

“I just feel really misunderstood”: a qualitative study into EDI and marginalised groups

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Foreword by Ria Bluck MMRS, Market Researcher, University of Nottingham Students' Union

As a researcher at the Students' Union, a key part of my role is to explore the views and opinions of students at UoN and to create new knowledge that works towards the betterment of their experience. It was for this reason that I was so pleased to be a part of this work, as it sought to do just that for marginalised students.

Across the sector there has been a positive shift in the priority placed on those who are less represented, not only throughout literature, but also in the evidence-informed initiatives trialled and implemented more permanently across institutions. It is only when we obtain and make use of data investigating student interest and experience that we begin to understand how heterogeneous these populations are, and the importance of realising such initiatives.

When beginning this research, I did not expect for it to be such a learning curve for me, both personally and professionally. It truly opened my eyes to how life changing higher education can be, and how equality, diversity and inclusion must be at the centre of that experience. Our work has brought to light important matters regarding support, representation and discrimination, and provides an institution-specific approach to addressing such issues. Because of this, I am extremely proud to have been a part of this project, and to have effectively amplified the voices of those who are typically less represented throughout the sector.

This work would not be what it is without the input of those at UoN and UoNSU, the students who spoke so honestly about their experiences, and the knowledge and unwavering passion of Myles Smith-Thompson.

This is yet another step forward, for both the University of Nottingham and the Students' Union, in working towards a more equitable vision and eliminating disadvantage for our students.

Thank you,

Ria Bluck.

Foreword by Myles Smith-Thompson, Equal Opportunities and Welfare Officer (2019-2020), University of Nottingham Students' Union

As a Black Graduate from Nottingham University who embraced the privilege of being nominated as the 2019/20 Equal Opportunities and Welfare Officer at the Students' Union, it has always been my committed intention to examine, investigate and explore the experience of marginalised and underrepresented groups. This intention has been rooted in my dedication and passion to enable and create a foundation for change which could serve as a catalyst and framework for spearheading an equitable, positive and impactful experience for all those who choose to make Nottingham their home.

The reality in which we find ourselves in 2020, is that we as a Sector are far from perfect. However, we have seen in these last few years an incredible shift and focus on improving the experience of those most underrepresented and marginalised in our Universities. From initiatives around mental health and wellbeing through to research and continual movement towards the acceptance of racism within our society and institutions, we as universities and unions have come a long way. However, although we have come so far, we must maintain that the metrics we put in place to satisfy how content we are do not overshadow the harsh reality that we are not there yet.

Reviewing progression through a comparative lens (where we were, where we are) should not be taken as finite, but as an indication of the correct direction of travel when it comes to issues of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

This report seeks to set a fundamental precedent that all institutions should take the necessary steps to understand their own landscapes in which they operate. It is not enough to initiate local changes on the basis of national trends and statistics alone, these overarching themes should be used as the foundations of work of which is then carefully considered and then applied to their own institution.

It has been a huge pleasure to have contributed to this report and I am tremendously grateful for the sheer passion, commitment and efforts of Ria Bluck who has collated all of our hard work together. I would like to say thank you to UoNSU and UoN for challenging the barriers in which students face on all fronts and having a genuine desire to create an equitable experience for all. Through this report, we were able to gain a direct insight into EDI related matters from the perspective of students, paving the way forward for the University of Nottingham and University of Nottingham Students' Union.

To conclude I would like each reader to take this away; echoing the words of Amatey Doku: "we are dealing with the lives of individuals" – to that I'd remind everyone that despite our diversity of backgrounds and experiences we all have a part to play and a responsibility to act.

Thank you,

Myles Smith-Thompson

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1. Abstract

Within the literature, there has been a focus on how marginalised students experience higher education, often with emphasis on attainment and progression. Observations across the University of Nottingham (UoN) and Students' Union (SU) revealed gaps in understanding and activity related to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Following these observations, Myles Smith-Thompson (Equal Opportunities and Welfare Officer 2019-2020) commissioned a research project to explore this from the student perspective. The initial literature review informed a qualitative project that would explore how themes of discrimination, representation and wellbeing play into the experience of UoN students in marginalised groups. To do so, a series of semi-structured focus groups and interviews were conducted utilising a thematic analysis framework.

The concepts of equality, diversity and inclusion were distinct in the minds of participants, yet it became clear that both representation and a sense of belonging underpinned each of them. Representation itself was evidenced through diversity, student voice, and a sense of belonging, with perceptions of its presence being variable across groups and specific to identity. Whether that be BAME and international communities who struggled to see themselves represented at both staff and student level, or those who felt at home and welcomed within student groups that celebrated their identity. It is notable that discrimination was prevalent within these groups, particularly evidenced through microaggressions and intra-minority conflict. Bearing this in mind, students found support (including reporting procedures) generally inaccessible – while trust increased access to support and determined positive experiences. In some instances, a lack of information and failing communication defined the experience of students and often wholly explained where staff and opportunities did not meet expectations: clear cut instances were shown for both the University and the SU.

Following our results, a series of recommendations are provided which aim to inform both the University and Students' Union on how to amplify the voices of these populations, as well as best support them. It is suggested that these become ingrained in our ways of working as to not serve as an afterthought - particularly surrounding proposals of culturally competent support and anti-discrimination education.

2. Literature Review

For many years, research has explored the experience of underrepresented groups within higher education and continues to accelerate as we advocate for widening participation and a more inclusive and diverse university environment. This increase in research has enabled universities and associated bodies to observe the challenges that these groups face, and to begin shaping targeted procedures and a culture which aims to prevent inequality. However, the higher education sector still faces challenges relating to EDI, and while these tend to relate more generally to student experience, the way in which we understand these concepts is also vital. Espinoza (2007) explored a conceptual dilemma surrounding both equity and equality. With both concepts being so ingrained in social policy, it questions whether there is a clear enough understanding of how they differ. Espinoza explains how these are in fact very different entities and that one does not ensure the others' existence. Whilst this research provides us with a distinction at definition level (namely that equity relates to fairness and justice, and equality associates with sameness), Espinoza's focus was to outline how the goals and purposes of each concept

differ across educational processes. This emphasises the importance of conceptualisation, not only to comprehend research, but to ensure the success of change implementation.

At this point, it also seems appropriate to communicate which groups of students are of interest when looking into the experience of marginalised students. While this review will use research that has placed predominant focus on BAME¹ communities, it will also draw comparisons with a wider range of protected groups, highlighting areas in which the development of support could work similarly – if not collaboratively. In this instance, those who have a protected characteristic will refer to the list formulated within the Equality Act (2010):

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Race
5. Religion or belief
6. Sex
7. Sexual orientation
8. Marriage and civil partnership
9. Pregnancy and maternity

The Equality Act (2010) is central to the development and improvement of EDI measures within the higher education sector. This Act has replaced and simplified several existing laws relating to discrimination, and has challenged universities to become more responsible in meeting criteria relating to the equal and fair treatment of its staff and students. Largely, the Equality Act extended its protection from direct discrimination to more individuals, with an increased focus on disability. The key principles of this Equality Law include protection against; direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation – predominantly through the use of positive action.

Smaller equality projects within universities across the country have utilised the Equality Act (2010) to guide its practice, alongside the use of Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which also came into force under the Act's development. The PSED specifically requires public bodies to make reasonable efforts to eliminate discrimination, advance good relationships, and to improve the equality of opportunities between groups. The University of Nottingham (UoN) evidences its use of policy and guidance within its practice, having worked alongside or having achieved accomplishments in the following:

- ECU Race Charter
- Athena SWAN
- Committed status within the Disability Confident Scheme
- Stonewall Diversity Champion
- Working Forward Pledge

Whilst this summary highlights the efforts of UoN in supporting both their staff and students, work from Nichols (2017) and the University's equality, diversity and inclusion consultation (2019) reveal challenges that remain within the University for such groups. These include: BAME attainment gaps, a lack of staff and student diversity, low disclosure of disability, incidents of harassment and discrimination, the health and wellbeing of staff and students as well as a sense of belonging. It becomes clear where the

¹ Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

University's challenges lie, but with such little work looking into the experiences of protected groups more generally, how can we understand why these discrepancies remain? Themes identified within the literature explore areas in which students most require support – and these will be discussed in turn.

2.1 Intersectionality

The experience of students who have a protected characteristic is largely similar, in that they often feel unrepresented, dissatisfied with the support available to them, and experience university more negatively. Research from the University of Bristol has also suggested that the concerns of students in minority ethnic groups differ based on intersectional identities (Connor, Tyers, Modood & Hillage, 2004). For example, ethnic minority students from a lower socio-economic class tended to have more financial worries than others, and those who were older were more likely to leave education early due to family commitments or difficulties. In this instance, intersectionality refers to the interaction between a person's social inequalities. The growing recognition of the challenges that intersectionality poses for university students has also come from literature looking into the needs of international students with disabilities. In particular, eligible support does not prove accessible for all, especially when this is not only governed by physical barriers but also cultural (Williams, Pollard & Takala, 2019).

Students with intersecting identities not only experience university differently, but also demonstrate dissimilar priorities when selecting a higher education provider. Specifically, prospective students with intersectional needs were more likely to select a provider based on its inclusivity and diversity more so than others (Trendence UK, 2019). Those with more intersections were even more so dependent on these qualities, reflecting a greater need and expectation for tailored support and empowerment from their provider. This appeared particularly important to those with multiple protected characteristics, as they are less represented within the university population and are likely to have more complex needs, expectations and experiences.

Research looking into those with intersecting identities also appears to amplify the negative experiences felt by those with a protected characteristic. Not only do these individuals report high levels of harassment and discrimination (subsequently affecting their wellbeing), but also face substantial challenges with progression and representation. Throughout this review, findings relating to this population will be outlined and considerations will be made with reference to the tailored approaches needed to support these individuals. A good example of this came from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU; 2018), who highlighted efforts made by Anglia Ruskin University in a series of case studies. A 'cross strand' approach was taken, whereby staff networks, for example the institution's Women's Network and BAME Network periodically met to ensure that intersectional needs are considered and best managed for those with multiple protected characteristics. Not only were these measures greatly received and had high staff engagement, but it demonstrates an approach which could easily transfer to the student population also.

The Office for Students has previously questioned the challenges that face minority populations, particularly with the homogenisation of such groups. Attending to areas of intersectionality, in itself is working to reduce instances of this, and will likely ensure that general support systems are more effective and university processes are more mindful of such needs.

