Closing the Gap: Research and Practice on Black and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment in Higher Education

ABSTRACTS

Grimond Building, University of Kent
Canterbury Campus

27th June 2016

Organised by:

Lissa Davies/Elizabeth Buswell
conferenceinfo@kent.ac.uk
(01227) 816194.
The 2015 higher education Green Paper stresses the importance of increasing access for ethnic minorities to the UK’s most selective universities as a means of increasing social mobility. However, recent studies have shown that university graduates from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely than otherwise comparable white graduates to progress to postgraduate study or to gain employment in a higher salary, graduate-level job after their degree (Lessard-Phillips et al 2014; HEFCE 2015; Zwysen and Longhi 2016). A separate set of studies has also shown that graduate outcomes vary significantly depending on subject studied and university attended over and above the impact of students’ prior attainment and social background characteristics (Power and Whitty, 2008; Hussein, McNally, and Telhajjg, 2009; Walker and Zhu, 2013; Macmillan, Tyler, and Vignoles, 2013). However, no study to date has explored how graduates’ labour market outcomes are influenced by ethnicity in interaction with other individual-, course-, and institutional-level characteristics in a meaningful manner. The present study brings these two strands of inquiry together to explore how graduate outcomes are influenced by ethnicity in interaction with other student, course and institution characteristics. We analyse data about recent British graduates (2009-2013) from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey from the UK’s Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). We use a combination of truth table analysis and regression models to identify which particular configurations of student, course and institution attributes are associated with better and worse graduate outcomes for ethnic minority graduates relative to their white peers. Our findings change a key assumption of the government’s social mobility policy agenda that graduating with a good degree from a highly selective university guarantees social mobility for students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

This paper will report on an international research project on the employability of black and minority ethnic students across three higher education systems: the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. The project, funded by The Australian Government Department of Education, aims to promote more equitable implementation of university employability strategies to promote academic attainment and graduate outcomes among minority students. A growing emphasis on employability as both a purpose and a responsibility of higher education is reflected in the explicit development of ‘work-ready’ degrees; the articulation of graduate capabilities related to employability; a growth in industry collaboration, and in the extent and diversity of clinical and other placements; and the increasing use of graduate outcome data to measure teaching quality, e.g. through the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework, and institutional reputation (Field, 2013). Research suggests that black and minority ethnic students are more likely to be under-represented in work-based placements, study abroad (Universities UK, 2016) and optional career development activities and that many student groups face disproportionately poor graduate outcomes (Harvey & Reyes 2015, Jackson, 2013; Mestan & Harvey, 2013). Our project examines literature and specific graduate outcome data for Non-English speaking background (NESB) students in Australia, Black and Latina/o students in the United States, and Black and Minority Ethnic students in the United Kingdom. We argue that embedding employability initiatives within mainstream curriculum will require addressing issues of diversity and the public good, acknowledging non-traditional conceptualizations of student cultural capital (Yoosso, 2005) and the intersectionalities of class, gender and ethnicity (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). This is particularly important within the UK context where an unintended consequence of the current political focus on the under-attainment of white working-class boys (Weale, 2016) may actually be the understating of ethnicity as a predictor of graduate employability outcomes.

The Access to HE diploma: A sustainable model for promoting black and ethnic minority student participation in higher education.

Julie Farmer and Joanna Parr, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

The Access to Higher Education (Access to HE) Diploma, regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), offers a second chance to secure progression to higher education for adults who left school without the qualifications needed. Since QAA started collecting data in 1999, over a quarter of a million students with an Access to HE Diploma have progressed into higher education. The majority of these students were aged 21 and over. The Diploma has a strong track record in supporting the progression and attainment of black and ethnic minority students in higher education. In 2013-14, of the 23,085 Access to HE students that entered higher education institutions in England and Wales, 31 per cent were from black and ethnic minority backgrounds (compared with 20 per cent of their peers with other qualifications). This paper will begin with a brief overview of the Access to HE Diploma and its history. It will then explore the role of the Access to HE Diploma in promoting black and ethnic minority participation in higher education, presenting data concerning applications, entrants and attainment. A real life perspective will be offered through discussion of recent case studies of Access to HE students and graduates from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. The final part of the paper will be from a practitioner standpoint, considering some of the ways in which Access to HE tutors support black and ethnic minority students in their Access to HE Diploma courses, applications to higher education and beyond.
**Session A**

