

Building Belonging Together: A Co-Created Exploration of Belonging and Inclusion

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1. Black students experience in UK Higher Education

Applying self-determination theory, Bunce et al. (2021) report that:

- Black students are less likely than White students to achieve a “good degree.”
- Unmet psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy negatively affect motivation and the desire for academic success.



1. Black students experience in UK Higher Education

Ibezim et al. (2025) identified the challenges faced by Black students that contribute to mental fatigue and lower academic performance as:

- difficulties with social integration
- racism
- institutional factors (e.g., microaggressions and biased assessment).



1. Black students experience in UK Higher Education

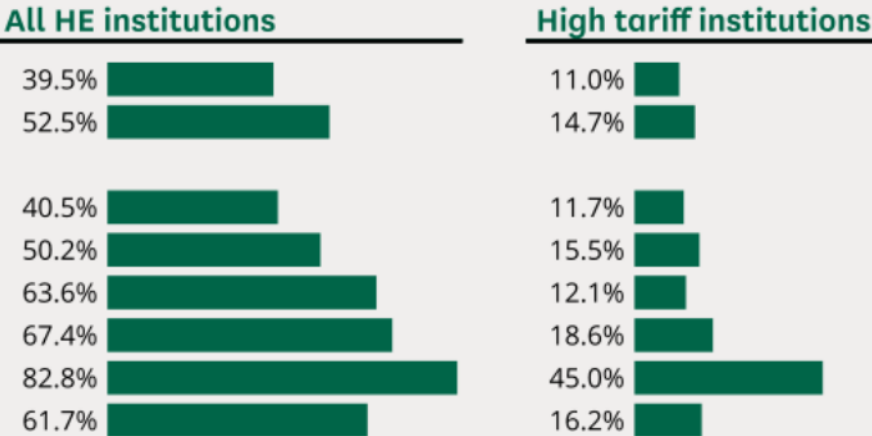
Black students experience misrecognition of their Black identity and a sense of non-belonging in “old” higher education providers in the UK (Osbourne et al., 2021).

- Their experiences include being the only Black person in lecture halls.
- Being told that they are the first Black person their peers have met.
- Being expected to use urban street slang and sell drugs.

