

# Final implementation and process evaluation report: Nottingham Trent University – Black Leadership Programme (BLP)

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## 1. Executive summary

This report was commissioned by The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) to help establish how institutional data can be used to support better evaluation of the student experience. The report supplements work by the external evaluator for this project, which will provide a flagship evaluation of one of Nottingham Trent University's (NTU) post-entry activities, the Black Leadership Programme (BLP).

### 1.1. Project team

The research underpinning this report was undertaken by colleagues in the Research and Insights Team of NTU's Centre for Student and Community Engagement (CenSCE). These colleagues were:

- Bec Aeddi (Research and Evaluation Coordinator)
- Zsanett Bicsak (Research and Evaluation Officer)
- Pete Crowson (Research and Evaluation Coordinator)
- Laura Hope (Research and Data Coordinator)
- Mike Kerrigan (Head of Research and Insights)

### 1.2. Project description

There are three key components of NTU's project objectives:

1. Undertake an Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) of NTU's BLP, underpinned by qualitative research with both prospective and previous participants of the programme. This would triangulate the findings of the flagship evaluation and

- enhanced Theory of Change (ToC) undertaken by the external evaluator.
2. Map common post-entry activities to contribute to a new post-entry activity typology, similar to TASO's Mapping Outcomes and Activities Tool (MOAT), and explore the transition to recording activities and participants onto an existing national pre-entry outreach tracker.
  3. Use institutional data to track educational outcomes of participants of extracurricular post-entry interventions and triangulate with an overarching ToC. This is envisaged to contribute to a practical guide to how data infrastructure can be used or developed within HEPs to enable tracking of activities and outcomes.

This report provides a rationale, methodology and findings of the first of these components, to support and triangulate the BLP flagship evaluation using institutional data and developing an enhanced ToC undertaken by the external evaluator. The second and third components of the above project objectives are published separately as stand-alone practical guides to support the sector in embedding data infrastructure and subsequent impact evaluations of post-entry activities.

### 1.3. Key conclusions from the Black Leadership Programme Implementation and Process Evaluation

The Black Leadership Programme (BLP) is designed to empower black undergraduate students to gain confidence and become resilient leaders through a series of hands-on events and community-building activities throughout the academic year. The intervention is designed to increase black heritage students' social capital, confidence, and ultimately engagement in all aspects of their university experience at NTU, primarily by facilitating a space for black heritage students who are at higher risk of isolation in academic and social spaces. The key conclusions drawn from the research were:

1. The BLP does not '*change*' the participants' self-identity. Instead, it provides an environment where they can present their authentic selves, re-evaluate their sense of self, and connect with role models to inform their 'possible selves'. There is good evidence that participants feel empowered and pride in who they are, as a result of participation.
2. The influence of community and social connections on participants is strong. Although evidence of a developed 'BLP community' in itself is mixed, there is strong evidence that participants build social connections through the BLP, that

benefit them academically and professionally. Learning from the programme also leads to participants building and strengthening communities outside of the BLP and NTU.

3. The development of soft skills (such as confidence, resilience, and communication skills) was seen as a key reason for participation, and is considered as the foundation for strong leaders. There is evidence of soft skill development, with participants giving several examples of how they engage and communicate differently with learning inside the classroom, persist in the face of challenges, and engage with university life more widely.
4. While participants were keen to seize opportunities targeted towards their ethnic group, there were some questions about whether this targeting had their personal interests at heart. However, these were addressed upon attendance, where participants understood the programme ethos of 'for us, by us', and were positively impacted by the programme. There is also good evidence that participation leads to students feeling a stronger sense of belonging at NTU, and mattering to NTU, as a result of participation.
5. There were several key highlights from the programme (both as individual sessions and experiences), as well as more holistically relating to feelings of collectivism and shared values of self-development, that were unique to this programme. The majority of suggestions for improvement related not to fundamental changes, but to increased expansion, visibility, and access of the programme itself.

#### 1.4. Key recommendations from the Black Leadership Programme Implementation and Process Evaluation

The key recommendations drawn from the research were:

##### **1. Improve the understanding of challenges related to black students.**

This report specifically details the experiences of a small number of students. Although insightful, this is far from representative of what is a large and diverse group of students. A significant amount of further research is required not only to understand the challenges that black students face, but to better define the variety of student groups within this categorisation.

## **2. Explore the use of role models and social connections within recruitment to NTU.**

Several students described their motivation to go to NTU as being almost directly a result either of friends, family, or key figures and role models prior to applying to university. Often, these students only had a vague idea of what NTU could offer them, and the unique selling points of the university. Instead, they had made their decision to apply based on the recommendation or example of a trusted figure. Student recruitment and outreach opportunities could look to make better use of these social connections, not only to recruit to the university, but to inform prospective students of what to expect if they choose to come to NTU after completing Further Education.

## **3. Improve and develop marketing and communication about the BLP.**

Many participants of the BLP described how they were interested in the idea of the BLP, but knew little about the programme itself up until the point they participated. Some described initially dismissing the opportunity, or missing the advertisement entirely, and regretted not acting on this awareness earlier and involving peers in the application process. It is recommended therefore that the promotion of the BLP itself is expanded, not only in terms of the amount of promotion, but in better communicating the content of the programme, and what participants can expect when they attend.

## **4. Closer integration with scheduled teaching and timetabling**

Several described missing sessions or opportunities available to them through the BLP, due to timetabling clashes with scheduled teaching. One of the main suggestions made by students was to better enable them to attend more sessions by ensuring that BLP sessions were better integrated with their scheduled teaching, or repeating sessions in the event of a clash. This not only allows more participants to be involved, but increases the 'dose' (i.e. number of sessions attended by participants), and thereby increasing the effectiveness of the BLP itself.

## **5. Increase the number of external speakers and networking opportunities**

One of the main outcomes of the BLP was the increase in social and professional networks. Several participants commented that this aspect in particular benefitted them both personally (in terms of friends and acquaintances at university), but also professionally (in terms of the number of potential career development opportunities). An expanded network within university links to an increase in belonging and engagement with other extracurricular activities, and has wider benefits for the students beyond academia. Several participants asked for more opportunities to build their network, and connect with industry professionals, particularly black professionals who had a shared experience, in order to expand their social opportunities further.

## 6. Expand the scope of the BLP

Currently, the BLP is predominantly aimed at second year students, with the opportunity for other undergraduate students to participate in the community building events. Most students felt that the programme was beneficial to them in its current form, however could be more impactful if it ran during previous or subsequent academic years. In addition, many asked for the programme to take more students overall; not only to ensure more have the opportunity to benefit from the BLP, but to also enhance the social networking possibilities of the programme itself.

### 2. Introduction to the Black Leadership Programme intervention

#### 2.1. Background and rationale for intervention

Throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century, across both the sector and NTU, there has been a consistent degree awarding gap between different advantaged and disadvantaged student groups (Mounford-Zimdars et al, 2015), none more so than between white students and some Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. Despite a renewed focus on such disparities of attainment, as evidenced by the Office for Students (2023) continuing to include degree attainment gaps by ethnicity in its key performance measures, these inequalities persist.

Whilst the term BAME has been used as a label for a group of students who may be disadvantaged, this in itself is problematic. Bunglawala (2019), for example, describes how the only commonality between individuals within the BAME community is that they are non-white. In fact, this label masks a wide range of cultures, backgrounds, experiences, issues, and assets. Breaking this label down highlights an important sub-group; black heritage students, who are particularly susceptible to disadvantages within HE. This sub-group includes Black African, Black Caribbean and Other Black Backgrounds, with all being considerably less likely, across the sector, to be awarded an upper second or a first class degree (AdvanceHE, 2021), and have lower average earnings and employment rates post-graduation (Department for Education, 2023).

The reasons behind these disparities are multifaceted, and despite significant research and literature, still not fully understood. This in part is due to the indirect and complex nature of the problem; the awarding gaps are not a direct result of one specific issue, but a symptom of a wider spectrum of issues that are caused by societal, sector-wide, and institutional factors (Mounford-Zimdars et al, 2015). These can be exacerbated by issues that may be personal or individual, and influenced by each person's intersectional demography and complex history. Research has found that factors which disproportionately impact black students include financial difficulties, lack of time as a



resource, lack of facilities and support, challenges in the transition into the HE environment, lack of confidence, lack of representation and role models (particularly in leadership positions and future careers), and social integration, including belonging and relationship building (Connor et al, 2004). The latter issues in particular have been subject to further investigation in recent years, and are the main focus of the intervention subject to this report.

Additional research into each of these areas provides evidence of the influence of these factors. For example, there is significant evidence that black students face more challenges in adapting to the UK HE educational environment, and that this challenge is compounded for those that were previously educated in a different country (Dhanda, 2009; Shaheen, 2016). A lack of 'preparedness for success' is also a factor disproportionately affecting black students (Singh, 2011), as is a lack of role models in leadership positions (Universities UK, 2019). Carson (2009) identified that black students are more likely to report feeling socially isolated, and experience 'microaggressions' and stereotyping. Walton & Cohen (2011) described how the cumulative effects of these stressors can subsequently lead to poor academic performance, as well as poor psychological outcomes. From a UK perspective, research conducted at a northern English university reflected these feelings of isolation and lack of belonging amongst their black student population (Davies and Garrett, 2012), highlighting the importance of these issues contributing, in part, to the black / white degree awarding gap.

Representation, belonging, mattering, and other related issues noted above all play a role in student behaviour and decision making, not just within university, but even prior to enrolment. For example, Read, Archer, and Leathwood (2003), after interviewing black students at a post-1992 UK university found that many based their decision of which university to go to on the proportion of people 'like them' at that institution.

## 2.2. The Black Leadership Programme Intervention

Many of the interventions delivered to tackle equality gaps had been positively *promoted* to specific target groups, but were available to all. Few interventions had been exclusively targeted at black heritage students; a group known to have, on average, the lowest rates of success across all ethnicities. To address this potential shortcoming and tackle some of the noted challenges and issues, the Black Leadership Programme (BLP) was initiated at NTU in the 2019/20 academic year, and has grown and evolved considerably since inception.

The BLP is designed to increase black heritage students' social capital, confidence, and ultimately engagement in all aspects of their university experience at NTU, primarily by facilitating a space for these students who are at higher risk of isolation in academic and social spaces. The programme offers participants the opportunity to develop leadership

skills alongside building characteristics such as belonging, empowerment and mattering, all of which have been shown to be associated with improved attainment (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Goodenow, 1993).

The BLP's significance extends beyond NTU; it is replicable in other institutions and NTU is currently establishing a cross-institutional network to achieve this. This has the potential to tackle ethnicity degree awarding gaps on a large scale, and address gaps in representation in leadership roles across the higher education sector.

