Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Understanding the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student experience

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Abstract: There is a significant attainment gap between white-British and British-BME students at UK universities, even after controlling for academic qualifications upon entry. The gap is particularly stark for black students.

The University of Brighton has recently undertaken a university-wide study to identify factors contributing to the British-BME attainment gap from the perspective of the students that it impacts.

This session will highlight some of the key findings from the study and provide an opportunity to discuss and promote:

- Some of the positive and negative factors that may impact the BME student experience;
- Interventions that have benefitted current BME students that have the potential to be replicated more widely;
- A better understanding of how student perspective is formed/impacted and provide an opportunity to discuss how/what we communicate to shape this perspective more accurately.
- Potential new interventions to improve the BME student experience and better support attainment to reduce the attainment gap.

Paper: *"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." (UUK[1])

There is a significant attainment gap between white-British and British-BME students at UK universities, even after controlling for academic qualifications upon entry. The gap is particularly stark for black students.

In their latest guidance to institutions submitting an Access and Participation Plans (APP) the Office for Students (OfS) has set a clear target for HEIs to eliminate the unexplained attainment gap between black and white students at their institution by 2025 with a view to eradicating the absolute gap by 2031. (OfS[2]) Although most universities are already undertaking work in this area, the OfS's target has renewed commitment and added impetus to reassess and redefine approaches to eliminating the BME attainment gap.

The University of Brighton has recently undertaken a university-wide study to identify some of the factors contributing to the British-BME attainment gap from the perspective of the students that it impacts.

Semi-structured focus groups were facilitated within each of the university's 12 schools of study, with UK domiciled BME students from all year groups and courses invited to participate. Focus groups took place in semester 2 of the 2018-19 academic year so that all students participating had completed at least 15 weeks of study prior to participation.

Questions were themed around the student experience across the complete student lifecycle, from pre-entry perceptions to transition, on-course support and careers guidance. The research focus was around both the academic and non-academic experiences of BME students and what might directly or indirectly affect engagement. Transcriptions of the focus groups are in the process of being thematically analysed to provide greater depth in understanding the extent to which specific issues are prevalent and how they impact BME students.

Findings are being considered taking a multi-level approach to analysis and questioning the data to answer the following:

- Is this a BME-specific issue or something that is likely to affect all students?
- Is the issue context-specific (e.g. to a type of course, to a particular school of study, to the institution or region) or is it a more systemic issue affecting the sector?
- Can the issue be addressed via changes to policy and procedural practice or resources? If so, what is the process and potential barriers to making these changes?
- Is the approach and/or behaviour of staff or students (or both) any aspect of the issue? If so, what steps are required to inform, educate and make appropriate changes to the culture that has caused the issue?
- What are the lessons to be learned and how can this finding guide future strategy and actions at a local and sector level?

This session will highlight some of the key findings from the study and present a number of considerations for delegates to take back and reflect on in their own institutional contexts.

Early findings suggest that, whilst many of the issues impacting the BME student experience may be shared by the wider student body, there are clear elements of the student experience where white students are being more advantaged than their non-white peers and that have an effect on

progression and attainment.

This session will provide an opportunity to discuss and promote:

- Some of the positive and negative factors that may impact the BME student experience;
- Interventions that have benefitted current BME students that have the potential to be replicated more widely;
- A better understanding of how student perspective is formed/impacted and provide an opportunity to discuss how/what we communicate to shape this perspective more accurately.
- Potential new interventions to improve the BME student experience and better support attainment to reduce the attainment gap.

References:

1. Universities UK and National Union of Students (2019). *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: Closing the Gap*. London: UUK, p.1.
2. The Office for Students (2019). *Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance.* Bristol: The Office for Students, p. 19.