



DOWNING COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

How to Report Incidences of Racism

Experiences of racism range from the discomfiting to the traumatic, from the seemingly invisible to the undeniably brutal. In the wake of George Floyd's murder and the global protest of Black Lives Matter, a critical moment has opened where institutions and peoples are committing to take greater action to end racialized violence and injustice. Downing is no exception. We are not yet the community we wish to be. This is why we are committed to taking bolder actions to facilitate anti-racist education amongst our members as well as bolstering our support and reporting processes to end everyday racism at our college, university and city.

As a part of this broader process, this document offers some guidance on how to deal with instances of racism towards our members, students, staff, fellows and alumni. We indicate the multiple supporting agencies in Cambridge and a series of steps you may take as a person who has been targeted or has witnessed racism. We will start with how we are understanding racism.

Racism

Downing's anti-discrimination policy, published on our website in 2019, echoes the Equality Act in covering all potential victims and perpetrators of racism, irrespective of colour:

"The Fellows, staff and students of Downing College believe that all forms of discrimination and racism are unacceptable. Not only do they divide communities and undermine social cohesion, they prevent individuals from achieving their full potential, to all of our detriments. We acknowledge that the responsibility lies with each of us to robustly challenge discrimination and to assert the positive value of diversity. We stand together with any of our Fellows, staff and students who are adversely affected by discrimination."

Racism is an ideology and a set of practices based on ideas of racial superiority that normalise control, domination and exclusion on the basis of racial difference, while legitimating privilege and oppression. Such differences include colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin. Racism has substantive effects on the organisation of our economic, political, and social lives.

One of the ways in which racism is perpetuated as a system of oppression is through everyday manifestations and microaggressions. Microaggressions are everyday acts that serve to marginalise minoritised communities of all kinds in more or less covert ways. For instance, this could involve asking 'Where are you really from?' or many other instances that while

apparently building inclusivity reinforce racialised differences. Expressions of racism include beliefs, feelings, attitudes, utterances, assumptions and actions that end up reproducing and re-establishing a system that offers dominant groups opportunities to thrive while contributing towards the marginalisation of minority groups.

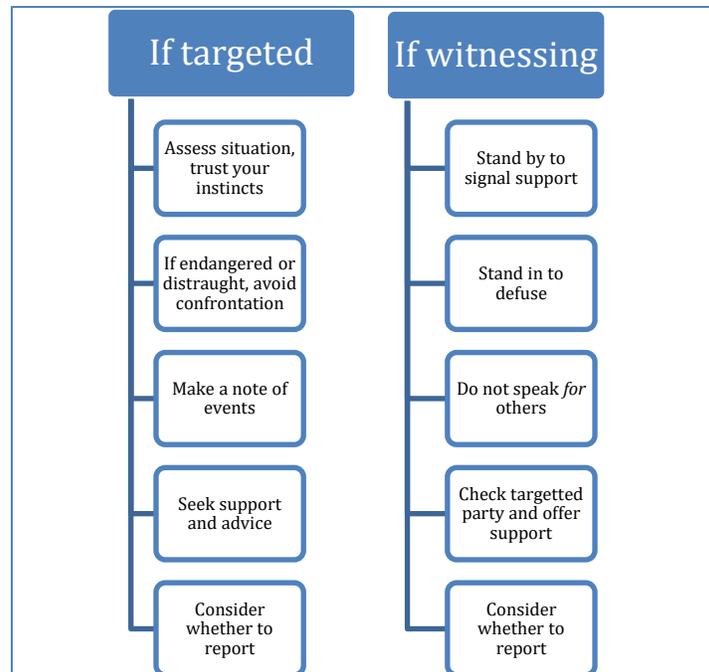
Racial prejudice is a common form of expressing racism and it involves suspicion and stigmatisation toward other groups, often relying on racial and ethnic stereotypes. Forms of racism can also refer to structural processes, environments or atmospheres and less discrete or more diffuse experiences. Sometimes racism can even appear through apparently 'well meaning' comments or actions. We are aware that some forms of racism might be easier to capture than others and that the term 'racist incident' or 'experiences of racism' might fall short for what you experienced or saw. We also understand that everyday racism is so normalised that many will not even perceive it as such. However, the acknowledgement of racism as an important step to nourish our personal lives and strengthen our community at Downing.

Immediate Action and Support

First, how should you act when you experience racism or witness something racist? This is a tricky and sensitive challenge yet ignoring the event or passing by ought not to be a standard behavior. Ignoring something offensive almost invariably means this harmful behavior will be repeated.

The first step, if you feel targeted, is to *remember that taking care of yourself comes first - it is not your responsibility to confront racism if you feel it would endanger your wellbeing or security*. If you witness an instance of racism, the first step is to stand by the person targeted by a racialized joke, inappropriate comment or verbal assault. Merely standing by as a witness can shift a situation.

