See My FACE: The missing race equality questions in Higher Education.


FACE: Fashion Academics Creating Equality

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Online Survey Report

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**Menu**

## Abstract

FACE: Fashion Academics Creating Equality is a voluntary organisation attending to race inequality in Higher Education. The present study introduces one element of ongoing focus: the impact of unacknowledged race bias on student ability, experience and learning outcomes within Higher Education. Race-aware and race equality questions must be swiftly added to all student surveys in order to present a more accurate picture of minoritised student experience and expose the dearth of minoritised academics in the system.

The current inflection points in Higher Education on the lived experiences of Black and Brown academics and all student learners, have far reaching impacts. Mental health, academic status, achievement levels, awarding gaps, economic progression and opportunity are all affected by white-centric structural and systemic policies and procedures.

Progress and disruption to this inequitable system within education is devoid of any immediacy, with reports of denial and disassociation leading to confusion and inactivity.

This study sets out to explore one nationwide pathway to knowledge and clarity with the power to challenge both systematic and individual denial. As findings from a survey featuring a wide range of institutions up and down the country show, significant discrepancies in student experience pertaining to race, emerge *only* when race aware and race equality questions are asked. With a total of *n= 881* participants from Higher Education, findings reveal minoritised students being more than twice as likely as white students to strongly disagree that they are taught by a diverse and inclusive teaching body. There was also and 11.6 percentage point deficit gap presented by minoritised students in response to whether they experienced a diverse, unbiased and inclusive curriculum.

When asked to comment on how race had affected ability to study, four main themes emerged: *How we experience our race; My knowledge has been curated through a white lens; The absence of Black and Brown academics; Aggression – the observed behaviours of white teachers and students.* The call for institutional cultural competency as a remedial imperative is presented in discussion below.

## Introduction

With white-centric education and teaching perspectives assessed as undermining for all learners in a variety of ways, specifically investigated and challenged, must be the impact on minoritised students who must fit into white-centric teaching protocols and assimilate into biased working environments.

In a 2021 report, Fashion Roundtable, the Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Groups for Textiles and Fashion & for Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion recommended '*an overhaul of 'diversity' practices within companies and educational institutions which acknowledge Great Britain's imperial past and how its structural racism and other forms of structural discrimination intersects within fashion education and the different sectors of the fashion industry.*'

In the year preceding this report, FACE: Fashion Academics Creating Equality, emerged to campaign for culture and diverse perspectives to be embedded into arts curriculums. In 2020 members of this voluntary organisation published a working manifesto demanding acknowledgement of the contribution of Black culture and creativity, to history, society and fashion.

Spotlighting education as key to challenging antiquated professional practice found in industry, FACE welcomes the *Representation and Inclusion Report* and recommendations from Fashion Roundtable (2021) acknowledging '*a large number of examples of institutionalised anti-Blackness present within the fashion industry, from recruitment and*

*progression, right through to the provision for Black or mixed-race models working on shoots or in shows.'* As such, FACE believes, acceleration of race and race inequality knowledge for all students in Higher Education, must now be a priority.

Various institutional attempts to address the lack of equitability through initiatives such as *Beating the Attainment Gap, Value Added Metric and Inclusive Curriculum Framework.* Proposing solutions is not difficult since there has already been research, case studies, evaluations of best practice, further supported by The Office for Students (2019b) which has provided guidance on the evaluation and evidence of impact for widening participation interventions. What is of concern is the lack of action. Individual institutions may have adopted reactionary bias training for white academics as a hoped-for intervention to white-centricity, - thought, however, to be ineffective (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016) as well as commitment to undertake the long-awaited curriculum decolonisation as part of structural overhaul, but this is also limited in effectiveness and consistency. One important aspect hampering progress, is lack of, or in many cases complete absence of, minoritised academics amongst staff both on the ground and in leadership positions. Black academics make up just 2% of the academic population (Adams, 2020) and are not recruited or progressed with the same keenness as white/non-minoritised colleagues. '*Inequalities persist, with lower proportions of both UK and non-UK BAME\* staff than white staff on open-ended/ permanent contracts, in senior management positions, and on higher salary bands. Proportions of BAME academic staff varied greatly between subject areas, with BAME staff comprising relatively high proportions of academics working in SET compared with non-SET. Leaving rates among BAME academics were also higher than for white academics'* as found by the *Staff Statistical Report* (Advance HE, 2020). In addition, a recent report by (Hefferman (2021) found that the data informing student surveys is flawed and prejudiced against those being assessed *'containing evaluations that are increasingly abusive with comments which are mostly directed towards women and those from marginalised groups.'*

*\*FACE uses the term 'Minoritised,' in place of BAME to reflect a collective identity where power is denied through structural action.*

Inertia and confusion continue to impact the system through detours, which may vary but '*essentially function to create an illusion of progress toward equity while cementing, or even exacerbating, inequity,'* (Gorski, 2019). This process supports anecdotal reports by members, of mere paper shuffling and time-wasting committees. As a result, it is minoritised students who pay the highest price. One documented example being the attainment gap data covered within the *Staff Statistical Report* (Advance HE, 2020) recording a deficit of -19% for students of Caribbean heritage and -23% for students of African heritage when compared to white/non-minoritised counterparts. In addition, although student population of minoritised students is approx. 20% only 5.3% of entrants to top universities are Black, compared with a 12% quota at other providers (UK News, 2020). Meanwhile, 81% of white/non-minoritised students received a first or 2.1. In contrast only, 68% of students labelled BAME received a first or 2.1 according to the *Staff Statistical Report* (Advance HE, 2020). It is acknowledged that other categories such as low-income white learners are also affected by current educational barriers, however *Ipsos Mori* on behalf of the *Social Mobility Commission*, found in 2020 that minoritised graduates are more likely to experience downward mobility, even after accounting for their educational qualifications (Perera, 2021).

Trends show that in 2018/19, 454,110 UK domiciled students identified as BAME, representing a 73.4% increase from 2003/04 numbers. The proportions of students who were Asian or Black have seen the most growth among ethnic groups in this time period. However, while BAME representation was relatively high among first degree undergraduates and taught postgraduates (25.5% and 23.0%, respectively). It was markedly lower among research postgraduate (18.1%) students. *Staff Statistical Report* (Advance HE, 2020).

