



Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment

Jacqueline Stevenson

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Introduction: the BME degree attainment learning and teaching summit

Between January and June 2012 the Higher Education Academy (HEA) delivered a retention and degree attainment learning and teaching summit programme. The summit was designed to gather research and consider the evidence about the contribution of the curriculum (in the broadest sense¹) to Black and minority ethnic (BME)² student retention and success in higher education, and the implications for policy, practice and further research. The summit comprised a series of activities designed to generate, collect and review evidence and the synthesised outcomes were presented at a two-day residential event attended by senior institutional managers and national policy makers.

This report outlines:

1. The institutional research undertaken as part of the summit.
2. Responses by delegates at the residential to both the institutional research as well as initial findings from an analysis of HESA data by BME student groups in relation to disciplines, modes of study and other student characteristics, considering both retention and achievement³.
3. A set of 'guiding principles' underpinning further recommendations designed to specifically address the key question: 'how can the curriculum enhance the retention and success of BME students in higher education?'

Background and context

The percentage of UK-domicile BME students studying in higher education, at all levels, is statistically higher than that of White students, with the proportion of UK-domicile BME students having increased from 14.9% in 2003-04 to 18.1% in 2009-10 (ECU, 2011). However, there are substantial differences in patterns of participation: in general, more BME females participate in HE than males; Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi participation rates are half those of Black African and Indian participation rates; and Black students are both older than other BME students and their White entrants (Aimhigher, 2006; Elevation Networks Trust, 2012). In addition, students of all ethnicities except Other Asian are more likely to study non-SET subjects than SET⁴ subjects, with the highest proportions of BME students seen in Medicine and Dentistry (32.0%) and Law (31.2%) (ECU, 2011) and to study in post-1992 HEIs, predominantly in the Greater London area. Indeed, there are more Black students at the University of East London than the 'top' 20 UK HEIs combined (Elevation Networks Trust, 2012).

¹ The term 'curriculum' incorporates curriculum organisation, design, contents, pedagogy and assessment (see Crosling et al., 2008).

² We recognise that students from ethnic minority backgrounds are highly diverse and not a homogeneous group. While we have adopted this term throughout for simplicity, we welcome research taking place focusing on specific ethnic minority groups, such as the Elevation Networks' *Race to the Top* report (2012), which focuses on the experiences of Black students from African and Caribbean backgrounds in HE and in gaining employment.

³ This work has been commissioned by HEA, and will be completed and reported on separately by Dr Ruth Woodfield, University of Sussex.

⁴ SET subjects include Biological Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering and Technology, Mathematical Sciences Medicine and Dentistry, and Veterinary Science among others; Non-SET subjects include Business and Administrative Studies, Creative Arts and Design, Education, Law, and Social Studies among others

In addition to the variable participation rates of BME students, the retention rates of BME students are also uneven, with 91.1% of Chinese entrants likely to continue or qualify compared to 90.4% of White students and only 88.7% of Black entrants (ECU, 2011). Of those who do remain in HE there is a significant gap in degree attainment between BME and White students as measured by the percentage being awarded a first or upper second class degree. Recent data evidence that 66.5% of White students studying first degrees received a first or upper second class Honours degree, with only 49.2% of BME students achieving this and 38.1% of Black students (ECU, 2011), with research conducted by the DfES (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007) showing that even after controlling for the majority of contributory factors (prior attainment, subject of study, age, gender, disability, deprivation, type of HE institution attended, type of Level 3 qualifications, mode of study, term-time accommodation and ethnicity), being from a minority ethnic group (except the Other Black, Mixed and Other groups) was still found to have a statistically significant and negative effect on degree attainment. Research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) also found that differences in the attainment between White and BME groups could only in some small part be explained by the differing profiles of the students HEFCE (2010). Current work by Ruth Woodford, commissioned by the HEA (referred to above) is now repeating the DfES analysis using more recent data. In addition, while little work has been undertaken to explore differences in attainment at module or course level, that which is available attests to similarities in the attainment gap at a more local level (Richardson, 2012).

Although attainment is improving across all groups, the gap has not narrowed significantly over recent years. For UK-domicile qualifiers, the difference between White students who obtained a first or upper second class Honours and BME students (the attainment gap) increased from 17.2% in 2003-04 to a peak of 18.8% in 2005-06 and is now at 18.6% in 2009-10 (ECU, 2011). Outcomes for BME students are lower than for their White peers across the whole of the HE sector, including within Russell Group (RG) HE institutions, although the evidence suggests that BME students perform better within the RG than within non-RG HEIs (Richardson, 2008). Black graduates, however, are already three times more likely to be unemployed within six months of graduation than their White peers (Elevation Networks Trust, 2012).

With over 80 graduates applying for every graduate job (AGR, 2011), and almost three-quarters of large graduate employers now routinely demanding that applicants have a minimum of an upper second class degree in order to sift out applications (Snowden, 2012), addressing the attainment gap is an ethical, social and economic imperative.

Addressing the attainment gap: sector responses

The reasons for the attainment gap is complex, and multiple factors – structural, organisational, attitudinal, cultural and financial – are all of significance (Richardson, 2008; Berry and Loke, 2011; Singh, 2011). Among other areas, however, research by the HEA and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (ECU/HEA, 2008) evidenced the importance of the curriculum (in its broadest sense) and in particular learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) practices, and highlighted the need for further research to explore: how students experience marking practices, assessment, feedback; student-lecturer and peer interactions; and how course design and pedagogic activities might maximise

student attainment. A synthesis of research, *Black and minority ethnic students' participation in higher education: improving retention and success* (Singh, 2011), commissioned by the HEA, drew further attention to poor LTA practices that might be contributory factors in maintaining the attainment gap, including problems of segregation, low teacher expectations, undervaluing or under-challenging of BME students, prejudiced attitudes associated with linguistic competence and discriminatory practice inherent in LTA activities and student support.

Drawing on the ECU/HEA research, 15 HEIs participated in a programme of activities funded by the HEA and the ECU designed to address the attainment gap. The outcomes of the programme drew further attention to those LTA practices that might be changed in order to help reduce the attainment gap, including the involvement of students in curriculum and delivery, internationalisation of the curriculum, the development and delivery of support for staff involved in curriculum design, and curriculum initiatives designed to improve both core academic and social competencies (Berry and Loke, 2011). Recommendations from the 'What Works? Student Retention and Success' programme⁵ (Thomas, 2012) has also indicated that students' engagement in the academic sphere is vital to high levels of success.

