

Understanding and overcoming the challenges of targeting students from under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds

Report to the Office for Students

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Abbreviations

BME: Black and Minority Ethnic

BAME: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

CfP: Compassion focussed pedagogy

CPAD: Continuing professional academic development

CPD: Continuing professional development

CRT: Critical Race Theory

DfE: Department for Education

DLHE: Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education

EAL: English as an additional language

ECU: Equality Challenge Unit

EMTAS: Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service

FE: Further Education

HE: Higher Education

HEA: Higher Education Academy

HEAT: Higher Education Access Tracker

HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England

IAG: Information and guidance

KPI: Key performance indicator

LPN: Low participation neighbourhood

NCOP: National Collaborative Outreach Programme

OFFA: Office for Fair Access

OfS: Office for Students

PA: Positive action

PAR: Participatory action research

PISO: Programme to improve student outcomes
SU: Students' Union

TEF: Teaching excellence and student outcomes framework

VLE: Virtual learning environment

WP: widening participation

Executive Summary

Context

Within UK higher education (HE) the gaps in racial inequality in relation to success in, and progression from, HE remain persistent and extensive. For many of those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME¹) backgrounds (see below), opportunities to attain equitable outcomes remain restricted.² In part barriers to equitable outcomes are structural. For example, home UK, undergraduate, BAME students are more likely to come from deprived areas, areas of low HE participation, and low socio-economic backgrounds and, therefore, also more likely to be first in family to access higher education³. Experiences of the school system, educational outcomes, and experiences of racism are also contributory factors⁴ whilst explanatory factors located within higher education sector include those related to curricula and learning; relationships between staff and students and among students; social, cultural and economic capital; and psychosocial and identity factors⁵.

Higher education access, retention, success and progression rates vary, however, between different ethnic groups. Despite this, the vast majority of providers continue to treat BAME students as a homogenous group. This means that interventions or resources can be misdirected whilst those who need targeted interventions can remain unsupported.

Understanding the nature and extent of disaggregated racial or ethnic inequalities is therefore a sector-wide imperative if these are to be effectively challenged and redressed. Further, highlighting those targeted interventions which have clear evidence of success can help to ensure effective practice is shared and embedded across the sector.

Of note is that, for the purposes of this research we define 'ethnicity targeting' as inclusive interventions designed to benefit all students but in particular one or more minority ethnic groups and/or exclusive interventions explicitly directed at one or more minority ethnic groups. We also recognise the contradictory nature of using the term BAME in this research when talking about the need for disaggregation (see Appendix E Terminology). We would welcome further discussions as to how to frame research reports such as these as well as the use of language and terminology used in approaches to institutional work to address inequalities in relation to access, retention, attainment and progression.

1 We recognise that this is a problematic and reductionist term to describe a population that is highly diverse (see Appendix E).

2 <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/addressing-barriers-to-student-success-programme/>

3 See

https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.661523!/file/BME_Attainment_Gap_Literature_Review_EXTERNAL_-_Miriam_Miller.pdf

4 See https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/bme_synthesis_final.pdf

5 See

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405123119/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2015/diffout/>

The research

The research⁶ was designed to collate information on targeted interventions, to understand where targeting is or is not taking place and why, and to share case studies of effective practice. The objective of the research is to improve the Office for Students' (OfS) and the sector's understanding of the challenges associated with this work, and provide practical solutions as to how these challenges might be overcome across the student lifecycle. The focus of the research was, specifically on UK home, undergraduate students. However, the recommendations and good practice guidance are, in the main, applicable to international students or to those studying at post-graduate levels.

Data collection comprised a sector-wide survey to HE providers; a survey to key stakeholders; analysis of the 2018-2019 access agreements; sector-wide case study data collection and analysis; and a Summit event enabling the contribution of further stakeholder perspectives.

Findings

Findings from our analysis of HE providers indicate that:

- Targeting is largely focussed on outreach and access interventions. Targeted interventions in relation to retention and success are few and those related to progression almost non-existent.
- Of those providers who targeted, the vast majority targeted more than one ethnic group and targeted cross-cutting disadvantages alongside ethnicity.
- Reasons for not targeting included: not seeing it as a priority; uncertainty as to how to address inequalities; a lack of evidence of what works; and difficulties in accessing or sharing data.

Findings from stakeholders raised further concerns in relation to:

- A lack of discussion of racism and discrimination as well as insufficient or ineffective mechanisms to capture disclosures of implicit racial bias and/or discrimination.
- Insufficient BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) leaders and/or critical minds in leadership positions.
- A lack of understanding of what targeting is and, in particular, the belief that targeting and/or positive action is illegal.
- A lack of transparency as to how HE providers are spending money, or not, on targeted interventions and activities.
- The perpetuation of deficit models with interventions built on racist stereotypes
- The lack of inclusion of BAME students in the design, development and implementation of interventions
- A lack of diversity in the curriculum.

⁶ The research, initially commissioned by the Office for Fair Access, took place prior to the opening of the Office for Students and the new regulatory vision for access and participation. Publication was delayed to precede the publication of the Access & Participation Plan Guidance for 2020-21

Finally the Summit event also raised concerns in relation to racial divides in regard to the provision of A levels versus alternative qualifications in schools⁷; the fallacy of the 'aspiration gap'⁸ and on-going myths in relation to living in a 'post-racial' society⁹.

Recommendations and guidance

Based on the lack of targeted interventions, key recommendations are that:

1. Providers should improve their institutional data systems so that they can consistently capture good quality **data**; this will ensure that activities can be effectively targeted and interventions effectively evaluated. This may require the aggregation of data across multiple years to ensure that more nuanced patterns of disadvantage can be identified and addressed. Whilst course level data can be helpful in mobilising course leaders to effect change, presenting statistical data as proportions or percentages can be unhelpful where numbers are low. Rather, the focus should be on numbers of individual students. This also helps to personify students with inequitable outcomes and can serve as a useful counter to increasingly abstract discussions.
2. Providers should make their BAME access, retention, success and progression **data public** to all students and staff. This includes making it readily available internally (including at departmental/course level data) and externally (for example through a dedicated institutional website with both data and plans to tackle inequalities).¹⁰
3. Providers should ensure that data is **contextualised for students and accompanied by a clear action plan** which indicates what action the provider is taking to ensure that the gap is reduced and then eradicated.
4. Providers should take a holistic approach to addressing inequalities for specific minority ethnic groups ensuring a **balance of interventions across the full student lifecycle**.
5. Providers should demonstrate in their access and participation plans how they will balance the focus of '**inclusive**' and '**targeted/exclusive**' interventions across the student lifecycle.
6. HE providers should summarise, on an annual basis, their **annual spend on targeted interventions** – across each aspect of the student lifecycle (access, retention, attainment, progression). This should include ways in which additional fee income is being used as well how interventions are being funded from as other sources, such as from the Addressing Barriers to Student Success (ABSS) programme funded by the Office for Students.¹¹

7 See <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/nov/29/students-with-btecs-do-worse-at-university-heres-how-we-close-the-gap>

8 See <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-lack-of-aspiration-is-not-the-problem/>

9 See <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/white-privilege-in-english-schools/>

10 This will in part be addressed through the OfS requirement that such data is made available in Access and Participation Plans, as well as broader requirement for transparency of data. However HE providers should ensure that students, parents and other stakeholders also have easy and ready access to such information.

11 See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/addressing-barriers-to-student-success-programme/>

Building on these recommendations we offer guidance for specific stakeholders which include case studies of effective targeted interventions drawn from across the sector. These are aimed at:

1. Policy makers
2. Access and participation practitioners
3. Teaching academics
4. Those supporting progression to employment or further study

In three appendices to this report, we make further recommendations for framing approaches to targeted interventions including: Using Positive Action (PA) approaches; developing Participatory Action Research (PAR) interventions; and using a Community Cultural Wealth approach to designing interventions. Underpinning these approaches is an ethical imperative to effectively and fully engage students in the conceptualisation, design and implementation of interventions which may affect them directly or indirectly.

In addition we offer a set of further appendices which cover the following:

- Language and terminology
- Additional resources and links to other interventions
- Additional case studies arising from this research

Rationale for the report

The wider context

Higher education both reflects and seeks to respond to the needs and challenges of wider society and among those needs is widening access to HE. While there has undoubtedly been progress in this area, racial inequality in relation to success in, and progression from HE remains persistent and extensive - although it varies between different ethnic groups. In addition, although ethnic inequalities in HE have been known about for some time, even among HE policymakers the focus has sometimes been on too narrow or even the wrong metrics, for example on access rather than on retention and progression.

Furthermore, HE is regarded as having the potential to contribute to a widening range of policy goals, from increasing knowledge to promoting liberal and civic values to encouraging social mobility, to increasing the UK's economic competitiveness and productivity. While this policy 'stretch' is a challenge for university administrators, regulators and ministers alike, it helps to underscore the wide social consequences of racial inequalities in higher education – for example how inequalities in degree outcomes are driving racial inequalities in the labour market, reducing people's opportunities and choices, while also damaging Britain's economy: in 2016, for example, the unemployment rate among people aged 16 to 24 was 23% for those from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to 12% for young white people¹², whilst Black, Asian and ethnic minority graduates are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than their white peers

12 <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest>

Racial inequalities are, of course, not limited to HE, and there is increasing recognition both of the extent of racial disparities and of the need to respond to them. When Theresa May became Prime Minister in 2016, she criticised what she called the ‘burning injustices’ that block some people’s opportunities and freedoms, and followed this up with an extensive ‘Race Disparity Audit’, outlining the scale of this particular injustice across public services.

This approach – first understanding the nature and extent of racial or ethnic inequalities – underpins this research project. We’ve been able to gather in one report a range of data, in large part because of support from the former Office for Fair Access (OFFA).¹³

Understanding and responding to racial inequalities however requires more than gathering data.¹⁴ On publishing the Race Disparity Audit¹⁵, the Prime Minister drew on a conclusion from the Lammy Review to suggest government departments would need to ‘explain or change’.¹⁶ Any racial inequalities require explanation, and ultimately will require HE providers and individuals to change their practices to ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes in HE. This approach is one that informs our recommendations, and should be the approach adopted across HE: by the OfS, HE providers and academic departments.

Our approach here also seeks to foreground the experience of those students, academics and administrators affected by racial inequalities and indeed racism in HE. The engagement of stakeholders can help public institutions, such as HE providers, realign their research and practice with the needs of national and institutional policymakers and implementers, as well as the local community so improving the relevance, transparency and adoption of outcomes and recommendations. Moreover, for the same reason, involving those affected by racial inequalities is a basic methodological and ethical research imperative.

Furthermore, ‘explaining’ racial disparities requires asking those affected what they believe are the main barriers to their equal participation and progression from HE. Our recommendations are informed by the findings of our surveys, focus groups and discussions about what best explains racial inequalities in HE, and ultimately seek to change these outcomes for the better.

Specific context

Against this backdrop of broader social racial inequality, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA¹⁷) challenged and supported the HE sector to do more to address the differences

13 OFFA ceased operations in March 2018 with overall responsibility for access and participation in HE now covered by the Office for Students (OfS)

14 See the comment by ECU (now Advance HE) <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/blogs/facts-figures-and-frustrations-the-challenges-of-a-national-conversation-of-race-disparity/>

15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-disparity-audit>

16 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41560927>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/lammy-review>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lammy-review-government-response>

17 The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was the independent, non-departmental public body established under the Higher Education Act 2004 and charged with promoting and safeguarding fair access to higher education for people from under-represented groups. OFFA ceased operations in March 2018 with overall responsibility for access and participation in HE now covered by the Office for Students (OfS)

in participation, outcomes and progression that persist between students from different ethnic backgrounds that can be masked by the overarching label of “Black and minority ethnic (BAME)”. This is continued by the OfS.

These differences are significant, with lifelong repercussions for under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic minority students and their families. Although **access** to higher education has improved for home BAME students and, in fact, BAME students as a whole are more likely to enter HE than White students, there is variation at a granular level, for example the proportion of Black Caribbean and White and Black Caribbean students entering a higher tariff institution is lower than all other ethnic groups and lower than White British students.¹⁸

Moreover, while BAME undergraduate students across the board enter HE in relatively large numbers compared to White students, the **retention** rates for all ethnic groups are poorer with the exception of Chinese and Indian ethnicities. White students are more likely to gain a first or 2:1 degree than all BAME groups. In its Student Characteristics report the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) analysis shows that:

*Controlling for entry qualifications, black students are between six and 28 percentage points less likely than white students to get a higher classification degree, while Asian students are between three and 17 percentage points less likely. The differences exist at all levels of entry qualifications, so are even apparent among students who enter higher education with very high prior attainment.*¹⁹

The attainment gaps are starkly displayed in the chart below.²⁰

18 https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/145556db-8183-40b8-b7af-741bf2b55d79/topic-briefing_bme-students.pdf

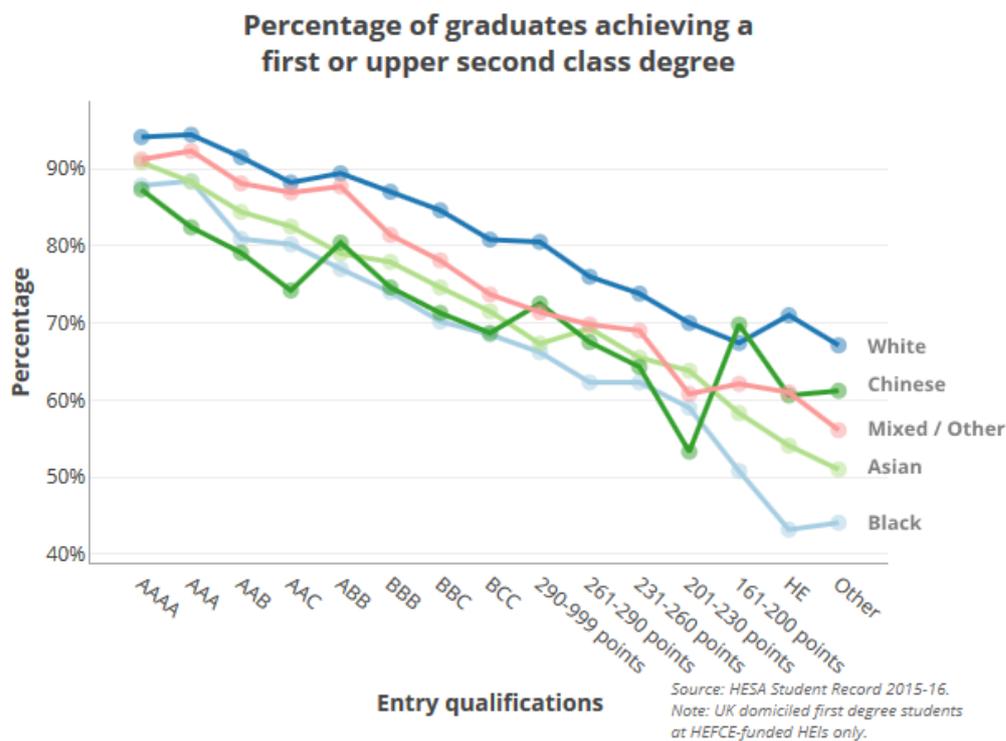
19

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319115442/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/students/>