Enhancing BME Student Skills and Employability

*Discussant: Duna Sabri*

_The role and effectiveness of career coaching in increasing self-efficacy, outcome expectancies and employability efforts of higher education students_

Joanna Molyne, University of Greenwich

The study examines the above factors in the context of the changing role of Higher Education (HE) resulting from the government pressure to increasing students’ employability efforts (HEA, 2012). This study proposes that the role of HE is to foster personal development, intellectual debate, self-actualisation and to offer opportunities to develop students’ full potential, regardless of their background and wealth. It argues that this is even more relevant for the post-1992 university students as, due to their socioeconomic background and their lower social capital, they do not have the same vocational opportunities that are available to the elite Russell Group students. This research proposes that there is a need, for the post-1992 Universities in particular, to address the issues of gender, ethnicity, perceived social support, socioeconomic status, cultural influences and gender role models in order to support students’ employability efforts, their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies.

Recognising these factors requires a reassessment of current practices associated with universities’ efforts of increasing employability of HE in order to create citizens who can think imaginatively, critically and independently and who are driven by intellectual curiosity and passion rather than being compliant audience driven by their future salaries (Faulkner, 2011; Stevenson, 2011).

---

**Session B**

What works: university interventions A

*Discussant: Deborah Cureton*

_The ‘wicked’ problem of BAME student attainment: a critique of attempts to implement collaborative approaches to learning._

Liz Austen and Caroline Heaton, Sheffield Hallam University

In recognition of the assertion by Mountford-Zimdars et al (2015) that student belonging and confidence are key factors in encouraging student engagement, we are undertaking an analysis which examines the extent to which co-design and peer-learning approaches enhance confidence, belonging and engagement in students from BAME groups. Through our participation in the REACT programme (Realising Engagement through Active Cultural Transformation), we aim to raise awareness of the need to think differently about explanations for our attainment gap. A synthesis of US literature by Stevenson and Whelan (2013) confirms that the analysis of BAME factors in student achievement is often over simplified. Richardson (2015) notes that attainment levels can only be partly explained by entry qualifications. This suggests that a range of facets need to be explored.

Attempts to define and operationalise any issues in attainment (for example, by analysing student engagement) become challenging and can be aligned to the notion of a ‘wicked problem’ (Conkin 2015). Such ‘problems’ are entrenched in social complexity, which increase in line with the diversity of the associated stakeholders. These problems have the ability to divide opinion, provide limited solutions and to lay blame for lack of results. The BAME attainment gap can be critiqued using this notion of a ‘wicked problem’ noting that, without recognition, this issue has potential to become ubiquitous and almost unsolvable. This paper uses the notion of a ‘wicked problem’ to: explore the BAME attainment gap using institutional data; discusses social complexities surrounding the attainment gap; outlines actions we have initiated to impact on student engagement; highlights some of the challenges faced with staff engagement in the programme; discusses ethical considerations in exploring the impact of initiatives on specific student groups; shares observations on our findings so far; and invites discussion on the potential efficacy of our approach.

---

_**SharedThinking as a social-belonging intervention**_

Nicholas Bowskill, University of Derby

Race, ethnicity, gender, religion are just a few examples of many different social identities. According to theory in social psychology, we may feel psychologically threatened if we feel we are being judged negatively, in certain social settings, based on one of our social identities. This is known as Stereotype Threat (Steele). Such a condition can give rise to chronic feelings of stress and anxiety. It may result in under-performance on academic tests (Walton) or it may influence decisions to leave a course early before completion. SharedThinking is a social-belonging intervention. The aim is to replace any belief that we may not fit in a particular setting with a sense of belonging. It was developed as an outgrowth from doctoral research at University of Glasgow.

