

NEON: Closing the undergraduate BME Attainment Gap (16 March 2018)

What work is being done: UCL example – Paulette Williams

Background

PW started working on project in July 2017. Gave an overview of attainment picture at UCL, forming the backdrop to the student-led campaign ('Why is my curriculum White?'). Project is multifaceted, recognising that student success is multipronged, and extends to faculty level with a focus on improving relationships & interactions between students/staff. It is linked to Kingston's HEFCE project (using value-added metrics and Tableau visualisation data to understand and reduce the attainment gap). Necessary to add another level of interrogation by disaggregating a 'good degree' classification by ethnicity.

Current picture

Current picture shows an increase in BME student dissatisfaction across the sector. Need to understand the key drivers for how students achieve a sense of belonging. They need to feel comfortable with reporting racial incidents, and this requires culture change. Thus, the project involves:

- Change-Makers project: students working in partnership with staff
- links to education strategy, assessment modalities, personal tutoring & TEF
- an institution-wide effort
- a full-time Sabbatical Officer to keep issues on the agenda at various meetings
- investment in the Race Equality Charter mark
- addressing cultural change by dealing with environmental issues
- using data from a variety of sources to build up a comprehensive picture of attainment
- developing an inclusive curriculum (using case studies, reading lists, examples from UK comparators, and HEIs across the UK & US)
- learning from Kingston's Curriculum Consultants project
- using an academic model project to align skills with requirements

Way forward

- create a staff working group
- review de Montfort's curriculum health check model
- develop a system to capture racial complaints to better understand the issues
- learn from Bristol's 'rating my progression' initiative
- celebrate students' successes
- work with HEA to develop unconscious bias training with a focus on using student-related scenarios
- support from Provost, who is an Envoy for race
- liberate the curriculum

The Student Voice: UCL Student Account

Guest speaker mentioned importance of not treating BME students as a homogenous group, e.g. important to distinguish between students from African and Caribbean backgrounds

Tertiary experiences matter. WP students have less access to extra-curricular opportunities that prepare them for selective schools, elite universities. Despite this, many students are resilient and aim high. Guidance and support are required to dispel the myths around university applications/career choices. For some, there are challenges for dealing with 'onlyness' in their HE environments.

Main challenges:

1. Supervisors are not always 'race-aware'. They tend to function from the perspective of normative assumptions for race and class
2. Students need a 'safe space' to raise their concerns, and to enable a shift in behaviour from 'rumour' to 'reporting'
3. Students need support to deal with feelings of unbelonging. Requirement for more communities of belonging, and opportunities to connect with alumni