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| **Beds SU Policy Ideal: A student support service that is more representative of the diversity of the UoB student body**  |
| ***Beds SU believes*** *that the University of Bedfordshire should commit to taking a diversity-centred approach to its student support offerings, as well as commit to hiring support staff that are broadly representative of the UoB student body.*  |
| **What are the facts?****UoB’s Current Student Demographic (2022):** * Nearly a quarter (22%) of UoB students are black
* Almost 40% of UoB students identify as male

**UoB’s Current Student Support Team:** * The University of Bedfordshire student support team is comprised of the following staff demographics: 2 White females and 1 Asian female on the counselling team, as well as 1 White female and 1 Asian female on the Mental Health support team (2022).
* Notably excluding male and Black representation.

**Current Mental Health Statistics for Black Communities and Males:*** A study[[1]](#footnote-2) by the Mental Health Foundation UK found that people from black and ethnic minority groups living in the UK are:
	+ more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems
	+ more likely to experience a poor outcome from treatment
	+ more likely to disengage from mainstream mental health services, thereby rendering them more susceptible to experiencing a deterioration in their mental health
* Black communities in particular experience high rates of mental health disorders and have a particularly fraught relationship with seeking treatment.
	+ For example, a UK wide survey[[2]](#footnote-3) conducted by the NHS in 2014 found that
	+ Black British women were 8% more likely than White British women to experience a common mental health disorder – such as depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.
	+ Black men were 10 time more likely to experience a severe mental health condition – or psychotic disorder – than white men.
	+ Yet they are the least likely ethnic group to seek treatment[[3]](#footnote-4).
* Research by Mind[[4]](#footnote-5) shows that men have generally been less likely to seek out mental health treatment and support than women.
* Mental ill health appears to be on the rise in men in the UK-data from YouGov[[5]](#footnote-6) shows that the number of men reporting to regularly feeling worried or low increased from 37% in 2009, to 43% in 2019.

**Current Mental Health/ Counselling Services Statistics:*** A student survey[[6]](#footnote-7) carried out by Cambridge Students’ Union found that 79% of BME respondents felt that they would benefit from seeing a BME counsellor.
* A growing number of universities – including the University of Cambridge and the University of Sheffield[[7]](#footnote-8) – have recently taken steps to embed BME focused support services into the broader student support system.
	+ However, the tendency to treat the BME community as a homogenous group can be problematic.
* Research suggests that the lack of male-centred imagery in the counselling space – coupled with traditional attitudes to masculinity – serves as a major deterrent to men seeking mental health support.
	+ For example, in a study by Hammer & Vogel (2009)[[8]](#footnote-9) which assessed a sample of depressed men who had not sought treatment, it was determined that more presentation of men in the marketing of mental health services increased participants likelihood to undergo therapy for their condition.
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| **How does this impact students?****Current UoB students feel they cannot access support services:** * A student has recently made the SU aware of diversity concerns within the student support team at the University of Bedfordshire, particularly a lack of black staff available on the counselling team.

**Data suggest that poor mental health can impact students in two key aspects of their academic journey – namely retention and awarding.*** OfS study[[9]](#footnote-10) found Black students with a declared mental health condition were shown to have the lowest continuation and attainment rates of all groups under study- in 2017-18, just 53% of black students with a declared mental health condition graduated with a first or 2:1, compared to 77% of all students declaring a mental health condition.
* Data published by the UoB[[10]](#footnote-11) (2019/2020 cohort) showed black UoB students were the least likely ethnic group to graduate with a 2:1- only 50% of black students attained a 2:1 or higher in 2020, compared with 61% of Asian students and 83% of white students.
* UoB data evidence an awarding gap between male and female students, with only 64% of male students graduating with a 2:1 or above in 2020, compared with 71% of female students.
	+ Whilst this problem at the UoB cannot be definitively linked to mental health via the existing data, nationwide data and research suggests a correlation between poor mental health and poor educational outcomes in black students.
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| **What is the Beds SU ideal?**This section sets out the ideal scenario that Beds SU will work towards:* Students should be able to choose a preference for the member of staff they see in student support upon booking.
	+ meaning that students who would – for instance – prefer to see a black counsellor, or a male mental health worker – could declare their wish to do so at the appointment booking stage.
* BME students should not be treated as a homogenous group.
* UoB should seek to have a student support staff base that is broadly representative of key student demographics.
	+ This would mean increasing representation of black staff and increasing representation of male staff.
* For those students less represented in the student body – such as those who identify as LGBTQ+ or disabled – the UoB should seek to establish links with external mental health support organisations that work with these groups and should provide relevant signposting to students.
* The UoB shout commit to the provision of transparent information pertaining to its support services.
	+ For instance, details on the diversity of staff, as well as how to request appointments with staff of certain demographics, should be made available to, and publicised to, students on the website to not deter them from seeking support if they feel they will not be adequately represented in the student support space
* The UoB student support team should commit to monitoring engagement levels with academic welfare support across demographic groups, to provide further necessary data on the issue
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1. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-black-%20asian-and-minority-ethnic-groups> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/health/mental-health/adults-experiencing-common-mental-disorders/latest> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/health/mental-health/adults-receiving-treatment-for-mental-or-emotional-problems/latest> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/6771/get-it-off-your-chest_a4_final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. *iBid (YouGov in Mind)* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://www.race-equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/the_bme_mh_toolkit.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://forgepress.org/2021/05/04/university-counselling-service-introduces-bme-students-support-group/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011000009351937> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/mental-health-conditions-compound-equality-gaps-in-higher-education/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.beds.ac.uk/about-us/our-governance/public-information/transparency-information/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)