20

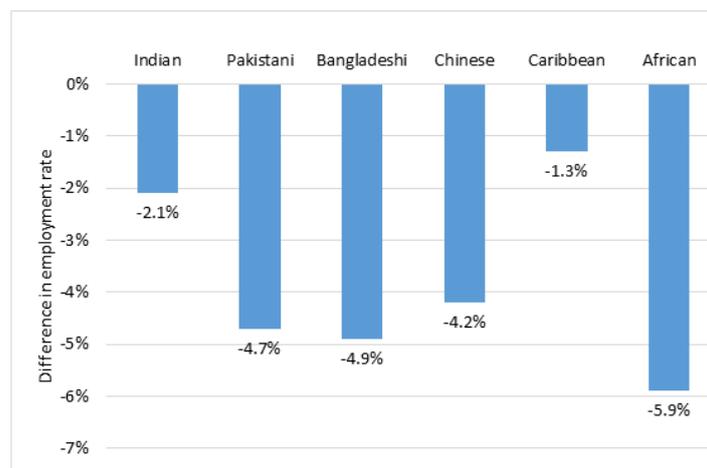
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319115442/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/students/>

Table 1: percentage of graduates attaining a 1st or upper 2nd class degree



Finally, in terms of **progression**, “regardless of entry qualifications, subjects studied, degree outcomes and other socio-demographic characteristics, differences in employment outcomes between White and BAME graduates persist even three years after graduation” (OFFA, 2018).²¹

Table 2: differences in employment and further study rate three years after graduation



Source: HEFCE, *Differences in employment outcomes* (2016)

²¹ <https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/topic-briefings/offa-topic-briefing-bme-students/>

Over the last few years there have been a number of sector-wide interventions designed to address these entrenched inequalities. HEFCE, and now the Office for Students, for example, have responded to the persistent attainment and outcomes gaps, by investing £7.5 million to Address Barriers to Student Success. The majority of these projects focus on improving outcomes for BAME students, whilst the investment affords the opportunity for the sector to understand and grow well-evidenced practice to support student success and progression. However, whilst the narrowing of disparities in outcomes between White and BAME students as a whole is a welcome trend, the data above points to the continuing need for HE providers to regularly and consistently disaggregate ethnicity data to understand the experiences of distinct ethnic groups as they move across the student lifecycle.

Once understood, there is then scope, as the OfS suggests, to consider refinements to existing interventions, or new interventions that can better target valuable resources to where they are most needed. Currently, the evidence from access agreements is that the vast majority of HE providers continue to treat BAME students as a whole even when there are considerable cohort sizes of specific sub-ethnic groups; there are few providers who have targets or activities that work at a more nuanced level than 'BAME' or that consider the impact of interventions beyond that broad category.

This is the background against which the OfS has asked HE providers to respond to what their data is telling them, and to begin to consider ethnicity targeting within the context of their existing widening participation work as a highly effective approach to addressing the persistent inequalities experienced by under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic groups.

Targeting: definitions

Targeting in the context of HE is similar to positive action (PA), interventions that are taken to specifically support student groups who are under-represented or disadvantaged in comparison to others. For the purposes of this research we define 'ethnicity targeting' as:

- i. Inclusive interventions designed to benefit all students but in particular one or more minority ethnic groups
- ii. Exclusive interventions explicitly directed at one or more minority ethnic groups.

An example of an 'inclusive intervention' as defined above is a review of a curriculum to specifically include Black-Caribbean authors – the teaching of which is delivered to, and of benefit to, both underrepresented and overrepresented groups. An example of exclusive targeting as defined above is a financial bursary or a place at a Summer School which is only available to a specific ethnic group. Our research demonstrates that both types of targeting are potentially useful. However, not all targeting is legal and HE providers need to be aware of the differences between positive action and positive discrimination.

Ethnicity targeting and positive action: the legal position

Targeting in the form of positive action (PA) are lawful interventions that are permitted under the Equality Act 2010 to "alleviate disadvantage experienced by people who share a protected characteristic; or reduce under-representation in relation to particular activities; or meet particular needs".

The Equality Act 2010:

Positive action: general²²

- (1) This section applies if a person (P) reasonably thinks that—
 - (a) persons who share a protected characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to the characteristic,
 - (b) persons who share a protected characteristic have needs that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it, or
 - (c) participation in an activity by persons who share a protected characteristic is disproportionately low.

- (2) This Act does not prohibit P from taking any action which is a proportionate means of achieving the aim of—
 - (a) enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to overcome or minimise that disadvantage,
 - (b) meeting those needs, or
 - (c) enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to participate in that activity

Such measures must be **proportionate** to achieving the aim. Targeting members of disadvantaged or under-represented ethnic groups is not legal unless the three conditions of proportionality, disadvantage, and need are met. Actions that do not conform to the legislation are at risk of being judged discriminatory.

The Equality Challenge Unit (now part of Advance HE) provides examples of positive action measures on their website. These include: “taking steps to remove barriers in student outreach or admissions for groups of students underrepresented in particular subjects” or “providing alternative processes to meet different needs in accessing services”.²³ They provide further guidance through their publication **Equality Act 2010: positive action through bursaries, scholarships and prizes**.²⁴ This usefully identifies “the key risks faced by HEIs and steps that can be taken to ensure they can legally provide bursaries, scholarships and prizes”.

Methodology

Our aim was to undertake research and produce guidance regarding the targeting of disadvantaged and under-represented pupils from different ethnic groups through access, student success and progression activities. We also took a whole lifecycle approach in relation to outreach and access (National Collaborative Outreach Programme, institution-led, or community-led activities); student success (both retention and attainment) and progression (into work or into further study)²⁵ where this was available.

22 From Chapter 2 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf

23 ECU (2018) <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/equality-legislation/positive-action/>

24 ECU (2012) <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-act-2010-positive-action-through-bursaries-scholarships-and-prizes/>

25 Thomas, L, Hill M, O’Mahony, J and Yorke M (2017) Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change: What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. London: Paul Hamlyn

Our research questions were

- What work is currently taking place across the sector targeting disadvantaged and under-represented pupils from different ethnic groups?
- Where is the focus of this activity in relation to the student lifecycle and where are the gaps?
- What challenges do HE providers face in developing and implementing these different activities?
- How do HE providers use evidence to identify challenges?
- How do HE providers perceive such challenges might be ameliorated?
- How do HE providers address challenges at discrete and transitional points of the student lifecycle?
- How do other stakeholders perceive these challenges and what is their experience and evidence in relation to how such challenges are addressed?
- How are further practical solutions identified, implemented and made sustainable?
- How do they become embedded and part of the culture of an institution?

This allowed us to achieve our objective, namely to improve the OfS' and the sector's understanding of the challenges associated with this work, and provide practical solutions as to how these challenges might be overcome across the student lifecycle.

Methods

We adopted a mixed methods approach throughout, bringing together both quantitative and qualitative evidence (see Appendix A: Methodology and Analysis for further detail). In brief this comprised: a sector-wide survey to HE providers; a survey to key stakeholders; analysis of the 2018-2019 access agreements; sector-wide case study data collection and analysis; and a Summit event enabling the contribution of further stakeholder perspectives. In addition an advisory group was established to support the framing of the research and development of the findings. This comprised four key policy makers from across the sector.

The following sections, unless otherwise specified, present findings from the survey to HE providers, the stakeholder survey, the Access agreements, the discussions at the Summit event and subsequent feedback to the research team as well as feedback from the advisory group.

Findings

The access agreements

We analysed the 2018-19 access agreement submission to understand how and to what extent HE providers are approaching ethnicity targeting²⁶. Whilst there remains a scarcity of ethnicity targeting in the sector²⁷:

1. There is a heightened **awareness** and acknowledgement by some HE providers of the importance of targeting.
2. There are examples across the agreements of research and **exploration** to establish the type of targeting that needs to take place.
3. There are existing activities and also **action** to refine these activities further or to develop new activities.
4. There are some examples of structural and cultural **change** where acknowledgement of the importance of targeting is creating new ways of working.

Across these examples, however targeting is largely focussed on outreach and access interventions. Targeted interventions in relation to retention and success are few and those related to progression almost non-existent.

The survey to HE providers

Our ethnicity targeting survey was aimed at HE providers who are targeting directly or indirectly specific ethnic groups. We received 42 responses: 30 from universities (70%) and 12 from colleges (30%). Five submissions targeting exclusively White ('working-class') students were removed from the analysis, leaving a total of 37 cases for analysis.

As with the access agreements, targeted interventions (directly or indirectly) were mainly directed at **student access** (76% of all those providers who responded indicated they targeted in this way); followed by retention (46%), student attainment (43%) and progression (22%).

Of those HE providers who targeted, the vast majority targeted **more than one ethnic group**, for example black British African or black British Caribbean (or mixed), or students of Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi descent.

All but three providers targeted **cross-cutting disadvantages** alongside ethnicity. These were:

Disadvantage/cross-cutting area of focus	Cited by (% of respondents)
Low income	80%
Gender	35%

26 The analysis of Access Agreement submissions was carried out with the use of MAXQDA Qualitative Data Analysis Software

27 See page 5 and especially points 19 and 20 in OFFA's presentation of key data from 18-19 access agreements. They note that there is increased support for BME students but more work needs to be done in "providing a granular analysis of [institutional] performance in relation to BME groups by considering entry and attainment rates of subsets of this group" <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Access-agreement-2018-19-key-facts-revised-OFFA-201708.pdf>

Disability	35%
Care-leaver/care experienced	35%
Mental health/learning difficulties/on autism spectrum	33%
Mature learners	33%
Carer	30%
Part-time	25%
Those estranged from their family	17%
Refugees	15%
Religion	12%
Poverty, deprivation	9%
Low progression neighbourhood	9%
Other educational disadvantage	6%

When asked why they don't target, a majority of providers (70%) stated that inequalities were not enough of an institutional priority, and 57% stated they were not enough of a departmental priority. A number of respondents noted that targeted interventions did not, in general, receive institutional funding despite the fact that additional fee income can be used for such purposes (of note, this was also commented on by some of those who contributed to the case studies as well as stakeholders at the Summit who also noted the lack of transparency about institutional spend).

Moreover while generally agreeing that problems of inequality were not difficult to address (57%), a majority of institutional respondents also indicated that there is **uncertainty about how to address them** (68%) or **a lack of evidence of what works** (76%). Problems with data (access to, and sharing of), geographic location, and a lack of BAME staff were also noted.

The stakeholder survey

We received 78 responses to this survey from academic staff (51%), students (12%), non-academic managerial staff and policy experts (each 10%), community or third-sector organisations (6%), and other roles (10%).

A recurring theme in stakeholder responses was that **racism and discrimination** was not discussed in HE, not discussed at the necessary levels, and therefore not addressed.

Stakeholder responses also concentrated on the issue of **leadership**, including the low number of black academics (specifically) and/or BAME senior managers (particularly policy makers), and what was described as a lack of diverse and critical minds in leadership positions. There was concern that staff advocates for radical action are seen as trouble makers and thus unsupported, and that BAME students raising challenges are regarded as trouble-makers and also unsupported.

In relation to **institutional policies**, it was argued that there are a lack of effective mechanisms to capture disclosures of implicit racial bias and/or discrimination; lack of confidence or willingness to deal with disclosures; lack of effective policies to manage racism and/or support those who have been treated in racist ways (whilst equity policies

that do exist may be ignored or overlooked), and a concern around unconscious (or conscious) bias in admissions.

Responses to the question on **targeting** also evidenced a lack of understanding of what targeting is, in particular the belief that targeting and/or positive action is illegal.

With respect to **data and information** there were concerns over the lack of institutional capacity to utilise and share data effectively; lack of sharing of other information about students especially prior to, and at the point of, entry; and an unwillingness by senior leaders (or those with ready access to data) to discuss data with students and staff.

In relation to **interventions**, respondents criticised the perpetuation of deficit models with interventions built on racist stereotypes; lack of acceptance that the causes of inequalities relate to race; and small scale interventions which focus solely on those policies and practice easiest to address.

Finally in relation to **institutional climate and pedagogy**, respondents noted the lack of: diversity in the curriculum, integration of equality concepts in curriculum design, diversity specialists/academics, meaningful involvement of students for example in curriculum design, support to develop students' sense of belonging support and advice on options for further study and employment.

The Summit event

A Summit event, hosted by Sheffield Hallam University, was attended by over 60 stakeholders. The draft findings were presented and explored and further data was garnered. Many of the same concerns as noted above were also raised by delegates at the Summit. Other key concerns were that:

The **lack of transparency** from institutions as to how they were spending money on interventions designed to reduce disparities in outcomes.

The close correlation between schools with high numbers of minority ethnic pupils and schools which offer predominantly BTEC rather than A-level qualifications means that many BAME secondary school leavers are **prevented from accessing** many university degree courses²⁸.

The wide acceptance of the **fallacy of the 'aspiration gap'**²⁹ highlights the pernicious effects of not knowing or acknowledging the actual data, or obscuring the data with **rhetoric about 'colour-blind' or 'post-racial' society**³⁰.

