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Students' Perceptions of Racial Diversity and Inclusion in UK Universities

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Abstract: Building on previous studies of racial inequality in higher education, this paper reports the findings of an online survey (N = 407) exploring the extent to which UK university students recognised the existence of racism in wider society and perceived the need for greater racial diversity and inclusion on campus. Utilising the CoBRAS scale developed by Neville and colleagues together with a new Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS) designed by the lead author of this paper, we find that most students reject the notion that we live in a colour-blind society and feel that their university needs to do more to foster racial diversity and inclusion on campus. However, while the rejection of colour-blind narratives was equally strong across students from all ethnic groups, Black students were significantly more likely than students from other ethnic groups to perceive the need for their university to become more racially diverse and inclusive.

Keywords: race; higher education; equality; Black and ethnic minority (BEM)

1. Introduction

Racial inequality pervades UK universities, negatively affecting the experiences and outcomes of students and academic staff from ethnic minority backgrounds, especially those racialised as Black. Although Black and ethnic minority (BEM) young people have been more likely to participate in UK higher education than their White peers since the 1990s (Modood 1993), those from Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds have been persistently under-represented among students attending the UK's most academically selective universities, in part because they are less likely to be offered places than their comparably qualified White British peers (Boliver 2013, 2015, 2016; Noden et al. 2014). BEM students consistently report experiencing overt racism and more subtle racial micro-aggressions on UK university campuses (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Pierce 1970) and have been calling since the mid-2000s for universities to "decolonise" the curriculum (Begum and Saini 2019; Peters 2015). Ethnic and racial inequalities are also evident in degree outcomes, with Black and Muslim students much more likely than their White peers to drop out of university before completing their studies and much less likely to be awarded a first or upper second-class degree (HEFCE 2014, 2015; Malik and Wykes 2018; OfS 2020). Similar patterns of racial inequality are evident with respect to academic staff. BEM people are strikingly under-represented within the academic workforce generally; Black people, in particular, make up less than 2% of the UK academic workforce (Shilliam 2015), compared to 3.3% of the wider national population (UK Government 2018). This is especially the case at the most prestigious institutions and in the most senior positions, including the Professoriate (Bhopal 2014). BEM academics are also more likely to be on precarious contracts (Advance HE 2021) and to be less well paid than their White peers

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(Arday and Jones 2022; Bhopal 2014). BEM academics report persistent feelings of being treated like "a body out of place" and of having their teaching and research appraised in a discriminatory manner resulting in impeded progression and promotion prospects (Rollock 2019, 2021).

These patterns point to long-standing and deep-rooted racial inequalities in UK higher education, which institutions have only recently begun to recognise and seek to redress. Tentative steps in this direction include higher education institutions (HEIs) working towards a Race Equality Charter award (Advance HE Website 2022), pledging to decolonise the curriculum (Arday et al. 2021), and promising to tackle the degree awarding gap as required by the higher education regulator since 2018 (Boliver and Powell 2023). Numerous previous studies have critically evaluated such steps, typically finding them to be inadequate (Bhopal and Pitkin 2018; Campion and Clark 2022). However, few studies to date have examined issues of race inequality in higher education from the perspective of students. This paper sets out to help fill this gap by reporting on a survey of UK university students conducted in 2020 which set out to explore students' perceptions of the existence of racism in society at large and of the need for greater racial diversity and inclusion at their own universities. We explore the extent of these perceptions among the UK university student body as a whole but are particularly interested in how these perceptions might vary across different ethnic groups.

We frame this study in section two of the paper by critically discussing the concepts of "colour-blindness", "diversity" and "inclusion" as they relate to the problem of racial inequalities in higher education and beyond. Section three sets out our core research questions and describes our empirical study. Section four presents the findings of our analysis of survey data collected from N = 407 university students during summer 2020. In summary, our results show that most of our student survey respondents reject the notion that we live in a colour-blind society and feel that their university needs to do more to foster racial diversity and inclusion on campus. However, while the rejection of colour-blind narratives was equally strong across students from all ethnic groups, Black students were significantly more likely than students from other ethnic groups to perceive the need for their university to become more racially diverse and inclusive. In the concluding section, we reflect on the implications of these findings for racial diversity and inclusion practices in UK universities.

