BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC STUDENT ATTAINMENT AT UK UNIVERSITIES: #CLOSINGTHEGAP

Universities UK

nus
national union of **students**
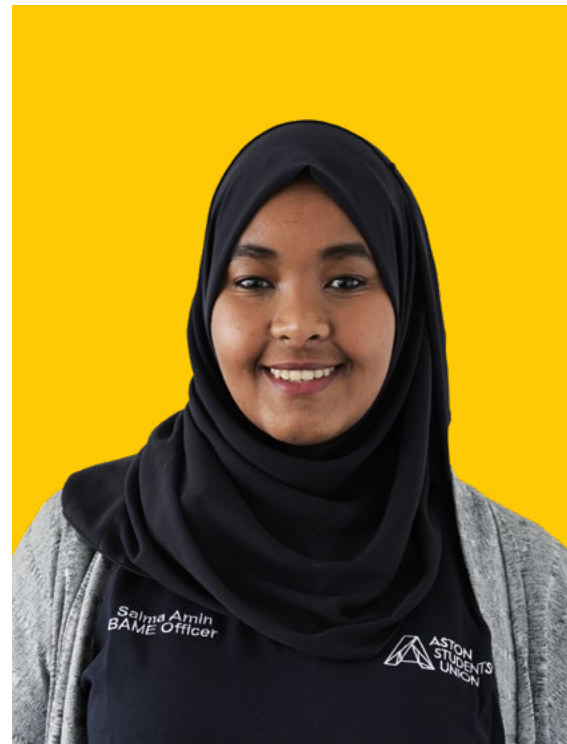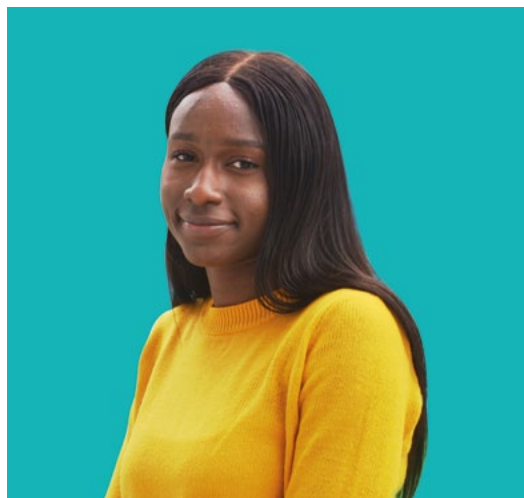
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FOREWORD BY BARONESS VALERIE AMOS, DIRECTOR, SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

When the extent of the BAME attainment gap in universities was brought to my attention, I was shocked, because universities should be places where opportunity and aspiration come together. Of course I knew that, given its extent in society, discrimination would exist in our universities. What I was not prepared for was the patchy approach to action to bring about change. Some universities have been slow in recognising the scale of the challenge and in committing to making the changes required. Others have made significant progress in narrowing the gap.

We face significant challenges in terms of representation, pedagogy, curriculum reform and student experience. BAME students do not do as well at university compared with their White counterparts – the latest statistics show a 13% attainment gap. BAME staff are poorly represented in both senior academic and university leadership roles: of 19,000 people employed as professors in the UK, only 400 are BAME women. In a typical gathering of 100 professors, 90 would be white and there would be just two BAME women.

Why is this happening? In Britain, we are proud to have some of the best universities in the world attracting global talent, yet the data in this report shows that even when BAME students overcome the hurdles that prevent them getting to university in the first place, they do not have an equal chance at succeeding. We are not operating a level playing field.

This is why I was pleased to be asked to lead on this project for Universities UK (UUK), working with Amatey Doku, Vice-President for Higher Education from the National Union of Students. We started a nationwide conversation about the BAME attainment gap and how to address it. The report shows how structural inequality within universities has a profound effect on students' ability to achieve. My thanks go to the students who participated in our evidence sessions and helped us to understand the pervasive and negative impact of discrimination on the student experience and their ability to achieve, and also to the university leaders, academics and university administrators who shared their experiences and perspectives.

This report shines a much-needed spotlight on what has been happening, and crucially provides advice on what needs to be done. We cannot afford to be complacent. We need to take action now.

None of this work would have been possible without the support and commitment of Amatey Doku, the staff at UUK and the vice-chancellors who participated in the advisory group.

Thank you.
Valerie Amos

FOREWORD BY AMATEY DOKU, VICE-PRESIDENT HIGHER EDUCATION, NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

I used my first big speech as Vice-President Higher Education at the National Union of Students (NUS) to tell the sector that the BAME attainment gap was simply unacceptable and deeply unjust. Despite my tablet's numerous attempts to silence me (by promptly shutting down just after I started speaking), I was hugely grateful for the opportunity to address a large group of vice-chancellors at the UK Conference at Brunel University London in October 2017, putting this issue on the agenda. It's been a great pleasure since then to work with the UUK team and alongside Baroness Amos on this project: co-production has long been championed by NUS as key to a successful student experience, and I hope this sector-level replication provides a blueprint for further co-operation.

My fear on starting this process was that it would stir up some interesting conversations, articles and commentary, but ultimately have no long-lasting impact for BAME students. However, since I started in this role, some key things have changed in relation to the BAME attainment gap. The sector now accepts that there is a problem – many more students'

unions are aware that there is an issue and have prioritised it in their campaign work; the Office for Students (OfS) in England has set new targets for institutions to close their gaps and the issue has even been given a profile by the Cabinet Office and the government's Race Disparity Audit. If you include the establishment of the new Evidence and Impact Exchange at the OfS, a 'what works' practice-sharing hub for the sector on related issues, and the tireless effort of activists and campaigners on the ground, we have a window of opportunity not just to continue to profile the issue but to make real change. Our report and our recommendations must be viewed in that wider context, as not providing all the answers, but spurring that collective effort to turn the intent of many to change into real, meaningful action.

This report would not have happened without the work of student activists and campaigners who made sure that this was on the agenda for NUS and allowed me to make it a clear priority for the Higher Education Zone for the first time in years. I'd like to thank all the students and students' unions that engaged with our surveys and shared their invaluable experiences at our roundtables.

Finally, I ask university leaders, from whom strong leadership on these issues is essential, not to treat the BAME attainment gap as a numbers game. Data analytics and targets will be critical to ensuring that there is accountability and transparency, but we must never lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with the lives of individuals who face systematic discrimination from all parts of society.

We must not be complacent, but I'm optimistic that if we take action, higher education can begin to play its part in the long-term project to dismantle racial inequality across British society.

Amatey Doku

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, progress has been made in widening university access and participation to disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students, but not every student benefits equally from their UK university experience. Substantial inequalities persist throughout the student lifecycle between students of different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

The inequalities in higher education mirror those in wider UK society. Broader political and social realities are evident on campuses affecting the experiences and actions of staff and students. As other organisations have dealt with the injustices and inequalities faced by ethnic minorities, the higher education sector has fallen behind other parts of the education sector, the NHS and local government in addressing these inequalities.

A student's race and ethnicity can significantly affect their degree outcomes. Of the disparities that exist within higher education, the gap between the likelihood of White students and students from Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds getting a first- or upper-second-class degree is among the most stark – 13% among 2017–18 graduates. The sector must partner meaningfully with students and robustly demonstrate its commitment to addressing the BAME attainment gap.

13%

'gap' between the likelihood of white students and students from BAME backgrounds getting a 1st or a 2:1 degree classification

Many universities have made a considerable effort to address this gap over several years with collaborative work between university leaders, staff and students' unions, but there is still a long way to go. Eliminating these attainment differentials and transforming the university experience for BAME students will require sustained work from across the higher education sector.

Universities UK (UUK) and the National Union of Students (NUS) have consulted with students, staff and vice-chancellors to identify the fundamental barriers to racial equality. This report and its recommendations aim to break down these barriers and accelerate sector-wide progress towards eliminating BAME attainment gaps.

UUK and NUS engaged with the higher education sector and external organisations from June to December 2018 through: two online calls for evidence with over 100 respondents; six regional roundtable evidence sessions with over 160 participants; institutional case studies; and input from a vice-chancellors' working group. In total, 99 universities and students' unions contributed to this report. We ask universities to adopt the guidance in this report and commit to transformational, university and sector-wide change.

Through our engagement, the sector identified five of the most significant steps needed for success in reducing attainment differentials, which we ask universities to consider as a framework for accelerating progress.

1. **Providing strong leadership:** University leaders and senior managers need to demonstrate a commitment to removing the BAME attainment gap and lead by example. UUK and NUS have created a checklist (see table 1 in section 5) for university leaders to draw upon when considering how to address their institution's attainment gap.

2. **Having conversations about race and changing the culture:** Universities and students need to create more opportunities to talk directly about race, racism and the attainment gap and to identify what students think is causing it. A change in culture is needed alongside a clear institutional message that issues of race are embedded within wider strategic goals.

3. **Developing racially diverse and inclusive environments:** University leadership teams are not representative of the student body and some curriculums do not reflect minority groups' experiences. A greater focus is needed from universities, working with their students, on ensuring that BAME students have a good sense of belonging at their university, and on understanding how a poor sense of belonging might be contributing to low levels of engagement and progression to postgraduate study.

4. **Getting the evidence and analysing the data:** Universities need to take a more scientific approach to tackling the attainment gap, by gathering and scrutinising data in a far more comprehensive way than they may currently be doing, in order to inform discussions between university leaders, academics, practitioners and students.

5. **Understanding what works:** Universities can work together to address gaps in the evidence-base by using applied research to ensure that evidence on 'what works' is high quality, and share evidence of what works and what doesn't. As a first step, UUK has created a collection of case studies, which universities and students are encouraged to engage with and develop.

Linked to the above steps to success, UUK and NUS recommend that:

— the Office for Students, (OfS) Evidence and Impact Exchange systematically reviews 'what works' (as well as what does not) as a priority, to inform universities' investment and strategies to address the attainment gap

— the government's Race Disparity Audit considers how it can support different parts of UK civil society – including universities – that are addressing similar, structural inequalities, and draw together evidence on how different types of organisations have achieved success

Universities are at different stages of addressing their own BAME attainment gap, with some quite far advanced, and others yet to place a substantial focus on the matter. Given this mixed picture, we would also like to see:

— an increase in the percentage of universities recognising attainment differences and setting specific targets to reduce them

— greater awareness among university staff of how to support BAME students

— greater insight into BAME students' perceptions, including where these are linked to students' sense of belonging

— appropriate disaggregation within the broad BAME category, ensuring practices and initiatives reflect that this 'group' consists of individuals with varied experiences and needs

There is no 'quick fix' to address and eliminate attainment differentials – and every university's context is different – but what the issues set out in this report mean in practice needs to translate into universities' wider strategies and plans to support continued or improving BAME student access and success.

In particular, this has to be the start of a journey on which higher education leaders are active in achieving results in addressing issues around race, ethnicity and attainment. UUK and NUS will evaluate how far the sector has come in early 2020.

99

universities and students' unions contributed to this report

1:
INTRODUCTION

Year after year, evidence has shown that white students are, on average, more likely to leave university with a first- or upper-second-class degree compared to black students, asian students, and students from mixed ethnicity backgrounds. This difference in educational outcomes is often referred to as the BAME attainment gap.

This report first explains what the attainment gap looks like in UK universities, followed by a summary of feedback from students and staff to two online calls for evidence. Information gathered through these surveys helped identify five steps to success. These are:

— strong leadership
— conversations about race and culture
— racially diverse, inclusive environments
— evidence and analysis
— what works

Subsequent chapters focus on each of these steps and the barriers that are preventing the sector from successfully closing the gap. They include recommendations for tackling the barriers to success.

The excellence and reputation of the UK higher education sector are recognised around the world. However, the attainment gap between students of different ethnicities exists at the vast majority of universities, and evidence suggests that these cannot be explained by a students' background or prior qualifications. Questions need to be asked about the impact of institutional structures on the university experiences of BAME students (OfS, 2018a). The sector is under significant scrutiny and must demonstrate that it is doing everything it can to understand the issues underlying the attainment gap and to identify constructive ways of addressing it.

DEFINITIONS

When we talk about the 'ethnicity attainment gap' at first-degree level, we are referring to the difference between the proportion of White UK-domiciled students who are awarded a first or upper second degree and the proportion of UK-domiciled Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students who are awarded degrees of the same class. This is also referred to as the BAME attainment gap.

We acknowledge the challenges in using homogenising language, such as BAME, and where possible, ethnicities have been disaggregated into smaller groups. We recommend that universities disaggregate student ethnicity data, where student populations allow for this. We also recommend universities consult appendix E in Stevenson et al (2019) for further discussion and detail about appropriate terminology.