As part of the evidence collected for the summit the HEA also advertised across the HE sector for examples of LTA activity and research currently being undertaken to address the attainment gap. These responses are detailed in Appendix A and evidence not only the complexity of the 'problem' and the multi-faceted approaches being undertaken to address it, but, significantly, the patchiness of responses across the sector. It is clear that some institutions, such as The Open University, have been working to address the attainment gap for many years and have developed both institution-wide and local level responses. To add to the information presented by the sector, in early 2012, a series of HE institutional visits took place across three of the four nations of the UK⁶ comprising, interviews with staff and students. The purpose of the visits was to establish awareness of the attainment gap and assessment, learning and teaching strategies that are (or are not) being undertaken to remedy it.

New institutional research

Methodology

Eighteen HE institutions were purposefully selected on the basis of mission grouping, size, location, size of BME student population and/or type of delivery. Of those approached 11 HEIs agreed to participate: three from the Million+ group, three from the University Alliance group, two from the Russell Group and one from the 1994 Group, as well as one unaligned HEI and one private provider of HE.

The HEIs were responsible for selecting staff and students to participate in the research but were offered suggestions as to who the research team would like to interview, namely: senior staff responsible for teaching, learning and assessment; sample of teaching staff; head of Students' Union (SU); and 'home' students, ideally those studying for undergraduate courses designed to lead to a

⁵ A three-year programme funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, delivered in partnership with the HEA and Action on Access.

⁶ It did not prove possible to arrange an institutional visit to an HEI in Northern Ireland.

'professional' career as identified in the Milburn Report (Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009).

Interviews⁷ took place with 53 staff and/or representatives from institutional Students' Unions (see Appendix B) and were designed to: establish awareness of the attainment gap, identify strategies being implemented to address it and explore institutional/individual responsibilities for such activity. The student interviews were designed to explore students' journeys into HE, their experiences to date, degree aspirations, academic strategies, barriers and support mechanisms, and post-graduation plans for employment or further study. Twenty-four students were interviewed. However, of these, seven were not home/EU students⁸ (see Appendix C). Therefore data from these seven interviews have not been incorporated into this report.

Demographic data were gathered for both staff (job role/position, ethnicity and gender) and students (ethnicity, gender, age, parental experience of HE (i.e. first or second generation), year of study and course). Interviewees were asked to describe their ethnicity without resort to a list of predefined categories, thus avoiding a priori assumptions in relation to what constitutes an 'ethnic minority group' (Burton *et al.*, 2008). Interview schedules (staff and students) were drawn up, adapted according to participant role and institutional context (see Appendix D and E). Ethical consent was obtained from Leeds Metropolitan University in advance of the interviews being conducted. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and then uploaded on to Nvivo⁹. Each transcript was then combed and coded for initial concepts, ideas, and themes. Over 60 thematic codes were produced, subsequently narrowed down to a smaller set of overarching themes. This initial coding was followed by further analytical coding, involving both the interpretation of and reflection on the meaning of the data.

Staff were numbered in chronological order according to when interviewed and identified by the mission grouping of their institution (Million+, University Alliance, Russell Group, 1994 Group, unaligned or private provider). They were also assigned a generic role in order to maintain anonymity¹⁰. The students were also numbered in order of interviews taking place, and are identified by mission group, ethnicity, gender, age, whether first or second generation into HE¹¹ (i.e. whether either parent has studied at HE level), year of study and course.

Findings: staff interviews

The overall findings from the staff interviews highlighted the complexity and multiplicity of issues relating to BME degree attainment, as well as the intersectionality between ethnicity, gender and class as this quote evidences:

⁷ Staff interviews were conducted by Dr Jacqueline Stevenson, Dr Paula Sealey and Shakiya Nisa. The HEA would like to thank, in particular, the significant contribution made to this part of project by Dr Sealey.

⁸ The data and research on the degree attainment of international students studying in UK universities are different to those relating to 'home' students and not easy to compare. Therefore the focus was on home students only.

⁹ Qualitative data analysis software.

¹⁰ The generic term 'PVC' has been used to cover PVC, DVC, etc.; the term 'Equalities Manager' is used for Equalities Manager, adviser, etc.; 'Lecturer' covers both lecturer and senior lecturer grades; 'Senior Academic' is used for principal lecturer grade and above and includes academic Deans and professor; and 'Senior Officer SU' is used for president, vice-president or senior officer.

¹¹ Used by within much of the academic literature as a proxy for students from working-class backgrounds (e.g., Thomas and Quinn, 2006).

I'm not aware of the details of it all or the size of the gap but I am aware that there is a gap between BME students and white students ... I would imagine that the background factors would play a part, such as kind of first generation people going to university, family pressures, things like that, there'd be a difference in those things for BME students and non-BME students. I think role models would play a part ... it kind of comes from lower down the school system and that kind of plays into it, that their kind of attainment level tracks through, so starting down at a lower level with the social pressures of BME students and to achieve academically or to not achieve academically. (Staff 36, Russell Group, Senior Officer Students' Union, White British, Male)

In addition, there were contested understandings within institutions of what constitutes a 'home BME' student. As noted above, seven of the 24 students put forward for interviews were international BME students. In addition, despite being briefed in advance of the interviews some staff persistently spoke of BME students having 'inadequate English language skills', insufficient preparedness for learning (because of the differences between UK and overseas schooling systems), 'culture shock' in studying in a new country, etc. While this may, in part, be due to issues relating to data sharing within institutions, some HEIs also viewed international and home BME students as synonymous.

However, three overarching themes emerged from the interviews: knowledge and awareness of BME inequalities/attainment gap; location and/or cause of 'the problem'; and effective teaching, learning and assessment practices, including academic student support and issues relating to staff and staffing.

Knowledge and awareness of issues relating to BME attainment

Across all the institutions, there was evidence of a strong commitment, at both institutional and 'grass-roots' levels, to widen participation, ensure the equality and diversity of the student body, develop inclusive practices and to enhance belonging. This was apparent at all levels, strategically and operationally. With regard to students from different cultural backgrounds there was also a strong commitment to developing cross-cultural interaction.