2. Literature Review

As public bodies, UK universities are required by the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) and Equality Act (2010) to abide by laws prohibiting direct or indirect race discrimination and are charged with a "general duty to promote race equality". In 2001, the UK government created a sector-specific body to "support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK". Known originally as the Equality Challenge Unit, and incorporated into AdvanceHE in 2018, one of its key initiatives has been the creation of the Race Equality Charter (REC) which encourages higher education institutions to identify and address the "institutional and cultural barriers standing in the way of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students" (Advance HE Website 2022). Universities receive a "bronze" award for successfully identifying these barriers and can obtain a "silver" award for evidencing their success in tackling them. Since the creation of the REC in 2014, however, only 29 of the UK's 170 HEIs have achieved a REC award, all of them "bronze".

This low number underscores academic criticisms that the REC "functions as an enhancement tool rather than a paradigm shift for race equality in HE" (Campion and Clark 2022, p. 20) and one, moreover, that appears to "privilege *intent* over *outcome*"

(ibid: 34). Interview research with BEM university staff involved in discussions around the REC found that race inequality was perceived to be an "unspeakable topic" or one which, if broached, was prone to be framed by others as "all in the imagination" (Bhopal and Pitkin 2020, p. 536). These observations suggest that an implicit adherence to colour-blind ideology represents a significant impediment to acknowledging, let alone tackling, problems of racial diversity and inclusion in higher education.

2.1. Colour-Blind Racial Ideology

The meaning of the term "colour-blindness" is complex, and the language used by those who subscribe to it implicitly or explicitly "is slippery, apparently contradictory, and often subtle" (Bonilla-Silva 2002, p. 42). According to Neville et al. (2000):

> "...color-blind racial ideology is a dominant racially based framework that individuals, groups, and systems consciously or unconsciously use to justify the racial status quo or to explain away racial inequalities..." (p. 276)

Colour-blindness involves denial, either explicitly or, more often, implicitly, that racism is the source of racial inequality, and is frequently accompanied by racist ideas being expressed unconsciously. Colour-blindness may involve "dysconscious racism", defined by King as "a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges" due to "an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness." (King 1991, p. 135). It can also manifest as "aversive racism", a related form of uncritical consciousness characteristic of the "racial attitudes of whites who endorse egalitarian values, who regard themselves as non-prejudiced, but who discriminate in subtle, rationalisable ways" (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000, p. 315). Colour-blindness extends to "attitudes toward a variety of racial and ethnic minority groups and not solely Blacks" (Neville et al. 2000, p. 59). Moreover, colour-blind attitudes may be adopted by BEM people themselves, constituting a false consciousness which leads "members of a subordinate group to believe that they are inferior, deserving of their plight, or incapable of taking action against the causes of their subordination" (Jost 1995, p. 400).

US scholars argue that colour-blind racism has been the "dominant racial ideology of the post-civil rights era" (Bonilla-Silva 2002, p. 42) in contrast to the overt racism that preceded it. This observation has been repeatedly borne out in empirical research. McConahay's (1986) Modern Racism Scale was one of the first scientific metrics developed to document empirically the prevalence of less overt racist attitudes towards people who are Black in the US. More recently, the New Frontiers of Colour-Blind Racism was a collection of reinvigorated scholarship around the study of colour-blind racial ideology (Burke 2016). Hartmann et al. (2017) researched colour-blindness as an ideology and a form of identification, finding that "a majority of all Americans, across all racial groups and demographics, directly, explicitly, and self-consciously connect with colour-blindness at a personal level" (p. 882). Out of 2451 of the Black, White, Hispanic and Asian respondents to Hartmann et al.'s survey, more than 70 percent indicated they "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with a colour-blind identity. Further survey research by Gonlin and Campbell (2017) found that people of "colour" (e.g., Black. Latina/o, and Asian) are less likely than White respondents to subscribe to colour-blind racial ideologies, but that those "with close relationships with whites are more likely to minimize certain types of racism" (p. 1), notably those that affect racialised minority groups other than their own.