RACIAL INEQUALITY IN THE UK

The BAME attainment gap does not exist in isolation within higher education, but is part of the wider structural nature of racial inequality in the UK. Efforts to tackle racial discrimination are not new: the first major UK legislation designed to create racial equality was the Race Relations Act, introduced over 50 years ago in 1965. However, there have been persistent barriers to progress. The racist murder of black British teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 highlighted heavily ingrained, institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police. The Macpherson Report (1999), following Stephen Lawrence's murder, called for public sector organisations to take greater responsibility for combating racism (EHRC, 2019a). Despite strong criticism of its limitations since its inception, the Race Relations Act wasn't repealed until 2010, with the introduction of the Equality Act.

The government launched the Race Disparity Audit in August 2016 to assess racial inequalities in Britain's public services (Cabinet Office, 2017). Following decades of legislation, the report found significant racial injustices in all areas of public life: health, education, employment, housing and the criminal justice system. In the UK, Asian, Black and those in the 'Other' ethnic group were the most likely to be living in 'persistent poverty' (Cabinet Office, 2017:9). The audit found that whilst 1 in 25 White British people were unemployed, rates increased to around 1 in 10 for those of a Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Mixed background. Black men were 'almost three and a half times more likely to be arrested than White men' (Cabinet Office, 2017:11), to name just a few of the many injustices raised in the report.

David Lammy MP (2017) and Baroness McGregor-Smith (2017) also published damning reviews regarding racial inequalities in the criminal justice system and race in the workplace respectively. The voluntary Race at Work Charter responded to McGregor-Smith's findings that 'there is discrimination and bias at every stage of an individual's career, and even before it begins' for people from BAME backgrounds (McGregor-Smith, 2017:3). This bias was largely found to be structural, resulting from an unfair system that works only for a select few. The government committed to implementing compulsory ethnicity pay reporting for large employers, mirroring the requirement for gender pay gap reporting established in 2017.

The Resolution Foundation published research into the ethnicity pay gap in July 2018, finding that Black male graduates experience a 17% difference in pay compared with White male graduates, even after controlling for factors such as type of work, personal characteristics and background (Henehan and Rose, 2018). The responses to the BBC's Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to universities revealed that there is an average pay difference of 26% for Black and Arab academics compared with their White colleagues at 22 universities, with greater penalties for female academics who also experienced a gender pay gap (Croxford, 2018). It is important to acknowledge the impact of intersectionality when considering racial inequalities in the UK. Gender, socio-economic background and disability, for example, can add to the complexity of an individual's experiences of racism and discrimination.

RACIAL INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Attainment differentials are complex at all levels of education. In schools, a number of BAME groups attain at a higher level than White British pupils and are more likely to go to university. However, for others, such as Black Caribbean children, attainment is consistently lower than for White British children, regardless of economic disadvantage (Cabinet Office, 2017). Although the number of BAME students starting an undergraduate course increased by 15.7% between 2013–14 and 2017–18, it is widely acknowledged that disparities and inequalities continue to exist in terms of where they study, the likelihood of their dropping out, the attainment of a 'good' (first or upper second) degree, and in employment opportunities (OfS, 2018a).

Of all the disparities that exist within higher education, the BAME attainment gap is among the most stark. It is important for attainment to be understood within the context and interactions of the other racial inequalities in higher education, as well as wider society. For example, university drop-out rates vary significantly by ethnicity, with Black students almost one and a half times more likely to drop out than White or Asian students (Keohane and Petrie, 2017). However, when we discuss attainment, we mostly refer to the students who have completed their degree and may therefore have overcome hurdles that cause others to drop out. The barriers that affect retention and attainment for BAME students interlink and have serious implications for students and their future after university (ibid.). For example, the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) found that about two-thirds of graduate recruiters set an upper second degree classification as a minimum requirement for a graduate job (Coughlan, 2018). Attainment differentials unfairly disadvantage BAME students, with the potential for long-term effects on students' lives after graduation.

The racial inequalities experienced by BAME students in UK universities are, therefore, a continuation of those experienced by BAME communities in all aspects of public and private life in the UK. This is not a new problem: calls for the higher education sector to act have been ongoing for many years. In 2011, NUS published *Race for Equality,* in which it highlighted the societal and institutional barriers embedded in education (NUS, 2011). Similarly, the Runnymede Trust's report, *Aiming Higher*, highlighted the complex, interlinking issues of race within institutions, from inequalities in pay and promotions for BAME academic staff, to the difficulties in ensuring that diversity policies become standard practice (Runnymede Trust, 2015).

Actions to close the BAME attainment gap and remove racial inequalities require university-wide cultural change. In 2019, Nicola Rollock (2019) interviewed 20 of the UK's total of 25 black female professors for the University and College Union (UCU).[1] The 20 professors described a persistent culture of bullying, racial stereotyping and microaggression within higher education. In addition, such low levels of diversity and representation have serious implications for BAME students' sense of belonging, and their perceptions of the possibility of pursuing a career in academia. Responding to these issues, much evidence compiled to date has concluded that a whole-institution approach to removing racial inequalities is needed to respond robustly to the multi-faceted issues that exist, including the BAME attainment gap.

1. In 2016–17, only 7.5% of professors were BAME men, and 2.1% BAME women (Advance HE, 2018).

"It's important to know that BAME attainment is not solely a BAME issue. It's a university-wide problem, and it shouldn't just be left to the BAME community to fix."

Adesewa, University of Huddersfield

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THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS (ENGLAND) AND BAME ATTAINMENT

In England, the OfS has acknowledged the increase in work that many universities are doing with their BAME students, as set out in their access and participation plans (and access agreements). However, the OfS has also highlighted the need for greater understanding of the unique challenges faced by specific ethnic groups across the sector. Its research shows that 'within every ethnic group there is a subgroup of individuals who are more disadvantaged or underrepresented in higher education than others in the group' (OfS, 2018a, p.7). The OfS therefore places particular importance on institutions improving intersectional analysis and understanding of their BAME students to enable effective targeting to remove inequalities.

Analysis of the 2017–18 access agreements shows that fewer than 40% of universities in England referred specifically to BAME student attainment or attainment gaps, while just over half of institutions set one or more outcome targets specifically for BAME students. Of these 154 targets, nearly one-third focused on student success, and of these, just over one-third directly addressed the BAME attainment gap. That works out to be around 16 universities setting a specific target to remove the BAME attainment gap (OfS, 2018a). The OfS has, however, since set a sector-wide key performance measure (KPM) of its own that focuses specifically on the attainment gap between white and black students over the coming years. The key performance measure is to:

> *eliminate the unexplained gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between white students and black students by 2024–25, and to eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030–31.*
>
> OfS, 2018b, p.4

On 1 February 2019, a package of measures aiming to tackle ethnic disparities at universities was announced by the UK government through the Race Disparity Audit. In it, the government reinstated its intention to hold institutions in England to account for the attainment gap through university access and participation plans. The government also announced Advance HE's review of the Race Equality Charter, undertaken with a view to improving research into addressing ethnic disparities in university workforces, and an intention to encourage the compilers of university league tables to account for performance in access and attainment in their methodologies.

In 2016, the Scottish government published its Race Equality Framework for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2016). The framework included an ambition to create inclusive learning environments, increase the diversity of the education workforce, and improve the educational and employment outcomes for BAME students.

2:
SECTOR DATA ON ETHNICITY AND ATTAINMENT

UK STUDENT QUALIFIERS

The most recent student data[2] for the UK (looking at graduates of 2017–18) shows that the attainment gap is 13.2%, down from 13.6% the previous year. Figure 1 illustrates the substantial differences in attainment between ethnic groups. The largest attainment gap is between Black and White students, followed by students classified as being of 'Other' ethnicity (any ethnicity that does not come under the other four broad categories; HM Government, 2011), and Asian students.

"It's important that staff interrogate the data behind attainment gaps, but they also need to understand the nuances and factors that lead to those gaps"

Joel, University of the Arts, London

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

2. Unless otherwise specified, the HESA student data used relates to first-degree (BA, BSc etc) classifications of UK-domiciled qualifiers at UK higher education institutions who obtained first degrees in 2017–18. Unclassified degrees (eg for medicine and aegrotat degrees) are not included. 'Unknown' ethnic groups are also excluded.

FIGURE 1: **PROPORTION OF UK-DOMICILED QUALIFIERS AT UK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS WHO RECEIVED A FIRST- OR UPPER-SECOND-CLASS DEGREE BY ETHNICITY, 2017–18**

TOTAL WHITE	**80.9%**

TOTAL BAME	**67.7%**

TOTAL BLACK	**57.5%**
Black or Black British – Caribbean	59.2%
Black or Black British – African	57.0%
Other Black background	56.3%
TOTAL ASIAN	**70.5%**
Asian or Asian British – Indian	75.7%
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	66.6%
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	67.5%
Chinese	76.6%
Other Asian background	67.3%
TOTAL MIXED	**77.2%**
TOTAL OTHER	**67.8%**

Source: HESA Student record, 2017–18

The attainment gap between White and BAME students overall persists even if the data is cut in different ways. For example, among 2017–18 graduates:

— **Subject group:** The 'education' subject group had the largest attainment gap of 20.1% followed by 'combined' subjects (19.7%) and 'architecture, building and planning' (18.6%). Note that 'combined' is used for courses that cover a range of subjects, such as modular courses.

— **Students living at their parental/guardian home during term time:** The attainment gap among those at their parental/guardian home during term time was 10%.

— **Domicile country (UK):** The attainment gap for England-domiciled qualifiers was 13.7%; for Wales-domiciled students it was 9.9%; for Scotland-domiciled students it was 11.4%; and for Northern Ireland-domiciled students it was 9.1%.

— **Domicile region (England):** London displayed the largest attainment gap (15.6%), with the smallest gap found in the East Midlands (9.2%).

Figure 2 shows the BAME attainment gaps that exist across UK higher education institutions. More than two-thirds of institutions had an attainment gap above 10% and 29% of institutions had an attainment gap of between 10% and 15%.

FIGURE 2: **BAME ATTAINMENT GAPS AT UK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, 2017–18**
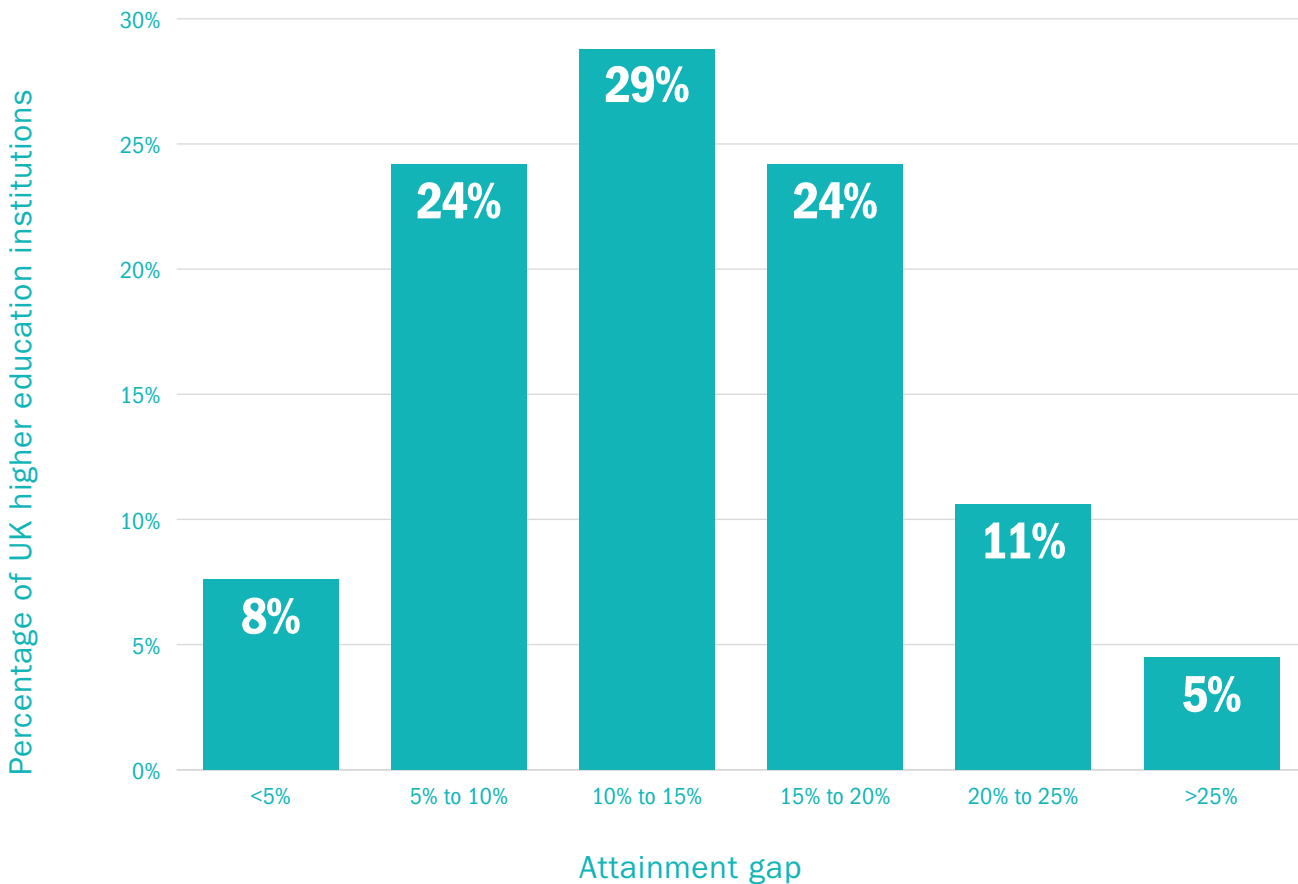
Source: HESA Student record, 2017–18

Note: percentage calculations are excluded for institutions where totals are less than 22.5%, in accordance with HESA's Standard Rounding Methodology.

