

BAME STUDENT EXPERIENCE REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

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For every hundred white students, Surrey awards 89 firsts or 2:1s.
For every hundred black students, Surrey awards 65 firsts or 2:1s.

We want to know why.



The University of Surrey
Students' Union

Who did we talk to?

In conducting this research, we spoke to 28 Black students and 8 Asian students in 6 different focus groups, a mixture of both male and females across all three Faculties at the University. In conjunction with this, we also surveyed 100 students:

ETHNICITY	NO. STUDENTS
Black	21
Asian	15
Arab	3
White	56
Other	5

FACULTY	NO. STUDENTS
FASS	45
FEPS	23
FHMS	32

GENDER	NO. STUDENTS
Female	69
Male	30
None of the above	1

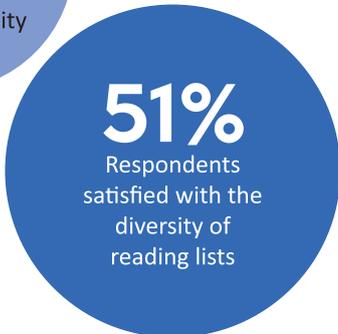
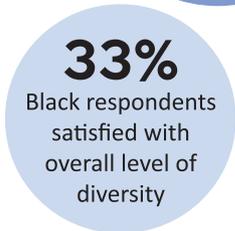
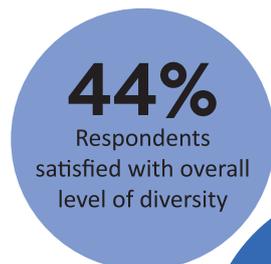
DOMICILE	NO. STUDENTS
EU	13
International	9
UK	78

Academic Life

DIVERSITY AND THE CLASSROOM

In our focus groups with Black students, we discussed the relationship between diversity and education at Surrey.

In general, our participants were positive about the level of inclusion in teaching practices (88% responded positively) but indicated that diversity was lacking in the curriculum and material being taught (81% responded in this way).



A key contributing factor that participants raised was the level of BAME representation amongst staff:

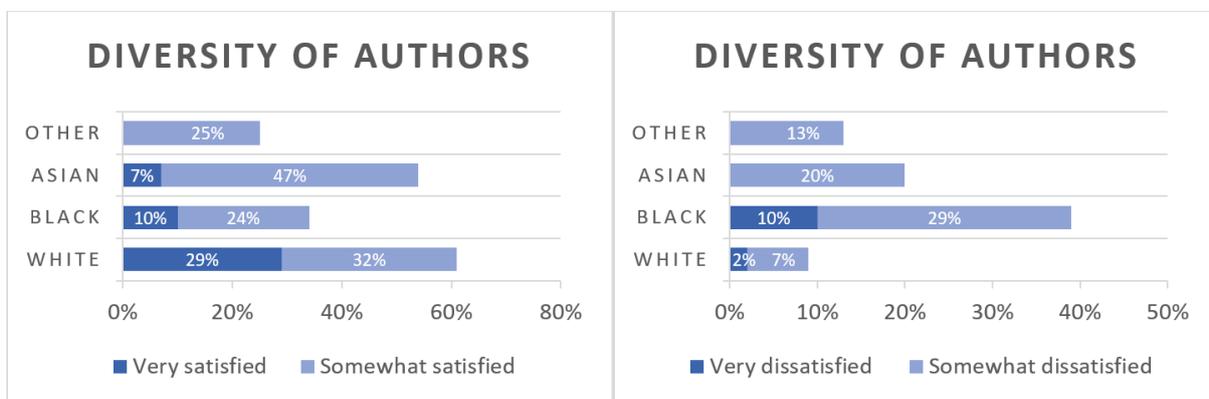
“I feel like the lack of presence [of black staff members] means there’s not much voice for black students.”