2.2 Harassment and discrimination

Whilst harassment and discrimination are not uncommon throughout the general university population, the prevalence of such behaviour is considerably higher in groups who are less represented. In October

2019, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC; 2019) published a report on racial harassment in British universities. This found that around a quarter (24%) of ethnic minority students had experienced racial harassment since the beginning of their course – being most prevalent for Black and Asian students. 34% of this population reported being racially harassed by being excluded or ignored, leaving them feeling invisible. Similarly, international students felt largely unwelcome and vulnerable as a result of harassment they had experienced.

This is comparable to the experiences outlined in the Stonewall 'LGBT in Britain, Work Report' (2018), which explored discrimination towards BAME LGBT+ individuals. While this was not specific to university experience, it helps to further highlight the challenges that underrepresented and intersecting populations might face in the workplace following graduation. Specifically, 10% of BAME LGBT+ graduates reported being attacked in the workplace because of their sexual orientation, compared with only 3% of White LGBT+ graduates. In addition to this, 12% reported losing their job because of their sexual orientation, again being considerably higher than those who were White.

Not only does this further evidence the unfortunate effect of intersectionality on experience, it helps to demonstrate that discrimination is not exclusive to the university environment. While this is true, university is a time where individuals who are subject to this harassment and discrimination have considerable access to professional services and peer support. The importance of ensuring a solid foundation of networks and support procedures to prevent this behaviour, and action appropriate help is extremely evident. As well as there being a higher presence of harassment in groups with protected characteristics, there also seems to be a dissatisfaction with the support and procedures associated with them.

Work by EHRC (2019) also highlighted the considerable number of universities who are without a bespoke way of supporting issues such as these, and while some reactive procedures are in place, the cause of the issue often remains unresolved. Staff members felt unconfident in dealing with a report of this kind, particularly due to a lack of understanding of student needs and the procedures that should be adhered to. As well as this, students who had experienced harassment were largely unwilling to disclose it, in fact it was found that two thirds of students did not report their experience of harassment to their university. Again, this was predominantly a result of a lack of confidence in the system, lack of understanding of how to report harassment, and concerns surrounding the severity of the issue. Ultimately, reactive approaches will not be able to provide support to students if they do not feel confident in reporting instances in the first place. Approaches which place priority on encouraging disclosure and trust with university services, as well as preventing issues of harassment and discrimination, are likely to be most beneficial in supporting those who are less represented.

This might include a focus on training programmes, embedding a new culture within day-to-day work, and implementing wellbeing and safety communications early on and throughout the university life of students. While the efficacy of implementing preventative approaches such as these comes from efforts regarding gender-based harassment and discrimination, its transferable qualities prove hopeful for those with differing protected characteristics. As a result of implementing such measures, students appeared more engaged with reporting and responding to violence, harassment and hate crime (Universities UK, 2019a). Alongside this, it seems that the implementation and signposting of wellbeing and welfare services at the stage of reporting would best utilise the reactive services on offer, and protect the mental health of those experiencing such behaviour.

2.3 Mental health and wellbeing

In general, students who are less represented are more likely to experience poor mental health. For example, those who are international often suffer with wellbeing by virtue of being further away from familial support and facing both language and cultural barriers (Office for Students, 2019). While some groups, particularly LGBT+ students, are more likely to utilise mental health services, this is not consistent for all who are marginalised (Trendence UK, 2019). For example, international students are less likely to use counselling and wellbeing services than British students. While there is a need to eliminate discriminating treatment using preventative measures, the availability of reactive support is still vital to the wellbeing of this population. For example, 8% of students who were affected by racial discrimination were left feeling suicidal, with their wellbeing and mental health being seriously affected (EHRC, 2019). As a result of this, students tended to disengage with activities, social opportunities and their studies – likely leaving them isolated and without both peer and professional support. While discrimination and harassment are not the sole reason for feeling isolated and marginalised, these feelings appear at the core of mental health issues, especially for BAME students.

Early research into the voluntary premature departure of university made noteworthy links between wellbeing and a lack of social connections (Tinto, 1987). Those who had left university before the completion of their degree found it harder to identify someone who they had a significant friendship with. This also helped to identify that external demands on a student's time can inhibit the development of these meaningful relationships, and was most associated with those who had dependents, were married, or were living off campus. In addition to this, more recent work identified that loneliness was most prevalent in those who were Disabled, Black, Minority Ethnic, or International (Dickinson, 2019). Again, these students were more likely to report having little or no true friendships than other students, which might be indicative of the wellbeing concerns and higher drop-out rates observed in such groups (Keohane and Petrie, 2017).

This peer support does not appear as clear cut as we might first assume. In one research study, BAME students were averse to joining groups specific to their ethnicity and felt that it would segregate rather than unite them with students who have an ethnicity different to their own. Students in this instance were more favourable of joining groups which reflected their interests as opposed to their identity (Davies & Garrett, 2012).

When supporting mental health through more 'traditional' measures e.g. counselling, it is important to not consider BAME as one identical group of individuals. Support services must be mindful of the variance found between cultural backgrounds and how that can influence a students' experiences and perceptions of mental health. In a brief provided by the Office for Students (2019) a number of recommendations were presented, aiming improve the mental health support for the BAME population, which included:

- A prioritisation of culturally competent approaches
- Targeting those who do not disclose through campaigns
- Collaboration with students and the students' union
- Increasing the representational diversity of staff
- Practising awareness of intersectional needs

The way in which students perceive a university's support services will determine whether they are best utilised, and so ensure they are robust enough and representational of the student body. This is in turn likely to increase disclosure and trust within universities and students' unions. Not only were

empowerment, collaboration and tailored advertisement of support services relevant for minority ethnic and international students, they were also desirable for LGBT+ students: this indicates the potential value of implementing such measures for all marginalised populations.

Not only have the OfS outlined ways of improving support services, but the National Students Survey (NSS) will run a consultation into support services in the spring of 2020. This aims to further explore how universities can shape their facilities to meet the needs of differing groups, and subsequently assess whether the support and guidance that they are receiving during their time in higher education is appropriate. It appears that although research is beginning to acknowledge disparities in the type of support needed for underrepresented groups, more responsibility should be taken by the provider to action these changes.

2.4 Attainment and progression

More recently, there has been a positive shift in the number of BAME students participating in university education – with one briefing reporting a 34% increase from 2011 to 2016 (Office for students, n.d.). This was particularly true of those coming from a low socio-economic status (SES) group. Not only is this the case, but new measures launched by the Government in 2019 look to hold universities to account for their efforts to increase opportunity and success for underrepresented students (the Race Disparity Audit); regardless of this, challenges with the attainment and progression for those who are less represented within Higher Education still endure.

The proportion of graduates with a first or upper second class degree were considerably lower in those who were Black (56%), with the highest proportion of students achieving these grades being White (80%) – this remained so even after controlling for entry qualifications, age, sex and course (Race Disparity Unit, 2019). With these controls in mind, disparities in success must be attributed to other factors solely affecting ethnic minority students, and research outlines that a non-inclusive curriculum and lack of tutoring/support can be responsible for this. The considerable number of students with a protected characteristic who drop-out of university could also be representative of attainment challenges. As a result, it seems that providers are beginning to understand the importance of discussing attainment gaps, particularly with BAME students (Universities UK, 2019b). Other ways in which universities are expected to improve the opportunity to succeed for the BAME population include:

- encouraging student leadership
- developing racially diverse and inclusive environments
- obtaining and analysing data on the attainment gap, and understanding how it works

It appears that being collaborative in approach and ensuring that appropriate contacts are informed is key to developing effective support in this area.

Not only is tailored support necessary for a student's ability to succeed within their degree, but is likely to impact on their subsequent progression. When controlling for external factors, BAME graduates were less likely to be employed or in further study after three years; specifically, Black students were 6% less likely than their White counterpart. In addition to this, research from Stasio & Heath (2017) found that someone of an ethnic minority background would need to send 60% more applications to receive as many call-backs as majority groups. This not only suggests that BAME individuals struggle to obtain a paid position more so than others and that discrimination at application stage can be a reason for this. In addition, those from a religious background were subject to similar levels of discrimination, and the

addition of having a higher education qualification did not help to eliminate these disparities between ethnic groups.

Universities appear to be working to empower and equip students to deal with the inequality of opportunity that they might face following graduation, with a third of institutions implementing progression activities for BAME students. As well as this, providers reported offering placements, work experience and internships specific to ethnic minority groups (Office for students, n.d.). However, it may be of worth questioning the efficacy of these measures if employers are discriminating against marginalised groups at application stage. Forging partnerships with employers who encourage diversity and equality of opportunity might be an appropriate additional step to take - helping to not only support BAME students but others who are also largely underrepresented. To further encourage this empowerment and readiness for employment, it is also important for students to have representatives. In this instance, having staff and support services which not only understand the needs of underrepresented individuals, but also demonstrate diversity in higher education.

2.5 Representation

Feeling represented within university was another element core to the experience of those who share protected characteristics. Research has shown that BAME students did not feel represented throughout current curriculums, influencing how they engaged with their course (Universities UK, 2019b). A briefing published by Stonewall in 2019, outlined how this representational challenge can also affect LGBT+ students. Though it is not an expectation that all subjects and modules within them should include specific content tailored to these groups, it is recommended that academic staff be trained to deliver content using inclusive language and remain sensitive to topics that might concern protected groups. Not only would this help to engage students with their course, but as a result might aid attainment also (Stonewall, 2019).

Relating to this, staff diversity is often disproportionate within higher education. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) found that only 0.6% of UK professors were Black, and that there were stark differences between the numbers of female staff members in high contract positions compared with males (Advance HE, 2018). Not only does this impact those working in higher education, but also means that students from protected groups are less likely to see themselves reflected in academic professionals. Furthermore, LGBT+ students felt that having a role model (someone of their community in a senior position) was more important than holding targeted networking events (Trendence UK, 2019). It appears that championing diversity at staff level is vital for these groups to feel welcomed and confident.

The enrolment of students from a diverse range of backgrounds plays an equally important role in representing marginalised groups. Though the numbers of BAME students have increased in recent years, it does not mean that this proportion is at all representative, or that measures in place to accept students into university are working appropriately. A briefing released by the OfS (n.d.) helped to highlight the disparity in different ethnicities accessing higher education. While it is important to note that race does not appear to have sole bearing on admission, even at the highest SES, admission to the most selective universities was lowest in Black students. And as identified by Boliver (2016), those from ethnic minority groups with comparative previous academic achievements were offered a place of admission less often than their White counterparts. In this instance, admission is unrelated to a desire to study at a higher educational level and seems to reflect an institutional bias.

