Report for Sussex University Race Equality Charter 2023

Introduction

We facilitated three focus groups two with staff and one with students. One staff focus group had two participants and the other six participants (REC Sat). Eight staff members in total. The student focus group had two participants. This included five black and Minoritised staff and two black and Minoritised students.

These focus groups were initiated from Sussex University in their steps towards achieving Race Equality Charter status, reflecting on university experiences and responses of black and minoritised staff and students.

The focus groups were open spaces where participants could raise concerns and issues pertinent to them, we would then prompt on certain themes if they had not been covered during the focus group. We assured anonymity to participants in their contributions. We recorded the sessions with each session lasting 1.5hours, these were transcribed to ensure we included all the comments made.

Given the small number of participants in the focus groups this allowed them to create a momentum and energy around certain themes together, therefore in providing the quotes in this report they can be understood as shared collective thoughts from each focus group.

This report is set out based on central themes from the focus groups. It seeks to articulate and represent the dialogues, experiences, reflections and ways forward of black and minoritised staff and students. We have as far as is possible sought to represent the report strongly with the voices and thoughts of the participants.

Sections

1) Overall approach to racism at Sussex University

2) Race Equity Advocates

3) Experiences of racism staff and students

4) Experiences of racism in the classroom

5) Recruitment of black and racial minoritised staff

6) Increased workload for Black and racial minoritised staff

7) White staff involvement in race and racism

8) Decolonising the Curriculum

9) Ways Forward

1) Overall approach to racism at Sussex University

From the following comments in this section, we can see there is cynicism about the seriousness in which the university is taking the issue of racism. There are elements of denial, the nature and scale of the problem, that the university is only just awakening to this as a problem, despite policies being in place no consequent action follows from those policies, and that there is no trust or belief that it is something the university want to tackle. The question is also raised if there is understanding of how racism operates and is manifested within the university. The loss of the Race Equity Advocates (REA) featured significantly in all the focus groups and was a concern for each person which certainly contributed to the points expressed in this section.

I don't think this university acknowledged that it had a problem with race and racism until about two or three years ago. There are no statues here, right? This is not Oxford. Our hall's called Mandela Hall, as it always has been for 30 years. Brighton's this liberal... I think that they didn't think we had a problem.

I think Sussex is really late to the party…it's a bit like how, you know, the awarding gap has to be closed, because you know, that is what all universities have to do. It is really late, and that is a part of... there is a bigger cultural issue to look at, and you do need someone to head it up, and people to stay long enough to do that…. when I looked at... even look at our policy, a lot of money went into the university policy around restoring respect, or dignity and respect. It's actually a really good policy. And a lot of resource went into that. But then, like, it's the... the infrastructure behind it isn't there, that makes people lose faith.

Participants raised the lack of accountability when the policy is breeched. It was felt the policy was not integrated within the operational structures and no implementation of any sanctions.

Like, when someone does breach it, which people breach these policies all day long. Like they're happening all of the time. Like not necessarily because of malice, right? Because of like, being like, not really getting it, or not realising you're a part of the problem of racism. People doing it, but there's very little to show that there's any, like, tangible, like, accountability for that. Even though the policy exists. I'll hear students talking to me, especially when we had Race Equity Advocates in the schools, I didn't understand that there was that policy at first. And then I started realising people actively breaching the policy, and then when you try and raise it to the right people, there's a reluctance to... there's a reluctance to kind of use it, do it through the systems. Because they don't want to reprimand their staff, even though what we were trying to say is, you don't have to reprimand them. It might be that you're showing that there's a training issue, or development issue, or something that needs to happen. And if they keep breaching it, after you're put the stuff in, then maybe you might have to have some course of action.

But there was a massive reluctance to do that. Like, I feel like that's a part of the culture… until stuff actually starts to happen, then you won't really shift the culture. Because people need to see that, oh, I'm getting pulled up when I use the

inappropriate language, and I've upset people. And then students and staff need to know when they put it in, put that in, that it needs to be... that something is going to happen. because actually, if people, students and staff, feel really vulnerable to even use those systems, just in case the comeback is on them. Because now, you don't see it being used properly.

To put into perspective how difficult the work is with Sussex University is that, when Black Lives Matter stuff, senior leadership decided that they - not all senior leadership, but as a whole, senior leadership voted to not write a statement in solidarity around the Black Lives Matter. It took a petition of students to make that happen, and staff, to make that happen. I don't care if Sussex only wants to do stuff for its reputation. As long as it does it, and it does it right, without harming people. Don't tell me you're doing race work whilst actually crushing, like, a whole load of people of colour, (reference to stopping funding for the race equity advocates) to the point they were all feeling, basically, very mentally ill. That is a mess.

Trust and participation

For the university to build trust within the staff and student cohort it is compliance enforcement and challenge to racist and discriminatory actions needs to be visible and enforced. Opening decision making process and involving black and racial minoritised staff and students is essential.

Trust in the organisation, and maybe also related to confidence, to express intention from senior leaders. Now, I think that the confusion around what's intended, people aren't having the courage to speak up about what the intentions really are. And that makes them seem hollow, and it makes it not compelling. And I think that we've had a sort of, we've been in that state for a long time, and we need to recover from it and build trust. and there's another point about the university's values. Stated as 'inclusion', which colleagues, who work in the field, think that's a patronising word, that's a passive word. The idea of marginalised groups being included is actually, you know, outdated. And we need to think about participation, and actually, reflecting on that relates to the points about taking, passively taking, taking things from others, rather than working with. So, the word 'participation' feels much more compelling to me. So those are just some reflections

I think there is a tendency, and I've been at Sussex since 2015, I've worked in London and Manchester. I think the sort of... the image of Brighton as a liberal progressive place leads to a kind of refusal to acknowledge that there is, not only that people do racism, but there are also racists. And I often hear, oh, nobody's like that here. You know, we'll just have to kind of massage over this. So, I feel there's a real kind of, something particular to Sussex that refuses to really acknowledge how racism works, and that they can be contributing to it and reinforcing it.

Marginalised Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Roles and Responsibilities.

Staff who had EDI roles felt very disillusioned with the role being side-lined and ignored. They could not identify the value of their role in achieving change as these comments make clear.