The programme has changed in scope and size over time. In the first two years of delivery (2019-20 and 2020-21) the BLP was delivered to 40-50 Level 5 black heritage students. This doubled in the 2021-22 academic year to circa 100, and by the most recent year (2023-24) expanded further to over 150 core participants (Table 1). There is also expansion in the work with Level 4 first year UG students for early intervention purposes and final year (Level 6), allowing for more embedded mentoring and practical application of leadership skills among participants.

Table 1: Applications and places offered on BLP core programme

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
<b>Number of eligible students</b>	Data Unavailable	1086	1362	1570	1618
<b>Total number of applications from eligible students</b>	Data Unavailable	103	103	133	220
<b>% of eligible students making an application</b>	Data Unavailable	9.5%	7.6%	8.5%	13.6%
<b>Total number of offered places</b>	36	53	103	111	153

The programme currently consists of:

- Launch event (Level 5 UG students)
- 'GRIT' resilience and leadership workshops (Level 5 UG students)
- Black studies workshops (Level 5 UG students)
- Employability workshops (Level 5 UG students)
- Culture opportunities (Level 5 UG students)
- Alumni mentoring (Level 5 UG students)
- Community and networking events (All UG)

- Celebration event (All UG)
- BLP Student Panel (Level 6 UG students )

In addition to the growth in numbers of participants, the timeline of the programme has also changed. Initially, the programme ran from February to June (effectively, only across terms 2 and 3). From the 2022/23 academic year, the programme has run across November through to June, with the majority of formal activities completed by March. This is for three main reasons; to ensure intervention is in place at an earlier stage, to mitigate against retention issues, and to enable a more sustained behaviour change to take place across a long period.

During the 2020-21 academic year, delivery of the programme was entirely conducted virtually, utilising software such as MS Teams to facilitate live sessions. This was a temporary measure in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which directly and negatively impacted on the design of the programme.

Some small changes have been made to the content of activities as the BLP expanded over the past few years (Table 2). In the first year (2019-20) of the BLP, the 'self' and 'development' events consisted solely of a two day 'GRIT' workshop and Leadership workshops delivered by an external black professional facilitator. In the second year (2020-21), a 'speed networking' event was added, along with a mentoring programme and an online 'employability' module (the latter was subsequently removed due to low engagement and high input costs). In the third year (2021-22), community building events were significantly expanded, and the 'strengths profile' and 'alumni workshops' (Black Workforce sessions) were added. Finally in the last academic year (2022-23), a new black professional facilitator was added, along with increased activities for Level 4 and Level 6 students, and a higher profile celebration event. In the present academic year (2023-24), Black studies and Mental Health workshops (in partnership with the University of Nottingham) was added, along with increased community building events. The GRIT programme was also expended to a 4 day programme, allowing for an increased 'dose' of the programme.

Table 2: Evolvement of the Black Leadership Programme\*

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
No. of participants	36	53	101	111	153
2-day GRIT workshop	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
4-day GRIT workshop	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes

Leadership workshop	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Speed Networking	No	Yes	No	No	No
Mentoring programme	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online employability	No	Yes	No	No	No
Black workforce workshops	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community and network events (All UG Levels)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
BLP Student Panel (Level 6 UG)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Celebration event (All UG Levels)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

\* Unless stated otherwise, the activity was delivered to Level 5 students only

### 2.3. Intervention aims and objectives

Activities delivered as part of the BLP are designed to positively influence participants’:

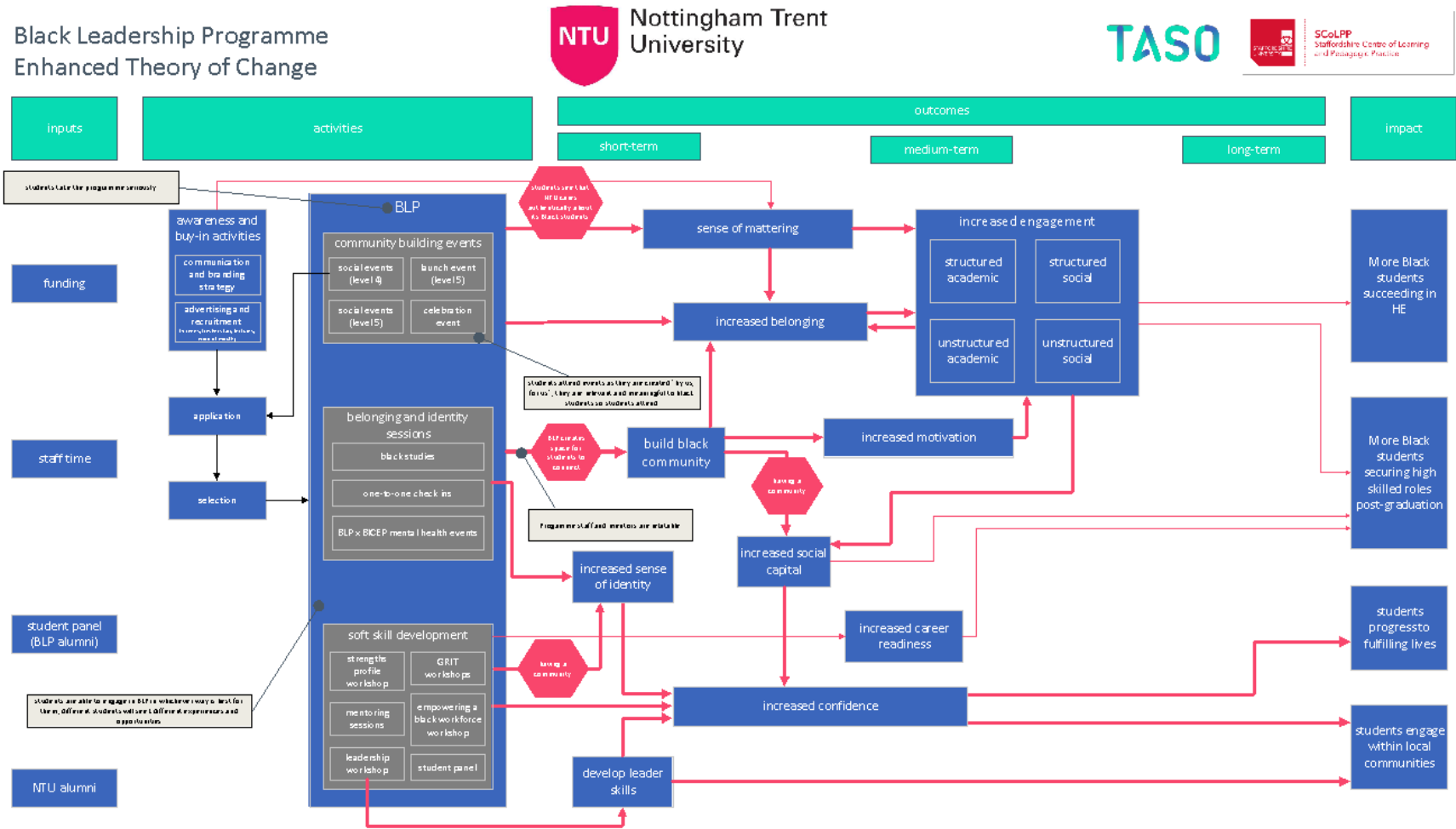
- awareness, understanding and buy-in of the programmes aims
- soft and professional skills
- feelings of identity, representation and sense of belonging
- trust in themselves, their university and wider community
- engagement on their course, careers opportunities and within their own communities.

These outcomes, in turn, are theorised to have an impact on students overall on-course and post-HE outcomes. Indeed, with a strong foundation of literature and supporting research, the BLP is envisaged to enhance participants sense of ‘mattering’ and ‘belonging’, which are understood to have a direct and positive impact on motivation to engage in academia (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Goodenow, 1993). Subsequently, this increase in engagement is directly correlated with an improvement in academic performance (Foster & Siddle, 2019). Another significant focus of the BLP is the empowerment of the individual students and their self-identity; this includes their ‘hyphenated self’ (Fine, 1994), e.g. what it means to be black; their ‘narrative-self’ (Trahar, 2009), which references their personal stories; and ‘possible-self’ (Markus & Nurious, 1986), such as envisioning themselves as a future leader. This development and empowerment of the ‘self’ links to both improvements in mental health and

wellbeing, and academic outcomes, through changing behaviours (Oyserman et al, 2006). All of these intermediate outcomes and changes in behaviour are mapped against Tinto's Theory of Student Integration model (Tinto, 2012), taking a holistic view of engagement, and how improving both academic and social integration has strong links to both attainment, and retention.

Ultimately, therefore, the BLP aims to address student attainment *indirectly*, through its intermediate outcomes relating to personal development, community building, and empowerment. This is illustrated in the enhanced ToC (Figure 1), developed in conjunction with the external evaluator, which the Implementation and Process Evaluation aims to test.

**Figure 1: Black Leadership Programme Enhanced Theory of Change**



## 2.4. Existing evidence

The BLP has evolved (as described in Section 2.2) based on feedback from key stakeholders, including black heritage students. The research upon which the Implementation and Process Evaluation findings are based was undertaken during the first term of the current academic year 2023/24. Therefore, until this year there has been limited systematic evaluation of the programme. However, the participant outcomes have been tracked and compared with non-participants as part of NTU's own reporting and monitoring processes. Whilst this internal analysis is not within the scope of this project (hence institutional data has been shared with the external evaluator to enable them to undertake an independent flagship impact evaluation, informed by the development of the enhanced ToC above), the preliminary analysis indicated that the BLP contributed to improved student outcomes (further details below). The methodologies adopted will be adapted in a more comprehensive data analysis exercise (as part of this project) of a number of student success interventions, to inform a practical guide as to how data infrastructure can be used or developed within HEPs to enable tracking of activities and participant outcomes.

In the absence of randomisation of participant selection, alternative statistical methodologies were employed to provide strong Type 2 evidence (empirical enquiry), according to the Office for Students' standards of evidence.<sup>1</sup> Case-control statistical matching was employed, which is a process regularly used in observational studies to reduce (although not necessarily eliminate) selection bias to provide an approximation of a randomised controlled trial, in order to assess the effectiveness of the intervention (Shapiro, 2008). This matching process, triangulated with separate logistic regression analysis, provided an indication that BLP participants were more likely to achieve higher average grades than their non-participating counterparts, when controlling for other important factors (including the highly influential grades achieved in their previous year of study). Indeed, 44% of BLP participants achieved Level 5 grade based assessment (GBAs) grades equivalent to at least a 2:1, compared with a control group of 36%, who shared the same characteristics and prior (Level 4) grades, but did not participate in the programme. The participants were also tracked in terms of their final degree attainment in the year/s after participation in the core programme. 62% of participants achieved at least a 2:1 (with 15% achieving a First Class degree), compared with 53% of non-participants from the control group (with 5% achieving a First).