This emerging practice:

1. Organises learning and teaching based on the group-level rather than the individual level.
2. Specifies a sense of belonging as a pedagogical goal
3. Emphasises the idea of learning and teaching based on the way others think as a key resource.
4. Establishes the normalisation of concerns common within the group
5. Builds and utilises group identity within and across different cohorts

We call this shift ‘pedagogy for social-belonging.’ Theory and practice will be described and data from early work will be provided.
Session B

What works: university interventions A

Discussant: Deborah Cureton

Initiating the conversation

Anjum Anwar, Gai Murphy and Pradeep Passi, University of Central Lancashire

Observing classes has provided key insight into student engagement and behaviours in class and the opportunities/barriers that current teaching styles promote. Inclusion is a key factor in promoting active engagement and observations found that BME student participation in classroom discussions was lacking at times. This poses a key question regarding cultural values of ‘not speaking up’ in the face of ‘authority’ is a barrier, which needs further investigation. Examples of ‘banking information’ (Pedagogy, Freire) in the early years during mosque education may have sensitized young Muslims to accept the authority of the ‘teacher’ much more than other BME students although this needs to be further evaluated. Inclusive teaching was most apparent in smaller groups, but engagement between the tutor and the BME students was low in larger groups, particularly in groups where there were small numbers of BME students in the classroom. Our interventions are focused on four main areas:

- Awareness Training for Tutors of BME students' background, learning styles, barriers for tutors
- Working with parents of BME students and exploring their expectations of what/how Universities cater for students of BME background
- Working with those students who need more one-to-one work (short term)
- Work with 6th form colleges to ascertain what is expected from University life and how to manage transition.

BME mentor’s experience of mentoring.

Louise Frith University of Kent

The Student Learning Advisory Service has coordinated the university's peer mentoring scheme for the past eight years. This year it is operating in 14 schools and there are a total of 337 student mentors. Peer mentoring is being used as a core intervention for many of the Student Success Projects including; Music and Fine Art, KBS Medway, Pharmacy, EDA, Anthropology, Architecture, Psychology and SMSAS. Peer mentors play a crucial role in supporting newer students' transition into and success at university. They are also important role models for new students. This presentation will look in detail at the profile of peer mentors and report on their representativeness of the student body as a whole. It will present data on the numbers of mentees and their profile. There will also be qualitative data on BME student mentors’ experience of mentoring. This will focus specifically on the role modeling that mentors do and allow them to give insights into issues that they face as BME students and how they support newer students. This presentation will give participants an insight into the role mentoring plays in the university in addressing the attainment gap and it may also provoke discussion about how the university can further support BME mentors so that they can be even more effective in their role.

Session C

Research and Race in Higher Education A

Discussant: Robbie Shilliam

Challenging deficit theories of black students in Higher Education

Mary Andall-Stanberry, Canterbury Christchurch University

Deficit theory can still haunt the academy, and nowhere is this more prolific than in rhetoric used to explain the position and overall experience, of Black Students in Higher Education. The adoption of a Critical Race Theory (CRT) approach is helpful in illuminating how and why this happens, especially if combined with auto/biographical narrative enquiry. And how, in thought and practice, the academy can be made more inclusive. The study illuminates something more complex and human than theory alone in that the lives of three women (Zara, Gail and the researcher), are redolent with the imprints of family, gender, generational change, migration and cultural richness attesting “community cultural wealth” and a challenge to “cultural capital” narrowly defined. To understand us and our narratives, requires an auto/biographical imagination where there is an inquisitiveness to find out the individual's historical and social as well as intimate experiences in society and to give meaning to these. Rather than a deficit model, the argument is that black students demonstrate forms of resilience, and that the academy needs to learn, in theory and practice, from what we have to offer.
Challenging exclusion and creating a sense of belonging for black and ethnic minority postgraduate students

Akhil Ahmet and Caroline Howarth, London School of Economics

Amidst increasing public discussion of racialised inequalities in the university sector, little is changing. In this paper we argue that we need to move away from the ‘deficit-model’ which sees ethnic minority students as lacking in ability or aspiration, and our universities as ‘already’ inclusive. Instead, we argue that universities need to see the barriers to full and equal participation in university life as something to be dismantled rather than overcome; that is, we need to challenge the processes and practices that uphold traditions of privilege, inclusion and discrimination in university contexts. We illustrate this argument with early findings from a case study project based at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Drawing on interviews with academic staff and photovoice material collected with black PhD students, we explore why the LSE has failed to attract and retain black and ethnic minority staff and PhD students. We examine written and visual narratives of their experiences of institutional dynamics and ‘micro-aggressions’ within the current School environment. We conclude with some initial considerations about what concrete changes are needed to challenge exclusion and create a sense of belonging for black and ethnic minority postgraduate students.