Figure 3 illustrates that, while degree attainment largely decreases in correlation with a decrease in A-level and BTEC entry grades in England, White students outperform students of all other ethnicities even when prior attainment is controlled for.

FIGURE 3: **PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS QUALIFYING WITH A FIRST- OR UPPER-SECOND-CLASS DEGREES, BY ETHNICITY AND ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS IN ENGLAND**
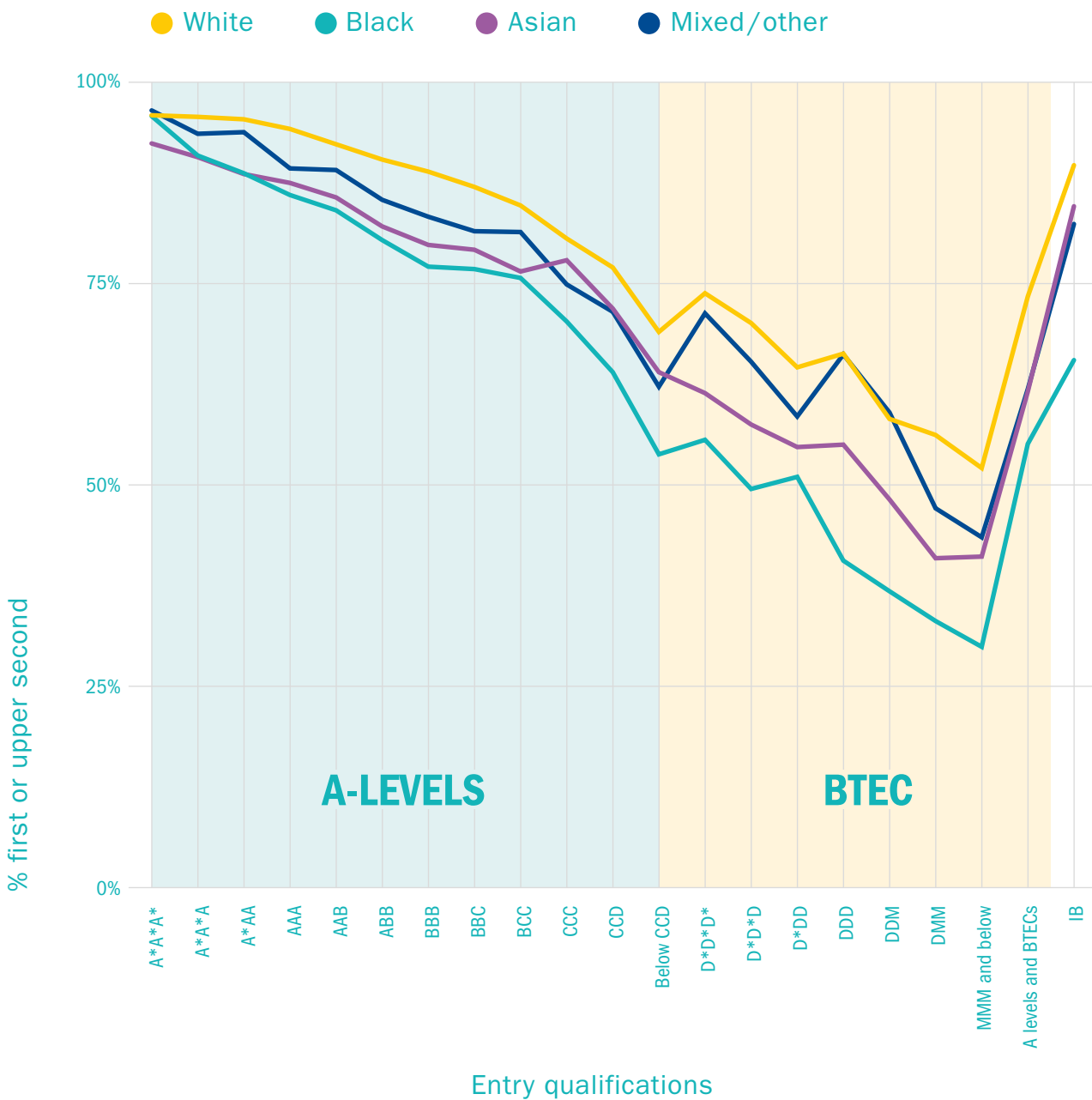
Source: OfS

Note: BTEC = Business and Technology Education Council qualifications: Level 3 BTEC qualifications are equivalent to an A-level; IB = International Baccalaureate

Overall, evidence from the OfS focused on English universities shows that, once other factors such as prior attainment, gender and age are accounted for, there remains an unexplained difference between White and Black students of 17%, and of 10% between White and Asian students (OfS).

STAFF AT UK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In 2017–18, 16% of all academic staff with a known ethnicity were BAME, as were 12% of non-academic staff.

Looking at academic staff contract levels,[3] 10% of professors were BAME, as were 6.9% of other senior academic staff.

As figure 4 shows, within these totals, just 0.6% of professors were Black in 2017–18, as were 0.7% of other senior academic staff.

FIGURE 4: **ACADEMIC STAFF AT UK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY ETHNICITY AND CONTRACT LEVEL, 2017–18**
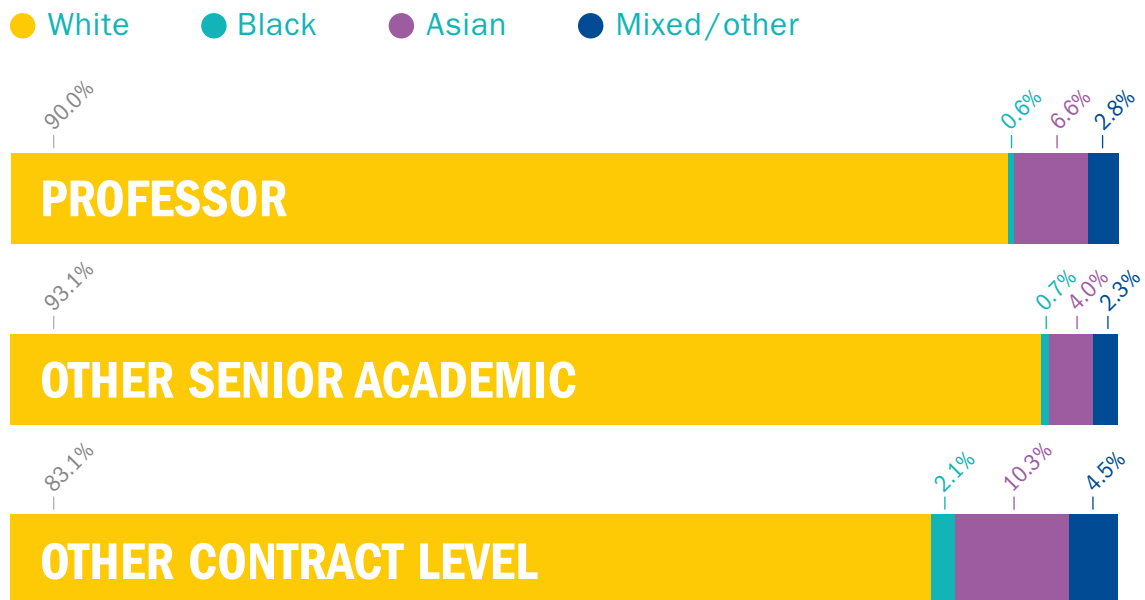
Source: HESA Staff record, 2017–18

3. HESA codes each staff contract. Note that professor level is defined as 'senior academic appointments which may carry the title of professor but which do not have departmental line management responsibilities'. Other senior contracts include leadership and management responsibilities. These contracts may also be held by people who hold the title of professor. It is likely that the methodology undercounts the number of professors because many will fall into more senior levels, eg heads of department. This should be noted when reviewing contract-level data.

3:
CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

This section gives a broad overview of some of the key themes identified in the literature as having an effect on ethnicity attainment differentials at degree level.

THE DEFICIT MODEL

It is important to understand the student deficit model when considering the factors that contribute to the BAME attainment gap, and the extent of their impact. The deficit model focuses on the attributes and characteristics of the student as the main contributing factors for attainment differentials: it assumes students are lacking skills, knowledge or experience. The model does not therefore allow for an examination of societal or institutional structures and the discrimination that exists within them. It follows in the deficit model that ownership, accountability and responsibility for the inequalities in attainment similarly are not placed with the institution, only the individual.

Although the literature widely acknowledges the importance of explicitly refuting the deficit model, studies (including this one) signal that deficit understandings of students persist in some areas. The factors highlighted in this chapter derive from relevant literature and should be contextualised within the unequal structures of society and higher education, as described in the introduction to this report.

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The culture of an institution is identified as an important factor in relation to the attainment of students from BAME backgrounds, and has a strong association with students' sense of belonging. Crucially, this includes an awareness of the issues affecting students from different ethnic backgrounds. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) report, *BAME student degree retention and attainment* (HEA, 2012) highlights a number of themes related to the lack of awareness among university staff of the issues that affect BAME students during their time at university. These themes included: confusion over definitions of BAME; limited awareness of the existence of a BAME attainment gap at their own institution; relying on the deficit model to frame the problem; and an over-reliance on statistics, which can sometimes mask cultural and structural problems.

Discussions on race and ethnicity can be difficult conversations to have. This can be a factor in the lack of internal understanding of ethnicity attainment gaps within institutions. There may also be resistance from some to accept that there is a problem, and a need to change established ways of working, if they are not appropriately inclusive.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AMONG ROLE MODELS AND STAFF

Having low numbers of BAME staff has been identified as limiting an institution's capability to address the attainment gap. It can mean that BAME staff become overburdened with the responsibility of acting as role models and mentors, and this can also create a perception that the responsibility for addressing the attainment gap and related issues does not fall to other members of staff. BAME staff should be consulted on attainment gap interventions, however, universities should be mindful of avoiding an approach that is, or appears to be, tokenistic.

INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM CONTENT, DESIGN AND DELIVERY

The design of the curriculum, its content, and the teaching and learning practices used to deliver it can have a significant impact on the way that students from different backgrounds and ethnicities respond to their course and lecturers and tutors.

In its research with students, NUS (2011) found that 42% of BAME students said that they did not feel that the curriculum reflects issues of diversity, equality and discrimination. They reported a lack of BAME-specific content and a 'mainstream' way of thinking. It is also important to consider *how* the curriculum is taught, as well as *what* is taught. A substantial amount of work into creating an inclusive curriculum has been undertaken, as well as exploration of the 'hidden curriculum'. The latter is the unintended learning of different attitudes, values and perspectives through the university environment, which typically reinforces social norms (Advance HE). There is an argument that the hidden curriculum should be brought into the open to allow it to be critiqued, and that ethnicity should be discussed as part of this.

BELONGING

A strong theme in the literature is the importance of inclusion and belonging. NUS (2011) found that when BAME students were asked why they were 'less likely' to be satisfied with their experience and less likely to get a first or upper second, respondents repeatedly cited feelings of discomfort, isolation and a sense of not belonging. HEFCE and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation ran a programme on student retention and success (Thomas, 2012) which found that a sense of belonging is crucial to retention and success. This looked at seven programmes being delivered collaboratively across 22 institutions. The evaluation identified belonging as an important factor and concluded that 'academic programmes and high-quality student-centred learning and teaching must be a primary focus for effective student retention and success' (Thomas, 2012, p.6).

PRIOR ATTAINMENT

It is widely acknowledged that attainment gaps develop much earlier in the education system than at university, and that attainment at GCSE and A-level can differ between pupils of different ethnicities, socio-economic background and other socio-demographic factors. The ethnicity attainment gap also tends to widen as pupils progress through the key stages of the national curriculum. However, it is widely recognised that too great a focus on prior attainment can lead to deficit understandings of BAME students, placing the responsibility for inequalities in attainment on the students themselves. Ethnicity attainment gaps persist in higher education even after prior attainment is controlled for.