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<sup>1</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/)

Whilst the rates of success were higher amongst the BLP participants against a robust comparator group, the results were not statistically significant, primarily due to relatively low participant sample sizes. Therefore, we cannot be certain that the control groups represent a wholly accurate counterfactual; i.e. what the treatment group would have achieved in the absence of the BLP. Nevertheless, the analysis provided very strong evidence of promise, in terms of the positive impact of the BLP on student success. These findings will be triangulated with the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) and the findings of the separate flagship evaluation undertaken by the external evaluator.



### 3. Implementation and process evaluation: Black Leadership Programme

#### 3.1. Methodology

The implementation and process evaluation (IPE) uses predominantly qualitative methods in order to provide context for the quantitative data analysed by the external evaluator, as part of the flagship impact evaluation. In all cases, qualitative interview recordings were transcribed using Otter.AI software, before researchers manually edited and completed the transcription for quality-control and anonymity purposes.

The IPE contains 3 phases:

- **Phase 1:** Interviews with Level 5 participants of the programme in the 2022-23 academic year following completion of the programme (the post-intervention sample, interviewed when they were Level 6). A total of 11 students (six female, five male) were interviewed as part of this phase; nine online via MS Teams and two in-person on campus.
- **Phase 2:** Focus groups held with Level 5 students who had been shortlisted to participate in the 2023-24 academic year, prior to the welcome event (the pre-intervention sample). Four focus groups were delivered in person, on campus to a total of 13 students (nine female, four male).
- **Phase 3:** Informal collaboration with highly engaged participants of the Level 5 programme in the 2022-23 academic year, to test the underlying ToC.

#### 3.2. Statement of research questions

The primary research theme of interest that the impact evaluation (carried out by the independent evaluator), supplemented by the IPE, seeks to address is:

- *To understand and describe the long-term outcomes and overall impact of participation in the Black Leadership Programme on target students.*

Breaking this down further, informed by the literature, there are several areas of focus that contribute to achieving the primary aim; these include motivation, barriers, capital, influences, process and solutions. This leads to several secondary issues of interest listed below:

- *Does involvement in the BLP reinforce or affect participants' self-identity or self-concept?*
- *Does involvement in the BLP influence student communities or social connections?*
- *Does involvement in the BLP improve participants' soft skills or abilities?*
- *How does participation in the BLP change student perceptions of NTU itself?*
- *What can the BLP do differently to improve outcomes for participants?*

These issues form a general structure to inform the specific IPE research questions. The process effectively involves backwards mapping – we cannot seek to identify process and implementation requisites without first considering the overall impact that the BLP is envisaged to have on its participants, informed by the ToC (Figure 1). Specifically, “*what can the BLP do differently to improve outcomes for participants?*” is a key consideration for the IPE and needs to be broken down more comprehensively into supplementary questions. These will take the form of specific research questions, shown in section 3.3.1.

### 3.3. Overview of IPE design and methods

#### 3.3.1. Specific Research Questions

The specific research questions the IPE is envisaged to address, as informed by the literature and the above statement are:

- ***IPE-RQ1 (Implementation): How was the programme implemented and what are the barriers and facilitators to implementation?***

In considering this question, we can consider the following themes:

- **Fidelity:** What was done, how was it implemented, when and where did it take place?
- **Adaptation:** What changes were made, when and why? What effect on perceptions of impact?
- **Dosage:** How much of the programme was delivered?
- **Reach:** To what extent should this programme involve Level 4 and 6 black students, in addition to level 5 students? and Is the programme marketed and communicated effectively to target students?
- **Context:** What is the perceived value and impact of black professionals themselves in delivering the programme?

- ***IPE-RQ2 (Responsiveness): To what extent did students engage with the intervention in line with intervention aims?***

In considering this question, we can consider the following themes:

- To what extent are participants able to engage in the programme as a result of the pedagogical approach?
- To what extent is the relationship between student engagement in the programmes impacted by the involvement of black professionals

- To what extent is the relationship between student engagement in the programme impacted by the '*black-only environment*'?

**IPE-RQ3 (Mechanisms and perceived impact): Was the BLP effective in delivering the aims of the programme? Did it achieve desired outcomes and impact?**

In considering this question, we can consider the following themes:

- Did the BLP enhance participants' feelings of identity, representation, belonging and mattering?
- Did the BLP contribute to an increase in participants' trust in themselves and their university?
- Did the BLP influence participants' engagement on their course?
- Did the 'black-only environment' contribute to the desired outcomes of the programme?
- Did the BLP contribute to improved participant attainment?

### *3.3.2. Research Methods*

The first phase of interviews with former participants of the Level 5 programme (now studying Level 6 at the time of interview) were semi-structured, permitting themes to develop that may have been previously unexplored. The interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes long and conducted predominantly online via MS Teams. The second phase of the research – focus groups with Level 5 students accepted onto the 2023/24 programme – were similarly semi-structured and of a similar length. Unlike the interviews, the focus groups were primarily conducted in-person, on campus.

A detailed breakdown of the methodologies adopted and the rationale behind them can be found in Appendix 1 and 2. The semi-structured interview schedules for phase 1 and focus group schedules for phase 2 are provided in Appendix 3 and 4.

### *3.3.3. Sample and data sources*

Participants for phase 1 (interviews) were recruited through an invitation to attend an interview, via email from the BLP coordinator. After an expression of interest was returned, participants were selected from the sample to ensure participants were from a representative range of demographic backgrounds (such as ethnic groups, gender, nationality, and other demographic characteristics), as well as a variety of academic indicators (such as NTU School, attainment, and engagement ratings), according to the NTU Student Dashboard.

Participants for phase 2 (focus groups) were initially offered the opportunity to participate in focus groups as part of their registration to participate in the BLP itself. Participants who indicated they would be happy to participate were subsequently contacted via email and invited to take part in the research. Again, participants were selected from the sample to ensure participants were from a representative range of demographic backgrounds (such as ethnic groups, gender, nationality, and other demographic characteristics), as well as a variety of academic indicators (such as NTU School, attainment, and engagement ratings), according to the NTU Student Dashboard.

Participants in both phase 1 and 2 were compensated for their time with a shopping voucher of £20. A full breakdown of the sample by the above demographic factors has not been included in this report, as this would risk the enabling of individuals' identification.

#### *3.3.4. Analytical approach*

The interviews and focus groups generated qualitative feedback which was auto-transcribed using OtterAI software. In the attempt to answer the above research questions, the transcripts were coded into overarching themes initially identified (using NVivo qualitative analysis software), before drilling down into more specific sub-themes. In effect, the research team conducted several 'waves' of analysis, to collate themes into large categories, before drilling down into more specific themes in subsequent coding 'waves'. This thematic coding was undertaken by two members of the research team, with their categorisations regularly cross referenced to ensure consistency and that important themes were not overlooked. Wave 1, carried out by Researcher A, consisted of a general overview with overarching theming. This was replicated independently by Researcher B in Wave 2. Following the collations of the independent themes derived from Waves 1 and 2, Researcher B carried out more in depth coding, effectively digging into those themes for which greater detail was sought. The results of the first three Waves were discussed with the lead co-ordinator of the BLP, to determine any further specific themes and sub-themes, which were collated in Wave 4 by both researchers concurrently.

#### 3.4. Ethics

Ethical approval for the evaluation of the BLP required a full ethical submission to NTU's AADH (Schools of Art and Design, Arts and Humanities, and Architecture, Design and the Built Environment) Research Ethics Committee.

A research application includes details of research scope, methodology, participants, data management and interview schedules to be used during the interview. The ethics application and supplementary data management plan was submitted on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023, and was reviewed by two members of the AADH ethical approval panel. Ethical approval was returned on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023 by the reviewers with a 'favourable opinion', with unique reference ID 1809376.

### 3.5. Findings

These findings are based on phase 1 and phase 2 of the research methodology. Shorthand is used to identify the anonymised participants thus:

- Phase 1 'post-intervention' interviews (those who participated in the BLP in the 2022-23 academic year) are referred to as "*Phase 1, interview x*".
- Phase 2 'pre-intervention' focus groups (those who were due to participate in the BLP in the 2023-24 academic year) are referred to as "*Phase 2, focus group x*".

The research followed a generalised structure in four overarching areas: 1) understanding the participants' identity and history, 2) understanding their wider experiences and ideals, 3) their preconceived views and perceptions of the BLP, and 4) their experiences of participating in it. Collectively, this provided structure for the feedback from participants through this evaluative research project.

The significant difference between phase 1 and phase 2, relates to the fourth area listed above. For the phase 1 group, participants were able to draw on their own experience of participating in the programme, whereas in the phase 2 group, participants gave views and opinions on the experiences they expect to have. While this may not seem directly comparable, it does provide context to measure actual against imagined experiences.

#### 3.5.1 *Participants: Identity and history*

##### ***Heritage***

The majority of Phase 1 and Phase 2 participants were home students, growing up in the UK. Of these, four British students had moved to the UK at a very young age. Although these participants have only vague memories of this, their parental narratives and experiences had an impact on the participants themselves, influencing their sense of self. Other participants were international students, coming to study in the UK from other countries in both Europe and Africa. Their situation was distinct and presented

their own challenges; for example one participant described VISA problems and painful separation from their family. Regardless of home or international status, the vast majority of participants identified themselves as ethnically African or African-British with only two participants of Caribbean descent. When discussing background however, almost half not only described country, but described their ethnic ‘tribe’ (such as Yoruba, Kikuyu, Igbo, Isoko) as being an important part of their identity, including its historical importance, language, and culture. This ‘tribal’ identity in part allows the individuals to feel part of a distinct community.

In addition to cultural heritage (whether national, tribal, or another grouping) the history of their name was also significant. Almost half of the students argued that their names are an important part of their self-identities (*Phase 1, Interview 5, 6, 7, 9, 11*). For example, one participant explained the family name is a “beautiful” part of self-identification as there is a “history behind it”, while another emphasised their connection to their family through their surname. A family name expresses one’s belonging, and a responsibility for representing the family and embracing the family’s culture and expectations. For most participants, not only the family name (or surname) was meaningful, but so was their first name. Several described how there was often a story or history behind their first name, particularly if it was not Anglo-centric or western. The impact of this is revisited later when looking at outcomes of the BLP itself.

### ***Upbringing***

The influence of parents was significant for most participants, where home lives were often characterised by strong values and parenting styles. Regardless of family structures, most participants faced high expectations, both in terms of academic performance, and graduate outcomes. Similarly, most international students interviewed explained that they felt a pressure and expectation to not only attend university, but to study abroad, make connections, and succeed professionally.