The role is restricted to race and then only to share with no subsequent actions, 'it's just a talking shop with anything on race'. How does the school respond to the race equality?

I think there are a lot of people who are very well-meaning in terms of, like, you know, being open to listen and being, you know, responsive, in terms of verbally agreeing with me in meetings, showing support. Sort of like, helping me articulate some of my frustrations, or some things that I'm talking about. But I do also feel like it just stays in that space, and it doesn't go beyond that. Something that I've been sort of passionate about from the beginning is making sure that, you know, there's tangible actions to the things that are being said. Are there action points? So, if I say, you know, there's an issue with funding for marginalised students, that that's being about beyond that meeting or, you know, that's being recognised beyond that meeting. Not just 'oh okay yeah, we understand, yeah, we know that we've seen research that indicates that, thank you for bringing that up'. And then okay, move on to whatever the next point is. It sort of feels like sometimes, I'm... I'm just there to, like, talk to it, as opposed to do anything about it. And times that I have tried to do anything about it, nothing's happened.

And the bureaucracy of the university, like the structures of it, means that it can only go so far before it sort of gets put to the bottom of the pile again.

The aim of equality, diversity and inclusion policies regarding staff roles and responsibilities are to prevent and remove unfair discrimination, harassment and victimisation and promote equality opportunity across the university and embed principles of valuing and respecting difference that is outlined in the policy of the university. This testimony illustrates how staff experience the gap between the EDI intentions and the reality.

I am in a fortunate position where I'm researching this, I'm researching the experience of black Brit-ish academics. So, I can put it into my work. But yeah, where does my work go? Do you know what I mean? …. But also, I raise it in the meetings as much as I can. I think, in my school, funnily enough, I've got this, like, label as like, a radical, or you know, someone who... not has a chip on their shoulder. I think they think I'm more just like young woke person who always has to say something about something, or always has something to say about something. But it's like, actually, no, this is my lived experience. That is why I'm saying something. And I've seen these incidences. So that is why I say things. But it can be trivialised, I think.

2)Race Equity Advocates

There was a huge amount of discussion and comments on the loss of the REA. This included the message it sent across the University about addressing racism, the way the loss was managed, and the rationale provided for cutting these roles.

The thing that I find difficult to talk about is the fact that, you know, we don't have... Race Equity Advocates for students or staff, but the harm that got caused was... it was racism, like, because to shut down students who were doing a really difficult job, it got shut down under the guise of funding. Which I will never, ever, anyone will tell me that

is true, when I look at how much money and resources is going to the new Student Enhancement Team, the Race Equity Advocates were amazing value for money. Because it was only the cost of student staff, some money towards the management, and a graduate, and our graduates don't get paid very much. And some money for activities. So, it was really good value for money, and no paraphernalia. No cups, no hoodies, no t-shirts, no... All the other stuff that comes with everything else. And actually, the university, in my mind, found it really difficult to not be able to be the ones that controlled the narrative. And quite frightened.

There was a strong feeling the work of the REA was just beginning and becoming embedded within Schools, which generated a feeling of change and hope.

At a school-level, it pretty much went well. There were some... there was definitely pushback, different people at different levels of how they deal with the fact that you've got to talk about racism in your school. So, you know, I went to every single Head of School, like, senior leadership meeting, and they were all very different. But it was just a start of the work. And you know, the buy-in was that, you know, you had to have buy-in with the senior leadership in that school. And then, you know, it basically wanted to get taken.

The shutting down of a whole load of students of colour, who basically didn't understand why when they were doing all this great work, they were being shut down. It was so awful for those students. It was so awful. I cannot say how awful it was, for those students who were like, doing all the listening to other students, putting things in place, working Race Equity Plans. Seeing some progress. Also coming against it. To then, it being taken away because somebody else wants to do it. Well, that's just... that's not what you do. If you're trying to do race equity work, you don't take away, so that you can do it yourself. You look at how you can work with that, and how you can mould that into your work, or use that same funding and stuff like that. It was an absolute diabolical mess. And at the same time, while the university are trying to say, 'we are trying to do racism and close the awarding gap, and we really care', on the same hand, harming a load of people and upsetting a whole load of students.

The report on 'Tackling racial harassment: University challenged,' recommends that universities need to invest in a diverse workforce so that a more tolerant and inclusive study environment can be created.

We have only one visible professor of colour. Who... let's say, the general consensus is, it took a little while for her to get a professorship. We don't have the widest student body, in terms of students of colour. But we do have some of the most difficult issues to deal with in terms of the curriculum. So, our school includes the Department of History. Department of Art History. Department of English Literature. All three disciplines which are regularly dealing with difficult language, difficult imagery, difficult narratives. And difficulties in discussing some of those. So, students of colour... and I know this because I've got either direct relations with our students, or I have four student who I work with. So, we have two students who are employed by the students' union. And we pay the students' union to employ them, and these are Race Equity Advocates. And their job is to go around and talk to students, and basically find out what the issues are. Probably would have heard about some of the issues around that scheme going... but we have decided as a school to continue funding it. And we

decided last year... well, I and my colleagues in the Race Equality Team basically told the Dean that we're not going to go through this every year, justifying why we need these students. So, can we fund it for two years please?

From the research we did in business school the main thing was the lack of a sense of belonging. Because of not having people that students, you know, see as reflecting their own culture, experiences, community, and you know, there is a lot of work going on, certain schools and certain places doing really, really good stuff. But it's not translating any further. So, you've just got these little pockets and silos. And you know, when we had the REAs, we did some really, really fantastic work with the REAs… they were acting as, you know, that kind of conduit for people in schools. And for that voice of the students of colour.

We talk about how schools are always doing different things, and how it's not kind of like a centralised process. Is that quite normal across universities? Or is Sussex kind of unique in that respect? I'm just wondering if there's a way, we can get a lot of these, particularly like, only some schools have Race Equity Advocates. So... wouldn't it be cool if we had them in every school? And I know that's to do with the funding and everything, and we had more before, but if the university could fully back those programmes, then you know, we'd be, you know, going forward... but it always seems that the university never wants to fund, or support, anything to do with diversity. Particularly when it comes to race. So, I'd definitely like to see the university put their money where its mouth is.