The pedagogical partnership between students, staff and institution is one that is envisioned as an effective method of fostering change, through which 'effective partnership practices have the potential to enhance teaching and learning as interpreted through all the NSS questions' (Matthews, et al., 2019). However, in order to foster an authentic and inclusive dialogue there has to be a recognition of the barriers minoritised students face by exploring their expectations as well as their experiences.

Currently there are no questions on race contained within the Office for Students (OfS) annual *National Student Survey* (NSS). The job of the NSS is to '*inform prospective students' choices, provide data that supports universities and colleges to improve the student experience support public accountability*.' (Office for Students, 2021). The OfS website states, '*every university in the UK takes part in the NSS, as do many colleges. Response rates are consistently high.'*

The present study therefore reports on a missing aspect of valuable knowledge required for clarity in the way that students are evaluated, and their issues addressed. '*See My FACE*', is an online survey which set out to capture hitherto unasked-for statements from minoritised and non-minoritised students in existing student surveys pertaining to race awareness and race inequality.

Findings and discussion support the demand by FACE that additional race aware and race equality questions are essential to expose the multiple deficits for minoritised students and Black and Brown academics in Higher Education, with the hope that accelerated progress will be made on behalf of all our students.

## Method

A total of *n = 881* students in Higher Education studying fashion and fashion related courses were recruited to an online survey via a variety of sources such as Instagram marketing, email invitation from FACE member academics to their students as well as posters in participating fashion institutions placed by students themselves. Students from over fifty institutions up and down the country took part.

## Materials

An online survey carrying a standard data protection declaration was posted during the months of April through to July. Students were asked to identify their ethnic group, age, and institution and study year before answering 4 questions measuring strength of response intensity. On a Likert scale with the score of 1 corresponding with Definitely Disagree, 3 corresponding with Don't agree/disagree and 5 corresponding with Definitely Agree. The final question aimed to capture lived-experience of students and was accompanied by a blank space with unlimited word count so that students could write as little or as much as needed.

These are presented below.

*I was taught by a diverse, unbiased and inclusive teaching body*

*I felt my academic progression was impartial, unbiased and equal*

*I felt able to study a diverse, unbiased and inclusive curriculum*

*I felt part of a diverse, unbiased and inclusive culture*

*Please add any further insight into your lived experience as a student in relationship to 'Race'? How, for example has 'Race' impacted (if at all) your ability to study?*

## Participants

The following categories were offered: White, Chinese, African, Mixed, Caribbean, Indian, Black other, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Arab, Any other ethnic group, Any other white background*, Prefer not to say.

* Identifies with the currency of being white (because they have experienced it).

## Total respondents: 881

| Respondent ethnicity | Number | Percentage of total |
|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 271 | 30.8% |
| White | 599 | 68.0% |
| Not disclosed | 11 | 1.2% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **881** | **100%** |

**Qualitative responses: 480*** *(54.5% of total respondents)*

| Respondent ethnicity | Number | Percentage of total |
|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 165 | 34.4% |
| White | 311 | 64.8% |
| Not disclosed | 4 | 0.8% |
| **Total** | **480** | **100%** |

Whilst minoritised respondents made up 30.8% of the overall total of responses, they accounted for 34.4% of qualitative response, indicating they were slightly more likely to provide qualitative feedback than white respondents.
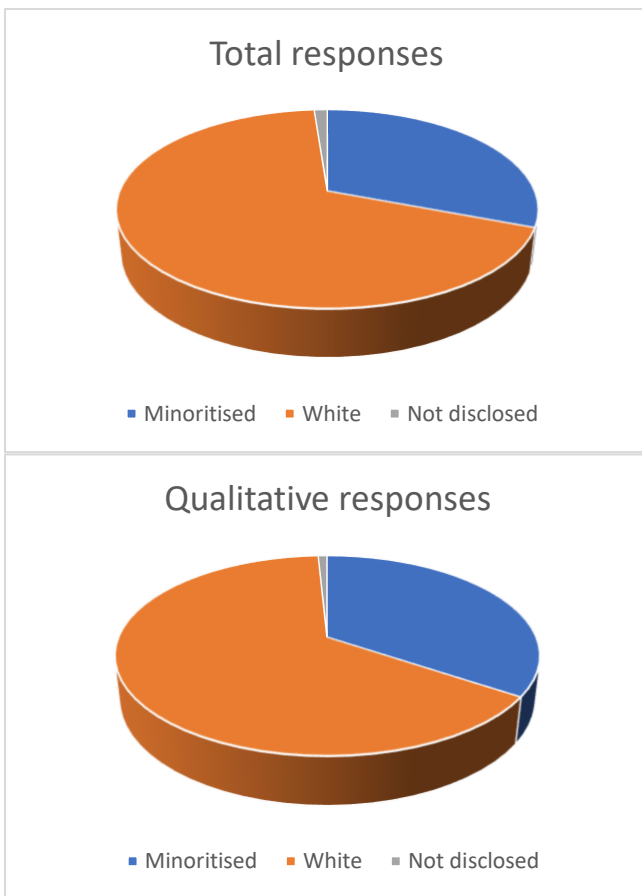


Analysis Results.