The damaging rhetoric that these issues of racial inequality are 'in the heads' of those from minority ethnic groups runs counter to their lived experience and can be a source of both **stress and distress**, whilst myths, for example that we live in a 'post-racial' society, can **damage possibilities for change**.

28 See <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/nov/29/students-with-btecs-do-worse-at-university-heres-how-we-close-the-gap>

29 see <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-lack-of-aspiration-is-not-the-problem/>

30 see <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/white-privilege-in-english-schools/>

There are **well-being consequences** for those young people from minority ethnic backgrounds who are being required to 'work harder' than their white peers, 'keep their heads down', or 'be silent in order to achieve.

Many minority ethnic students and staff are being over-burdened by requests to act as mentors or role models and their well-being needs are not always being met.

Recommendations and guidance

Recommendations

Based on the lack of targeted interventions across the sector we have drawn up four key recommendations.

1. Providers should improve their institutional **data systems** so that they can consistently capture good quality data; this will ensure that activities can be effectively targeted and interventions effectively evaluated. This may require the aggregation of data across multiple years to ensure that more nuanced patterns of disadvantage can be identified and addressed. Whilst course level data can be helpful in mobilising course leaders to effect change, presenting statistical data as proportions or percentages can be unhelpful where numbers are low. Rather the focus should be on numbers of individual students. This also helps to personify students with inequitable outcomes and can serve as a useful counter to increasingly abstract discussions.
2. Providers should make their BAME access, retention, success and progression **data public to all students and staff**. This includes making it readily available internally (including at departmental/course level data) and externally (for example through a dedicated institutional website with both data and plans to tackle inequalities).
3. Providers should ensure that **data is contextualised** for students and accompanied by a **clear action plan** which indicates what action the provider is taking to ensure that the gap is reduced and then eradicated.
4. Providers should take a **holistic approach to addressing inequalities** for specific minority ethnic groups ensuring a balance of interventions across the full student lifecycle.
5. Providers should demonstrate in their access and participation plans how they will **balance the focus of 'inclusive' and 'targeted/exclusive'** interventions across the student lifecycle.
6. HE providers should summarise, on an annual basis, their **annual spend** on targeted interventions - across each aspect of the student lifecycle (access, retention, attainment, progression). This should include ways in which additional fee income is being used as well how interventions are being funded from as other sources, such as from the Addressing Barriers to Student Success (ABSS) programme funded by the Office for Students.

Further recommendations are contained in our guidance for specific stakeholders.

Guidance for institutional success

Working to address racial inequality is challenging and there is no single effective solution. Rather, a multi-faceted, multi-layered approach is needed but, crucially, one which disaggregates minority ethnic groups and addresses issues of intersectionality.

Developing an organisational culture that addresses racial inequality and discrimination requires whole-institution approaches supported by robust national policy endeavours. Moreover, tackling racial inequalities in HE must be everyone's business, and not only those of BAME staff. While BAME staff must be consulted and included in designing and implementing policy, all senior staff should be held responsible for understanding and delivering on race equality.

On this basis, aside from the recommendations outlined above and in the guidance for specific stakeholders we also make three further recommendations for framing approaches to targeted interventions whilst in the appendices we have also included reflective questions which can be used to assess understanding and evaluate approaches before they are implemented:

1. Using **Positive Action (PA) approaches**: the legal right to use positive action is identified above. Professor Chantal Davies at the University of Chester has outlined a set of questions which HE providers can use to frame PA approaches to interventions.³¹ Of note, where HE providers are unsure about the use of positive action, they may find it helps to seek legal advice in order to build confidence, and to guide and support initiatives (see Appendix B).
2. Developing **Participatory Action Research (PAR) interventions**: Participatory action research is a form of collaborative research, education and action which is used to gather information to use for social change. Unlike many other approaches PAR is driven by participants and based on their own concerns. It is therefore a form of action research which is built on research and action with people rather than for people (See Appendix C).
3. Using a **Community Cultural Wealth** approach to designing interventions: we have developed a set of reflective questions³² (see Appendix D) which can be used, or adapted, to stimulate questions amongst members of staff, including with students, or as a way of reflecting on our own practice. They are based on the work of Tara Yosso³³. Yosso conceptualizes community cultural wealth as a critical race theory (CRT) challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital. Her model identifies six types of capital that can be used to frame or reflect on relationships and interactions with students, to act as a corrective to more commonly held deficit models.

31 <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Chantal-Davies.pdf>

32 Written by Professor Jacqueline Stevenson, drawing on Tara Yosso's work on Community Cultural Wealth (see *Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth* at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1361332052000341006>) and Angela Locke's development of this work (see

<https://www.bttop.org/sites/default/files/public/SUMMARY%20OF%20YOSSO.docx>

33 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1361332052000341006>

Further guidance has been developed for specific stakeholders. These are:

1. Guidance for institutional success: policy makers
2. Guidance for institutional success: access and participation practitioners
3. Guidance for institutional success: teaching academics
4. Guidance for institutional success: supporting progression in to employment or further study

The guidance has been developed by drawing on the knowledge and expertise of those stakeholders involved in this study, including respondents to our HE provider and stakeholder surveys, and contributions from those who attended our Summit event. Our call for case studies produced a number of exemplars of good practice. One example is included in each set of guidance. Others are contained in appendices to this research report. We would like to thank all those who contributed to the writing of these case studies.

In addition we have a set of further appendices which cover the following:

- Appendix E: Language and terminology
- Appendix F: Additional resources and links to other interventions
- Appendix G: Additional case studies arising from this research

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Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology and analysis

Introduction

The aim of this project was to undertake research and produce guidance regarding the targeting of disadvantaged and under-represented pupils from different ethnic groups through access, student success and progression activities. We also took a whole lifecycle approach in relation to outreach and access (National Collaborative Outreach Programme, institution-led, or community-led activities); student success (both retention and attainment) and progression (into work or into further study)³⁴ where this was available.

Our research questions were

- What work is currently taking place across the sector targeting disadvantaged and under-represented pupils from different ethnic groups?
- Where is the focus of this activity in relation to the student lifecycle and where are the gaps?
- What challenges do HE providers face in developing and implementing these different activities?
- How do HE providers use evidence to identify challenges?
- How do HE providers perceive such challenges might be ameliorated?
- How do HE providers address challenges at discrete and transitional points of the student lifecycle?
- How do other stakeholders perceive these challenges and what is their experience and evidence in relation to how such challenges are addressed?
- How are further practical solutions identified, implemented and made sustainable?
- How do they become embedded and part of the culture of an institution?

This allowed us to achieve our objective, namely to improve the Office for Student's and the sector's understanding of the challenges associated with this work, and provide practical solutions as to how these challenges might be overcome across the student lifecycle.

Methods

We adopted a mixed methods approach throughout bringing together both quantitative and qualitative evidence. This includes a sector-wide **survey to HE providers**. Respondents were also asked about reasons why they did or did not target, the focus of any targeted interventions, the approach to evaluation, and challenges faced in using targeted approaches. The call for evidence was sent out through a wide range of channels: JISCmail lists, Twitter, and directly to contacts known to the HEA and Runnymede through our own research and practice networks. This resulted in **42 responses**. See

³⁴ Thomas, L, Hill, M, O'Mahony, J and Yorke, M (2017) Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change: What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-student-success-strategies-institutional-change>

Institutional Survey below - Ethnicity targeting, widening participation and student success survey.

Drawing on the above responses, especially the summary of challenges faced in the sector, we developed a further **survey to key stakeholders** used to draw out perceptions of key challenges and possible solutions and to help identify and prioritise interventions which might reduce disadvantage. In doing so, we aimed to help the sector to arrive at an 'expert' consensus. Respondents included representatives from community organisations working with different minority ethnic groups and sub-groups, key policy makers, authors and contributors to key reports, and students. There were **78 responses**. See Stakeholder Survey below: Ethnicity targeting – Interventions and Obstacles Survey.

OFFA provided the research team with all **2018-2019 access agreements** which had referenced work with students from minority ethnic backgrounds as well as particular subgroups. These were searched for examples of targeted interventions.

Case study data collection and analysis: a long list of possible case studies was drawn up from the institutional survey and the access agreements. Project managers or their representatives were interviewed about their intervention. Draft case studies were returned to them for revisions and a final case study agreed. **Eleven case** studies were produced offering representative (by intervention and provider) examples of targeted interventions from across the sector. The majority of interventions were focused on access, the fewest on progression. This reflects our broader findings from the data.

A **Summit** event, hosted by Sheffield Hallam University, was attended by over **60 stakeholders**: national and institutional policy makers, academics, student support officers, representatives from students unions, and students. The draft findings were presented followed by an exploration of the draft recommendations in interactive workshops. This was followed by a 'respondent jury' where two key stakeholders gave their personal reflections on the findings. The workshops and the discussion following the jury allowed further evidence to be gathered from delegates about key challenges and possible solutions.

In addition an advisory group was established to support the framing of the research and development of the findings. This comprised four key policy makers from across the sector.

The following sections, unless otherwise specified, present findings from the institutional survey, the stakeholder survey, the access agreements provided by OFFA, the discussions at the Summit event and subsequent feedback to the research team as well as feedback from the advisory group.

Findings

Analysis of access agreements

An important source of evidence of ethnicity targeting is HE providers' submissions of their access agreements. We analysed their 2018-19 submission to understand how and

to what extent HE providers are approaching ethnicity targeting³⁵. The following is a summary of our findings. Most HE providers continue to treat black and minority ethnic groups as a whole but in comparison to previous years there is some evidence of targeting and pockets of progress in ‘unpacking’ the disadvantages and under-representation of specific ethnic groups.

Rather than describe the current scarcity of ethnicity targeting in the sector³⁶, what follows is a selection of examples of positive practice from particular HEIs as described in their access agreements. We find it useful to categorise these examples into four types of activity:

5. There is a heightened **awareness** and acknowledgement by some HE providers of the importance of targeting.
6. There is research and **exploration** to establish the type of targeting that needs to take place.
7. There are existing activities and also **action** to refine these activities further or to develop new activities.
8. There are examples of structural and cultural **change** where acknowledgement of the importance of targeting is creating new ways of working.

Examples of ethnicity targeting are few and far between but it will be useful for HE providers to consider which type of practice and activity they are engaged in and whether the examples below provide an opportunity for **cross-institutional learning** and progress.

Awareness

There is evidence of increasing awareness in universities of the importance of ethnicity targeting and of disaggregating the category of 'BAME' or 'BME'. For example, University College London write: *“For 2016 entry, BME students made up 45% of UCL’s first-year UK intake. This **headline figure hides under-representation among certain groups**”*. UCL go on to provide the relevant break down. Equally, Bristol University write: *“Our 2016-17 intake data indicate that the University performs well against our Black and Minority Ethnic progress measures for applications but that this is not evenly spread amongst all ethnic categories. Although we are pleased to be exceeding our progress measure we are keen to make faster progress and move beyond the blunt definition of ‘BME students’”*.

We provide a more detailed example from The University of East Anglia (UEA), a university that is developing its awareness of the importance of disaggregating the 'BAME/BME' category and of ensuring that unequal outcomes for specific student groups are not invisible. UEA already have in place a great deal of interventions to ensure equality of outcomes between white and minority ethnic students. In the 2018-19 access

35 The analysis of Access Agreement submissions was carried out with the use of MAXQDA Qualitative Data Analysis Software

36 See page 5 and especially points 19 and 20 in OFFA’s presentation of key data from 18-19 access agreements. They note that there is increased support for BAME students but more work needs to be done in “providing a granular analysis of [institutional] performance in relation to BAME groups by considering entry and attainment rates of subsets of this group”

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511111540/https://www.offa.org.uk/publications/analysis-data-and-progress-reports/>

agreement they reported that “*non-continuation for UEA UK BME students has improved year on year and for the first time in three years in 2015-16 UK **BME students were less likely to drop out than their white counterparts were.***” However, they went on to add “*We do note... non-continuation rates were higher among our small cohorts of **Asian-Pakistani and Black-Caribbean** students, which needs further investigation and action*”.

UEA also reported that activity to close attainment gaps is showing a positive impact: “*the 5-year trends in the proportion of students achieving good honours for all groups is positive,*”, but they went on to note that “*Good honours rates were lower than the BME average in 2015-16 among our small cohorts of **Asian-Indian, Asian-Pakistani and Black-African** students, which needs further investigation/ action*”.

Equally, a review of their progression data³⁷ highlighted “*no significant specific negative performance gaps between [widening participation] group*”, while at the same time reporting that:

***We are not complacent**, however, and note that in addition... review by ethnicity subgroup highlights inconsistent performance across many of the smaller groupings year on year. Small base sizes make these data only indicative ³⁸ but areas to address may include the below BME average graduate prospects in each of the last 4 years of available data for our small **Black-Caribbean** cohort.*

This growing awareness of the differences within the overall 'BAME' category is an essential step in ensuring that interventions aimed at minority ethnic students benefit those who are particularly under-represented or disadvantaged. For example, King's College London's awareness of differences within the BAME student population led them to reflect on already existing activity and how to improve it. They write:

Overall King's College London's widening participation schemes have a high uptake among BME participants. But we are keen to further nuance our approach to increase the number of under-represented students (specifically, though not exclusively, African Caribbean students) applying for and gaining a place on programmes such as King's Scholars and K+. Looking ahead to 2018-19 ... We will host an annual event for Amos Bursary holders and Associates, as well as establish a scholarship for black boys, in association with [Amos](#), to encourage more high achieving young black men to choose King's.

Exploration

Awareness of the differences in outcomes for different ethnic groups is an important step in ethnicity targeting. But often a university will need to explore these differences in greater depth to establish the patterns of disadvantage at a local (department and programme) level. Moving from awareness to exploration is not an automatic step: it

³⁷ UEA assess progression in terms of positive graduate destinations using the most up to date DLHE data. They have also reviewed UEA's TEF core metrics for 'Employment or further study' and for 'Highly skilled employment or further study' by the widening participation splits.