Race Equity Advocates and Connectors. Are they bringing that forward, that these students feel completely isolated, and they're basically doing their degrees on their own and missing modules, and just doing it by themselves? is that on the agenda of what's being put forward to the Dean?

If the university follows the path of removing the Race Equity Advocates, then consideration needs to be established on the leadership, ownership, and strategic implementation of the race equality policy across the university.

Looking at the different schools, until we have Race Equity Advocates, the schools were not working on any Race Equity Plans.

The university has a tendency to pat itself on the back for work that the Students Union has done. So, the race... the Race Equality Advocates, the Buddy Scheme. I've seen stuff be labelled as; this is the university doing this. We're great. And then at the same time, not... again, it comes back to funding. The university has, like, so much funding going to all these other things, and then when it comes to things like this, like the Buddy Scheme is a huge thing for new students who particularly are like, from international backgrounds, people of colour. It's not just... it's across other aspects as well. And then there's the Language Cafe. There are all sorts of great stuff that the Students Union does, that has very minimal funding, and yet the university talks about how it's all there for its students, and you know, doing all these great things. But they're very little... I know funding isn't everything, but funding goes a long way into being able to make stuff happen a little bit. So yeah, and the other kind of side of that is, I've been here about five years, four years, I think. So, I was here at the start of the Race Equality Charter stuff happening. And I think there's two of us that are the same as when we

started. And I get that there's always change, and the university has gone through a lot of change. But it makes it very hard to keep the momentum.

These experiences highlight the need for a strategic development plan which implements policy across the whole university within a specified timeframe for implementation and fully resourced.

We start to finally get somewhere, where we have a group of people that finally understands, you know, the demographics that we are working with, the issues that the university has, has understood, and looked at the data, has listened to people's experiences, and then when we finally start to make a plan, we're losing everybody, and we have to go back to square one. And it just feels like we're going around and round and round at this beginning stage, and we've never really, like, fully been able to start to proper implementation of a really good strategy that'll keep us moving forward.

Certainly, in Sussex, there are huge areas of under-representation. And significant areas of disadvantage. And I use those two words because they're different ways of describing oppression basically, and how things play out. And interestingly to me, the issue of Race Equity Advocates I know was alive and no longer funding of it, was something that I came into, I think it's still something that has to be sorted out, there's no doubt about that, one way or another. Because the work was, and is, valued.

The participants felt the university needs to consider a resolution to the REA situation given the incredible value they have provided to the students and the schools.

From what I witnessed, from the REAs that I worked with in the Business School, it was absolutely gutting. You know, they were told lastminute.com that basically their contracts were ending in like, a week's time. We were doing all this amazing work; I had a really good relationship with the two REAs that we had in the business school. We worked really closely together. We built up this good relationship, we were doing our Race Equity Action Plan, we were doing all this work, and it was gone in the blink of an eye. And I had to fight to get money to pay them to keep them on, so we could finish that piece of work, as casual workers

3)Experiences of racism-staff and students

The Equality and Human Rights Commission published a report in 2019 Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities Challenged. The report outlined the level of racial harassment experienced by students and staff in UK universities citing it as being a 'common experience,' ranging from physical attacks, name calling insulting jokes, subtle and nuanced acts and being exposed to racist materials or displays. In most cases students said their harasser was other students and a large number said it was their tutors or academic staff. Given this national picture, the reported experiences from staff and students within these findings reflect this.

The testimonies below illuminate the depth of challenge black and racial minoritised students face in navigating and securing the basic foundations for learning such as safe secure housing; diverse course content and resourcing; robust reporting and recording of racist abuse. The under-reporting and recording of racist incidents restrict

the university ability to take appropriate action and be in touch with the lived daily experience of its students and staff.

This overall lack of any accountability, lack of authentic support systems, poor reporting procedures, omission of adequate action, ownership, or systemic acknowledgement of this lived reality for black and racial minoritised staff and students perpetuates the institutional systemic nature of racism. Thus, negating upon the obligations outline within the Human Rights Act 2010.

The 2019 Tackling racial harassment: Universities Challenged Report states:

'Universities have an incomplete picture of the scale of racial harassment because of underreporting and informal complaints not being recorded routinely. This calls into question the extent to which universities are meeting their PSED (Public Sector Equality Duty) obligations which include having regard to the need to eliminate harassment and to foster good relations. To meet these obligations, universities must have reliable evidence when developing and reviewing their policies and procedures. If a university has a poor understanding of the scale of the problem, this can lead to their priority setting, resource deployment and activities being inadequate to tackle the issues'.

There are varied areas that were identified in this section: housing; diversity as extra-curricular; access to academic support; curricular; discussions on race.

Housing…how people are impacted by not being able to get a home here. lots of black, international students are of colour, like not being able to have a guarantor, and there being no systems, no systems in place to be able... there's a guarantor scheme, but hardly anyone can use it….and then people face a lot of discrimination in just the housing market. And then that impacts people's ability to, like, get their heads down for their education. Has a really big impact. But then there's other stuff like, like people talk a lot about their kind of, what's in their modules, and like the course content, and the readings, and like, not having... and the diversity being like, an added-on, like it's an added extra-curricular... I've heard that a lot. Obviously, I can't pinpoint like, all the different schools, but when there is... when it does happen, it is an extra, so you don't actually have to do it.

Black and racial minoritised students felt isolated and vulnerable when they are housed without members of their own community and in all white halls of residents.

And the housing thing came up in that as well, on a more local level. So, on a campus-level, about, which we managed to get a bit of movement on, working with the Housing Team, was about letting students request to be housed with people that they know, or people from their community, so that you do not get what we know has happened, where you've got one black student in a hall with all white students, and they experience racism on a daily basis. And are completely isolated

People don't report what happens to them, because there is no faith or trust that anything will be done. I had that experience recently. A racist comment was made in an email, by a more senior person than me. I challenged them on that point and advised them that what they were saying was racist and advised them not to use that

example again. And I got a mansplaining two-line email back, completely ignoring everything... and I'd said a very considered and very level response but making it very clear that what they said was racist and was unacceptable. And nothing's been done about it. I passed it on, absolutely nothing's being done. So why would I, a white person who's not even, it's not even being directed at me, why am I going to bother doing anything again? Let alone being the person who has actually been traumatised by that direct attack

Academic advisors' access and support

The overwhelming experience of marginalisation, isolation and feeling like an outsider /the other, was expressed as racism being the norm leaving students isolated. The lack of any awareness and omission from white academic staff regarding the impact of their own whiteness and the institutional cultural white norm meant that students at times felt invisible, isolated, and powerless.

