WARWICK SPEAK OUT

September 2018

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"I have never in my 21 years of life experienced the amount of racism that I have since my start at Warwick. NEVER."

- Anonymous Student

Contents

Summary

In reaction to institutional racism at the University of Warwick, as manifest in the Black Attainment Gap, and several racialised incidents which came to the attention of Warwick Students' Union (WSU) and Warwick Anti-Racism Society (WARSoc), these stakeholders came together to gather insight into the experiences of students of colour. This report uses the terminology 'students of colour', rather than the often used 'BME students' as these are experiences are specific to students impacted by white supremacy, and racial hierarchy (notably students of African, Caribbean, Asian and Arab descent), whilst the phrase 'BME' includes white ethnic minority communities. This research set out to look at racist microaggressions, more overt and recognisable incidents of racism, and everything in between, in order to gauge the impact of racism on the student experience.

Warwick Speak Out encourages students of colour to speak out about their experiences, and calls on the University to speak out and take action to improve the education experience of students of colour.

Methodology

There were 37 respondents to the Warwick Speak Out online reporting tool, and 11 attendees at focus group. Some of these 48 engagements included multiple incidents, all of which have been factored into the statistics below. However, many students requested that what they disclosed was not relayed and, thus, they cannot be shared within the quotes describing what these incidents entail later in the report.

Key Findings

This report looks at key themes from the racist incidents that students reported: breaking these down into incidents with staff, and with fellow students.

18 of the responses raised an issue regarding words, actions, or lack thereof, of University staff, including
- Lecturers;
- Academic tutors;
- Residential life tutors;
- Campus security;
- Staff within the immigration department;
- Members of staff in University outlets.

There were **33** incidents reported perpetrated by fellow students, notably by
- Peers in academic settings;
- Those within accommodation;
- Those in societies.

40 of the incidents reported noted verbal offences, including but not limited to:
- Slurs;
- References to racially charged violence;
- Racist 'jokes';
- Othering of students of colour;
- Inappropriate or derogatory questions or comments.

There were also **3** reports of physical offences, e.g. hair-touching.

Additionally, the report collates student experiences & opinions on:
- The quotidian nature of racism;
- The impact of racism on mental health and wellbeing;
- The education experience;
- Lack of faith in the reporting system;
- The University's stance on racial discrimination;
- The wider student community's awareness of racism.

Key Recommendations

Training

- Staff – both academic and non-academic – should receive more robust training on race, and the impacts of racism on the student experience. Any such training should include an understanding of intersectionality and the fact that, for example, LGBTUA+ students of colour, and disabled students of colour face additional barriers to accessing education, and enjoying their education experience that are unique to students at each intersection of these multiple identities. This will help to reduce the numbers of incidents perpetrated by staff, and to enable them to intervene and, thus, to relieve students of colour of the widely mentioned feeling of obligation to educate fellow students, and staff. This will also promote a culture of accountability, and to reassure students that such a culture exists as a lack of this was also noted as a barrier to reporting.

- Mental health professionals should receive particular training on how race, racism, and intersectionality impact mental health, and there should also be an effort made to employ people of colour within mental health services.

- The University should cultivate a culture whereby white students have an awareness of the experience of students of colour. The University also has a role to play in highlighting what is, and what is not, acceptable behaviour of students, as suggested by a student:

   "The University can make a big thing of not having fridges in your room and people listen, why can't they do that for racism?"

   This, as the student suggests, could include Residential Life Tutors addressing this at the beginning of the year; as well as mentioning that racism is not accepted within the welcome address given to incoming students, and further embedding an understanding of anti-racist practice within the student experience, throughout students' time at Warwick.

Review of the Reporting System

- Within this report, it is glaringly evident that students of colour feel disillusioned by the reporting system and the way in which the University deals with racism. The response to these findings must also be two-fold: the University should review the communications surrounding the reporting mechanism itself and why students do not have confidence that their experiences of racism will be taken seriously; and should also interrogate why students do not feel that it demonstrates a truly zero tolerance approach to racism due to related cases to date.

Decolonising the Education Experience

- A curriculum that critically interrogates, and dismantles dominant systems of knowledge, whilst promoting a more well-rounded approach to thought through a liberated curriculum, with particular attention to race, is beneficial for students of colour and to their engagement with course content. A

decolonised curriculum could also encourage white students to engage with concepts of power and privilege, in order to stimulate a more conscious student community and, in doing so, potentially reduce the number of racist incidents that occur.

