

Supporting black and minority ethnic student success in higher education- narrowing the attainment gap

Feedback from the HEA, ECU and
HEFCE sponsored summit
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This presentation

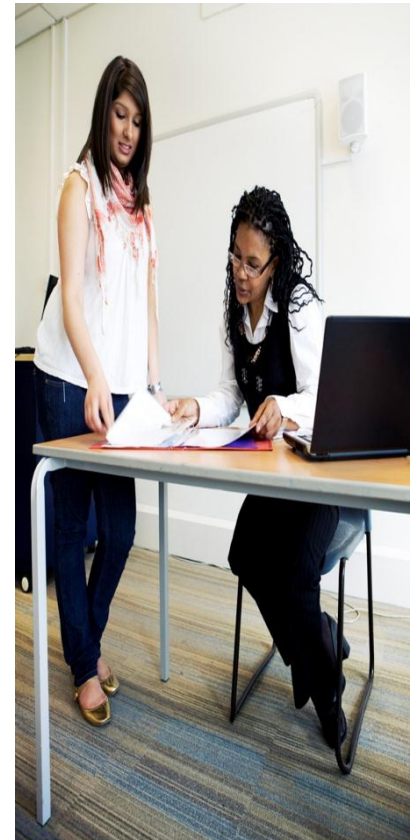
- The evidence



- The student 'voice'



- What can we do to narrow the gap?



Definition of the attainment gap

- The attainment gap measures the difference between the proportion of first degree undergraduate qualifiers within two groups who obtain a first class or upper second class honours degree.
- This presentation contains information on the attainment gaps between white and BME students

The data picture....



NATIONALLY

- More BME students than ever are accessing higher education
- Over the past seven years, the proportion of UK-domicile BME students has increased from 14.9% in 2003/04 to 18.1% in 2009/10
- Over the past seven years, the percentage of UK-domicile leavers achieving a first class or upper second class honours degree has steadily increased for most ethnic groups
- For UK-domicile qualifiers, the difference between the proportion of white qualifiers who obtained a first class or upper second class honours and that of BME qualifiers (the attainment gap) increased from 17.2% in 2003/04 to a peak of 18.8% in 2005/06 and was at **18.6%** in 2009/10
- In 2010 for UK-domicile leavers, BME leavers (12.6%), particularly Chinese (14.7%) and black (14.3%) leavers, were more likely to be assumed to be unemployed than white leavers (6.2%) .

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

- More BME student are coming to UoB
- Over the past 7 years, the proportion of UK-domicile BME UG students has increased from 21.4% in 2003/4 to 22.3% in 2011/12
- Over the past four years, the percentage of UK-domicile leavers achieving a first class or upper second class honours degree has slightly increased for most ethnic groups
- For UK- domicile qualifiers, the difference between the **proportion** of white qualifiers who obtained a first class or upper second class honours and that of BME qualifiers increased from 15% 2005/06 to **17% 2010/11**
unknowns = 10%
- In 2010 for UK-domicile leavers, BME 14.4% leavers compared to 8.25% white leavers were assumed to be unemployed.

College	Flag	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Arts and Law	BME	67.61%	56.04%	60.19%	55.59%	58.42%
	White	78.49%	80.47%	79.78%	79.17%	82.05%
	GAP	10.88%	24.43%	19.59%	23.58%	23.63%
Engineering and Phys Sci	BME	53.46%	47.32%	53.26%	54.75%	56.41%
	White	65.52%	69.77%	76.59%	78.99%	76.62%
	GAP	12.06%	22.45%	23.33%	24.24%	20.21%
Life and Env Sci	BME	49.12%	58.31%	50.53%	47.31%	69.62%
	White	69.63%	76.29%	73.17%	74.48%	79.46%
	GAP	20.51%	17.98%	22.64%	27.17%	9.84%
Medical and Dental Sciences	BME	46.67%	61.36%	53.19%	62.86%	63.83%
	White	74.74%	70.81%	73.20%	74.73%	68.21%
	GAP	28.07%	9.45%	20.1%	11.87%	4.38%
Social Sciences	BME	60.59%	62.62%	63.45%	63.05%	68.81%
	White	69.73%	77.84%	82.56%	83.84%	85.75%
	GAP	9.14%	15.22%	19.11%	20.79%	16.94%
University total	BME	57.61%	56.79%	57.79%	57.03%	63.84%
	White	72.29%	76.90%	77.70%	78.57%	80.69%
	Gap	14.68%	20.11%	19.91%	21.54%	16.85%

Source: Planning Office data warehouse. Only UK-domiciled students considered accessed April 2012 based on data November 2011

The BME Attainment Gap at the UoB

It's complex....