When you are a person of colour, it's great when they(students) have another person of colour or someone who really gets it, and with someone who really supports them, they get so much out of their student experience. But it's like, I'm realising it's a bit like make-or-break. So, it's like, if you don't have a good experience with your academic supervisor, or if they don't reach out to you, or you don't know how to reach out to them, or they tell you to come in and they send you away, and then people of colour being impacted more by that. Because like, their unable to talk to them about their experiences, or they're facing discrimination with their academic advisors. And as soon as they face a little bit... it can only take a tiny little bit of discrimination, just one little moment, that might seem like just a bit of micro-aggression, and that is enough for a student to be like, I'm not seeing them ever again. And then they don't... people don't seem to know that you can just ask for another one. Or they do know, and they're too frightened, because they feel like it's going to show something up, and that's going to affect them. And so, they don't ask for another one.

It was felt white teaching staff lacked an understanding, skill set, confidence, and empathy to manage the complexity and nuance of race dynamics. They struggled to develop open conversations and understandings about black and racial minorities experiences. Overall, it was felt that principles of fair treatment were being undermined.

Student connectors and conversations on race

The role and expectations for communication on race appeared to rest with two student connectors, which appears to have an enormous responsibility for the safeguarding of students who are often isolated in lectures, on the receiving end of racist abuse and having to navigate a colonised curriculum, within the context of the institutional white culture.

And then we have got two Student Connectors who are employed by the university, and they work on communications. So, they've set up an Instagram account, or they're running an Instagram account for the students of colour in the school. So, we've got a lot of these connections. And what I hear is a lot of very isolated students. Who might

be sitting in a lecture theatre, and then, difficult language comes up, difficult topics come up, and they feel like the spotlight is on them. So, we've had some historical debates a couple of years ago around various words beginning with N. And I think there may be some kind of generational difference in understanding what does and does not constitute for certain people an N word, or the N word. But that debate has allowed us to think I think a bit more widely about, regardless of that particularly offensive word, how you have conversations around race. Which you need to do in History and Art History and English Literature. But that recognising that for the student of colour in the room, this is experienced in a very different way. And so, our lecturers have started to, we've had a few sessions on microaggressions and various other things. So, the conversations are happening.

Reporting and recording of racial harassment within the official systems through the tutor and or complaints process was very low. The student connectors opened conversations about racial harassment and the lived experience of black and racial minoritised students. This mismatch creates an incomplete picture of the nature and extend or racial harassment and abuse because of the informal reporting and lack of recording.

... I've been in meetings.... I can remember very clearly a meeting, which was talking about a range of different things about student progression and student experience, and I was talking about the experience that students might have when they're out and about in town. Going into nightclubs and being told 'there's enough of you in here', that kind of thing. And I raised this, and straightaway I was told 'yes, well we need to look at all of this stuff intersectional'. Now, I'm a big fan of intersectional approaches to things, but that was racism. I've also had, in that same meeting or the follow-on meeting, I've had a situation where I was talking about issues on my module with awarding gaps. And before I was able to explain what I meant, someone else turned around loftily and explained to me that really my problem was, I need to be re-thinking my assessments. So I was, you know, my experience, my knowledge, my lived experience, my realisation of what was going on, was shouted down from this position of, I know what. Now, you can turn around and say that wasn't racism, but I'm too old to know.

My experience of one particular student from a couple of years ago who was very passionate about issues... about exploring through drama, through artistic expression, black British male history. But was forever being directed to focus instead on black American male history. Because of the interests of the particular tutor. This led to a huge, massive, big issue. The result of which is, complaints happened but nothing has changed. Tutor remains in place. Student's gone off. Has a sort of relationship with the university, through me and through other people, but not the relationship it could've been.

Being told how to teach black students,

Black staff construct their racial identities and professional practise to engage and teach students successfully, However, they judged and measured against expectations and constructs from their white counterparts.

One of the things I kind of came up with, against, with other colleagues who work on the particular part of the programme, is an approach to teaching. If I take my Foundation Year students, I walk into a classroom. Probably about half of them are students of colour. And I'd say about 90% of that half are male….. I've kind of adopted quite a... not authoritarian, but it's really clear who's in charge of the classroom………. I brought that over into my Foundation Year teaching, and I think it works with my students. Particularly my black male students of colour. Because we have fun, we have a laugh. But they know what needs to happen, and when. And if someone is slouching around as if they are sitting at home watching telly, I'll tell them off. I come up against teachers who criticise me for my approach and say things like, 'What we really want to do is be a bit more understanding'. And I said, 'I am understanding'. But I'm also understanding that the students I'm teaching here don't necessarily have all the codes that certain people will have been given, as to what they need to do to jump through the hoops they've got to jump through.

And my approach is based on that, because that's who I was 30 years ago. And I'm kind of sick and tired of being told how I should approach people who I know, if that makes sense.

4) Experience of racism in the classroom

The research from Birmingham University (July 2021) highlighted the 'Racial Disparities in Higher Education' regarding isolation and marginalisation of students and staff within the academic environment. They commented that universities overall are aware of the health implications of isolation at university and the types of risk that are associated with this for students. However, the compounding lack of diversity within the learning experience; the associated isolation and marginalisation that accompanies this; coupled with the consequential failure to recognise its impact can have detrimental effects upon the attainment and health of black and racial minoritised students and staff.

I think the points you are making about student experience are actually really important to discussions of staff experience. And that goes to both students of colour experience and staff of colour experiences. Because I have lived in Brighton for 7 years and I know the racism that happens. I've experienced that as a student. Yes, not at Sussex, but as a student who lives in Brighton amongst, you know, Brighton and Sussex students. And I've experienced that as a doctoral tutor. And I had an incident... yeah, I would call it an incident, where I was new to the role of being a doctoral tutor, so obviously there was some anxiety there about, you know, am I doing this properly? Am I, you know, being professional enough? Do the students respect me? And there's age and gender that play into that as well. And I had an incident where I'd asked a student if they could... they were working in a group and there was something that was wrong with the group dynamic. And I was discussing it with them and said, you know, maybe you should contact the person who has been absent. Maybe you should make that first step and contact them. And they turned around to me and said, 'why should I contact them?' You know, 'isn't that your responsibility, it's your course, you should be doing that'.