However, much of this awareness and activity relating to inclusivity was generic, relating to all students, and, other than widening participation outreach activity there was little evidence of interventions designed specifically for BME students. Few staff were aware of the actual percentage of BME students studying at their institution, and almost none knew the proportion of BME staff:

I can't remember the exact percentages for, it's much smaller numbers for black students, I think it's only something like 3%, 4% maybe. I mean White, it's less than 50% so we do have quite a big mixture of groups plus as I say the largest is British White which is about 45-50%, it varies. Asian but of course because we have this massive intake of Chinese students from overseas and then blacks are about 4%, mixed race probably 2% and then the other categories similar. Quite low numbers really. (Staff 35, Russell Group, Senior Academic, White British, Female)

The majority, while knowing that there was an attainment gap across the wider HE sector, were also unable to give any evidence of the gap in their own institution, beyond recognising that, in general, BME students did worse than their White counterparts:

Um ... I'd have to check the surveys, the module level surveys because I'm not sure of the breakdown. The survey that we carried out ... we probably didn't have ethnicity, I'd have to check. (Staff 21, Million+, Senior Academic Asian British, Male)

In some cases, staff did not believe there was a particular gap in their own institution as they were not aware of it:

We have students from over 130-odd countries and speaking over 40 different languages, it might be just like the culture of the organisation here, that it's very open and people might be thinking about it [attainment gap] in the back of their head or maybe mention it to someone else but it hasn't, as you said, bubbled up to us, because if it actually happens a lot it most likely would bubble up and we'd hear about it but I can't think of anything. (Staff 47, Unaligned, Senior Officer Students' Union, African Other (Sudanese), Male)

More frequently, staff spoke of 'other staff' being unwilling to discuss issues around ethnic minority students, either for reasons of 'political correctness' or for fear of 'saying the wrong thing', meaning that issues of BME under-attainment were being avoided. It was also suggested that such discussions were not taking place within institutions since formal recognition that there was 'a problem' would require institutions to address it, which would, in turn, incur significant costs – either financial or in relation to staff time. There were, of course, exceptions with some staff being highly aware of the gap and having interrogated their institutional data:

I was interested in things like 'where was the greatest difference?', 'was it early on in the degree?', 'was it in particular types of coursework, under particular types of assessment mode, between particular sub-groups within the ethnic group?' (Staff 51, Million+, Senior Academic, White British, Male).

The awareness of senior managers regarding their own institution's attainment gap was patchy. Some were aware of the attainment gap and believed that there were plans in place to address it, although they might not have been directly involved in such discussions, since they took place 'elsewhere' within the institution. Other did not believe there was a problem:

I mean, I certainly don't think there's much with regards to, you know, Black and minority ethnic groups 'cos, as I say, it's not something that's really discussed in our school or whether it's just something that we think isn't an issue because we think we're dealing with it because we've got all these systems in place that treats everyone fairly and consistently. You know we wouldn't positively discriminate in favour of students 'cos we treat them all fairly and equally really so I don't think there's much coming through but I might be wrong. As I say the Director of Undergraduate Programmes she's not aware of anything and the previous Director of Teaching he was never aware of anything. (Staff 35, Russell Group, Senior Academic, White British, Female)

In general, other staff did not believe senior managers were aware of the issues or that there were any institutional strategies designed to address the gap. However, while teaching staff also often had little awareness of the gap at institutional level many were aware of their own course/module attainment breakdown and recognised that there was a gap more locally.

Location and/or cause of ‘the problem’

All staff, without exception, recognised that some students did better than others, in relation to retention and success, due to systemic, societal inequalities, predominantly relating to a lack of social, economic or cultural capital:

It's part of a wider social phenomenon, that there are social, cultural and economic ranges of factors that mean that certain groups will under-perform and be disadvantaged in a range of social interactions and that would apply to higher education as with other areas of society. (Staff 32, Russell Group, Senior Academic, White British, Male)

Some staff raised concerns about how institutional racism militated against BME student success. However, only a small number of staff believed that their own institutions were racist, rather it was deemed to be an external societal problem. A few staff, however, did challenge this view, arguing that:

I don't mean by that, that we have individually racist members of staff. But I think, [the] University, like all universities operates within structures that are hangovers from a prior era. You know, the whole lecture-essay closed exam, three hour exam structure which we still largely operate was designed for a rich white people, 3% intellectual elite, you know, and we still have that. So I think the structures and the systems that operate within this university and, I would warrant, within many universities, they're not designed to be conducive the sort of cohorts that we have now. (Staff 15, University Alliance, Lecturer, White British, Male).

Other structures and/or practices of the university received much wider criticism and were considered both an irritant and also, and more significantly, a bar to progress. Areas of concern included inadequate complaint mechanisms. Some staff commented that concerns about poor pedagogic practice were difficult to raise, that their informal criticisms often went unheard, and that more formal concerns about the practice of colleagues were not dealt with effectively. Staff were also critical about what they considered to be inadequate and cumbersome lines of communication. There were concerns that issues relating to staff-student experiences at grass-roots level had no forum within which they could be aired and subsequently heard by senior managers. Institutional decisions about pedagogy (such as changes to marking practices) were imposed from ‘the top’ without sufficient consultation with those required to carry out changes. On a more pragmatic level staff also drew attention to the inappropriateness of maintaining a two-semester structure based around a Christian calendar. Not only did this not meet the needs of a religiously diverse student body, but it also meant that teaching was highly intense and students had insufficient time and space to reflect, develop and progress. Finally concerns were raised in some institutions about the inadequate composition of both informal advisory groups and formal governance committees, deemed to be unrepresentative of the student body and in the case of student representatives for example, dominated by White middle-class students.

Many staff were also frustrated that pressures of time meant that they could not devote sufficient time to effect change; others argued that institutional bureaucracy meant that change was difficult to initiate. Across the research-intensive universities (the two Russell Group and the 1994 Group university), in particular, there was a feeling that teaching and learning were devalued compared to research, with research activity taking a high priority and effective teaching practice rarely rewarded:

There'd have to be a great deal more reward and recognition available to staff for their endeavours in teaching and learning. I think there are very limited reasons for staff to engage with any of this stuff when virtually their entire career rests on their research output ... If you choose to focus on learning and teaching in any sense, it's usually, you know, career suicide. (Staff 16, University Alliance, Lecturer, White British, Male)

Where good teaching was recognised the response was often to 'reward' staff by giving them final-year undergraduate or postgraduate teaching, thus removing them from first-year teaching where they might be most needed¹².

Some staff, though by no means all, located the 'blame' for the attainment gap with students. This was more commonplace across the research-intensive HEIs. Problematic areas identified included: inadequate academic background, often linked to attending state rather than private schools, or having 'non-traditional' qualifications, and, consequently, having an inadequate knowledge base on which to build, meaning they quickly fell behind their peers; academic communication 'deficiencies' – both inadequate English language skills and also an inability to write well academically:

I mean generally we get them all coming in at the same level so there must be something that would explain why they don't attain so well and I don't know if it's mainly linked to their socio-economic background that, you know, and their social class I guess that would determine what type of school they've been to, the learning techniques they've adopted there and, you know, whether that feeds through to university such that they find it more difficult to study or mix once they get there. (Staff 35, Russell Group, Senior Academic, White British, Female)

Some, though few, staff also considered that, in part, the attainment gap could be a consequence of BME students being older than White students (which is true for Black entrants but not other groups), or argued that gender plays a role – with, for example, Black men 'unwilling to ask for help'. A further theme, for a small number of staff, was that, despite best efforts, BME students chose not to mix with other students:

When we take them in on the first day they're in a big lab, you know, and there's maybe 100 of them and we do various activities. And I just set them out alphabetically, you know, so there's no prejudice. But within two hours, when they come back from their coffee break, they've all rearranged themselves into [ethnic] groups. (Staff 42, University Alliance, Senior Academic, White Scottish, Female)

It is important to note, however, that the majority of staff interviewed believed strongly that it is the structures and practices of universities that privilege some students while discriminating against others and that placing the blaming on students for their failures is both unacceptable and based on faulty premises.