- There is also a pedagogical element to decolonisation of the curriculum. Several students mention feeling that the onus is on them to educate fellow students, with regard to race and racism, often within academic settings. Academic staff should be better supported to navigate students of colour's experiences of discussing race in academic settings.

Student Voice on Race and Racism

- It is implicitly evident that students lack a vehicle for airing their experiences and opinions of race, racism, and anti-racist work within the University. The University should, therefore, establish what the best mechanism for student engagement in these conversations moving forward.

Incidents with Staff

Below are the reports from students that involved unpleasant interactions with staff members, excluding those which we are unable to share publicly. They include the reading of, and insensitivity towards, racial slurs; negative treatment of students of colour, sometimes in direct contrast to that of their white counterparts; or inappropriate questions and comments – all of which indicate a lack of awareness of the impact of race on the student experience. As such, we recommend more robust training for all University staff members, particularly those who are student-facing.

Academic Settings

"In an honours level literature seminar, a classmate who is a POC contributed to the group discussion by highlighting the text's dealing with colonial history and surrounding issues. To this, our tutor responded by looking down at the register, and then, becoming overtly surprised by the student's Italian surname and her being a woman of colour, he spoke it out loud, slowly. **Marvelling, he questioned her about her ethnicity**, asking **"where do your people come from?"** The student then proceeded, albeit hesitatingly, to provide details of where she was born and her parent's countries of origin. I found the whole scene highly disconcerting and hugely irritating because rather than respond and expand on the discussion points raised by the student (that were significant to the text and had not previously been addressed by the tutor), the tutor instead diverted the discussion thus wasting valuable lesson time to satisfy his own personal intrigue. The language used - 'your people' - highlighted the tutor's **highly problematic views** about, and knowledge of, ethnicities, culture, history, society etc."

"I was in a lecture that was trying to get feedback on the course. One anonymous question given to the lecturer asked why a major aspect of the time period we were studying wasn't in the course. The response by the lecturer was that **they weren't interested by that aspect, particularly mentioning the race of the people involved and myself**. I found the way the answer was framed about race as shocking. It was as if the history of my people was irrelevant due to their colour."

"In one of my lectures, my lecturer was talking about 'exotic solutions' and then suddenly said 'or solutions from **shit hole countries as Donald Trump would say**' … I found out from a friend that this lecturer has previously said things along a similar discriminatory line- he's said Muslim women look like [they're] wearing gimp suits, made transphobic comments and ableist remarks"

One student reported that **their lecturer said that "[C]hinese students cannot sit together or be in the same lab group** … he also criticise[d] lots of things of China like population growth and energy consumption… **I am very unhappy** with the experience but he is the one who grade[s] our module so what can we do"

"[A] tutor **read out the n-word** and then proceeded to take up the seminar time explaining why **he felt he was able to use this word**. His reasoning was that during the time the poem was written, people were happier to use/say the n-word and that **today we are too PC and touchy about using such language**. I was disgusted by this and **felt very uncomfortable, especially being the only POC in the room**. I lacked the emotional and mental energy required to challenge his argument and thus his opinion remained the only one spoken in the class."

"I wasn't surprised when a Warwick sociology lecturer asked whether white privilege should be called white advantage because he didn't opt in."

"A white panellist in a student's lecture said that "decolonising the curriculum was unnecessary and people clapped."

"One of my seminar tutors was explaining the background to a spoken word piece and **could have been more sensitive about using the n-word**. It was completely unnecessary and the entire class just stared at me, waiting for me to call her out on it."

Students who had experienced racism on their Year Abroad, reported the following:
- "my department didn't advocate on my behalf"
- "It took two months for the University to reply…I remember thinking, is that what I pay all that money for?"
- "There are issues when BME Students go abroad, you just don't get the support from Warwick."
- A student said that they were "only supported by a black academic"

Non-Academic Settiings

The Immigration Department
"Throughout my three years as an international student in the neighbouring city of Birmingham, I never once experienced racism in any shape or form. In contrast to my experience at Warwick, I experienced racism from the first day I arrived. The Immigration Department was by far my worst encounter - with **the staff being outrightly rude, refusing to help me in any way, and threatening me with not being able to start my postgraduate programme on time**, all based on a fault on THEIR part. **None of the other international students on my programme experienced this** even once and I personally feel that [I] was discriminated against because of the COLOR of my skin; because I am AFRICAN; because I am BLACK."