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Race For Equality (NUS, 2011) highlighted that researching where to study could be more of a challenge for BAME students whose parents had no knowledge of the admissions process or hadn't been to university themselves. This can be compounded by insufficient information, advice and guidance (IAG) at schools and colleges. The same report highlighted that 25% of respondents felt that the IAG provision accessible to them was poor, or could have been better. The qualitative evidence suggested that the type of institution the respondents attended, along with their socio-economic background and the expectations of their teachers, had a significant impact on the answers BAME students gave to this question.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The financial implications of going to university are increasingly important to both current and prospective students, and the value for money presented by higher education is under intense scrutiny. A recent UUK (2018) report, *The financial concerns of students,* found that for current undergraduates, living costs are a more significant concern than the level of tuition fees. Research by NEON (2017) and the Department for Education (Fagence and Hansom, 2018) shows that the financial aspects of going to university are more salient to those from under-represented and lower socio-economic groups. Research at the University of Sheffield with post-2012 entrants found that the effect of taking term-time jobs to cover basic living expenses has on the academic experience is more pronounced among some student groups than others: those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more affected than others (Crockford et al., 2015).

PREPAREDNESS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Singh (2011) has identified 'preparedness for success' as a key theme in the literature around the attainment gap. This includes a lack of adequate IAG, as discussed above, but is also linked to how integrated students feel in the university community and culture. Singh also identifies material wealth, previous educational experiences, parental involvement and experience of higher education, and social and cultural capital as factors that can influence how prepared BAME students feel for university.

"Having a tutor from the same background as me gave me a sense of comfort. I was able to talk to them not only about academic issues, but also advice for me personally."

Sanif, Kingston University, London

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

4:
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IDENTIFIED BY THE CALLS FOR EVIDENCE

This section gives an overview of the factors identified by the sector as contributing to the ethnicity attainment differentials at degree level.

In June 2018, UUK sent out a call for evidence aimed primarily at practitioners and staff at institutions providing higher education, and NUS issued a separate call for evidence for student representatives. These requests for information aimed to find out how the attainment gap is being addressed and what barriers practitioners and students face in their work to remove it.

These results may disproportionately reflect the views of those most engaged with the issue of the BAME attainment gap, and, given the sample size, may not necessarily be representative of where the wider sector is now.

UUK SURVEY

UUK received 44 completed surveys, submitted by 39 individual institutions (four institutions responded twice) and one other higher education organisation.

KEY FINDINGS

— When identifying contributing factors to ethnicity attainment gaps, those often associated with the student deficit model were regarded as less significant than those that universities can change.

— There is a strong understanding of issues of staffing and teaching and learning methods which respondents suggest affect the BAME attainment gap.

— As set out in figure 5, the most significant contributing factor, according to 87% of respondents, was a lack of role models from different ethnic minority backgrounds. This was closely followed by curriculum delivery (82%), a lack of diversity in the ethnicity of senior staff (79%) and curriculum design (77%).

— Only 23% said subject choice was a contributing factor and just over one-third felt that prior attainment and insufficient IAG contribute to the ethnicity attainment gap.

FIGURE 5: **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONDENTS' RANKING OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE ETHNICITY ATTAINMENT GAP**

Which of the following, if any, do you believe are relevant contributing factors to any ethnicity attainment gaps at your institution?

Lack of HE role models representing all ethnic groups	87%
Curriculum delivery	82%
Lack of diversity of ethnicity of senior staff	79%
Curriculum design	77%
From lower socio-economic background	64%
Institutional culture and leadership	59%
Institutional support	46%
First generation entry into HE	41%
Prior attainment	38%
Insufficient IAG	38%
Subject choice	23%
None of the above	5%

— 76% of respondents told us that their institution had designed interventions or activities to address or reduce any ethnicity attainment gaps, informed by the above factors.

— Of the barriers that institutions experience in addressing ethnicity attainment gaps, the most prevalent were: the level of inclusive practice across the institution; understanding how to work effectively with students; and internal ownership of the issue (see figure 6).

FIGURE 6: **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONDENTS' RANKING OF BARRIERS TO CLOSING THE ETHNICITY ATTAINMENT GAP**

Have you/your institution faced any of the following barriers in trying to address ethnicity attainment gaps? Please select all that apply.

Level of inclusive practice across the institution	67%
Internal ownership of the issue	64%
Understanding how to work effectively with students	64%
Challenge to prioritise at university or departmental level	61%
Confusion about targeting students	52%
Lack of data to support interventions	48%
Creating the environment for interventions to flourish	45%
Language and terminology used by the institution	27%
Other	21%
None of the above	6%

NUS SURVEY

NUS received 69 completed surveys, submitted by students and representatives from 35 institutions and their students' unions.

The open survey covered respondents who attended institutions whose students' unions are affiliated to NUS, and a small number who did not. This included a spread of institutions across the UK and reflected the variety of types of institutions, from small and specialist to large institutions, and including post-1992 and Russell Group institutions.

Again, the responses to this call for evidence might not be representative and are presented here as indicative.

KEY FINDINGS

— Only 7% of respondents stated that their institution discusses the attainment gap with students. Respondents were largely aware of the attainment gap due to their position as a students' union sabbatical or officer, not due to their status as a student per se.[4]

— 69% of respondents hadn't raised the issue of attainment gaps with their institution and of those who did (31%), fewer than half (14%) felt that it had resulted in action.

— Excluding those who mentioned initiatives relating to widening participation, or union-led initiatives (such as BAME representatives), less than a quarter (21%) of those surveyed could describe university-led initiatives to address the attainment gap.

— Figure 7 shows that, as for the UUK survey results, a lack of role models and ethnic diversity in senior leadership is believed to be a significant contributory factor for student representatives.

— Lower socio-economic background (75%) and university culture and leadership (72%) were more commonly perceived as contributory factors to the BAME attainment gap among student representatives.

4. However, note that over half of respondents to UUK survey reported being confused about targeting students. This could influence the openness of universities to discussing BAME attainment gaps with students, and consequently a low level of knowledge among students generally.

FIGURE 7: **STUDENTS' RANKING OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

Which of the following, if any, do you believe are relevant contributing factors to any ethnicity attainment gaps at your institution?

Factor	Percentage
Lack of diverse senior leaders	78%
Lower socioeconomic background	75%
Institutional culture and leadership	72%
Lack of role models	72%
Insufficient IAG	55%
Curriculum design	54%
Curriculum delivery	49%
First generation entry	48%
Institutional support systems	48%
Subject choice prior to university	33%

The five sections that follow set out:

— what university leaders, students and staff said were the most important steps to success in overcoming the substantial barriers that remain in addressing BAME attainment differentials

— what the wider evidence shows

— examples of what universities are already doing to address these barriers

We conclude with recommendations for action to unlock further progress, informed by what the sector (and wider evidence) has indicated.

"I want to see our leaders have open discussions with their students and staff. They need to be sensitive, but also make an effort to learn, as well as educate."

Amna, Aston University

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

5:
PROVIDING STRONG LEADERSHIP

A university's approach to addressing the BAME attainment gap will not succeed unless it is underpinned by strong leadership, with university leaders at the highest level and senior managers leading by example and taking responsibility for change.

As research (Singh, 2011) and our engagement suggest, robust support from senior university leaders is vital to underpinning the work required to remove the attainment gap. Ownership of, and accountability for, the attainment gap needs to sit with vice-chancellors and/or their senior teams. The role of senior leaders in removing ethnicity attainment gaps is to ensure the provision of appropriate resources, drive institutional change and lead by example to embed an institutional commitment to removing racial inequities. This commitment should be strategically implemented and formally adopted in relevant policies and plans (Berry and Loke, 2011).

Such policies and plans could include targets and key performance indicators (KPIs), driven at the highest level, for closing the attainment gap, and reports on progress, without signalling that this work is complete: the commitment to race equality is an ongoing one that should be permanently embedded in the work of the institution.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES ALREADY DOING?

Some vice-chancellors and senior leaders are actively engaged or leading their institution's work to remove the BAME attainment gap. A small number of institutions have created KPIs for this area, but it is clear that more can be done to commit to change. Forty-eight UK universities are members of Advance HE's Race Equality Charter (REC), of which 10 have received the bronze award.[5] The REC is due to be independently reviewed in 2019.

Below are some examples of how senior leaders are involved in leading on attainment gap projects.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

King's College London is making a concerted effort to accelerate its work in diversity and inclusion, particularly in race equality. A significant element undertaken in 2018 was the start of a formal development programme for its 35 most senior leaders and decision-makers, within both academic faculty and professional services. This started with training sessions to create an understanding of structural inequality with a specific focus on race and disability. The programme continues with coaching and masterclasses to assist senior managers in identifying how to address race inequality at both the institutional level and in their specific areas of work.

King's College London has created KPIs to hold senior leaders and the institution to account for the BAME attainment gap.

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON (UAL)

The UAL Court of Governors has set a target to eliminate its attainment differential by 2020. The aim is to eliminate the differentials in a systematic and targeted way via a package of interventions that address attainment and student satisfaction. This approach aims to ensure that differential work is regarded as core to the institution, not an add-on.

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5.   At the time of publication, institutions are given three years from joining the REC to apply for an award, after which their membership is withdrawn.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

In May 2018, Professor Janice Kay, Provost and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Exeter, launched the Provost Commission to recommend and implement new approaches, events, initiatives and policies to ensure all of its campuses are welcoming, open and diverse places for students, staff and visitors.

The Provost Commission comprises academic and professional services staff, students and members of both students' unions, the Exeter Students' Guild and the Falmouth and Exeter Union (FXU) based in Penryn, as well as the Athletics Union. The commission is exploring new ways to promote equality, diversity and inclusivity through five themes of activity (student awareness, training and support, staff awareness, inclusive teaching and learning, an inclusive culture; and environment and data mapping).

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE (LSE)

Equality of respect and opportunity is one of the core principles set out in the LSE's ethics code, and the new LSE 2030 strategy further emphasises the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as a guiding principle for decision-making, and commits to increasing support for EDI as a strategic priority.

LSE's EDI Office serves as a vital resource in furthering its commitment to EDI, and providing services for students, staff and senior management to support diversity, inclusiveness, equal access, equitable treatment and multicultural understanding and competency. There is a newly appointed head of EDI, reporting to the chief operating officer. The work of the EDI Office is overseen by the EDI advisory board, chaired by the LSE director.

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY LONDON

Kingston University London adopted the reduction of the BAME attainment gap as an institutional KPI following a recommendation by the vice-chancellor and with the endorsement of the university's board of governors on 4 March 2015.

The KPI was to raise the BAME value-added (VA) score to 1.0 by the end of the 2018–19 academic year. The university has almost met this VA score a year ahead of target.

VA scores take account of a student's entry qualifications and subject of study when assessing their degree attainment. Data for UK-domiciled graduates is used to create a probability that a student will achieve a first- or upper-second-class degree. These probabilities are aggregated to create an 'expected' percentage of a given cohort of students who should achieve a first or upper second.

If the cohort achieves this percentage, the VA score is 1. For percentage attainment above or below this percentage, the VA score is proportionately greater or less than one.

The university's comprehensive approach to tackling BAME attainment has resulted in significant improvements to the institutional VA score for BAME learners and a reduction in the BAME attainment gap. To challenge itself further Kingston has developed a new KPI to increase the proportion of full time first degree qualifiers taking a course on which the BAME students meet or exceed sector expectations based on their entry qualifications and their subject of study. This reflects Kingston's commitment to measuring progress at course level and ensuring that all students are supported to achieve their academic potential.

VIEW THE CASE STUDIES

CHECKLIST OF ACTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

Our findings suggest that a greater role for leadership in addressing the BAME attainment gap will be vital in ensuring that the key barriers to success identified in this report are better acknowledged and tackled throughout an institution. There was a strong sense that vice-chancellors could benefit from the existence of a checklist of actions to consider as part of a framework for supporting university senior leaders to move forward with their own strategies in this area.

Drawing on the actions set out in this report, UUK and NUS recommend that university leaders consider table 1 as part of a framework for addressing their institution's BAME attainment gap.

"If students don't see themselves reflected in certain roles at university, or in certain careers and companies, they automatically disregard those roles as a possible future career. To tackle that we need to have role models at university."

Amna, Aston University

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TABLE 1: **CHECKLIST OF ACTIONS**

KEY AREA

ACCESSING EVIDENCE AND DATA ON THE ATTAINMENT GAP

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Having the right data

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

At what level does my institution monitor the attainment gap currently?