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) practices

One of the strongest narratives across the staff interviews was a commitment to inclusive learning, teaching and assessment practices. However, there was a general lack of knowledge of any teaching and learning strategies that had specifically reduced the BME attainment gap. While some staff

¹² It is notable that some students also commented on the poor teaching 'imposed' on first years.

believed that such activity was taking place, 'somewhere in the university', they were unable to provide any specific information.

There was, however, a strong belief across the interviews that, in particular, some forms of assessment privileged particular groups of students. While few staff were able to provide evidence to back up these claims, nonetheless many believed strongly that students needed to be taught how to successfully undertake different forms of assessment; in addition, a smaller number would have liked to be in a position to offer multiple forms of assessment so that students could select the form of assessment that best allowed them to demonstrate their skills and capabilities.

We encourage a range of assessment which includes ways to draw on experiences – personal, professional, volunteering for example – and bring those in. So I would choose readings which engage with some of those issues as the set readings for particular sessions ... So diversity is kind of large really in many of the sessions. (Staff 1, 1994 Group, PVC for Learning and Teaching, White British, Female)

The National Union of Students has been campaigning for institutions to introduce anonymous marking of their assessments for some time drawing on research evidencing grade improvements for female students when anonymous marking practices are adopted (Bradley, 1993; Dennis and Newstead, 1994; Francis *et al.*, 2001; Newstead and Dennis, 1990); however, anonymised marking received mixed comments from those staff interviewed. While some HEIs had implemented blind marking schemes the majority had not, since such practice was only possible for some forms of assessment and in some disciplinary areas. In addition, while recognising that inclusivity meant meeting the needs of a diverse student body, there were differences of opinion over how far LTA practice should be adapted to meet these needs and how far it was the responsibility of the individual student to learn how to deal with particular forms of practice.

Most staff believed that the learning journey should be a partnership between staff and students, with shared responsibilities and greater equity in relation to power and the production of knowledge:

I think we have to shift that back, lecturers have to be facilitators and in terms of 'right, we're equal, you and I are here to learn together, I may know a little bit more than you but I can learn from you and we can expand your knowledge' so putting the emphasis on the students and expand their own knowledge. (Staff 19, Million+, Senior Academic, White Other, Female)

Consequently many staff were keen to actively engage students in developing a globalised, inclusive curriculum, including rewriting learning outcomes, redesigning reading lists, bringing in students' experiences and designing and writing different forms of assessment:

We also encourage a lot of diversifying of the curriculum even if it's little things. Like using examples that everybody can understand so, not having an ethnocentric or a mono-cultural kind of base from which you explain your subject, like, you know, how Islamic mortgages works as well as the standard mortgage from the Halifax or whatever. (Staff 16, University Alliance, Lecturer, White British, Male)

Academic student support

Across the staff interviews there was some concern that high expectations were not set for BME students and they needed greater support to realise their potential. However, most staff felt that BMEs should not be singled out as a target group (although they were untroubled by the fact that other groups, e.g. international, disabled or mature learners, received specific support):

I'm really reluctant to think about ways in which different groups may be singled out, for example, for study skill support ... I think all institutions need to think about not just an add-on, but ways in which all groups are structurally, institutionally, strategically supported and become an embedded part of an institution and aren't just an add-on to bring up figures of particular groups of students. (Staff 1, 1994 Group, PVC for Learning and Teaching, White British, Female)

Rather, staff believed that support should be integrated and homogenous, but also multi-faceted, recognising that certain forms of support are access by certain groups of students:

Things that are good for some students are good for all students ... I've just finished developing a Student Charter and we use social media to engage the students but ... I cannot say 'oh I'll only aim at a typical group of students', you know, my students in my head are all shapes and colours. (Staff 19, Million+, Senior Academic, White Other, Female)

They did, however, believe that there should be specific support strategies for students at risk of failing or who had failed, which may include BME students. Where other targeted provision was implemented these should be informed by clear evidence informed for example, who does/doesn't use the employability office. Other suggestions for supporting BME students more specifically ranged from bringing in more BME role models into the institution, including visiting lecturers, and establishing targeted peer mentoring schemes, though support for this was varied.

Staff and staffing

Across all institutions, effective staff training was seen as key to successful BME student support, retention and attainment. This started with effective inclusive teaching strategies embedded in Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) or equivalent courses, seen as critical to addressing issues of diversity in the design and delivery of the curriculum:

With regard to learning and teaching, then the sorts of things that we'll do on the programme is encourage people to explore their curricula, their reading lists into what extent are they inclusive or exclusive of different groups of people. We'll get people to explore the sorts of methods that they use in the classroom ... I want to deal with it [debates around race and power in classrooms] head on in the PGC HE. (Staff 1, 1994 Group, PVC for Learning and Teaching, White British, Female)

Of concern, however, was how to draw in staff who had taught for many years and who did not perceive the need to change their practice. There was also a particular concern about the poor quality of much personal tutoring, with inadequate training and briefing being given to those required to undertake this role. Where personal tutoring was deemed to be effective this was mentioned as a significant reason why some students did well:

I mean I had a couple of testimonials last week from one of the [students about personal advisor], she was so grateful to her because this personal advisor was very, not only was she an advisor she was also a teacher and a tutorial tutor so she's really helped her a lot in terms of advice but also in terms of her study support; she managed to get a First class and she was saying 'I wouldn't have done it without you' so it's really pleasing to see those kind of things come back to us. (Staff 21, Million+, Senior Academic, Asian British, Male)

Findings: student interviews

The ways in which the students regarded the BME attainment gap was highly complex. None of those students interviewed were aware that there was a gap, despite having a general belief that their BME friends and peers were often struggling to be successful in their academic studies.

Academic expectations and preparedness

When the attainment gap was drawn to their attention only a few students felt that it might be due in any way to their ethnicity. Those few who did, questioned whether the cause of their under-attainment might lie in their own academic inadequacies, including their support seeking strategies.