I am not White, will I make it? Studying the University Gap at Birmingham City University.

Tiyannah Alexander, Alicia Donaldson, Daniel Jones, James Maidment, Monique Price, Latifa Shtta – Undergraduates at Birmingham City University

Birmingham City University suffers from the same trend as other universities in that a significant disparity exists between the achievement of a first or 2(i) between white and students of colour. In 2014/15 75% of white students achieved a good degree, compared to only 60% of students of colour. The attainment gap existed across degree programme and also when controlling for UCAS tariff points on entry. It appears as though there is something about the university, rather than cultural deprivation of the students, that is leading to this significant inequality. We received funding from the university to set up 10 focus groups with students across the faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences to ask students of colour their experiences of the university that could impact on such figures. Based on the previous literature we anticipate that the environment; curriculum; lack of diversity in the teaching staff and; experiences of racism all contribute to these figures. This paper will present preliminary findings from the focus groups, giving voice to the students who took part in the study. The aim is to take the student responses to the staff teams in order to find ways to address the issues and this initial study is an important first step.

The endurance of academic capital in higher education: how cultural and institutional factors maintain the white BME attainment gap.

Alexander Hensby and Lavinia Mitton, University of Kent

Since the Government introduced changes to the cost and terms of tuition fees, English universities have faced renewed challenges to understand the relationship between students’ learner characteristics and differentials in academic attainment. Of particular concern is the attainment gap between white and BME students, with statistics from HESA (2013) showing that the former are consistently more likely to convert their entry qualifications into a 2:1 or above. This trend, which is reproduced throughout the sector, indicates that this gap is not only maintained but exacerbated at HE level.

Drawing on original survey and interview data, this paper examines differences in the student experience for white and BME undergraduates at an English university. Although there is no single explanation for the attainment gap, results suggest that BME students have higher expectations of their academic success than their white counterparts, a difference that is partly attributable to differences in family background. In cases where these expectations are not initially met, our research finds that students typically display greater confidence in using the university’s support systems to their advantage. Following the work of Watson (2013), the paper concludes by highlighting the endurance of academic capital in higher education, and how universities need to pay closer attention to ensuring that universities avoid privileging the educational development of predominantly white, middle-class students.

Lunch will be available after the morning presentations
How can Race Equality Charter impact on degree awarding rates?
Claire Herbert, ECU Race Equality Charter

ECU launched its Race Equality Charter (REC) in January 2016, following a trial with over 30 higher education institutions in 2014/15. The aim of the charter is to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education and therefore it has a direct correlation with minority ethnic degree awarding rates. This presentation will outline the main requirements for REC with particular focus on the teaching and learning aspects of the framework. We will outline the institutional drivers for engaging with REC, and degree attainment work more generally, and provide feedback from those institutions which took part in the trial, highlighting what they found useful about the process.

Delegates will leave the session with a clear idea of what REC involves, and how it can be used to tackle racial inequalities within institutions. Delegates will be provided with a variety of leavers for promoting REC involvement within their institutions, including how it links explicitly with the teaching excellence framework, university access agreements, and internationalisation strategies.

The negotiation of ethics and communication in institutional research about inequality in students’ outcomes.
Duna Sabri, Kings College London

There is widespread concern across the UK HE sector about unequal attainment between white and black and minority ethnic students. In addition to a range of national studies and reviews of the literature over more than a decade, many universities have initiated their own research which has sought to confirm this inequality within their own institutions and explore its causes. Among the findings of a recently completed HEFCE-commissioned review, of the causes of inequality in students’ outcomes in HE (Mountford-Zimdars, Sabri et al: 2015), was that many institutions concentrate their resources on research and inquiry and can be slow to communicate their findings and formulate interventions that may in due course reduce the inequality.