2. Access, Progression and Attainment (UK Data)

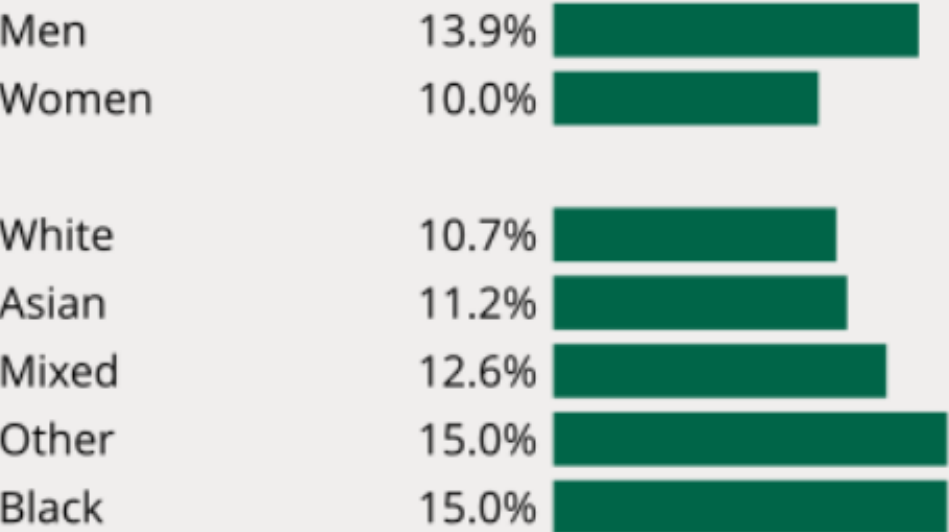
Progression to HE, 2023/24

State schools pupils by age 19, England



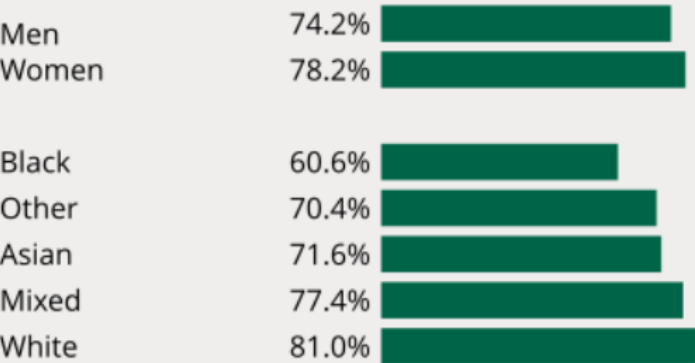
Non-continuation rates 2022-23

Full-time undergraduates in England



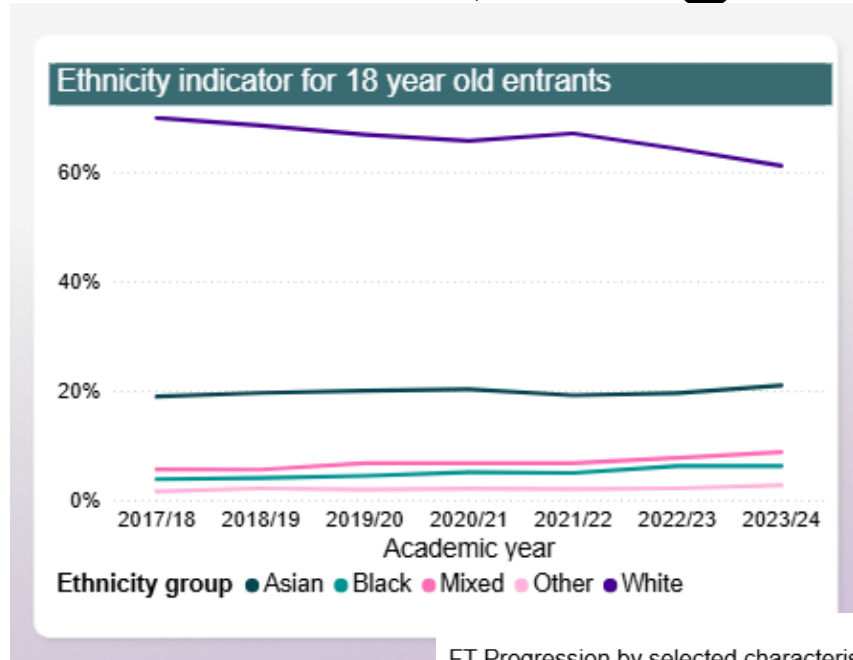
Students achieving a first or upper second class degree, 2023-24