Does this level of analysis allow us to fully comprehend the factors creating the attainment gap? If not, what else is needed?

Does my institution make sufficient use of qualitative evidence to understand students' experiences of university and how this can affect attainment?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Assess the existing mix of data and evidence used to understand the causes of the attainment gap, and identify areas less understood to enhance the robustness of the evidence.

Assess the extent to which evidence on students' lived experiences is informing any strategy to address the BAME attainment gap, and ensure this is central to informing actions.

Consider the merits of committing to a board-level engagement with the BAME attainment gap. A KPI could be set to reduce and remove the BAME attainment gap.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Using data limitations as an excuse not to push ahead

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

How much more is my institution doing to address the BAME attainment gap beyond analysing data, ie, what are we doing with it?

Is it possible to set an institution-wide standard on what robust data looks like across departments and faculties to evaluate the attainment gap?

How could this help ensure that a plan of action is not held up within parts of the organisation?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Senior leaders should show support for heads of schools, colleges or faculties responsible for driving change locally, providing them with the appropriate information, resources and institutional messages to empower others.

KEY AREA

HAVING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Lack of spaces to talk openly about race

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

What space is there within my institution to enable students and staff to talk openly about matters relating to race without fear of being judged for saying the wrong thing?

What message expressing a commitment to race equality is currently sent out from senior members of staff across the organisation? In what ways are these perceived positively or negatively?

How is my institution's senior team engaging with the views of students and student representatives to ensure that feedback on my university's commitment to race equality is informed by those affected by racial disparity?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Senior leaders must lead by example in talking about race, opening conversations and creating appropriate spaces for students and staff.

Senior leaders should take a key role in disseminating institutional messages on issues of race, setting the tone of the conversation and centering the student voice.

Consider whether coaching, development opportunities or programmes are needed to give leaders the confidence to talk about race and take a leading role in opening conversations.

Consider how performance in this area is measured, including recognition for contributions to tackling barriers to equality, diversity and inclusion.

KEY AREA

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Enhancing ethnic diversity within academia

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Does my institution have a commitment to proactively improving ethnic diversity within the academic workforce? What impact is the current position having on staff recruitment and retention?

Does my institution collect information on students' views of any lack of diversity? Can this inform what we do about it?

Do any disparities exist in the progression of graduates to postgraduate study?

How widespread is unconscious bias training at my university and what follow-up is there for those who have had it?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Consider how individual steps such as unconscious bias training are put into practice and evaluate the extent to which they fulfil wider organisational objectives for eliminating bias in relation to both the recruitment of staff, but also in teaching and assessing students.

Where BAME students are under-represented in the postgraduate student population, consider engaging undergraduates and decliners to understand the barriers to progression that need addressing.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Taking steps to review curriculums and teaching and learning practices

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

To what extent does my institution understand the impact of existing curriculums and teaching on the BAME student experience?

What actions are being undertaken to address any shortcomings, and to what extent are students informing this work?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Senior leaders should consider mechanisms for recognising (and perhaps rewarding) staff and students who press for the removal of racial inequalities.

Monitor the impact of curriculum reviews on BAME students' engagement.

KEY AREA

KNOWING WHAT WORKS

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Understanding the appropriateness of targeting initiatives

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

In targeting initiatives, does my institution treat BAME students as one homogenous group? If yes, am I confident that we fully understand the divergence in students' lived experiences within this broad group? Does my university have a sufficiently large BAME student population in order to do so?

How are targeted interventions perceived by students in scope?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Senior leaders should encourage evidence-led, targeted interventions which do not use the deficit model. It is important that all staff understand why deficit approaches to addressing attainment gaps should not be used.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Evaluating the impact of initiatives

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Has my institution developed any initiatives intended to address the BAME attainment gap? If not, can this be justified?

To what extent are my institution's initiatives being evaluated, and do current processes provide sufficient resource (including evaluative capacity) to better inform senior leaders what has been effective and what to avoid doing in the future?

To what extent is my institution drawing on best practice to inform what we do about the BAME attainment gap?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate resources are dedicated to removing the attainment gap, including for any appropriate tailored interventions, research and expertise in data analysis.

Consider where further collaboration and opportunities to share resources and knowledge might be achieved between departments but also with other universities operating in a similar context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the information in table 1, our findings suggest further key actions that university leaders should consider:

— featuring a commitment to closing the BAME attainment gap in university strategic plans, as opposed to just publishing separate diversity policies or statements

— providing a yearly update on the attainment gap for staff and students to reinforce institutional commitment to closing the gap and being transparent about institutional inequalities

— how staff might be able to provide evidence, for example in the form of annual reviews, promotion committees, etc, of how they adapt their practice in response to bias workshops or similar development activities, as part of senior leaders' efforts to embed racial equality in all areas of an institution

6:
HAVING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE, AND CHANGING THE CULTURE

Research has shown that open, meaningful and constructive conversations about race, racism and ethnicity are vital (Bouattia, 2015). With strong leadership and support from executive teams, there is a need to open up conversations about the issues that lie at the heart of the BAME attainment gap within universities. Universities and students need to create more opportunities to talk directly about the BAME attainment gap, identify what BAME students think is causing it, and move towards a clear message that removing racial inequalities is embedded within institutions' strategic goals.

"I want university leaders to start having conversations about race. There should be a conscious effort to engage with BAME students so leaders can know what they are struggling with, and what kind of changes they would like to make"

Adesewa, University of Huddersfield

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

WHAT DOES THE SECTOR SAY?

Across society, conversations about race and racism can be uncomfortable, including for university leaders, staff and students. However, it is imperative that difficult conversations about race, racial stereotypes, microaggressions and biases are held within universities, regardless of feelings of unease. Through our engagement with the sector, we found that a common reaction to this unease was for a university to discuss the attainment gap in relation to wider diversity and inclusion policies and projects, at times, perhaps, in order to avoid difficult conversations about race and ethnicity specifically (Ahmed, 2012). By itself, this approach may not go far enough. Whilst universities have a legal responsibility to ensure equal opportunities for those with any of the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, the BAME attainment gap needs to be acknowledged as a racial inequality, and not simply viewed through a wider lens of inclusivity and diversity (Bell and Hartmann, 2017).

We received examples from institutions in which staff who might feel uncomfortable about discussing issues of race react to a need to address the attainment gap by comparing the matter to another inequality, such as gender or socio-economic background. However, in addressing the BAME attainment gap, the focus must be primarily on race and racialised factors affecting students, albeit with acknowledgment of other intersections where these might be contributory factors. For example, an initiative that worked well to increase the number of women in senior leadership teams may not work for increasing the number of BAME senior leaders.

University staff who are already working to remove the attainment gap at UK universities can report facing resistance and defensive reactions from some colleagues (Berry and Loke, 2011). A frequent suggestion through UUK's and NUS' engagement has been that, in order to open up the dialogue, spaces are needed where conversations about race and ethnicity can take place that are honest and respectful with established ground rules. These spaces could vary in their format – they could be online, or in the form of working groups, panel events, film screenings or discussions.

Racial microaggressions are a form of subtle everyday racism. They are slights that are often said without intentional malice.

It is widely accepted that those who are a victim of microaggressions in everyday interactions often feel confused, frustrated and upset (Rollock, 2012).

It is important to accept that individuals have different levels of knowledge and understanding of issues of race. It is through actively engaging in conversations that individuals can become more informed about:

— the experiences of BAME students and staff

— appropriate language and terminology to use when referring to matters linked to race or ethnicity

— the histories of BAME groups in society

Within these spaces, staff and students may ask questions and learn about issues of race, in the knowledge that they will not be judged for saying the wrong thing (the fear of which, in itself, can be a barrier), but educated and informed about what is appropriate and what is not. To further facilitate open conversations about race, universities can identify, acknowledge and develop a plan to address the need for education and training in this area for staff and students. This is already happening in many cases, most notably through unconscious bias training for staff. It is important that at least some initiatives to engage staff with issues of race are widely employed, to avoid reaching only those who are already engaged. This approach, as part of a wider strategy, can support these discussions to later move out of a dedicated space and into the open university environment.

MAIN CHALLENGES

— **Being afraid of saying the wrong thing:** The primary challenge that our engagement highlights in talking about race is the fear, unease and defensive reaction of some when asked to talk openly about race and the BAME attainment gap. If conversations that are specifically about race, racism and ethnicity are avoided, though, there is a risk that deficit understandings of students will be perpetuated, as opposed to challenging the structures and practices that underpin the attainment gap.

— **BAME individuals being seen as the sole representatives of BAME student populations:** In some cases, the responsibility for liaising with these students fell to BAME staff.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES ALREADY DOING?

To ensure that the voices of BAME students are heard, many students' unions have elected BAME students' officers to their executive teams. Many students' unions are also working with their institutions to establish larger ambassador programmes for BAME students, or with a wider inclusivity focus, as in the examples below.

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

In 2017–18, the University of Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire Students' Union employed 10 BAME student advocates to support an institutional objective to reduce the attainment gap. One student was hired for each school to represent the voices of their BAME student peers. The students are line managed by a race equality project officer. Key elements of this programme include:

— creation of dedicated spaces for BAME students and the dissemination of data associated with the BAME attainment gap to students

— facilitation of dialogue with staff members to address issues BAME students face.

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE (LSE)

The LSE Students' Union (LSESU) has appointed an anti-racism officer who is responsible for running campaigns and events aimed at eliminating and countering all forms of discrimination based on race, religion or nationality and supporting students who have been victimised by racism. The LSESU works in collaboration with all departments and divisions across the school, including the BAME staff network group Embrace.

GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART (GSA)

The GSA Race, Rights and Sovereignty series seeks to celebrate, challenge and inspire the next generation of creative professionals about race and empower them to have a creative voice.

It began in response to student and staff demand for increased opportunities to unpack ideas and safe forums for discussion. The Students' Association has been closely involved as a partner in the GSA's public lecture series to ensure that the lectures have a positive effect on the student experience. Now in its third year, having delivered 13 different events, the series has a practitioner-led programming ethos to resist tokenism and to create space for tackling issues surrounding equality and diversity in a genuine and supportive environment.

A new, dedicated website was launched in 2019, with an open-source resource centre with recommended reading lists and support networks suggested by invited practitioners, GSA staff and students, and the general public.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The 'History Makers' touring exhibition presents portraits of Cambridge's black graduates, from 1720 to the present. The exhibition is a collaboration between the university and colleges and student society the Black Cantabs Research Society. All Cambridge undergraduates starting in 2018 viewed the exhibition as part of their induction, as well as hundreds of other visitors.

Putting a spotlight on the 'hidden histories' of early black students at the university has been a means to stimulate conversations around the representation of ethnic minorities at Cambridge, and to influence a move towards a more inclusive culture. The portraits are styled as counterpoints to the traditional Cambridge portraits lining the walls of the university and colleges in a deliberate challenge to create a new tradition of representation and inclusion for ethnic minorities.

The exhibition is designed to encourage discussions around race and racial bias: in the words of its introduction, 'As you walk this corridor, do these images match your idea of what you think Cambridge is? If not, why?' The exhibition provokes visitors to challenge their own construction of belonging and perceptions of inclusivity by asking 'who really belongs here?'

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

In 2017—18, the University of Manchester, in collaboration with the University of Manchester Students' Union, led a successful bid to the HEFCE Catalyst fund to work in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Birmingham to deliver its Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Programme.

The programme adopts a co-production model, undertaking activities aimed at tackling the causes of differential outcomes for BAME undergraduate students and those from low socio-economic groups. Key features include:

—   development of internal and external networks both among students and between students and staff

—   creation of safe spaces, where students and staff can engage in open dialogue on inclusive learning and teaching environments, academic support and well-being

—   training student ambassadors to be active bystanders and to safely challenge racism, microaggressions and discrimination

This model moves away from consultation to actively engaging with students as partners.

VIEW THE CASE STUDIES

"When I arrived at university it didn't seem like diversity was being celebrated and utilised in the way I was used to."

Joel, University of the Arts, London

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of our findings, we recommend that universities:

— consider what mechanisms are currently in place that allow for open and honest conversations about race not only between students and staff, but between staff members across the organisation

— work to understand the impact of these mechanisms, for example in terms of how much meaningful engagement is being achieved through these structures, as well as wider evaluation of how conclusions drawn from internal conversations about race are informing whole-institution action to address the attainment gap

— assess their existing approach to facilitating discussions about race, racism, ethnicity and the BAME attainment gap, ensuring that projects, policies and discussions are not simply diluted through the use of collective terminology such as that related to equality, diversity and inclusion more generally, but are given sufficient room to be discussed as standalone issues

— ensure that senior leaders lead by example in encouraging all staff and students to talk directly about race, racism and ethnicity, despite feelings of unease, through the use of dedicated spaces and forums

— consider employing BAME student ambassadors and student active bystanders to facilitate conversations between students and staff

— encourage academics to liaise with these ambassadors and invite contributions at meetings and committees to facilitate conversations about race in general, but also more faculty-specific matters

— guard against individuals being seen as sole representatives of BAME student populations

7:
DEVELOPING RACIALLY DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Having conversations about race that are informed by data and evidence of individuals' experiences will possibly uncover an imbalance in diversity between a university's student and staff populations. It is clear that university leadership teams are not always representative of the student body and some curriculums do not reflect minority groups' experiences.