These findings regarding the prevalence of colour-blind ideology in US society—and ethnic group differences therein—have been replicated in higher education settings in the US. Research with students and community members at Midwest and West Coast Colleges found that respondents from all racial groups scored relatively high on the Color-Blind

Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) developed by Neville et al. (2000). However, Latino participants were significantly less colour-blind than White and Black participants, with respect to perceptions of white privilege and of overt racism, whereas Black respondents were significantly less colour-blind than White and Latino participants in terms of perceptions of institutional racial discrimination. A further survey of students attending predominately White universities in the USA which also utilised the CoBRAS, found that White students were significantly more likely than their racially minoritised peers to subscribe to colour-blind ideology, and that this substantially accounted for their more positive perceptions of the racial climate on campus (Worthington et al. 2008).

While the prevalence of colour-blind ideology in wider society and on college campuses has been extensively researched in the US (Neville et al. 2000; Worthington et al. 2008), no research has investigated the extent of colour-blind ideology among students attending UK HEIs. This paper aims to fill this gap and to explore how colour-blind ideology impedes efforts to improve racial diversity and inclusion in UK higher education.

2.2. Racial Diversity in Higher Education

It is useful to conceptually distinguish between racial diversity on the one hand and racial inclusion on the other. The call for greater racial diversity can be conceptualised as a call for equitable representation; in contrast, the call for greater racial inclusion constitutes a claim to equitable recognition (Fraser 1999).

Young BEM people have been statistically overrepresented in UK higher education overall since the early 1990s, as Modood (1993, p. 172) observed in the empirical data at the time; "ethnic minorities are concentrated in the less desirable institutions" and "experience unfavourable bias in selection for admission to [more desirable] universities", especially "Afro-Caribbean men and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women". This continued to be the case throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Curtis 2006) such that, by 2010, 3.7% of Black 18-year-olds and 8.7% of White 18-year-olds were attending higher-tariff universities, representing an enrolment rate gap of 5 percentage points (UCAS 2022). By 2021, however, rates of enrolment in higher-tariff universities had increased substantially for Black (12.6%) and White (13.8%) young people alike, resulting in a much smaller contemporary enrolment rate gap of just 1.2 percentage points (UCAS 2022).

This stark under-representation of BEM students in higher-tariff universities until recently reflects the historic prevalence of colour-blind ideology within the HE sector. Because colour-blind ideology implicitly centres "whiteness" as "the norm", its adherents are at best blind to the lack of racial diversity among students gaining access to the most prestigious institutions. To the degree that racial and ethnic underrepresentation was acknowledged, the "dysconscious racism" that colour-blind narratives engender enabled the sector to brush this off as the result of fair competition under conditions of "meritocratic equality of opportunity" (Boliver et al. 2022).

Indeed, it was only after repeated publication of empirical evidence that BEM applicants to highly selective universities were less likely to be offered places at higher-tariff universities than their *comparably qualified* White peers (Boliver 2013, 2016; Noden et al. 2014) that policy makers intervened to "place a duty on institutions to publish application, offer, acceptance and progression rates, broken down by gender, ethnicity and disadvantage" (DBIS 2016, p. 41). By requiring universities to document not only the ethnic diversity of their student bodies, but also the equitableness of admission ('offer') rates for applicants from different ethnic groups, this legislation effectively challenged colour-blindness masquerading as meritocracy, paving the way for a substantial closing of the Black-White gap in access to higher-tariff universities in recent years. In contrast, the persis-

tent under-representation of BEM people among the academic workforce in UK universities (Shilliam 2015), especially at the most prestigious universities and in the most senior levels of the academic hierarchy (Bhopal 2014), has yet to come under serious public scrutiny.

2.3. Racial Inclusion in Higher Education

As noted above, racial inclusion differs conceptually from racial diversity in that it calls for equitable recognition as distinct from equitable representation (Fraser 1999). Racial diversity is of course a precursor of racial inclusion, but the former does not guarantee the latter, and without the latter the former is perhaps best characterised as *superficial diversity* (Jones 2022); a matter of simply "counting the heads" rather than "creating, fostering, and sustaining practices and conditions that encourage and allow individuals to be themselves" (Ferdman and Deane 2014, p. xxii). As Sherbin and Rashid (2017) put it, "Diversity Doesn't Stick Without Inclusion". The lack of racial inclusion, even in comparatively racially diverse HEIs, is evident in the overt and more often covert racialisation of BEM staff and students; the white-centric nature of the university curriculum; the ethnicity awarding gap at degree level; and racial disparities in recognition and promotion among academics.

