas and pathways in college.
14. Achievement rates for Black* groups are improving generally but tend to be lower at Entry level and level 1, where most Black* students are concentrated.
15. Black* students are more likely to be formally referred to college disciplinary processes.

FE Quality Outcomes and Black* Leadership

16. As at 31 August 2023, 92% of colleges were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. Although Black* CEOs and Chairs were very much underrepresented through the research studies, it is important to point out that this is not as a result of a record of poor performance amongst colleges who have Black* CEOs and/or Chairs. At present 93% of colleges led by Black* CEOs are judged as being either Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and 91% of Black* Chairs currently leading colleges with the same inspection outcomes.

We raise the above point because throughout the research studies Black* students, staff and leaders shared perceptions that they were seen as 'less worthy' and felt they had to work harder to prove themselves.

We believe each of the above hypotheses warrant deeper investigation by individual colleges, and also at sector level.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

We make the following five recommendations to system and sector leaders, policymakers and stakeholders:

1. Take urgent action to alleviate institutionalised ethnic underrepresentation in colleges, recognising why this is educationally, emotionally and reputationally critical.
2. Review and publicly report student participation, attainment and progression data in terms of ethnicity, to assess college contributions towards making the most of an ethnically diverse Britain, locally, regionally and nationally.
3. Recognise the relationship between 'fair recruitment' and 'positive action' through college recruitment and selection processes and move to the latter, to accelerate progress towards addressing evidential gaps in ethnic representation.
4. Act on the 'cause for concern' about the ethnic breakdown of student and staff referrals via college disciplinary, grievance and redundancy processes, and assume responsibility for enabling the full potential of Black* students and staff throughout their college journeys.
5. Build on the courage and foresight demonstrated by the ten colleges who inspired this report, to systemise and standardise qualitative and quantitative data collection and reporting for all colleges, in terms of ethnicity.

ABOUT THE BLACK LEADERSHIP GROUP (BLG)

Our mission: Eradicate racism.

Our vision: An anti-racist culture at the core of all aspects of UK life and work, and equity of access to the employment market.

Our purpose: We exist to challenge systemic racism for the benefit of all Black* communities and the wider UK society as a whole, to be the authoritative voice of Anti-racism in F/HE, schools, public, voluntary and private sectors and to further the interests of people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who share a lived experience of the effects of racism.

**Black
Leadership
Group**
Activist. Authentic. Authoritative.

Contact Details
To affiliate or for further information,
please email exec@blackleadershipgroup.com