Full-time students in England

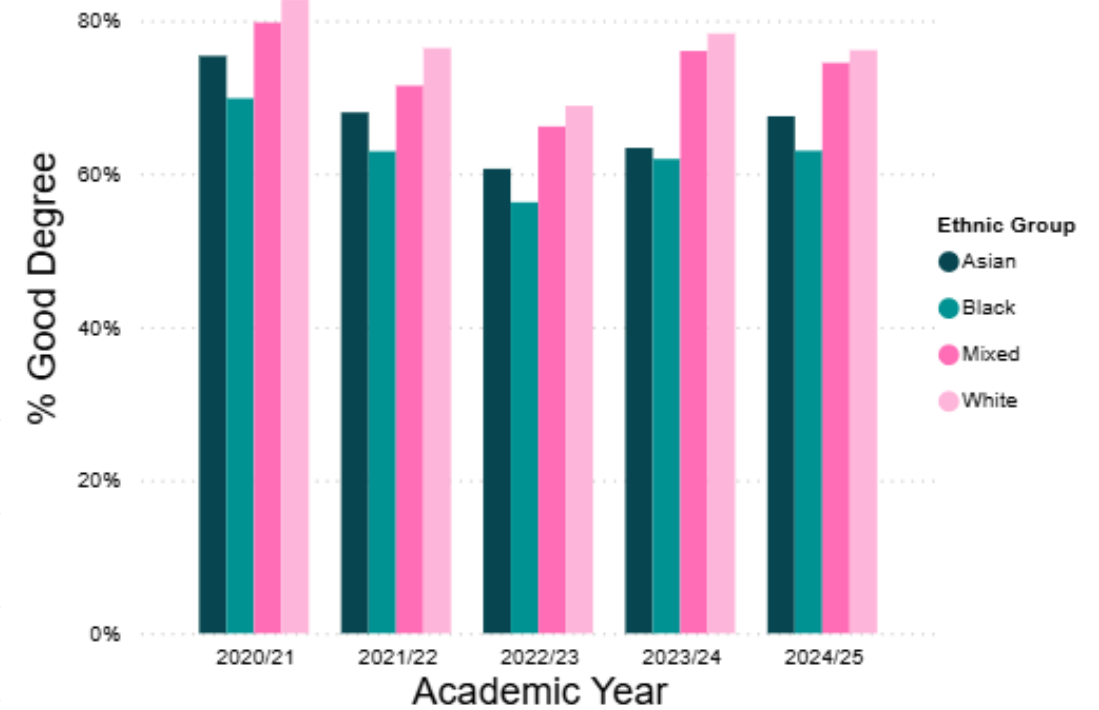


Source: Bolton, P. and Lewis, J. (2025) Research Briefing: Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England. *House of Commons Library*.

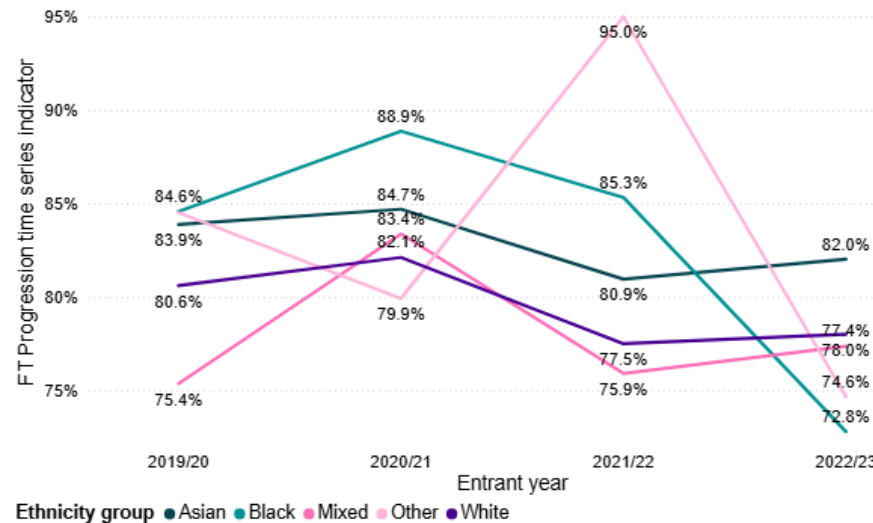
2. Access, Progression and Attainment (UoM Data)



% Good Degree and % Good Degree by Academic Year and Ethnic Group



FT Progression by selected characteristic



Not belonging,
Unbelonging,
Belonging,





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Building Belonging Together

Networking & Mentorship Event

Wednesday

25 Feb 2026

1:00 to 3:00 PM



Connect with academics - Share your experiences - Influence positive change

Building Belonging Together

Aim

- Create an inclusive space for conversations about lived experience and belonging.
- Share career insights, mentorship, and networking opportunities



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Participants

- Students from UG, PGT, MBA, and PhD programmes.
- Attendees from AMBS and the wider Faculty of Humanities.
- Academics, PS colleagues, Career Services, and MEC representatives.
- Black and other ethnic minority groups.