Research on the experiences of BEM students and staff in UK higher education indicates the prevalence of overt racism and racial microaggression on campus (NUS 2011; Dumangane 2016). Originally coined by Chester Pierce 1970, the term racial microaggression has been defined as "a form of systemic, everyday racism, often subtle and seemingly innocuous in nature" (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018, p. 145). Racial microaggression can take on three forms: *microassault* (e.g., old-fashioned racism), *microinvalidation* (e.g., diminishing psychological thoughts and wellbeing), and *microinsult* (e.g., racial putdowns regarding character or heritage) (Sue et al. 2008). Because of its implicit nature, racial microaggression is fraught with "attributional ambiguity" and hence uncertainty about whether the interaction counts as an experience of racial prejudice (Hoyt et al. 2007). The accumulation of these subtle racialised experiences causes racial trauma (Arday 2022), affecting mental health in ways that are similar to the PTSD experienced by soldiers returning from war (Hoge et al. 2008). The implicit racism of White students and staff has been theorised as stemming from "'interracial anxiety" (Plant and Devine 2003); that is, White people's fear of appearing prejudiced when interacting with Black people, resulting in avoidance strategies that reinforce negative attitudes and beliefs. Consequently, BEM students and academic staff alike report persistent feelings of being treated like "a body out of place" (Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Rollock 2019, 2021).

The lack of racial inclusion in higher education is further evident in the white-centric nature of the curriculum which has prompted Black-led student campaigns to ask, "Why is my Curriculum White?" and to seek to "Decolonise the Curriculum" (Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Peters 2015). As Begum and Saini (2019) put it:

> "Decolonisation is crucial because, unlike diversification, it specifically acknowledges the inherent power relations in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and seeks to destabilise these, allowing new forms of knowledge which represent marginalised groups—women, working classes, ethnic minorities, and LGBT—to propagate." (p. 198)

Thus, decolonisation seeks to promote racial inclusion by giving due recognition to the intellectual contributions of BEM scholars by incorporating their work into the curriculum. This is important because Eurocentric epistemologies which underpin the 'traditional' curriculum omit and misinterpret alternative epistemologies, contributing to a deficit model of thinking towards racialised and other marginalised groups (Arday et al. 2021; Woodson 1933).

Linked to the absence of the contributions of BEM scholars within the university curriculum is the inability of predominantly White academic staff to acknowledge race in the classroom (Begum and Saini 2019). This dysconscious adherence to colour-blind ideology renders invisible the impact of normative whiteness of the educational experiences and outcomes of BEM students (Cross 2012). Consequently, the very large gap in the rates at which Black and White students are awarded a first or upper second-class degree, though increasingly acknowledged in official statistics (OfS 2020), continues to be regarded as mystifying.

The persistently White-centric and simultaneously colour-blind nature of academia similarly helps to account for racialised inequalities in academic recognition among teaching and research staff in UK universities. BEM academics report having their teaching and research appraised in a discriminatory manner, resulting in impeded progression and promotion prospects (Advance HE 2021; Rollock 2019, 2021). As a consequence, although the number of academic staff in UK universities who are from British BEM backgrounds has grown over time, from 4.8% in 2003/4 to 7.7% in 2019/20, presently just 4% of Black UK academics are Professors compared to 11.6% of White UK academics (Advance HE 2021).

What is clear from the foregoing is that the persistence of colour-blind ideology and dysconscious racism remains a significant barrier to racial inclusion, raising the question as to whether what is needed are not so much efforts to promote inclusion as to tackle *exclusion*. The work of Sonya Douglass Horsford (2014) on how educational leaders can improve racial equality in their institutions is instructive here. Horsford advocates a four-step model of development towards racial equity in educational settings: improving *racial literacy* by fostering an understanding of the socially (mis)constructed nature of "race" and of why and how "it is used to reproduce inequality and oppression"; adopting *racial realism* in place of colour-blind ideology so that historical and contemporary pervasiveness of racism is acknowledged; pursuing *racial reconstruction*, with a view to establishing new ways of thinking and acting in relation to race; and seeking *racial reconciliation* too as to "heal the soul wounds" caused by "race" and racism (2014, p. 126). An integral part of this process is the recognition that comes from hearing the voices of the racially marginalised, through methods developed by Critical Race Theorists such as *counter-storytelling* (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Solorzano 1997).