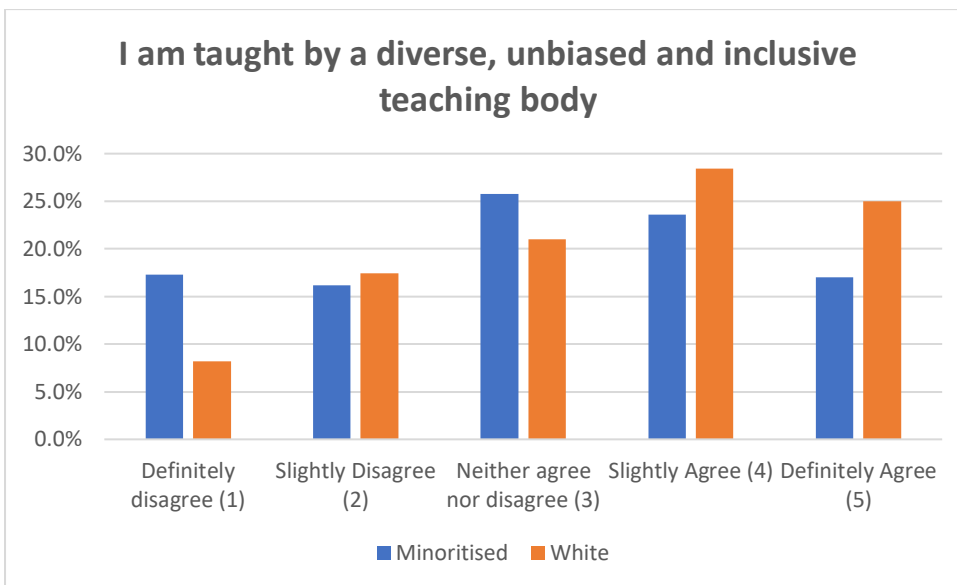**Question 1: I am taught by a diverse, unbiased and inclusive teaching body.**

| Respondent ethnicity | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 47 | 44 | 70 | 64 | 46 | **271** |
| White | 49 | 104 | 126 | 170 | 150 | **599** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not disclosed | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | **11** |

*Respondents providing each answer as a % of their ethnic grouping (please note, as percentages are rounded to 1 decimal place, totals may add up to 0.1% lower or higher than 100)*

| | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 17.3% | 16.2% | 25.8% | 23.6% | 17.0% | **100%** |
| White | 8.2% | 17.4% | 21.0% | 28.4% | 25.0% | **100%** |
| Not disclosed | 18.2% | 9.1% | 54.5% | 9.1% | 9.1% | **100%** |

Minoritised respondents were more than twice as likely as white respondents to strongly disagree that they are taught by a diverse student body (17.3% of minoritised respondents gave this answer versus 8.2% of white respondents).
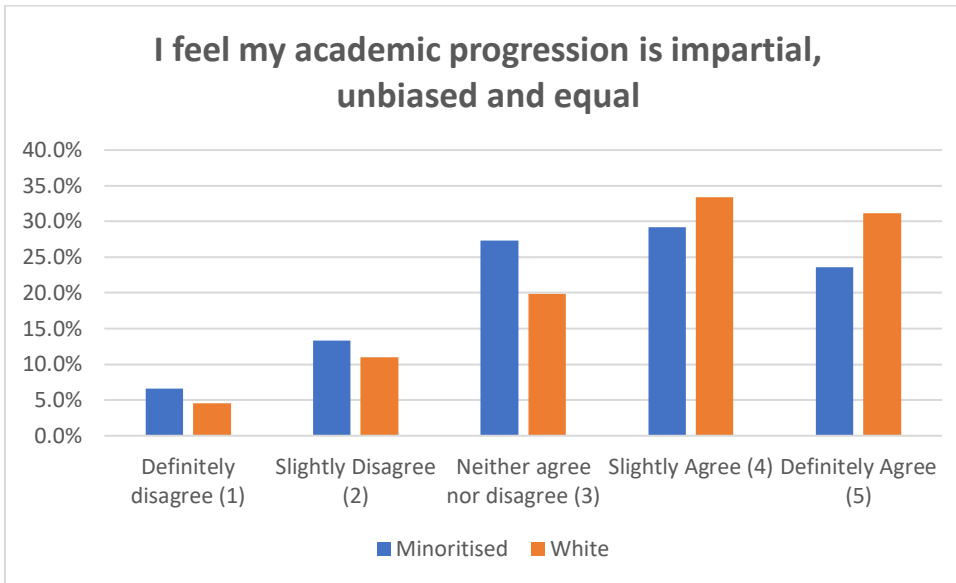


* Responses where ethnicity undisclosed excluded

**Question 2: I feel my academic progression is impartial, unbiased and equal.**

| Respondent ethnicity | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 18 | 36 | 74 | 79 | 64 | **271** |
| White | 27 | 66 | 119 | 200 | 187 | **599** |
| Not disclosed | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | **11** |

*Respondents providing each answer as a % of their ethnic grouping (please note, as percentages are rounded to 1 decimal place, totals may add up to 0.1% lower or higher than 100)*

| | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 6.6% | 13.3% | 27.3% | 29.2% | 23.6% | **100%** |
| White | 4.5% | 11.0% | 19.9% | 33.4% | 31.2% | **100%** |
| Not disclosed | 18.2% | 9.1% | 27.3% | 36.4% | 9.1% | **100%** |

Minoritised students more likely to disagree than white students (2.1 percentage point difference in strongly disagreeing, 2.3 percentage point difference in slightly disagreeing).



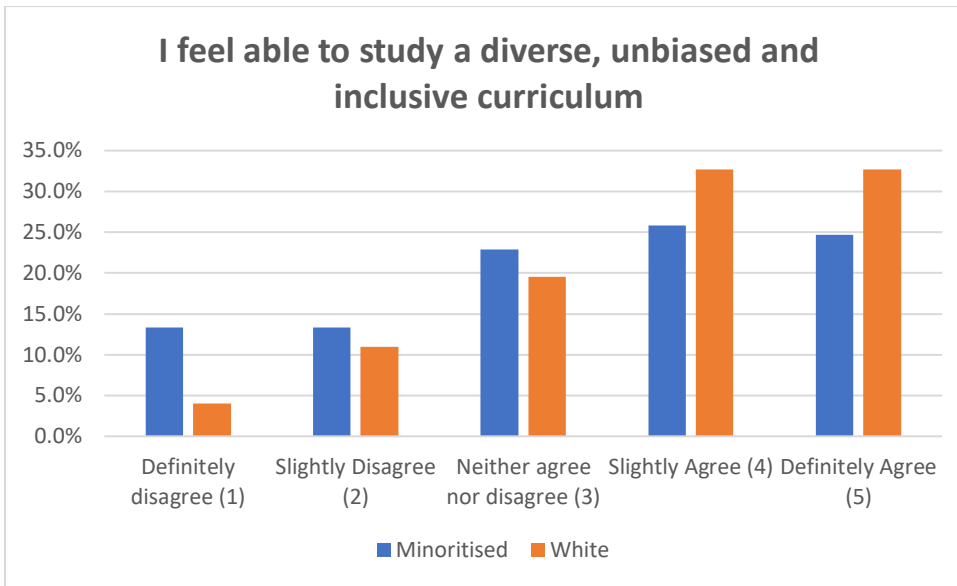* Responses where ethnicity undisclosed excluded