I don't know, I would say that we don't get the same grades as white students. I've never seen our [sic] students get 2:1s we are ... I don't know why but maybe just my work is but I'm always on the 67 to 68 borderline. I'm not saying that they say because our names are different I wouldn't say that. Maybe we're just not clever enough, maybe their work is a better standard than us ... Maybe the feedback they get, stuff like that. They go see the tutors a lot more than we do, they e-mail the tutors a lot more than we do so on our hand as well we should be a bit more ... proactive. (Student 3, Million+, British Asian Pakistani, Male, 21, 1st generation, Human Resource Management)

Some other students drew attention to the ways in which what might be possible for them was limited by familial expectations:

We've got limitations and responsibilities whereas like White people, I can't say they haven't, but we are more reserved and we can't actually do what we want ... you have to like take everything into consideration. This is the community I live in. This is my role. This is my family. This is their expectation and I can't just push that to one side and continue or do what I want to do. (Student 5, Million+, British Asian Pakistani, Female, 21, 1st generation, Human Resource Management)

However, by far the majority of students argued that their under-attainment had had little to do with culture, ethnicity, or racism; rather it was more to do with their lack preparedness for higher education, and their subsequent academic development once there. In particular they considered family, including parental lack of experience and understanding of higher education, class, poverty and prior schooling all to be highly relevant, particularly for BME students at Russell Group universities:

Like everyone else went into labs and they looked at all this equipment and they all knew what they were doing and fiddling around with stuff and I just thought 'I've never seen this before' ...

and it's probably because everyone else was from a quite well funded, you know, private school background ... and you feel a bit embarrassed to put your hand up and say 'I don't know what the hell this is' and you just try to pick up as much as you can but, yeah, it is one of the things I found quite difficult. (Student 12, Russell Group, British Asian Pakistani, Female, 22, 1st generation, Medical Physics)

This lack of preparedness was compounded by what was regarded by some as an abject failure on the part of teaching staff to build their academic skills, develop their confidence and help them to understand the social mores of the institution:

One thing to be sure of is that I had an argument with a tutor and he kicked me out of his class because basically I had an understanding that we be at uni, at our own will so I used to walk, not just me, everybody else, if they wanted to walk out or go toilet, you don't have to put your hand up, its free will and I went to answer my phone, I didn't answer in class, teacher was giving a lecture so I just sneak back around behind the corridor and I went outside then he followed and he took my bag, picked up my bag, touched my bag, put my papers outside of the corridor. (Student 4, Million+, British Asian Pakistani, Male, 22, 1st generation, Business Studies)

This was not the case for all students, however, with some highly praising of their lectures:

Even if you email them there is an instant reply. They don't delay unless they are in a lecture. And they're really active, I mean they don't sit when they teach which I really like. Like even if I don't feel like standing when I see their activeness I really like it, I really like them. (Student 15, Million +, British Asian Sri Lankan, Female, 25, 1st generation, Chemistry)

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) practices

The students were highly variable in relation to the LTA practices they felt best supported or hindered their attainment. They were clear that some practices advantaged some groups of students over others and had their own particular preferences as to what forms of LTA best met their needs. However, these preferences were highly individualised and did not in any way relate to ethnicity. Rather, students across all ethnic groups criticised 'dull and boring' lectures, poor academic and personal tutoring, too tight deadlines for assignments and inadequate feedback.

The students were also critical of a lack of preparedness for different forms of assessment and, in particular, not having assessment requirements fully explained to them. They also believed that the ways in which essay titles or exam questions were written acted as a barrier to those students who were less familiar with a specific style of academic writing.

Many students were highly critical of the lack of support offered to them, in particular the lack of individual time with academic staff, which they felt was both unacceptable and callous:

In the university lecturers have the time, in school they have the time, teachers have the time, to take a personal line ... and I personally think that this university probably like most universities, in fact bugger it most universities, have failed and I see people complaining about Oxbridge quite a lot and saying they don't care enough about their students but I don't really see a difference here. The only difference I see is that counselling is really quick here. But the lecturers if you go to them, I say this from experience because a friend of mine tried to commit suicide a few

weeks ago and she's been going to the lecturers again and again and their response has always been 'throw an extension' or like 'go and see Counselling' which is of course is the response that they should give, both of them, but that's after having a conversation, a personable conversation with a person where you get to know them, you find out about them, you take a bit of a care in their lives. (Student 11, Russell Group, Black British (Other), Male, 28, 2nd generation, Chemical Engineering PhD)

This was by no means the case for all students, with some commenting that they found their tutors and lecturers caring, approachable and generous with their time. However, those students who felt unable or unwilling to approach academic staff were forced to fall back on alternative support strategies, with many drawing heavily on friends:

Well I've got a group of friends. We have a competition between us. We give each other a bit of banter like someone has got higher than this group, someone got higher in this group and in this coursework. We just compete with ourselves. We just help motivate each other to get a better grade and there is. (Student 3, Million+, British Asian Pakistani, Male, 21, 1st generation, Human Resource Management)

In relation to receiving targeted support for BME students, however, the students interviewed were almost wholeheartedly against it. They felt that singling them out for support smacked of inadvertent racism, even where students recognised that they needed extra help. Rather they wanted support mechanisms to be available to all students, but for those mechanisms to be more diverse and varied, with staff reaching out to help those students reluctant to access mainstream support. This was true for all aspects of support including peer mentoring, academic skills provision and specific activities such as bringing in role models:

The moment you racially profile in such a way that you say 'there are not enough role models' people feel that there should be more role models and the moment that they feel there aren't enough role models for them to look up to they then don't look up to anyone and therefore actually that leads to a failure in their own perceptions and about why black people aren't doing well enough, 'oh, I don't have anyone to look up to, what should I do?' which isn't necessarily the case ... I think the argument for role models is very annoying because no-one ever talks about white role models. (Student 8, Russell Group, British Black African, Male, 23, 2nd generation, History)

Developing a sense of belonging

The students also repeatedly referred to what they regarded as the universities failures to integrate them effectively and develop a sense of belonging. In the main they considered this to be irrespective of ethnicity, rather a general failure to engage with and offer support to those most in need:

There isn't a culture of relationship building here ... like me, as an example, it should be on my records to say that I was homeless, had no family whatsoever, that should be something that is clear. I should therefore be someone that's highlighted and looked after in my time here. My lecturers should be calling me in all the time to make sure that I'm alright. I have no support systems at all, like for me my only support systems are my friends, I have no family, no nothing. That doesn't exist at this uni and the fact that no-one called me into a meeting in my first week

here to say 'hey, I hope you're well'. (Student 8, Russell Group, British Black African, Male, 23, 2nd generation, History)

However, the students also drew attention to the lack of inter-ethnic integration. While some staff had highlighted this issue, it was not a strong narrative running through the staff interviews. For the students it was. They believed the institutions should do significantly more to help them to fit in, particularly those students who didn't drink alcohol:

The physics society for instance all they tend to do is go on bar crawls and stuff and even when we have our frontiers lectures like our special guest physicist coming in we have beer and doughnuts after so it's, I think if you don't drink alcohol and stuff then kind of you're just like in a place where you can't even mix as much. I mean I can go and eat as many doughnuts as I like and stuff but I won't probably be as merry as everyone else by the end of it. (Student 12, Russell Group, British Asian Pakistani, Female, 22, 1st generation, Medical Physics)