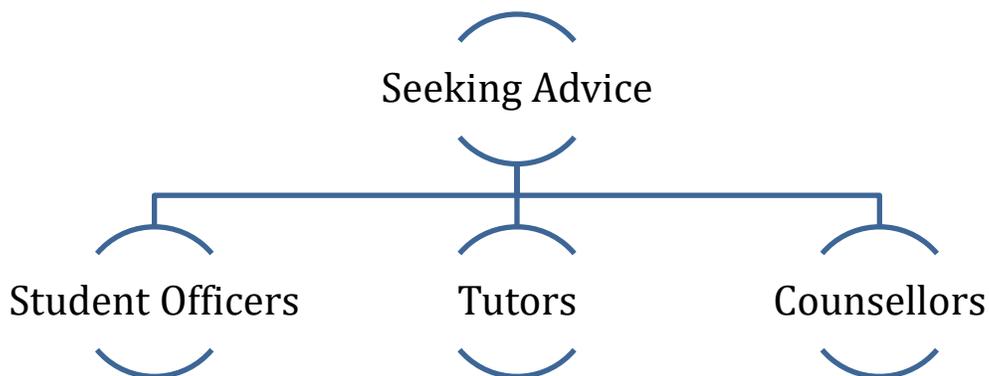
The second step is to assess the gravity of the situation and whether there is an opportunity for a friendly challenge or if it is better to simply shut it down for the moment. If the situation seems to have arisen out of ignorance, or if it seems unclear, following your instinct and your feelings is important, as one effect of racism is confusion and doubting yourself. In order to clarify, you may decide to challenge and check comments in amicable fashion. You can also make a note of events, so as to allow some time for reflection with the harmful party. If the situation feels stressful, interrupting it and shutting it down for the moment might be the best way to send a message that there is something going on and prevent escalation. Maybe you don't feel able to do any of this so moving away from this situation might be the right thing for you so you can recover and decide what to do next. If you are a witness, remember in any instance, not to speak on behalf of others' feelings or intentions, and to check with the targeted party if they are okay and if they are aware of the support available to them in College and beyond.



Visibility and Advice

If you have suffered or witnessed an instance of racism, you should not keep it to yourself. It is best to seek support amongst college officers, friends and family. Often telling others what happened can make some discomfort lift, break a sense of taboo and/or motivate you to take appropriate action. If you are a student, you could reach out to college staff. There are a number of people you may talk to and seek advice from - your tutor, the college nurse, the college counsellor, the chaplain, your Director of Studies or any other member of staff to whom you are comfortable talking. Each of these people may offer different sorts of help and insight and should always advise you as to the full range of support networks you can tap into. All members of staff are bound to a duty of care and upholding anti-discriminatory conduct. Beyond staff, support and advice can also be sought with JCR and MCR officers.

For ease of reference for students, let's rehearse here some ways in which of these staff members may help (see also Fig. 2).



The first and most common port of call to report an instance of racism is your tutor. Tutors have been trained to deal with racism issues and have taken the Race Awareness training provided by the university. Tutors advising you on a wide range of support networks and available actions at your disposal. The first thing a tutor will do is listen to your accounts of the events and assess the situation. A tutor will focus first on immediate welfare needs and second on whether conduct interventions are required. In terms of welfare needs, a tutor will refer to the availability of college and/or university counselling; as well as check whether your study and college conditions are insulated from high-stress pressures. A tutor may also indicate self-help resources and support groups dealing with racism. In terms of conduct interventions, a tutor will assess and discuss with you what actions might be effective in deterring further instances of racism and providing you as a victim or witness with a sense of redress. Here, there is a large range of possible actions to be taken, from informal mediation, to anonymous reporting, to disciplinary procedures and formal complaints. These are discussed in detail below. In short, then, Tutors are there to provide you with advice and support in accessing welfare support networks and resolution procedures. If problems emerge with your assigned tutor or DoS, please contact the Senior Tutor directly.

The second port of call may be the college counsellor, or alternatively, a university counsellor. Experiences of racism can be psychologically very challenging, leaving marks of anxiety, depression or anger that may upset many areas of our lives. Counsellors are trained professionals and will provide you with a safe space to speak freely and to become proactive about self-care. Counsellors will allow you to speak without fear of judgement or burdening others with difficult emotions. Counsellors will also give you practical tools to help you avoid negative behavior/thought patterns.

In addition to your tutor and counsellors, you may also share concerns with your Director of Studies (DoS), especially if you feel a given lecturer, supervisor or co-worker has behaved inappropriately. Your DoS may refer you to your Tutor, but in some cases might also indicate a number of departmental routes to redress inappropriate conduct.