**Question 3: I feel able to study a diverse, unbiased and inclusive curriculum.**

| Respondent ethnicity | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 36 | 36 | 62 | 70 | 67 | **271** |
| White | 24 | 66 | 117 | 196 | 196 | **599** |
| Not disclosed | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 0 | **11** |

*Respondents providing each answer as a % of their ethnic grouping (please note, as percentages are rounded to 1 decimal place, totals may add up to 0.1% lower or higher than 100)*

| | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 13.3% | 13.3% | 22.9% | 25.8% | 24.7% | **100%** |
| White | 4.0% | 11.0% | 19.5% | 32.7% | 32.7% | **100%** |
| Not disclosed | 18.2% | 9.1% | 36.4% | 36.4% | 0.0% | **100%** |

Minoritised students more likely to definitely disagree than white students (9.3 percentage point difference).



I feel able to study a diverse, unbiased and inclusive curriculum

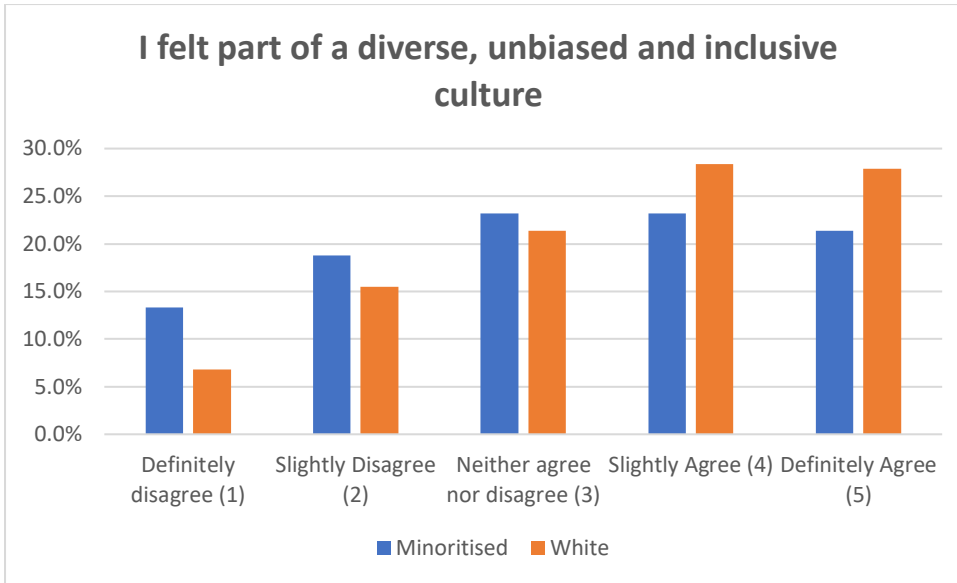* Responses where ethnicity undisclosed excluded


**Question 4: I felt part of a diverse, unbiased and inclusive culture.**

| Respondent ethnicity | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 36 | 51 | 63 | 63 | 58 | **271** |
| White | 41 | 93 | 128 | 170 | 167 | **599** |
| Not disclosed | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 1 | **11** |

*Respondents providing each answer as a % of their ethnic grouping (please note, as percentages are rounded to 1 decimal place, totals may add up to 0.1% lower or higher than 100)*

| | Definitely disagree (1) | Slightly Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Slightly Agree (4) | Definitely Agree (5) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minoritised | 13.3% | 18.8% | 23.2% | 23.2% | 21.4% | **100%** |
| White | 6.8% | 15.5% | 21.4% | 28.4% | 27.9% | **100%** |
| Not disclosed | 18.2% | 0.0% | 27.3% | 45.5% | 9.1% | **100%** |

Minoritised respondents almost twice as likely to definitely disagree (13.3% of minoritised respondents gave this answer versus 6.8% of white respondents).

## I felt part of a diverse, unbiased and inclusive culture



* Responses where ethnicity undisclosed excluded

## Summary

Minoritised respondents were more likely to disagree with each of the four statements than white respondents.

The statement where there was the most disparity between white and minoritised responses was question 3, where a total 26.6% of minoritised respondents disagreed to some extent, versus 15.0% of white respondents, an 11.6 percentage point gap.

Taking an overview of all respondents, minoritised, white and undisclosed, the statement most disagreed with was question 1, where a total of 247 respondents disagreed to some extent (28.0% of all respondents), although 432 (49.0%) of respondents did still agree with the statement to some extent, with 202 (22.9%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

In addition, more minoritised respondents were providing qualitative feedback, relative to their population 60.9% of minoritised respondents versus 51.9% of white respondents, amounting to 9 percent point difference.

## Qualitative overview

A reduced proportion of students chose to engage with the following question: *Please add any further insight into your lived experience as a student in relationship to 'Race'? How, for example has 'Race' impacted (if at all) your ability to study*?

Replies totalled *n= 480*. Four themes emerged. These are listed here and correspond with selected excerpts from students further below in the appendix.

### Theme 1: How do we experience our race?

In a white environment, race difference is experienced as a highly visible aspect of identity in Higher ducation, bringing with it a cargo of discomfort not least, the complexity of being invisible at the same time as being hyper-visible. Students explained this as *feeling different*, *not fitting in* or *not feeling included* as well as *not getting enough attention*. This gave rise to a sense of injustice about the lack of fairness around reduced mentoring that they experienced on campus. Many

students observed that they were not in the favourite group and therefore got less resources and tutor interest, noting that white/non-minoritised academics almost always spent more time with white/non-minoritised groups. In addition, white/non-minoritised peers were not challenged for appropriation and were observed as having to do less.