Familial expectations often stem from parents’ ambitions to secure stable lives for their children. These aspirations often manifest in specific job preferences; almost half mentioned the high prestige of occupations such as doctor or lawyer, choosing this educational pathway. Some were driven by familial pride, leading parents to compare their children’s achievements with other children, and subsequently pressure the participants to acquire a university education. Other participants described the impact of role models within their families, providing an intrinsic motivation to succeed and a blueprint of hard-work and aspirational behaviour.

*“University was an expectation from me, but it was also a goal I had in mind personally as well. I think it was only an expectation due to status and just to fit in, like with a lot of West African culture... they like to compare their kids [and] what they're doing, "Oh, my kid goes [to] university here. My kids are doctors". That's why it was more of an expectation. It seems like they placed so much value in what your kids doing and is a bit toxic. But that's why it was mainly their expectation on me.” (Phase 1, interview 9)*

An interesting family dynamic referenced in multiple interviews was the oldest child (or older cousins and siblings) having a special role, serving as both a high-achiever and a significant example for the younger siblings. As a result, several participants described how they felt a personal ‘responsibility’ to lead.

While some described the discipline they received, and pressure to achieve as a positive motivator, others described how they sought a different relationship with figures of authority in order to find motivation and achievement. This was a particular challenge for participants who not only came from a family home with strict rules and high standards, but from an international education system that also reflected this approach. Two participants in particular described their upbringing in an East African educational tradition, in which teacher punishment was in excess of what is experienced in the UK system (and occasionally corporal or physical). This provided a challenge in adapting to UK university life.

*“It was very normal for teachers to just punish us and be tough for the smallest bits. Like you could wake up five minutes after they've say you should have woken up, and the first thing that they're doing is beating you up and you can't do anything, because that's what's happening to everyone. ...in terms of me expressing my emotions, I'd much rather just keep quiet and not say anything. Because I can't now start complaining that the teachers meeting me when they think that punishment is the best form of discipline. So we did develop very negative outlets of expressing ourselves.” (Phase 1, interview 7)*

Overall, the benefits of education have already been instilled in the majority of these students, and therefore the BLP does not necessarily play a part in adding to this motivation. Instead, it is worth understanding where this motivation comes from, and that educational motivation is linked not just to achieving a degree, but achievement more widely as a career and in building wider capital.

### ***Local Communities***

Local community groups have a strong influence on each participant's sense of self. Some participants described the benefits of growing up in a multicultural urban centre, not only in finding peers with similar values, but being able to find their own identity, roles, and responsibilities in that environment. A few described growing up in a less diverse area; however this was not necessarily negative, and often these individuals described various communities they were part of as a positive influence on them. However, there were some descriptions of "code-switching" or "masking" behaviour in these environments, and linking this to hiding or not fully realising one's identity, due to a) the need to fit in, and b) not being able to contextualise their struggles with others like them. An environment with fewer individuals who experience the same challenges as yourself, can also lead to feelings of isolation.

*"from primary school and secondary school, growing up in a predominately white school.... I feel like you get so used to pretending and putting on this character. It's like, is it me that belongs or is it the pretend character that belongs?" (Phase 2, focus group 2)*

It is important to note however that although the location of upbringing can link to the strength of an individual's self-concept, it is not predictive. It was not always the location that determined one's minority position, as a large proportion of participants shared experiences of isolation, regardless of where they were brought up. Experiencing isolation was also confirmed by participants who were raised overseas. In two particular cases, participants who grew up in countries with majority black populations can still feel isolated or 'othered', with links to socioeconomic class (*Phase 1, interview 2*) or school demographics (*Phase 1, interview 10*).

*"I did go to a predominantly Asian school... But I think because of that ... I tend to gravitate, gravitate towards people, like myself, which are black people..." (Phase 1, interview 10)*



In addition to community values, several described the impact of religion. Both local churches and mosques had an impact on values and wider identity, also carrying a burden of ‘responsibility’ to that group once they leave that environment. A few participants in particular noted how some aspects of university life (for example, ‘drinking culture’ or ‘overt dating’ or ‘sexualised behaviour’ in social events) clashed with their identity, not as a black student, but as a Christian or a Muslim. These students subsequently sought communities that reflected their own values, after finding conflict in existing groups. In these situations, those participants found their black identity to be reflected in certain communities, but their religious or historic community identity was not.

### ***Characteristics***

The influence of ethnicity, hometown, beliefs, motivations, and abilities, all collectively form an individual’s character. Participants not only described their identity in their backgrounds and experiences, but described personality and character traits. Notably, a disproportionate number of students described themselves as being ‘introverted’, preferring to remain a quiet follower within a group or seeking solitude, rather than a loud or dominant character that seeks group situations.

*“I’m a quite introverted person, I speak when spoken to. But if you showed me that you’re interested in anything that I have to say, and that you have similar interests, I’m going to ramble further for ages when once I’m comfortable.” (Phase 1, interview 6)*

Probing this characterisation, some exhibited extroverted personality traits when feeling comfortable among peers. It could be argued therefore that a significant number of participants (in *Phase 1, interviews 2, 4, 5, 6, 10; Phase 2, focus group 2*) exhibited introverted characteristics more as a form of self-protection rather than reflecting who they are.

Several types of ‘code-switching’ or ‘masking’ behaviours were described by participants. For example, mitigating against a perception or stereotype that as a black individual, they would be considered ‘loud’. As a result, several described moderating their behaviour by actively being quieter or contributing less within certain university environments (*Phase 1, interviews 1, 7, 10, 11; Phase 2, focus groups 1, 2, 3*). Some

also decided to change their appearance or do favours for others, in order to become more likable or acceptable. This was often linked to an attempt to fit into the wider group, conform to expectations or standards, or even to better ‘belong’.

*“you might pretend to laugh at a few jokes, ...you don’t want to appear as the loud black girl or anything like that. So you just have to... yeah, you’re just not yourself.” (Focus group 2)*

There are links here not only to sense of belonging, but sense of mattering (discussed in the next section). This ‘code-switching’ ultimately had a negative impact on their sense of identity and their own value; as students’ attempt to increase a sense of belonging, this conversely reduces their sense of identity. For a few participants (particularly in Phase 2) this behaviour change and masking of identity led to longer term questions of who they are. This not only reinforces the need for the ‘self-identity’ strand of the programme, but offers some insight into why this may be an issue for black students in particular.

*“I had an identity crisis before that... ...I would straighten my hair, to be honest I still do now. I would try and fit with the white girls because I was around them all the time.” (Focus group 4)*

### 3.5.2 Participants: Experiences and ideals

#### **Journey**

Friends and family played a large role in participants’ subsequent journey into HE. This was particularly heavily felt at pre-enrolment stage, where friendships were a large influence on the choice of HE institution (*Phase 1, Interviews 1; 3; 10; 11*). Participants described either how they had collectively planned to go to the same university, or proactively followed an influential figure or role model within their community or friendship group in school.

*"I put my mind on Essex for the past three years, not because of anything, but the fact that there was one other black girl in grammar school that I just looked up to. In my school, we had about 1000 students, 10 of us were black. So I didn't check the course, nothing, it's just Essex, that's where I'm going to go to." (Phase 1, interview 3)*

Subsequently, even after several years at NTU, many still maintain close contact with friends from their childhood and count those as their closest friends at university, rather than establishing friendships independently (*Phase 1, interviews 1; 6; 7; 8; 10; 11*). For many, shared personal experiences linked to race (both positive and negative) had bonded these individuals together strongly. Participants without these pre-existing relationships reportedly struggled significantly with isolation and loneliness, which was exacerbated by their minority status. As a result, those that did not have pre-existing friendships to rely on, sought new connections specifically on the basis of shared experiences and perspectives. Due to experiencing isolated positions and shared traumas, some described gravitating towards other black people as natural (*Phase 1, Interviews 3; 7; 10*). These participants explained that this connection played a key role in building a stronger identity and maintaining their sense of self in diverse contexts.

### ***Belonging***

Almost half of the participants described a place where they felt 'belonging' as somewhere peaceful, comfortable, or safe. For these students, the physical space itself was a key aspect of feeling a sense of belonging. A majority however described belonging as being more strongly linked to the interpersonal relationships and communities within a space. A 'safe space' serves as a gathering point where individuals feel connected, and several directly defined 'belonging' through community or collectivism (*Phase 1, interviews 1; 3; 8; 9; 10*). For several students, belonging involves advocating for, and representing each other; the implication is that being able to express their beliefs and connection openly in front of others, is demonstrable of their sense of belonging.

Almost half of the Phase 1 participants described a strong sense of belonging at NTU (*Phase 1, interviews 3, 4, 6, 7, 9*), while the other half described this as something that has increased over time, but perhaps not yet a strong feeling (*Phase 1, interviews 1, 2, 5, 7, 11*). Notably, when speaking to Phase 2 participants (those who had not yet participated in the BLP), in only one focus group out of four had participants positively describe a sense of belonging at NTU. Generally, participants felt a distinct lack of

belonging when other black students were not present in their physical place. Several described situations in which they were engaged about their minority status (often with the objective of helping address this as an issue), however this engagement had the opposite effect, leading to them feeling even less belonging within that space.

*"I'm one of three black girls in the class. And I just felt like I'm the spokesperson for that class. Like, I'm very much... I don't mind talking, I feel like I articulate myself very well. So every time someone asks a question, it's looked for me to be the spokesperson for all the black people on this. Which is very exhausting sometimes! That's the only way I feel like I don't belong sometimes. When I look around, it's like... "Where's people like me? Where? Where are you?" (Phase 1, interview 10)*

### ***Mattering***

When discussing 'mattering', most participants articulated their feelings and thoughts on being heard. For these students, the concept of 'mattering' centres around the external partner (i.e. NTU) acknowledging their personal situation, and any issues they may face. Similarly, some described 'mattering' as centred around the idea of valuing students more generally, while others described it in terms of the consequences of being acknowledged or recognised, and of being heard and valued. Some linked their participation in the BLP with 'mattering' to NTU itself.

*"...there's always this narrative of, "oh, I'm the only black person in my class, if I speak up, they might not understand what I'm saying". But if you don't say anything they'll never know. ...Everybody had to speak in those different [BLP] sessions and share their viewpoints. So it made us feel like our voices mattered. And we should also start feeling like our voice matters in spaces where there's not a lot of people who look like us." (Phase 1, interview 7)*

During the BLP, students had the opportunity to represent themselves and their perspectives (therefore their voice is heard). However, they also needed to convey their beliefs and accumulate experiences wherein the university environment itself acknowledges this (therefore being valued). Some participants described their expectation of this process with NTU staff members outside of the BLP, describing their

wider need to be understood (*Phase 1, interview 10*), to be cared for by the university (*Phase 1, interviews 9 and 11*) and to be provided an environment in which they could feel comfortable and safe at university (*Phase 1, interview 6*).