It has been argued that challenges relating to access, particularly for BAME students, are due to great interest in highly competitive courses (particularly at elite institutions). Yet others have referenced the

use of a 'representative quota' that once filled, will limit the acceptance of other students in this group (Boliver, 2016). It is important for universities to actively review their processes of admission to ensure that protected groups have an equal and fair opportunity to study – which quota filling measures do not. For empowerment and inclusion to become a permanent part of the admissions process seems vital to the success of achieving true representation at student level.

Summary

Research within the area of EDI has substantially increased in recent years, enabling higher education providers to begin applying this knowledge to the recruitment, support and progression of their students. The benefits of creating an environment which celebrates diversity and to subsequently advertise this to prospective students are clear. Yet to achieve this for less represented groups, research indicates that trust must be built – not only with respect to student-staff interactions and student-student interactions, but also with the procedures and policies in place to support them. Besides this being beneficial for the effective use of support services, it is likely that this will increase the disclosure of protected characteristics as well as concerns surrounding harassment, discrimination and mental health.

Overall, literature demonstrates a misconception and lack of comprehensive knowledge surrounding those in less represented groups and how their needs differ. Not simply how they differ from the majority population, but even between different ethnicities and intersections. While intersectionality is not a newly defined concept, the extent of this research within the university populations is somewhat limited – meaning that in some cases, we are only able to make assumptions regarding the efficacy of measures implemented to support these groups. To overcome this, research seems to place priority on empowering the voice of those with intersecting identities and understanding their expectations for support. Collaboration with those who have intersecting identities, and between networks or representatives appears to be a well-received way of doing so - this is likely to also help build the valuable social connections needed to ease the transition into higher education, and enable those less engaged to utilise their voice.

If anything, research in this area helps to evidence that it is not simply about adhering to equality guidance and policy, but also about going above and beyond to enhance the experience and engage those who are less represented with higher education. This not only concerns the wellbeing of these students, but also their academic representation and success. Universities must work to have appropriate representatives and encourage regular, open conversation regarding issues that continue to present themselves within academia for these groups. Training and awareness raising sessions/campaigns have proved their worth throughout EDI literature in achieving this, and helping to empower staff to deliver these effectively and appropriately. Appropriate next steps for research are likely to include; assessing the effectiveness of measures implemented for underrepresented groups (also being mindful of how/whether this differs for intersectional students), how to best help those less likely to engage with university and students' union support services, to further explore gaps in attainment and representation.

Not only has this research enabled our knowledge of the experiences of underrepresented groups to become more focussed, but has prompted us to explore how these themes reflect within the UoN population and how we can work towards a more equitable experience for all students at this institution. By doing so, it allows us to recommend and implement measures that are tailored the experience of

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those, not only in a Russell Group University, but also tailors it to the processes we have in place or are currently lacking – a one size fits all approach across HE does not seem effective in this instance.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Methods and research questions*

To truly uncover and reflect the experience of under-represented students at UoN, a phenomenological approach prioritising narrative of subjective experience seemed most appropriate. Before now, qualitative research has proved beneficial within the area of marginalised groups and their experience at the University of Nottingham (Nichols, 2017), and so employing an approach that prioritises this seems most appropriate. Interview schedules were designed in a way that explored the following research questions:

1. Are students aware of what EDI is and how EDI measures can work to support them?
2. What support do those in underrepresented groups at UoN expect?
3. What is the experience of those in protected groups who are enrolled at UoN?
 - a) How does harassment and discrimination affect this experience?
4. Do the experiences and expectations of intersectional students differ from those with one protected characteristic?
5. To what extent do students with protected characteristics feel represented at UoN and UoNSU?
6. How do these students affiliate with the Students' Union?

3.2 *Sample*

Participants were selected from the University of Nottingham student population, using Microsoft Forms sign-up, having been distributed through Students Network communications, Disability Liaison Officers and Union social media channels. While, participation was voluntary, all participants were incentivised with £15 cash for taking part in the research. The sign-up form was used to assign participants to groups based on their identity. To take part in the research, the participant needed to fit at least one of the following groups:

1. BAME
2. Religion and faith
3. LGBT+
4. Mature
5. International
6. Disabled students
7. Intersectional

As well as this, the information gathered through the sign-up form was used to informally weight gender, domicile/fee status, and study stage. It is important to note that there was low engagement from the postgraduate population in this instance, and male students were underrepresented in this sample. A full breakdown of participant demographics is available in section 8.1, and as can be seen from the 44 participants, there was a good range of participants across groups. Considering the breadth of demographic groups obtained and the principle of saturation, increasing group size would not have yielded new information in the mind of the researcher – more rather it was more important to researchers to focus on the richness of data across groups as opposed to detailed data of one sector of marginalisation.

3.3 Data collection and coding

Data collection, for reasons that will be explained, was conducted using a two-phase approach: a series of focus groups and subsequent follow-up interviews. Seven focus groups were scheduled (with the mature students' group being split into four individual interviews due to COVID-19), each lasting between 65 and 110 minutes. Five follow-up interviews were conducted, using Microsoft Teams' online video call functionality, of which they ranged between 40-65 minutes long.

All interviews were recorded using an audio device, with focus groups being transcribed by the researcher using an auto-transcription app. Otter is a voice to text application which helped to speed up the transcription process – while this proved beneficial for the timeline of the project, transcripts did require editing following this stage (particularly where the app could not understand accents or quick speech). This did, however, allow for increased familiarisation with the transcripts. All follow-up interviews were transcribed by an external transcription service, helping to reduce the time of transcription further.

As mentioned, a phenomenological approach was taken to explore the experiences of marginalised students at UoN. More specifically, Thematic Analysis (TA) was employed as a basis for theme formulation. As TA is not bound by theoretical frameworks, it provides a flexible approach to exploring the reality of individuals – being particularly suitable for semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were analysed by assigning codes to the data in a recursive way – revisiting data to ensure that the codes allocated offer a comprehensive view of the data, allowing themes to be generated. In this instance, a deductive approach to TA was utilised, where themes were developed around preconceived ideas within existing literature and knowledge – primarily the literature review conducted prior to this research. While this meant that themes were self-affirmative, it allowed us to explore in depth, the experience of students in targeted areas relating to higher education.

3.4 Ethical considerations

As in the demographic table (section 8.1), participants have been anonymised and assigned a participant number following data collection – ensuring both a confidentiality and richness of data. With the aim of exploring topics that are more sensitive in nature, it was important to ensure that students felt safe within the environment, and therefore a two-phase approach was employed. This meant that researchers could explore topics such as mental health and discrimination in a 1:1 setting where there would be no chance of double disclosure (this being the disclosure of sensitive information both to a group, and the researcher). Not only did this approach prove to be ethically valuable, but allowed us to explore these areas comprehensively. Where topics were of a sensitive nature, participants were provided with a document detailing the services available to them if they so wished to discuss them further, in a more professional capacity.

Informed consent was gained prior to data collection, particularly as the sessions were recorded. Participants were provided with an information sheet, and a subsequent consent form to sign if they were happy to proceed. With this, students were also given a verbal reminder of their right to withdraw before beginning the sessions, and were provided with the researcher's contact details might they need them.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Defining EDI: Analysis of the definitional data

Within the initial focus groups, participants were asked to define the terms equality, diversity and inclusion. We will examine how these concepts were explored by those in protected groups, before detailing how they might co-exist. As participants understood these concepts mostly in relation to their own experience at UoN, it is important that we also pay strict attention to any variance between groups.

Equality

As in research by Espinoza (2007), participants identified a distinction between equality and equity, noting that equality provides an incomplete view of the support needed by those facing inherent disadvantage as a result of their identity. The way in which these concepts were discussed helped to unpack that opportunity and outcome are central to how participants understand both equity and equality. And while equitable treatment was only explicitly noted by a few, participants were relatively forthcoming with the idea of eliminating disadvantage, and how that differs from providing the *same* resources to all. Participant 11 provided an excellent analogy to explain this to others in the group.

"I don't know what the word is, because not everyone's the same but everyone should get the same outcomes. So say if a child is four foot is trying to watch a football game over a fence, and there's a guy who is six foot and he can easily watch over the fence. Equality would mean giving them each one box so they could stand on the box and try again, but the child is still not tall enough. So to make it more equal, you give the child more boxes than the person who is already tall enough so that he can see the match as well... So it's not all about giving them the same stuff but it's the outcome as well, and that needs to be the same." (Participant 11)

In essence, equity works by respectfully recognising the differences between individuals, and working to reduce any disadvantage caused by those disparities. Having made this distinction, equality as a concept remains ingrained in the language of participants when discussing the treatment of those in protected groups. For instance, participants expect to be seen for the individual they are or their merit, as opposed to the group(s) they identify with or belong to. Treatment free of discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes was vital to the way in which students verbalised this concept. Ways in which equality tended to manifest itself for these populations were throughout opportunities such as: equal pay, professional progression, access to higher education and university attainment.

"I think more of opportunities, in my opinion, because I think that's what changed the most when I went to university, particularly from a single parent background and a Black man from South London. I think when I went to university it kind of evened the playing field a bit more in terms of opportunities to work, to study for an education and again, of course, for opportunities to branch out and find other interests as well. So, when I think of equality I think of everyone being treated fairly but I think particularly of opportunities rather than, for example, finance." (Participant 41)

Of importance here, is how students related fairness to equality: for some, fair meant *the same*, yet for others it was relative to who they were and their needs. The latter was used in regards to the reasonable adjustments often needed for disabled students to have equal access or opportunity. If anything, we

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can be certain that the conceptual challenge between equity and equality only highlights the importance of standardised terminology throughout our communications with students, as well as the advantage of using 'equity' when concerning the experiences of marginalised students – as we recognise that this is naturally understood in relation to their own identity.

Diversity

This concept seemed more concrete in the minds of participants than equality, with very little variance across groups. Diversity was defined as a wide range of people from different backgrounds, often referred to within an environment or context – in this instance, students tended to relate this directly to the University of Nottingham itself. Participants spoke about a diversity of age, gender, race and ability. Initially, conversation tended to focus on identifiable attributes or characteristics, yet participants were quick to explore concepts of ideology and perspective and discussed how this could ensure diversity where cultural or race identity might be similar.