Of those non-minoritised students that did answer the question of race, many simply answered N/A or non-applicable. When there *was* reflection, many more stated that race didn't affect them. In other words, white/non-minoritised students do not consider their whiteness as relevant to race conversations possibly because whiteness did not bring any discomfort or struggle. Amongst some non-minoritised students however, there was recognition of privilege and acknowledgment of benefits in a white system whilst also expressing concerns about their minoritised peers.

### Theme 2: My learning has been curated through a white lens

Students talk of fear that grades will be affected if white/non-minoritised academics don't *"understand"* what they see and so this compromises the content of their work and how they approach their learning. There is lament about reductive learning environments, and being unaccompanied in their learning journey including being sent to Google or feeling obliged to seek help outside of the institution

In addition, race and racism in fashion is not explored in lecture presentations or general learning, presenting a double burden for minoritised students: firstly, they feel unprepared for the realities of professional practice, which is also biased, secondly, the unwanted responsibility to educate the class about race, falls to them. The latter as we shall see under the final theme 4: *Aggression – the observed behaviours of white teachers and students,* is highly traumatic for minoritised students.

White/non-minoritised learners are dissatisfied with the lack of knowledge amongst their white/non-minoritised educators. They are noting unacceptable behaviours from academics and criticising their university or individuals for display of bias and inaction. However white/non-minoritised students do not register an emotional cost resulting from a deficit of race awareness and diverse cultural knowledge. There is however lament for lost learning opportunities. Students also flag up race equality learning and knowledge as an obvious anti-racist tool for future proofing the industry going forward.

### Theme 3: The absence of Black and Brown academics

Minoritised students relay struggles of many kinds and put this down to lack of a diverse teaching cohort which deprives them of someone who can understand or relate to them. Lack of a relationship with a Black or Brown/minoritised academic affects them personally as well as hampering their developmental journey. Many speak of not being creatively understood, or seen culturally, or worse: experiencing a disapproval for exploring personal and cultural inspirations or needing to talk about race as a starting point for their creativity.

This impacts confidence and instils personal doubt within the learner. The emotional cost for these students is stress and isolation. Feeling unsupported is an issue, students repeatedly lament as is missing out on vital mentoring and guidance at a crucial stage in their development. Confirmation of the lack of academic cultural competency is also seen when white/non-minoritised peers are not challenged by white/non-minoritised academics for behaviours including appropriation.

### Theme 4: Aggression – the observed behaviours of white teachers and students.

Students from both minoritised and non-minoritised groups report on an oppressive culture of indirect and direct racism, ranging from rude and uncooperative teaching environments where empathy and understanding is denied, labelling of students stereotypically to their faces, to outright racial slurs and offensive verbal utterances where nothing is done and worse, continues year in year out with white/non-minoritised academics being repeatedly protected and favoured by the system. Minoritised students are subject to humiliation at the hands of staff, while, as one account documents, students in the background are sniggering. This member of staff justified the behaviour as 'representative of industry conditions.' Other students express the belief that leaving education is their only option in order to escape further damage to their mental health. As one mourns, "I'm mentally and physically exhausted. I can't do any more of this."

## Discussion

As this survey report makes clear, when students are asked to comment on race and its impact on study, there is outpouring of injustice and malfunction woven into their experience. This is not to say that there was an absence of any positive feedback with some students commending individual tutors for personal support and wholehearted mentoring, however the latter is what we would expect.

Thus, the current findings pertaining to race inequality have implications for institutions, their relevance and their future. Recruitment of experienced academics able to teach a decolonised curriculum from a position of cultural competency must now be a priority. As we have evidenced, low attainment stats such as those highlighted in the Staff Statistical Report (Advance HE, 2020) do not exist in a vacuum and can be seen to have derived from the obstructive, demotivating and highly stressful learning environments that many minoritised students find themselves in. These environments are notable for the absence of Black and Brown academics.

If we are to swiftly innovate, away from old models, it is pertinent to highlight incentives addressing both personal and professional gains from the recognition of diverse identities and perspectives in both education and the workplace. Enhanced cognitive flexibility and creativity (Leicht, de Moura, & Crisp, 2014) together with competitive advantages positively implicated in profit and business efficacy (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2014), are recognition of powerful outcome of environments featuring exposure to a broader range of thinking and, or counter-cultural heuristics. This acknowledgement is crucial for teamwork within all educational environments and teachers should be directing this vital interaction between individuals and groups. It is also expedient that recognition of global marketplace narratives and logistics requires all students to graduate with culturally competent knowledge beyond the Eurocentric viewpoint.

There are specifics to address. Student evaluations: found to be openly prejudiced against the sector's most underrepresented academics, contribute to further marginalisation of the minoritised voices, *'the very individuals that universities declare to protect, value and are aiming to increase in their workforces,'* (Hefferman, 2021). As recommended by Fashion Roundtable (2021), senior leadership must openly address white supremacy in their institutions and advance beyond *"diversity training to focus on the legacies of structural inequality that inhabit the fashion industry to this day."* As such, the case for normalising the presence of supported and valued minoritised academics, able to educate all students from an anti-racist perspective, as well as progressing these academics to leadership positions, is an imperative. All institutions must prioritise a far broader range of culturally competent educators because all students deserve a race equality education (with purchaser demand for value, unbiased mentoring and pastoral care for wellbeing - a market requirement). In addition, race-aware and race equality questions must be swiftly added to all student surveys in order to present a more accurate picture of minoritised student experience whilst also expose the dearth of minoritised academics in the system.