A greater focus is needed from across the sector, working with their students, on ensuring that BAME students have a good sense of belonging at their university, and an understanding of how a poor sense of belonging might be contributing to low levels of engagement and progression to postgraduate study.

Efforts to enhance the ethnic diversity within the academic community in UK higher education are far behind those to diversify the student population in recent years. While around 7% of UK university students are black, of all UK professors, fewer than 1% are black (HESA; Advance HE, 2018).

Evidence suggests that an imbalance in diversity can lead to individuals from ethnic minorities feeling less included within their educational environment. In the context of this report, research highlights that BAME students' sense of belonging can affect their university experience, likelihood of dropping out and overall attainment (Keohane and Petrie, 2017). It is therefore vital that universities enhance efforts to create environments that are racially and ethnically diverse and fully inclusive for BAME students and staff.

This section discusses the importance of ensuring that universities value the experiences and backgrounds of all students and staff.

WHAT DOES THE SECTOR SAY?

A university environment with few or no BAME academics, professors or senior leaders risks isolating BAME students (Arday, 2015). While it is important that BAME students have role models in their institution, which can help foster a sense of belonging, respect and aspiration, in UK universities this is not straightforward, even in universities with racially diverse student populations (OfS, 2018a). Calls for universities to prioritise diversifying both their academic and professional services staff are not new, and while some universities are encouraging BAME students to do postgraduate study with an emphasis on building a career in academia, such efforts take time to yield substantial change – BAME students represented 17% of UK-domiciled postgraduate research students in 2014–15, and this figure remained the same in 2017–18 (HESA).

Evidence suggests that, in comparison with White students, BAME students can often be more reluctant to ask for help from academics and less likely to feel supported in their studies (Stevenson, 2012). Where this is the case, it is important that the factors that can lead to a poor sense of belonging driving this are well understood. They include: a lack of BAME role models; unrelatable curriculums; academic and student biases; and microaggressions (Rollock, 2012). Several universities have already begun to examine their assessment methods and curriculums, including in relation to the BAME attainment gap. Students' levels of cultural and social capital often arise in these considerations; however, it is the institution and academics that decide what skills, experiences and backgrounds are valued and recognised (Stevenson, 2019). More consideration could therefore be given to understanding the effect that existing curriculums and content (and wider teaching and learning practices including assessment and feedback) might be having on student inclusivity, including where the social and cultural capital accrued by particular groups of students might be disproportionality valued. Kalwant Bhopal (2018) suggests that greater understanding and recognition of white privilege is needed in the UK, drawing on research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on racial inequalities (EHRC, 2015).

Our engagement highlighted several universities undertaking curriculum review (sometimes referred to as liberation or decolonisation), activities in collaboration with their students and/or students' unions, each with important findings for the wider sector. These activities mostly exist in pilot phases and have not been rolled out across entire institutions. Many of the initiatives are not race specific, but also include equality assessments relating to gender, disability and sexuality. When considering the focus of review work, it is important that race is sufficiently considered as a standalone equality issue in order to unveil specific issues. The student voice is also of great importance. BAME students need to see a genuine desire for change behind any reviews and have a chance to share their views and experiences as part of the process (Bouattia, 2015). Similarly, whilst terms such as 'liberation' and 'decolonisation' are sometimes used, students have told us that they must be used responsibly.

Unconscious bias training is taking place or being piloted for many members of staff at universities, in different formats. For some institutions, it is voluntary training and for others it is compulsory for specific members of staff, for example academic staff but not those working in professional services. Many universities run training of this kind for those on recruitment and selection panels. However, unconscious, implicit and conscious biases can have a significant effect on the sense of belonging and attainment of BAME students (EHRC, 2019b). Whilst overall training of this kind can be beneficial, the limitations should be acknowledged. The EHRC assessed the effectiveness of unconscious bias training in 2018 and concluded that whilst it can reduce implicit bias, it is unlikely to eliminate it entirely (Atewologun, Cornish and Tresh, 2018). The EHRC found limited evidence to suggest that such training can change behaviours. However, more sophisticated, interactive training is more likely to result in a greater awareness of implicit bias for participants. Universities are therefore encouraged to consider and evaluate their unconscious bias training formats carefully to maximise the effectiveness of such training.

Our engagement with the sector on this issue suggests that, preferably:

— training should be interactive and face to face, so that colleagues can challenge one another and confront their biases, as opposed to passive online training

— training should not be a one-off activity that allows a box to be ticked and not revisited; it is not a 'quick fix' and is unlikely to eliminate implicit bias

— universities should ensure familiarity with the EHRC's recommendations (Atewologun, Cornish and Tresh, 2018)

— training should go beyond the remit of recruitment to include engagement with students, teaching and assessment

— as part of a long-term institutional willingness to address unconscious bias, staff should be encouraged to enact their training and formally provide evidence of how they mitigate their biases on an ongoing basis – an example of which might include employees evidencing their commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

MAIN CHALLENGES

— **Enhancing ethnic diversity within academia:** The primary challenge in developing racially diverse university environments is the lack of BAME academic and senior staff members. A common theme raised by BAME students through our engagement was the knock-on impact that not having any teacher who 'looks like me' has on a sense of belonging and aspiration, engagement and attainment.

— **Taking steps to review curriculums and teaching and learning practices:** Although equality impact assessments can be fairly commonplace, for example in parts of the public sector, reviews of a university's curriculums can be difficult to get started, and at times such intended steps can be viewed as controversial. Nonetheless, universities should consider the merits of doing so as part of any wider commitment to improving equality of opportunity. It is vital that any reviews are undertaken in partnership with students.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES ALREADY DOING?

Many universities are actively increasing the visibility of BAME role models for students through film screenings, workshops and high-profile speakers. These initiatives provoke conversations about race and ethnicity both organically and through structured discussions. Universities are also creating inclusive environments through formal learning opportunities, such as modules which improve cultural awareness.

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

The University of Hertfordshire has held inclusive practice workshops with over 37 academic programme teams. The workshops included:

— presentation of national, institutional and programme-level value-added (VA) data to enable consideration of attainment gaps

— inclusive curriculum enhancements, and discussions on implicit bias and compassion-focused pedagogies

Whilst the project is ongoing, 11 case studies of good practice have been published (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2017) and changes made to the university's annual monitoring and reporting mechanisms at programme level. All undergraduate programmes now comment on attainment gaps (as measured by VA scores) within their annual monitoring reports, and programme actions plans must identify activities to reduce any gaps.

BRUNEL UNIVERSITY LONDON

Brunel University London held a screening of the film *Dear White People* with a panel discussion featuring the poet and Chancellor of the University of Manchester, Lemn Sissay, for 200 students and staff.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON (UCL)

UCL established its Inclusive Curriculum Health Check in 2018, based on the Inclusive Curriculum Framework created by Kingston University London, leading a HEFCE funded consortium project. A guide (UCL, 2018) has been created to assist staff in developing an inclusive curriculum with a checklist for considering content, delivery and assessment of programmes.

The checklist is a mandated action that will be used in the UCL Annual Student Experience Review (ASER) process. UCL plans to:

— appoint and train students as inclusive curriculum partners

— implement online and face-to-face unconscious bias training

— develop a system for anonymous reporting of racist behaviour

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The University of Oxford held three high-profile lectures to open conversations around curriculum reviews, with the following speakers:

— Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies

— Professor Homi Bhabha, Anne F. Rothenburg Professor of the Humanities and Director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University

— Professor Ruth Simmons, Former President of Brown University, and first black president of an Ivy League institution

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

Glasgow Caledonian University built intercultural awareness workshops into modules and made them available to students in all schools to help students develop an understanding of different cultural norms and values which will be useful in their academic or professional careers.

The concept belongs to Student Vice-President Yetunde Ogedengbe, who spotted a gap in student learning. The programme provides a baseline for first-year students to develop their understanding and recognise the unconscious bias that exists within global academic, social and working environments.

The workshop has been developed to be sustainable within the teaching curriculum. It picked up one of the Student Engagement 2019 Awards run by sparqs, and was shortlisted for an NUS Scotland 2019 diversity award.

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

At the University of Dundee, master's-level social work students undertake compulsory modules on decision-making and research methods that aim to decolonise the curriculum and support cultural and religious diversity in learning and teaching. The project builds on professional and inclusive practices inside the classroom, including an understanding of non-Western approaches to ethics such as Buddhist, Islamic and Confucian approaches and argumentation.

The project concerns not only what is taught, but how it is taught and changing understandings of whose knowledge it is, so that the voices of BAME students are not marginalised. Inclusive practice is informed by criticalities of identity and power, and parallel lives exercises that debunk the notion of symmetry of experience between students. The learning materials introduce community speakers, concepts of the self and research methods drawn from the subcontinent.

The project is ongoing, but initial reflection has highlighted the importance of buy-in from other staff who can approach equality issues through the lens of sameness rather than diversity of approach to achieve equality of outcomes. Experience has also found that alternative learning techniques such as decolonial work can be perceived as confrontational and can take more time in a classroom environment than a traditional curriculum. The modules are open to other master's students within the School of Education and Social Work on an elective basis.

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND, BRISTOL

UWE Bristol held a number of role-model workshops with BAME alumni as guest speakers for students in the Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences.

SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

SOAS has created a Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit for Programme and Module Convenors. The work has been led by the Decolonising SOAS Working Group.

The toolkit acts as a briefing on what 'decolonising' learning and teaching might entail. At its root it is about making what we teach and how we teach it more responsive to the problems of colonial and racialised privilege and discrimination within our teaching practice.

It is not a set of prescriptions but a set of suggestions and ideas for colleagues and students to think through, individually and collectively. It is animated by a spirit of critical dialogue within education, and is also connected to wider institutional questions about the principles and practices of good teaching – in particular work on racialised attainment and inclusive pedagogy.

The SOAS Academic Board also approved the Decolonising SOAS Vision and Action Plan in November 2017. This vision outlines SOAS' wider commitments to address the need for decolonisation within the school, in addition to curriculum review processes.

VIEW THE CASE STUDIES

"I would like to see more diversity in staff at the university. There is currently a barrier there, which more diverse staff would help to overcome. It helps to see people you relate to."

Joy, University of Kent

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings suggest that universities should consider:

— assessing how they can create environments that are racially diverse and fully inclusive for BAME students and staff

— reviewing students' sense of belonging in order to inform and tailor further interventions to improve the inclusivity of both academic and social life for BAME students, including consideration of where experiences might differ between students of different ethnicities

— ensuring that academic, students' union and professional services staff are equipped with the knowledge and resources to appropriately implement inclusivity measures in their everyday work

— assessing the effect of existing commitments to diversify academic and professional services staff and senior leadership teams, and identifying any effective and less effective actions being taken to achieve this

— working with students to understand the barriers to postgraduate study faced by BAME students

— evaluating where it might be necessary to undertake curriculum and assessment reviews and piloting such work in collaboration with students, and following up with an evaluation of impact

— encouraging academic staff to reflect on their practice and understanding of student 'capital', using the guidance in appendix D of Stevenson (2019), based on the work of Tara Yosso (Stevenson, O'Mahony and Khan et al, 2019)

— the value of face-to-face implicit bias training for all staff, the long-term impact of which could be measured and compounded with mechanisms that allow staff to show evidence of how they mitigate their biases

8:
GETTING THE EVIDENCE AND ANALYSING THE DATA ON THE ATTAINMENT GAP

When considering the practical initiatives and interventions to remove attainment differentials, access to the right types of evidence and data can ensure evidence-based judgements are made. Relevant university staff need access to a suite of evidence in order to understand both the scale and scope of their institution's attainment gap and the lived experiences of BAME students over the whole student lifecycle.

The sector needs to take a more scientific approach to tackling the attainment gap, gathering and scrutinising data in a far more comprehensive way than currently, in order to inform discussions among university leaders, academics, practitioners and students. This could well require granular, programme-level attainment gap data being made available to all academic staff, with appropriate data protection in place. The evidence base could be strengthened further if data is intersectional and disaggregated by ethnic group.

Throughout our sessions, academics and support staff described headline data and evidence as clearly being vital to illustrating the extent of any racial inequities in attainment within an institution. However, a recurring theme highlighted by universities is that access to detailed evidence is needed to inform any discussion about the BAME attainment gap where a member of staff is either new in their understanding that it exists, or where an individual refutes that there is a problem, beyond adopting a deficit approach.