### **Leadership**

The majority of participants described leadership in terms of competencies and skills. These participants underscored the paramount importance of soft skills and several descriptions were linked to group dynamics and interpersonal relationships (*Phase 1, interviews 4, 5, 10, 11*). These individuals described how a leader should communicate effectively, distribute tasks and workloads based on members' strengths and weaknesses. Leaders should meet the criteria of taking uncomfortable decisions, being confident, and authentic. Furthermore, they should foster positive relationships, demonstrating openness to diverse views and suggestions, and position themselves as equal partners to team members. This perspective describes a leader who not only speaks but also listens to others; somebody who does not merely lead but cooperates with team members.

*"To be the head of something, and have people listen to you, follow you, but also, as a leader, you have to take advice from others."  
(Participant 4)*

Participants were directly asked about their definition of 'black leadership', in contrast to general leadership characteristics. The distinction made was the responsibility of the representation of black people as a whole, and the additional challenges that black individuals face in society. It is felt that an extra responsibility, additional challenges, and higher levels of accountability make becoming a black leader more difficult, however the fundamentals of 'leadership' (for example, skills or approach) remain the same.

*"...it's very unusual for black people to get to such high roles. I know that society is changing, but it's still not the norm. So I would say you're held to a higher standard or more accountability, especially as a black leader, because it's in society, looked at as "why are you able to do this?" kind of thing." (Phase 1, interview 4)*

To overcome societal barriers, some participants highlighted certain characteristics that they believe a black person needs to develop. For instance, that a black leader should be “more mindful” of how they present themselves and learn more fully to “speak to people” and “communicate with people.” Others suggested strengthening resilience, as one ‘has to have thick skin’, and emphasising the importance of hard work.

### 3.5.3 BLP: Perceptions

#### **Application**

The majority of participants found out about the programme via the promotional email (*Phase 1, interviews 1, 3, 9, 11; Phase 2, focus groups 2, 4*). Others were introduced to the BLP via lecture or seminar shout outs (*Phase 2, focus group 2, 4*), via the Freshers’ Fair (*Phase 1, interview 2; Phase 2, focus group 3*) or through LinkedIn posts. When finding out about the programme, a small number of participants described immediate enthusiasm, often enhanced by encouragement from friends or family. A small number of participants were initially disinterested, and described dismissing the programme entirely, only to return to it at a later date. The most common reaction however was that of intrigue or curiosity, and a need to know more before fully committing to participation. A few participants described an undercurrent of suspicion about the programme despite their intrigue, particularly relating to the reasons for its existence. These participants described how they wanted to take advantage of an opportunity, but were unsure to what extent it existed genuinely to help them or existed simply as a ‘tokenistic’ endeavour.

*“And typically, I guess, you're just sceptical because... one, you don't know who's running it. So you don't really know what their intentions are behind it. And like, if it's really for benefitting black students, or more, just like hitting a quota that the university has.” (Phase 1, participant 1)*

After finding out about the BLP, one of the main motivations for applying was to seize the opportunity for self-development, particularly when this aligned with the participants own professional and personal aspirations. For almost half of the participants, the hope of meeting new people (both from similar ethnic backgrounds and similar values) was key. For a few participants, there was a feeling that they had yet to find a place to belong at NTU in similar environments, but had anticipated that the BLP would be a different experience.

*“When I first heard about it, it immediately struck out to me so I'm thinking, Okay, this is something where people that are like me are going to be there. So I feel comfortable naturally... ..I've seen people that I'd seen around in uni, but I didn't really know them like that. And it gave me an opportunity to like, connect with them.” (Phase 1, interview 6)*

A significant selling point of this programme appears to be its specific target group of black students. According to these participants, the “black-only” environment was attractive as they hoped to take part in a programme that was specific for them, considering black students’ circumstances, challenges, and experiences.

### **Expectations**

Once the participants had applied and were subsequently shortlisted for the programme, thoughts turned to their hopes and expectations of the BLP itself. Again, there were a variety of different expectations; some had no pre-conceptions of the programme while others had aimed to attend a specific session and had therefore focused only on what specific elements of the programme may hold. Several responded more vaguely about their hopes of boosting their confidence and building networks. To increase their confidence levels and expand their networks, some participants expected to engage with successful black individuals to gain insights into their achievements and learn about the efforts they made for them. Other participants hoped that the programme would enhance their self-identity as black students and widen their opportunities in the future. Self-identity in particular could be nurtured through ‘a sense of pride or belonging’, and some hoped to find an encouraging atmosphere distinct from their home environment, where ‘educational goals and prospects’ are expanded on outside of their parental rules and expectations.

*“I was hoping to feel a lot more confident, above all. I also want to be able to express myself better in a professional environment as well. I also knew it would be a good way to make friends. Especially like having friends that are serious about their future. And friends that can hold you accountable.” (Phase 1, interview 2)*

Overall, participants for the most part did not convey that they had a clear or specific idea of exactly what to expect from the programme itself, however this did not detract

from their participation. Participants were ultimately attracted to outcomes, rather than the process.

### ***Differentiation***

Some participants had their perception of what the BLP may offer shaped in part by their experience or involvement in a separate student run initiative targeted primarily at black students (African Caribbean Society – ACS), which offered a point of comparison between two distinct programmes.

*“I was able to meet my friends in the ACS. So I met a couple of my friends within that meet and greet. ...’It’s a lot of events, a lot of meet and greets... a lot of parties.... but people aren’t trying to have deep conversations with you if they’re just trying to go to a party and have fun.” (Phase 1, interview 5)*

Some students specifically discussed attending ACS events, describing them as a very positive experience where they could make friends, particularly in their first year. The BLP was perceived to offer something completely different, with greater focus on self-development and providing opportunities for maintaining deeper relationships. The ACS was seen as a largely social and community focused group, rather than a programme for self-development. The BLP was perceived as more structured and formal in comparison, while still maintaining the idea that it is designed by black individuals for black students.

#### *3.5.4 BLP: Participant Outcomes*

### ***Reaction***

Participants were asked about their reaction to being part of the BLP, with many comments describing the ‘feeling’ of participation. The ‘black-only environment’ (a particular highlight of the programme for participants) itself inspired a strong reaction, whereby participants overwhelmingly described how they felt more comfortable and could be their more ‘authentic’ selves in this space. ‘Code switching’ or ‘masking’ behaviours were no longer needed during BLP sessions, and several described how impactful this was.



*“What's this? What do you mean, everyone that's in this room looks like us?... I can just be myself here. I can laugh as loud as I can, I can speak the way I want to speak. It just felt like a safe space.” (Phase 1, interview 7)*

In addition to the short term impact, several participants directly linked their response back to ‘mattering’ and ‘belonging’ (section 3.5.2). The exclusively black environment had a key role in developing a longer-term sense of belonging not just during the programme, but at NTU more widely. It was perceived that the community element not only provides a ‘safe place’ but offers meaningful ‘acknowledgment’ to its members. When asked about how they perceive themselves as a meaningful part of NTU after being part of the BLP (see section 3.5.2 – *Belonging*) all Phase 1 (post-intervention) participants expressed a positive belief and/or experience of being valued by the university, in comparison to a minority of Phase 2 (pre-intervention) participants. Interestingly, feeling valued and belonging towards the university also had an impact on behaviour; some emphasised the importance of taking personal responsibility going forward to garner support and visibility at university.

Beyond the ethnic exclusivity, participants also described how they felt a kinship and sense of belonging on the programme due to their shared experiences and values. Participants consistently emphasised how a shared experience or understanding between individuals helped them feel a sense of warmth and comfort (Phase 1, interviews 2, 3, 6, 8, 10).

*“...[I can] sit next to someone that who can relate to it. Or opposite someone who can relate to it. Or diagonal to someone that can relate to it... just will make me feel more warmth.” (Phase 1, interview 8)*

This often then expanded beyond the programme itself, to their wider university life and connection with NTU. Feeling a sense of comfort, respect, value, and warmth, helped them to integrate better into the wider university experience.

*“I started making such deep friendships and deep connections with people... I started to get involved in all these different activities like working at the Global lounge, the black leadership programme... And*

*yeah, everything just kept on going so well. And I found my swing and I felt like I belonged.” (Phase 1, interview 2)*

### **Community**

The individual connections made throughout the programme not only had the immediate impact on the participants and their feelings, but were a positive outcome in themselves. Several described how the connections they made through the BLP were either more closely based on values rather than social experience, or were seen as a positive professional ‘network’ that they could maintain post-graduation, as opposed to widening a circle that provided positive social experiences during university. These connections in several instances were expected to be longer lasting, and were beneficial not only from a personal, but professional perspective.

*“I just thought that people that will be applying for a programme like this would envision that type of future for themselves. And I think I was right. (...) ACS, I was never really able to like maintain lasting relationships with people who were from here. In BLP I was able to... because we just get to know each other a lot more and connect more.” (Phase 1, interview 2)*

Several examples were given of students keeping in contact with fellow BLP participants as they believe this forms the basis of a professional network for them to take with them beyond graduation. One-third of the students explained that the BLP provided a platform for them to talk about themselves in a group, and these situations put many of them out of their comfort zones. However, by listening to each other’s stories, they discovered many parallels between their feelings, experiences, and the difficulties and thoughts of other members. This not only helped them to reflect on their own identity, but to reframe their self-concept and develop a shared understanding as the foundations for a future community. Most described how they feel a more active responsibility for promoting black representation within their own communities, and are now taking a leading role in doing so.

### **Personal Outcomes**

After participating in the programme, each student acknowledged an impact on their sense of self. The BLP played a crucial role in strengthening self-esteem, allowing

participants to reflect on achievements. This, in turn, fostered a sense of pride among black students, and re-enforced a positive sense of identity. Several students strongly emphasised the need to be ‘unapologetically’ themselves. To this end, the environment created exclusively for black students helped them to act and behave more ‘naturally’ or ‘truthfully’, and participants gave examples of how they were now more frequently expressing their own authentic self.

Listening to others' stories during the BLP mitigated preconceptions of their isolated positions as black students. Sharing their personal experiences provided opportunities for understanding the feelings and thoughts of other black students, and several described how the BLP helped them overcome fears or preconceptions about others' judgments. Not only was this linked to pride in self-identity, but a few students gave explicit examples where they were more outspoken within the classroom, as well as socially.