However, as Brannon et al. (2018) observes efforts to promote racial inclusion in this way are frequently met with backlash form the dominant group in the form of "(1) perceived or actual restriction of independence or autonomy, (2) preference for the status quo and colour-blindness, and (3) beliefs that racial and other social equalities have been reached" (p. 57). Brannon et al., argue that these forms of racial exclusion can be overcome by adopting an "inclusion for all framework" which "address[es] the goals and motivations of both marginalized and dominant group members" (ibid., p. 59). Focusing on inter-group relations in this way minimises the "threat" of multicultural perspectives to *White insecurity* which might otherwise result in a retreat into colour-blind ideology (Jones 2022).

This kind of work to tackle racial exclusion is key to achieving the genuine racial reconciliation emphasised by Horsford. It constitutes a means of decolonising the minds of members of the privileged group, enabling them to become White "allies. . .who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society's patterns of injustice and take action to change it" (Williams and Sharif 2021, p. 1) and "challenge other people who are white to do the same" (Tatum 1992, p. 474).

3. Materials and Methods

In light of the above, the empirical component of this paper sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do UK undergraduate students subscribe to colour-blind ideology?
2. To what extent do UK undergraduate students perceive the need to increase racial diversity and inclusion at their university?
3. How strongly correlated are students' views in relation to colour-bind ideology and their perceptions of the need to increase racial diversity and inclusion at their university?
4. Are there significant race/ethnic group differences with regard to colour-blindness and the perceived need for greater racial diversity and inclusion in higher education?

To answer the research questions outlined above, an online survey of UK university students was carried out by the authors during summer 2020.[1] To reach participants, the authors sent global emails with the survey link to various institutions (e.g., academic departments) and student societies (e.g., student's union) across the UK, yielding a total of 407 responses.

Although the number of responses is reasonably large, the fact that this is a convenience sample rather than a probability sample means that it cannot be assumed to be representative of the wider population of UK university students. A further limitation is that respondents may not have answered honestly. For instance, participants may have exhibited social desirability bias, over-reporting socially acceptable behaviours and under-reporting undesirable ones (Bernardi and Nash 2023). Although completely eliminating social desirability bias is challenging, methods to reduce bias included ensuring participant anonymity, using both direct and indirect survey items, and minimising the number of questions to prevent survey fatigue.

The survey collected basic demographic information together with students' responses to two sets of attitudinal questions. The first set of attitudinal questions, described in more detail below, were adapted from the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) developed by Neville et al. (2000) to assess the extent of denial of the existence of racism in wider society. The second set of questions make up the Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS) developed by the first author of this paper to measure students' perceptions of the degree of need for greater racial diversity and inclusion on campus.

3.1. Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)

The original CoBRAS consisted of 20 attitudinal survey questions posed in the form of statements to which participants were invited to respond on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree". Ten of these items were selected for inclusion in our survey, with some rewording the questions where necessary to make them applicable to the UK context. Higher response values indicate a greater degree of colour-blindness.

1. Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.
2. It is important that people begin to think of themselves as British and not Black British, Indian British or Chinese British.
3. Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.
4. White people in the U.K. are discriminated against because of the colour their skin.
5. Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.
6. Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.K.
7. English should be the only official language in the U.K.
8. Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.
9. Racial and ethnic minorities in the U.K. have certain advantages because of the colour of their skin.
10. Racial problems in the U.K. are rare, isolated situations.

3.2. Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS)

The RIAS was developed by the first author of this paper, informed by qualitative interview data with Black, Mixed-race, Brown and White students attending an elite university in the UK (Jones 2022). A thematic analysis of this interview data generated 5 overarching themes which were subsequently used to develop the items in the RIAS. Like the CoBRAS, the items in the RIAS are phrased as statements to which survey participants are invited to respond on a Likert scale running from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Unlike the CoBRAS, the RIAS included a "neutral" option so that respondents did not have to respond if they didn't want to, and to reduce or avoid response bias (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011). A higher score on each item indicates a greater perceived need for a more racially diverse and inclusive university. Items 1 and 2 relate specifically to diversity; items 3 through 5 relate to promoting inclusion; and items 6 through 8 relate to tackling exclusion.