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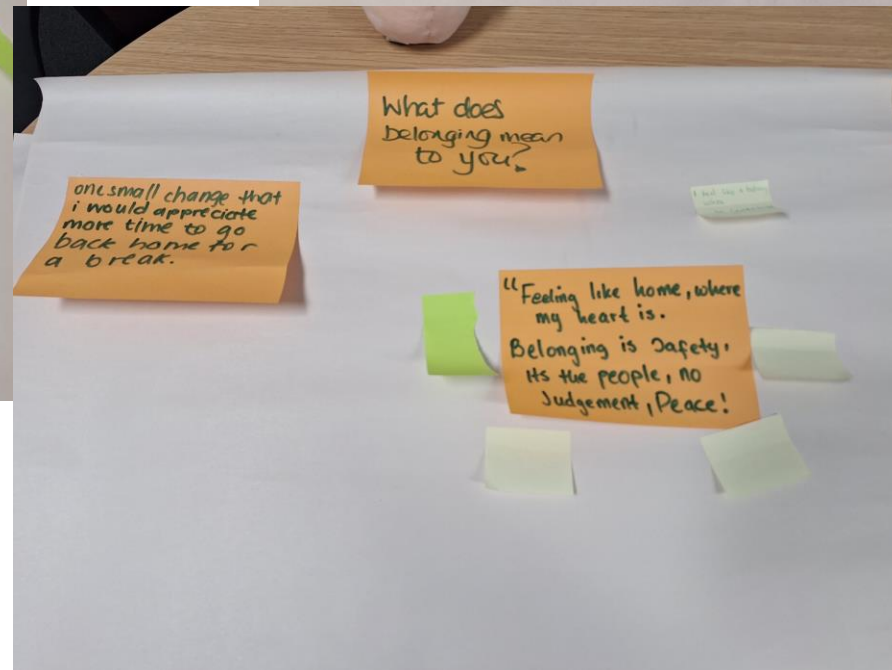
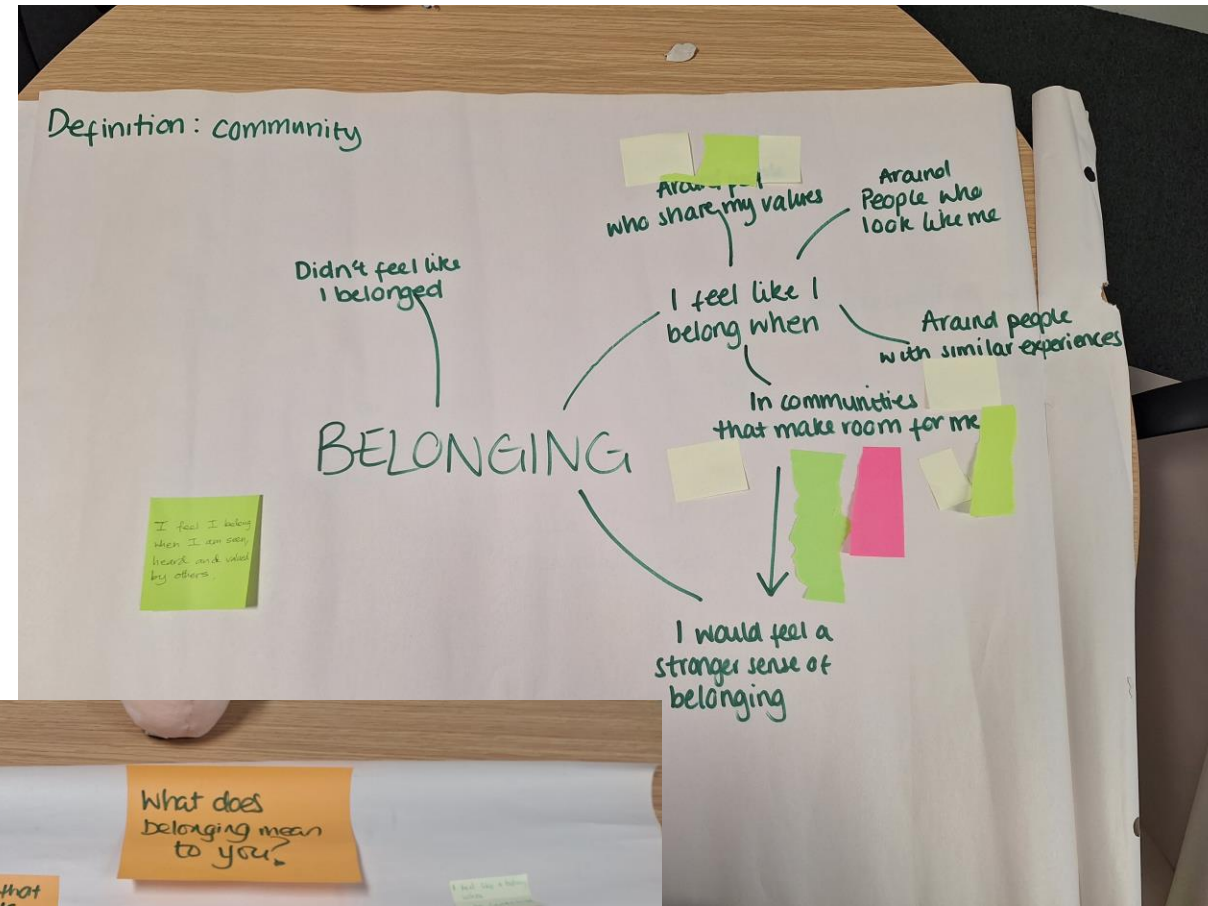