*“I just now be unapologetically me like every room that I walk into, it's my room. I'm here for a reason! If you like it [or if] you don't like it, I'm here and I'm here to stay! I think that's one thing I did take from it.”*  
(Phase 1, interview 10)

Public speaking as a skill was noted as a key outcome for many, particularly in relation to discussing names. However, wider skill-development was also reported at various points throughout participant interviews. A third of participants described how the programme provided opportunities to use and improve existing skills, understand their own capabilities during the BLP, and recognise themselves as leaders in their own lives.

### ***Academic and Professional Development***

Several participants described the BLP’s contribution to their wider professional development, and ability to ‘reach their potential’. For example, emphasising an improved confidence and resilience, more regularly self-reflecting, and development of communication skills.

Most acknowledged that the programme improved their engagement through increased self-efficacy. For example, one participant explained that the programme was empowering; as the only black person in a lecture, they had experienced unpleasant feelings, such as being “looked at” or “stared at” when expressing their thoughts during

a seminar. Following the programme, this participant still acknowledged that such experiences might occur, but no longer feels embarrassed. More widely, participants' engagement and course activity has increased during their lectures, enabling them not just to confidently take part in seminars but also to speak in front of a predominantly white group or community. Some highlighted that the mentorship scheme within the programme had strengthened their engagement. Furthermore, students' activity and effectiveness have been improved through networking, for example, by forming study partnerships. By motivating each other and studying together on campus, several described an enhanced learning experience. Notably, a few participants gave examples of how they persisted to a greater extent in their studies, but also in attempting to secure a placement opportunity.

*"I think the confidence and teamwork in skills I learned that was good for me when I have interviews with other companies for placements. I think the resilience as well helps me out with that, when I essentially got one towards the end. I think also, when it comes to the other things I learned, I learned a lot more about myself." (Phase 1, interview 9)*

### **Highlights**

For many, one of the most impactful moments throughout the programme was when participants were required to introduce themselves in front of others and speak about their names. Several discussed that beyond just stating their names, sharing experiences through their stories and listening to each other's experiences were impactful. The BLP helped them accept their name and feel a sense of pride.

*"That was the first time I've said my full name in a room full of people... then I said the meaning of my name. And then I call my mom afterwards, on my way home and I was just like, "Oh, thank you for naming me that". Because growing up, I didn't really like my name." (Phase 1, interview 11)*

Some argued that vocalising names and self-introduction are crucial, as they convey complex feelings, thoughts, and experiences that individuals and their families hold.

*"That was probably the most beautiful exercise because sometimes... names are very, very powerful. As black people, we have to make sure*

*that people pronounce our names properly, because it's taken a lot for us to get to where we are. Just hearing people talk about how their names linked to different cultures, ... their names carry so much culture that they weren't aware of.” (Phase 1, interview 7)*

In addition to this, the GRIT workshops and guest speakers were seen as particular highlights of the programme, and arguably make for strong selling points of the BLP itself.

### **Changes**

Participants were given the opportunity to make suggestions for how to change or improve the programme as they saw fit. For the vast majority of participants, improving the programme would be achieved not through fundamental changes, but through increased accessibility and visibility of the programme itself. Around half suggested increased accessibility with greater integration with university timetabling would be a powerful improvement to the programme. These participants often cited examples of times where they could not attend due to timetabling clashes, or other commitments. Some participants expressed regret at not being more actively involved in the community building events in particular, again in part due to clashes with university commitments. Expanding the programme scope was also suggested, with one participant in particular describing how it would have been beneficial to their friends, one of which ultimately dropped out of university.

*“...unfortunately for me, my social circle wasn't involved in that programme. ...But looking back.. I do think that's one side I wish I got more involved in. Meeting those people... if I see them now we will talk and say hi and everything.” (Phase 1, interview 1)*

These participants also suggested having more sessions, or repeated sessions, as a solution to missing out or being unable to attend. Almost half of the participants made suggestions for improvements around the advertising and promotion of the programme. These participants gave examples in which they had very nearly missed the opportunity to be part of the programme altogether, or friends and peers had in fact missed the opportunity to apply and regretted not being part of the programme once the opportunity had passed. A few made specific suggestions for changes or improvements to the content; in addition to more community events, suggestions were made for more guest

speakers to be included in the programme. In particular, these students wished to hear from more 'black leaders' or 'inspirational black figures' who could provide both role modelling and networking opportunities.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.3. Review of findings

The review of findings from the interviews and focus groups (*section 3.5*) is structured around the research questions (detailed in sections 3.2 and 3.3), and references literature discussed in the introduction and background section (*section 2*).

#### ***RQ1: Does involvement in the BLP reinforce or affect participants' self-identity or self-concept?***

Self-identity is complex for participants, and includes a variety of ethnic indicators with a deep meaning that these can carry (*section 3.5.1 – Heritage*). Who the individual is and their self-concept is strongly shaped by their family (*section 3.5.1 – Upbringing*) and within local communities, where they feel a sense of belonging, allowing them to then explore and develop their own identities (*section 3.5.1 – Local Community*). When entering the education system however, almost all participants described how they felt 'othered' or isolated due to their race, and how this affected their behaviour (*section 3.5.2 – Belonging*). This leads to participants modifying their behaviour, and presenting themselves differently to how they may feel they are; this includes the perception of being seen as 'loud' or having a particular appearance that could be criticised (*section 3.5.1 – Characteristics*).

There is a good amount of evidence that participation within the programme saw participants immediately cease code-switching behaviour (*section 3.5.4 – Reaction*). Students described how the BLP gave them a unique environment for them to feel comfortable, and the activities, in particular sharing their names and GRIT sessions (*section 3.5.4 – Highlights*), allowed them to then explore their identity and reinforce who they are. In turn, the reinforcement of self-identity links to behavioural changes, where participants are more outspoken within the classroom, and able to navigate difficult or challenging situations (*section 3.5.4 – Personal Outcomes*). This provides an example of not only where participants see a reframed 'possible self' (as described in the literature) but are matching their behaviour to enact those qualities.

***RQ2: Does involvement in the BLP influence student communities or social connections?***

The BLP delivers Community Building Events (CBEs) for all participants of the BLP. The need for community and social connections is not only highlighted in the literature (*section 2.1*), but by the students themselves and how they have personally been shaped by community as they grow their identity (*section 3.5.1 – Local Community*). Social connections and maintaining a sense of community was a key factor for participants in their decision not only to enter higher education, but more importantly, which institution or university they went to specifically (*section 3.5.2 – Journey*). Furthermore, establishing a sense of belonging at university was strongly linked to social connections and community, with participants describing how belonging links to mutual support and collectivism in this space (*section 3.5.2 – Belonging*).

Participants viewed the BLP as providing a different social experience to other initiatives that were specifically developed for black students (*section 3.5.3 – Differentiation*). Participants of the BLP described how they found and developed social connections through the programme, however these manifested as more professional than personal relationships for many participants. Although one of the main aims of the BLP is to develop a distinct community for black students at NTU, the outcome for many was the development of more personal rather than communal relationships (*section 3.5.4 – Community*). Any development on a community level was more likely found in providing skills or foundations for individuals to take to communities outside of the BLP, rather than building a strong and sustaining BLP student community in itself. During the programme, a communal and exclusive environment was beneficial to many students, particularly in expanding their professional network, and in providing a space for them to present themselves in a comfortable environment (*section 3.5.4 – Reaction*). There is also evidence of lasting impact of social connections on academia in particular, with some participants forming study partnerships that helped both in terms of motivation to perform in the classroom, and supporting each other practically in that area (*section 3.5.4 – Academic and Professional Development*). Referring back to the literature, an issue raised was the impact of feeling socially isolated, and a lack of belonging, which ultimately leads to poorer academic performance (*section 2.1*). Many participants described the impact of the exclusively 'black' environment of the programme as directly impacting these issues (*section 3.5.4 – Reaction*), which again subsequently benefits academic performance, albeit indirectly.

***RQ3: Does involvement in the BLP improve participants' soft skills or abilities?***

Black students at NTU are not considered less able or lacking in comparison to the wider student body. However, sector literature indicates that black students face more

challenges than their white counterparts, and are more likely to experience difficulties in relationship building and confidence (Connor et al., 2004), as well as preparedness for success (Singh, 2011). Enabling the development of soft skills are a focus of the BLP, aiming to help the student develop and thrive in the face of additional challenges. Participants were clear that they are strongly motivated to develop their abilities and achieve both academically and professionally, and for many, that this motivation was embedded at a young age (*section 3.5.1 – Upbringing*). Therefore, there is not necessarily a need for the BLP, or indeed any other programme, to ‘push’ students towards education and its benefits, as this is already embedded. Instead, there is perhaps a need to ‘push’ the student towards the steps needed in achieving their goals. When discussing leadership, participants described the necessity of strong soft skills and how these are only more relevant for black leaders due to their additional challenges (*section 3.5.2 – Leadership*). The BLP therefore is key in providing a method to achieve the goals, not inspiration or motivation towards the goals themselves.

It was found that a clear expectation of the programme was also the development of soft skills, in particular confidence-building, and expanding their social network, to enable personal success (*section 3.5.3 – Expectations*). The interviews provided clear evidence that students were more confident as a result of their participation in the programme, sharing examples of how they felt they were more confident in themselves, and expressing their values and beliefs without prejudice (*section 3.5.4 – Personal Outcomes*). Some also shared how this confidence was applied to their academic performance, as well as persistence and resilience, both within the classroom and in seeking extra-curricular opportunities such as a work placement (*section 3.5.4 – Academic and Professional Development*). In addition, soft skills linked to leadership, such as communication skills, were also highlighted by some participants as being improved as a result of participating within the programme. Finally, several students described themselves as introverted or shy in university environments (*section 3.5.1 – Characteristics*), however evidence also suggests that participation in this programme allowed some participants to challenge this assumption, being more likely to feel less shy or vulnerable in situations they may have previously found intimidating (*section 3.5.4 – Personal Outcomes*).

***RQ4: How does participation in the BLP change student perceptions of NTU itself?***

When discussing why participants chose to come to NTU, several described that this choice was heavily influenced not directly by the institution, but by friends, peers, or role models who had previously chosen to apply to the university (*section 3.5.2 – Journey*). As a result, many saw aspects of their lives, for example social lives or extra-curricular



experiences, as distinct from the university, rather than integral to it. Many gave definitions of ‘belonging’ as intrinsically linked to social experiences (*section 3.5.2 – Belonging*), and this can in part explain why many pre-intervention participants described a lack of belonging to NTU. In addition, some described how they felt isolated and othered within this space, in spite of efforts to accommodate them. Many post-intervention participants, however, described a strong or developing sense of belonging at NTU (*section 3.5.2 – Belonging*), and as a result some participants were more likely to engage with the university, particularly when seeking support or advice from staff (*section 3.5.4 – Reaction*).

