

Black at Sussex Annual Report 2024–25

(Accessible Version)

Annual Impact and Activity Report - Accessible Format

This accessible version of the Black at Sussex Annual Report has been specifically designed to meet university accessibility guidelines and WCAG AA standards. It contains the same comprehensive information as the visual report, formatted for optimal screen reader compatibility and PDF accessibility.

- 📄 This document covers the period from 2024 through to 2026, showcasing a transformative year of achievement, innovation and cultural impact at the University of Sussex.

Executive Summary

A Transformative Year of Progress and Impact

The 2024–25 academic year marked a watershed moment for Black at Sussex. With an expanded presence across campus, national media engagement and maximum output of our ring-fenced budget for the first time in the programme's history, we made significant strides towards our core mission: to improve the experience of Black students and staff at the University of Sussex, through ongoing research, events and initiatives.

2024-5 represented the third year of our agreed initial five-year plan, and the momentum has been extraordinary. From reimagining our brand identity to launching innovative business initiatives, from celebrating Black excellence through alumni portraits to amplifying student voices through creative programming, Black at Sussex has established itself as a cornerstone of inclusive community-building at Sussex.

This report highlights the key achievements, initiatives, and cultural contributions that have defined this remarkable period. It demonstrates not only what we've accomplished, but the depth of commitment from students, staff, alumni and community partners who have made this work possible.

Key Statistics for 2024-25:

- Full budget maximised for the first time in programme history
- 12: Proposals supported celebrating Black excellence
- 2: BBC features providing national media spotlight
- 4: Partnerships established with Black-led organisations

Strategic Achievements

Building Foundations for Lasting Impact

Visual Identity Creation

Black at Sussex introduced a vibrant, distinct visual identity aligned with Pan-African aesthetics. This new branding has been consistently applied across all materials, presentations, and media, significantly enhancing recognition and creating a cohesive visual language that celebrates Black culture and heritage. The rebrand has strengthened our visibility across campus and in external communications, making Black at Sussex instantly recognisable and professionally positioned.

Website Overhaul

A dedicated online hub for events, resources, and opportunities was successfully launched, dramatically improving accessibility and visibility for both students and staff. The new website serves as a central information portal, featuring upcoming events, past achievements, resources for wellbeing and academic success, and opportunities for engagement. Traffic metrics show significant increases in user engagement compared to previous years.

Black Brighton Calendar

We coordinated and launched a comprehensive listing of Black at Sussex events, now live and serving as a hub for cultural activities throughout Brighton. This calendar integrates with broader Brighton community events, positioning the University as a key contributor to the city's vibrant Black cultural landscape and creating pathways for town-gown collaboration.

Governance and Representation

Reformatting of Steering Committee: The Steering Committee underwent a significant restructuring to ensure majority Black representation, reinforcing authenticity, lived experience, and accountability in decision-making. This change ensures that the voices shaping Black at Sussex's direction are those most directly impacted by its work. The new structure has enhanced trust, improved strategic alignment, and strengthened the programme's legitimacy both internally and externally.

Enhanced Terms of Reference: A yearly membership review process was introduced as part of updated Terms of Reference, ensuring that committee composition remains dynamic, representative, and responsive to the evolving needs of the Black community at Sussex. This governance innovation promotes transparency, prevents stagnation, and creates pathways for emerging student and staff leaders to contribute their perspectives.

Black at Sussex within Culture, Equality and Inclusion: Black at Sussex forms part of the university's 'Inclusive Sussex vision' where all members of our community will have equal access to opportunities, and we will enable and support them to fully achieve their potential and contribute to the success and advancement of the University.

Key personnel:

- Black at Sussex Project Lead: Bud Johnston
- Black at Sussex Chair: Gavin Mensah-Coker
- Assistant Director of HR Culture Equality and Inclusion: Isobel Pearce
- Pro Vice Chancellor for Culture, Equality and Inclusion: Professor David Ruebain

Programme Highlights

Innovation and Excellence in Action

01

Guest Lecturing Campaign

Black at Sussex successfully led a strategic campaign to bring Black guest lecturers into student learning spaces across multiple schools and departments. This initiative directly addresses curriculum decolonisation goals whilst providing students with diverse role models and expertise. A series of talks were confirmed and delivered throughout the academic year, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees. The campaign demonstrated strong strategic alignment with the University's commitment to decolonising curricula and enhancing inclusive pedagogy. Student evaluations highlighted the transformative impact of seeing Black scholars and practitioners in academic spaces.

02

Alumni Portraits Programme

The Alumni Portraits Programme achieved significant milestones this year. "First Contact", featuring the initial six alumni portraits by acclaimed photographers Eddie Otchere and Charlie Phillips, was exhibited across campus to considerable acclaim. The full 12-portrait series has now been completed and is prepared for a major exhibition in Sussex Library, launching in October 2025 for Black History Month. These portraits celebrate the achievements of Black Sussex alumni whilst creating visible representation that inspires current students. Each portrait is accompanied by biographical narratives that document professional journeys, challenges overcome, and advice for future generations.