The student said this to me, but in quite a flippant way. And they waited 'til... I was discussing this in a group with my other doctoral tutor, and then I sort of returned alone to sort of say, okay, how are we getting on, have you messaged them then? And then they said it in a flippant way, and sort of were really making me feel like I hadn't done my job properly, or making it seem like it was my responsibility to chase this student for their group project. And I was... I think in my personal life I can be quite direct and strong, but in that moment, I really sort of crumbled and was like, oh God, I'm in over my head. And I went home and reflected on it, and I thought, that was the feeling of feeling like I was dismissed, or that was the feeling of, you know, feeling like I was targeted. And then I traced it back to, actually, they didn't say that when my white colleague was there.

They could have easily said that when my white colleague was there, if they really felt it, was our responsibility. But they waited until I was alone to humiliate me, essentially, in a group dynamic with other students present. And I think after having that experience, I can see how other colleagues... I spoke to my other colleague about it, and they sort of brushed it off. I didn't say that I felt like the student was being racist, but I said, you know, that was a bit weird, I don't know how to feel about this. And they were like, oh, you know, don't worry about it, it happens all the time.

This is a white colleague who said this to me. But I didn't disclose that I'd felt that it was, you know, racially motivated or anything like that. But then at the same time, I don't think I need to... I do not need to say that you know? I don't need to say that. But I think, from that experience I've been in that situation where, I know somebody is being racist, or there's a microaggression happening, or there's some sort of dynamic that's playing out. But how am I being supported? Who can I talk to about this? How do I learn how to manage this or navigate this? If I had other academics of colour, I could go to them and say, you know, something weird happened, the student said this to me, and I felt a bit funny about it.

This example indicates the inability of white staff to recognise racism leaving the black and minoritised staff member isolated. The white students are left unchallenged perpetuating the racist norm.

Research has indicated that black and racial minoritised students and staff face a multitude of systemic barriers which they must consciously and systematically navigate their way through so that they can pre-empt any negative, abusive, and micro-aggressions in order to tackle the structural wider context of racism.

5) Recruitment of Black and racial minoritised staff

The recruitment and the retention of black and racial minoritised staff is a university sector wide issue, and the lack of representation on the teaching staff and in management is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed.

One of the things that comes up from students, but also from staff, is the issue of recruitment and retention, and you know, just having a really white workforce. And that's how students perceive it. And I think, you know, as Monique said, feeling that people get it. I've heard that expression used with me by students. 'I'm glad you get it', you know? So, I think there is something about, you know, which affects staff, which

is about recruitment and retention, which also then has implications for students as well. They do, you know... I don't necessarily buy this, but it's something I'm hearing all the time, is we want to see people like us teaching us, and that will make a real difference to us, in terms of feeling comfortable about, you know, speaking up in class even. Then obviously we have the whole issue of, issues around language, maybe where staff, which staff have used inappropriate language, and students have been affected by that. You know, I think that is compounded by the fact that it's a really white, you know, staff. And hearing sort of problematic language in the classroom, even if lecturers try and contextualise what they're saying, the fact that they are white professors makes, just makes it sort of, you know, really difficult for our students.

The lack of black and racial minoritised staff within Sussex University in senior roles is perceived as a significant problem by students. The concerns from participants are in relation to overall leadership and the pace in which recruitment and retention is being prioritised.

But there is some good stuff happening, but it's happening really slowly. And I still don't think that the top of the school really gets that our real big issue isn't our awarding gaps - which are terrible. Isn't necessarily the overt racism that students face in town, which is terrible. But I think, and I'm not a student... I was a student here in the early-'90s. '92 to '95. But I think the biggest issue is the recruitment and the retention of staff of colour. Recruitment and retention. Our turnover's high. People come and then people go. And I can understand why. Because it's really, really, really annoying to have to be... to have instances where your situation is questioned. Or your right to speak is questioned. I mean, I approach it by just being thoroughly bloody-minded…... And I'm an education-focussed lecturer.

Participants explored the question as to why black and minoritised staff do not stay at Sussex university. Which gave rise to reflections about what steps and strategies are in place for attracting and retaining a diverse workforce; what steps are taken to value black and racial minoritised staff and how do you retain staff.
Racist abuse, micro aggressions, and lack of any support or systemic redress contributed to the poor retention of staff.

Why Black and racial minoritised staff don't stay at Sussex

I know people who have been on the end of direct racism from... and I don't think this is a microaggression, from students. White students? I know of colleagues of South Asian heritage who have a pronounced South Asian accent, who have been mocked in the classroom, and not supported. I know of colleagues who've been told, when they've had difficulty with students, and the difficulty has become so overwhelming that those well-meaning colleagues, you know, mindful of the mental distress of the person who's dealing with racism or microaggressions, has said, 'yeah, maybe it would be better if you were at a more welcoming university'. You know, I know of this.

The impact racial trauma has for staff and the lack of any meaningful understanding of this happening from the university, means there is no accountability, and responsibility for this issue in the recruitment process.

The hiring and the retention, the retention's a massive one. Because if you're giving... if people are hired with this assumption that, you know, they're going to have an experience that's similar to other academics, white academics, you know, that's what they've signed up for, that's what they've come to work for, and they want that same experience. And if you're not giving it to them, they're going to be cheated. And it's traumatising. It can be really damaging and traumatising. So, I think that that's something that people need to be aware of. It's not, this isn't a joke, these are people's real-life material conditions, and they're existing as part of that. And if they're traumatised here at Sussex, the likelihood of them... yeah, they might go to an institution in London, but how are they going to react to white students? That trauma is still there. How are they going to... are they going to be as... as passionate about the thing that they were once as passionate about because they've experienced such a horrible thing at an institution? It's... I think it's quite a violent thing, that people don't use that language to speak about it. And I think we should use that language to speak about it.

There is an urgent need for quality assurance across leadership and management in tackling retention of black and racial minoritised staff.