University Outlets
"Most of the university staff at shops and food outlets, [are] white and British. On many occasions I have had unpleasant experiences with the staff being rude and I feel like this is because I am not white and British. **When the British white person behind me goes to be served the interaction is much different than mine.** This is ridiculous. Maybe try and hire staff that's a bit more diverse and accepting"

Campus Security
"I was **racially profiled by campus security**. I was waiting for some takeaway which had arrived late and campus security kept coming round and **looking at me suspiciously**. Even after they questioned me and I told them, they still kept looking at me."

The Health Centre
"[At] a doctor's appointment at the Health Centre last week I was asked "where are you really from?" I said London. The doctor gave me a deadpanned expression, "I mean, **where are you really from?**" I knew what she was asking but I didn't see how it had anything to do with diagnosing a common cold."

Warwick Accommodation
"Warwick Accommodation … treated me with absolute disregard in regards to my complaints about my accommodation in Coventry. Despite reporting the racist incidents I had with my accommodation's management, they simply dismissed my email ... I made the effort to go to their office and schedule a meeting to speak with a staff member, but even then my complaints were dismissed."

Incidents with Students

Peer-to-peer incidents were by far the most frequent of the reports we received, and this is indicative of both a lack of consciousness and regard for race and racism within the student community. The incidents that students reported to *Warwick Speak Out* ranged all the way from racist 'jokes' to some extremely harrowing incidents of harassment and abuse – much of which we cannot publish, due to certain students' requests for confidentiality. During the focus group, the conversation around peer-to-peer racism expressed a frustration not only around the incidents themselves, but also of the lack of support from other students, and from staff. The University has a responsibility to foster an environment whereby all members of the University community are aware of what conduct is, and is not, appropriate.

Academic Settings

"I was called "coloured" twice and **referred to as "you coloured people"** in a seminar by another student."

"The amount of racist comments I have heard in seminars is both **heartbreaking and disgusting** at the same time. For such a 'prestigious' university, some Warwick students really need to check themselves!"

"During a Q&A after my first group presentation at Warwick … [a]nother student in my seminar used a discussion on workers' rights and unions in 18th and 19th C Britain to make several comments. The comments included **disliking social mobility initiatives because they gave unfair advantages** and … their belief that "it wasn't cool to be white anymore" and their upset that ethnic minorities were more desired in terms of aesthetics in society. I was genuinely shocked and appalled … Finally I managed to contain my upset at being a person of colour who is regularly fetishised for being mixed. I explained that fetishisation of ethnic minorities was being confused with celebrating them and the sexualisation was nothing to be envied. Worse than the fact I looked around and saw only one other POC, was the **silence and lack of support from anyone else**. I realised nothing of what I had said was taken in by the person that made the comments, and that they weren't looking for a debate but wanted a rant, in a "safe" setting where their prejudices could be seen as intellectual discourse."

"I heard two white students **referring to a POC professor as "so cute" in a belittling way after a lecture because of their accent**."

In the PAIS common room, a student "overheard a group of students talking about how they thought **black people can't swim** and about **throwing pork in to mosques**."

Within Accommodation

"A drunken flatmate **once 'jokingly' said to me that he was going to lynch me** for not giving the correct directions to a venue. I was shocked and angered that they would **think it ok to joke about such abhorrent racist violence** and not know any better, and his being intoxicated was not an excuse. This happened at the beginning of the academic year and **knowing that I would be living with the person for several more months made confronting them about it a fraught decision**."

"[A] flatmate **told me that I 'look like every other black woman'** and took my disapproval as being unfair as he claimed it was merely a joke. He got someone else to confront me on the matter, telling me I was wrong to suggest the comments were racist as I was being "ridiculous'. Meanwhile, the rest of **my flatmates remained silent** on the topic despite watching everything unfold."

"My housemate made …**racially [abusive] remarks** like Chinese bastard, fucking Chinese go to hell, yellow fever, Asian is disgusting, Asian don't deserve to live and the list goes on."