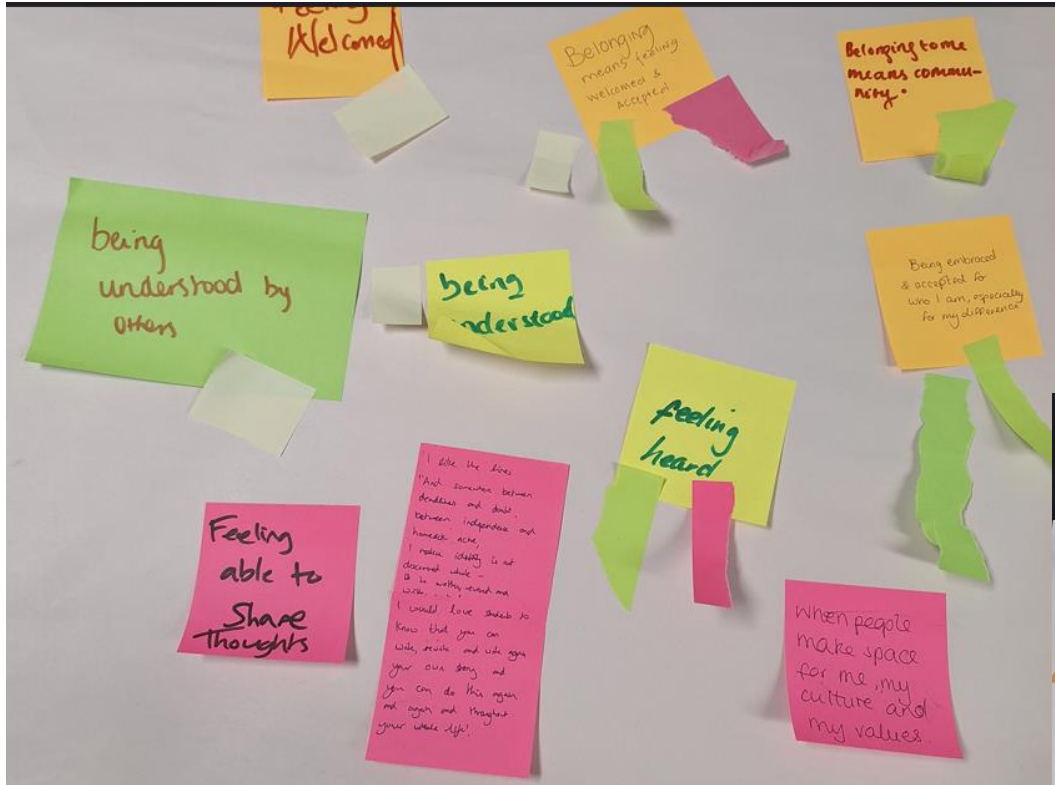
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Building Belonging Together