³⁸ This is noteworthy as small base sizes are often referred to by HEIs as an obstacle to further exploration or action. Despite a small cohort, UEA has still found the indicative data important to address

might depend on staffing and funding amongst other factors. In the 2018-19 access agreements, we find some useful examples of analysing access and achievement data for particular ethnic groups and how this relates to other markers of disadvantage. For example, University of Huddersfield write:

We have appointed a researcher to undertake multi-factorial analysis of student retention and achievement to enable us to identify which groups are most at risk in this institution. She has identified underachievement in students of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin, with high proportions of vocational entry qualifications (such as BTEC). We are confident that these factors persist when other factors, such as age, gender and entry qualifications have been taken into consideration.

And the University of Bristol:

We are committed to examining multiple indicators of deprivation and to doing all we can to reduce their impact. We have added in several new intervention targets to reflect the need for intersectionality between progress measures and the partnership work we are undertaking. Recognising the need to increase the number of students from specific BME groups (Asian/Pakistani, Asian/Bangladeshi and Black/Caribbean in particular), we have introduced a target for the number of such students on our Insight Into Bristol programme.

Action

Awareness of the different outcomes of the ethnic groups that make up BAME student population and exploring those differences further can help HE providers justify modifications to existing interventions, or the adoption of a new approach. In the area of student access, Buckinghamshire New University carried out research and were able to report that the “*findings have been used to develop a new outreach intervention that offered practical, solutions-focused approaches to address the specific barriers to entry faced by Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls.*” In the area of retention and attainment, London Metropolitan University reported that it has: “*undertaken further analysis of student attainment [which] has shown variations in progression and attainment across the university between minority ethnic groups particularly Black African students*”. The findings are incorporated in the university’s comprehensive university wide Programme to Improve Student Outcomes (PISO), and one example of action is:

Reverse engineering the experience of successful Black African graduands to inform the development of academic support services, develop graduate-led guidance in order to increase motivation and aspirations as well as performance and also provide role models for all Black African students, especially those who are not performing as well as their peers

Our analysis found that there is limited ethnicity targeting work taking place to support **student progression** to further work or employment. The University of East Anglia however provides an example of the importance of ongoing monitoring of their already strong offering of progression interventions (UEA Award and Employment Development Fund). They write, “*Indeed, taking continual action is particularly important in light of the*

clear national trends which illustrate that there are issues relating to employability for students from under-represented groups. For example, LPN [low participation neighbourhood] and black African graduates are less likely to be in graduate level jobs 6 and 40 months after graduating”.

In light of this, they have been working to ensure they have additional methods of monitoring potential progression. For example, new questions have been added to the University’s registration task, completed by all new and returning students each year, to gain a more live and detailed understanding of students’ employment aspirations, plans and confidence, and the level of impact their university experience is having on these factors.

Change

Our final comment on the 2018-19 access agreements relates to aspects of university culture and structure , and several noteworthy examples of the ways universities think and work that can, we argue, enable effective ethnicity targeting. For example, Brunel University reported on its differential data and went on to note:

In February 2016 the University agreed to make the attainment gap an institutional KPI [key performance indicator] that is monitored annually and in September 2016 the University appointed a Student Success Project Manager to implement the ‘Student Success Action Plan’, and who is working across both academic and professional departments. This project, supported by the Brunel Education Strategy and Equality and Diversity Strategy, aims to achieve a culture shift in the University through a co-ordinated approach, overseen by our Pro-Vice Chancellor (Quality Assurance and Enhancement).

London South Bank University [LSBU] were one of the few HE providers to comment on the importance of leadership and the importance of diverse staff working at all levels across the university including at senior level:

Our Equality and Diversity Committee is chaired by a member of our Executive team, demonstrating the commitment within senior leadership to the E&D [equality and diversity] agenda. This committee oversees all our work in this area and some key highlights are articulated below. Learners at LSBU comment that regularly seeing academics at every grade representing diversity demonstrate that LSBU is a place where everyone can succeed. We are proud that of the 90 Black African Caribbean Professors in the UK that two hold positions among our seven Executive Deans.

Blackburn College was one of the few to discuss the importance of working in the local community beyond the usual ‘outreach’ activities or interventions: “*We have an important role to play in supporting the academic attainment of young people in our local community.*” They go on to report that staff including college executive staff are members of school governing bodies (primary and secondary) and on the Board of a local Academy Trust:

In areas of high deprivation and with a very diverse population like Blackburn, representation on a School's Governing Bodies supports the College's agenda on raising aspiration and access to Higher Education with the strong promotion of a local Higher Education offer that meets the needs of the Asian heritage population in particular where families prefer to stay together and local.

Finally, the mention in Buckinghamshire New University's access agreement of data-informed activity by their Students Union (SU) is a welcome reminder of the scope for HEIs and SUs to collaborate and align their work so that HE providers are working where possible in tandem with students' representatives and societies.

The Students' Union captures detailed participation data which enables the organisation to identify under-represented student groups, as a proportion of the overall student body, across its activities or within particular services. This informs the Union's strategic approach to service development and has seen their Advice Centre target young white males and brought about the introduction of female only recreational fitness classes, in particular to address low participation among Asian students. This approach has also contributed to a decision to introduce part-time student officers for groups such as mature, part-time and BME learners to ensure their voices are captured in the Union's decision making processes.

Conclusion

The key points from our analysis of the 2018-19 access agreements is that ethnicity targeting is at an early stage, but examples to date represent opportunities for cross-institutional learning. To ensure that interventions are benefitting disadvantaged and under-represented ethnic groups it is essential that:

- HE providers are **aware** of differential outcomes for different ethnic groups.
- HE providers **explore** these differences internally at the programme and course level, and their intersection with other markers of disadvantage.
- HE providers modify their action or take new **action** to address inequities as they apply to particular ethnic groups.
- HE providers consider the **change** that is needed to ensure that the structure and culture is enabling of ethnicity targeting.

There are obstacles to progress, naturally, and our two surveys of i) HE providers and ii) stakeholders sought to understand some of these in more detail.

Analysis of institutional and stakeholder surveys

Our ethnicity targeting survey was aimed at HEIs who are targeting directly or indirectly specific ethnic groups. The survey was chiefly issued to those in HE providers responsible for drawing up and submitting their HEI's access agreement. OFFA's analysis of 2018-19 access agreements suggests only a very small number of HE providers are engaged in ethnicity targeting and as such we expected only a small number of responses. We received 42 responses, 30 from universities (70%) and 12 from colleges (30%). Five submissions targeting exclusively White students were removed from the analysis, leaving a total of 37 cases for analysis.

In addition, we conducted a second survey directed at HE provider **stakeholders** asking about their views of the obstacles to addressing both ethnic inequalities across the student lifecycle and specifically ethnicity targeting. We received 78 responses, of which roughly half were academic staff (51%); the rest were students (12%), non-academic managerial staff and policy experts (each 10%), community or third-sector organisations (6%), and other roles (10%).

Analysis of institutional survey responses

What stage of the student lifecycle is targeting directed at?

On the basis of responses, interventions that target (directly or indirectly) students from under-represented or disadvantaged, ethnic backgrounds, are mainly directed at **student access** to university or college, with 76% of all HE providers selecting this option. **Student retention** was selected by 46% and **student attainment** by 43% of respondents. The smallest number of interventions was of those aimed at **student progression** to further study or employment, with 22% naming this as an aim of their interventions.

Table A1: stage of the student lifecycle targeted

	all		universities		colleges	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Student access	28	76	21	72	7	88
Student attainment or closing attainment gaps	17	46	14	48	3	38
Student retention	16	43	11	38	5	62
Student progression to further study or employment	8	22	6	21	2	25

Targeting

When asked which ethnic group their most successful intervention targeted, most HE providers identified more than one ethnic group. Five HE providers targeted two or three specific ethnic groups for example black British African or black British Caribbean (or mixed), or students of Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi descent, seven HE providers targeted a mix of both the above ethnic groups, eleven HE providers targeted a larger mix to include variously Arab, Chinese or Irish traveller, and thirteen HE providers a mix of the above ethnic groups including white. All but three targeted cross-cutting disadvantages alongside ethnicity. **Low income** was the most common of these by far, selected by 78% of respondents (29). This was followed by, in the range of 30-40% of HE providers, **disability, care-leavers, gender, mental health problems, learning disabilities, carers** and **mature students**. Lower frequency but by no means insignificant variables included **part-time** (19%), **estranged from family** (16%), **refugees** (11%), and **religion** (8%).

Why HEIs don't target: barriers and concerns

Within the context of targeting, both institutional and stakeholder respondents were asked to indicate their institution's experience of the obstacles in addressing ethnic inequalities across the student lifecycle from a pre-set list of responses. Tables A1 and A2 summarises these responses. In addition both sets of respondents were given the

opportunity in the survey to provide further, qualitative responses. These have been integrated into the body of the report.

A majority of HE providers (70%) believe that inequalities are enough of an institutional priority, and more than half (57%) believe that inequalities are enough of a departmental priority. While generally agreeing that problems of inequality were not difficult to address (57%), a majority believe that there is uncertainty about how to address them (68%). Many agreed that there is a lack of evidence of what works (76%). There was a relatively even division of agreement and disagreement for the other questions, except for the final question, where 57% did not believe that there is a tendency to see students' own lack of success as their own responsibility.

Table A2: why HEIs don't target, institution responses

Inst it ut i o n a l r e s p o n s e s	A g r e e		N e i t h e r a g r e e n o r d i s a g r e e		D i s a g r e e	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
The inequalities are not enough of an institutional priority	8	22	3	8	26	70
The inequalities are not enough of a departmental/local priority	7	19	9	24	21	57
The inequalities are considered too difficult to address	11	30	5	14	21	57
There is uncertainty as to how to address the inequalities/lack of examples of good practices	25	68	4	11	8	22
There is a lack of staff awareness	17	46	9	24	11	30
There is a lack of staff training/support	18	49	8	22	11	30
We have tried previous interventions without success	7	19	12	32	18	49
There is a lack of evidence of what works	28	76	3	8	6	16
There is a lack of ownership of the 'issues'	19	51	10	27	8	22
The pressure of league tables are an obstacle	13	35	11	30	13	35
There are conflicts between the objectives of central admissions and other departments	9	24	11	30	17	46
There is a tendency to see students own lack of success as their responsibility	12	32	4	11	21	57

The stakeholder responses to the same questions are quite strikingly different from the institutional ones. They believe that inequalities are not enough of an institutional or departmental priority (69% and 76% respectively) to the same degree that the HE providers believe that they were not.

Table A3: why HEIs don't target, stakeholder responses

Stakeholder responses	Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
The inequalities are not enough of an institutional priority	54	69	7	9	17	22
The inequalities are not enough of a departmental/local priority	59	76	8	10	11	14
The inequalities are considered too difficult to address	48	62	23	29	7	9
There is uncertainty as to how to address the inequalities/lack of examples of good practices	67	86	6	8	5	6
There is a lack of staff awareness	63	81	4	5	11	14
There is a lack of staff training/support	60	77	7	9	11	14
We have tried previous interventions without success	27	35	35	45	16	21
There is a lack of evidence of what works	38	49	17	22	23	29
There is a lack of ownership of the 'issues'	67	86	5	6	6	8
The pressure of league tables are an obstacle	41	53	22	28	15	19
There are conflicts between the objectives of central admissions and other departments	42	54	21	27	15	19
There is a tendency to see students own lack of success as their responsibility	61	78	7	9	10	13

Likewise, there are contrasts of views on the difficulty of addressing inequalities (62% agreement), and the tendency to see students' lack of success as their responsibility (78%). Several other responses stand out in these results: 81% believe there is a lack of staff awareness, 77% that there is a lack of staff training/support, and 86% that there is a lack of ownership of the issues.

There is clear agreement between the stakeholder and the institutional views on only one question: 86% of stakeholders and 68% of HE providers believe that there is uncertainty about how to address inequalities and a lack of examples of good practice.

Table A4: why HEIs don't target, comparison between responses



Institutional responses

Institutional respondents were also asked if they had experienced any other kinds of obstacles in addressing ethnic inequalities relating to student access, retention, attainment or progression.

Just under a half of the respondents said they experienced additional obstacles not already listed above. Some of these responses were elaborations of obstacles they had already listed. Of those who identified new obstacles, problems with **data** was the most common, with five respondents citing problems with collection and analysis, for example “Data analysis made difficult through the inadequate collation of data because of **restrictive software**”; “**Reliable baseline data** from the general population at local or regional levels; **Having reliable robust data**, having funds to be able to run a more thorough project would be really useful for us”; “One of the biggest issues for us is the low numbers of BME students, this can make useful **data difficult to interpret** and show improvements”; and “**Data on ethnicity is not provided to institutions by UCAS** at the point of application, only at the end of the cycle. This makes it difficult to identify applicants who may be eligible for these scholarships or other similar initiatives”.

Geographic location was mentioned by three respondents, for example: “[This] makes it more difficult for us to recruit an ethnically diverse student population both in terms of logistics (long-term outreach at a distance is challenging) and student motivation to study here (lack of knowledge, family support, and feeling out of place)”. **Lack of BAME staff** was cited as an obstacle by three respondents. One of these wrote: “Islamophobia and the general avoidance of discussing why BME students underperform amongst predominantly white staff teams and senior management”.

One respondent focused on lack of guidance relating to ethnicity targeting: “Ethics/issues relating to targeting /identification of students for particular interventions either based on ethnicity or other characteristics. This is a recurring dilemma, with little guidance”; and two responses cited the **lack of departmental or unit collaboration**:

“The biggest obstacle is addressing the lack of departmental collaboration and opening up a space where academics and students can work together across the university and share ideas”.

‘Support’ for academic development is defined by professional services who deliver this ‘service’ and address deficit with generic support at a distance from the subject, rather than by academics who tend to focus on more proactive developmental advice naturally focused on the discipline.

The institutional respondents were also asked, “Thinking outside of your own institution, what do you think is the biggest obstacle facing the higher education sector in addressing ethnic inequalities?”