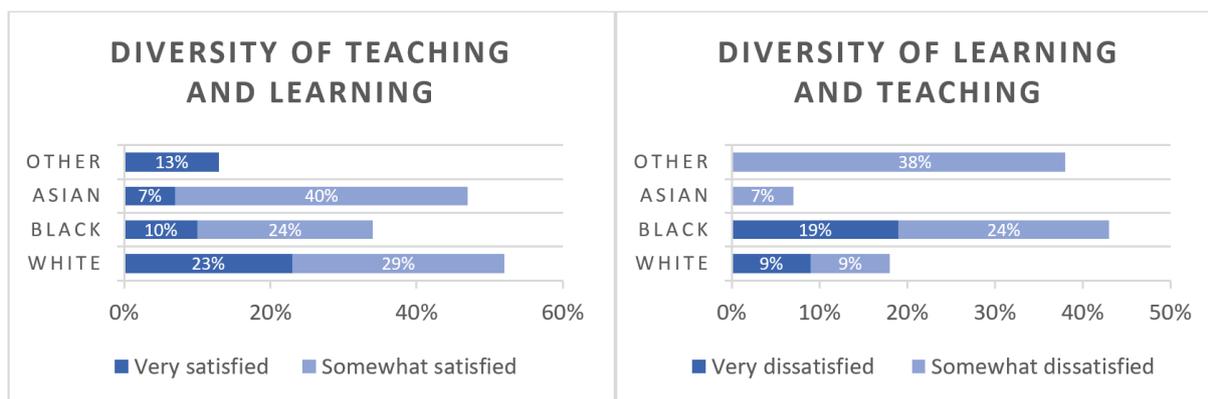
“When people say that it won’t make any difference [hiring BAME lectures], I think it’s easy for them to say that because they’re used to seeing people that look like them, but for us that don’t see anyone that looks like us, it does make an impact.”

In our follow-up survey, we asked students how satisfied they are with diversity in 1) lecture/seminar content; 2) of authors in reading lists, and; 3) in general across learning and assessments.

Half of all respondents were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the diversity of authors and other individuals in lecture/seminar content.

However, noticeable differences can be seen when considering ethnicity:





MARKING AND ASSESSMENT

The 2019 National Student Survey indicates a difference in student satisfaction with the fairness of marking assessments when comparing ethnicities. In our survey, we asked “Do you feel that markers are aware of your race when marking?”, and the vast majority indicated that markers are not aware. In our focus groups with Black students, 61% of students expressed that they felt marking was open to bias, and one-in-four believed they had personally experienced unfair or biased marking.

This suggests a possible variation of student expectation and an opportunity to further understand students’ expectations of fair marking practices.

“I feel like I have to prove myself and be ten times better than everyone [referring to white classmates] before I can be seen as equal...I think that there is bias”

We recommend additional research to understand how students understand fairness in marking.

A general theme amongst respondents was that anonymous marking would inspire greater confidence in the fairness of marking. Some students mentioned the possibility of intentional or unintentional bias when marking work where the name is provided:

“I’m not sure as I believe all of our exams are marked by candidate number only however for some cw [coursework] I can understand the preconceived prejudice from someones name even if unintentional”

We recommend a student consultation on revised anonymous marking practices.

In open comments, it was also highlighted that some students feel that they would benefit from greater access to, and feedback on, exam scripts. We believe that this would provide greater transparency of marking and allow additional development opportunities for students.

“After doing exams, we should get access to see our own exams... we learn from our own mistakes and if we don't know what we did wrong, we don't learn from them.”

We recommend a review of access to exam scripts, and the opportunities to receive feedback on exams.

GROUP WORK

Overall, white respondents were likely to express comfort in group settings. However, students from overseas and Black students were notably less comfortable for reasons including:

- Perceived quality of English
- ‘Mansplaining’
- Being the ‘only one’

“I already stick out because of my race so i don't particularly want to attract more unwanted attention to myself” – Black female student

Black and Asian female students showed a higher response rate for comments on being “singled out”, “intimidated”, or “excluded”.

One Asian female student shared that “they tend to exclude me in proper discussions no matter how much I try which I understand why since I'm a hijabi. Therefore, I do feel uncomfortable when I get assigned a group work with certain people.”