## Appendix

### Key student examples

### Theme 1: How do we experience our race?

*"I have had many experiences within the English educational system in which I felt my race impacted the validity of my voice".*

*"I always feel the ''different'' one"*

*"I don't feel like I can do things inspired by my culture as no one around me would understand and I have been given weird looks from expressing my culture"*

*"As a Black woman I have often felt out of place in my university and class. Sometimes I struggle to connect with aspects of the course, and I do not feel at all represented"*

*"Nobody listens to my point of view for the projects".*

*"Sometimes I feel a bit less confident in group projects or presentations as there are not many people who look like me."*

*"Feeling of isolation and at times invisible, and forgettable."*

*"It has actually impacted my study horribly and that has made me to shy away about including my race into my design."*

*"Race has created many, many environments where I am the only (or one of a couple) person of colour within a room, my class group, year group, which affects you as you do notice when there isn't anyone that looks like you not only within your class but also amongst the teachers."*

*"As an international student I felt I didn't get as enough "attention" as an English student"*

*"I have experienced enough micro aggressions from the white, middle class students around me who take up a lot of space in the arts - and use their privilege and wealth to an advantage. I have seen too many students culturally appropriating, even my own culture - and they are never called out. This is just a fraction of the way in which I have felt not included being at art school."*

*"I find that because I'm Chinese, people automatically assume we know everything and understand the work. This goes for any students or tutors. I also find that some tutors have favourites in the fashion course when I was in 3rd year. Those favourites were recognised easily, they would get all the help and most time spent with the lecture and whenever there are no lessons going on. Those lecturers would smile and hoover around their tables and see if them want any extra help. But they don't come to us at all and where I sit, it is a full diverse group, we're talking Bulgarian, Thai, British-Indian-African, British-Indian, Chinese, Cypriot, British, African."*

*"Racial issues with students, micro-aggressions, feeling isolated and lonely because of the lack of POC I've met here."*

*"If a white woman wants to recreate looks from her family in the 2000's then it is considered just fun and fashion but as soon as a Somalian woman wants to recreate looks from her family in the 2000's it stems back to race and educating others about race. University is hard enough as it is, to get to grips with the course and teaching but I find that being a minority makes me feel like I need to educate through my work and that even if I just want to do something, I like it's always going to somehow link back to race because I am not white."*

*"The discrepancy in tuition fees do not seem encouraging to international students when they are most often considered "less than" compared to British students in terms of teaching. To really encourage diversity, it should at least be equal on the level of student experience when international students are asked to pay so much more. It feels as though diversity is just a cover to bring in international "cash cows" to boost the British economy."*

**\***

*"No impact"*
*"Race has not impacted the way I study,*
*"Everything's OK"*
*"None."*
*"It hasn't."*
*"I'm OK."*
*"Nothin."*

*"I can't comment because I'm white and I feel it's not my place to."*

*"It hasn't impacted me personally, but I'm surprised it took a worldwide outcry for Black rights for the teaching staff to incorporate more POC artists in my course."*

*"I am white, I understand my privileges and how I can move about society to enable other students to have a voice by sharing their truths about their race."*

*"I think it is important to understand as a university student the perspectives from different races and genders to highlight the real-world issues and not just the glamourous side of the fashion industry."*

*"I am aware of my white privilege but often unaware how to use it best."*

## Theme 2: My learning has been curated through a white lens

*"I find that in everything related to the training of managers etc in fashion, the faculty forces us (young Africans) to have a Western or American perspective on this industry. The continent is relegated to the rank of spectator while it contributes enormously through its culture etc".*

*"I am unable to comfortably implement my culture within the briefs as I am scared that my lectures will simply not understand it and grade it lower."*

*"I have to tie in Black cultural topics I'm interested into the Eurocentric essential reading list for my assessments to get a good grade."*

*"I would ask about post-colonial arts and be told to Google it. At the start of my education, I naively thought this would benefit me, allowing me to structure my own learning but then I began questioning the equality within my education and why I was the only student within my classes who was receiving this treatment."*

*"I don't think it's fair if a student wishes to study something related to western art and culture (which we are often taught about in lectures) tutors seem way more equipped with knowledge to do with those themes than anything non-Western. When I am given guidance or help from tutors, I'm often sign posted to the same artists I've been told about since college!"*

*I feel that when speaking on topics of race some of the teachers implicate their own opinions/ bias when they haven't gone through the struggle of race/racism.*

*"Being the only Black student in my class, and only having one teacher of colour for one course during all my years at college definitely only gave me one side of the fashion industry and only gave us "white" references"*

*"I have done projects based around my heritage and found myself being pressured to supress parts of my identity and culture, to make it more suited to the white, western and modern style of design which is minimal and neutral. I have been asked to tone down the 'chaotic' colours in my work (the colours which I took as inspiration from my culture, and I felt represented it well), and told to fit it more into a modern design. I didn't feel included because of this as my culture in its authentic form isn't minimal and concise and neutral, but I was afraid of being marked down for being 'loud and garish'.*

*"Black students will have a different experience compared to other students. Black students will have the same resume/experience as their other classmates but won't be offered the job based on discrimination. I think this should be talked about as it's the reality of Black students. Hair discrimination, Pay Gaps, Racial harassment etc."*

*"I felt as though when Black and Brown students do projects based on their culture, the tutors don't want to hear it or even know how to approach it - this is why we need more tutors of colour. One of my tutors also told me my designs were too revealing, when the standard for revealing clothing is different in every culture. A white man who produced something very revealing, was incredibly praised by the tutors for doing something 'unique' and not seen before".*

*"It is isolating and unaccepted when I bring about ideas of my culture in my work. I feel pressured to follow a white European aesthetic in my work to please my tutors and to gain their respect, so they support me in turn. I feel we need more Brown and Black tutors to solve this issue, as it does not seem to*

be inclusive and accepting of our diverse cultures. Being the only brown person in my group is also very isolating and intimidating. Students tend to group together with their ethnic backgrounds at first, and this isolates me from being the only brown person."

"I'm always put in groups with the other Black people in the class, there are only 4 of us. There is less focus on us."

"We were studying African textiles and I remember being very excited as I am of African descent. I believed this would be an opportunity for me to delve into my heritage and excel within my course. I used my sketchbook to explore how African art has heavily influenced different European art movements. I focused on the similarities 20th century Cubism has to the art of 18th century Ndebele house paintings which comprises of bright coloured geometric shapes. My teacher saw my work and told me I didn't understand what African art was and that I was focusing on Cubism. She used the Yoruba Indigo Resist-dye patterns as examples of what she said was an African pattern. Though I showed her Esther Mahlangu's work, brought fabrics from Zimbabwe and photographs of my family members wearing garments made with similar patterned fabrics, she refused to accept my research and evidence, insisting I fall in line with her view that only Western African art is authentic African Art. I stood my ground, advocating for Southern African art to also be recognised as authentic African art and in turn received low grades in her class. I remember feeling disheartened after having my first-hand experience of my culture being questioned. I felt my voice and experience as a Black woman wasn't valid unless it aligned with the European gaze and perspective of who I am. Sadly, this has been a constant as I have continued my studies over the past 14 years."