Some obstacles were repeated such as, “The provision of study support centrally (removing it from academics and disciplines) is problematic across the sector”. Staffing was a repeated concern: “White academics teaching a white curriculum to a diverse student body, and a poor pipeline of BME academics coming through the system”. And there were some further

responses similar or identical to those in the pre-given list. But there were also obstacles not already mentioned; chief amongst these was the lack of adequate finance, and this was mentioned frequently for its impact on students and access to education, as illustrated by the following quotations:

Fees are not the issue but money to live on is a major impediment to study

Specifically for conservatoires, cuts to funding for good quality music provision from a young age in state schools means that potential applicants from a broad variety of backgrounds are becoming less and less likely to come through to HE. This cannot be rectified by outreach activities at 16 or 17; music tuition must begin young to reach a suitable standard for admission. Also some cultures are more likely to not consider music to be a "proper profession" and young people are pushed towards law, medicine, accountancy etc., just treating music as a hobby.

In conclusion, institutional respondents' comments on the barriers to addressing ethnic inequalities tended to focus predominantly on structural issues: lack of finance, poor data, pressure of league tables, conflicts of objectives between central admissions and other departments, and insufficient evidence and training.

Stakeholder responses

Stakeholder responses when asked a near identical question were more likely to focus on issues relating to racism or staffing but also included institutional policies and interventions, lack of knowledge and poor use of data. These are summarised below.

A recurring theme in stakeholder responses was that **racism and discrimination** was not discussed in HE, not discussed at the necessary levels, and therefore not addressed. The following quote provides an example of the frustrations expressed by respondents to this survey:

"There can be a lack of belief that it is truly race that is the differential factor to success. It is tended to be shifted onto other characteristics, such as class or entry qualifications. There can also be a lack of data or confusion about data. I think there is also the issue that people are very defensive when talking about race and believe that we live in a post-racial society".

There were a great deal of other responses raising the issue of racism and it is important to share those here. These included mention of discrimination against black or minority ethnic academics; racial micro-aggressions; lack of institutional and individual willingness to discuss race/racism and high levels of institutional and individual defensiveness around racial inequalities; unwillingness to discuss structural and other forms of racism with students; a feeling that issues around racism are sidestepped/ignored to avoid damage to institutional reputation; lack of recognition of white privilege; colour blindness; belief/assertion that the institution is 'post-racial', a frustration that white academics are complicit in racism through omission, ignorance, or apathy. Shifting blame and responsibility on to 'the other' was mentioned and increase in securitisation and limitation of speech on campuses which was argued was creating a hostile climate for many students.

Stakeholder responses also concentrated on the issue of **leadership**. Responses pointed to the low number of black academics and/or BAME senior managers (policy makers), and what was described as a lack of diverse and critical minds in leadership positions. There was concern that staff advocates for radical action are seen as trouble makers and thus unsupported, and that BAME students raising challenges are regarded as trouble-makers, or as provocative or aggressive and thus unsupported. Other responses mentioned superficial equality training which lacks in reflexivity; lack of enforcement of mandatory equality training; lack of status given to equity research or practice and lack of institutional and individual confidence to discuss race/racism; lack of open and honest discussion about race.

Connected to leadership, a further set of comments focused on **institutional policies**. It was argued that there is a lack of effective mechanisms to capture disclosures of implicit racial bias and/or discrimination; lack of confidence or willingness to deal with disclosures; lack of effective policies to manage racism and/or support those who have been treated in racist ways (whilst equity policies that do exist may be ignored or overlooked), and a concern around unconscious (or conscious) bias in admissions.

Responses to the question on **targeting** admitted confusion and a lack of understanding of what targeting is and, in particular, the belief that targeting and/or positive action is illegal. There was also concern that targeting will single out students as being 'deficit', and a belief (without an evidence base) that students do not want to be 'targeted'.

With respect to **data and information** about variations in access to, and progression through, a HE provider for under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic groups, responses concentrated on what was described as a lack of data or confusion about data sharing. These included a lack of institutional capacity to utilise and share data effectively; lack of sharing of other information about students especially prior to, and at the point of, entry; and an unwillingness by senior leaders (or those with ready access to data) to discuss data with students and staff. Within the concern about a lack of data, some stakeholders mentioned the **student demographics** and the challenges of small numbers of students from BAME backgrounds in general and from specific ethnic backgrounds in particular. There was a concern that 'close up' data analysis would reveal students' identities, and – a repeated theme – that other widening participation metrics (such as socio-economic background) are seen as of more importance.

Commenting on **interventions** in place that do not or had not worked in the past, respondents criticised the perpetuation of deficit models with interventions built on racist stereotypes; lack of acceptance that the causes of inequalities relate to race; and small scale interventions which focus solely on those policies and practice easiest to address. Respondents also criticised that interventions that were not joined up and/or part of a systematic institutional plan to address inequalities and interventions led by individuals with personal commitments but which then disappear when the person moves on. Short term funding, which focuses largely on access, was mentioned as was the absence of quotas of staff and students from under-represented backgrounds.

A final set of comments related to **institutional climate and pedagogy**. It was argued there was a lack of diversity in the curriculum; under-resourcing of pedagogic development; lack of integration of equality concepts in curriculum design; lack of

diversity specialists/experts teaching in HE; Eurocentric curriculum and environment and (mostly) white lecturers; lack of meaningful involvement of students for example in curriculum design and departmental/course review; lack of support to develop students' sense of belonging and a lack of appropriate support and advice on options for further study and employment.

Surveys

The following are copies of the two surveys used in the research: the institutional survey and the stakeholder survey.

Institutional Survey

Welcome to the ethnicity targeting, widening participation and student success survey
This survey is run by the **Higher Education Academy** and **Runnymede Trust** to ask about your university or college's targeting of students from under-represented, and/or disadvantaged, ethnic backgrounds in widening participation and student success.

We want to hear if your institution has interventions or practices that

1. **target** (directly or indirectly) disadvantaged, and/or under-represented, ethnic groups and
2. have **evidence** of successful impact or outcomes.

The sort of interventions we want to hear about are interventions to either widen **access**, improve **retention** rates, close **attainment** gaps, or support **progression** to further study or employment.

Completing the Survey and Data Protection

All data collected in this survey will be held securely. Cookies and personal data stored by your web browser are not used in this survey.

When reporting results no individuals or institution will be identified, nor any individuals or institution identified by implication. The exception to this is if we wish to include your intervention in the case studies in our final report. We will only do so with your permission.

At the end of the survey you will be asked to provide your contact details. Any details you give will be held securely and only used to contact you for the purpose stated.

The survey is composed of 15 questions and can be saved part way through. Most questions are very short. Note that once you have clicked on the Continue button you cannot return to review or amend that page.

1. What is the name of your university or college
2. What is the role of the person completing the survey (e.g. Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Senior leader, Programme leader, Student leader)
3. Thinking about all of the interventions at your university or college that target (directly or indirectly) students from under-represented, and/or disadvantaged,

ethnic backgrounds, which of the following are your interventions mainly directed at? Try to select only one answer but select more than one if you need to.

- Student access
- Student retention
- Student attainment or closing attainment gaps
- Student progression to further study or employment
- Other [If you selected Other, please specify]

Thinking about your interventions that **target** (directly or indirectly) students from under-represented, and/or disadvantaged, ethnic backgrounds, the following questions will ask about your **most successful** intervention

4. Thinking about your most successful intervention, which of the following is your intervention chiefly addressed at? Try to select only one, but select more than one if you need to.

- Student access
- Student retention
- Attainment or closing attainment gaps
- Progression to further study or employment
- Other [If you selected Other, please specify]

5. Which ethnic group does (or did) your intervention chiefly target? (If more than one group, select all that apply)

- White
- White: Gypsy or Traveller
- Black or Black British: Caribbean
- Black or Black British: African
- Any other Black background
- Asian or Asian British: Indian
- Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- Mixed: White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed: White and Black African
- Mixed: White and Asian
- Mixed: Any other Mixed background
- Arab
- Any other ethnic background [If you selected Other, please specify]

6. Thinking of the specific ethnic group(s) you targeted, did your intervention take into account another student category or (cross-cutting) disadvantage? Please select all that apply from the list below

- Gender
- Low income
- Religion
- Disability
- Carer
- Care-leaver

- Mature
 - Part-time
 - People estranged from their family
 - Refugees
 - People with mental health problems, specific learning difficulties and/or who are on the autism spectrum
 - Children from military families
 - Other [If you selected Other, please specify]
7. Please describe your intervention in the space provided below. (There is no word limit).
 8. Please describe the evidence you are using to assess your intervention's success, or the evidence you are currently gathering or planning to gather. (There is no word limit).
 9. In a few sentences, please tell us how this intervention came about and what, in your opinion, was the chief factor (or factors) enabling you to implement it.

Obstacles and challenges to ethnicity targeting

There is a range of ethnic inequalities relating to a student's journey to and through higher education. Universities can face obstacles in how they address these.

Please be as honest as you can with your answers to the following question. We remind you that answers are anonymised for reporting purposes.

10. From your institution's experience of the obstacles in addressing ethnic inequalities across the student lifecycle, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

[Note - The following response options were given: strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree or disagree; agree; strongly agree]

- The inequalities are not enough of an institutional priority
 - The inequalities are not enough of a departmental/local priority
 - The inequalities are considered too difficult to address
 - There is uncertainty as to how to address the inequalities/lack of examples of good practices
 - There is a lack of staff awareness
 - There is a lack of staff training/support
 - We have tried previous interventions without success
 - There is a lack of evidence of what works
 - There is a lack of ownership of the 'issues'
 - The pressure of league tables are an obstacle
 - There are conflicts between the objectives of central admissions and other departments
 - There is a tendency to see students own lack of success as their responsibility
11. Have you experienced any other kinds of obstacles in addressing ethnic inequalities relating to student access, retention, attainment or progression that are not listed above? Please tell us about them

12. Thinking outside of your own institution, what do you think is the biggest obstacle facing the higher education sector in addressing ethnic inequalities?
13. We may wish to select your intervention as a case-study in our project report. We will only do so in consultation with you. We would be grateful if you can provide a follow-up email address
14. This survey has asked about your most successful intervention. If you have another successful intervention that you would have wished to include, please tell us about it in one or two sentences, and we will be in touch.
15. Is there anything else you want to add?

There are no further questions. Please click 'Finish' to submit your responses

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.

Stakeholder Survey

Ethnicity targeting - Interventions and obstacles

Welcome to the ethnicity targeting, interventions and obstacles survey

The **Higher Education Academy** and **Runnymede Trust** have been asking universities and colleges about their work in addressing ethnic inequalities in higher education and specifically about interventions that target students from under-represented and/or disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds.

We now want to get the views of broader stakeholders who can add to our understanding of the obstacles universities and colleges face and the possible solutions.

The survey is composed of 7 questions and it should take only 15 minutes to complete.

Completing the Survey and Data Protection

All data collected in this survey will be held securely. Cookies and personal data stored by your web browser are not used in this survey.

When reporting results no individuals or institution will be identified, nor any individuals or institution identified by implication. At the end of the survey you will be asked to provide your contact details. Any details you choose to provide will be held securely and only used to contact you for the purpose stated.

About you

1. In terms of responding to this survey, how would you best describe yourself?
 - Community or third-sector organisation (or member of)
 - Student representative
 - Policy expert or policy maker
 - Academic
 - Student

- Other [If you selected Other, please specify]

There is a range of ethnic inequalities relating to a student's journey to and through higher education. Universities and colleges can face obstacles in how they address these. The following questions seek your views on those obstacles that might account for lack of institutional progress in addressing persisting ethnic inequalities.

2. From your understanding of the obstacles universities and colleges face in addressing ethnic inequalities across the student lifecycle, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

[Note - The following response options were given: strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree or disagree; agree; strongly agree]

- The inequalities are not enough of an institutional priority
- The inequalities are not enough of a departmental priority
- The inequalities are considered too difficult to address
- There is uncertainty as to how to address the inequalities/lack of examples of good practices
- There is a lack of staff awareness
- There is a lack of staff training/support
- Previous interventions have been unsuccessful
- There is a lack of evidence of what works
- There is a lack of ownership of the 'issues'
- The pressure of league tables is an obstacle
- There are conflicts between the objectives of the university/college's central admissions and other departments
- There is a tendency to see students' own lack of success as their responsibility

3. Do universities/colleges face other kinds of obstacles in addressing ethnic inequalities across the student lifecycle that are not listed above? We are interested in those relating broadly to student access, retention, attainment gaps, or progression to further study or employment. Please comment briefly below.

4. Many universities/colleges are engaged in interventions aimed at students from under- represented, and/or disadvantaged, ethnic backgrounds. Please briefly comment upon a solution or approach that you believe would make a difference if adopted in higher education, or one that is already making a difference.

5. Some universities/colleges aim their interventions at black and minority ethnic groups as a broad category, others target (directly or indirectly) a specific ethnic group. Do you have any comment or advice on overcoming the challenges of targeting a specific ethnic group? Please comment briefly below.

6. Would you be willing to help the HEA and Runnymede further in this work? We may wish to ask further questions of some respondents. If you are happy to be contacted, please provide a follow-up email address

7. Is there anything else you want to add?

There are no further questions. Please click 'Finish' to submit your responses

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix B: Positive Action Approaches

Professor Chantal Davies at the University of Chester has outlined a set of questions which HE providers can use to frame positive action (PA) approaches to interventions.

- Is there a particular **need**, under-representation or disadvantage among a group that the HEI wishes to address?
- What is the **evidence** of that need, under-representation or disadvantage?
- What is the **cause** of that need, under-representation or disadvantage?
- How will the measure **address** the need, under-representation or disadvantage?
- Are any other groups disadvantaged by the introduction of the measure and if so who? If so, what plans are in place to **alleviate** negative impacts?
- Is there another, more effective (or less adverse to other groups), way for the HEI to address that need, disadvantage or under-representation (i.e. **proportionality**)?
- For what period of time will the measure be in place? What arrangements are in place to **review** the impact of the measure?
- **Publish** rationale and details of measure and review mechanisms.

Of note, where HE providers are unsure about the use of positive action, they may find it helps to seek legal advice in order to build confidence, and to guide and support initiatives.

Appendix C: Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is a form of collaborative research, education and action which is used to gather information to use for social change. In particular, it involves people who are concerned or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it. Many of the interventions designed to address inequalities are developed by policy makers, academics or other practitioners in isolation from students, with assumptions made about which interventions will have most impact. Where students are involved it is often to give a perspective on approaches already being formulated or to provide feedback on those that have been implemented.