Some of the students were also highly critical of the fact that the institutions presented an image of diversity in their marketing materials, particular on their websites, that turned out to be unrealistic, leading to a strong sense of 'deception':

If you go on the website of the university there's a photo at the beginning of like a black guy, with a white girl, and a Chinese guy and you think 'wow' but when you get here [the others are all laughing] ... there is some people who kind of mix like that. But if you see a lecture theatre, sometimes in tutorials, you see the African students sitting together ... it [images] shows that everyone kind of chills with each other when they don't. People get on perhaps but they don't socialise that much, I don't think. (Student 11, Russell Group, Black British (Other), Male, 28, 2nd generation, Chemical Engineering PhD)

Summary of research findings

1. Across the staff and students interviews there were commonalities in relation to the location and/or cause of 'the problem' including the inadequate academic background and academic preparedness of some students and their poor academic communication skills, inadequate student support mechanisms and a lack of understanding of what was expected academically; only some of these areas were perceived to relate to ethnicity.
2. Staff also drew attention to societal/structural barriers, such as poverty, and institutional barriers, such as perceived racism and/or political correctness, and, what they believed to be, the devaluing of teaching and learning.
3. Students described a range of non-academic factors, including those related to familial pressures and cultural differences, which they believed impacted significantly on their integration into the institution but were often disregarded.
4. Staff and students differed over who they felt was responsible for addressing these issues and lowering the attainment gap.
5. Staff responses were mixed with most recognising the need to change institutional structures and LTA practices; however, the role that schools, families and the students themselves had to play was also highlighted.
6. Students, in contrast, firmly located the responsibility for the attainment gap with the institution, in its broadest sense and more particularly with academic staff. While (some) students believed they were unprepared for learning, lacked the requisite academic skills, or

had insufficient confidence in their own skills and abilities, they considered it fundamentally the responsibility of university to support them to achieve.

7. Both staff and students felt that reducing the attainment gap required: a greater commitment to ensuring inter-ethnic integration; a greater diversity of approaches to LTA practices, in particular forms of assessment; and the diversification of students support mechanisms to ensure that support is available to all who need it. Staff and students were also in agreement that support, both pastoral and academic, should be available to all students and that, only in exceptional circumstances should BME students be singled out for targeted interventions.

The HEA summit meeting

The 24-hour residential meeting was convened to enable experts, practitioners and students to present and review evidence and experience about BME student retention and success, and the contribution of the curriculum to overcoming the problems identified.

Reflections on the findings

Delegates spent time over the two days reflecting on the summary of findings as well as on presentations from HEFCE, further research from the HEA (published separately) and testimonials from BME student representatives. In addition, delegates were given the opportunity to discuss the emerging work being developed by Singh and Cousins¹³, as well as their own institutional work and experiences, all of which contribute to this report. Key reflections were that:

- The issue of improving BME attainment may be considered at the heart of ‘what is a university for’, for example increasing inclusivity and equality of opportunity, and through this enhancing social justice and social mobility by enhancing educational outcomes for those historically less privileged than other groups in society; a narrative of social change and transformation should, therefore, underpin institutional policies.
- The ‘business case’ for increasing diversity and enhancing BME attainment should also be utilised to help drive change: the BME population in the UK is increasing (Wohland *et al.*, 2010) at the same time as HEIs are increasingly competing for a share of a capped student body. Within such a competitive market students will increasingly make choices based on quality of provision, value for money and graduate outcomes. Those HEIs who maximise the attainment of all students, including BME students are likely to attract more ‘consumers’ of higher education.
- The commitment from the change should be led from ‘the top’ and be written into strategic plans.

¹³ This is a joint study between the University of Wolverhampton and Coventry University exploring the gap between BME and White students across the two universities. Attainment variation within and across modules where attainment by BME students is high will be analysed, taking into account gender, entry qualifications and internal ethnic variation within BME groups, and changes to teaching and learning methods will be trialled by module leaders, students and other colleagues.

- Approaches to reducing the attainment gap should be predominantly ‘post-racial’¹⁴, i.e. part of mainstream provision, drawing on existing good practice in inclusive learning and teaching.
- Minimising the attainment gap requires a partnership approach between staff and students, involving local Students’ Unions and the National Union of Students; students should be regarded as co-producers of knowledge and success; consultation with students needs to be systematic; structures have to be put in place to ensure communication and practice takes place.
- *All staff, all staff*, pastoral, administrative and academic, need to be equipped with the skills and confidence to build relationships with *all* students; in particular clear and specific guidance and training for personal tutors should be put in place. Staff should make sure that students understand exactly what is expected of them – in relation to academic behaviours, participation and the production of work; however, students should also be empowered to challenge poor practice and clarify feedback. A diversity of support mechanisms needs to be implemented with staff and students aware of their responsibility for seeking out and giving support.
- An ecology of success should incorporate participation, belonging, attainment and retention; all students should be supported towards success and helped to realise their potential; clear expectations for achievement should be set for all students. Safe spaces need to be established to enable effective dialogue centered on diversity to take place; staff and students need to be equipped with the skills to participate in such discussions.
- The curriculum should be made relevant to all students, related to and using the students’ experiences. Areas such as reading materials and theoretical input should include non-White, non-Western perspectives.
- Fair marking practices should be implemented. This might include: clear and transparent assessment guidelines; offering a choice of assessments; providing exemplars of first class assignments; aligning module marks against dissertation marks; anonymous marking; scrutinising both assignments and marking for cultural biases. In addition, assignment briefs should always be undertaken in the context of a discussion-based activity.
- Peer-assisted learning and peer mentoring could include a focus on understanding degree classifications, including what might be required to be successful at each level of degree, understanding assessment requirements and ‘interpreting feedback, and how to ‘challenge’ lecturers. Students should be provided with examples of good coursework at different levels, given opportunities to mark themselves and each other and be involved in designing induction programmes. Staff should also encourage students to reflect on and grade their ‘intellectuality’ and how they can develop ‘academic thinking’.

¹⁴ Critics of post-racialism argue that it is “a twenty-first-century ideology that reflects a belief that due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action” (Cho, 2009, p. 1594).

- Students should be offered early feedback; staff should consider bringing students together to say what they don't understand about the feedback. Students should be given an opportunity to practise appropriately referencing and attributing work; the plagiarism disciplinary process should be 'decriminalised'; rather than focusing on an admission of 'guilt' issues of suspected plagiarism need to be handled sympathetically and students provided with counselling.
- Issues around employability centre on low social capital not just race; pre-university 'aspiration raising' should centre on becoming the 'post-graduation employed'; engagement with all students should take place early, involving employers. Students need to understand the job market, be provided with opportunities for networking and have opportunities to rehearse their own narratives of the employable self. They should also be encouraged to understand the impact of achieving an upper second or first class degree on graduate employability.