Along with college staff, you may also seek support and advice from college and university student officers. At college level, both the JCR and the MCR will have representatives responsible for Welfare and Equal Opportunities and Black and Ethnic Minority matters. Officers in these posts will be trained and have experience to advise you on how to seek support and redress. At university level, moreover, the Cambridge University Student Union (CUSU) and the Graduate Union (GU), will have full-time officers who can offer further support. In recent years, CUSU has also been hosting a student-led BME campaign which militates to end everyday racism at Cambridge.

Beyond this seeking advice and support, especially if you are a witness of racism, it is also useful and important to take the time to educate yourself about how to be anti-racist and participate in creating a better community and culture. It is better to be proactive than reactive, avoiding harm rather than trying to remedy it. At the end of this document, a series of practical texts on anti-

racism are listed. Resources on ‘decolonizing the university’ and ‘decolonizing the curriculum’ are also included as these are particularly prescient questions for student and academic reflection.

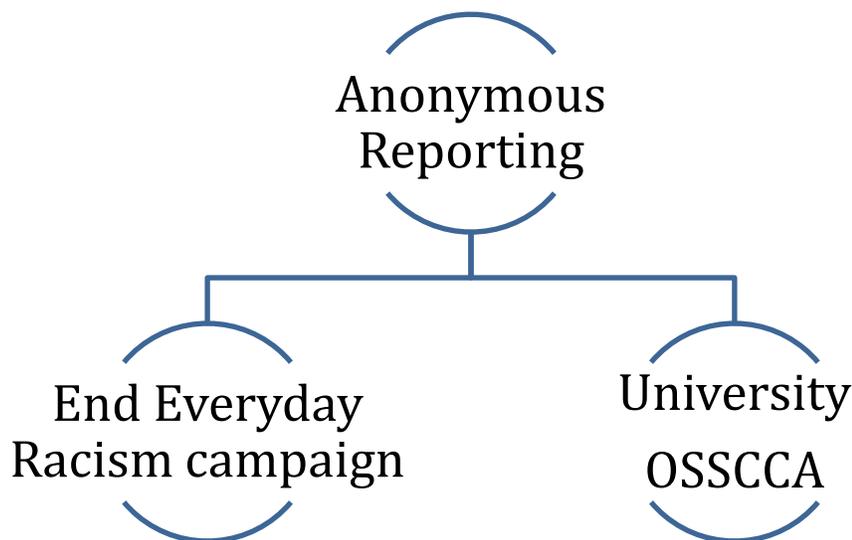
Anonymous Reporting

Independently of whether you choose to pursue any disciplinary or restorative action, it is critical that you report any instance of racism you suffer or witness at Downing, the wider University and Cambridge. Whilst an anonymous report is not followed through with a targeted disciplinary process, it builds up a fine-grained archive of where, when and with whom instances of racism are recurrent. This allows for the University’s anonymous reporting procedure or anti-racist campaigns such as the End Everyday Racism, to raise awareness and demand action to ensure appropriate standards of conduct. There are two key places to submit anonymous reporting of instances of racism you witnessed or experienced, both directed to students and staff.

One is the University’s anonymous reporting form ([through OSCCA, see here](#)). Through this pathway, though no direct disciplinary action is taken, information is collated for Human Resources departments and tutorial teams to seek conduct improvements on contexts recurrently reported. Every year, this evidence will also be collated and published (c.f. [the 2018 report](#)).

The second is the End Everyday Racism research/campaign, which seeks to document the experiences of racism for Cambridge students and staff ([see here](#)). This project is creating an archive and issues periodic reports which will be used to advocate for targeted institutional change across Cambridge departments, colleges and institutes. You can see [the 2020 report here](#). This project is supported by [CUSU/GU](#), [UCU Cambridge](#), the [Black Cantab Research Society](#), and the Freedom Loving You network ([FLY](#)).

In short, then, though anonymous reporting will not produce effects for you individually, it will feed into making the extent of a shared problem visible and will inform better institutional action being taken. For these reasons, it is important witnesses also participate in reporting.