"Even like people who are all Asian, could be sitting in the same room, and we have different ideas, we're all Asian but we have different ideas." (Participant 14)

The way in which students conceptualised identity, in itself, was important to this discussion. Participants highlighted how a person's experiences, needs and intersections all play a part in determining diversity, aspects beyond what is typically attributed to identity. A good example of this, which a few students recalled was social class. Ultimately, diversity was understood as reflection of society, a true representation of different types of people. And aside from those who felt the presence of these differences was enough, some felt that diversity should in fact be a celebration and appreciation of those variances.

Inclusion

Inclusion associated strongly with a sense of belonging, in other words, feeling welcome within an environment and feeling part of a community. Participants explained how this manifested itself throughout connections with others and the ability to be their authentic selves. While most groups spoke about a sense of belonging in relation to University and SU groups, international students referenced an immersion within the British culture more widely – expecting to feel 'at home' while studying at UoN.

Regardless of this distinction, having equitable opportunities to engage with activities and events was important to the inclusion of all groups that were interviewed - helping us to understand that students tend to conceptualise inclusion as a physical space to be involved. It also became clear that an element of responsibility was embedded within inclusion for participants across groups, often discussing the need to be involved to ultimately become included. Yet, a students' role in their inclusion seemed variable and dependent upon needs, for instance where needs are more nuanced or complex, it requires a more proactive role from the student themselves. This was particularly true of disabled students, as highlighted by participant 30.

"If you're interested in something there's no reason you can't do it, you just need to make them aware that there could be a problem that they need to think about and plan." (Participant 30)

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Not only is inclusivity defined by the ability to access opportunities, but also in how individuals are treated within that environment. For inclusion to thrive within opportunities, students must feel accepted, valid and free of judgement. Ultimately, this concept was underpinned by respect and understanding, and across groups, participants explored the idea of inclusivity as a mind-set rather than an action. What is meant by this is the preparedness and willingness to respect and understand the differences of others – a clear expectation of how inclusion could be intertwined within pre-existing structures or procedures.

How do these concepts relate?

It should not be of surprise that these concepts relate to each other in some way, having formed a well-used and popular acronym over the past few years, but what exactly means that they work well together? While some participants spoke about inclusion being a by-product, used to determine the success or lack of both diversity and equality, the conceptualisation of these three terms was inconsistent across and within groups. It was clear that students relate them in vastly different ways, and often find themselves combining two to equal a third – indicating a synonymous and interchangeable nature to them.

"I think inclusivity and diversity leads to equality...I think if you have equality and diversity that allows you to experience inclusivity. I think it works for all three of them like if you have two of them, you're more likely to have a third." (Participant 6)

To make sense of the transposable relationship that these concepts seem to have, it is first important to understand what underpins them. Whilst not all participants explicitly identified what this relationship was, they did not fail to recognise the role of representation in each of their individual classifications.

"They're all kind of linked. They're all looking at, like making people feel like they belong and like representing them so I think representation is the thing that links them really." (Participant 18)

In the minds of students, it was important that representatives were available and prepared to meet the requirements of a diverse population, and that all individuals had equal access to or could identify someone who might represent them. This diversity of the student body was also important for the inclusion of participants, and helped them to understand how these concepts might co-exist. Where representation worked well, students found it easy to evidence how equality, diversity and inclusion should and could work for the benefit of those in marginalised groups.

As well as this, students often related EDI and representation to how their presence (or in fact lack of) made them feel. Where participants could evidence these concepts, they reported feeling: more able to identify with others, that their identity was valued and welcomed, and more connected to individuals and the communities that surround them. It becomes apparent that a sense of belonging was ingrained in the implementation of these concepts for these populations, and their likely relationship with wellbeing.

4.2 Representation

As we have just explored, representation was at the forefront of discussion regarding EDI. When defining the term representation, we begin to see how it manifests itself within both the expectations and experiences of both UoN and the Union, for those in marginalised groups.

Staff diversity and curriculum

A large part of participants' understanding of representation revolved around the diversity of the academic environment – more specifically, whether academic staff reflected the identities of the student population and how inclusive course material was. In some instances, this was explicitly referred to as role modelling, in which students looked for someone in a position of trust and authority that represented their identity or beliefs. Yet it seemed as though that this was a shortcoming of UoN schools and faculties, particularly in the eyes of BAME and international communities. As a result of this, participants reported feeling misunderstood and found it hard to relate to academic staff. This was not exclusive of academic staff either, with one international student struggling to access support due to a perceived lack of relatability and understanding.

"I think that's also what kind of sometimes blocks me like if I want to have a chat with someone. But then I go like 'yeah but they probably won't get what I'm saying', because sometimes my wording is confusing and everything and so you go like, that's not worth it I'll just call my mum. But it would be helpful for example if there's people, not saying they represent the entire world, but certainly less English people in welfare."
(Participant 25)

While BAME representation and staff diversity is clearly essential to these groups, diversity for this population isn't solely about seeing other Black or Asian people in senior positions, but more rather the level of understanding that can come with that. In the same way there were concerns that, if implemented incorrectly, staff diversity could become tokenistic in nature which would not serve its expected purpose.

For other protected groups, there was an absence of conversation about being represented at staff level, but more rather discussion related again to having staff that are prepared to deal with diverse identities, abilities, and social backgrounds. This was particularly important to those who have intersecting identities, who reported feeling that their needs were dismissed by staff who did not fully understand – as they often had no other student to reference in a similar position. Where staff representation was present, it enabled a level of understanding and empathy in which students felt enhanced their academic experience. They felt they had a point of reference to aspire to, which gave them a sense of drive and self-belief.

Not only did participants highlight issues of staff diversity when concerning academic representation, but also felt that the curriculum was somewhat White and Eurocentric. Participant 41 discussed how a lack of focus surrounding BAME patients, and how symptoms might present themselves on darker skin has limited his understanding and practical application of knowledge within the discipline – only being educated about the importance of such academic focus from the work of others in the sector.

"They've realised that actually the disease's symptoms and signs are entirely different on a person who's ethnic. So, I'd like to see it in education as well...We aren't given many patients who have problems on darker skin and so we actually don't know what it looks like and that kind of challenges us a lot." (Participant 41)

While discussion surrounding the diversity of the curriculum was limited throughout these interviews, there was an eagerness to learn and incorporate cultural and ethnic divergences within students' learning.

Student diversity

In a similar way, participants conceptualised representation as the extent to which they see themselves reflected among the student population – the diversity of students at UoN. Not only did this mean a physical representation throughout courses, halls, and student groups, but also in how the University and Union represent this diversity within media and prospectus-type material. Another important distinction in their understanding of diversity on campus was that it not only related to culture or ethnicity (which tended to be a conversational norm), but with other social classes for instance.

To firstly address discussion that spoke to ethnic diversity among students, those from BAME communities were clear in their perception that UoN was a predominantly White environment. As with academia, BAME students found it hard to recognise themselves within the wider student population. One participant identified that this was true of her course, being one of two Black students and addressing her friend in the group who was the only Asian student. As noted, this was not exclusive to course environments. In fact, students found that hall diversity was somewhat inconsistent, with an expectation that BAME communities would live in certain accommodation.

"It's really really White. I mean at our formal, we were so shocked that there was other Black people...we were so baffled because we literally thought it was just us. I would tell people 'right I'm from Cavendish', and they'd be like 'what, you're not at St. Peter's court or Raleigh Park?' and stuff, it's just really really weird. I don't think it's that big of a deal but, you know, it's almost as if they want us to be as a be St Peter's Court or Raleigh Park like it's weird if you're not yeah." (Participant 39)

This lack of diversity was also noted by White students who felt there was a segregation between halls. Participants themselves questioned whether this related with the availability of catering provisions or was more in line with the affordability of accommodation types: also discussing the role that social class might have here. With this, students from international and intersectional groups outlined that UoN was an environment for middle class people and those from a different social background often felt unrepresented amongst others – this seemed to relate to an elitism associated with UoN's Russell Group affiliation. Interestingly, a student's previous educational background seemed to determine how adjusted they were to a middle-class White environment, as well as how diverse they perceived the institution to be.

"I'm kind of used to it now as the sixth form I went to was very White, so you know it's not really that much of a deal. But compared to people who've come from very diverse schools and stuff, coming into university and then finding out everyone's very White middle class from the same kind of background... yeah it's very minimal diversity in campus." (Participant 39)

This finding also seemed to hold up when considering the cross-cultural experiences of international students, who typically reported much poorer student diversity in their home schools than in UoN. There is clearly inconsistent narrative of student diversity across campus, yet times where participants did feel represented, helped to reduce feelings of being ostracised and isolated.

Sense of belonging

When concerning representation, participants made clear links with inclusion and how the surrounding environment made them feel. For instance, whether they felt welcomed and valued by others in the community and whether they had fair access to opportunities. More specifically, it concerned how well

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the environment catered to student needs, and for BAME, international and intersectional students, it seemed that expectations were often left unmet. For Participant 36, this was particularly true of Welcome and other events aimed at accommodating all.

"Most of the time, it's to cater to White British student, and you have like two days where international students to settle in and honestly that's not enough" (Participant 36)

Not only was a diversity in Welcome Committee Members and Mentors important for increased relatability among students, but it also ensured that the experience itself was inclusive of student needs. For instance, opportunities and information tailored to the typical British student experience is not likely to harbour a sense of belonging within those from another country. So, having underrepresented groups portrayed and catered to in respectful, non-stereotypical ways throughout extra-curricular activities and academic environments helped to ensure an ease of involvement, and thus inclusion. This applies especially to women in STEM subjects. And while participants reported their experiences very differently here, it was clear that the impact of inclusive environments and targeted interventions was a driving force in fostering those feelings of belonging so regularly associated with representation.

"What has made you feel so included on your course?" (Facilitator)

"...there are certain activities or conferences are just tailored for women in engineering." (Participant 42)

"I know that people have been trying to like, increase the number of women in STEM, but it's simply the fact that you are not able to find yourself like a community or friends maybe within that kind of profession." (Participant 29)

As has been alluded to, not all experience was negative for participants. International students made comparisons with previous institutions they had been a part of and had praised the efforts made by UoN to welcome those from differing backgrounds. Safe spaces that had been set up for those in protected groups were also of value (especially for LGBT+ students), allowing the opportunity to be themselves and have a place that they can trust they will fit in. Yet, it remains that perceptions and experiences of a sense of belonging are inconsistent, both within protected groups and between campuses more generally.

Student Voice

Representation of voice was also central to the formulation of this idea in the minds of participants. This concept defined into two distinct areas: representatives that are employed to talk on behalf of a group, and opportunities for individuals to put their own voice or opinion forward.