This paper will first explore why institutions undertake (or commission) research about inequality and will identity some of the most commonly chosen methodological features. It will offer an analysis of the assumptions that different research strategies make – explicitly or inadvertently - about causality. These assumptions are constantly formed, remade, and sometimes adjusted in the formation of the research and the developing understandings of those involved in it: from its commissioning through to fieldwork, analysis and interim reporting and evaluation. The nature of these assumptions, it will be argued, can both hamper and sustain the wider communication of findings among staff and students. The paper will conclude with some proposed principles for communicating within institutions about internally generated social inequalities. Finally, it will question where the parameters of responsibility should lie for the quality of the research, and for ensuring that, ultimately, the research helps to reduce unequal attainment between white and black minority ethnic students.

Why education won’t solve the BME gap until it catches up with its sister disciplines. And how it could do both.
Theo Gilbert, Hertfordshire University

Introduction: Compassion is the noticing of disadvantage/distress to others and commitment to reduce or remove it. How compassion enhances critical thinking in task focused groups/communities and what this means for building more integrated, collaborative local and global societies is being researched by neuroscience, anthropology, psychology/group psychotherapy. For a number of reasons - which help construct and sustain the BME attainment gap - education’s contribution to this research is limited and disappointing. The study I will present, responded to the NUS’s call (Race for Equality, 2009) (for better integration of FE and HE students inside classrooms) by applying the above research in the HE seminar room. Action research was used to support students in their compassionate management of their weekly, small group seminar discussions. A UK university provided a range of modules to participate. Student participants were local white, local black, local ethnic minority and international. Overall, 250 students and 10 seminar tutors in two departments took part.

Methods: Seven data collection tools were used including: ethnographic field notes of human interactional processes in seminars; interviews, focus groups (students, tutors, external examiners); film of ‘end-of-module’ assessments of small group seminar discussions; marks and written feedback given to each individual student for a) critical thinking performance and b) compassionate moves to keep the group socially and intellectually cohesive in these assessments. Template analysis was the main means of data analysis.

Findings: On a module of 41 ethnically diverse students, statistical tests (on all individual student scores) showed no BME attainment gap, specifically, for critical thinking performance as an indicator of academic achievement. The study’s qualitative findings across all ethnic groups, in this and other modules suggested how and why this had happened.
**Session A**

The attainment gap: re-thinking university policy

*Discussant: Miri Song*

---

**The Leeds Beckett Deep Dive Project: actions to address home BAME undergraduate students’ degree attainment.**

Susan Smith, Leeds Beckett University

This presentation will outline the process, initial findings and actions from the current Deep Dive project which is exploring home BAME undergraduate students’ attainment and how the University can support them effectively to get more 2:1 and 1st class degrees. Despite numbers of BAME students being relatively small at LBU (12%), there is a clear attainment gap. BAME students across the sector are more likely than their white peers to get a Third or 2:2. (Broeche and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008). At LBU, 49.8% BAME students get good degrees compared to 64.5% of white students. Nationally 73% of white students get 1st and 2:1s but 58.5% of BAME students nationally get 1sts and 2:1s. Our University is below average for attainment for white and BAME students both in our own University and compared to the sector and the gap in white and BAME attainment remains significant. A broadly interpretive approach was adopted for this project. Detailed analysis of quantitative data relating to 5 large UG courses, analysis of course documentation and of qualitative data from staff and student focus groups was undertaken. Six actions (listed below) were identified from the emergent findings and will be discussed. These are part of a more inclusive approach to practice catalysed by our Race Equality Charter Mark Action Plan and a parallel project about supporting disabled students.

1. the identification of two Inclusivity Champions per School and Service
2. establishing a pan-University group to address inclusive assessment practice;
3. establishing a work group exploring BME student uptake of placement opportunities;
4. “unconscious bias” training for all staff
5. establishing a project to review “white curricula” which would mirror the existing NUS campaign “Why is my curriculum white?”
6. working with the SU to encourage more BME students to stand as student course representatives.