On the day

- A flat power dynamic between academics, PS colleagues, and students.
- Round-table seating designed to encourage conversation and connection.

What does belonging mean to you?



Belonging Themes

Being heard, seen, and listened to

- Definitions of belonging centred on voice and recognition.
- Contributions are acknowledged; perspectives are taken seriously.

Feeling included, accepted, and safe

- Being invited into spaces, conversations, and communities without fear of exclusion or judgement.
- Comfort, trust, and emotional grounding.

Being valued for knowledge and expertise

- Importance of intellectual recognition was highlighted.
- Capturing belonging not only as a social experience but as an academic one.
- Belonging for many participants is closely tied to feeling competent and respected.



Belonging Themes

Community, connection, and open-minded relationships

- Belonging as deeply relational, grounded in supportive interpersonal connections.
- Belonging is constructed through shared values, mutual respect, and collective care, rather than institutional branding or formal structures.

Emotional safety and stability

- Depicted belonging as an emotional state characterised by safety, comfort, and calm.
- Belonging is strongly tied to wellbeing, trust, and emotional groundedness.

Belonging as dynamic and context-dependent

- Highlights the need for sustained, ongoing interventions rather than one-off initiatives.

Representation and identity affirmation

- Belonging is enhanced when individuals see their identities reflected and affirmed in the spaces they occupy, whether through peers, staff, or community structures.