Unlike many other approaches PAR is driven by participants and based on their own concerns. It is therefore a form of action research which is built on research and action *with* people rather than simply *for* people. This means that the benefits of the action are more likely to come to the people directly affected. In addition, local knowledge is rarely the basis of research or policy, but PAR is built on democratic beliefs about knowledge, with beneficiaries deemed to have equitable knowledge about what is of importance and how any concerns can be addressed. The process of Planning, Action, Reflection, and Evaluation therefore involves collaboration at every stage, with equitable sharing of power.

Durham University offers a very helpful guide on PAR and how to develop a PAR approach: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/beacon/PARtoolkit.pdf>

Appendix D: Community Cultural Wealth approaches

Written by Jacqueline Stevenson

Yosso conceptualizes community cultural wealth as a critical race theory (CRT) challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital. Her model identifies six types of capital that can be used to frame or reflect on relationships and interactions with students, to act as a corrective to more commonly held deficit models. Using the reflective questions can help identify what is actually known about our minority ethnic students or where interventions may be based on flawed perceptions.³⁹

Aspirational capital

- What do we know of the aspirations, inspirations and expectations of students from different ethnic groups? What assumptions do we have about them?
- In what ways can we recognise and acknowledge the aspirations/expectations of our students?
- What future 'possible selves'⁴⁰ do our students conceptualise? How can we enable these imaginings to have more salience and to become more elaborated?
- How can we help students to develop 'road maps' enabling them to link concrete action in the present with their desired future selves?

Linguistic capital

- Do we value the linguistic capital students may bring to the classroom or other spaces? And do we even recognise it exists?
- How can we recognise and include multiple forms of linguistic capital in our practices?
- What forms of language do we use in our institutions? Does it work to marginalise or silence some of our students?
- Are our curricular practices dominated by Eurocentric voices? How can we decolonise our teaching and learning practices so that we recognise and respect other voices?
- What opportunities do we give to students to tell their stories? How do we include narrative and storytelling in our practices? How do we help our students narrate their stories of success, as well as their struggles and challenges?

Familial capital

- Do we recognise the importance of family to students? What assumptions do we make about their families? How do we create environments that can recognise or include families?
- Do our practices alienate and disenfranchise certain groups? Do we know?
- Do our students feel they belong to our community? Do we know what belonging looks and feels like to all our students?
- How do we create a climate that builds care and compassion towards others?

³⁹ See Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1361332052000341006>) and Angela Locke's development of this work (see

<https://www.bttop.org/sites/default/files/public/SUMMARY%20OF%20YOSSO.docx>

⁴⁰ 'The ideal selves that we would very much like to become . . . the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming'. (p. 954); Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986) Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41: 954–969.

Social capital

- Do we recognise the different forms of capital our students possess or do we position them as deficits?
- What assumptions do we make about students' social connections? How do we help students stay connected to the communities and individuals instrumental in their previous educational success?
- How do we support the building of new networks? How do we engage with staff about the types of support successful students need?
- To what extent, and how, do we acknowledge other aspects of the student's identity and experience - their gender, class, disabilities/abilities, sexual orientation, religion etc. - and understand how these interact and intersect to influence their experiences and approaches - potentially positively as well as negatively?
- To what extent do we understand the differences between students of a specific ethnic group and do not assume that all share the same experiences based on their ethnicity?
- Are we aware of and value the commonalities and differences between students of all different backgrounds - which may or may not relate to race/ethnicity?
- To what extent does our teaching provide opportunities for students to explore these commonalities and differences of experience and perspective - different points of connection - to enable more nuanced, deeper, and richer understandings of each other and the worlds we inhabit?
- How aware are we of our assumptions, prejudices and unconscious biases in relation to all aspects of social difference? How willing are we to challenge ourselves and each other about different forms of privilege and oppressive practice?
- What can we do to raise our awareness and understanding of students from groups more dissimilar to our own?

Navigational capital

- How do we help students navigate our institutions? What are the practices that are exclusionary for some of our students and how can we change them?
- How willing are we to recognise that our institutions may not be supportive of some students? Or to be actively hostile to others?
- How willing are we to reflect on the practices that need to change? How willing are we to fight to change them?
- Do we recognise and accept the micro-aggressions of further or higher education in our own practices? How can we challenge these and are we even willing to?

Resistance capital

- Do we recognise the resilience of our students? How do we enable others to re/consider this resilience in non-harmful ways? How can we draw on these resources in the classroom?
- Do our practices perpetuate hegemonic ways of being and doing things? How willing are we to change our practices? Or relinquish power?
- Do we draw on 'non-western' and non-white forms of knowledge in our teaching? In what ways can we revise our curricula to ensure we offer 'decolonised' approaches to our teaching and assessments?

Appendix E: Terminology

In the UK, the umbrella term ‘black and minority ethnic’ (BME or less often BaME) or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) are the terms most commonly used to describe all those who are non-white British, and thus may also include those who describe themselves as ‘white other’. Key higher education (HE) policy-making organisations including the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office For Fair Access (OFFA) (now together the Office for Students), the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (now together⁴¹, Advance HE) use the acronym BME whilst simultaneously recognising the problematic nature of using a reductionist term to describe a population that is highly diverse not just in terms of ethnic or racial background but also by dint of socio-economic status, religion and gender amongst others⁴².

Alternative definitions, used in other contexts, are:

- **Minority ethnic:** used as a corrective to the term ethnic minority as the latter suggests that minority status arise from simply being from an ethnic background rather than from the low value accorded to any particular ethnic group
- **Minoritised ethnic people:** used by academics amongst others to further emphasise that minority status is arrived at through particular process of discrimination, racism or exclusion. This can particularly be the case where students are studying in HEIs where non-white students are either in the majority, or are a large cohort, yet the policies and practices of the institution remain largely ‘white’. Used by a number of academics including Carlton Howson⁴³.
- **People of color or people of colour:** the category was formed in the late 1970s as a purposeful claim to a common group identity, in particular as a positive alternative to ‘non-white’, which, it was argued, perpetuates a deficit account of other races. The term was also adopted as a move to develop understandings of race beyond the black-white binary. The term ‘people of color/people of colour’ encompasses all categories of people who do not identify as ‘white’. Sara Ahmed, the British-Australian scholar uses the term people of color in her writing as do a number of other academic⁴⁴.

Terminology used in the data

The majority of the respondents to our institutional survey used the term **BME or BaME** (Black and Minority Ethnic), **or BAME** (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) with others using the term ethnic minority or less frequently minority ethnic. The term BME was frequently used even when a respondent was subsequently talking about a specific ethnic subgroup.

As Trevor Phillips, former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality has argued however, the term BME exists purely ‘to tidy away the messy jumble of real human beings

41 Along with Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

42 Singh, G. (2011) A synthesis of research evidence. Black and minority ethnic (BME) students’ participation in higher education: improving retention and success. York: HEA. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/bme_synthesis_final.pdf

43 <http://dmu.academia.edu/CHowson>

44 <https://www.saranahmed.com/>

who share only one characteristic – that they don't have white skin' (reported in *The Times*, 2015⁴⁵).

A BAME mentoring programme for pupils in Year 11 at a local secondary school. This is an identity match programme where BAME secondary school pupils are matched with BAME university students. Year 11 pupils are paired with BAME students....This programme has been designed to be mutually beneficial for both BAME school pupils and BAME university students [Institutional Respondent].

Of note, many of the stakeholder respondents used the term '**people of color**' or '**people of colour**'.

White people are in charge of designing research and interventions about attainment gaps and employability issues. Invariably, this leads to students of colour being labelled as deficient or difficult - they are objectified as research studies and the sad thing is that students of colour internalise this racist discrimination. Getting the university to talk about race openly and honestly is a huge obstacle. People of colour - students and staff - are just too scared to say anything in case they get into trouble. Or, they adopt a colonial/white privilege framework that reproduces anti-blackness.

Regardless of terminology used, however, the stakeholder respondents as well as those who attended the Summit were clear that terminology and language to be used institutionally should be discussed with students from minority ethnic groups and if the term BME or BAME was used it should be made clear why this term was being adopted.

Positive action and targeting requires a sound evidence base, and understanding of racial inequality requires that groups are not homogenised. We must disaggregate and take an intersectional approach (including other identity characteristics) to make smart and effective decisions around under-representation of minority ethnic groups. That said, at times certain actions and conversations will find commonalities between groups, particularly around combatting 'whiteness' and 'white privilege'. We would advise that specific actions and data analysis are as specific as possible, but that larger campaigns, awareness raising and training (as supporting activities) may find wider engagement with 'people of colour' or political 'Blackness' (see NUS) or other preferred self definitions, will be important.

In addition, 'whilst racial [or ethnic⁴⁶] categorising is useful for assigning data and as a basis of measurement, it often limits the reader's ability to compare a range of categories and can be seen to neglect factors such as religion, culture and/or language. These other facets of an individual's identity can play a major role in understanding experiences' (Elevations Networks Trust, 2012: 9⁴⁷).

45 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/22/black-asian-minority-ethnic-bame-bme-trevor-phillips-racial-minorities>

46 Authors' addition

47 Elevation Networks Trust (2012) Race to the Top. The Experience of Black Students in Higher Education. Available at:

[https://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Race%2520to%2520the%2520Top%2520-%2520Bow%2520Group%2520-%2520Elevation%2520Networks%2520\(April%25202012\)_0.pdf](https://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Race%2520to%2520the%2520Top%2520-%2520Bow%2520Group%2520-%2520Elevation%2520Networks%2520(April%25202012)_0.pdf)

Elevation Networks Trust (2012)

Race to the Top. The Experience of Black Students in Higher Education. Available at:

[https://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Race%2520to%2520the%2520Top%2520-%2520Bow%2520Group%2520-%2520Elevation%2520Networks%2520\(April%25202012\)_0.pdf](https://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Race%2520to%2520the%2520Top%2520-%2520Bow%2520Group%2520-%2520Elevation%2520Networks%2520(April%25202012)_0.pdf)

Throughout this report we have therefore grappled with how to frame our discussion in ways which recognise the perils of homogenising a diverse group - which we have criticised as problematic - whilst making the report readable. In their recent articles for the BBC News⁴⁸ and Shades of Noir,⁴⁹ Rajdeep Sandhu and Rayvonn Shaleigha D'Clark respectively describe the distaste felt by many to the use of BME and BAME. As D'Clark notes (2018, n.p.):

Once upon a time, a longitudinal study assessing the attainment outcomes for (HE) higher education black, brown and Asian students came to consequently define them as BAME. Why because their numbers so devastatingly low that the only way to produce any substantial outcomes was to bring all of these groups together. Similarly, the commonality in all being non-white meant that this act seemed like good thing to do.

This issue underlies the need for this research and the continued lack of disaggregation in institutions is reflected in our findings. It still leaves us needing to find a way to describe our research. Ultimately, and unsatisfactorily, we have used the terms BAME and/or minority ethnic students, except where an alternative term has been explicitly used by respondents or contributors. However we recognise this remains problematic, including the fact that in some institutions these students are in the majority and not the minority.

We would therefore welcome a national debate on terminology.

op%2520-%2520Bow%2520Group%2520-%2520Elevation%2520Networks%2520(April%25202012)_0.pdf
48 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-43831279>
49 <http://shadesofnoir.org.uk/b-a-m-e-is-l-a-m-e/>

Appendix F: Resources and links

Targeted local employment and economic growth interventions

- West Midlands - Inclusive growth in the West Midlands: an agenda for the new Mayor <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/inclusive-growth-west-midlands-agenda-new-mayor>
- Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) programme - <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/evaluation-partners-outreach-ethnic-minorities-poem-final-report>

Community-based interventions

- WIG (cross-sector independent charity and membership organisation) Diversity and Inclusion Network and programme - provides peer support, challenge and insights for professionals across their membership <https://www.wig.co.uk/networking-events/networks/diversity-inclusion-network.html>
- Royal Court Theatre's Critical Mass scheme (2004) intended to build a 'critical mass' of playwrights from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, now extended to other theatres <https://royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/critical-mass-2/> <http://www.belgrade.co.uk/news-and-blogs/blogs/championing-new-voices-in-british-theatre-submissi/>
- Media and creative industries diversity programmes - helping young people from black, Asian and other non-white minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds secure paid training opportunities in creative companies, and supporting them into full-time employment: <https://creativeaccess.org.uk/>
- The Inspire programme, part funded by Arts Council England (2009) - aimed at attracting more BAME curators in museums and galleries through two-year work placement opportunities <https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/inspire/>
- Arts Council's Change Makers leadership and development programme - increasing the diversity of senior leadership in art and culture by targeting the development of BAME and/or disabled leaders: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/change-makers>
- PwC Diversity Career Mentoring programme - to provide role models and support for university students/employees from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds <https://qmplus.qmul.ac.uk/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=101434>
- Civil Service Fast Stream Summer Diversity internship programme - for students from diverse backgrounds in their final two years at university: <https://www.faststream.gov.uk/summer-diversity-internship-programme/>
- Guardian Newspapers BAME Positive Action scheme - 2-3 week summer placements for BAME groups: <https://workforus.theguardian.com/entry-level-opportunities/positive-action-scheme/>
- Example of Police force positive action scheme: <https://www.staffordshire.police.uk/positiveaction>
- Ethnic Jobsite - offers recruitment advertisers opportunities to target BAME candidates to bridge the gap between employers and ethnic minorities in the UK <https://www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk/>

Appendix G: Further case studies

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the writing of these case studies from each of the HE providers showcased below.

The following case studies draw on our overarching principles. They reflect the focus of interventions in that access to HE is overly represented. In addition we were unable to identify case studies relating to targeted interventions in relation to progression from HE although there are a small number of examples of emerging good practice across the sector which will hopefully be reported on over time.