"Representation is just knowing that someone or a group of people is talking on your behalf, looking after your rights or your... yeah, well, rights and just your interest." (Participant 42)

As highlighted by participant 42, student voice serves the purpose of inclusion and ensures that specific needs are catered to – which was of particular importance during times of impactful decision. Aside from their clear expectations of what student voice should look like, and its role in representation, the

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majority of participants were relatively dissociated with its presence at UoN. Those more engaged with the University (either academically or otherwise) were able to identify that elections, Officers and Course Representatives all work to empower student voice. Saying this, LGBT+ students were particularly aware of Officers - both at the Union and within their course - that could help to enable change and speak on behalf of that community.

Expressing their views was vital for those in underrepresented groups, yet it went beyond 'being heard' for some, with the expectation that their voice should be respected and understood as a viable consideration. Where students weren't treated in this way, they felt shut down and unable to be an effective representative of student experience.

"...when you're in these meetings, sharing your voice and representing your cohort, some of the lecturers will just go, 'but it's not like that' back to you but this is our experience not yours. So it's almost we need like a non-judgmental environment."
(Participant 30)

As well as this, those in representative positions felt that students tended not to take full advantage of and utilise student voice opportunities as much as was expected of them – which is likely to explain their lack of engagement beyond definitional conversation here. It can be said that students are aware that they are represented in some way, but are not always able to recognise who that might be – particularly when less engaged in University activity altogether.

4.3 Harassment and discrimination

Experiences of discrimination

As in previous research, students did not tend to refer to their instances of discrimination using terms such as racism or sexism – more rather, there was talk of 'casual racism' or otherwise discriminating behaviour. Participants spoke about a breadth of experiences that were not limited to one area of the university experience. These narratives spanned classrooms, accommodation, work opportunities and off campus environments. A lot of the time, students reported feeling ostracised, isolated, and misunderstood as a result of these negative experiences. Some even spoke about how discrimination had become something they had come to terms with being part of their life – not only because it was difficult to manage alongside the pressures of academia, but also because they did not want to react in a way that might fulfil a stereotype.

"Some of my flatmates were actually saying offensive words. We would be sitting together but they would just say racial... I've forgotten the word, but its very race specific, and I was the only Black person there. So, you know when you talk in a group and then nobody's actually facing you let's say, and they're just talking in a group. I was just like 'what the hell has happened?', they kept on doing it but I never gave them a reaction, because not only was I used to it, it was the first week and I didn't want to come across as if I'm too sensitive, or whatever. I was trying to make friends and everything, I just ignored it. But then when I did raise it, I remember they made the whole thing like I was trying to complain" (Participant 9)

There was a clear narrative that BAME communities experience discriminating treatment at UoN with repeated reference to being undermined and having their opinions or complaints dismissed, as if not relevant. In one instance, participants 9 and 10 reported missing out on paid work opportunities within the University because they were repeatedly 'benched' while the same people were assigned the work.

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Even where participants hadn't experienced discrimination themselves, they reported instances of racial harassment that they had witnessed on campus – particularly surrounding Asian students at the time of COVID-19. As well as this, a couple of participants spoke about group chats being toxic and dangerous places, where discriminating language was tolerated and hardly ever reported.

This discriminating behaviour was not isolated to these communities either, participants from other protected groups spoke about how their experience at university had been laced with disproportionate treatment, unfair opportunities and a lack of accessibility – being particularly true of disabled students. And for international students, name calling and stereotypes were a norm: often at the hands of UK students passing it off as a joke. This discourse between participant 29 and 25 goes to show the extent of such behaviour.

"I mean not having Romanian people be called the strawberry pickers of the UK would be nice. (Participant 29)

I've never heard that (Participant 25)

It's either gypsies or strawberry pickers (Participant 29)

I mean whenever a person learns I'm Italian they go pasta, tortellini and pizza. They don't even say hi. (Participant 25)

You're Russian, that's another one we get." (Participant 29)

Micro-aggressions

As mentioned in the above sub-theme, students identified experiences that were referred to as 'casual' or 'subtle' acts of discrimination. Microaggressions are defined as indirect, subtle or unintentional forms of discrimination against those from marginalised groups. An example of this came from an LGBT+ student who discussed how a friend had commented on the identity of both him and his partner.

"I think sometimes there's comments that people might make that obviously they don't intend in any way to be rude or anything but I think sometimes they don't realise that can have an impact. (Participant 19)

Could you give me an example of that? (Facilitator)

Can't remember exactly what she said, but, it was just along the lines of, like, saying that my boyfriend was like, less obviously gay ... stuff like that, that then makes you think, why I guess." (Participant 19)

This brings attention to how stereotypes, assumptions and unconscious bias can embed themselves so naturally into the lives of marginalised individuals. Ultimately there is a lack of understanding in how such observations and statements might negatively impact someone in a protected group, for those not from a minority background. Again, these instances were present both in and outside of the learning environment. The number of students who reported microaggressions was stark, and particularly for those from BAME or international communities, it seemed something of an ongoing experience for them. Whilst these experiences had proved significantly hurtful and detrimental to an individual's wellbeing, these participants often dismissed the experience or made justifications for the individual who was responsible for the behaviour. Whether that be attributed to a lack of understanding,

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ignorance, or previous diversity in their lives, these behaviours (often from close friends or housemates) were excused. Due to these experiences, being in situations where they feel unrepresented was often met with some apprehension that they might have to experience yet another microaggression.

"It's just like they're all lovely people, but it's like, as people of colour like if you're surrounded by White people you feel a bit uneasy. Like, sometimes unintentionally they say something, you find it offensive, but like they're not like aware to that."
(Participant 36)

It is important to note that there did seem to be some variance between groups. For international students, microaggressions tended to focus on their ability to speak English – participant 24 and 25 having been patronised by other students for coherently speaking a language they have known their entire life, and attributing this to 'not sounding as international as expected'. Whilst for disabled students, it seemed embedded within their academic experience more generally. In these instances, lecturers had made assumptions about their ability and often denied their request for support as they 'didn't need it'.

"...Course Leaders try and put you in boxes, like 'we've dealt with everyone with disabilities before we know what to do', without actually considering the complexity of your situation." (Participant 30)

It seems that challenging such behaviour is difficult for those in protected groups as there is such little understanding of microaggressions. Steps must be taken to educate, both staff and students, on more subtle forms of discrimination to truly prevent their occurrence – whether this be throughout documentation, campaigns, or training sessions.

Not being enough

For this population, it became apparent that when subjected to discrimination, the theme of 'not being enough' manifested itself. What is meant by this, is that discrimination was based on an assumption of how a person should look or speak to 'fit' within a group, and where those expectations were not met microaggressions seemed to thrive. Throughout discussion we observed how this impacted students across groups, with Participant 30 stating how she had experienced microaggressions more so when her disability was hidden.

"I think, the big one is probably people making assumptions and go – just kind of go, 'You don't need that,' or 'Why are you needing that?' 'There's nothing wrong with you,' and I think I've – what I've seen has changed because I started the institution obviously, in September and then from November my health drastically changed and what I found was you'd get more questions and kind of, 'why are you doing it like that?' in the first few months when it was kind of an invisible disability so no one could see it."
(Participant 30)

This same principle presented itself for those who are mixed race, often being denied of their true identity because they don't look or sound the way they are expected to. This is particularly problematic at student level, with some participants being told they are 'not Black enough' or 'not really White'. Being notably present in cultural student groups, it unsurprisingly caused feelings of exclusion and judgement from both those of a shared and different ethnicity. Participants 37 and 39 speak to that and discuss the emotional impacts of being rejected by those who are expected to accept your identity.

"I found that when I was in my first year doing the freshers fair, I went up to the Korean society because I'm half Korean, and it just like instantly felt shameful like I was like the only like non full Korean there. And I kind of felt like I just got such bad vibes and we were having a conversation in Korean, my Korean conversational-I'm not fluent. I could tell that they didn't like me... I just felt instantly like I just kind of shut down." (Participant 37)

"Yeah same I'm quite comfortable with my identity... like people expect me to be part of ACS and all that kind of stuff and I completely agree with their manifestos and what they stand for, but I just personally do feel a bit disconnected, in my identity like I grew up in a very White area I went to a very White school. And so I just feel like its people that are supposed to have my back, are always questioning my validity and how Black I am how whatever part of my identity it is that they're questioning." (Participant 39)

It seems, more than anything, that this highlights a narrative of intra-minority conflict in that those not fitting an expectation or stereotype are excluded by the group themselves. It seems plausible to conclude that those with intersectional identities are most at risk of falling victim to this rejection and discrimination.

Reporting discrimination

Before exploring participants' experiences and expectations of reporting procedures at UoN, it is important to first address how they understand the concept of harassment – a term that is used at the forefront of these systems. Participants verbalised this term as a repeated act, centred on a person's protected characteristics, that negatively impacts their wellbeing. For those articulating this concept, there was a predominant focus on physical and verbal actions.

Students tended not to report instances of discrimination or harassment that they had faced during their time at University, and where they had, they had reached a dead end with dried up opportunities for further support. What seemed just as pressing was that students appeared to very rarely consider the possibility of reporting instances. They believed that nothing would come of it, that they would be unfairly treated because of their identity, and generally felt without direction when trying to access the support. More prevalent though, was the perception that the discrimination they had faced was not serious enough to report – often resulting in the participant talking themselves out of it and downplaying their experience.

"You can kind of in your own head belittle yourself and be like, 'but it's just me this is happening to you' or 'but it's just like, it's just my experience' or 'but it just happened once I'm sure it won't happen again'. You kind of talk yourself out of it before even reporting it or before even bringing it up to somebody. You're kind of just be like, 'oh no it's not that bad, oh no it's not that bad' I think like, this generation especially is very like good at being like crying, but like, thumbs up, like on the outside." (Participant 15)

While diminishing one's own experiences seemed to associate with previous discrimination, in that they had become almost desensitised to it over time, it seemed that a lack of clarity surrounding what would constitute as 'reportable' played into the perceptions of severity. This also leads us to question whether using the term harassment deters students from reporting instances of microaggressions or when the severity of a behaviour is unclear - particularly as participants conceptualise this term as persistent or

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recurring.

What students expect from reporting procedures tend to echo why they do not currently utilise them. Participants expect the University to mediate appropriately and in line with the students' expectations, to be professional and take each case (no matter its size) seriously, and to be informative throughout the process as well as within the materials that accompany it. More precisely, students feel that the current reporting procedures do not provide enough information concerning: how to report, what can be reported, and what action will likely be taken - how is it possible for students to trust a service that they know so little about?