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"I think the predominantly white staff try their best at inclusivity, but for a truly unbiased educational experience they would need to be trained in actively dismantling the inherent bias within the existing system. As a white woman I learn more about the reality of race in the art world from short online videos made for free by activists than I could ever imagine learning from the university."

"The content of the education we receive is 97% focused around white culture". There is no sense that white students should challenge their own work, privilege or prejudices.

"We have had topics such as race and gender taught by cis white people and I feel we need to bring guest lecturers who have first-hand experience to teach us."

"My course focuses on a viewpoint that feels predominately white. The modules fail to look at fashion from the perspective of different races unless taught by our only Black lecturer.

"I'm a Caucasian studied in a 99% Caucasian taught school, we never studied really studied other cultures unless you went out and did that yourself and even then, no one would be able to guide you and keep you on track, so you didn't misrepresent a culture that isn't your own."

"The teaching body has been entirely white, aside from Black technicians, who actually have taught us more than the tutors but do not get credit for that. Because of this lack of diversity there has been no insight into other cultural perspectives in our learning."

"With majority white and only one member of staff being a POC I find some people lacking inclusivity or unwilling to accept the great depths of systematic racism and the level of our privilege."

"As a student of Fashion History and Theory in a predominately white class with an all-white teaching staff I'm definitely aware that the curriculum is not three dimensional."

"I have been educated in a predominantly white environment that hasn't facilitated conversations about race and equality in depth. Most definitely this will have narrowed my education unconsciously through a privileged bias. Race and culture is a topic that I've had to make a conscious effort to educate myself on, outside of my immediate academic environment".

*"I am White Caucasian and I recognise that my white privilege has played a huge part in how I have perceived and experienced my time within education so far. I am constantly represented within the fashion industry no matter where I look, whether it is in campaign imagery, fashion shows, on social media or elsewhere. However, I cannot say the same for my Black and Brown friends. Having those external influences has an enormous influence on us whether we realise it or not, no matter whether it is positive or negative. During my time at university, I have undertaken numerous internships within the fashion industry, from start-up brands to large designer brands, allowing me to witness this lack of inclusivity and diversity within the fashion industry first-hand. There is a drastic need for change, now more than ever. I think it's important to realise that this lack of inclusion within the industry is majorly impacted by our experiences within education. If we have had an inclusive and diverse learning experience it is likely to reflect in our work in the future.*

*"I have only ever had one lecturer of colour within my university experience and therefore I feel my education has been a huge "whitewash". A lot of what I have been led to believe within my education has been solely from a "white" point of view and other points of view have not been considered. It has been hugely biased, and I feel now retrospectively that there are huge gaps in my education within culture, history, literature the list goes on..."*

*"I have noticed a lack of Black/African/Caribbean guest lecturers, designers and staff teaching in the design/lectures department, which I feel could potentially impact how effectively ideas are exchanged."*

*I think it's important to realise that this lack of inclusion within the industry is majorly impacted by our experiences within education. If we have had an inclusive and diverse learning experience it is likely to reflect in our work in the future".*

*"From the perspective of a white academic who is also a student, the lack of a diverse academic and student body and a predominant focus on white academic papers and academic literature has reduced the scope of my learning, presenting narrow cultural perspectives and a lack of discussion about the impact of race on the development of knowledge."*

*"The staff is all white including cleaners, canteen and security, invited guests are all white, there is no diversity at all, I feel that the policy of diversity is just a tick box and not a reflection of what is there on the ground."*

### Theme 3: The importance of Black and Brown lecturers

*"I have not been able to learn from Black lecturers, this has made me feel disconnected with my background."*

*"I have only had 1 ethnic professor in university, but they left during 1st year, after that all have been white.*

*I have noticed a lack of Black/African/Caribbean guest lecturers, designers and staff teaching in the design/lectures department, which I feel could potentially impact how effectively ideas are exchanged."*

*"It would be beneficial to have a variety of lecturers from different backgrounds and races to really understand the fashion industry from different backgrounds. Without the teaching from the only male and only Black lecturer, the course wouldn't look at the fashion industry from any perspective other than white and female.*

*"Whiteness is definitely the centred experience most of the time, and exploring any other topic feels like it's "other" or politically motivated even when that isn't the aim. It's only when non-white tutors are leading discussions that whiteness is de-centred."*

*"Not comfortable to relay certain subject of my work to non-Black tutors. And unable to do so and because there are no permanent Black tutors throughout my course. They also do not understand certain points of views a Black tutor would!!!"*

*"I am one of three Black students on my course which can be very alienating at times. There are no Black academic teaching staff or technical staff on my course which has sometimes affected the help I've received in*

*relation to the concept of my work. For example, my dissertation topic surrounded themes of identity, culture and colonialism with specific case studies from the Caribbean and West Africa. I had no support with the content of my essay, I reached out to multiple external resources for help. I gained more help from asking others including academic teaching staff members from outside my course and at another university. Overall, the art and design department at my university are not equipped for tackling such issues if students wish to explore these themes in their work. The students have to totally rely on external sources and get little to no direction from teaching staff. If there was a more diverse body of staff within my department at university, perhaps I would've found better help and direction with my work."*

*"I am learning in a fake environment that does not in any way emulate the actual world that I live in. This constrains and limits discussions (especially of race). I have been surprised at the naivety and lack of engagement many students have around me of issues of race/intersectionality."*

*"Many times, I found myself arguing against my tutors in moments they were creating microaggressions or operating on racist assumptions. I often felt alone in this effort, and the difficult relationships with tutors that resulted has directly impacted my academic progression."*