LEVEL PLAYING-FIELD

In the context of focus groups, participants discussed the notion of a ‘level playing-field’ at Surrey, in the sense of fairness and equity in the treatment of all individuals. Of those asked, fewer than 50% of focus group participants expressed that they did perceive a level playing-field; the other respondents either unsure or disagreeing:

“Do you think there's a level playing-field for all students at Surrey”



“I think that the uni wants to make it seem that everyone is equal but I think that we are not, it just to show people that yes we have equal this and equal that but they value certain types of people over others so I don't think that we are all equal no”

OTHER COMMENTS

We asked students for any other comments relating to the diversity of their curriculum. Thematic analysis shows 3 prominent areas of discussion:

- **Diversity in the sciences**
- **Positive practices**
- **Representation amongst staff**

Diversity within taught content was raised by several students. Two students from FASS directly referenced the high proportion of “*cis white men*” within their course content. One student shared that “*Everything on my course is by a cis white man, unless the module is specifically about a different race or queerness. Disability/ability has never even been mentioned.*”

One student from FEPS remarked on their reading list: “*As an engineering student I do understand that most of our resources are written by men since it is only recently that women have begun to participate in this field but it seems as though the department uses this as an excuse to not have to push to be diverse.*”

Within the sciences, one black, male student stated that “*As a scientist, there is no representation in the industry. This is further reinforced when I’m on placement and don’t see anyone that looks like me either.*”

Diversity amongst staff was a theme brought out in multiple responses. Some had positive reflections on the diversity of staff, including one white student from FEPS who remarked that “*The lecturers in my department are a diverse group of people*”. However, a female Asian student within FHMS expressed: “*Every one of my lecturers are white, there’s not one POC*”.

Multiple students identified the value in hearing from diverse perspectives within their learning. Summarised by one student in FASS:

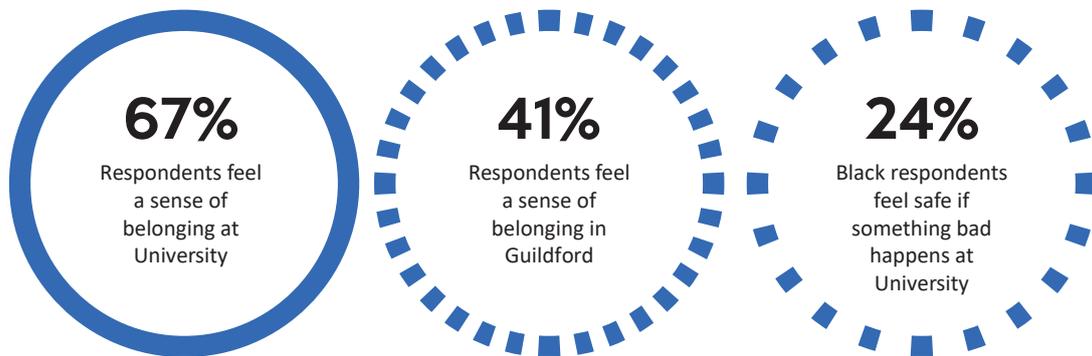
“*In such an international community ... I have enjoyed teaching from a variety of lecturers not only coming from different countries, but [who have] taught at different universities before, bringing varied perspectives*”

In focus groups, participants highlighted that staff confidence and literacy in having conversations about race in the classroom varied.

We recommend additional training for academic staff on respectful communication with diverse audiences.

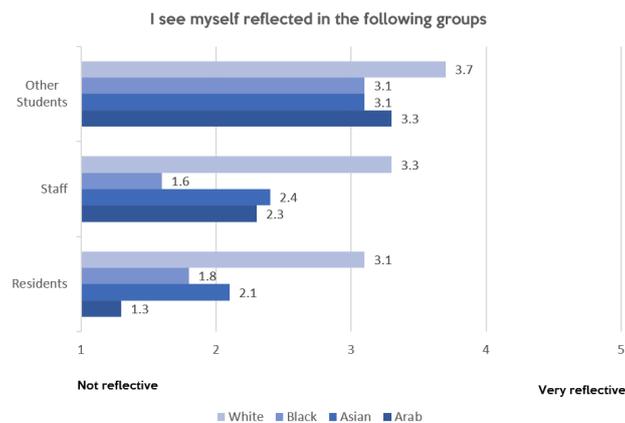
We recommend for staff appraisals to require attendance at unconscious bias training.