When describing ‘mattering’, participants often reflected on the relationship between themselves and NTU itself (and university staff members by extension), and the desire to be understood, valued, cared for, and provided a safe environment (*section 3.5.2 – Mattering*). The initial reaction to the very existence of the programme addressed assumptions of some participants as to the extent to which students like them were catered for (*section 3.5.3 – Application*), and several responded positively to the idea that this programme was designed specifically “for us, by us” (*section 3.5.3 – Differentiation*). There is good evidence from the research that the BLP, both in terms of content, and by the very nature of its existence, lead to positive changes in perceptions of NTU, leading to participants being more likely to engage with NTU and university life more widely; outcomes that were predicted in the literature (*section 3.5.2 – Sense of mattering; Sense of belonging*).

***RQ5: What can the BLP do differently to improve outcomes for participants?***

As discussed in the methodology, this research question was broken down into three distinct IPE questions.

***IPE-RQ1 (Implementation): How was the programme implemented and what are the barriers and facilitators to implementation?***

Firstly, IPE-RQ1 relates to how the programme was implemented, including barriers and facilitators. The details of what was done during the BLP, how it was implemented, as well as when and where it took place (i.e. ‘Fidelity’), is described previously in this report (*section 2.2*). The programme itself has evolved over time (i.e. ‘Adaptation’), and again, this is detailed elsewhere (Table 2, pg. 9). The programme during this academic year was delivered in full (i.e. ‘Dosage’), and any issues around wider circumstances (i.e. ‘Context’) were discussed (*section 2.2*). The research provided some feedback relating to the ‘Reach’ of the BLP. Participants were clear in that one of the main changes they

would make to the programme is to expand the programme to as many students as possible, and increase the advertising and promotion to the existing target group (*section 3.5.4 – Changes*).

***IPE-RQ2 Responsiveness: To what extent did students engage with the intervention in line with intervention aims?***

IPE-RQ2 relates to the extent to which students engaged with the BLP and its aims. In answering this question, it is important to consider the feedback gathered relating to the participants' initial reaction to finding out about the programme, and how they perceived it. For many participants, the BLP presented an opportunity for a new experience, but also uncertainty in terms of what participation may look like or the motivations behind the existence of the programme itself (*section 3.5.3 – Application*). Most did not enter the programme with clear expectations, and some were only concerned with participating in specific events, rather than the programme as a whole (*section 3.5.3 – Expectations*). The extent to which participants engaged with the programme was therefore mixed and variable between participants. Some however did express that they regret not participating more in the programme, particularly relating to the more social or community focused events (*section 3.5.4 – Changes*). These participants suggested that more clarity, repeated sessions, and better integration with timetabling would result in participants having more opportunity and stronger motivation to attend all that was offered.

***IPE-RQ3 Mechanisms and perceived impact: Was the BLP effective in delivering the aims/outcomes? Did it achieve desired outcomes and impact?***

Finally, IPE-RQ3 relates to the mechanisms for achieving the desired aims and objectives of the programmes, and the perceptions of the impact. There is considerable detail given throughout the findings (*section 3*) and previously in this section, relating to the impact of the programme. The perceptions of the students themselves are key to reviewing the effectiveness of the programme. BLP participants agreed with the importance of achieving academic success at university, however most did not draw a clear link between the positive outcomes the programme had on them, and the subsequent impact it had on them academically, without prompts. Participants did however describe how the BLP developed soft skills such as resilience, communication skills, or confidence (*section 3.5.4 – Academic and Professional Development*), which is understood and predicted to impact the participants academically (*section 2.3*).

Similarly, participants did not complete the programme and subsequently describe themselves as leaders, however they did describe how they had started to demonstrate

behaviours and a self-concept that reflect leadership qualities (*section 3.5.4 – Personal Outcomes*). Participants did not describe the BLP as a community in itself, however did describe how social connections and relationships were formed through the BLP, and how they felt a sense of belonging within that group of individuals (*section 3.5.4 – Community*). Overall, there is considerable evidence from the research that the short-term outcomes were achieved by the programme, however longer-term outcomes were not considered or reflected on by participants. This requires supplementary evidence, such as triangulation with the flagship impact evaluation of the BLP, undertaken by the external evaluator.

## 4.2 Limitations of the research

The BLP evaluation was due to be conducted and completed inside a 6 month period, presenting several challenges to completing effectively.

### 4.2.1 Short timeframe of the project

The BLP evaluation for the 2022-23 academic year had an ambitious aim in evaluating a year-long programme and producing detailed and meaningful outputs inside a six-month window. In addition, this evaluation is heavily reliant on qualitative feedback, the analysis of which is a time-intensive task. The researchers followed a thematic analysis and a strict structural approach to the interviews and focus groups, in order to mitigate for a short analysis window. Although this focused the analysis of the feedback, more time and resource could have provided more comparisons between specific groups. Similarly, although a literature review has been included as part of this report, issues of racial disparity are complex and undoubtedly there may be significant issues or challenges for specific groups of students that have been unintentionally omitted. Therefore, further literature reviews, evaluation, and exploratory research, is welcome.

### 4.2.2 Different pre- and post- cohorts

The BLP is a year-long programme, taking place throughout the entirety of an academic year. In order to accommodate a shorter timeframe from concept to completion, the evaluation would be unable to gather feedback pre-intervention and post-intervention, from the same cohort of students. Therefore, post-intervention interviews were conducted with participants of the 2022-23 year BLP, whereas pre-intervention focus groups were conducted with shortlisted future participants of the 2023-24 year BLP. Although the programme was largely identical between these years in terms of marketing and communication of the programme, there may be some subtle differences

both between marketing strategy, and the cohort themselves. This may then result in slightly different expectations or perspectives that this research project would not have captured. A different methodology that repeats the pre- and post-intervention interviews, across multiple programme years, would not only ensure consistency between pre- and post- groups, but would help identify changes between cohorts.

#### *4.2.3 A self-selecting sample*

This evaluation relied on participants to be recruited by responding to invitation emails from staff members responsible for programme delivery. This sample therefore are more likely to have been engaged with the programme and willing to engage with NTU more widely, by the very fact that they responded to the email itself. This may bias the sample, with students who participated in the research being less likely to have dropped out of the programme altogether at an early stage. Beyond this, the BLP itself is a non-compulsory programme, and therefore students have self-selected for participation in the programme itself. A solution for these issues may be to build in an evaluation to the programme itself, and the potential for a comparator group of students who in no way engaged with the BLP, but from a similar demographic background.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Concluding statement

The findings from this project first and foremost highlight the distinct differences within the cohort of students simply grouped as 'black'. From ethnicity to upbringing, to the impact of local communities, and through to the individual, each participant told unique stories about who they were, what this means to them, and the individual strengths they have. Collectively, the participants described the challenges that they have faced, and how their response to these challenges shape their values and behaviours. The importance of community and social connections extended to and beyond enrolment, with many participants relying on these pre-existing connections for support and guidance, rather than potential new relationships found within NTU. Initially, feelings of belonging and mattering at NTU were mixed, with several students reportedly feeling isolated at university, and in small seminar groups in particular.

As a group, the participants overwhelmingly described how they had strong aspirations for professional and personal success, and had explored participation in the BLP in part to continue their personal development, but also in part due to curiosity about an opportunity designed by people like them, for people like them. From the very beginning

of the BLP, many participants were overwhelmingly struck by the impact an exclusively black environment had on them. Feelings of comfort and connection with others were immediate, and most discussed how they felt they could be their more authentic selves as a result. Particular sessions within the programme, including the GRIT workshops, guest speakers, and opportunities to share their personal experiences in a group setting, had a strong impact, not only on participants' self-concept and self-identity, but helped them to develop their confidence, communication skills, and build resilience. Many developed social connections within the groups, particularly in order to give themselves greater social and professional opportunities, as a conscious choice to develop their own social capital.

The experience led to most of the participants developing a greater sense of belonging and mattering within the university. Furthermore, participation for some led to them engaging more in the classroom, and with wider university life. This reflects one particular objective of the BLP, in positively impacting the participants' academic performance, not through direct action, but indirectly, through the social structures around the student and soft-skills and abilities at an individual level. This provides a foundation to improve the participants' capability to achieve, and facilitates their pre-existing motivation to succeed, lead, and thrive at university and beyond.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the interviews and focus groups held as part of this evaluation.

### **Improve the understanding of challenges related to black students.**

This report specifically details the experiences of a small number of students. Although insightful, this is far from representative of what is a large and diverse group of students. A significant amount of further research is required not only to understand the challenges that black students face, but to better define the variety of student groups within this categorisation.

### **Explore the use of role models and social connections within recruitment to NTU.**

Several students described their motivation to go to NTU as being almost directly a result either of friends, family, or key figures and role models prior to applying to university. Often, these students only had a vague idea of what NTU could offer them, and the unique selling points of the university. Instead, they had made their decision to apply based on the recommendation or example of a trusted figure. Student recruitment and outreach opportunities could look to make better use of these social connections,

not only to recruit to the university, but to inform prospective students of what to expect if they choose to come to NTU after completing Further Education.

### **Improve and develop marketing and communication about the BLP.**

Many participants of the BLP described how they were interested in the idea of the BLP, but knew little about the programme itself up until the point they participated. Some described initially dismissing the opportunity, or missing the advertisement entirely, and regretted not acting on this awareness earlier and involving peers in the application process. It is recommended therefore that the promotion of the BLP itself is expanded, not only in terms of the amount of promotion, but in better communicating the content of the programme, and what participants can expect when they attend.

### **Closer integration with scheduled teaching and timetabling**

Several described missing sessions or opportunities available to them through the BLP, due to timetabling clashes with scheduled teaching. One of the main suggestions made by students was to better enable them to attend more sessions by ensuring that BLP sessions were better integrated with their scheduled teaching, or repeating sessions in the event of a clash. This not only allows more participants to be involved, but increases the 'dose' (i.e. number of sessions attended by participants), and thereby increasing the effectiveness of the BLP itself.

### **Increase the number of external speakers and networking opportunities**

One of the main outcomes of the BLP was the increase in social and professional networks. Several participants commented that this aspect in particular benefitted them both personally (in terms of friends and acquaintances at university), but also professionally (in terms of the number of potential career development opportunities). An expanded the network within university links to an increase in belonging and engagement with other extracurricular activities, and has wider benefits for the students beyond academia. Several participants asked for more opportunities to build their network, and connect with industry professionals, particularly black professionals who had a shared experience, in order to expand their social opportunities further.