Many staff in universities have access to detailed, granular data to inform their internal conversations about their attainment gap, but not all do. In some cases, this can perhaps be due to a lack of staff capacity or analytical expertise. Comprehensive attainment-gap data that controls for entry grades can be helpful in calculating the 'unexplained' difference in attainment that originates whilst students are at university, thus excluding an individual's prior attainment and other characteristics such as socio-economic background. Granular and disaggregated data also allows for an intersectional understanding of BAME students' university experiences.

WHAT DOES THE SECTOR SAY?

The sector consistently told us that data is a useful tool for supporting any conversation highlighting the existence of a BAME attainment gap in a particular faculty, department, programme or module. Largely, the more granular data that was available, the clearer the picture became. It was equally important, however, that universities see students as individuals, not percentages or statistically insignificant groups.

Intersectional and disaggregated ethnicity data is valuable in highlighting where and when inequities manifest themselves among BAME students in the curriculum, subject disciplines and their wider university experience (OfS, 2018a). Having access to, and analysing, data that is disaggregated and cut in several ways can inform the implementation of targeted interventions at the time when they are likely to have the most impact. The University of Nottingham, for example, found its BAME attainment gap to be smallest among first-year students and largest among fourth-year students. Kingston University London has developed an attainment-gap dashboard, which shows the relative performance of White and BAME students for all its 3,000 modules. Through demonstrating the differences in the attainment gap between the same groups of students, over different modules, staff are able to explore which factors could be contributory. Similarly, in seeking to know its students better, Kingston also found that students who took BTEC qualifications have lower progression rates than those who took A-levels, and a greater proportion of students with BTECs are also from a BAME background. Measures are also being taken to support commuter students, the majority of whom are BAME.

Qualitative evidence, however, must not be undervalued at the expense of quantitative; listening to, sharing and acknowledging the lived experiences of BAME students ensures that the effects of racial inequities are at the forefront of diversity and inclusivity discussions, interventions and policies (NUS, 2011). Student representatives and students' unions are key to gathering qualitative evidence which can complement or contextualise data on actual attainment. To avoid BAME students undertaking extra unpaid work, students told us that this engagement should:

— take place during timetabled sessions that are most convenient for students

— be approached with transparency, in that the purpose of the engagement should be made absolutely clear

— involve students being reimbursed for any spare time they give up

A sole focus on quantitative data should be discouraged to ensure that BAME students' voices are centralised in conversations about the attainment gap and racial inequalities.

It was widely stated in our engagement that other forms of data are also relevant to improving understanding of the attainment gap and the student experience, including data on retention, employment and graduate outcomes, complaints, and racially motivated hate-crime figures (Singh, 2011). The attainment gap does not exist in isolation from other inequities that BAME students face. The employment outcomes for BAME students, for example, are not always equal to those of White students, even when they have the same degree outcomes (OfS, 2018a). These inequalities in graduate outcomes have been found to persist three years after BAME students graduate in comparison with the experiences of White students. Universities should therefore consider the use of data in areas outside attainment when working towards an institutional approach to removing racial inequalities that is informed by student and staff experiences.

On complaints, it is relevant to consider whether student complaint-reporting mechanisms are fit for purpose, not least because a lack of complaints about racism, racial discrimination, harassment or racially motivated hate crime, does not necessarily signal that racism is not taking place (NUS, 2011).

MAIN CHALLENGES

— **Having the right data:** University staff told us that their biggest challenge in this area was in accessing the required data, especially at a granular programme level. Once granular, disaggregated and intersectional data is available, both the dataset and the intersectional factors become very complex. Qualified statisticians or analysts may therefore be needed to explain and make full use of this data, although this would not be straightforward for certain institutions. This is equally important in circumstances where the validity of the data is called into question or individuals reject the findings.

— **Using data limitations as an excuse not to push ahead:** A frustration some university staff and students experienced was an over-reliance on data and data collection. Data collection activities, or a lack of data, were sometimes used as reasons to avoid action on removing the attainment gap. Where there was a perceived lack of evidence in what really works to remove the attainment gap, or it was felt that outcomes would be difficult to measure, there were some tendencies to avoid taking any action at all. This approach was likely exacerbated by feelings of unease in talking about race. Consequently, while access to comprehensive data is valuable, it is equally important that repetitive data collection does not become the enemy of action: we received examples whereby individuals sceptical about there being an attainment gap would simply request more and more data, delaying action and progress. Universities have a moral and legal duty to ensure the success of all students and therefore must act where there is an apparent inequality.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES ALREADY DOING?

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY LONDON

Kingston University London is leading on a project with the University of Hertfordshire, University of Wolverhampton, University of Greenwich, De Montfort University and UCL, funded by the OfS.

They have produced a value added (VA) dashboard that has enabled a much more nuanced understanding of attainment gaps at programme level.

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON

UAL has a well-developed data dashboard that gives accessible information to course teams about all aspects of the student experience and differentials. The UAL's academic enhancement model (AEM) is a centrally located, cross-university approach to removing attainment differentials, based on agreed data thresholds for attainment and student satisfaction scores.

Working in partnership with the university's planning department and executive board, the AEM team agrees data thresholds (which increase each year). Courses that fall below these thresholds work with AEM leads to create co-designed AEM support packages. The AEM leads have a key role in brokering and delivering the targeted support that is agreed with the course leader and dean for each course. AEM is compulsory for all courses below the data thresholds.

In 2018, UAL saw a 4.9% reduction in its BAME attainment gap.

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

In 2018, a Cardiff University campaign to ensure the voices of BAME students are heard reached the National Assembly for Wales as part of Black History Month. The #ITooAmCardiff exhibition featured freestanding images of BAME students accompanied by their own inspiring words to share their experiences of being a BAME student on campus.

It was modelled on a social media campaign created by students at Harvard University. The exhibition, sponsored by Vaughan Gething AM, the Assembly Member for Cardiff South and Penarth, was on display at the National Assembly for Wales' Pierhead Building in Cardiff Bay from 26 October to 30 November 2018.

Cardiff University's Equality and Diversity Project Officer, Susan Cousins, was behind the #ITooAmCardiff campaign aiming to raise awareness of the BAME student journey.

VIEW THE CASE STUDIES

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings suggest that universities should:

— consider the suite of evidence that is currently being used at their institution to identify and interrogate their own BAME attainment gap, and whether the student voice is being sufficiently captured to contextualise any quantitative data

— consider how to make granular programme-level attainment-gap data available to all appropriate academic staff, with relevant data protection in place. Ideally, this data will be intersectional and disaggregated by ethnic group where possible. Students' unions should also have access to this data

— manage attainment-gap data centrally, ideally by qualified data specialists who can explain what the data means

— use qualitative student experience evidence to show staff and students where the experiences of BAME and White students might differ, and broaden awareness of any effects of racism and microaggressions (Rollock, 2012)

— work with students' unions to coordinate any BAME students' 'storytelling' and qualitative evidence collection through focus groups, events or ambassador schemes

9:
UNDERSTANDING WHAT WORKS

Universities will be at different stages in following the steps to success identified in this report so far. However, a consistent block to improving progress is in knowing 'what works'.

Existing interventions and initiatives to close the BAME attainment gap are wide ranging in both impact and format. Universities of similar student populations, localities or size could benefit more than they currently do from sharing their knowledge on what works and what doesn't in attainment-gap interventions.

Universities can collectively work to address gaps in the evidence by using applied research to ensure evidence on 'what works' is high quality, and share evidence of what works and what doesn't. As a first step, UUK has created a collection of case studies.

It is important that BAME students have a key role in co-creating and informing the implementation of attainment-gap interventions, facilitated by students' unions, and that they are compensated for their time in doing so.

There is no simple solution to closing the attainment gap, as this report has shown, but there remains a substantial space to be filled with information on evaluated, effective initiatives that do work, in order to help universities and students make progress.

"It's understandable that staff might not know what BAME students go through and the issues they face; but it's about being open to understanding and learning about these."

Salma, Aston University

SEE FULL INTERVIEW

WHAT DOES THE SECTOR SAY?

Each university is unique in its context, whether that be in academic disciplines, institutional structure or locality. Our research and other writing in this area also note the importance of acknowledging the differences in experiences between ethnic groups, in addition to other intersections such as gender and socio-economic backgrounds. The size of, and reasons for, the attainment gap might vary between ethnic groups. It is important that interventions are therefore tailored to individual university contexts and student populations (Thomas, Hill, O'Mahony and Yorke, 2017).

To understand racial equity is to understand the difference in starting points for individual students. Some interventions aiming to remove the attainment gap could result in attainment being improved for all students, but without removing the discrepancy between White and BAME students, because White students might be, on average, starting at a higher level of attainment at the point of intervention. Jacqueline Stevenson et al's (2019) report on ethnicity targeting, written for the OfS, describes two different types of targeted interventions:

> *Inclusive interventions designed to benefit all students but in particular one or more minority ethnic groups*
>
> *Exclusive interventions explicitly directed at one or more minority ethnic groups.*

POSITIVE ACTION AND POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION

Stevenson et al.'s research suggests there is value for universities in using both inclusive and exclusive targeted interventions for removing the attainment gap. Our research, however, signalled differing levels of confidence among university professionals in implementing targeted interventions. For some staff members, there were concerns about the legality of targeting BAME students. Practitioners should be aware of the difference between positive action and positive discrimination to overcome these concerns. Positive action refers to forms of preferential treatment for members of under-represented or disadvantaged groups, stemming from past or present discrimination. It can be legally implemented in higher education according to section 158 of the Equality Act 2010.[6] Positive discrimination, however, is unlawful. This includes treating someone more favourably because of their race (see annexe B for more details).

Through our engagement, a common concern was that students may feel demotivated by targeted interventions which suggest they need greater support than other students (Berry and Loke, 2011). There is also a perceived risk that some interventions promote a deficit understanding of BAME students by considering them to be lacking skills, aspirations or motivations (Burke, 2015). One method for avoiding this approach is to consider other student characteristics. For example, the University of Kent identified that BAME students are more likely to enter with non-A-level qualifications and to be a first-generation student. Inclusive interventions have therefore been targeted at students using other characteristics such as commuting, those in receipt of a low-income scholarship, mature students or widening participation students.

Our engagement and similar studies highlight university practitioners' concerns that being open with BAME students about the attainment gap could result in students internalising the inequalities they face, leading to 'a pattern of self-replicating behaviour' (Berry and Loke, 2011, p.17). However, students told us that they want their institution to be transparent and open with them about the attainment gap. Similar calls for transparency around race equality in higher education have been made by others in the sector. Gary Loke, Director of Knowledge, Innovation and Delivery, for example, has highlighted that transparency in discussing issues of racial equality does not need to result in reputational damage, as many in the sector fear (Loke, 2015).

6. 'The Equality Act 2010 does not apply to Northern Ireland.'

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING INITIATIVES

When devising interventions, university staff told us they were looking to find out what works and what doesn't in removing the attainment gap, with evidence still patchy, particularly given the variety of contexts within which each university operates. There remains space for universities to work together better to share practice in this area to meet a common goal in the interests of students, including how initiatives are evaluated in terms of their impact, who was involved, what the role of students was, how much time and resource were needed, and an open conversation about the barriers faced, which in many cases will not be institution specific.

The OfS' Catalyst-funded collaborative projects that form the Addressing Barriers to Student Success programme are a good example of this. Knowledge is shared on the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives at multiple universities. There are 17 projects, including 59 involving higher education providers and 28 other organisations such as employers and charities. The projects cover a range of areas:

— inclusive and active teaching and learning practices

— wellbeing for students

— progression to postgraduate study

— graduate employability

Universities should make use of the findings from these projects in the OfS Addressing Barriers to Student Success programme (OfS).

Through our engagement, the sector proposed student–staff partnerships that include:

— students being involved in the creation and delivery of interventions and reimbursed for their time: it is important that students have a genuine opportunity to create and give feedback on proposed interventions – students' unions are well placed to facilitate dialogue between universities and their students

— joining up work on the attainment gap with professional/student services and academic departments. A curriculum could be reviewed to include BAME authors and perspectives, but it is also necessary to have BAME counsellors and student advisors, for example

MAIN CHALLENGES

— **Understanding the appropriateness of targeting:** Significant challenges exist in knowing what works in interventions for tackling the BAME attainment gap. First, in deciding whom to target in an intervention, universities need to decide when it would be suitable to use inclusive or exclusive interventions, and whether a particular ethnic group would be more appropriate in any targeting than all BAME students. Universities with smaller BAME student populations may find it more challenging to target specific ethnic groups. Interventions must also avoid a deficit approach that could further isolate students.