Representation and Belonging



In our focus groups, we asked Black students whether they felt there was the right level of representation of Black people amongst staff at Surrey. 89% said “no” (the remaining 11% were unsure).

We asked students on a 5-point scale to rate the extent to which they felt students, staff, and Guildford residents reflected people like them. Whilst the majority (58%) responded either 4 or 5 in relation to students (meaning that they felt students to be highly reflective of people like them), differences can be seen when considering ethnicity:



68% of black students rated the extent to which they felt that staff were reflective of people like them at a score of 1, the lowest option, indicating a sentiment that staff were not reflective of their lived experiences. BAME students on the whole scored the extent to which they felt Guildford residents are reflective of people like them at a similar level to their perceptions of staff.

“Whenever I go to town there are always people who look at me, stare at me, it’s like they’ve never seen a black person... like we’re a different species.”

In focus groups Black and Asian students mentioned the importance of role models and highlighted the lack of role models from similar backgrounds or perspectives as themselves, both in university and society. Despite this, several participants stated that having two black sabbatical officers has had a positive impact on their university experience.

“Seeing two black faces in the committee you feel you’re being represented, and there are people who would relate to and understand you if you go speak to them, so I think representation is very important in how comfortable you feel at Uni.”

“If there was any year I would use the Union or University services it would be this year. It was just, psychologically, “oh, you look like me.”

We recommend the introduction of an award at graduation that celebrates the contribution from a BAME Student towards life at Surrey.

DISCRIMINATION

In our focus groups 54% of black students stated that they had experienced racism at Surrey or in the local area, participants also discussed microaggressions. Several students perceived there to be covert racism at Surrey by both staff members and students which often manifest as microaggressions.

“When that girl left a banana on your desk. You can’t go to the President and say this girl gave me a banana, she needs to go, but we all know what she means. She might as well call you a nigger.”

“Institutional racism, which is more covert, more hidden, like saying things in a certain way, and if you’re not black you don’t really understand it [...] I think there’s a lot of institutional racism which you can’t pinpoint.”

A black male participant mentioned that he felt the need to portray himself in a certain way due to how he may be perceived because of his skin colour; this perspective was also adopted by other students.

“I feel like I have to portray myself in a certain image that will be safe because I feel that my outer appearance already gives off a certain perception so I have to be overly nice to make up for the fact that because of my appearance some people will think that I’m a mean person.”

27% of survey respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of discrimination on campus or in the local area. Of those that specifically referenced the form of discrimination, 6 took place in Guildford or referenced local residents, 3 referred to feeling discriminated against by the University or by staff, 3 referred to racism (in addition to one making specific reference to maltreatment when wearing a hijab), 2 referred to discrimination on the basis of sexuality, 2 on the basis of gender, and 1 on the basis of accessibility.

Although these numbers may themselves appear small, it paints a worrying picture amongst the broader student population. Indeed, some respondents commented that they expect for there to be problems in future, or that they are aware of incidents affecting friends:

“No I haven’t, well, not yet”

“Personally no major issues but friends have experienced severe discrimination for being of East Asian descent and when reported to the University received [sic.] no support and therefore I lack trust in the University.”

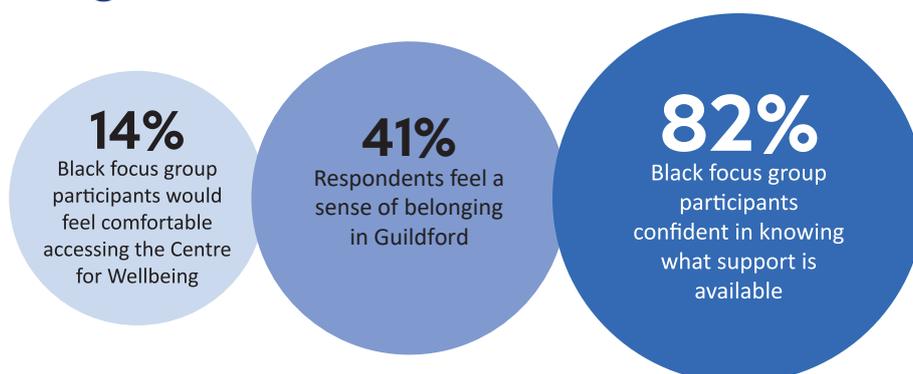
A male respondent also shared experiences of perceived profiling from local law enforcement:

“I feel like its a stigma [...] one time I was with my friends, two other black friends and we were walking up to our accommodation [...] and we were suddenly surrounded by like seven or eight apparent police officers who asked us for our student cards and they had followed us all the way from the bridge”

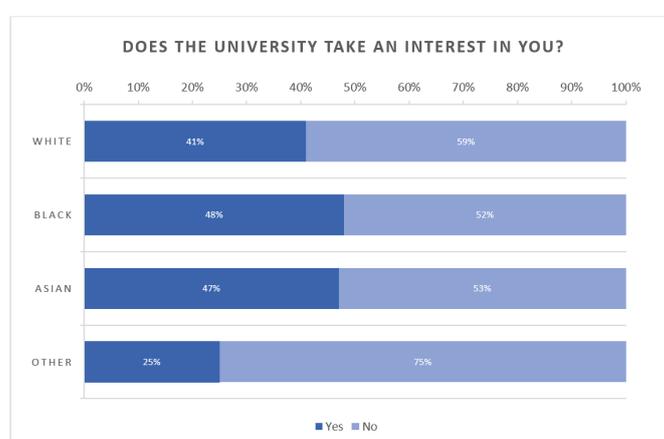
Black male students in the focus group agreed with the above statement and shared personal experiences, 3 out of 4 had been stopped and searched by the police. They believe this was due to racial profiling.

We recommend introducing a liaison group with Surrey Police with student representation.

Wellbeing



We asked our respondents “Do you feel that the University takes an active interest in you?”. On the whole, our respondents painted an unsure picture:



When discussing the support available, several positive comments were made about individuals at the University, and provided some insight into the services from which students would seek support:

- **Centre for Wellbeing** (37 mentions)
- **The Students' Union** (including Nightline and Wellbeing Champions) (11 mentions)
- **The Hive** (8 mentions)
- **Guildowns Medical Centre** (7 mentions)
- **Personal tutors** (5 mentions)

Although the Centre for Wellbeing received the most mentions by name, it is worth noting that 8 respondents highlighted waiting times as a barrier to accessing support from the Centre. When asked specifically about factors that would affect whether a student could access support on campus, 20% highlighted waiting times as a concern, followed by privacy (6%), the commute (5%), and cultural understanding (4%).

In our focus groups Black and Asian students highlighted cultural differences and the lack of BAME staff as a key factor preventing them from seeking support services.

“I feel like because of my cultural background and religious beliefs I wouldn’t get advice or support I’m looking for there.”

Participants also mentioned that more should be done to support the wellbeing of BAME students as mental health problems are often not spoken about within their communities. An Asian student stated that mental health problems are considered “taboo”.

“I think that black people minimise our own problems, so we could be going through the exact same thing as a white person but we just don’t see it as much because we have been through worse or because our families went through worse or our people went through worse so me being sad today doesn’t really mean much in comparison.”

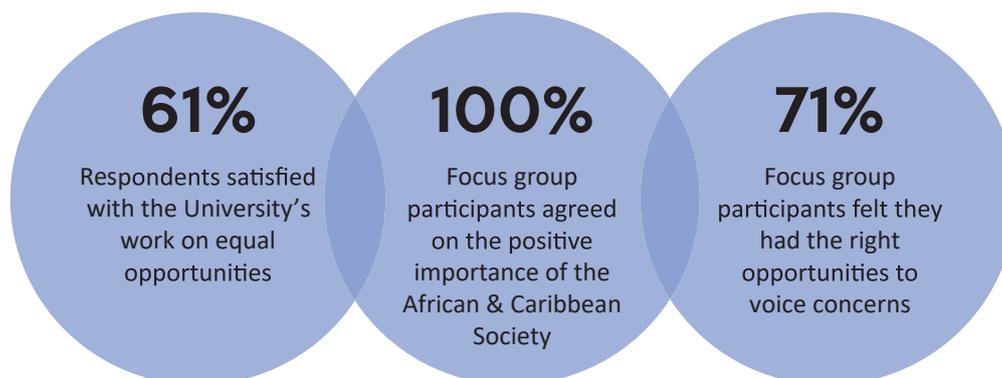
We recommend the introduction of a specialist in mental health and culture.

