

Why we reject the report authored by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

University entrance: the report notes that the largest proportion of White university students attend elite universities. In contrast, the smallest proportion of black university students attend elite universities. They are instead the most likely to attend 'low tariff' universities, such as former polytechnics.

University outcomes: the report notes that, 'Once at university, ethnic minority students – with the exception of Asian students – are more likely to drop out, have lower levels of attainment, and lower earnings after graduating.' It notes that White students have the highest percentage of first class degrees at 32%, and Black students with the lowest percentage at 15%.

Main take-away: the report states that it 'found no evidence of systemic or institutional racism'. It claims that insufficient student motivation, single parent households and poverty are alternative explanations for racial disparities. And it further states that greater attention should be paid to geographic disparities and 'White underachievement'.

2. How does the report aim to address racial disparities in education?

The report focuses primarily on whole-school interventions, arguing that 'interventions [should not] single out ethnic minority groups from the White majority. It is about collectively raising standards for all children based on what works to boost opportunity. A rising tide really can raise all boats.' The report includes a set of formal recommendations, as well as informal recommendations in the preface, introduction and conclusion. We list some of the main ones here.

Lengthen the school day: the report claims that 'many academies and free schools, which tend to outperform council-run schools, have used their autonomy to lengthen the school day' and recommends that similar programmes should be implemented in council-run schools. It further suggests the use of (i)5(l)5(dF)13(g)-8u-80003}TJETac4(i)20(m)-14dc(s)-4(s)22eW*nBT[005570058>87(

Create alternatives to negative calls for decolonisation: the report puts forward the 'Making of Modern Britain' teaching resource as a response to negative calls for 'decolonising' the curriculum. Neither the banning of White authors or token expressions of Black achievement will help to broaden young minds. We have argued against bringing down statues, instead, we want all children to reclaim their British heritage. We want to create a teaching resource that looks at the influence of the UK, particularly during the Empire period. It states that 'There is a new story about the Caribbean experience which speaks to the slave period not only being about profit and suffering but how culturally African people transformed themselves into a re-modelled African/Britain.'

Area-targeted school funding: the report does not recommend any changes to 'the work of levelling-up funding for schools through the recently introduced national funding formula' as the full benefits of this work 'have not yet had a chance to materialise.' The report instead recommends that new funding should be used to target 'area-based' disparities in education.

University outreach in schools: the report recommends that the Office for Students issue stronger guidance on funding outreach programmes and placing university outreach staff in schools to help reduce disparities in applications at an earlier stage.

Apprenticeships: the report 'encourages the Government to encourage more minority students to take up apprenticeships as an alternative to pursuing university studies.'

3. Why do we reject the report?

Shoddy use of evidence: a [number of experts and organisations quoted in the report have objected](#) to their inclusion on the grounds that the evidence base for the claims made in the report is very weak, and that their research findings have been intentionally misconstrued or falsely reported. We agree. For example, the report repeatedly claims that privately-run academies outperform government-run schools, without providing evidence for these claims. It further claims that academies should be used as the model for school-based interventions targeting racial disparities, without considering the evidence of [higher rates of exclusion](#) of black and impoverished students from these academies.

Similarly, the report claims that 'minorities who have been long established in a country,

However, the report also notes the strong statistical relationship between race and class in terms of income levels, job type, unemployment prospects, social housing, and free school meals. As such, the report contradicts itself.

Related to this, insofar as the report disaggregates racial categories by income and gender, it appears to take an intersectional approach. But instead of considering how different vectors of inequality interact with each other, the report seems to assume that the presence of one set of vectors (class and geographical inequalities) precludes the explanatory role of others (race and ethnicity).

Discredited conceptualisation of race: related to this, the report seems to assume that race is an exogenous variable, which is wholly determined by people's phenotype and therefore immune to socio-economic factors. While phenotype often plays an important role in constructions of race, the well-documented malleability of race, and its expression of economic and social power has given rise to a consensus scholarly view that race is an [endogenous variable](#), and therefore subject to bidirectional causation with factors such as class and social status. In other words, racial disparities in education do not only stem from individual discrimination, by which an individual treats people with the same characteristics unequally (for example, when [employers reject](#) Black candidates with the same education qualifications at much higher rates than White candidates). Racial disparities also stem from social mechanisms, such as constraints on accessing services or assets, which are in turn informed by race (for example, [laws penalising nomadic cultures](#) make it difficult for Irish Travellers to access housing, education and employment). Both channels feed into each other, thereby hindering linear causal narratives. As [Prof Kalwant Bhopal has argued](#), the report's failure to recognise this has meant that the report misconstrues and misunderstands racism as a form of personal animus based purely on skin colour, rather than an interlocking system of discriminatory policies and practices.

Ex ante exclusion of racism as an explanatory factor: the report divides racial disparities into two categories:

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Closing comments

The report singles out ‘the idealism of those well-intentioned young people [in the Black Lives Matter protests] who have held on to, and amplified, this inter-generational mistrust.’ This mistrust, the report argues, contributes to Black people’s lack of optimism about their future, and is partially responsible for racial disparities. The implied suggestion then, is that opposition to racism, instead of racism itself, drives racial inequality. This argument is premised on demonstrably false claims, and its vilification of student protests is not only a failure to recognise the value of student activism; it is a failure to recognise the value of a democratic and egalitarian politics.

We therefore reject the report on empirical, conceptual and ethical grounds. It offers a distorted and harmful perspective of racism in the UK. Its mistrust of democratic protest is antithetical to the way we see the world and the way that we work. And its lack of belief in you, as students and as young people, is in direct opposition to the central hope of education - that students will one day overcome the failings of their teachers.