— **Ensuring transparency and openness:** The purpose of interventions needs to be clear to students. If there is open communication about the attainment gap, but not about the measures used to remove it, this could have a negative influence on BAME students' perceptions of their institution and thus the student experience. A challenge can also exist in encouraging BAME students to take part in interventions relating to the attainment gap, whether that is because of a lack of incentive, time constraints or a lack of awareness.

— **Evaluating the impact of initiatives:** When evaluating the impact of initiatives, a common issue is difficulty in attributing an impact to a particular intervention. Often, several interventions will run concurrently, complicating the evaluation process. Notably, the OfS has recently published an evaluation tool which could facilitate the sharing of practice, including on evaluation methods.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES ALREADY DOING?

Many universities are undertaking research-led interventions to improve student attainment. In some cases, dedicated staff have been hired to focus on these issues allowing for greater opportunities to evaluate the impact of interventions. Pilot and embedded interventions are already taking place in teaching, learning and assessment processes, resources and staff training.

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

The University of Brighton established its Widening Participation Achievement Team (WiPAT) in January 2017 to lead on its institutional approach to student retention, success and progression. The project work includes:

— using course-level attainment-gap data analysis to start conversations with academics and examine student intersectionalities

— developing the student success framework

— planning Advance HE unconscious bias workshops for academic staff

— revising the definitions of inclusivity and inclusive practice

— conducting an anonymous marking pilot

— working in partnership with the students' union.

A further £75,000 of funding is committed for 2018–19 for initiatives and interventions that are directed at the BAME attainment gap, funded from access agreement funds. The University of Brighton has seen a reduction of 6% over three years in the BAME attainment gap and 8% in the Black attainment gap.

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

The University of Portsmouth's Raising Awareness and Aspiration project assessed the impact of personal tutoring on reducing the attainment gap. It is funded by the OfS from 2017 to 2019, in partnership with the University of Sheffield and King's College London. Portsmouth has built, piloted and successfully rolled out a personal tutoring platform in 2018.

The platform enables all personal tutors to connect with their personal tutees, with a specific focus on personally welcoming all BAME students and, through both individual and group activities, opening opportunities for them to make friends with their peers.

SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

In 2016, SOAS Students' Union published *Degrees of racism: A qualitative investigation into ethnicity attainment gaps at SOAS* (SOAS, 2016). SOAS has implemented a number of interventions as a result of the findings of this report, including the creation of two working groups focusing on the attainment gap and decolonisation activities. Interventions include:

— development of a learning and teaching toolkit for academic staff to interrogate their curriculum and pedagogy

— addition of questions regarding decolonisation to the annual programme review process and to student evaluation of modules questionnaires

— piloting of a BAME mentoring programme in which staff from BAME backgrounds mentor students from BAME backgrounds

— instigation of partnerships with external organisations to deliver training for staff in order to increase self-efficacy and the ability to implement an inclusive approach: a structured and nuanced approach was developed to roll out unconscious bias training with intersectional dimensions.

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

The University of Kent developed its Student Success Project as a multi-modal approach, conducting institutional research into attainment. The project was a response to intersectional data produced within the university regarding attainment and is overseen by the senior deputy vice-chancellor and provost. The project is ongoing with a funding commitment from the university until 2022.

— Institutional research has enabled the development of context-led interventions, both local and institution-wide, where they are most needed.

— The students' union is represented on the steering group, and students also conducted separate research to deliver the BAME student voice.

— The project manager meets with union staff and officers monthly to report on progress.

Initiatives within the project involve both students and staff, and include curriculum reviews, a programme of inspirational speakers, and seminars for staff to encourage engagement in the work.

ASTON UNIVERSITY

Aston University is leading the OfS Levelling the Playing Field project, which is working to reduce differential BAME employment outcomes, based on Aston's research that shows that taking part in work-based learning (WBL) has a moderating impact on the BAME attainment gap, and differential employment outcomes.

The project includes: Aston University; Birmingham City University; City, University of London; and Ulster University.

The aim is to engage 1,800 students in scaled-up interventions, leading to increased placement and WBL take-up, and ultimately supporting positive graduate employment outcomes for BAME, low socio-economic status and disabled students, and closing the graduate employment gap. The five interventions are: professional mentoring; micro-placements; recruitment matching service; speed recruitment events; and embedded employability modules.

The project will include an assessment of the institutional replicability of the interventions and the development of a sector work-placement and WBL toolkit.

VIEW THE CASE STUDIES

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings suggest that universities and students' unions should consider:

— how they can best work together and use sector networks and resources to effectively implement interventions to remove the attainment gap and share their experiences

— whether any of their current interventions, practices or structures inadvertently promote a deficit understanding of BAME students

— using Stevenson et al.'s (2019) report when devising interventions to overcome the challenges of targeted interventions for BAME students

— how open the institution currently is concerning ethnic disparities, including on attainment gaps. It is important that any messages about the attainment gap are accompanied with an explanation of what the institution is doing to remove the gap and with a message of how students can share their views and suggestions

— collaborating with other institutions and sector bodies to share what works and what doesn't in interventions, using existing materials from organisations such as NUS and Advance HE, and other scholarly research, and the UUK and NUS collection of case studies.

— designing interventions so that they include BAME students with a key, paid role in co-creation and implementation, as well as staff from student and professional services

Some universities in England include reference to addressing their own BAME attainment gap as part of their access and participation plans. The OfS has recently made eliminating the ethnicity attainment gap between White and Black students one of its key performance measures, and has also recently launched the Evidence and Impact Exchange to monitor and promote social mobility in higher education. Given the starkness of the BAME attainment gap compared to other inequalities of opportunity, UUK and NUS also recommend that:

— the Evidence and Impact Exchange systematically reviews 'what works' in closing the attainment gap (as well as what does not) as a priority, to inform universities' investment and strategies.

In addition, UUK and NUS heard from organisations outside higher education – including schools – whose challenges in addressing ethnic disparities overlap with those set out in this report. The government is already reporting data on ethnic disparities across different parts of civil society through its Race Disparity Audit, but to date has not moved as far as identifying common factors that underpin or help create these disparities. In the light of this, this report also recommends that:

—   the UK government's Race Disparity Audit considers how it can support different parts of UK civil society – including universities – that are addressing similar structural challenges, and draws together evidence on how different types of organisations have achieved success.

In the meantime, UUK and NUS have created a collection of case studies for universities to share practice, and we strongly encourage universities and student unions to engage with this.

VIEW THE CASE STUDIES

10:
CONCLUSIONS

UUK and NUS are calling on universities to accelerate efforts to remove the BAME attainment gap. Vice-chancellors and senior leaders have a crucial role in leading a whole-institution approach to change, by opening up conversations about race and building a racially diverse and inclusive environment.

Students value the transparency that accompanies joined-up working between their university and students' union to remove ethnicity attainment gaps. The voices and lived experiences of BAME students can be fundamental to informing universities' decision-making and planned activities. All students should feel equally that they belong at their university; linked to this, the students we engaged with as part of this work want to see BAME role models in their institution's leadership teams, practitioners and staff.

Meanwhile, those with any level of responsibility for addressing attainment differentials need a sufficiently detailed understanding of intersectional differences and ethnic groups to assist in the recognition of the extent of inequalities that BAME students face. Disaggregated programme-level data could therefore be invaluable for institutions with larger BAME student populations.

Many universities are measuring attainment differentials to varying extents of complexity and have implemented interventions designed to remove the gaps. Some institutions are leading the way in setting strategic targets and KPIs for removing inequalities in attainment, while others are relatively new on their journey. We would like to see further action, commitment and impact from the higher education sector in reducing and ultimately eliminating this longstanding ethnic disparity. Doing so will take time, but there are some clear directions of travel that could demonstrate a renewed level of commitment.

UUK and NUS would like to see:

— an increase in the percentage of universities recognising attainment differences

— increased awareness of how to support BAME students among university staff

— better understanding of BAME students' perceptions, including where this is linked to their sense of belonging

— appropriate disaggregation within the broad BAME category, ensuring that practices and initiatives reflect that this 'group' consists of individuals with varied experiences and needs

In particular, this has to be the start of journey on which higher education leaders are active, and working with students, to achieve results in addressing issues around race, ethnicity and attainment. UUK and NUS will evaluate how far the sector has come in early 2020.

ANNEXE A:
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The project was launched on 6 June 2018 by UUK and NUS with a call for evidence seeking universities' and student representatives' experiences of the barriers faced by BAME students within the higher education sector, and possible routes to success for closing the attainment gap.

UUK's and NUS' calls for evidence were circulated as surveys, aimed primarily at practitioners/staff at institutions and students respectively. The surveys were designed to help us understand:

— what attainment gap data there is and how it is being used

— the factors contributing to BAME attainment gaps

— interventions that have been implemented and their impact

— any gaps in practice and knowledge

— challenges in bringing about changes to institutional cultures

— the existence of barriers to undertaking work to address these gaps

— whether further evidence is needed

UUK received 44 completed surveys, while there were 69 responses to the NUS survey.

Owing to the important role of leadership in tackling the BAME attainment gap, a vice-chancellors' working group was established to:

— provide feedback and a strategic view on the areas of focus set out for the project, and its recommendations

— consider the role of vice-chancellors in helping to accelerate progress in reducing BAME attainment gaps

The selection of members was based on an expression of interest to be involved in the UUK–NUS project. Membership of the group was:

— Baroness Valerie Amos CH, Director, SOAS University of London (Chair)

— Professor Paul Boyle, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester

— Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Aston University

— Professor Karen Cox, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Kent

— Professor Geoff Layer, Vice-Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton

— Professor Quintin McKellar, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Hertfordshire

— Dame Minouche Shafik, Director, London School of Economics and Political Science

— Professor Peter Slee, Vice-Chancellor, Leeds Beckett University

— Professor Steven Spier, Vice-Chancellor, Kingston University London

— Professor Sally Mapstone, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of St Andrews

— Professor David Phoenix OBE, Vice-Chancellor, London South Bank University

— Professor Sir Chris Husbands, Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University

— Professor Steve West CBE, Vice-Chancellor, University of the West of England, Bristol

Thanks also go to Professor Jacqueline Stevenson and Aloma Onyemah from Sheffield Hallam University for their contributions and guidance.

A roundtable event was chaired by Baroness Amos on 6 July 2018. The roundtable was attended by students' union representatives, university practitioners and senior staff, as well as other key stakeholders, including from the UK government. The aim of the event was to draw on the expertise of the participants to inform the focus and direction of the research. The discussions substantively focused on:

— the major barriers to addressing the BAME attainment gap and what is needed to overcome these

— experiences of implementing initiatives to improve BAME student success and reduce the gap

— what success looks like

Five evidence sessions were subsequently held in October and November 2018 at: Aston University; University of the West of England, Bristol; Glasgow Caledonian University; Sheffield Hallam University; and London School of Economics and Political Science. The sessions were held with university leaders, staff, students and others outside the sector to:

— share experiences and learning from a variety of perspectives

— identify how to ensure effective collaboration between students and staff

— discuss what next steps are necessary to address the attainment gap

— inform UUK–NUS recommendations in this area

Over 150 representatives attended the five sessions; the discussions were structured around four key themes that had emerged from the initial call for evidence and roundtable event:

— Evidence

— Opening conversations around race

— Inclusive environments

— Initiatives and interventions

Before each evidence session, participants were encouraged to complete a UUK case study template, of which 17 were submitted. Case studies were used to capture information on a wide range of activity already under way or planned across the higher education sector, to enhance understanding of what works and what doesn't in tackling the BAME attainment gap.

ANNEXE B: POSITIVE ACTION AND POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION

To lawfully implement positive action, a university must reasonably think that students who share a protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil-partnership[7], pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation):

— experience a disadvantage connected to that characteristic; or

— have needs that are different from the needs of persons who do not share that characteristic; or

— have disproportionately low participation in an activity compared to others who do not share that protected characteristic.

Examples could include:

— providing bursaries to obtain qualifications in a profession such as journalism for BAME students whose participation in that profession might be disproportionately low

— providing mentoring to BAME students to facilitate their progress into highly skilled employment

— providing employer visits and mock assessment centres for BAME students working with employers who wish to address an under-representation of BAME graduates in their workforce

Any actions would need to be proportionate to the disadvantage or under-representation faced by students with protected characteristics. The action must be justifiable with appropriate evidence, quantitative or qualitative, including student feedback data.

An example of positive discrimination, which is unlawful, would be providing BAME students with extra time to complete exams because of attainment gaps between BAME and White students. The only lawful exception to this practice is for disabled students, who can be treated more favourably and receive positive discrimination in their favour within the terms described in the Equality Act 2010.

7. Only relevant to employment.

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