---

**Session B**

What works: university interventions B

*Discussant: Uvanney Maylor*

---

**Why creating an inclusive environment, curriculum and approach to learning and teaching will improve the performance of BAME students and close the attainment gap.**

Winston Morgan, University of East London

The persistence of the attainment gap (16-18%) between BAME students and their white counterparts can be attributed to the failure of the sector to understand the factors which cause and sustain the gap. We know the causes are multifactorial, but regardless of the cause, both historically and currently the primary interventions have all assumed a BAME student deficit model. This misconception has underpinned the continued focus on “fixing” the BAME students, with little success. In 2016 the student body is increasingly diverse with 20% coming from BAME backgrounds. By contrast the profile of academic staff in terms of ethnicity and educational background is relatively narrow. Without appropriate training the environment and L&T experiences delivered by such staff cannot effectively respond to the needs and requirements of a diverse student body. In this environment many students from widening participation and BAME backgrounds feel excluded and this is reflected in; poor retention, progression, completion, misconduct, attainment and employability. My research has identified over 40 factors which either cause or sustain the attainment gap, the vast majority are the result of university policies, practices, staff attitudes and behaviour. Based on these factors, I developed a Toolkit (Include BAME) to provide clear guidance on how to improve the performance of BAME students and thereby reduce the attainment gap. A key action demanded by the toolkit is the requirement that university staff must examine and reflect on their professional practice in relation to:

- Creating an inclusive environment on campus.
- Making the curriculum more inclusive.
- Adopting an inclusive approach to L&T.

All these actions challenge the conventional thinking and behaviours of university staff. The result will be a student body that feels they belong on campus, they have a purpose for being at university and can achieve at the highest level.
# Session B

## What works: university interventions B

**Discussant: Uvanney Maylor**

### Profiling progress and navigating university resources: the development and optimization of a succinct academic progression management system and resource finder.

*David Atkins, University of Kent*

Two problems, reasonably related to the degree attainment gap between different groups, are facing some universities. Consequently, two pilot initiatives are currently being developed and evaluated; the Progress Profiles and the Virtual Student Adviser. Firstly, ineffective monitoring of students’ academic progress is likely to undermine a University’s ability to target and prompt the individuals most in need, regardless of the student’s background. The Progress Profiles aim to enable staff and students to quickly assess an individual’s academic progress. Current, the progress profiles succinctly outline a student’s academic progress using a traffic light system, and by graphing both students’ attendance and coursework progress; this enables rapid, and yet an efficient understanding of students’ academic progress. Secondly, any disorganized processes for students to navigate to the most suitable resources to meet their idiosyncratic needs is likely to undermine that individual’s ability to determine the optimum course to enhance their academic experience. Universities typically have abundant resources to meet students’ academic and wellbeing needs. Consequently, the overwhelming number of resources available results in difficulties in navigating to the most appropriate resource. The Virtual Student Adviser (VSA) aims to enable students (and staff) to find the most appropriate resource for a student’s individual needs within approximately 10 seconds. Functionally, the VSA poses a series of questions to the user and uses a decision tree format in which to drill into the user’s academic or wellbeing issues that have recently arisen. Subsequently, users are presented with the most relevant University resource to overcome the identified issue. Findings from both initiatives will be discussed. However, preliminary findings of the Progress Profiles demonstrate that there is widespread interest in the notion of a profiling system amongst the student community. In addition, student feedback highlights specific amendments that need addressing in future iterations, and new features to explore.

### Widening participation whilst closing attainment gaps between student groups: a realistic objective for higher education?

*Richard McManus and Moira Mitchell, Canterbury Christchurch University*

This study offers a number of contextual perspectives on nationally reported attainment differentials and examines them within the learning and teaching environment. Instead of using HESA degree classification data, it measures the difference in the average mark of various demographic groups across specific assessments in a range of modules within a programme of study. The demographic groups are analysed simultaneously, so that while each is considered the others are controlled for. As well as information about student demographics, the study analyses information about specific assessments (type of assessment, timing and weighting) and information about the student cohorts. The study incorporates 1,291 students and 179 assessments (the dataset includes over 23,000 individual assessment grades) and identifies (i) the prevalence and extent of attainment gaps between demographic groups (gender, ethnicity, nationality and disability) and (ii) the potential contributory factors or underlying causes for the attainment gaps. In this second stage, the study measured the specific impact of module, assessment, timing and cohort effects on the gaps in attainment between the demographic groups. This allowed the researchers to identify academic situations in which attainment differentials increase or decrease. Findings from this analysis contribute to the evidence base about how universities can adapt their teaching and assessment strategies to minimise disparities in attainment and to support the most vulnerable students. Moreover, this research proposes a methodology which could be replicated to compare the results with different groups in various institutions.