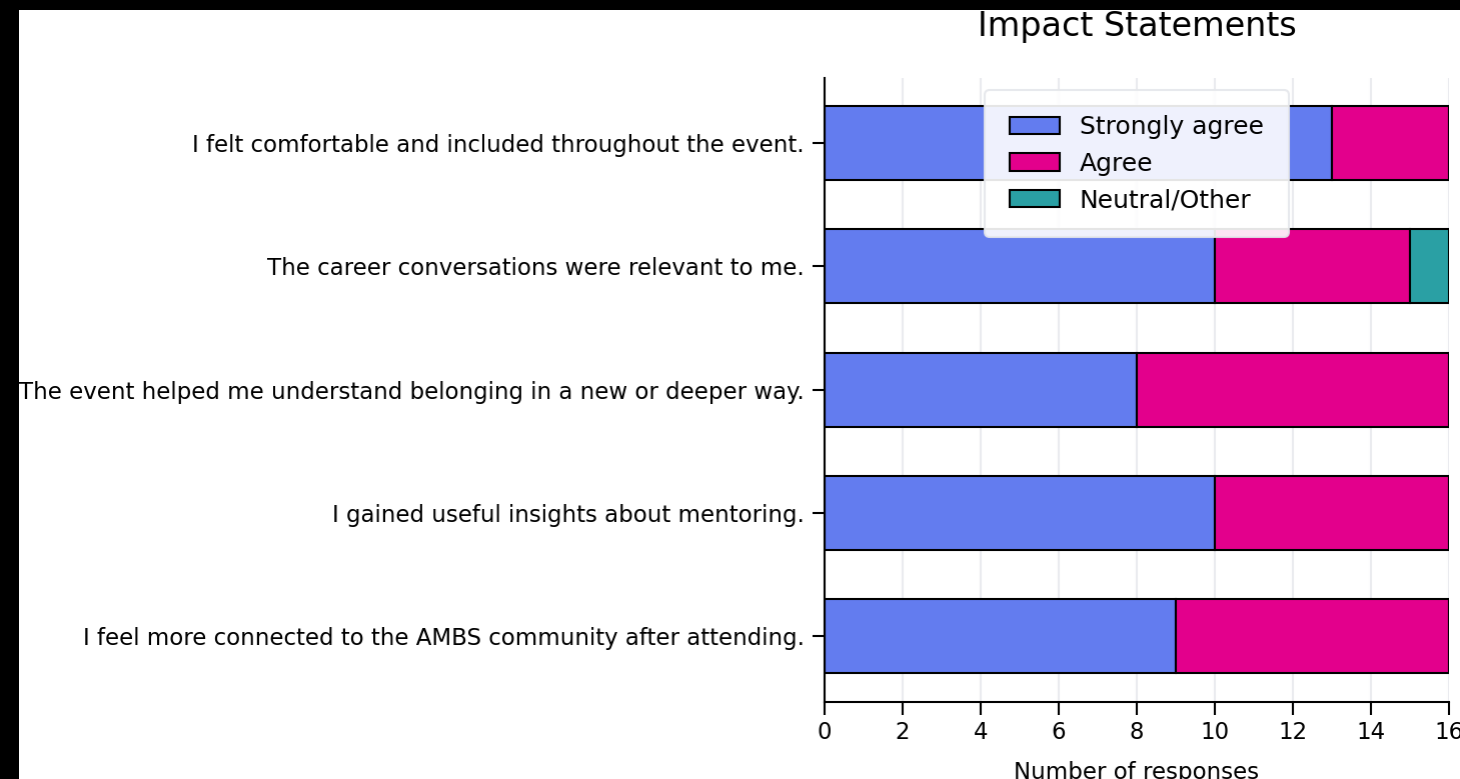


Overall event rating

- Excellent 15
- Very good 2
- Good 0
- Fair 0
- Poor 0

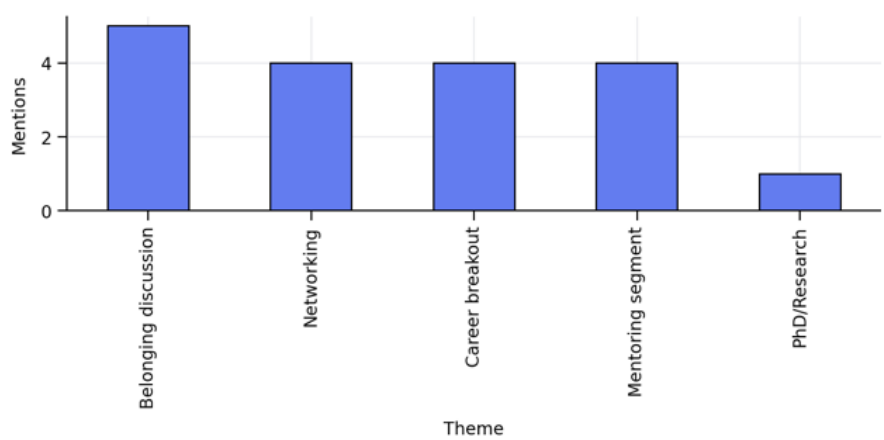


Impact on belonging, mentorship insight and inclusion



What participants valued most

Most Valuable Elements (Theme Mentions)



“I absolutely loved this event. As an international student, I’ve often found it challenging to feel fully integrated into this community, but this gathering made me feel like I truly belong here.”

Feedback

What is one change you would like to see implemented to support belonging?

More chance for everyone one to meet up to facilitate that community feeling

Being more intentional about creating an environment that supports belonging.

“I would like to see the implementation of a regular, peer-led "belonging circle" program, where students from all backgrounds, especially underrepresented groups like Black students and international students, can gather in safe, facilitated spaces to share their experiences, challenges, and hopes for the community...”



Thank you
Questions and Contributions
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