1. My university needs to enrol more students from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.
2. My university needs to employ more academic staff from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.
3. My university needs to listen more to the concerns of its Black and ethnic minority students.
4. My university needs to take steps to decolonise its curriculum.
5. My university needs a better system for reporting racist incidents.
6. My university should be more responsive to the racist incidents that are reported to them.
7. My university should require all students to take an anti-racism course.
8. My university should expel students found to be engaging in racist behaviour.

It is worth noting that the survey was conducted during the summer of 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and shortly after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the USA. It is likely that responses to the survey were influenced by the tragedy of George Floyd's murder and the swell of anti-racist feeling in its aftermath. Regarding its effect on White respondents, this could potentially swing both ways, prompting White guilt on the one hand or White backlash on the other. For our Black participants, an even more heightened awareness of anti-black racism and problematic Whiteness in HEIs seems most likely.

4. Results

The online survey yielded a total of 407 responses.[2] As shown in Table 1, most survey participants recorded their ethnicity as White (62.9%) while a minority recorded their ethnicity as Black (10.6%), Mixed (9.8%) or Asian (13.0%). Participants were disproportionately female (70.3%), and most were studying at undergraduate rather than postgraduate level (69.3%).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for each of the survey items included our adapted versions of the Colour-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (see Panel A) and the Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (see Panel B). The most common responses to each survey item are highlighted in bold.

Table 1. Sample descriptive statistics.

	N	%
Ethnicity		
White	256	62.9
Black	43	10.6
Mixed	40	9.8
Asian	53	13.0
Other	15	3.7
Gender		
Male	102	25.1
Female	286	70.3
Other/missing	19	4.6
Level of study		
Undergraduate	278	69.3
Postgraduate	123	30.7
Other/missing	6	1.5

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for each survey item (row %).

Panel A: Survey questions adapted from the Colour-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)						
	(1) Strongly disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Slightly disagree	(4) Slightly agree	(5) Agree	(6) Strongly agree
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.	**35.9**	**33.9**	10.8	6.9	5.2	7.4
It is important that people begin to think of themselves as British and not Black British, Indian British or Chinese British.	**28.5**	**28.0**	17.2	9.6	7.6	9.1
Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.	**63.6**	21.6	7.1	3.7	1.7	2.2
White people in the U.K. are discriminated against because of the colour their skin.	**63.1**	21.9	4.9	7.6	1.5	1.0
Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.	**36.9**	**38.4**	6.4	7.6	8.9	1.7
Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.K.	15.5	**25.1**	17.7	**26.8**	9.8	4.9
English should be the only official language in the U.K.	**34.4**	**22.9**	14.0	12.8	8.4	7.6
Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.	**36.4**	**34.1**	14.6	7.3	4.8	2.8
Racial and ethnic minorities in the U.K. have certain advantages because of the colour of their skin.	**39.6**	**35.6**	13.0	7.1	3.7	1.0
Racial problems in the U.K. are rare, isolated situations.	**47.9**	**30.9**	9.9	4.7	4.0	2.7
Panel B: Survey questions adapted from the Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS)						
	(1) Strongly disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Slightly disagree	(4) Slightly agree	(5) Agree	(6) Strongly agree
My university needs to enrol more students from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.	3.0	4.7	6.7	20.0	**30.9**	**34.7**
My university needs to employ more academic staff from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.	3.0	3.5	4.2	14.3	**24.2**	**50.9**
My university needs to listen more to the concerns of its Black and ethnic minority students.	3.0	2.0	2.7	15.5	**27.6**	**49.3**
My university needs to take steps to decolonise its curriculum.	6.0	4.7	7.2	16.2	**23.9**	**42.0**
My university should require all students to take an anti-racism course.	7.4	7.9	6.2	15.3	**25.9**	**37.3**
My university needs a better system for reporting racist incidents.	3.5	2.3	6.5	15.6	**29.5**	**42.6**
My university should be more responsive to the racist incidents that are reported to them.	2.5	2.3	4.8	15.7	**28.2**	**46.4**
My university should expel students found to be engaging in racist behaviour.	2.0	3.0	7.2	14.3	**21.0**	**52.6**

Note: Most common responses are highlighted in bold.