### The 'Just-ness' of our teaching practice: issues of normative practice, social justice and inclusion

*Annie Huhes and Nona McDuff, Kingston University*

The HE sector is recognising the need to move beyond a focus on equality of access to address equality of educational outcomes across the diversity of our student body. This body of work has identified persistent differentials in educational attainment which, whilst complex in their composition (HEFCE,2015) must be addressed in part through a critical reflection of academic cultures and practices (Archer, 2007). This workshop will examine the sector drivers relating to equality, diversity and inclusion in Higher Education. It then explores the potential of inclusive approaches as mechanisms to improve the educational outcomes for all student groups. Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which we design and deliver our curricula to engage all our students in learning which is appropriate, accessible and meaningful to all (Hocking, 2010). We discuss the key principles of an inclusive approach and outline a framework which, we suggest, can guide and support academic staff in embedding the key principles of inclusivity into their learning and teaching.

By the end of the workshop you will be able to: Recognise the connection between learning and teaching praxis and the debates around inclusivity and equality of opportunity in education; Reflect on how pedagogic practices can contribute to variable educational experiences and attainment amongst different student groups; Recognise the ways in which implicit assumptions and normative practices can influence your teaching and learning practices; Engage with the principles of an inclusive curriculum and action in your own teaching in STEM through the Framework for Excellence in an Inclusive Curriculum.
Session C

Research and race and culture in higher education B

**Exploration of current IAG practices towards improved student outcomes for students from BAME**

*Graeme Atherton and Alex Hall, Access HE*

On entry to higher education (HE), white students are more likely to achieve a first or upper second class degree than students from BAME groups who achieved the same entry grades. This gap persists even among students with outstanding A-levels. ‘Prepare to Succeed’ as a project focuses on the quality of pre-entry information, advice and guidance received by students from BAME groups in order to better understand whether current practices in the delivery of IAG are having an affect on BAME students’ abilities to make decisions about HE and on their future success. The need to better understand the relationship between pre-entry IAG and student access and success for students from BAME groups is heightened in London where there are over 50 ethnic communities with over 10,000 members. Moreover, over half of the BAME population of the UK live in London and therefore the participating HEIs have student bodies consisting of high numbers of learners from diverse BAME backgrounds. This paper will explore the findings of extensive focus group work with approximately 400 students from BAME backgrounds currently studying at 8 diverse higher education institutions (HEIs) in London. This paper will present findings around the extent to which students received quality IAG prior to entering HE and the role of formal and informal information sources. Using this information, this paper will establish whether these students were able to make positive, knowledge-based decisions. We will discuss whether the expectations of higher education generated through pre-entry IAG for these students were realised or whether the reality of HE differed from the image crafted through earlier guidance. On this basis, this paper will establish whether the students felt prepared for HE study or whether there are additional pieces of information which should have been communicated. Overall, this paper will show what, when and how students received IAG, whether the IAG was sufficient and how IAG could be improved in the future for students from BAME groups.

**Exploring the experiences of BME students on undergraduate Social work and adult nursing programmes**

*Dave Marland, Gloria Likupe, Sarah Donkin, Grace Nambozi, University of Hull*

This presentation will discuss a small qualitative study which is exploring the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) undergraduate students on nursing and social work professional programmes in a northern University. The experience of students in the learning environment is one of the determinants for achievement in higher education and it plays a key role in students’ academic performance. There is a growing body of knowledge about the attainment gap between BME and white counterparts in higher education in general. However, there is comparatively little known about the experiences and the attainment of BME students on programmes that include a professional placement (work-based) element. This particular study focuses on two such programmes. Aspects of the student journey being examined include relationships with student peers; relationships with professional mentors and academic supervisors and relationship with patients and service users. In addition, the study is exploring dimensions of the learning environment and curriculum content. The study is employing established qualitative methods to engage participants. This includes interviews and focus groups with current students from both programmes. In addition, we are undertaking interviews with past students who have qualified and moved into practice within the last 3 years. Further, we are undertaking a structured curriculum analysis, examining subject modules using a simple content framework tool, developed for the study. The presentation will highlight our approach and rationale and discuss some of the interesting challenges we have experienced in undertaking this research. In addition, we will present emerging findings and highlight some of the potential implications for social work and nursing programmes.