We recommend a communications campaign in collaboration with faith and cultural societies regarding the availability of support on campus.

We recommend the introduction of translated materials publicising the Centre for Wellbeing.

We recommend a commitment to BAME student consultation in support service design.

Student Voice and the Students' Union



Overall, 47% of respondents in our survey did not feel included in decisions made about their course, compared to 45% who suggested that they did feel included. When considering work taken surrounding equal opportunities, however, a higher proportion of students reported satisfaction with the University's work (61%).

In focus groups, it was highlighted that work surrounding Equality and Diversity, particularly events in relation to diversity, could be better promoted or publicized across campus.

We recommend themed communications from the University on the theme of inclusion, including clear actions and progress made against targets.

In the course of our focus groups, participants discussed the nightlife in Guildford and raised a specific recommendation relating to the use of songs in Rubix that employ the N-word or other appropriated terms.

"Using the N word for example in a song, obviously that's very subjective but people should be more conscious and not say it, I have a problem with that."

This was also highlighted in our survey, when we asked students "If you could change one thing about the University, what would it be?" A respondent stated:

"To stop playing songs with the N word in Rubix."

We recommend guidance relating to the cultural appropriateness of song choices in.

RUBIX

Throughout our focus groups, participants highlighted intersections between culture and faith. Indeed, a number of both focus group participants and survey respondents noted the importance of a relationship with their faith, or support from a faith-based organisation.

When asked in focus groups, 100% of participants agreed that the Afro-Caribbean Society (ACS) has a positive impact on their student experience, and other societies were also highlighted. This suggests an opportunity for greater communication via student groups of support available to students.

■ We recommend communications campaign in collaboration with faith and cultural societies regarding the availability of support on campus

In conjunction with considering access to support, our focus groups asked about the accessibility of extenuating circumstances (EC) processes to students and, in particular, whether participants felt that BAME students are as likely as their White counterparts to report personal circumstances to the University. In this case, all participants agreed that BAME students are not as likely to seek access to ECs, and several expressed not knowing that support from the Students' Union was available for this.

“I think black people are just slower to ask for help and have more of a mentality to just bear it I think, I know a lot of white students are quicker to complain when they've got issues, I find as well that white students tend to know where to go for help with those issues whereas black students wouldn't.”

■ We recommend continued promotion of academic advice within the Students' Union.

CHANGE ONE THING

Both our survey and focus groups concluded by asking “If you could change one thing about the University, what would it be?”. Of the responses, the biggest theme was inclusion (18 mentions). Inclusion-based comments included: sport, academic support, communication of academics, food, events, and employability.

1 in 4 of BAME respondents left an inclusion-based comment, which suggests a particular interest in inclusion within this group. The list of ideas will be made available separately.

■ Recommendations in Full

ACADEMIC LIFE

1. Additional research to understand how students understand fairness in marking.
2. Student consultation on revised anonymous marking practices.
3. Review of access to exam scripts, and the opportunities to receive feedback on exams.
4. Additional training for academics on respectful communication with diverse audiences.

BELONGING

1. Staff appraisals to require attendance at unconscious bias training.
2. Introduce an award at graduation that celebrates the contribution from a BAME student towards life at Surrey.
3. Introduce a liaison group with Surrey Police with student representation.

WELLBEING

1. Run a communications campaign in collaboration with faith and cultural societies regarding the availability of support on campus.
2. Introduce translated materials publicizing the Centre for Wellbeing.
3. Commit to BAME student consultation in support service design.
4. Introduce a specialist in mental health and culture.

STUDENT VOICE AND THE STUDENTS' UNION

1. Themed communications from the University on the theme of inclusion, including clear actions and progress made against targets.
2. Introduce a policy relating to the cultural appropriateness of song choices in Rubix.
3. Continued promotion of the Students' Union's academic advice function.
4. Collaborative working with the University on tailored communications, student consultation on anonymous marking, and additional research on perceptions of marking fairness.

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The University of Surrey
Students' Union