

Exploring the influence of the Student Experience on Gender and Ethnicity Attainment Gaps

Summary: It is widely documented that there are gaps in attainment between minority ethnic and White students, and male and female students. This on-going research project at the University of Plymouth aims to investigate differences in the student experience of Higher Education, and their potential influence on variations in attainment amongst particular student groups. Preliminary analysis of questionnaire results suggest differences in expectations of university life, study patterns, work habits and socialization patterns within student groups.

Background

- ❑ Prior research has indicated that there is a gap in attainment of good degrees (Firsts and 2:1s) between male and female students, as well as between White and BME students (both at Plymouth and nationally).
- ❑ Much previous research has been quantitative in nature, and reasons for the gaps in attainment are not yet clear.

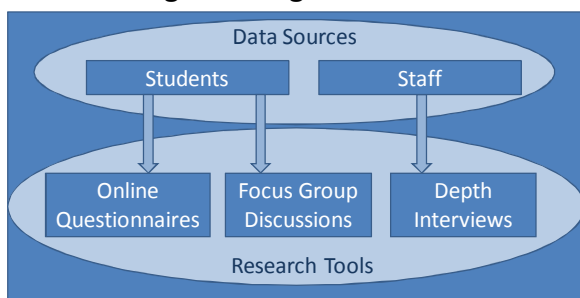
Objectives

- ❑ To obtain quantitative and qualitative data about the nature of the student experience for different student groups.
- ❑ To obtain qualitative data from members of staff about their perceptions of the nature of student study, support requirements and social experiences.

Research Questions

- ❑ What are the similarities and differences in background, expectations and experience of ethnic minority and white students?
- ❑ What are the similarities and differences in background, expectations and experience of male and female students?
- ❑ In what ways and to what extent might identified differences in background, expectations and experience help to explain the differential attainment of these groups?

Research Design – Triangulation Plan



Sampling & Recruitment

- ❑ Online Questionnaires were administered to students from six disciplines. A response rate of 17% was achieved.
- ❑ Six focus groups will be conducted using purposive samples consisting of BME home students, BME overseas students and discipline-specific single sex groups.
- ❑ 21 semi-structured Interviews were conducted with staff.

Challenges Faced

- ❑ Demographic nature of the South West (Plymouth) influenced low numbers of BME home students.
- ❑ Definitions of 'home' and 'overseas' students based solely on fee structure did not capture 'Home UK' student group accurately.
- ❑ Some participants reluctant to comment on controversial/sensitive issues
- ❑ Difficulty in examining student experiences particular to each ethnic group within the 'BME' category owing to low numbers.
- ❑ Difficulty of isolating factors and attributing causality due to possible interactions between factors. (Example: age, gender and ethnicity)



Provisional Findings from Questionnaire

- ❑ Higher percentages of BME students indicated that going to university was important to their families.
- ❑ BME students indicated higher attendance rates, but also indicated lower number of hours studied outside of class when compared to White students.
- ❑ A higher percentage of female students indicated more than 10 hours of study a week outside of class hours, compared to male students. Males were more likely to miss lectures.
- ❑ More males indicated a preference for online study resources than females.
- ❑ A higher proportion of BME students anticipated a first class when compared to White students. More males than females anticipated Firsts and 2:1s.
- ❑ A higher percentage of Black British students reported not feeling part of the social life at University when compared to White students.