*"Being one of very few Black students has meant I often feel isolated when addressing or raising certain issues, like I carry the responsibility to educate or excuse classmates All of these factors mean that participating in class with my full self is uninviting at best and a harmful experience at worst."*

*"So, whenever I have a review, the lecturer would just say the same thing to the international students as well. But it changed when we had an African lecturer, she understood our cultures and even if he/she didn't understand he/she would sit there and push us to talk more about it so that we could include within our work."*

*"There were times when some of my tutors didn't understand the decisions I made for my project as a Black woman which was painful at times."*

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*"As I am white, I am privileged. But every time colonisation, race, cultural appropriation etc come up in theory class the tutors go out of their way to avoid saying even the word colonisation let alone acknowledge how much damage it did. Instead, it is presented to us as "sharing cultures" and the topic of cultural appropriation with heavy racial connotations is presented as a topic for a little fun debate, which encourages insensitive students to speak up saying when their (ALWAYS white) heritage is "appropriated" they're not offended, and neither should black people be. The tutors never call them out, so I try and do that instead but it's hard because 9/10 times the tutors hold the same exact views and it's actually disgusting"*

*"Race isn't something talked about or truly focused on at my university. The curriculum offers a minor part for cultural understandings, but they only have one Black tutor so there are huge gaps in the learning. The only positive is that it is such a free-thinking school you can independently choose to study or lean anything you want about race and culture. The university just won't be as much of a help as there is a great lack of Black staff members. The 2 Black staff members I have met have been amazing but there is not enough of them."*

*"There is no diversity here at this University in terms of teaching staff. There is one Black student that I know of and have had conversations with about the lack of diversity here in the South West and how he has been treated by the police because of this, asking him what he was doing when looking up at architecture on the street. I remember thinking how angry I would be if I was asked questions like this in the pursuit of my art degree. I was born in London and I find I am diminished because of the lack of diversity. There is a richness to life when you are surrounded by diversity from people from all walks of life."*

*"One of friends on my course who is studying her skin colour within art I don't think a lot of the tutors really know how to help progress her as the student body is mainly made up of white people and they lack the education around racial issues to help introduce her to materials like books or journals by Black academics etc that potentially could push her grades."*

"I supported a PhD candidate who was also a POC to go through the application process for a funded PhD last year, and I was deeply surprised that they did not get further through the process. I do not get the impression as a student at this Uni that I am in an institution interested in race equality beyond mouthing the usual platitudes and appointing 'experts' to 'help' the University improve diversity."

"I was lucky enough to be taught by a lecturer of colour. My lecturer brought new, refreshing, and innovating ideas, which then allowed me to think from a completely new perspective. However, through this, I learnt how the university is lacking diversity within its own teaching staff. Having diversity of thought from staff is crucial and this can only be achieved by having staff from different ethnicities and backgrounds. We need more variation."

It's been great having Zoom seminars as we have had way more guest lecturers than usual, which has broadened the voices we're exposed to."

## Theme 4: Aggression and victimisation – the observed behaviours of white teachers and students.

"One of my tutors was on the degree course and they didn't even have a degree. They were defensive, sexist and racist. And laughed at unfunny things, not impressed. I wanted to do well, but they affected my confidence and grades :("

"Some of my lecturers allow other students to degrade and or disrespect another race openly in a team environment without any repercussions."

"Several students (including myself) have had conversations with members of staff who felt it necessary to tell us to "prove the stereotype wrong" and make presumptions that we must be struggling at home - absolutely disgusting behaviour from lecturers."

"I'm mentally and physically exhausted I can't do any more of this. I came into uni with the dream of doing Masters but after these 3 years, I just want to be done. 3 years of feeling out of place and unheard."

"In my first year I had a lecturer say to my face 'I can't believe someone like you made it to uni'. Just one of 4 examples I can give about times when lecturers or students questioned my capabilities despite them being evident in my work. I've gotten 1sts since the start of uni, so the work I produce is good, but they refuse to give us Black students our accolades. I ended up transferring to another institution because of racism. There is institutional racism at university – ask any Black student. Lecturers don't believe in us and see us a lower in value than white students. We are a tuition check to them. That's it! – I stuck it out because my parents encouraged me to believe in myself, but it's been countless times I thought about dropping out due to racism at university."

"One of my lecturers called me aggressive. It affected my learning for over a year."

"There are very few Black students and no Black teachers on my course. I am also aware of the fact that one of my teachers has said a racial slur and is ignorant of race issues."

"Sometimes when students speak out about issues with their lecturers it gets brushed aside and not understanding the bias amongst race inside the classroom. Also, with my experience some of my lecturers allow other students to degrade and or disrespect another race openly in a team environment without any repercussions."

"All the white tutors have limited knowledge of non-white artists and subjects) and often students are pressured into making work about traumatic themes. I have seen COUNTLESS deeply racist comments towards other students, students forced into teaching the other students about intergenerational traumas (many times breaking down sobbing). One member of staff in particular (head of first year, so with a key pastoral care role) must have been complained about hundreds of times. Most of these complaints were not formalised, because of a fear of being ostracised, bullying and an impact on their academic

*progression. However, despite MANY formal complaints, the tutor stayed at least 25 years, protected by other members of staff."*

*"There was an incident where a white male called a Black male in the studio the N word and very little was done about it which I feel impacted everyone in the room's ability to study."*

*" Some teachers need to be more careful with different levels of language understanding with students whose first language isn't English and be more accepting and support them"*

*"It has affected my classmates quite a bit. It saddens me to hear how they are being treated sometimes and I think some tutors have racist ideas that come out in the form of racial slurs and that really makes my friends feel like shit sometimes."*

*"There was an incident, where non-British, specifically non-European students were berated after a presentation, with the rest of the cohort laughing in the background. He has an aggressive feedback style, and when he couldn't understand the accents of students presenting, he would state this rudely and aggressively with other students sniggering in the background. Official complaints were dropped due to the student who came forward finding out that he has complaints against him every year, and nothing happens. He also gave an 'apology' in which he said that he is representing industry, this is how the real world is, and inviting students to come to a presentation he is giving, with the opportunity to provide feedback to him in the same manner."*

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**Further reading**

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**Ends.**