03

Black Brilliance in Business

The 2024/25 academic year marked the highly successful pilot year of this innovative employability initiative, which connects Black students with Black professionals and entrepreneurs across diverse sectors. The programme featured networking sessions, mentorship opportunities, skills workshops, and industry insights. Feedback from participating students was exceptional, with many reporting increased confidence, expanded professional networks, and clearer career pathways. The programme secured continuation funding into 2025/26 with plans for expansion, increased student engagement targets, and growing partner interest from businesses committed to diversity and inclusion.

04

Student Connector Programme

Two dedicated student roles were supported throughout the year, focusing on content creation, outreach, and event co-delivery. These Student Connectors served as vital bridges between Black at Sussex and the wider student community. They produced engaging social media content, helped organise and promote events, and provided peer-to-peer support. A major achievement was the production and distribution of the co-created Black Student Guide for Welcome Week 2024, which significantly increased cultural orientation, provided practical advice for new students, and enhanced visibility of Black at Sussex from the moment students arrive on campus.

05

Community and Cultural Contributions

Black at Sussex demonstrated strong community engagement through several key partnerships. The Brighton BASH Carnival collaboration delivered Black-led workshops on "Crowns" (the theme of 2025 Brighton BASH Carnival), celebrating Black hair, heritage and history through creative expression. Active participation in BASH Carnival included events and youth engagement activities that connected university students with younger community members. BBC Sussex Radio featured Black at Sussex for the second time, spotlighting the guest lecturing initiative and amplifying the programme's impact both locally and nationally, raising the University's profile as a leader in inclusive practice.

Financial Report

Strategic Investment and Full Budget Utilisation

2024/25 Budget Overview:

Black at Sussex achieved a historic milestone by successfully spending or ringfencing the entirety of its £43,261 budget – a first for the programme since its inception. This achievement demonstrates mature financial planning, strategic prioritisation, and effective project delivery. The full utilisation of allocated funds reflects the programme's capacity to translate resources into meaningful impact whilst maintaining rigorous financial governance.

The budget was strategically allocated across core programme pillars: student support, employability, cultural programming, governance, and infrastructure development. Every pound was invested with intentionality, ensuring maximum benefit for Black students and staff whilst building sustainable foundations for future work.

Significant Investment Categories:

Investment Category	Description
Black Brilliance in Business	Investment in pilot employability programme
Student Connectors	Supporting two student roles throughout the year
Guest Lectures	Across a series of guest lectures
Alumni Portraits	To bring phase 2 to completion. Next steps TBD
Other Projects	Various additional initiatives and operational costs
Total Budget	Complete allocation achieved

Several additional proposed projects entered decision stages for delivery in 2025/26, ensuring continuity and momentum.

The uncommitted funds as of July 2025 stood at £0, representing complete and responsible allocation of all available resources. This financial stewardship positions Black at Sussex as a model programme within the University, demonstrating both ambition and accountability.

Future Programming

Events and Creative Programming for 2025-26

As detailed below, an ambitious range of events have been planned, launched or completed for the 2025/6 academic year, each designed to celebrate Black culture, foster community and create spaces for creative expression and intellectual engagement.

Upcoming Events and Initiatives:

October 2025:

- Launch of Alumni Portraits: Eddie Otchere delivered a powerful conversation with Project lead Bud Johnston about the origin and journey of the alumni portraits project, marking completion to this phase of the project and pondering what could happen next.
- BLM Exhibition - Photography Exhibition: An exhibition by BARCO and Brighton and Hove Museums was brought to the university and housed in the library throughout October.

October 2025 – September 2026:

- Mid Street Labs: A five-month creative project mapping Black student experiences in Brighton through photography, oral histories, and creative writing. This innovative initiative documents the lived realities of Black students navigating university life and the broader Brighton community, creating an archive of voices, stories, and perspectives.

2025/26 Academic Year:

- Black Brilliance in Business: Returning for the 2nd year. An internal collaboration with the Business School throughout the academic year. Students are coached into leadership scenarios taking responsibility for the programme activities, marketing and coordination.
- Book Festival: The festival will feature author talks, reading circles, and discussions that centre Black voices, narratives, and intellectual contributions across genres from fiction to critical theory. Students have been taken on as festival curators.
- Afrori Books Collaboration: An ongoing partnership providing students and staff with access to diverse literature, particularly works by Black British and African diaspora authors. Launch of a student-led book club alongside a celebration of Black-authored literature.

February 2026:

- Women of Colour: Creative and leadership-focused workshops led by Black and Brown women, addressing intersectionality, empowerment, and professional development. Preparation began in 24/25 with partner identification and programme design, ensuring authentic delivery by women with lived experience and professional expertise.
- Tapestry of Black Britons: Delivered by Paula Ogun-Hector Sussex alumn. A lecture and exhibition exploring Sussex's Black student history from the 1960s to present day. This archival project uncovers forgotten stories, celebrates pioneers, and contextualises contemporary experiences within a longer trajectory of Black presence at the University.