"I think it's just clarity because I think just a clear outline of what you should report and where you should report and just a clear outline of all the, like, the process, I think. Because I think knowing what to report is a good start but also you need to know how to report it and how it will be dealt with. Otherwise, if you don't understand that then it's probably not going to encourage you as much to report something. If you don't know actually what's going to happen, so you probably will assume nothing will happen even if you do report it." (Participant 19)

While participant 19 identified that this would sit best on the current online reporting page, participant 36 argued that it seems more appropriate that this information is more widely available. As we have seen, students tend to dismiss instances of discrimination, often feeling that it is not worth reporting or that they do not want to 'make a fuss', and so it is unlikely that these individuals will visit a discrimination reporting page at all. Rather, the University and Union should look at intertwining this information throughout its available communications with students, to not only clarify or change perceptions of severity, but to normalise and increase the accessibility of reporting discriminating behaviour. And with this, to consider ways of reporting that might cater more specifically to the type of discrimination faced – would it be more appropriate to report microaggressions separate to that of other types of discrimination?

4.4 Support services and welfare

Having explored students' awareness of EDI policies and support services, there was an obvious disparity between the two. When concerning policies, only those most engaged with the Union or University were aware of their existence. Those unfamiliar with current guidance, however, were expectant that policy should prevent discrimination, ensure equal opportunities, and secure diversity of representation (at student level) for those in protected groups.

Participants found it much easier to name services that could support them with issues of EDI, and did so comprehensively. Recognition of where support was lacking and how both the University and Union were expected to work on this was explored and will be discussed throughout this theme. It is important to note that, while in this theme wellbeing and its targeted support is considered, exploration of support more generally will be the focus here.

Mental health and wellbeing

Several students in marginalised groups spoke of the negative impact that their university experience had on their wellbeing. For participants who were interviewed, university was often an isolating experience and they found it easy to become lost in the crowd or overlooked. While participant 19 recognised that this was due to their accommodation type, participant 41 directly attributed this to

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failed communication and a lack of support. Here, the student discusses the emotional impacts that a rejected EC application to seek support for his disability caused.

"I felt rejected. I felt misunderstood. It was a really depressing time to be in my life for various reasons and to add this onto it just isolated and ostracised me more between what I thought everyone else was achieving and what I effectively wasn't achieving"
(Participant 41)

While poorer mental health tended to be attributed to inadequate support for those in follow-up interviews, participants did explore what had defined instances of good support for them – whether that be internal or external services. Participants identified that the best support for improving wellbeing was perceptive, informed as well informative, and proactive (where staff go out of their way to help).

"He offered to go to the meeting with me as well to support and back up if I forgot to say anything that I had discussed with him in previous meetings he will bring it up. I think that's a good example of good support." (Participant 36)

In addition to this, students also stated that having friendships and becoming involved in diverse environments was integral to the self-management of their wellbeing, something that will be explored more extensively in section 4.5.

Role of the University and Union

While participants identified that both the University and Students' Union have a responsibility to support marginalised students, the way in which their roles were defined differed significantly. The perceived role of the Union was to support the personal lives of students whereas for the University, it was to support academic experience and wider organisational concerns – conversation of supporting welfare and wellbeing typically associated more so with the Union. Saying this, students tended to dismiss this distinction when concerning issues of a more serious nature.

16: I think if it was a more serious issue it might be more involved in the university.

F: When you talk about serious issues, what kind of thing do you mean?

16: Maybe like academic discrimination, I might go more towards the university than the Students' Union.

And with this, seeking support from the Union was considered more informal and accessible in nature. It was expected that the Union would have a role of responsibility in upholding a physical presence for all students and offering safe spaces for those in protected groups – to lead in the representation of the student body through the use of inclusive opportunities, Officer roles and student voice. To act independently of the University and provide impartial support was also important to these populations. For those particularly familiar with the Union's work, it was expected that they would challenge the actions and practices of the University, yet for others, collaborative work was essential.

Though there was some struggle to distinguish Union and University services, participants were much more thorough in their expectations of the SU. For the University, expectations seemed more grounded in policy and procedures. For example, following EDI guidelines and laws within their practices to prevent discrimination or inequity of any kind. They also related the University's role to ensuring a diversity of students across and within courses.

"Whereas I think the university itself has certain things, it has to do to like prevent discrimination to make things accessible, that if it doesn't do it's almost like breaking the law isn't it? I mean, yeah discrimination and equity laws so that if it doesn't do it, they have to do it legally" (Participant 30)

This discussion not only outlined the expectations of students, but helped to identify that the perceived role of the Union has an individualistic focus, unlike that of the University whose principal role is to support that of the collective. As participants have such solid expectations of support, it is likely to be indicative of where students feel that support has let them down or has failed. And so, where discrepancies are present between the expectations and actual roles of supporting marginalised groups, it seems only appropriate to resolve this and provide informative distinctions – not only will this help to manage the expectations of students, but possibly boundaries also.

Trust and accessing support

Trust was instantly identified as an important component in accessing support for marginalised groups, whilst this was unsurprising, it helped to identify what students attributed to a heightened sense of trust. These appear to break down into four core areas: approachability, professionalism, expertise, and understanding - which will now be explored in turn. It is important to note that this did also seem dependent on what type of support was needed, in which the priority between these factors shift. For example, when making a complaint there is more emphasis on professionalism and expertise than for issues of a sensitive nature – these other areas do not become redundant, more rather are less important at time of access than say approachability.

Approachability was integral to participants when accessing support and more informal guidance. Where staff were forthcoming with support, students found it easier to gain help and it provided them with confidence that their welfare was of priority and worth. Yet, where communications were impersonal or infrequent, they felt discouraged to engage in support altogether and lacked trust in the efficacy of the service. In a similar way, a substantial number of students recognised that having a friendly face or attitude would help them to trust support – not only to encourage access but to disclose information also.

"I think approachable. They need to be really approachable and friendly, because if you don't have that approachable nature or that friendly nature, people aren't going to be able to sit down and talk to you about what's going on. I think that's crucial." (Participant 44)

For both professionalism and expertise, they associated with a sense of confidence that the support would actually work for them. More specifically, professionalism referred to confidentiality and impartiality which was vital for those accessing support to freely speak about their experiences and concerns, trusting that they would be handled appropriately and not be of detriment to their academic record. As well as this, participants trusted those who were free of judgement and provided unbiased advice. These factors were not only important for the disclosure of information, but in providing some security of information moving forward – and highlights why some spoke about online services so favourably. Lastly, being responsive to a students' needs was a particularly trustworthy trait and increased perceptions of professionalism. This reduced any burden that the individual might initially feel, especially for those who were most vulnerable.

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Likewise, students felt more trustworthy of those who showed expertise, whether that being in the area of concern or as someone who can action change and implement further support. Seeing a staff member that was suitably informed or qualified to help validated that they were in the right place, particularly when they evidenced their ability to action a result and follow through with support – checking in where necessary.

"I think a follow through is really important because they're saying they're gonna do something, and then they don't that can make it harder to reach out the next time because you're like well, you know, nothing happened the last time." (Participant 35)

With this, preparedness to listen and help (especially with a cohort so diverse in needs) was a trait that helped participants develop trust, and also reduced instances of assumptive and stereotypical behaviours.

Familiarity with the staff member or 'time known' was a factor that participants identified as essential in mutual understanding. Students felt more likely to seek support with those they were familiar with, particularly if their needs were complex and needed a thorough understanding (e.g. disabled students). Relatability and representation helped to improve perceptions of understanding (particularly cultural understanding) for some, often using that as a basis to determine who might be most trustworthy. Moreover, participants also identified that trust and understanding must be mutual, for them to place trust in a staff member, they must be trusted themselves.

Challenges in accessing support

Participants were extensive in their discussion of services that were not currently in place throughout UoN and the SU that they would expect to see. This was discussed as a challenge of accessing support and while we cannot explore all these options individually, culturally competent and tailored support was central to discussion. For example, international students sought tailored financial and career support as well as an increased availability of provision during university vacation times – the latter also being true of mature students whose concerns often included childcare. As well as this, a number of students spoke about introducing mentoring/buddy schemes, which they believed would enable personalised support across the university experience. Some examples of this included: women in STEM subjects, disabled students engaging in activities or sports, society buddies or course-wide mentors.

Aside from support services that currently are not in place, participants identified that both a lack of information and failing communication often meant they were deterred or unable to access support. Students found it difficult to navigate information when locating services, and did not know who to contact if they needed support, especially concerning issues of EDI. Discussion in both the mature and LGBT+ group highlight just how uniformed participants felt.

"Yeah. I don't know who I'm meant to contact. I don't know what... and it's quite general but it goes quite university wide but I don't know what help is available to me." (Participant 41)

"I wouldn't really know the process. Like if something happened I don't really know where I would go, I don't know where to start." (Participant 17)

"I mean, it's probably easily accessible if you know where to access it." (Participant 19)

All groups actively identified that this was problematic, and that it would often lead to them dealing with the issues themselves – meaning it went unresolved or even worsened. Where students were able to find support, they were left unsure of whether it was suitable for their needs and how it would help them. This was especially true of the extenuating circumstances process, discrimination reporting procedures, and disability support services. Once again, participants request clarity surrounding what services are available to those in marginalised groups, what they can support, and how services typically work: delivered to them in documentation form or provided through awareness raising talks. It is only then that students perceive services to be accessible and trustworthy. Notably, it appears that the knowledge students have of support, identified at the start of this theme, is relatively superficial. While they can name services with ease, they are unsure of how and where to access them.

As we have previously identified, communication has a substantial role to play in both the wellbeing of students and in the efficacy of support services. While some participants praised their experiences with staff in this respect, the quality of communication was largely variable and unpredictable. Instances where staff communicated opposing information was not uncommon, particularly for those with a disability, which left them questioning the legitimacy of the services they had accessed and even managing staff relations in rare instance. For participant 30, the impact of COVID-19 had meant that any disability support she had received, had become extremely impersonal with issues being left unresolved.

Continuity of communication between services was discussed quite frequently here. Those who had accessed support, yet needed referral to more specialised or more appropriate services, often felt that they were forgotten about or found themselves being sent in circles. Participant 41 spoke extensively about how he was passed from one service to another without actually being given the support that he was searching for.