Access

The Larkia project at Leeds Beckett University

Keys to success

- Long term nature of the project - now in its 26th year - with ongoing funding from the institution as well as institutional commitment to sustainability
- Strong but flexible project leadership and management which has allowed the project to evolve over time
- Long term work with a small number of schools enabling trust to be built up over time
- A two day residential which meets the social and cultural needs and requirements of the participants and is regarded as a 'safe' environment
- Keeping the project small and focused despite high demand

The intervention

The Larkia project⁵⁰, funded using 'OFFA-countable' access agreement expenditure, is a two-night residential event which enables girls from years 10 and 11 from a South Asian background to find out more about HE. The programme features interactive subject workshops, motivational speakers, creative technology and team-building events. The programme helps students by increasing their confidence and self-belief, strengthened by the support of Student Ambassadors, who act as role models and mentors.

The University uses schools-based data to identify target schools, some of which have over 90% of their pupils from South Asian backgrounds. The schools also meet other key widening-participation criteria such as being in a low participation or low income neighbourhoods. The project team work with just 5-6 schools, and around 35 girls in one given year enabling them to build up trust and to manage parental concerns 'close up'. Undergraduate students go into the schools to talk to the students; they, and the project team, also talk to parents if required and/or send out further information.

The project is **evaluated** through pre- and post- intervention questionnaires. Questionnaires identify base levels of knowledge of HE, and of Leeds Beckett University in particular. These levels increased significantly after the event. There was also evidence

⁵⁰ <http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/schoolsandcolleges/our-pre-16-programmes-and-support/larkia/>

to support respondents' increased motivation and drive to progress in their chosen fields. Confidence levels about accessing HE, the primary remit of the project, increased from 42% to 87%. Teacher and parents' focus groups at the end of the residential programme are used to consolidate the partnership with key stakeholders. Attempts have been made to use The Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) but as numbers of participants are so small the data has not been useful.

The intervention faces a number of **barriers**: whilst the results of the evaluation are invariably positive many of the girls subsequently choose to attend other HE providers due to the sorts of courses offered or geographical location. As it stands the university remains committed to working with those from local communities and different ethnic backgrounds. However as data on its feeder schools improve, the focus of the project may shift to supporting girls from feeder schools rather than schools selected solely on the basis of their ethnic profile.

The **success** of the intervention comes from the strong, long-term relationships built up with the schools and the trust the team have built up with both the schools and parents. Support also comes from the university's institutional commitment to enhancing its recruitment of those from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In addition the project has evolved over time to meet the needs of its target group: it has moved from being an arts-based project run with an external organisation to one which focuses on developing young people's understanding of the breadth of subjects on offer in HE as well as how different subjects can lead to different careers. This shift in focus has been imperative in meeting the actual needs of this group who are, largely, already highly aspirational. It has also moved from being non-residential to residential offering a greater opportunity for social events and for the development of soft skills, such as confidence building.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- The need to offer specific subject awareness sessions to help inform Key Stage 5 choices
- The need to broaden understanding of different sorts of courses available and the range of jobs that can result from different sorts of degrees; the employability element of the intervention is crucial
- That the trust, of schools and parents, has to be earned and built up over time and that this has to be done 'close up' and with sensitivity
- The importance of having student ambassadors, or other people associated with the scheme, from similar backgrounds as the targeted community

Promoting potential at The London School of Economics and Political Science [LSE]

Keys to success

- The importance of establishing depth and quality of relationships with secondary schools. This is a key enabling factor to successful scheme start-up and progress
- Involving parents/carers in the application process, and throughout the scheme. This is vital to ongoing engagement during the scheme and beyond.

The intervention

Promoting Potential is a programme running since 2011-12 which explicitly targets Black African and Caribbean boys to support their access to HE. The programme works with students to further develop subject knowledge and knowledge of university; to recognise and feel confident in academic, social and personal abilities; and to feel empowered to make and defend decisions about higher education and the future.

Promoting Potential involves a three day Spring School followed by two 'top-up' days in August and October for cohorts of approximately 50 students. The programme of activity combines a development of subject knowledge, academic skills, confidence, motivation, and aspiration. Research shows that all of these increase opportunities for under-represented pupils to access higher education and progress across the student lifecycle. Black African and Caribbean boys are particularly under-represented in higher education and the LSE Promoting Potential scheme specifically targets this student group via schools in surrounding boroughs in London. In recruiting these participants, the scheme gives particular consideration to students who are eligible for free school-meals; live in areas of low progression to university; are in care or have caring responsibilities; have a disability; have parents employed in low socio-economic categories; have parents/carers who are eligible for means tested benefits; or will be the first generation in their family to attend HE.

Students take part in a range of social-science lectures and workshops designed to introduce them to the wide range of subjects they could study at an institution like LSE, focussing specifically on the subjects they wouldn't ordinarily study pre-GCSE. Complementing the academic content of the programme, students undertake skills development sessions including networking and public speaking workshops. This is supported by motivational lectures focussing on achievements of key figures in black history and the opportunity to interact with various LSE Students' Union (LSEU) student societies including a networking event with the LSE African Caribbean Society. Another key element of the programme is a half day 'subject in action' off-site visit where students spend an afternoon experiencing the world of work and implementing their networking training. Previous visits have included Barclays Bank, Canary Wharf London and Reed Smith, a law firm in the City of London. On the final day of the Spring School, and in preparation for the future top-up days, students set themselves goals for the next three months which they write on a postcard. The postcards are then sent back to the students in advance of the top-up day.

Evaluation comprised surveys, which are used at each stage of the intervention to track participants' knowledge and understanding of key terms associated with university, whether they have undertaken certain activities such as talking to parents and teachers about their future, researching universities or courses, and their attitudes towards university and the social sciences. Tracking is then used to establish whether participants on Promoting Potential subsequently participate on other LSE widening participation schemes or apply to LSE. Both the surveys and tracking activity provide evidence of a high level of success for the programme in terms of building students' awareness and knowledge of university: 85% of students increased their understanding of university teaching and student life through participation on the Spring School, and 75% report that they've taken steps to prepare for university after participating on the scheme. The

availability of HEAT (the Higher Education Access Tracker) will now enable LSE to track participants' eventual journeys into HE, as well as looking at whether they participate on other universities' pre-entry activities after taking part in Promoting Potential.

One of the **successes** of the intervention is that throughout the scheme, students are introduced to HE both formally and informally through engagement with undergraduate student ambassadors who share their experiences, as well as through presentations which provide information about university more generally.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- The importance of ensuring the capture and use of learning from the early iterations of an intervention. This is key to improving programme design
- The need for persistent reviews of evaluation mechanisms and use of high level impact indicators is key to the sustainability of a scheme
- The importance of formalised KPIs, such as written access agreement milestones, which typically attract senior institutional support and enable the work to gain traction.

Fashion Outreach Project at Liverpool John Moores University

Keys to success

- Collaboration between the central outreach team and academic faculty which utilised the expertise and experience of both groups to address and understand students' needs
- Focus placed on addressing the under-representation of BAME students within a particular course through subject-specific intervention
- Focus on the development of practical skills through an outcomes-based intervention which provided students with an accurate and authentic representation of studying Fashion at university

The intervention

Drawing upon the expertise and experience of the Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) Fashion programme and the LJMU Outreach Team, the Fashion Outreach Project was a 6-week collaborative project that targeted local Year 12 BAME⁵¹ students with an interest in studying Fashion. The programme was developed to better understand and help address the specific under-representation of BAME students within the university's Fashion department, reflecting a sector-wide concern with the under-representation of Black and Asian students in the arts in general⁵². The programme aimed to provide students with an insight into studying Fashion at undergraduate level whilst also developing some of the practical skills needed to progress onto the subject at HE level. The project ran for three years, recruiting, on average, 11 students each year, approximately half of whom were BAME.

51 The term BME was chosen and used by Liverpool John Moores University.

52 See for example <http://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdIx0u7/The-more-colours-you-add-AccessHE-Creative-report.pdf>

In each session participants were mentored by academic staff and current LJMU students to learn about the theory and practical elements of the subject. Students either created an original garment for the project's final catwalk event or produced marketing materials and advertised the final show. The programme was delivered in the evenings from 4-6pm with transport provided by the university.

Those who attended a minimum of 90% of the sessions and successfully completed the programme were guaranteed an interview if they applied for the Fashion degree programme. Whilst not guaranteeing a place on the course, this gave students the opportunity to discuss their achievements and aspirations to study the subject at degree level, and gave credit to their commitment for engaging in the programme.

Pre- and post- event evaluation forms highlighted an increase in students' knowledge of HE, confidence and likelihood of applying to university. Across the project's three year duration, 35%-40% of participants applied to LJMU, with an enrolment rate of between 10% - 14%. One student obtained employment as a model following his participation in the programme.

The intervention faced a number of barriers. The demographic of the local area combined with the highly specific focus of the intervention was identified as a particular challenge to recruiting BAME participants. This issue was addressed by targeting schools with high proportions of BAME students. The after-school timing of the programme affected the attendance of some students due to conflicting social and extracurricular commitments. Delivering the project to younger students within school hours may resolve this challenge. The delivery of the project also relied on input from academics on top of their stipulated teaching hours and work commitments; this pressure impacted their ability to attend each week, resulting in their extra time being funded by the outreach team.

The **success** of the intervention came from the collaboration of academics and widening participation (WP) practitioners working together to address the under-representation of BAME students within a specific department through an intensive intervention. The small cohorts involved allowed for one-to-one support and engagement with staff and student ambassadors. The practical nature of the project also provided students with an authentic representation of the reality of studying Fashion at undergraduate level, helping them to ascertain whether a Fashion degree was an appropriate choice for them.

This model has recently been successfully replicated within the university's Dance department. To improve the project's sustainability and relieve pressure on academic staff, it is supported by current Dance students whose participation forms part of one of their academic modules.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- The need to be bold in attempting to redress the under-representation of BAME students within particular degree courses through subject-specific interventions even though this may mean working with small cohorts
- Providing students with a guaranteed interview following the successful completion of an intervention can help raise their confidence in applying to HE
- The need to embed the development and delivery of outreach activities, where feasible, into teaching activity in order to maximise the time and cost-effective use of staff, and utilise the expertise and experiences of current students

All Girls Can Project at Manchester Metropolitan University

Keys to success

- Focus placed on the intersection of gender and ethnicity: both desk research and focus groups had identified that South Asian girls face distinct challenges to entering HE compared to their male counterparts
- Working with internal and external stakeholders within the local community to inform the development of a locally relevant project
- Relatable staff and role models from within the South Asian community has allowed for effective and sensitive engagement with both students and parents/carers

The intervention

The *All Girls Can*⁵³ project is an aspiration-raising initiative targeting local Year 9 and 10 female students from South East Asian backgrounds. Drawing upon **research** findings from focus groups with current South Asian female undergraduates, the project has identified a number of specific challenges faced by young women from these communities in relation to entering HE, including religious, financial, cultural and community barriers. This research has informed the development of the project's two-stage **practical** intervention which aims to address specific barriers through 'myth-busting', providing relatable information and guidance (IAG) and relaying first-hand experiences about university to both students and their parents/carers.

Session 1 comprises a 2-hour school visit targeted at students; students share their 'Hopes and Fears' as well as their personal aspirations and concerns in relation to identified barriers. This is followed by an interactive discussion facilitated by Student Ambassadors; students then complete the *Hopes/Fears* activity again. Session 2 invites the students and their parents/carers for a full-day campus visit with activities and separate workshops for parents/carers. Parents/carers also complete the *Hopes/Fears Activity* to gain a better understanding of their attitudes towards HE.

53 <http://gmhigher.ac.uk/events/all-girls-can/>

Pre- and post- event **evaluation** forms as well as comparisons of students' answers from the two *Hopes/Fears Activity* sessions are used to measure changes in confidence and attitudes towards HE. Students' long-term outcomes are also monitored via the Higher Education Tracker Access Tracker (HEAT). The evaluation suggests that some girls feel cultural and family pressures to pursue certain vocational careers paths, but engaging with current students and alumni enables both girls and their parents to see the benefits of different paths.

The intervention faced a number of **barriers**. Some schools were initially uneasy over the ethnicity targeting as they believed it would marginalise South Asian girls, and exclude students from other backgrounds. This inspired the production of a short teachers' guide which outlines the specific barriers to entering HE faced by South Asian girls. Accessing and engaging parents has also been identified as a particular barrier and parents' evenings have been used to advise and support them.

The **success** of the intervention comes from the support of internal stakeholders including academics as well as guidance from local community organisations. As a local, British Pakistani Muslim woman, the Project Manager's insights into the community have helped to gain the trust of both students and parents/carers, particularly when addressing sensitive personal, cultural and religious concerns.

The project has recently successfully expanded under the university's National Collaborative Outreach Programme⁵⁴ (NCOP) partnership to work with students in the Bolton, Rochdale and Oldham areas, home to high numbers of the South Asian community.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- The need for relevant IAG resources and training for teachers and schools to raise awareness of the specific challenges faced by certain communities and help address concerns they may have over the use of targeting
- The need to provide separate IAG and interventions for parents/carers and to do so with tact and sensitivity
- The need for more diverse finance IAG for both students and parents to help address concerns within certain communities over loans (i.e. Shariah friendly provision)
- How working collaboratively with NCOPs can help expand the provision of small-scale projects to other geographical areas and ensure their long-term sustainability.
- The need for a diverse WP and outreach staff who can help engage a diverse range of students.

⁵⁴ HEFCE-funded programme which aims to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2020 <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/>

Keys to success

- Collaboration between institutional partners with each making different contributions
- Launching with a one day event to raise awareness and build contacts, relationships and commitment
- Focus on girls as experience from previous mixed events had indicated that boys tended to dominate activities and discussion.
- Focus on post-graduate employability not just access

The intervention

Using funding from HEFCE, as part of the former National Networks for Collaborative Outreach Study Higher and Oxford Brookes University ran a programme to improve the information and guidance about higher-level study for year 9 Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls in Oxford, Reading and High Wycombe.⁵⁵

The project ran for ten months and included both **research** (a literature review, analysis of data from the collaborating universities on their respective recruitment and retention barriers/issues, and new research gathered through interviews with current undergraduates from partner HEIs) and **practice**. The practical interventions included a one day conference (30 Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls attended the day) as well as a number of workshops focused on breaking down barriers such as concerns about moving away from home and parental concerns and pressures; as well as advice on making UCAS applications and on applying for student finance. The interactive sessions also involved five Pakistani and Bangladeshi professional women talking about their careers; activities (such as a talking fears game) and impartial careers advice including graduate job possibilities and opportunities.

