

STUDENT SUCCESS (EDI) PROJECT – RESEARCH



Crucial to the Student Success (EDI) Project is its commitment to **original research**. In seeking to improve success rates for students, whatever their learner characteristics and/or background, the project has been developing an **evidenced knowledge base about the social and structural causes of attainment gaps**. It is crucial for us to improve our understanding of these gaps so that we can put in place effective measures that give all of our students every opportunity to fulfil their academic potential.



Phase I

Drawing on Student Barometer survey datasets, in-depth interviews with students and staff, and collaboration with the project's nine pilot schools, project research focused on a number of themes that helped maintain the attainment gap. Phase I research reports are now available on our website.

Race and academic expectations

- A higher proportion of BME students claim to be **aiming for a 1st** – and are confident of achieving it – than white students.
- BME students claim to feel less **prepared and organised** for university than their white peers.
- BME students' pressures to succeed may often not be fully articulated to **academic staff** at Kent.

Transitions for BTEC entrants at Kent

- There is an attainment gap between BTEC/Access and A-Level in all academic schools, and BTEC-only students have a lower than average **retention rates**.
- Students with BTEC qualifications are at a disadvantage where **curriculum and assessment** is more aligned to A-Level qualifications.

Study and social life for commuting students

- A higher proportion of BME students **commute to Kent campuses** than white students.
- Commuting students **living alone** (especially mature) have poorer attendance records compared with commuters living with family.
- Commuting limits the time students **spend on campus**, and also opportunities to build peer support networks.

Re-thinking the academic adviser system

- Student use of, and **satisfaction** with, the AA system is below the level it should be, with a third finding meetings not useful.
- The system is supposed to provide **continuity and overview** to a modular system, but lacks clear purpose and definition to students and staff.
- The system is struggling to support students **at risk of lower performance**.

Making use of assessment feedback

- Students report having only a **limited window to engage with their assessment feedback** because of the need to work on their next assessment. BME students are less likely to pick up work, and are less satisfied with their feedback.
- Students' **prioritisation of grades above feedback** risks overlooking evaluation processes that will aid their learning development.

Access to student support services

- Students have an awareness of the range of student support services available to them, but information is usually received in one go during **Welcome Week**.
- Students are reluctant to make use of support services '**until the last minute**'. Being transferred from one service to the other can also create '**referral fatigue**'.

Phase II

Our new research strategy builds on Phase I findings to consider specifically how our teaching and campus culture can be made more inclusive.

The colour of our curriculum

- The research literature points to the '**white curriculum**' as barrier to inclusivity, and failing to legitimise contributions to knowledge from people of colour.
- From Kent's Educational Strategy: 'We will ensure our staff body remains diverse so that our curriculum reflects and addresses a range of perspectives'. How can this be **operationalised**?

Race, identity, and belonging

- Survey findings indicated that BME students were **less engaged in campus life**, yet the popularity of Kent's Afro-Caribbean and Islamic societies suggests that at least *some* students have found a sense of identity and belonging on campus.
- Does Kent's range of **student societies** provide sufficient coverage for BME students on campus, or do certain populations feel **socially excluded**?

Attendance and alternative learning practices

- BME students' recorded attendance is consistently **lower** than for white students.
- Does academic diligence policy improve engagement and attendance? Are non-attending students engaging academically using **alternative means** that are productive for their learning? Is there a mismatch between staff and students' understanding of the **purpose and value of lectures**?