**Race inequality in HE: complexities of researching educational debt**

*Manny Madriaga, Sheffield Hallam University*

With the tenets of critical race theory in mind (Matsuda et al. 1993; Solórzano 1998), this paper shares a story of some of the ethical and epistemological issues in conducting research on persistent racial inequality, particularly degree outcomes, in United Kingdom (UK) higher education. It is a researcher’s story of having to negotiate a university’s commitment of ‘keeping up appearances’ with performative measures alongside a promise to students towards achieving social justice and recognition of their differences on campus and in our classrooms. This paper explores this uncomfortable negotiation as these interests converge in addressing racial inequality in the UK academy. Fanon’s (1967) black skins and white masks, as well as Du Bois (1903) ‘double-consciousness, are foregrounded here in describing this uncomfortable negotiation, this ‘grey zone’ (Back 2002), while researching institutional racism in higher education.

This story is based on ethnographic research, entailing interviews with staff and students, conducted at one UK university to acquire teaching staff and student perceptions on possible solutions to address what Ladson-Billings (2006) terms ‘educational debt’. Evidence from this research suggests a university occupational culture in which misrecognition of students’ racial and ethnic differences is normal (Tate IV 1997). Normalcy, as understood here, is whiteness being taken-for-granted and left unmarked. The paper concludes in advocating for socially-just pedagogies that not only marks whiteness and resists this normalcy, but seeks and works towards hopes, possibilities and becomings in our very own universities.
**Session C**

**Research and race and culture in higher education B**  
**Discussant: Kehinde Andrews**

---

**Roma Students’ Experiences in European Higher Education: Exploring gender, identity and marginalisation**  
Tamsin Hinton-Smith, University of Sussex

This paper draws on insights from *Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility: Inclusions, Equalities and Innovations (HEIM)*, an ongoing 3-year Horizon 2020, Marie Skłodowska-Curie funded project exploring Roma students’ experiences of participating in European higher education. Findings from both the data collected so far and experiences of working together on the project as part of an international team made up of Roma and non-Roma, have identified important transferable insights around issues of identity, intersectionality and belonging in higher education, and in particular tensions between assumptions of individual and collective responsibility for ethnic inequalities in participation and outcomes. While widening participation discourse has rightly critiqued narratives of personal responsibility for success and failure that blame minorities in higher education for their own marginalisation, revisiting of the juncture between structure and agency by participants in this research asserts an important space for the potential of individual determination in response to, rather than undermining, recognition of pervasive inequality. Participants further asserted their right to equal participation in higher education for their own selves, rather than as representatives of increasing participation for their ethnic group, with the associated burdens of this in terms of using their degree to work towards the good of their wider ethnic ‘community.’

Insights from Roma women students and recent graduates particularly identified a strongly gendered dimension to the symbolic border crossings between background of origin and the process of *becoming* an HE student within a narrative that tacitly positions those who deviate from narrow notions of the ‘typical’ (or Ideal) HE student, as other, inferior and deficit. This paper hence draws in particular on insights from five Roma women interviewees whose contributions particularly engage with these issues. Through honing in on the lens of Europe’s largest and most marginalised minority, this study offers wider messages into the complex mechanisms of persistent experiences of marginalisation and unbelonging in HE, despite attention to addressing ethnic inequalities in terms of increasing numbers.

---

Please could all delegates and presenters, choose sessions A, B or C for the morning/afternoon, by filling out the accompanying form and send back to Lissa and Elizabeth; [conferenceinfo@kent.ac.uk](mailto:conferenceinfo@kent.ac.uk).

Alternatively visit our website and go to the registration or Programme page.