Contested and unstable categories- 'BME' – multiple identities
Within 'BME' Indian and Chinese students are more successful and
in general female BME students perform better than male BUT:

Broecke, S. and Nicholls, T. (2007) found that:

'While a wide range of factors contributed to differential degree attainment (such as economic background, age, gender, whether a student lives at home, term-time working, parental income and education, having English as an additional language, entry qualifications and prior institution attended), these alone could not account for the disparity in attainment between BME and white students. Even after controlling for the majority of factors which we would expect to have an impact on attainment, being from a minority ethnic community is still statistically significant in explaining final attainment.'

A summary of the evidence presented at the Summit

Experiential

- Lack of general support and isolation- networks and friendship groups
- Lack of support by staff and a feeling of isolation for the student due to a lack of cultural diversity and opportunity to integrate with other students
- Undervalued and lower expectations of the students by staff = 'folk pedagogies' (Singh 2012)
- Struggling to settle in – transition to university
- Lack of visible diversity and academic role models

Structural

- Academic staff not realising there is an issue, or not able/willing to respond or they know there is something going on but not sure what! Happy to discuss international students etc but not BME(Woodfield 2011)
- Lack of inclusive curricula/ 'colour blind' approach
- Academic processes e.g. more likely to be accused of plagiarism
- Racism (but a lack of willingness to accept it –liberal institution etc.) (NUS 2011)
- Lack of student participation in curriculum design and assessment
- Role for the NUS/Guild

Particular

- Lack of understanding of discipline/subject choices and what those courses, students [parents] expect (Dhandra 2010)
- Lack of preparedness for university and once here, less confident about accessing support. Black and Asian males are substantially less likely to use financial, personal, disability and study support and other services (Woodfield 2011)
- Willingness to share cultural and other difference and, at the same time, be recognised as individuals

What did the students say?

➤ *Role models are important, as is institutional culture*

e.g. “I think you’ll find that Black students in Russell Group institutions probably have a worse experience than Black students in other institutions that probably have a lot more Black lecturers and a lot more Black students that go there. The social element helps the university experience. The experience would be probably worse for Black students at institutions with less of a Black culture.” Black focus group respondent [Race for Equality \(NUS 2011\)](#)

➤ Want supportive tutors – understanding the impact of prior experiences and not ignoring the student’s heritage

➤ Want inclusivity in the curriculum and a curriculum that reflects diversity

➤ *“Often, programmes are heavily focused on what is considered ‘mainstream’ and may not adequately cater to students of diverse backgrounds.”*

Black Caribbean respondent, HE

➤ *“There is a standard way of thinking that is hegemonically White, and students from ethnic minorities either have to get with the programme or do worse ...”* Black African respondent, HE

➤ *“Teachers automatically assume we’ve had the same education as Whites. The tests are biased and framed around a White discourse that makes it impossible at times for us to understand.”*

Black African respondent, HE

In summary then; the reasons for lack of parity in attainment is associated with a range of personal, cultural, institutional and structural factors (Connor et al., 2004, Broecke and Nicholls, 2007) overlaid with instances of direct and indirect racism (Turney et al.,2002; Jacobs et al., 2007; Jessop and Williams, 2009).

It would therefore follow that enabling success will require a multi-pronged response.

Enabling BME success?

- Important to challenge the idea of BME students as victims and foster self-efficacy, critical self-reflexivity, resilience and culture capital. **HOW?**
- Recruit more role models from high achieving BME professionals and academic staff (as tutors too).
- Learn from schools , fostering a culture of achievement, access to support, respect, tackling racism, an inclusive curriculum where BME pupils' experience, heritage and participation in British life is adequately acknowledged.
- Take a broad view of the inclusive curriculum, importance of unconscious ethnic stereotyping (Woolf et al) pg 41

- Cross racial interaction (Chang et al 2006).
- Fair assessment. There is a growing body of statistical evidence suggesting that BME students generally feel less happy with their experiences of assessment when compared the white students (SurrIDGE, 2008; NUS, 2011) = transparency.
- Work with the student union to facilitate discussions, produce and disseminate information and help to develop inclusive practices for all students.

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