**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

**Title**: Disaggregating the BAME Degree Awarding Gap: Understanding The Experiences Of ‘Black’ Students.

**Objectives:**

1. To understand students’ identity in relation to being “Black”
2. To explore the personal (i.e., lived experiences) and educational stories of “Black” students.
3. To understand “Black” students’ experiences of university so far, to enhance their academic and overall student experience.

**Overview:**

Three sets of 2-hour focus group discussions with 4-5 participants each were conducted online. Overall, 13 students who identified as ‘black’ participated in the study and all received a £30 voucher in appreciation of their time.

**Summary of main findings:**

1. **The ‘Black’ Identity**: Students place significant importance on their families, black identity as well as black culture, and these have a clear linkage to their academic experience and success.

*‘‘ Yeah, I think that I personally like being black because, you know, we've got a really good culture, it’s rich and also like we are fun to be with’’*

*‘‘I really value my identity as being black’’*

*‘‘But I don't feel sorry for myself for being black, I am very confident. I think it's special because I get to stand out, everyone notices me you know’’*

*‘‘So, I'm gonna say I'm unapologetically black’’*

*‘‘I'm going to regard my Black identity as my pride because being black is not a crime’’*

*‘‘As a black person in a foreign country, I might say my family is quite important because they are my first priority. So I need to keep communicating with my family back at home, maybe whenever I'm depressed or I just need someone to talk’’*

*‘‘Yeah, even for me, family is really, really important. Like, for example, if I make a decision or if I have to make a decision, I always ask my family first’’*

*‘‘Basically, family means everything to me’’*

1. **University and On-campus experience:**
   1. Experience with negative stereotypes and racism
   2. Inadequate support when reports about racism are made.
   3. Inadequate representation of black senior staff and black guest speakers to serve as role models.

*‘‘The expectations are a bit, I don't know what to use. It feels like you're not smart enough. You’re expected not to be smart enough. You’re expected not to be quite intelligent. You’re expected to be lazy…’’*

*‘‘There’s a way that we are being perceived. We are perceived as not being good enough, we are seen as not having the intellectual capacity needed for certain level or position’’*

*‘‘You have to constantly validate yourself. So there are some certain things that you don't necessarily have to do, but being black, you just have this need to constantly validate yourself to show that you are enough, to show your relevance, and I don't think it applies to other ethnic group, so it puts you at a place that you have to do more than is required, and that affects every phase, except of course you are within your own black community then I don't think there's that pressure’’*

*‘‘ I had to literally sleep on my books doing physics anatomy, biology and stuff to get like an A and stuff. I think that because I knew that would actually set me, you know, get me to define who I am and to become normal or be considered like a normal student like other people’’*

*‘‘whenever you go to the university, cause I've been to, you know, like the top, I've been to the offices where like, you know, the top positions are there, but they're all like White, and I'm like, why? like it doesn't really make sense’’*

*‘‘On placement, I've had like the older patients, they have said or called me- that black lady. I've had like instances where, like a dementia patient, she's been confused and said like, a racial slur and I'd tell someone, but they just say she's just old, it doesn't really matter. I feel like if the university provided better support, I feel like, I don’t know, that would have been way better’’*

1. **Learning and Teaching Experiences**
   1. Difficulty relating with lecturers and peers.
   2. Experience with racialised classrooms.
   3. Lower expectations from lecturers
   4. Academic support- both positive and negative narratives.

*‘‘Yeah, for me 100% like the university needs to, like recognise the fact that you know we are black simply because in one of my lectures, actually all my lectures, you can see the segregation between white people and black people. You see all the white folks in one side and all the black folks in the other side, and that pains me because, you know, we are people as well. And the fact that every time when the lecturer tries to, like, pronounce our name, he gives us like, you know, English names. And I'm like, no, that's not right because that’s our name, that's our identity’’*

**Recommendations:**

1. Increase the representation of black (and BAME) academics and guest speakers across all disciplines to provide diverse perspectives and role models for black (and BAME) students.
2. THINK INTERSECTIONALITY:
3. Ensure that initiatives and measures aimed at closing the degree awarding gap consider the heterogeneity of the experiences of the different subgroups embedded in the term ‘BAME’.
4. Explore the lived experiences and educational stories of other subgroups of BAME.
5. Raise awareness of the degree awarding gap throughout the students’ body - utilise diverse channels to disseminate information on the statistics, narratives, and contributory factors to the gap as well as actions taken by the university to tackle this inequality.
6. Raise awareness and educate all staff and students about the unconscious biases and the harmful impact of stereotyping of black students.
7. Establish More Support Networks:
8. Encourage black students to report incidents of overt racism, microaggressions, or stereotyping and ensure sufficient support is provided to those who do so.
9. Enhance information, guidance, counselling, advisory, and academic support services to include culturally sensitive support tailored to the specific needs of black students.
10. Intensify efforts to tackle racial segregation in classrooms:
    1. Promote cultural competency and sensitivity towards black identity among lecturers and academic staff.
    2. Empower and educate teaching staff on how to recognise and address biases that may contribute to unintentional segregation within classrooms.
    3. Develop and enforce classroom seating arrangements that actively discourage racial segregation and promote diverse interactions among students.
11. Proactively consider the role of family and black identity in black students’ academic success:
    1. Implement systemic initiatives that acknowledge and support relationships with family members who can provide black students with emotional support, coping mechanisms for oppression, and motivation to succeed at the university.
    2. Promote the recognition and accommodation of the unique responsibilities and commitments that black students may have towards caring for younger siblings or parents, by providing flexible academic policies, such as adjusted deadlines or alternative learning options.
    3. Investigate further the intersection of family influences, black culture, and academic success among black students.
    4. Provide ongoing support for student-led societies that focus on promoting black culture, identity, and activism.
12. Continue work on decolonising the curriculum and promote this among BAME students.