As the staff and students interviews and reflections from the summit evidence, however, there is no universal approach to reducing the attainment gap. The overall feedback from the summit event has, therefore, been summarised as a set of guiding principles designed to underpin changes to policy and practice at both institutional and 'grass-roots' levels.

Ten guiding principles

1. The need for change must be recognised and supported at institutional strategic level, ideally championed by the PVC for LTA; reducing the attainment gap should also be enshrined as an institutional key performance indicator, underpinned by robust data.
2. A holistic, longitudinal approach should be taken to reduce the attainment gap, from pre-entry 'aspiration raising' activities through to progression to post-graduation study and/or employment.
3. Interventions should be 'post-racial'. Where targeted interventions are deemed to be desirable, a clear rationale for such activity should be communicated to both staff and students.
4. Initiatives designed to reduce the attainment gap should, in principle, be based on clear evidence and have timely and measurable outcomes. However, implementing faster and more substantial change may require a degree of risk-taking.
5. All students should be viewed as partners in the educational journey and systematically involved in the design and implementation of inclusive learning, teaching and assessment activities.
6. Institutions should put strategies in place to ensure staff feel able, and empowered, to develop effective relationships with *all* students; these relationships should be built on a sharing of power and responsibility.
7. Regular and effective monitoring and evaluation strategies should be initiated alongside the implementation of both mainstream and targeted strategies. Results should be disseminated appropriately, including where no change has been effected; where change has occurred strategies need to be put in place to ensure such change is sustained.
8. Academic development and support should be largely mainstreamed and students should be encouraged and empowered to draw on these existing mechanisms; however, institutions also need to implement alternative strategies to support those students unable or unwilling to access mainstream provision.
9. Institutional strategies should be implemented to enable staff to develop sufficient confidence to deal with issues of race and racism; both staff and students should be afforded 'safe spaces' within which to discuss race and racism.

10. All teaching staff should set local targets for reducing the gap; good practice in teaching and learning, leading to enhanced student success, should be recognised and valued institutionally.

Institutional reflective questions

The following reflective questions are offered as a starting point to assist institutions in reviewing their approach to reducing the BME attainment gap.

1. To what extent does the institution monitor the retention, progression, completion and attainment of all groups, including specific groups such as BME students? What plans are in place to enhance retention, progression, completion and attainment?
2. To what extent are staff and students across the institution, at all levels, aware of the BME attainment gap? Is the evidence openly available, regularly monitored and discussed?
3. To what extent have targets been set to reduce the attainment gap? What strategies are in place to ensure success?
4. To what extent are strategies based on clear evidence? Have plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of any such strategies been put in place?
5. To what extent have teaching and learning practices, in particular those relating to assessment, been evaluated, including by students, to minimise possible bias and discrimination?
6. To what extent do staff feel skilled and empowered to build effective relationships with all students? Is high quality learning and teaching rewarded within the institution?
7. To what extent have approaches designed to improve the success of all students been mainstreamed? To what extent are *all* students accessing academic, pastoral and other support services?

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Appendix A: Evidence of activity from across the HE sector

National reports

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Dhanda, M. (2010) *Understanding Disparities in Student Attainment: Black and Minority Ethnic Students' Experience*. University of Wolverhampton. Available from:

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Reflective papers

HEA/EUC (2011) *Improving the Degree Attainment of Black and Minority Ethnic Students*. Presentations, reflective papers and related from the 15 institutions who participated in the initial summit are available from: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/EthnicitySummit> [5 May 2012].

Conferences and seminars

Coventry University and University of Wolverhampton (2012) Touching Hearts and Minds: tackling disparities in student attainment. One-day conference, Coventry University.

University of Chester (2012) Exploring the experience of Black Minority and Ethnic students in Higher Education. One-day research symposium, University of Chester Law School.

HEA/University of Nottingham (2012) Access recruitment and retention of black and minority ethnic (BME) students when nursing is all degree: the role of pedagogical cultural competence. Health Sciences Discipline Workshop and Seminar Series 2012, University of Nottingham.

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The legal launch pad programme:

http://www.onlinebld.com/the_legal_gateway/the_legal_launch_pad_LLIP.html

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Positive Action Training Hub (PATH) into teaching focuses on improving the rate of recruitment and the retention of students from minority ethnic groups into Initial Teacher Training:

<http://path.uwe.ac.uk/>.

Teaching Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (hosted by C-SAP, the Higher Education Academy Subject Network for Sociology, Anthropology, Politics):

<http://www.teachingrace.bham.ac.uk/index.htm>.

Appendix B: Staff interview demographics

HEI No.	Mission grouping	Staff number	Job role/position	Ethnicity	Gender
1.	1994 Group	1.	PVC ¹⁵ for Learning and Teaching	White British	Female
		2.	Equalities Manager ¹⁶	Black British	Female
		3.	Lecturer ¹⁷	Black British	Male
		4.	Lecturer	Black British	Female
2.	Million+	5.	Senior Academic ¹⁸	White British	Male
		6.	Senior Officer ¹⁹ Students' Union	White British	Male
		7.	Senior Academic	Asian British	Female
		8.	Equalities Manager	White British	Male
		9.	Senior Academic	Black British	Male
3.	Russell Group	10.	PVC for Learning and Teaching	White British	Female
		11.	Lecturer	White British	Female
		12.	Senior Academic	White British	Male
		13.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Female
		14.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Male
4.	University Alliance	15.	Lecturer	White British	Male
		16.	Lecturer	White British	Male
		17.	PVC for Learning and Teaching	White British	Female
		18.	Senior Academic	Black British	Female
5.	Million+	19.	Senior Academic	White Other	Female
		20.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Female
		21.	Senior Academic	Asian British	Male
		22.	Senior Academic	Asian British	Male
		23.	Senior Academic	White British	Female
		24.	Lecturer	White Other (Middle East)	Female

¹⁵ The generic term 'PVC' has been used to cover PVC, DVC, etc.

¹⁶ The term 'Equalities Manager' is used for Equalities Manager, adviser, etc.

¹⁷ 'Lecturer' covers both lecturer and senior lecturer grades.

¹⁸ 'Senior Academic' is used for principal lecturer grade and above and includes academic Deans, professor.

¹⁹ 'Senior Officer SU' is used for president, vice-president, senior officer.

