What is the project objective?

To redevelop personal tutoring to realise its potential as a means to help close the attainment gap for students from BME groups or lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

- We know the gap remains even after controlling for attainment and other relevant factors (Broecke & Nicholls, 2006).
- We know access is important – but increasing access to create more diverse student bodies doesn’t seem to automatically reduce the gap.
- This suggests the issue goes deeper and relates to the quality of pedagogical relationships students have with staff once they enter university.

We know also that...

- Non-traditional students “struggle to learn the rules of the HE game” (Stuart et al, 2011)
- What Works? report notes that students want to get to know their Faculty, and prefer pastoral support delivered by academics (Thomson, 2012)
- Positive relationships (with staff, with peers) is a factor known to influence student outcomes (Cousin & Cuerton, 2012)
- “Staff are agents of change” for students - can instigate a dialogue about HE ‘rules’ (HEFCE, 2015)

This is why we believe effective, high quality Personal Tutoring can make a real difference to attainment gaps.

What are we bringing to the project to scale up and share?

- Several institution-wide strategic initiatives to improve personal tutoring, including PATS (Sheffield) a package featuring an online platform and a series of policy and CPD initiatives, and King’s Principles of Personal Tutoring and Online Personal Tutoring Portal.
- Experience of a range of training and development activities and accreditation frameworks, including several HEA assessors, and Fellows in the project team.
- Extensive research in this area, including the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education’s Trust Me! Project – looking at how to build pedagogies of Trust; The BME Student Attainment Gap research; and Sheffield Student 2013, a longitudinal tracking project of students from lower SEC backgrounds.
- Experience of monitoring the attainment gap as a Key Performance Indicator, and the formation and testing of metrics to monitor this.

Key deliverables:

- The implementation of a PATS-like approach to personal tutoring at all three institutions. In pilot faculties across 2017/18 academic year: Engineering (Sheffield), Dentistry (King’s), Creative and Cultural Industries (Portsmouth)
- An evidence-based best practice toolkit and CPD package to tackle closing the attainment gap, which can be rolled out nationally to support personal tutoring, aligned to national HE CPD frameworks.
- Added-value research, evaluation into attainment gaps and personal tutoring. With a big data set being generated, and a team of leading and talented HE researchers supporting the project, the opportunities for sharing additional research and insight with the sector are numerous – join our mailing list and watch this space!

A diverse coalition of universities dedicated to closing their attainment gaps and sharing their practice.

- University of Sheffield
  - 10%
- King’s College London
  - 7%
- University of Portsmouth
  - 18%

Raising Awareness, Raising Aspiration

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- Contact our project manager: S.Dent@Sheffield.ac.uk