In relation to the CoBRAS items, the most common responses to 9 out of the 10 statements were "Strongly disagree" or "Disagree", suggesting that, in general, our survey respondents rejected a colour-blind account of the nature of wider society. "Strongly disagree" was by far the most common response to two items in particular: "Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today" (63.6%) and "White people in the U.K. are discriminated against because of the colour their skin" (63.1%). In contrast, the most common responses to the item stating that "Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.K." were "Slightly agree" (26.8%) and "Disagree" (25.1%).

Turning to the RIAS items, the most common responses to all 8 statements were "Strongly agree" or "Agree", suggesting that in general, our survey respondents felt that more needed to be done to make their universities more racially inclusive. Two of these 8 items attracted comparatively fewer "Strongly agree" responses: "My university needs to enrol more students from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds" and "My university should require all students to take an anti-racism course."

To analyse this data further, we employ principal components analysis to reduce the ten CoBRAS items down to a single measure of the degree to which respondents take a colour-blind view of wider society. We then run a second, separate principal components analysis to reduce the eight RIAS items down to a single measure of the degree to which respondents felt that more needed to be done to make their universities more racially inclusive.

Table 3 reports the results of these two principal components analyses. Both sets of results yield one component for each set of items, accounting for 47.2 percent and 67.9 percent of the variance across all items included in each analysis, respectively.

Table 3. Principal components analysis solution.

Panel A. Colour-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)		
Component	Eigenvalues	% of variance
1	4.72	47.2
2	0.90	9.0
3	0.84	8.4
4	0.80	8.0
5	0.64	6.4
6	0.54	5.4
7	0.46	4.6
8	0.41	4.1
9	0.38	3.8
10	0.31	3.1
Panel B. Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS)		
Component	Eigenvalues	% of variance
1	5.43	67.9
2	0.77	9.6
3	0.62	7.7
4	0.42	5.3
5	0.24	3.0
6	0.20	2.5
7	0.17	2.2
8	0.14	1.7

Table 4 reports the item loadings for results of the two principal components analyses. As can be seen, all items contribute substantially to their associated principal component (although the loading values are comparatively smaller for the items stating, "Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension" and "My university should expel students found to be engaging in racist behaviour").

Table 4. Principal component analysis item loadings.

Panel A. Colour-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)	
	Component 1
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.	0.682
It is important that people begin to think of themselves as British and not Black British, Indian British or Chinese British.	0.614
Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.	0.750
White people in the U.K. are discriminated against because of the colour their skin.	0.713
Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.	0.492
Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.K.	0.741
English should be the only official language in the U.K.	0.609
Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.	0.807
Racial and ethnic minorities in the U.K. have certain advantages because of the colour of their skin.	0.664
Racial problems in the U.K. are rare, isolated situations.	0.744
Panel B. Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS)	
	Component 1
My university needs to enrol more students from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.	0.894
My university needs to employ more academic staff from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds.	0.892
My university needs to listen more to the concerns of its Black and ethnic minority students.	0.892
My university needs to take steps to decolonise its curriculum.	0.894
My university should require all students to take an anti-racism course.	0.786
My university needs a better system for reporting racist incidents.	0.833
My university should be more responsive to the racist incidents that are reported to them.	0.802
My university should expel students found to be engaging in racist behaviour.	0.534

A Pearson correlation of -0.777 ($p < 0.001$) indicated a strong and statistically significant association between respondents' scores on both the CoBRAS and RIAS, in the expected direction (i.e., those who subscribed more strongly to colour-blind ideology felt less strongly that there was a need to improve racial diversity and inclusion at their university).

In the final step of our analysis, we run two separate linear regression models to explore whether respondents from different ethnic groups differ in the degree to which they take a colour-blind view of wider society (panel A) and in the degree to which they believe that more needs to be done to make their universities more racially inclusive (panel B). Respondents reporting their ethnicity as White are taken as the reference category in each case.