Pre- and post- event **evaluation** forms captured aspirations and fears. Teachers at the one day event were also asked to complete evaluation forms about their perceptions of barriers faced by students and their thoughts about the event. A 2 minute film of the day was also made. The evaluation suggested that moving away from home (because of costs and commuting) was a key concern, but that the girls had positive associations with having a career, developing new skills and social aspects of university life.

The intervention faced a number of **barriers**: there was initial reluctance and sensitivity from one HE provider to share their ethnicity data due to small numbers. Transport was problematic due to the geographical area, with a need for coaches, parking etc. Some local schools had concerns about the ethnicity-targeting aspect of the project, so recruitment was challenging. Year 11 girls could not be included as planned because of GCSE pressure.

The **success** of the intervention came from the collaboration between different HE providers. Oxford Brookes was lead partner, coordinating and managing delivery of all elements; Buckingham New University gave significant input, hosting a one-day

⁵⁵ See legacy outputs here

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319123609/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nngo/find/>

conference and providing student ambassadors; University of Reading identified Pakistani academics for the careers talks. This partnership also meant that the HE providers avoided focussing on their own recruitment, allowing for joint, impartial collaboration.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- That any intervention needs to focus on actual and not perceived concerns - for example aspiration to access HE is not a concern for many South Asian girls but concerns about post-graduate employment are.
- The importance of raising issues of employment and careers with Year 9, if not earlier.
- The need to address schools' reservations about targeted interventions requires difficult conversations.
- The need to work with current undergraduates - exploring their experiences in order to identify how younger (school) students could be helped earlier.
- The need to take an even more nuanced approach: the intersection of class, culture and geography (rural/urban/location) are issues that often aren't addressed when targeting ethnic groups; parental background, education and employment can have a bigger impact on HE access, retention and progression than ethnicity *per se*. Bangladeshi (mainly London-based) and Pakistani (Northern England) groups are also highly diverse in profiles and backgrounds and this needs to be recognised when working with sub-groups.
- That parental concerns need to be addressed over time and not just in a one off event.

Retention and attainment

Writing it yourself at Sheffield Hallam University

Keys to success

- Holistic approach to writing development
- Project alert to the need to recognise students identities and that writing and language use are closely linked to students' sense of self
- Developing a sense of community, focused on purposeful shared work

The intervention

Academic writing is acknowledged as a challenge for many students. At university, voice - a form of self-expression and personal identity - is consistently subject to scrutiny and critique. Acquisition of disciplinary discourse and assimilation into a disciplinary community is consequently not straightforward for many students but occurs in a contested arena crowded with issues of belonging, identity and resistance.

The intervention therefore arose from a desire to support those students who need to develop independent judgement about their text and to develop productive study

practices. The project team wanted to make explicit the linguistic development required by a dissertation and model the practices required to develop clear, accurate, critical writing in a socially supportive environment; in particular the team wanted to avoid the delivery of a 'service' which addresses a 'deficit' through generic support at a distance from the subject, recognising that this can particularly disadvantage students from minority or excluded groups. Such approaches can also individualise the learning experience and blame the novice learner for their failures. Instead of reacting to individual problems in low scoring texts, the team wanted to embed activities throughout the students' final undergraduate year, to support them to develop as critical, disciplinary writers, while fostering independence in this process.

The target community was, and remains, Asian women and English as an additional language (EAL) learners but the intervention is open to all and benefits from a rich mix of students. The intervention was semi-embedded, delivered by disciplinary staff working with a literacy specialist from outside the faculty, working with students from across a cluster of social science subjects; however it sat outside the taught curriculum.

It was composed of three elements: exemplars of student writing with staff commentary to establish what features are valued and score highly in final year work (this is available online); writing retreats used to support writing drafts of dissertations; and staff and peer led Writing Circles used to support students redrafting and reformulating their work in small groups. The Writing Circles use an established pattern devised to maximise time spent working closely on text and are simple enough for students to replicate; this involved sharing draft texts (up to two pages of A4) reading and commenting on texts. The focus of feedback was on structural organisational features and was deliberately positive. The Writing Circle ended with summing up next steps, prioritising action.

Informal interim evaluations indicate that students who attended, valued both the writing circles and the retreats and some have credited the intervention with an improvement in their grades. A more robust **evaluation** strategy will test for changes in perceptions of confidence in writing skills, and how this might be related to personality. Post- intervention focus groups will explore the students' experience of being involved in the intervention and how it has impacted upon them and will be used to help develop the structure and content of the writing sessions, as well as help evidence the efficacy of the sessions as a way of supporting students' confidence in academic writing, and an improved sense of themselves as a writer.

Communication about writing development proved a **barrier** to recruitment, because the students themselves perceived any intervention to be addressing deficit or did not perceive issues with academic writing to be relevant to them personally. This problematized both anticipated development and any intervention to support this. In addition the Writing Circle process necessitates a degree of vulnerability, and works on a basis of mutual trust; for this reason, recruitment was influenced as it was delivered by staff not personally known to the students. This in turn has had an impact on scalability and raises questions concerning where support is best situated: the next stages are to build confidence with staff to build micro-practices into mainstream provision.

The **success** of the intervention came from staff persistence and the feeling that the project addressed real student needs. In particular the intervention filled a gap in

provision which was not being met by other social networks (such as family). Over time as students built a sense of trust there was evidence of transfer of practices, with students also beginning to lead their own Writing Circles independently. In addition, a number of students began to invite friends along to Writing Circles.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights

- The importance of personal trust in asking students to engage in developmental activities.
- The need to fully embed interventions such as this within the curriculum and co-deliver these with staff known to the students.
- The need to build trust over time: the writing circle process necessitates a degree of vulnerability and can only work on the basis of mutual trust.
- The potential of the activities to support development of independent judgement and control of written discourse which is in turn crucial to raise attainment.

Flying Start at University of Huddersfield

Keys to success

- Careful analysis of data to enable a nuanced approach to interventions including better intervention-design and roll-out
- Significant commitment to data analysis in terms of planning, time, and financial resource
- Attention to the intersectionalities of disadvantage
- Leadership that can draw on staff involvement and support for new initiatives

The intervention

Flying Start is an intervention targeted at groups of students that typically underachieve, indirectly targeting 'at risk' groups as identified by data analysis. Although the university's interventions do not target discrete ethnic groups, its strategic examination and careful use of data has enabled it to identify distinct patterns of disadvantage and to adopt a highly nuanced approach to interventions. The result in the case of Flying Start is an intervention designed to benefit British Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnicities, male students, entrants with vocational qualifications and those from low socio-economic groups.

The University of Huddersfield has sought to close white-BAME attainment gaps for several years and has seen significant improvement with their gaps narrowing. In order to make even greater progress, they have invested heavily in an exploration of their data to gain a thorough understanding of patterns of achievement and underachievement across the university and of the characteristics of those students who are at greatest disadvantage. They established that modules and courses that had recruited students chiefly through vocational routes, for example BTEC routes, were most at risk of underachievement. They also found that those courses had significant numbers of British

Bangladeshi and Pakistani students. They were satisfied that other characteristics such as mode of study or age were not explanatory factors.

They then designed an intervention that took particular account of the journeys to and through HE for those students. The 'Flying Start' intervention takes place over the first two weeks of the academic year and has two objectives: enhancing students' academic abilities and exploring identity and belonging. There is a mix of both organised social time and supervised independent study. A sense of community and identity within the classroom is achieved by moving away from the practice of conventional induction, which initiates the student into the university in favour of the message that says: *the university is you*. Flying Start works closely with staff and has involved a big push for them to be very aware of who their students are and what they are doing. Work is also undertaken to build relationships not only between staff and students but also between students through peer work and group interactive work.

In its first year to date, the programme has seen **statistically significant results** (most at 99.9% confidence level). All Flying Start students report stronger relationships compared to non-Flying Start students, and in addition male Flying Start students also report significantly higher levels of belonging and engagement compare to male students on other courses. Though it is inevitably difficult to ascribe a causal relationship, there is sufficient evidence to judge that the intervention has impacted positively on outcomes. Tutors reported students taking ownership, positively meeting the challenge and contributing to sessions more than previously. Particularly notable were indications of improvement in retention at the beginning of the year and signs of early attainment; for instance, Applied Science students showed statistically significant improvement, compared to previous intakes, in maths performance through specifically focussed activities.

Replicability and sustainability

- Maximising the use of internal data to establish patterns of inequality costs time and money and this is an obstacle to easy replicability within and across HEIs. However, robust data enables better and more efficient targeting of resources which can help justify the initial financial outlay.
- Cross-tabulating attainment and ethnicity data with other variables such as entry qualification is key to targeting interventions at the appropriate course level.
- Interventions that take into account disparities between ethnic groups are more likely to have nuanced outcomes and defined impact, which in turn increases replicability and sustainability.
- Flying Start relied on a large number of committed staff willing to trial a new intervention for student success. HE providers looking to replicate the work will need to consider staff time and factors that support staff engagement.

The Student Success Project at Brunel University London

Keys to success

- Using institutional data to identify and target specific ethnic groups most affected by the attainment gap

- Outlining explicit targets and deadlines in relation to reducing the attainment gap in the university's Access Agreement
- Close collaboration with the Students' Union and engaging with students as co-producers and researchers

The intervention

Funded by 'OFFA-countable' Access Agreement expenditure, the Student Success Project⁵⁶ is a three-year initiative aimed at reducing the attainment gap⁵⁷ between White British and Black British students at Brunel University London. This specific targeting is based on the analysis of institutional data and **research** which shows that while there is a significant difference in the degree outcomes of students with different characteristics across the university, the greatest gap is between Black British and White British students. The university has committed in their OFFA Access Agreement to halving the attainment gap between these two groups by 2020-21 from a baseline of 22% in 2014-15.

The project aims to work across the student lifecycle to better understand the experiences of, and perceived barriers to, learning for Black British students. Working closely in partnership with the Union of Brunel Students, the project concentrates on four key areas: awareness, assessment and curriculum, retention, and sense of belonging. **Practical** interventions include employing students to work alongside academics to conduct reviews of their reading lists and curriculum content in order to assess their diversity. The project has also funded a *Liberated Library Campaign*, purchasing new books from the global south, people of colour, female, LGBT+, and disabled⁵⁸ authors as recommended by students. These books are intended for both academic and recreational reading and aim to encourage a more diverse curriculum as well as increase students' sense of belonging within the university.

Institutional data shows a reduction in the attainment gap between White British and Black British students from 22% in 2014-15 to 14% in 2016-17. However, given that there is no one single cause of the attainment gap, it is difficult to **evaluate** which interventions may have contributed to this improvement.

The intervention faced a number of **barriers**. Although staff have been happy to discuss the attainment gap, broader conversations about race have proven difficult in some cases. There have also been some difficulties in shifting the focus from data analysis to implementing interventions. Evaluating certain aspects of the projects have also posed some challenges including the difficulty of assessing the impact and effectiveness of awareness-raising activities and training. The very small number of Black students on some courses also makes it difficult to confidently claim whether subject-specific interventions have had a direct impact on improving attainment.

The **success** of the intervention has come from harnessing the expertise of students by collaborating with them as co-producers and researchers; this has allowed for an in-

⁵⁶ <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/student-success>

⁵⁷ This attainment gap is defined by Brunel University London as the disparity between White British students and Black British students achieving 1st and 2.1 classification degrees

⁵⁸ Terms chosen and used by Brunel University London

depth insight into their lived experiences of the curriculum and the effectiveness of different teaching and assessment strategies. The commitment of senior staff such as the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) to whom the project directly reports to has also been highly influential in gathering support across the university.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- Explicit commitment from senior staff including Vice-Chancellors and academic Heads of Department is highly influential in garnering support from staff across the university
- Focusing on understanding and addressing the attainment gap at individual subject level helps create highly specific interventions and can increase the engagement of departmental staff; it can also help increase the sustainability of projects by distributing responsibility across the university
- Engaging with students as co-producers and researchers helps enable interventions which focus on the actual, and not assumed, concerns of students

The Nottingham Trent University (NTU) Student Dashboard

Keys to success:

- Staff and students have equal access to a student's data ensuring a sense of shared ownership and closer collaboration for student success
- Making data available and accessible to students empowers them to better own, describe and distinguish problems and solutions
- Live data mean student support and interventions can be discussed immediately, at a point when it is useful to do so and not when it is too late.

The NTU Student Dashboard is an example of implicit targeting of students to promote student success. The Dashboard tracks students' engagement with their studies and the university, through electronic monitoring of door swipes, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) use, library book loans, assessment submissions and attendance.

NTU's statistical analysis demonstrated a very strong positive association between engagement, as recorded by the NTU Student Dashboard, and student success. For example, when testing the efficacy of the system, it was found that just 24% of students who had low average engagement according to the Dashboard successfully progressed to their second year of study at first attempt, compared with 92% of highly engaged students. There was a strong relationship with attainment too. Indeed, 81% of highly engaged final year qualifying students achieved a 2:1 or First Class degree, compared with 42% of students who had low engagement in their final year.

Importantly, NTU analysis found that low engaged students were disproportionately the same student groups that typically have lower rates of success across the student life cycle; male, BAME, WP and/or BTEC qualification route students. Therefore, the NTU Student Dashboard correctly identifies those students most in need of support and has enabled the implicit targeting of disadvantaged student groups through their *behaviours* rather than (or in addition to) their *characteristics*. The Dashboard automatically alerts

staff (and students) when a student has not been engaging, thus enabling timely intervention through one-to-one meetings with tutors and/or signposting to additional support services.

Replicability and sustainability

The work highlights:

- The importance of engaging staff in the design of interventions. NTU staff were clear that the dashboard should communicate data on student behaviour and not data on student characteristics. This was key to building staff support for the work.
- The importance of making data available to students. Both staff and students can view the data, meaning students are able to see their own behaviour relative to others, and are not purely reliant on staff explaining the data to them. Shared ownership of data is a key step in building support for the use of student dashboard projects.

The shared access to live data means staff and students can more quickly identify problems, and together discuss students' progress, needs and support.