It should be one of the criteria upon which the new Vice Chancellor's term is judged a success or not. Whether the issues around staffing have been tackled. And you know, maybe it's a bit like the materials we use. If there's only so much time in the curriculum, some things have to go to make room for other things. Maybe the same is true of staff.

And of course, that leads you into a whole set of different, you know, very awkward questions. But if there's a recruitment freeze, we're not employing staff. So, I think... I do think it's kind of, if you want to ask the question of white staff, ask them how they feel, very senior white staff, about sitting in post for years and years and years.

From the staff side, I still hear comments from people where they say they're the only non-white face in a department or a division or an area. And that same sense of isolation can exist on staff side, we tend to do stuff around unpicking what's already there, rather than knowing as a university what already, what there should be in place to support different groups. We don't have this coordinate sense, or this mapped sense of where the, either the support groups are, how we link into one-another, how the communities can draw themselves together.

6) Increased workload for Black and racial minoritised staff

The initiative to develop relationships with black alumni relied on black and minoritised staff working in their own time. This project has been based on individual contribution not any systemic planned process.

We are in the middle of publicising it further. (The Black at Sussex project) But this is about recognising and celebrating our alumni in the hope of fostering greater belonging through current students, but also taking a critical eye as to where we are now. So, it's not just celebratory. Those of us involved in it have had to work on this in

our own time, to get to a point where we get institutional backing and funding. Now that the institution's seen that this is a really good project, it's amazing how, you know, fine, that's the political deal you make, right? But we were just tunnelling along on this. Now the few of us who worked on it, they were mostly white. But we were just tunnelling along because we thought it was important. It wasn't the institution that said, we need to think, you know, radically differently about how can encourage greater sense of belonging. I know that these initiatives have happened in various parts of the university, they happen in silos. There's some really good stuff happening in Life Science. But it's because of the individuals there, not because of any systematic or systemic processes.

Invisible workload

The nature and extent of invisible workloads to support and engage black and minoritised students from staff from those backgrounds is immense.

It just comes back to that idea of this invisible workload, that a lot of academics of colour get. And to be fair, students of colour have some of that too, because they're trying to find how they feel safe around and trying to build a community when that's afforded to white students, or majority students. Whereas you know, students of colour, they have to look around and find where they feel safe. So, I don't think that's something that should be minimised, this workload. Because it is a workload, and you get emails from students, and you feel compelled to answer them, because you know if you don't answer them, then they'll just disappear, and they won't do well. And that's not something I think that should be taken lightly.

Can I add something to that? Because I think there's something in there about time and the tutor, and the tutor as an academic advisor. So... depending on what academic advising scheme you are on as a tutor, your time with the student could be anything from 5 to 15 minutes. Now, if you are working with a student and you suspect that some of the output that they are or not giving, or some of their attitudes or attendance or something, is to do with something that's going on behind what they're presenting, then you need a bit of time to be able to get that student's trust, and then also to delicately try and dig some of that out. Now, I've done that with students. Not just students of colour but, you know, other students with protected characteristics, or whatever, whatever, whatever. But you need time to do that. Some of my academic advising time will be a 45-minute to an hour session with a student, most of which is just chatting.

Black and racially minoritised staff experience this added workload with demands from white staff enquiring about how to support black and minoritised students.

I get people knocking on my door, white colleagues, saying 'I want to talk to you...' I had somebody the other day, oh my God. Someone wanting to talk to me about a student of theirs, he's... he's a... he's a black male student. And what... she was worried about something in one lesson, because of one bit of attendance. His attendance has been fine all the way through. His submissions of work have apparently been all the way through. But there was this one session where he seemed, you know... and she'd had a conversation with him, and the student said basically, he doesn't have any friends. Was quite isolated. And he said he'd tried the BAME Society,

and that didn't really feel right for him. So, she came to me! And I was like, 'well... I don't know. Erm... have you suggested the Drama Society?' And she went 'oh yeah, I hadn't thought of that'. My question is, why were you not doing some work? And why did you assume it was that? And why did you think, okay, black student, talk to the black man?

7) White staff involvement in race and racism

The dialogues from the focus groups indicated that there is a need for an opening up of a process of reflection around the notion of 'Whiteness' particularly for white teaching staff within the university. Talking and reflecting about 'Whiteness' means looking at how the structural systemic and multiple social advantages benefit white people and perpetuate the racist power structures.

I've either seen people who are scared to talk about race and racism, to the point where it's not on their radar, they... you can see visibly that they're uncomfortable. Or they think they know it; they think that they've done the work. And I think, you can't think you've done the work, because it's ongoing. I haven't done the work and I'm a person of colour, you know. It's an ongoing thing. There's new research all the time, there's new things, there's a change of language, there's shifts of perspective. So, nobody's done the work. We can't say we've done the work, and we know. So, I think it's quite frustrating for people of colour when we're confronted with these situations, like, can you help me find the reading for this? When you know, you're an academic, you can go on Google Scholar and, you know, search for things, because that's what you do. You're a researcher. So, you know that people have the capability to go and look for information, but they're asking for you to do extra labour and extra work, just to... I don't know whether it's a thing of, to be seen to be doing something, or to be validated and say, hey look, I'm interested in this. Or if it's trying to make a connection between people. But I think it makes it incredibly hard for people of colour to say what white academics are doing, or say how they're supported, when it just feels like there's this... you're either scared or you think you know everything.
White staff teaching race etc

We don't as a school have a module on the history of minoritised ethnic people from, who live in the UK, in these isles. We don't have a module on that. So, we don't have that. But we do have stuff on black American history, which I'm very regularly talked about. So.. but less flippantly, there is work going on, there is lots of work that we do on race, identity, ethnicity, all of that. Most... well not mostly. All bar one, who's the Director of Race Equality, who... who teach on that, are white. And that's our issue. Not because there's anything illegitimate about a single white lecturer teaching on a course. But if you're the black student and every single course that has anything to do with race, ethnicity, identity, is taught by somebody who doesn't look like you, you begin to sort of thing, well... I mean, I had that, when I had my African History course. I was like, this is really interesting, but this is also an interesting dynamic that you're telling me about me. I mean...

8) Decolonising curriculum.