Formal Complaints and Mediated Resolution

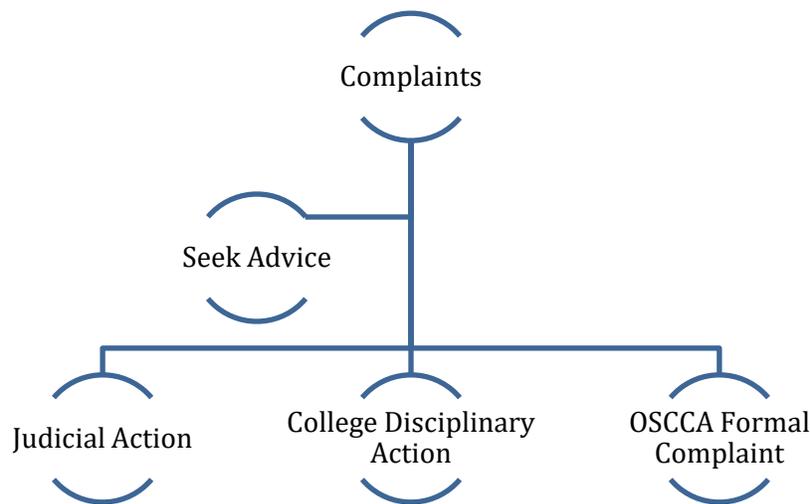
It is important to remember that in the most serious cases racialised harm can and ought to be prosecuted as a form of hate crime or unlawful [discrimination](#). Government and civil advice is available [here](#) and [here](#) on rights and procedure. You may seek such action as a victim, witness or supporter, and in instances of harassment, intimidation and incitement, as well as assault. If you seek to do this, remember that here as in other instances, you are entitled to ask your College Tutor and Senior Tutor for advice and support, as well as with the Student Union's Advice Service ([SUAS](#)).

Yet, it is often the case that instances of racialised harm occur where prosecution isn't seen as the most appropriate, effective or desired pathway. The most common examples here, may be found in instances when a colleague, friend or fellow student or alumni is expressing racist views. Such instances can be dealt with through informal mediation, anonymous reporting and formal university complaints.

At college level, if you are a student and you have been targeted by another student, informal mediation can be pursued with the help of the tutorial team and JCR and MCR officers. Most commonly, you'd contact your tutor, retell the incident and discuss what redress to pursue (c.f. college policy [here](#)). This may include a variety of options - from college-level disciplinary action (via the Dean), an college-level informal restorative process, i.e. 'alternative resolution' (with support from the Senior Tutor and the tutors of both victims, witnesses and perpetrators); or a [formal complaint](#) through the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA). Disciplinary actions are pursued to discourage perpetrators from repeating harm. Alternative resolution processes are about facilitating an exchange between victims and perpetrators where wrongdoing and conflict is acknowledged and empathy is sought as a pathway to forgiveness, learning and closure (c.f. [IIRP](#) guidance). This can be a difficult but rewarding process. Given this process can be quite uncomfortable for victims, be sure to discuss whether it is appropriate with the Senior Tutor and other college officers.

A formal complaint through OSCCA initiates a thorough investigation (up to a few months) and results in disciplinary action if appropriate. Here it is critical for a complaint to be accompanied with enough evidence about the reported acts of misconduct by the accused student or staff member. This can be a lengthy, somewhat intrusive and stressful process by comparison to informal routes. It also operates by investigation and decision rather than mediation, thus distancing complainants from shaping sought outcomes.

As a member of staff, you are also entitled to report racialised misconduct and harassment, either to you or third parties in the university ([see guidance here](#)). You can seek confidential advice from a Dignity at Work Contact and your trade union reps. If you want action undertaken, you may submit an anonymous report, seek an internal mediation process or initiate a formal grievance procedure (to be conducted by the relevant HR department). Should you need psychological support, you are also entitled to access the [Staff Counselling Service](#) confidentially and free of charge.



Key Resources at Cambridge

*Race Equality at Cambridge - Help and Advice for Students and Staff:

<https://www.race-equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/help-and-advice>.

*End Everyday Racism: <https://racismatcambridge.org/>

*Cambridge University Student Union BME Campaign:

<https://www.cusu.co.uk/about/cusu-campaigns/the-black-and-minority-ethnic-campaign/>

* Dignity at work policy: <https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/dignity-work-policy>

Some Resources on Anti-Racist Education

Eddo-Lodge, Reni. *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. Bloomsbury, 2018.

Kendi, Ibram X. *How to be an antiracist*. One world, 2019.

Oluo, Ijeoma. *So you want to talk about race*. Hachette, 2018.

Saad, Layla F. *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor*. Sourcebooks, Inc., 2020.

Sue, Derald Wing. *Race talk and the conspiracy of silence: Understanding and facilitating difficult dialogues on race*. John Wiley & Sons, 2016.

Rutherford, Adam. *How to Argue with a Racist: History, Science, Race and Reality*. Hachette, 2020.

'How to be anti-racist: it's more than books, quotes and Blackout Tuesday', Washington Post, 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL0HJ2VDSxU>

Anti-Racist Resource Guide: <http://www.victorialynnalexander.com/antiracistresourceguide>

'How to be an Ally': <https://guidetoallyship.com/>

Some Resources on Decolonising the Curriculum

Bhambra, Gurminder K., Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu. *Decolonising the university*. Pluto Press, 2018.

de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Decolonising the university: The challenge of deep cognitive justice*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

GlobalSocialTheory.org - <https://globalsocialtheory.org/decolonising-the-university/>

DecoloniseSociology.com - <https://decolonisesociology.com/>