As Panel A of Table 5 shows, there are no statistically significant differences between respondents from different ethnic groups with regard to the degree to which they take a colour-blind view of wider society. Compared to White respondents, Black respondents have lower scores on this scale which is suggestive of a stronger rejection of colour-blind attitudes, but this difference is not significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

In contrast, as Panel B of Table 5 shows, compared to White respondents, Black respondents have higher scores on the scale capturing the belief that more needs be done to make their universities more racially inclusive. This difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.008$).

Overall, our findings suggest that university students in general largely reject a colour-blind view of wider society and largely believe that more needs to be done to make their universities more racially inclusive. However, Black students in particular are more cognisant than others of the need for universities to become more racially inclusive.

Table 5. Linear regression of PCA component factors onto respondent ethnicity.

Panel A. Colour-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)			
Ethnicity (White = ref. cat.)	B	Std. error	*p*-value
Black	−0.216	0.169	0.202
Mixed	0.091	0.172	0.598
Asian	0.141	0.151	0.353
Other	0.257	0.266	0.334
Constant	−0.015	0.064	0.810
Panel B. Racially Inclusive Attitudes Scale (RIAS)			
Ethnicity (White = ref. cat.)	B	Std. error	*p*-value
Black	0.451	0.170	0.008
Mixed	0.004	0.174	0.983
Asian	−0.017	0.151	0.910
Other	−0.094	0.283	0.741
Constant	−0.042	0.064	0.516

5. Conclusions

Race equity, diversity and inclusion measures require critical engagement from HEIs to support underrepresented bodies being racially excluded. The insufficiency of UK universities' efforts in these regards continue to recreate racialised spaces and experiences for racialised and ethnic minority students (Arday et al. 2022; Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018). Black students and staff in particular carry the weight of being overlooked due to colourblind rhetoric contributing to their exclusion, despite a degree of awareness of the need to construct a racially inclusive environment for everyone. Thus, overcoming colour-blindness and façade approaches to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion requires a race-conscious anti-racist agenda.

Applying two attitudinal scales, this paper set out to quantitatively examine student attitudes in relation to colour-blindness (CoBRAS) and their perceptions of the need for greater efforts to ensure racial diversity and inclusivity (RIAS) on UK university campuses. The findings suggest students of all race/ethnic backgrounds do not subscribe to a colour-blind racial ideology. However, students with stronger levels of colour-blindness felt less strongly that there was a need to improve racial diversity and inclusion on their university campus. This pattern matches the findings of previous studies showing that colour-blindness is associated with a lack of awareness of discriminatory issues (Hartmann et al. 2017). Moreover, while a majority of students from all race/ethnic groups felt that their HEI should embed additional racial equity, diversity and inclusion policies, unsurprisingly this was felt most strongly by the Black students in our sample. Their attitudes reflect Black scholar literature emphasising the resiliency of Black people to *racial exclusion* is a result of racialised experiences with White peers (Shilliam 2015; Rollock 2021). The findings also point to the need to tackle the threat of *racial exclusion* in academic spaces, which will require a greater awareness of and responsiveness to the experiences of Black students and academics. Indeed, it is not only the case that a majority of our respondents wanted their university to cultivate procedures of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, it is also the legal responsibility of HEIs to do so (Jones 2022). UK universities face the necessary task of dismantling colour-blindness and if they are to tackle racial exclusion by implementing genuine anti-racist policies and actions designed to foster a space for all bodies to thrive rather than merely survive. For instance, utilising Douglass Horsford's (2014) four-step model of development (see section Racial inclusion in higher education); decolonising the curriculum with a woke pedagogy to attract and retain BEM students (see Caldera 2018); fully investing in the REC for diversity, inclusivity, and belonging (Arday et al. 2022; Campion and Clark 2022); and suggested from the findings, deploying positive action methods to increase BEM representation (Jones 2022, 2024).

In closing, we highlight the value of the RIAS developed and implemented in this paper as a new measure of students' perceptions of the need for more (and more effective) racial equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives. We believe that the RIAS can be profitably used by other researchers, and in other educational settings including schools, to measure support for policies designed to promote an anti-racist educational environment.

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Notes

1 Durham University's board of ethics granted ethical approval. Additionally, informed consent for online survey participation highlighted the purpose of the study, procedures, benefits, and confidentiality.

2 We exclude 3 responses where ethnicity data were missing. 174 respondents (42.8%) stated that they were currently students at the authors' higher education institution.

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