A staff and student focused group explored decolonising the curriculum. They shared their cynicism of the approach, as being reduced to updating and extending 'reading

lists'. They did not feel there was any substance or depth to examining decolonising, rather seeking it as something that they were being asked to do. This was also perceived as an area that black and racial minoritised staff would specialise in be responsible for.

In my school, interestingly enough, I teach on decolonising education in Knowledge, Power and Society. And that's what my research is about. So, something I read a lot about and think a lot about. But I think, in my school, unfortunately it's been limited to just thinking about reading lists.

And every time I try and bring a conversation about, I don't know, capitalism, about neoliberalism, about the production of race and racism, and the origins of that, or the production of knowledge, and how knowledge is seen... which knowledge is seen as legitimate and which isn't, those are the things which are like, okay, this is a bit too extreme or radical or whatever. We're going to just think about adding a few more voices of colour onto our reading list. And that's where it sits and that's where it exists.

I think the hardest thing that I find is, because decolonisation is such a topical theme, and such a... it is a buzzword, it's become a buzzword in my opinion. So, I think there's this association with decolonisation of being like, okay, it's just about race, or it's just about, you know, voices of colour, it's just about whatever it is. And it's... if you read about it, it's actually... those things are involved, but it's not really about that just exclusively. And then it's difficult, like you're saying, it would be great if we could make a tangible toolkit or a library guide, or a 'how to decolonise'. But actually, that's not what decolonisation's about. And that's not how... it's not an event, is it? It's not this thing where you can just tick the box and say, okay, we've decolonised now. It's an ongoing thing, which then makes it difficult to package and send out within institutions. But then it's like, should we even be trying to do that?

I think they (white staff) do now, because there's a sense of fear around it, or a sense of hesitancy. There's obviously something that's making people uncomfortable about that. But I do think there are some people that do know that that's part of it. But I also think that it doesn't matter, because I... I don't think it matters, because I think there are staff of colour who don't grasp what it means. So, I don't think it matters too much. But I think what matter it's how been co-opted, and it's been packaged. And that's the issue, which makes it then hard to actually put it in place, and then hard to actually engage with it at institutional level. In my opinion, I don't think you can decolonise the university. It's a colonial thing. The institution is colonial, you know? How can you undo something that is it? So that is my opinion. But then at the same time, have people in my department saying, you know, 'this is your area, how can I decolonise my course?' And I then think, okay. How do I navigate that?

9)Way Forward

The next two contributions highlighted a theme from the three focus groups that the relationship between the SU (student unions) and University needs clarification and development. The first comment was in the context of the loss of REA, proposing closer working with the SU. The second comment highlights the poor working relationship and communication,

It just seems like, whenever cuts are made, it's always... it's always the kind of communities that have the most discrimination that suffer the most from this sort of stuff. And people of colour are particularly the most vulnerable I think, at the university. More so than some of the other groups. Which is insane, I think, considering how... we've got quite a diverse academic group, and Professional Services really, is really, really, really, really white. But then you've also got a massive student population that's so diverse, and yet we fail them so dramatically. And it's just, yeah, shocking. But I suppose where it comes back to is, I think a lot... the Students Union has done a lot of work, and the university should really follow suit. Like, just work with the Students Union, and understand what's worked for them. …. well not putting more work on the Students Union, but like, I'd like to see the union and the university work together a lot better with this.

The university sort of tacks on to what the Student Union does well, and then takes it… but instead of taking it formally, it takes it underneath, from underneath us. So, it stops funding us, or it won't tell us that it's doing the thing that we're doing. So, we run around still trying to do it, not realising that they're trying to do it. And so that's really confusing. But if some of my work, the university asked for it, yeah, I would go, win, and might give it to them, if it was appropriate to give it to them. And it makes it really difficult. But then on the other side of that, people ask me... not just me, lots of people, for everything. But they don't tell me, tell you, that they're using it to replicate your work. And as a Students Union, we have a much better thing of collaboration. We tend to give everything over. I have given everything over, how I do things, what, I did not realise it's being used to set up exactly stuff we're doing. We've been making that mistake as a Students Union. I want it to not be a mistake, I want it to be formalised. If you want... if the university want it, maybe you're the best people to have it, and you're going to do more resource. But what happens is it gets taken, and that's like what happens, that's what happens with the equalities work.

The relationship the university has with the wider community and local authority specifically in relation to reporting racism specifically its accountability and actions taken on report and support was raised and discussed as the next three quotes evidence. The suggestion was to establish partnerships with successful projects working on hate crimes who students could trust that exist within the local authority, until the University has developed a more robust process that's trusted by students.

I don't know if this is normal or not, but when I started working at the Students Union and then started working into like, equality stuff at the university, something really shocked me, and I have no idea if it's the same as other universities. But there seems to be no accountability outside of the university. So, we've got, like, you know, there's a new tool, Report and Support, which the Students Union has heavily tried to give as much consultation on. Even though there's been resistance to that consultation. It's actually been really useful information that we've got from students about what they want and need. And we're still struggling to give that information, because people don't... I don't know why there's resistance there, because the information we give has tailored that tool. But then, like, hearing how, where stuff goes to afterwards, I find really worrying. Because someone who's worked in the community in Brighton, if there's incidents of stuff, okay, there's hardly any incidents of racism, right? No surprise, because there's no trust. And it's scary, and it could come back on you even worse. But when it does happen, everything's just navigated through the own

university rules. Where for me, I'm like, if there was sexual assault happening in a certain place on university grounds, or there's racism happening with certain people doing it, or certain schools doing it, that information is all just held by the university. But the university is part of Brighton and Hove. That would happen nowhere else. Nowhere else in Brighton and Hove, any other institution, you'd have, like, you're sharing that information, as information share. And actually, I really think there is an opportunity here to work with Brighton, and the systems that they have, and the people they have.

So, we talk about the Students Union not getting resource. There's a resource out there that could be better resourced, if the university tap into it, that help people report things around faith, hate crimes, like racism, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender). They've come together and formulated a group, but they can't get in. They've come to us as a Student Union, because they don't know how to get into the university. And students could be supported with a group that you actually trust. And that information then could be shared. And as you do better, the better that Sussex does, the more reports you will get.