March 2026:

- Decolonising the Archive: In pursuit of alternative, embodied and community-based archiving (Guest lecture)
- STRAND - Screening of Files Across the Isles: We welcome STRAND, three sisters who have been filming and documenting Black communities and storytelling in places in Britain perhaps not recognised for having significant Black communities

April 2026:

- Files Across the Isles- An Exhibition & Screening: A one-day exhibition and screening experience of the Files Across the Isles project, including images from collaborations with photographer Karis Beaumont, taken in Brighton. Starting an archive of images of the Black community of Brighton.
- The Black Creatives Lab: Brought to you by Black at Sussex and The Kusp, The Black Creatives Lab is a one-day immersive experience designed to support, celebrate, and elevate Black students interested in careers across the creative industries.
- Why the Black Cultural Archive is UK Black History Made Real (Guest lecture)

July 2026:

- Brighton Bash Carnival 2026 – Celebrating Black Joy, Culture and Community: BASH stands for Building Alliance, Solidarity & Hope - a perfect reflection of the carnival's mission: to celebrate diversity, Black culture, and community strength through music, food, art, and togetherness.

October 2026:

- BLAcademia Symposium: An interdisciplinary academic and creative event bringing together scholars, artists, and activists to explore Black intellectual traditions and contemporary contributions. Originally scheduled earlier, the symposium was strategically rescheduled to maximise participation and impact.

Additional Guest Lectures (Dates TBC):

- Strategic Inclusion in Organisational Change
- Bounce Forward: Resilience for Young Trailblazers
- We're Not Waiting: The Power of Black Digital Activism
- Pubs, parties, rhizomes and ancestors: a journey of creative entrepreneurship and community building (working title)

Looking Ahead

2026–27 Strategic Priorities

As Black at Sussex enters its penultimate year before the current five-year plan concludes in July 2027, our focus shifts towards consolidation, legacy-building and ensuring sustainable impact beyond the programme's initial timeframe. The coming year presents opportunities to deepen existing initiatives, launch ambitious new projects and document our learnings for future continuation.

Strategic Priority 1: Deepen Alumni Engagement

Expand alumni engagement through strategic storytelling initiatives and the major portrait exhibition launching in October 2025. Develop mentorship pathways connecting alumni with current students, creating intergenerational networks of support and opportunity. Document alumni success stories across diverse sectors to inspire and guide current students navigating their own career journeys.

Strategic Priority 2: Deliver Flagship Programming

Successfully deliver BLAcademia Symposium and Women of Colour programming with strong local and national partnerships. These flagship events will position Sussex as a leader in Black-centred scholarship and intersectional practice, attracting external participants and raising the University's national profile. Ensure robust documentation and dissemination of outcomes.

Strategic Priority 3: Expand Black Brilliance

Roll out Black Brilliance Across Sussex – an ambitious campaign to replicate Business School successes in other faculties including Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM disciplines. Tailor employability programming to sector-specific needs whilst maintaining core principles of connection, mentorship and opportunity. Secure faculty-level buy-in and resourcing.

Strategic Priority 4: Ensure Financial Completion

Allocate final budget provisions strategically before programme wrap-up in July 2027. Prioritise projects with lasting impact, legacy value, and potential for institutional embedding. Work with University leadership to identify pathways for continuation beyond the current funding cycle, ensuring that momentum built over five years is not lost.

Key Success Metric: By July 2027, Black at Sussex aims to have established self-sustaining structures, embedded practices and institutional commitments that ensure the continued support and visibility of Black students and staff beyond the initial programme timeframe.

Acknowledgements

With Gratitude: Celebrating Our Community

Thank you to the students, staff, alumni, and community partners who shaped and strengthened Black at Sussex throughout 2024–25. From carnival workshops to committee rooms, from lecture halls to exhibition spaces, your vision, passion, and commitment fuel this work every single day.

This report represents the collective effort of dozens of individuals who believed in the possibility of a more inclusive, representative, and culturally vibrant University of Sussex. Your contributions — whether through governance, creative programming, event attendance, or simply showing up authentically — have created something truly special.

"Black at Sussex is more than a programme; it's a movement, a community, and a testament to what becomes possible when we centre Black voices, experiences, and excellence." — Gavin Mensah-Coker, Black at Sussex Chair

Special Recognition:

Student Connectors: For exceptional content creation, tireless outreach efforts, and authentic peer-to-peer engagement that brought Black at Sussex into the daily lives of students across campus.

Library Services: For co-leading exhibitions and collection development initiatives that have transformed the Library into a more inclusive and representative space for all.

Steering Committee: To all Steering Committee members, past and present, for their unwavering commitment, strategic guidance, and courageous leadership in shaping a programme that truly serves its community.

As we move into year 4 of this five-year journey, we do so with immense pride in what has been achieved and profound optimism about what lies ahead. The foundations have been laid. The community has been built. The impact is undeniable. Together, we continue to make Sussex a place where Black students and staff not only survive, but flourish.