"My white flatmate in first year argued it was racist that only black people could say the N word. I explained that this was flawed reasoning and he proceeded to say to me, **"what's up my n****"**, twice, to prove his point. After he said it the first time, I was shocked and told him to never say that to me again. After he said it the second time, I left the room. Yet I lived with him so it was not reasonable to just never speak to him again. **He never** apologised and we never spoke about it again but I thought about it for weeks (I still think about it now, nearly two years later) and **it made me feel extremely uncomfortable in my own accommodation**."

"I experienced racism in my flat …it got to the point where **I didn't want to go in to the kitchen, I was not eating and I got ill**."

"My flatmates **thought it was appropriate to use the n-word**. This was during karaoke and I was appalled. At first I thought it was because they were international students and that they didn't understand the weight of the word. But when questioned, they admitted to knowing."

"When the weather first started to improve around a week ago, around Rootes and Bluebell, people would gather to sit in the sun and relax on the grass. There was an incident involving **a student of Asian descent getting called a "P*ki"** by another, white student. **Campus security did nothing**."

A student reported flatmates "always commenting on [her] food". When the student explained that this food is what her family eats and how her family prepares food, a white student replied, "**Your parents must be stupid**."

One student explained that she was once told by a flat mate: "**you should be grateful for slavery, it's the reason why you are here**"

Social Settings

Regarding an academic society, one student reported: "from their election process, to the diversity in their current committee, down to the atmosphere at ALL their events, I was treated with the highest form of discrimination at every effort I made to be involved in their events."

"At a [political society] social, an attendant started singing "I have never seen a [slur referring to people of Pakistani origin] down a pint"."

General Student Experiences

Students referred to a pattern of white students being purposely controversial in order to get a reaction from black students:
- "People are doing it on purpose**, trying to rile us**"
- "They think they are trying to be academic, always **playing devil's advocate**"

"During a conversation, a male white student told me that he felt pressured to self-censor whilst at university and claimed that **his free speech was compromised as he felt unable to use the n-word**. Even when I told him this was fundamentally racist and disgusting, he used his experience at Kanye West concert to argue that the rapper himself wanted fans to use the n-word. He told me that **he did blackface** as a tribute to his favourite rapper and did not think there was an issue with this. His friend also visited and used the n-word whilst singing."

"Was asked outside a lecture theatre how I knew English by a student in the second week of university - even though I had been able to attend the same university as them and I was born in England."

"I have had **countless people comment on my accent**, my parents' jobs, what I dress like and how much money I have."

Student Experiences & Opinions

The Impact of Racism on Mental Health and Wellbeing

"I spent the last 2 years **feeling alone**."

"I was constantly aware of my difference and that **lack of support**."

"The seminar tutor and the other students **didn't even seem to notice or care**."

"It's disgusting that students of colour have to cope with **the stress of dealing with such ignorance and arrogance** on top of general university-related and induced anxieties."

"Since that time that experience stayed with me. Not just in that seminar, but others, **I began talking less and experienced more anxiety** about the way others saw me and the lack of support in the room on that day. At Warwick I found that although the courses were enjoyable, you can't escape the privilege and entitlement that comes from the white students who claim "free speech"."

"This [racist incident] happened within the first two hours at University, **I didn't want to be the angry black girl**, so I stayed in my room and **ate crisps for dinner**." The fear of this trope was mentioned by multiple students.

"Students need support on how to deal with [racism] and mental health"

Students discussed going to mental health professionals and that because they articulate their mental health in a certain way, **they aren't seen as vulnerable** and get a different response to white students.

"I have a white friend who got a message from a staff member when she didn't go to lectures but a BME student in the same situation didn't. We need support. We could be having a hard time."

Several students discussed the impact of racism on their attendance:
- "Racists incidents put you off coming in to the university".
- "It puts you off coming onto the campus".

Regarding a racist incident: "It made me feel so out of place and so uncomfortable."

Racism is a Quotidian Experience for Students of Colour at Warwick

"It happens all the time"

"It happens **every day**"

Multiple students referred to the concept of **reporting as redundant** because of how frequently they experienced racism:
- "You know it will happen tomorrow"
- "It happens so much you think, what is the point?"

The Education Experience

"For a supposedly forward-thinking university of a high calibre, the curriculum … needs a remarkable amount of **change before it can be considered even remotely decolonised**."

A student expressed that during seminars that discussed race, they were **"expected to be spokesperson for black people"**, saying "I'm here to learn, just like everybody else. I don't see why I'm always put in a position to educate others."