"I would say the lack of communication as well. The continuity of services. So, for example, I emailed Students' Union Advice upon the recommendation of my Disability Support Tutor and they said 'there's not really anything we can do' and they referred me back to my personal tutor who, in the first place, was quite void of any help or aid... So, I think communication, for sure. I think there should be a continuity of care"
(Participant 41)

For this participant, a failure in communication meant that alternative support was unaware of his poor experience with an academic tutor, only to direct him back there for further help. Not only do instances such as these lead the student to re-explain themselves which, in itself can be problematic for more sensitive issues, but can also produce persistent feelings of rejection and misunderstanding. Whilst students were empathetic with the demand placed on these services, failures in communication were damaging to a participants' willingness to seek further support, and thus their wellbeing. It seems important that the University and Union collaborate in a way that can develop this chain of communication, where students working through services have access to a consistent and reliable flow of support.

4.5 SU affiliation and engagement

Those who were engaged in SU groups and activities were plentiful, with only a handful of students reporting that they have never been involved with the Union in this way. As we have seen, friendships and diverse/cultural spaces have been beneficial to a students' wellbeing – which SU engagement had

enabled. As well as helping to build friendships, being involved with the Union had several positive impacts on university experience for those in marginalised groups. For example, it had: promoted a work-life balance, reduced feelings of homesickness, helped students to settle into a new environment, and have new experiences. The way in which these are facilitated will be discussed momentarily, but first it is important to understand those who do not engage and those with poor experiences. Those who had not experienced SU activities or events tended to be those who had made friends throughout their accommodation and course, and so didn't feel that extracurricular activity would benefit their wellbeing in any way: with both participants 39 and 40 stating that to take part would be socially draining or too demanding amongst other responsibilities and friendships.

Experiences that were negative tended to relate to accessibility concerns or those of not fitting in. Participants from QMC, Derby and Sutton Bonington campuses spoke about their struggle with engaging with SU events. Either the event was based too far away from where they lived, or travel did not accommodate for typical finishing times, incurring further expense. Concerns of accessibility even proved true for mature students here, in that their preference for activity and external responsibilities such as childcare were not considered. As well as this, concerns of not feeling like they would fit in tended to deter students from joining or discouraged further attendance. For sports and active societies, there was a perception of professionalism or elitism which was intimidating for beginners – and so participants often saw SU groups as relatively exclusive.

"I think with some of the societies, they're better than others so I'm part of the badminton society but when I joined, it didn't really feel like I fit in because a lot of the people were full on professionals so I didn't think they were very helpful for people who wanted to try out for the first time. I think that would help a lot with the sports, I feel like a lot of the sports here are competitive. There isn't really much for people that are starting out with a new sport." (Participant 6)

This was not only true of performance-based groups, but cultural groups also – those with established friendships or cliques were particularly deterring for participants. And, those who had intersecting identities found it hard to navigate groups which relate so definitely to one identity or another. It seemed that there was little opportunity for students to experience groups which celebrated diversity within an identity.

"I'm part Chinese part Filipino and I studied high school in Canada, but I don't exactly just relate to one group you know. Like in the Chinese group, I can't really relate to them. I'm not full Filipino, and I'm not White or anything. And so that's also stopping me from joining the clubs, because sometimes they already have their own Banter, and I might not be able to fit in." (Participant 2)

Ultimately, poor experience of SU groups was determined by perceptions of not fitting in. Alongside educating societies about EDI and the importance of diversity within groups, it seems appropriate for the Union to encourage societal collaboration for those facing issues such as these, looking to truly encourage a sense of belonging. It also would be of value to explore beginner or non-competitive sports groups to foster a level of approachability for those looking to engage in something new.

Identity vs Interests

Now we have determined the level of student engagement with the Union, we can now look to understand what governs these experiences of student groups. As in previous research (Davies &

Garrett, 2012), marginalised students often have underlying motivations for choosing what groups they engage with throughout higher education: and this does prove true for this population, in fact the differences were clear. For identity groups, engagement was about finding those with shared experiences – it is of note that we left the interpretation of 'identity' down to the participants, and while nearly all related this to their protected characteristics, it also appeared inclusive of course or discipline. These groups gave students the opportunity to talk about concerns they had (whether they be related to identity or not) with people that inherently understood them. With this, students reported feeling that this had some therapeutic advantage and even used groups in place of professional support.

"...sometimes some people do need a space that is just their own, say just for LGBT plus people or just for people who identify with a particular gender because they may feel that they can't raise certain concerns or they can't be candid and honest about their experiences and their concerns, if there are people who don't have don't have similar perspectives or experiences to them." (Participant 12)

Involvement such as this also helped to increase a sense of belonging, as participants reported feeling at home and accepted when with those similar to them. Not only did this manifest itself within their experience as a whole, but helped to ease feelings of being homesick. It meant that students had a community in which they shared traditions and celebrations - being particularly true of religious or cultural celebrations for international students. Discussion also demonstrated that engaging in identity-based groups could help students to develop their identity. For instance, to have a deeper connection with their culture or to explore their sexuality or gender – ultimately, to get a better understanding of who they are. For international students, this related to being able to speak their home language (no matter their fluency).

This differed somewhat from how participants reported utilising groups relating to interests. Having common ground with others was important in forming friendships, and while friendships based on identity proved beneficial for improving wellbeing and a sense of belonging, students found it easier to make friends with people who had similar interests. Identity alone could not ensure that individuals would be alike in their interests, intellect, or opinions. In the same breath this was a good way of exploring more diverse groups of people, and widening the type of friendships they had. Those who reported being comfortable with their identity felt no need to actively seek friendships with those who were similar in that way to them and found more value in diversity.

"...when you are satisfied with who you are, and perhaps what you're becoming as well, I think that you don't necessarily need to pull resources from other people's identity. And that, I think, is applicable to myself where now that I am happy with who I am, as cliché as that may sound, I am more interested in people who could expand my interests intellectually, emotionally and in other aspects than I am in terms of who I am." (Participant 41)

Those who felt they had been turned away or excluded from an identity group had often chosen to abandon that part of their engagement, and focus on something in which they felt their identity would not be judged. Groups relating to interests were important for participants to explore or reawaken their passions. It provided them with some enjoyment and time away from academic pressures (a work-life balance). International students often used this as a way to immerse themselves within the British culture, and even used it as a stepping stone for a more permanent life in this country after University.

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Fundamentally, students did not want to put themselves in a box and limit their engagement, more rather, they used different groups to serve different purposes. In fact, there were instances where a synergy between identity and interests was present, making it difficult for participants to state a preference. This included feminism and LGBT+ groups where the rights and events of their identity has become a passion or interest of theirs. But still, students were clear about what purposes these opportunities served for their affiliation and engagement.

Championing EDI

The number of student groups available were praised time and time again, particularly as participants saw this as a clear effort to be inclusive of protected groups, as well as interests that span across multiple identities. There was also a recognition that the autonomy to create a new student group allowed those who weren't accounted for, to ensure that they were equally as represented. Those who were most engaged with the Union also highlighted how they felt the Officer team showcased efforts to make its environment equal, diverse and inclusive. However, concerns came from those who could not distinguish what those roles had done for their cohort.

This tended to be a common theme within discussion about whether the SU truly championed EDI for marginalised students of the University of Nottingham. For the most part, participants are relatively unfamiliar with the work of the Union outside of sports and societies, and struggle to identify work that had been implemented to support less represented groups – regardless of what their expectations for the role of the Union might be.

"I don't necessarily see the Students' Union impacting my life or that of people around me very much. I don't entirely know how they help EDI." (Participant 41)

However, multiple participants did recognise the work that has been done for the LGBT+ community, praising it for celebrating and supporting a part of their identity. It seemed for one student that the shielded nature of the staff teams dehumanised the Students' Union and made it hard to evidence its departments and their purpose/work. Fundamentally, it was believed that the Union lacked focus surrounding issues of EDI which only became more apparent for those living and studying outside of University Park Campus. Those on Sutton Bonington and Derby campus felt that the focus of EDI and efforts to reach marginalised students on these campuses were not up to scratch – more rather the Union appears preoccupied with entertainment, not necessarily meeting the needs of minority groups where resources are more limited. A consistency of approach is expected across campuses, to meet the perceived standard and stronger presence of representation and support on University Park.

If we are to live up to our expectation of being the student voice at the Students' Union, we must speak up. Not simply about issues of EDI and how we can support them, but to campaign for change – whether that be internally or University wide. At the heart of it all, students want us to be vocal, to evidence of work for marginalised groups, and to listen.

5. Conclusions

The concepts of EDI are understood well by participants, and as a sense of belonging and representation underpin them, it is of no surprise that they mediate the experiences of marginalised students throughout both their academic and personal lives. While there is some variation in the interpretation itself, participants consistently understand and attribute the concepts to their personal identity and needs – and with intersectionality often came a need for equity over equality. It seems that an absence

of culturally competent or otherwise tailored services simply evidences the importance of such strategic focus for underrepresented students. As well as this, interviews helped to establish the role of trust between staff and students, and how a lack of it (or its individual components) likely explains instances where students do not disclose and seek support for poor mental health and discrimination. And for those experiencing discrimination, occurrences were a product of being misunderstood – which often led students to question its severity.

Participants value the opportunities available to them at the Union and have core motivations that encourage affiliation and engagement – though it is unclear as to whether these motivations are intentional or not. Regardless of this, just because a student might belong to an identity, does not mean that they will engage in that way: often it can serve no purpose to their personal development or can prove difficult for those with intersecting identities. While students feel catered for throughout social opportunities, they feel that a lack of staff and student diversity (especially in academic spaces) truly leaves them feeling ostracised. It is important that we seek to foster that sense of belonging across spaces, and understand how personalised approaches can work to establish that.

While the scope of this work has meant that its focus is broad and possibly lacking depth in areas, it has enabled an institution-specific view into how protected groups experience university. And more than anything, has shed light on how diverse students truly are. While simply being aware of these issues is not a fix, this project begins to broaden our understanding of how we can best work towards fixing them and ensure justice for these populations – which we must be brave and ambitious in working towards. Any recommendations that are formed as a result of this work should become ingrained within our culture and ways of working, they cannot act as an afterthought. Work must also be collaborative and non-assumptive in approach, as not to miss the mark in the efficacy of our efforts and further misunderstand marginalised students.

What can the research sector learn from COVID-19?

Having conducted research throughout the initial months of the coronavirus pandemic, I was required to transition the final focus group and all follow-up interviews online (using Microsoft Teams). Doing so was not straightforward, in that research materials required alterations, splitting the focus group would warrant longer data collection, along with some inevitable technical issues. However, online data collection surprised me, in that its flexibility allowed for more diverse populations to attend. One participant even stated that with having childcare responsibilities, online measures enabled him to take part. Whilst it might restrict group work or workshop style activities, it provides us with a valuable data collection method that only seeks to prioritise less represented students. Whether that be to combat issues of access for disabled and parent students, to reach those on smaller campuses, or to research those who have returned home during University vacation times.