These are hating crimes. And hate crimes need to go to where hate crimes are meant to go to. And yet the people who do the hate crime work say they're not getting any... they're not having any contact with University of Sussex. Which means the University of Sussex can do whatever the hell it likes. When the University of Sussex does get on it, and it gets better at its reporting and supporting, and it listens, and it puts the right people in place, and it does it more professionally, but you're not going to get trust overnight, right? So, students need to go to places where they can trust them to support them with it. And yet there's systems in Brighton that could support with that, if you create a partnership with them. And all of this is just not happening, and I'm just like, I just look, I come in and I go, I don't understand. Like, why is it not working? I know it's an education institution, but it's still an education institution that sits within the city. It's not... things are not being used, and resources are not being shared in the way that I would expect. So, I think that's really important, because you're not going to get trust from people straightaway. And anyone that wants to talk about it, wants to put that in, I can put you in touch with the right people, who can make that happen. But at the moment, they don't know how to do that. And I just think it's worth raising, because there's no accountability for the city

The following points raise the issue of resource for the race equality work. The first point is central to achieve effective race equality and address systemic and institutional practices. If there are special sections that everyone feels are responding and '*dealing with it'*, this will not change the mainstream operational and academic practices of the university. Special initiatives often become the work of those involved and tend not to engage staff more widely.

I think there's a tendency for people to be appointed to particular roles. And I speak as someone who has been appointed a particular role, Director of Race Equity, and then thinking that the job is done because that person has been recruited. Whereas actually, the fact that, you know, the head of the, the Associate Director of the curricular in the school also needs to get time to do that race equity work. So that's kind of not built into the system. It's almost like, we've appointed someone, so that race equity work is being done. But I need everyone else, I need the subject heads, I

need them to be resourced, but also be accountable, for doing that work. I can't implement race equity work in the whole school. I need everyone else to be resourced to do it.

I wonder if we're going to do this properly, whether there's enough in order for us to fully facilitate this process. So as part of whatever conclusions we might draw, I feel there needs to be a proper assessment of resource. Because race isn't the only issue at the university. And you can see, they all get pulled from pillar to post, to support various different initiatives. And I feel, whether it's dedicated individuals for kind of different strands, or whatever it might look like, how that might... , the amount of resource, and how that resource is deployed, I think probably needs some real attention.

Each school are working independently. And they can do that. And schools that had Race Equity Advocates have been working on Race Equity Plans and at different places. Because it is quite a big piece of work, to turn kind of anecdotal issues from students and staff, into actionable plans. But you have to resource it. And that's the thing, the labour, from what I can see, it's really good that there's more equality and diversity leads in some schools, where there's some infrastructure. But even then, it's not enough. And it's quite a heavy load.

And then some schools where that doesn't exist. And then you've got staff who might want to do that work, they're actually picking it up as extra. So there has to be some sort of consistency across it. And that can happen, Like, it can definitely happen, if each school is mandated to do it, and it has to be really, like, accountability, somebody, people are actually added to the actions that have to take. And it doesn't have to be done tomorrow or next year, but there has to... happen. And then we need to see whether they've got to those action plans

One participant shared some of the work on race equality that is and has been taking place, noting that more qualitative data needs to be collected and actions not initiatives to address structural racism are required.

We've done several programmes this year around addressing racism. The executive group, the leadership group, did some training. There was an online course established, Union Black. Which not as many people as we'd hoped to undertake did do it. We've just started something called Black at Sussex, which is a five-year funded programme to recognise and celebrate many of our black alumni. Because we've had amazing black alumni. And there are lots of reasons for doing it, apart from it being a good thing, but one of which is the sense of belonging. Sussex is hugely under-represented in terms of black staff and students. There are some complexities for us in that, some people feel that the focus has been on African and Caribbean heritage people, and not enough on other racially marginalised people. So, there are issues there that need to be thought about. I suppose... I suppose what I would finish off saying is that we're still building an evidence-base to understand the particularities of racism, basically. We know a lot about data, we have data, quantitative data. We have some qualitative data, but in my view, not enough. And this is one of the ways that this is going to be really useful. And from that, we will be better able to build through-going initiatives. And... well initiatives is a funny word, but thorough-going actions to address

the structural racism, as well as the kind of, some of the behavioural stuff, which still plays out.

This final comment is pertinent in illustrating the divide in relationships and approach between those involved in this work of race equality and the university. A call for a more honest appraisal and understanding of the position of the university on the nature of the problem is important to move forward as suggested by this participant there continues to be a denial of the problem, and development and change proves more difficult to achieve.

I feel like the university needs to understand that it's not about showing how good you are, 'oh, we do...' You've got to get into the understanding to change stuff, you have to stop worrying about being called a racist institution. Like, all your students, as soon as they start, they realise. It doesn't take long, yeah? Your staff know. So, everybody knows, right?

This is not the thing I want people to think people should be worrying about. It's that, to be trusted, people need to know that it is okay to draw out the stuff that's the negative experience, because the negative experience comes to the changes into what needs to happen in terms of the actions. And this is why I don't think it is appropriate that the university, right now where it's at right now, is like, the best place for some bits of work. So, like, where it's the bits of work that get taken from the Students Union, is getting put somewhere else. It's not appropriate yet for some of that work. Because whilst it's an institution that there's no trust, people can't criticise, because there's a culture of bullying, harassment, quite frankly.

That is not the time, yet, because it's not a trusted institution yet, to be able to do those pieces of work. One day, maybe it will be. But in that time, like, don't try and just take the work. Do the work, because I get into the room, I can get out all the stuff really quickly, because people know I'm not the university. But as soon as you've got staff that are within the university systems, and especially students who, it also makes them really nervous. They want to show they're doing a good job and they're being paid by the employer to then, and they go off and they just do lots of really great events and stuff. But it's not really challenging racism.

Because the institution isn't quite there yet. Not quite? It's nowhere near there yet. So, let the institutions that can do that bit of work do that, and collaborate with them. Until the university is in a place where it can do that critical work, and it stops being so, having so much, like, fragility around it. Where it's okay with it. Then you can, then maybe you can take on those pieces of work. You know? And that's kind of my hope, is that moving forward, we'll stop this kind of like, taking from the under-represented groups because you want it, because you've got to be shown to be the ones doing the work. That's got to stop, because that causes the harm in the first place. That's not doing the good work. That's really dangerous work. There're other ways in which to do things.