"I don't understand why it's always a **black student's responsibility to educate others**. I'm not a search engine. There's Google for that."

"It's hard when you are the only black person in the room, **you don't want to have to represent all black people**".

Lack of Faith in the Reporting System

Regarding a lecturer reported about through this anonymous form: "[I] know he's been complained about and **the university said his behaviour wasn't appropriate but didn't take any further action**. I want to report him but **I don't trust the uni to take it seriously** and I'm worried I'd be mocked for doing so."

A student expressed that they were worried about the impact of reporting an incident: "**I didn't want the whole residential team to** know so I just kept quiet for a whole year."

In conversation about a recent case in the Law Department, students discussed the problem in valuing intent over impact; they asked **"what is unintentional racism?"**

When asked why they didn't reports incidents that they had described, students had the following to say:
- "Why would you want to cause **havoc** for yourself"
- "If you are vocal about racism this is what happens to you" in reference to another student who was threatened with a countersuit for alleged defamation after exposing racism that they had experienced.
- "Warwick University **doesn't take complaints seriously**."
- "Very little zero tolerance for racism."
- "It's **stressful** and it takes a lot of time."
- "The **onus is on the student** when it should be the responsibility of the University".
- "There is **no confidentiality** within departments."
- "There is **no culture of accountability**".
- "Don't know who to report it to? So many structures, where do you start?"
- There was also a discussion of stigma surrounding reporting.

The University Needs a Stronger Stance on Racial Discrimination

"The entire social culture surrounding the university seems geared towards benefitting upper-class, white males and given the recent scandalous group chat laden with racism and LITERAL RAPE APOLOGY, **I hope this issue is taken seriously by the Vice-Chancellor**. I want to be proud of my university, but **if it wants to portray itself as a truly international institution … then it must take an extremely tough stance** on racial (and other forms of) discrimination."

"Just look at the embarrassment Warwick Uni had to face in the news before action was deemed necessary, because they didn't attack the primary incidents first. Do better Warwick. **Educate and Enforce.**"

"[Campus security] were far more interested in policing people for gathering in public spaces together (as we are free to do so) without actually dealing with such a blatant act of racism."

Students mentioned incidents that happened on buses and in night clubs and questioned if the University have a duty of care towards them when they are off campus.

A student communicated a need **more robust "disciplinary measures and accountability measures"**
It was highlighted that the University needs "to include the message that racism will not be tolerated in Orientation Week. The University can make a big thing of not having fridges in your room and people listen, why can't they do that for racism?"

Another student requested strong messaging from the Vice Chancellor: "Stuart sends out regular emails like welcoming students back to the University, why can't he **tell us what is happening on racism**?"

"We need a zero tolerance policy towards racism."

The Wider Student Community is Dismissive and Unaware of the Impacts of Race

"These kinds of experiences are shocking as you expect well-educated people to act with responsibility when it comes to certain words. The dismissive attitude displayed by non- black PoC and white people when black people complain about the use of the n-word is similarly dismaying. I know for a fact people would not be so lax about other words which have historically been used to marginalise other communities."

"The biggest lesson I learned was that there is an overwhelming lack of awareness of privilege and entitlement. Students are able to explore this in their essays for marks, but do not apply the same lessons to their behaviour in real life. **There needs to be a change in the culture at Warwick** in general, and the History course specifically, where students actually digest the exploration of privilege and how it affects their viewpoint and credibility on certain topics, rather than just using it to get their 2.1 or 1st."

"These are just some of the **experiences that POC are told to "move past"** because others are "still learning"."

Conclusion

Whilst we have pulled together some key recommendations guided by students' opinions and experiences, these raw and candid student voices speak for themselves – we must do more for students of colour. The contributions from the 48 students whose experiences and opinions make up this report highlight clear trends in what students of colour are facing during their time at Warwick, and the impact of those experiences on their wellbeing, their education, and their University experience. It is critical that we utilise the findings in order to take active steps towards a better experience for students of colour.

Next Steps

Warwick Speak Out does not stop here – this continues to be an evolving campaign, and insight mechanism. The online reporting tool remains open for students to submit their experiences, and we will be re-launching our call for students to utilise the tool later on this year.

We look forward to working with the University to implement the recommendations, and to seeing the university community become an ever-better place for students of colour.