What can be learned from the Black Lives Matter movement?

The re-emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement has held a magnifying glass up to higher education providers in recent months. It is clearly important that we seek to recognise and understand the different ways in which UoN's population experience life at university – not only through our social and academic provisions but in how we conduct research also. Both the University and Students' Union vow to be ambitious and act as a platform for those who are Black, and to do this, we must continue to listen. Where further research is conducted, it is important to not homogenise groups such as BAME as it fails to distinguish individual experiences. As we have seen from this research there is no standardised

experience for protected groups, and so we cannot react to and explore disparity in a way that is generalised.

6. Recommendations

1. To provide culturally competent and accessible support provisions across the University and the Students' Union:
 - a) To ensure that all routes of support (including academic tutors) are prepared to deal with diverse needs, and that components of trust are embedded in their practice. It is important to also consider how these can be best advertised for different groups of students as well as how to cater to intersectionality.
 - b) For the Students' Union and University to collaborate in a way that produces a centralised service/document outlining support services and their purpose.
 - c) For the Union and University to consider the use of mentoring or buddy schemes across their current provisions, to enable tailored support where possible.
2. To strategize in a way that is equitable in nature. This action serves as a clear indicator that we seek to provide justice and support for those in protected groups. Our actions must become focussed on eliminating inherent disadvantage for all marginalised groups.
3. To normalise reporting discrimination and increase access to services and anti-discrimination information:
 - a) To consider revising language throughout reporting procedures, to be inclusive of those experiencing microaggressions or instances in which the severity is questioned.
 - b) To introduce an ongoing anti-discrimination campaign or series of materials that can disseminate information regarding: behavioural standards on campus, promotion of services available to support, and types of reportable behaviour.
 - c) For societies and other student groups to have equity and anti-discrimination training become part of their affiliation.
 - d) To ensure staff are trained and informed about microaggressions, unconscious bias, and stereotyping – and how to directly support or signpost such issues.
4. Where appropriate, schools should look to implement culturally sensitive and inclusive course materials and opportunities – exploring ideas that diverge from a White, Eurocentric focus.
5. Where possible, collaboration across societies and networks should be encouraged. Not to form new groups but to ensure that intersectional students are catered for. For example, where the Women's Network can inform ACS.
6. For first year students (including postgraduates) to have an introduction to the Union, and to be educated on the purpose of the organisation and how it works to represent individuals from diverse backgrounds. Where physical attendance is not possible, it should be accessible through online means.
7. Further exploration is needed into the experiences of marginalised students, to not only address areas in which the breadth of the project inhibited (such as the distinction of BAME groups, as well as for Transgender students), but to assess the effectiveness of interventions that are implemented as a result of these recommendations.
8. To ensure staff diversity across both the University and Students' Union.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Participant Demographic Breakdown

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| Participant Number | Group Assigned | Gender | Study Stage | Domicile/Fee Status | Protected Characteristic(s) |
|--------------------|----------------|--------|-------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Religion | Male | UG | The UK | Religion or belief; |
| 2 | Religion | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | Religion or belief; |
| 3 | Religion | Female | UG | The UK | Religion or belief; |
| 4 | Religion | Male | UG | The UK | Religion or belief; |
| 5 | Religion | Male | UG | A non-EU country or territory | Religion or belief; |
| 6 | Religion | Male | UG | The UK | BAME;Religion or belief; |
| 7 | Religion | Female | UG | The UK | Religion or belief; |
| 8 | BAME | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | BAME; |
| 9* | BAME | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | BAME; |
| 10 | BAME | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | BAME; |
| 11 | BAME | Male | UG | The UK | BAME;Religion or belief; |
| 12 | BAME | Female | PGR | The UK | BAME; |
| 13 | BAME | Female | UG | The UK | BAME; |
| 14 | BAME | Male | UG | The UK | BAME;Religion or belief; |
| 15 | BAME | Female | UG | The UK | BAME; |
| 16 | LGBT+ | Male | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |
| 17 | LGBT+ | Female | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |
| 18 | LGBT+ | Female | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |
| 19* | LGBT+ | Male | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |

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| | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|--------|-----|-------------------------------|---|
| 20 | LGBT+ | Female | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |
| 21 | LGBT+ | Female | UG | The EU | LGBT+; |
| 22 | LGBT+ | Male | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |
| 23 | LGBT+ | Female | UG | The UK | LGBT+; |
| 24 | International | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | I do not define into any of these groups or networks; |
| 25 | International | Female | UG | The EU | I do not define into any of these groups or networks; |
| 26 | International | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | I do not define into any of these groups or networks; |
| 27 | International | Male | UG | A non-EU country or territory | I do not define into any of these groups or networks; |
| 28 | International | Female | UG | The EU | I do not define into any of these groups or networks; |
| 29 | International | Female | UG | The EU | I do not define into any of these groups or networks; |
| 30* | Disability | Female | PGT | The UK | Disability; |
| 31 | Disability | Female | UG | The UK | Disability; |
| 32 | Disability | Female | UG | The UK | Disability; |
| 33 | Disability | Female | UG | The UK | Disability; |
| 34 | Disability | Male | UG | The UK | Disability; |
| 35 | Disability | Female | UG | The UK | Disability; |
| 36* | Intersectional | Female | UG | A non-EU country or territory | BAME;LGBT+; |
| 37 | Intersectional | Female | UG | The UK | BAME;LGBT+; |
| 38 | Intersectional | Male | UG | The UK | BAME;LGBT+;Religion or belief; |

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| | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|--|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| 39 | Intersectional | Female | UG | The UK | BAME;LGBT+; |
| 40 | Intersectional | Gender non-binary or non-conforming | UG | The UK | LGBT+;Disability;Religion or belief; |
| 41* | Mature | Male | UG | The UK | BAME;Disability;Mature;Religion or belief; |
| 42 | Mature | Female | PGR | A non-EU country or territory | Mature; |
| 43 | Mature | Male | PGR | The UK | Mature; |
| 44 | Mature | Female | UG | The UK | Disability;Mature; |

BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic); LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender); Mature (UG >21 at time of entry to the university, PG >26 at time of entry).

*Those who attended a follow-up interview, original participant numbers will be kept in this instance.

8.2 Focus group schedule

Section 1: Awareness and understanding

Post it note exercise

- To get things started, I want you to consider what equality, diversity and inclusivity all mean to you.
- We'll take one by one and I will note your ideas and thoughts down as we are going – starting with equality...

(Prompt: What do you think of when I mention these words or how would you define them?)

Discussion

Can you tell me if equality, diversity and inclusion are important to you as a UoN student? Why?

Can you name policies that are currently in place to support and ensure EDI for UoN students?

- a) If you are not aware of these, what policies or guidelines might you expect to be in place to ensure EDI for all UoN students?

Section 2: Support

Post it note exercise

- What services, processes and resources are you aware of that *currently* support students with EDI?
- What services, processes or resources would you like to see that are currently *not in place*?
(Prompt: what do you expect to be in place to support you with EDI?)

Discussion

In what ways would you expect this support to help those in underrepresented groups? *(Prompt: why is this support important to those in minority groups?)*

Have you faced any challenges when trying to access support?

What encourages you to access support?

What role do you think the Union should play in supporting underrepresented students?

Does this differ to the role of the University? In what ways?

Do you feel that support is easily available to all students at UoN? If not, why?

Section 3: Representation

Discussion

The Students' Union offer opportunities to get involved including societies, sports clubs, and volunteering – how many of you are aware of these?

- a. If you have been a part of any of these, how has this influenced your university experience?
(Prompt: has this made your time here easier/harder?)

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- b. If you have not engaged with any of these, what has your experience been like? Have your experiences been similar or different to what has been mentioned?

When thinking about how you engage with the Students' Union, would you prefer to engage with groups relating to your identity or interests? Why?

Post-it note exercise

When thinking of the word representation, what does this mean to you?

(Prompt: how would you define the word representation?)

Discussion

Do you feel represented as a student of UoN? In what way? *(Prompt: Think about the support, facilities, opportunities that you have engaged with)*

Do you feel that EDI is championed within UoNSU? Why do you think this? *(Prompt: Do you think that UoNSU is inclusive of all students who have a protected characteristic?)*

8.3 Interview schedule

1. Let's start by getting to know a bit more about you and your background, outside of your academic studies. Tell me a bit about where you are from and what made you want to study at the University of Nottingham?
2. What has your overall experience been like at the University of Nottingham as a student from your background?
3. How has your experience at the University impacted on your wellbeing and mental health?
(Prompt: has university impacted negatively or positively on these factors – in what ways?)
4. Have you ever accessed support to help you deal with challenges to your wellbeing that you might have faced as a UoN student?
 - a. If yes, what was this support? What was your experience of the support? What encouraged you to use the support services or talk to a member of staff within the University of Students' Union wellbeing?
 - b. If no, what has prevented you from accessing support to help with your wellbeing? What would encourage you to use support services or talk to a member of staff within the University or Students' Union regarding wellbeing?
5. What might you consider the term 'harassment' to include?
6. The university currently define harassment to be: "Harassment is any type of unwanted behaviour that you find offensive or which makes you feel intimidated or humiliated. This can take the form of spoken or written words or abuse; offensive emails, tweets or comments on social networking sites; Images and graffiti; physical gestures; facial expressions; or comments attempted to be passed off as

jokes. Harassment can happen on its own or alongside other forms of discrimination, and can be specifically linked to protected characteristics." Would you say that is in line with how you define it? Is there anything that you would/wouldn't include?

7. Tell me about a time where you have experienced or seen any kind of harassment or discrimination while on campus? *(Prompt: This might include harassment or discrimination directed at you or it might be a time where you have witnessed it happen to someone else)*
8. How did this make you feel?
9. Was this instance of harassment reported? *(Prompt: Did you report this instance of harassment?)*
 - a. If yes, how? What was the outcome? Were you satisfied with this? What did you expect from the University in relation to this?
 - b. If no, was there a reason for this? What might encourage/support you to report instances of harassment to the University or Students' Union? What would you expect from the University in relation to this?
10. Have there been any other instances where you have faced any challenges because of your identity whilst at University?
 - a. Could you tell me a bit about this?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to see improved or introduced at UoNSU to support students from less represented groups with wellbeing, support or discrimination?
12. And with this, is there anything else you would like to share?