6.	University Alliance	25.	Member of Widening Participation team	White British	Female
		26.	PVC for Learning and Teaching	White British	Female
		27.	Senior Academic	White British	Female
		28.	Lecturer	White British	Female
		29.	Member of Widening Participation team	White Other (Middle East)	Female
		30.	Member of Widening Participation team	White British	Female
7.	Russell Group	31.	PVC for Learning and Teaching	White British	Male
		32.	Senior Academic	White British	Male
		33.	Senior Academic	White British	Male
		34.	Senior Academic	White British	Female
		35.	Senior Academic	White British	Female
		36.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Male
		37.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Female
8.	Private provider	38.	Lecturer	White British	Male
9.	University Alliance	39.	PVC for Learning and Teaching	White British	Male
		40.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Male
		41.	Senior Academic	White British	Female
		42.	Senior Academic	White Scottish	Female
		43.	Senior Academic	White Scottish	Female
10.	Unaligned	44.	PVC for Learning and Teaching	White British	Female
		45.	Senior Academic	Asian British-Indian	Male
		46.	Senior Research Fellow	White British	Female
		47.	Senior Officer Students' Union	African Other (Sudanese)	Male
		48.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Female
		49.	Senior Officer Students' Union	White British	Female
		50.	Senior Academic	White Irish	Male
11.	Million+	51.	Senior Academic	White British	Male
		52.	Senior Academic	White British	Female
		53.	Senior Academic	White British	Male

Appendix C: Student interview demographics

Student number	Mission grouping	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	1 st /2 nd gen.	Year of study	Course (all UG unless specified)
1.	Million+	British Asian Bangladeshi	Female	21	1 st	2	Human Resource Management
2.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Female	21	1 st	3	Law and Criminology
3.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Male	21	1 st	3	Human Resource Management
4.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Male	22	1 st	3	Business Studies
5.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Female	21	1 st	1	Human Resource Management
6.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Male	26	2 nd	3	Business Management
7.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Female	21	1 st	3	Human Resource Management
8.	Russell Group	British Black African	Male	23	2 nd	3	History
9.	Russell Group	British Asian Pakistani	Male	20	2 nd	1	Pharmacy
10.	Russell Group	British Asian Indian	Male	22	1 st	3	Economics
11.	Russell Group	Black British (Other)	Male	28	2 nd	4	Chemical Engineering (PhD)
12.	Russell Group	British Asian Pakistani	Female	22	1 st	1	Medical Physics
13.	Russell Group	British Asian Indian	Female	22	1 st	2	Sociology
14.	Russell Group	British Asian Indian	Female	20	1 st	3	History
15.	Million+	British Asian Sri Lankan	Female	25	1 st	2	Chemistry
16.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Female	21	2 nd	3	LLB Law
17.	Million+	British Asian Pakistani	Female	21	1 st	3	LLB Law
18.	Private provider	Indian (international)	Male	24	1 st	1	Business and Management
19.	Private provider	Black African (international)	Female	25	1 st	1	Banking and Management
20.	Million+	Indian (international)	Male	19	2 nd	2	LLB Law
21.	Million+	Bangladeshi (international)	Male	22	2 nd	2	LLB Law
22.	Million+	Chinese (international)	Female	22	2 nd	2	Pharmaceutical Science
23.	University Alliance	Black Africa (international)	Female	18	1 st	1	Business and Management
24.	University Alliance	Saudi Arabian (international)	Male	31	1 st	1	Business and Management

Appendix D: Staff interview schedule

1. Baseline/biographical date: age, gender, ethnicity, time in HE; role/teaching responsibilities
2. Are you aware of the BME attainment gap across the HE sector? If yes, do you have any sense of what might account for this? (If not aware, explain and then ask for their thoughts.)
3. Are you aware of the BME attainment gap within your particular institution and on particular courses? If yes, do you have any sense of what might account for this?
4. Are there any BME groups you think do better/less well than others? What might account for this?
5. Where and when do discussions about BME attainment take place (if at all)?
6. Are you aware of any changes that have been made to aspects of the curriculum/teaching and learning/assessment to try and reduce the attainment gap? If so, why did these changes come about/what were the drivers?
7. Have you had any direct involvement in any of these particular strategies?
8. Have you any evidence that such strategies have been successful? What evidence?
9. What (further) strategies could academic staff put in place that might help Black and minority ethnic students be more academically successful?
10. Why might some of these things not currently be happening? What might make it more feasible to put alternative strategies in place?
11. Does the university have any schemes or programmes that advantage students who gain 2:1s or 1st (such as requiring 2:1 or above for entry on to PG course, part-funding PG courses for those with high level degrees)? Do you feel that such practices may be indirectly discriminating against BME students (on the basis that BME students are statistically less likely to achieve that degree ranking)? How might this be addressed?
12. What other changes could the university put in place that could help BME students be more academically successful? What are the barriers and how might these be minimised?
13. What support could organisations such as the HEA, HEFCE and ECU be doing to support the degree attainment of BME students?
14. Is there anything else you would like to contribute or discuss that you feel would be helpful for us to know?

Appendix E: Student interview schedule

1. Baseline/biographical date: age, gender, ethnicity, first/second generation into HE.
2. Past:
 - a. Journey into HE – Why? Why here/this course? Who was influential (e.g. school/family/others)? What strategies did you adopt to help you achieve your goal?
 - b. What were your early academic experiences on arrival at the university? What were the most positive/least?
 - c. How did you capitalise/build on the most positive (i.e. what did you do/strategies)?
 - d. How did you deal with the less positive aspects (what did you do/strategies)? Who/what resources did you draw on (internal/external)? What more could have been done to support you?

- e. Have you had to deal with any actual discrimination (within or outside the university)? If yes what did you do to deal with this, if anything? What people/resources have you drawn on?
 - f. Do you feel you are treated equally to your White counterparts – in relation to teaching and assessment practices? If no, do you have any specific examples?
3. Present:
- a. What level of degree are you aiming for? Why?
 - b. What academic and other actions are you putting in place to achieve this desired outcome?
 - c. What might be a hindrance (academic) and what are you doing to minimise this risk/threat?
 - d. Are there any aspects of the curriculum/teaching and learning/assessment that you have found suit you best? Why is this? (particular area of focus)
 - e. Are there any aspects of the curriculum/teaching and learning/assessment that remain problematic? What are you doing to address these problematic areas?
 - f. What are academic staff doing (approaches to the curriculum, teaching methods, assessments, etc.) that is helpful to you?
 - g. What (further) changes could academic staff put in place that could help you be more academically successful?
 - h. What changes could other staff across the university put in place that could help you be more academically successful?
 - i. What could academic/other staff do that might help Black and minority ethnic students in general be more academically successful?
4. Future:
- a. Are you starting to think about post-graduation employment? What do you want to do and why?
 - b. Have you started to put anything in place to help achieve this? If so, what are you doing? What could you be doing?
 - c. How important is the level of degree you might attain in helping achieve your goal?
 - d. What might stand in your way? How are you addressing this/could you address this (if at all)?
 - e. Are there any things that academic staff could be doing to help you achieve your desired future?