### **Expand the scope of the BLP**

Currently, the BLP is predominantly aimed at second year students, with the opportunity for other undergraduate students to participate in the community building events. Most students felt that the programme was beneficial to them in its current form, however could be more impactful if it ran during previous or subsequent academic years. In addition, many asked for the programme to take more students overall; not only to ensure more have the opportunity to benefit from the BLP, but to also enhance the social networking possibilities of the programme itself.

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6.3.



6.4. Appendix 1: Methodological breakdown Phase 1 – Interviews with post-participants

<b>Sample</b>	Level 6 (final year undergraduate students) who participated in the Black Leadership Programme during the 2022-23 academic year. These participants will have identified as 'Black', however that singular categorisation masks a variety of ethnic backgrounds and cultures. There was an aim for these participants to be from a range of demographic backgrounds (e.g. gender, national origin, cultural group) and from a range of academic disciplines within NTU.
<b>Implementation</b>	Conducted online via MS Teams, approximately 30-60minutes in length. Record of interviews kept via transcription. These were auto-transcribed using the OtterAI automatic transcription service. Interviews also had audio-visual recordings, as a backup for transcription purposes only. All recordings and transcriptions are saved to a secure SharePoint file.
<b>Analysis</b>	Semi-structured interviews generated qualitative feedback only. Research coded using NVivo. A thematic analysis approach is used by the researcher. The researcher conducted several 'waves' of analysis, to collate themes into large categories, before drilling down into more specific themes in subsequent coding 'waves'.
<b>Research Questions</b>	<p>Primary question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To understand and describe the long-term outcomes and overall impact of participation in the Black Leadership Programme on target students.</li> </ul> <p>Secondary questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does involvement in the BLP reinforce or affect participants' self-identity or self-concept?</li> <li>2. Does involvement in the BLP influence student communities or social connections?</li> <li>3. Does involvement in the BLP improve participants' soft skills or abilities?</li> <li>4. How does participation in the BLP change student perceptions of NTU itself?</li> <li>5. What can the BLP do differently to improve outcomes for participants?</li> </ol>
<b>Justification</b>	These interviews provide an in-depth accounts of students' own experiences, both at NTU and more widely in relation to race. Students are also able to give an insight into their concept of self-identity, community, and abilities, and how that has changed over time. Finally, they are best placed to share their views on not only what the BLP achieves, but how, based on their own personal context.

6.5. Appendix 2: Methodological breakdown Phase 2 – focus groups with pre-participants

<b>Sample</b>	<p>Level 5 (second year undergraduate students) who have been shortlisted to participate in the Black Leadership Programme during the 2023-24 academic year.</p> <p>These participants will have identified as 'Black', however that singular categorisation masks a variety of ethnic backgrounds and cultures. There was an aim for these participants to be from a range of demographic backgrounds (e.g. gender, national origin, cultural group) and from a range of academic disciplines within NTU.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	<p>Conducted in person on campus, approximately 30-60minutes in length. Record of interviews kept via transcription. These were auto-transcribed using the OtterAI automatic transcription service. Focus groups also had audio-only recordings, as a backup for transcription purposes only. All recordings and transcriptions are saved to a secure SharePoint file.</p>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p>Semi-structured focus groups generated qualitative feedback only. Research coded using NVivo. A thematic analysis approach is used by the researcher.</p> <p>The researcher conducted several 'waves' of analysis, to collate themes into large categories, before drilling down into more specific themes in subsequent coding 'waves'.</p>
<b>Research Questions</b>	<p>Primary question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To understand and describe the long-term outcomes and overall impact of participation in the Black Leadership Programme on target students.</li> </ul> <p>Secondary questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does involvement in the BLP reinforce or affect participants' self-identity or self-concept? (baseline measurement)</li> <li>2. Does involvement in the BLP influence student communities or social connections? (baseline measurement)</li> <li>3. Does involvement in the BLP improve participants' soft skills or abilities? (baseline measurement)</li> <li>4. How does participation in the BLP change student perceptions of NTU itself? (baseline measurement)</li> </ol>
<b>Justification</b>	<p>These focus groups provide an in-depth accounts of students' own experiences, both at NTU and more widely in relation to race. Students are also able to give an insight into their concept of self-identity, community, and abilities, and how that has changed over time. Finally, they are best placed to share their views on their expectations of the BLP, and their own motivations for participation.</p>

## 6.6. Appendix 3: Interview Questions with 'Post' Participants (Phase 1)

### Pre-amble and introduction

#### *Interviewer reminder:*

- *Describe the purpose of the study.*
- *How the data will be used.*
- *Participant has a right to anonymity and withdrawal.*
- *Ensuring participants have any questions answered before recording starts.*

#### *[start recording]*

- *Thank participants for participating.*
- *Clarification: This interview is understanding this students experience not only of BLP, but of university more widely. Some of the questions may explore issues of race and ethnicity. It is important to remind that participant: anything that an individual participant describes is **not** considered representative of that participants race/gender/background or any other student group. Feedback is taken in context of a number of interviews. We want to know the individual's own experience.*

### Part 1 - Personal

#### 1.) **Tell me about yourself.**

- a. Describe your **home life** outside of university.
- b. Explain how your **ethnicity** influences your identity.
- c. Explain how your "**culture**" influences your identity.

#### 2.) **Tell me about your friends and family.**

- a. Describe the **communities** you belong to outside of university.
- b. Tell me how you became **involved** in these groups.
- c. Describe the **impact** that these groups have had on you.

#### 3.) **Tell me about your journey into university.**

- a. Describe when you **first felt university** was for you.
- b. Tell me about what **motivated** you to come to university.
- c. Describe your journey **throughout first year** until now.
- d. Tell me about your **friendships** throughout university.

#### 4.) **Tell me what you study, and explain why you choose this course.**

- a. Describe what **belonging** means to you and your belonging at NTU.
- b. Describe what **matterng** means to you, and how much you matter to NTU.

- c. Describe how difficult or easy you find it to achieve **academically**.

## Part 2 – BLP

### 5.) Tell me why you decided to participate in the BLP?

- a. Describe what you **heard** about the BLP before you applied for the programme.
- b. Describe the context, frequency, and specific activities **you participated** in.
- c. Tell me about what makes a 'leader', and what makes a **'Black leader'**.

### 6.) Describe how you felt participating in the programme.

- a. Describe your initial **expectations** and how they compare to reality.
- b. Describe how participating in the programme has **impacted how you feel** about university life.
- c. Describe what a 'Black-participant-only' **environment** made you **feel**.

### 7.) Describe your experience of the BLP.

- a. Describe the most **engaging or remarkable experience** during the programme.
- b. Tell me what you would **change** about the programme.
- c. Describe your biggest **challenges** to participating in the programme.

### 8.) Explain how the programme might positively impact those that participate.

- a. Explain how participants build **meaningful relationships** during this programme.
- b. Tell me where you **might not have improved or developed** as you expected.
- c. Explain why **this impact cannot be replicated** in other extra-curricular activities such as mentoring or societies.

### 9.) Describe the impact of the BLP on you personally.

- a. Tell me how the programme may have impacted your **sense of identity**.
- b. Tell me how the programme may have impacted the **wider student community**.
- c. Tell me how the programme may have impacted your **academic work**.

### 10.) Tell me about your plans looking ahead at the rest of your time at university and beyond.

- a. Tell me about what you might **do differently** as a result of participating in the BLP.

- b. Describe how you might **apply the skills** you've learned in your future personal and/or professional life.

### Part 3 - Overview

- 11.) **And finally, what changes do you believe the university should make to support Black NTU students specifically?**

### Finishing up and debriefing

*Ask participants if there is anything they would like to ask us*

*Repeat a summary about why this is taking place, reassure about anonymity, and remind their right to withdraw.*

*Thank participants for participating.*

*[end recording]*

## 6.7. Appendix 4: Focus group questions with 'Pre' Participants (Phase 2)

### Pre-amble and introduction

#### *Interviewer reminder:*

- *Describe the purpose of the study.*
- *How the data will be used.*
- *Participant has a right to anonymity and withdrawal.*
- *Ensuring participants have any questions answered before recording starts.*

#### *[start recording]*

- *Thank participants for participating.*
- *Clarification: This focus group is understanding this students experience not only of BLP, but of university more widely. Some of the questions may explore issues of race and ethnicity. It is important to remind that participant: anything that an individual participant describes is **not** considered representative of that participants race/gender/background or any other student group. Feedback is taken in context of a number of interviews. We want to know the individual's own experience.*

### Part 1 - Personal

#### 12.) **Tell me about yourselves.**

- a. Describe your **home life** outside of university.
- b. Explain how your '**ethnicity**' influences your identity.
- c. Explain how your '**culture**' influences your identity.
- d. Explain how '**family**' influence your identity.
- e. Internationalisation and family?

#### 13.) **Describe what 'community means'**

- a. Describe the **communities** you belong to outside of university.
- b. Tell me how you became **involved** in these groups.
- c. Describe the **impact** of community.

#### 14.) **Tell me about your journey into university.**

- a. Describe why going to university is important?
- b. Describe when you **first felt university** was for you.
- c. Tell me about what **motivated** you to come to university.
- d. Describe what it is like to make friends at university.

#### 15.) **Describe and discuss the following:**

- a. What **belonging** means to you and your belonging at NTU.
- b. What **matterng** means to you, and how much you matter to NTU.

- c. What academic success means to you, how difficult or easy it might be to achieve it.

## Part 2 – BLP

### 16.) **Tell me why you decided to participate in the BLP?**

- a. Describe what you **heard** about the BLP before you applied for the programme.
- b. Tell me about what makes a ‘leader’, and what makes a **‘Black leader’**.
- c. Tell me about any other extracurricular activities you participate in?

### 17.) **Describe how you feel about participating in the programme.**

- a. Describe your initial **expectations**
- b. Tell me what the programme tells you **about NTU**
- c. Describe what a ‘Black-participant-only’ **environment** might make you **feel**.

### 18.) **Describe your experience of the BLP.**

- a. Describe what you are **most looking forward** to.
- b. Describe your biggest **challenges** to participating in the programme

### 19.) **Describe the impact of the BLP on you personally.**

- a. Tell me how the programme might impact your **sense of identity**.
- b. Tell me how the programme might impact the **wider student community**.
- c. Tell me how the programme might impact your **academic work**.

## Part 3 - Overview

### 20.) **And finally, what changes do you believe the university should make to support Black NTU students specifically?**

## Finishing up and debriefing

*Ask participants if there is anything they would like to ask us*

*Repeat a summary about why this is taking place, reassure about anonymity, and remind their right to withdraw.*

*Thank participants for participating.*

*[end recording]*