



# REVERSE PEDAGOGY: A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY APPROACH TO THE BAME AWARDING GAP

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### 1. SUMMARY

The BAME student-citizens on this project concluded that:

1. Families don't always understand the demands that university makes on students.
2. Peer mentoring can be a source of shame and stigma unless it's normalised and perhaps ethnically sorted.
3. BAME advocates value one-to-one meetings with deans and others (e.g. OVC) with authority to drive change.
4. BAME students worry about the awarding gap becoming another source of stigma.
5. Not everyone comes in with A-levels. Transition from prior study needs more support.
6. Unconscious bias training and racism education must be for all, including students and professional staff
7. Blind Marking should be standard across the university.
8. Staff and students need to get to know each other as people. Staff need to drop their guards and show vulnerability.
9. Careers support isn't working for BAME students. They want to know which firms and sectors will welcome them.
10. BAME is an umbrella, not a bucket. Needs are diverse and there can be BAME-on-BAME racism.
11. On-campus housing can be a site of exclusion and discrimination.
12. Students don't know how to report racism within the university or what happens if they do.
13. The heart of home is the kitchen. Access to familiar cuisine would go a long way to making students feel at home.

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### 2. AIMS, AMBITIONS, AND PROJECT DESIGN

This project took a bottom-up approach to the BAME awarding gap. The aim was to create the right conditions for BAME students to lead the conversation and shape the recommendations. Knowledge is power. Students were therefore provided with the same information and research as those in senior management and academic positions in the University of Hertfordshire (UH). The project's ambition was to combine student experience and structured research to assess current policies and guide future policymaking directed at the BAME awarding gap.

#### i. The Citizens' Assembly Methodology

We adopted the Citizens' Assembly framework as closely as possible. Top-down committee-based deliberation tends to mishear or misunderstand people's experiences (especially if the people deliberating are relevantly different from the people having the experiences, for example a male-dominated medical profession making decisions about women's healthcare). On the other hand, directly democratic methods (such as referendums) do not easily facilitate evidence-based policymaking, especially if the evidence is counter-intuitive. In the case of awarding gaps, we have these two features. On one side, policy must be evidence-based. On the other side, the senior management and senior academics at UH are, overwhelmingly, white. Here we have a classic situation where the members of the body tasked with formulating and implementing policy are different in the relevant respect from the people the policy is intended to help. The citizens' assembly methodology recommends itself as a means to overcome this obstacle. We saw this as a way of continuing and radicalising the student-focussed approach of the BAME Student Success Working Group.

The plan was to recruit students at any and every level of study from across the university to participate in a series of four deliberative meetings, spaced at fortnightly intervals, each lasting two hours. Ideally, a citizens' assembly has 50-250 participants. We planned for the lower end of that range, and in the end the project gained the interest of approximately 20 students altogether. Not all of these students attended all of the sessions.

The four sessions were as follows:

- **What is a Citizens' Assembly?** We (Ahlberg and Larvor) introduced students to the methodology of the project. We gave them some background information about the awarding gap as well as access to a shared OneDrive folder containing research and data. Students were encouraged to add to the folder (though none did).
- **What does the data say?** The group was exposed to the data relating to the BAME awarding gap. This was delivered by Nathan Ghann and was essentially the same presentation that he gives to UH staff.
- **What has been done?** Nathan described the initiatives currently in place at UH to reduce the BAME awarding gap. Again, this was the same material as circulates among UH academics and management.
- **What is to be done?** This final session was for group members to write-up their proposals to reduce the BAME awarding gap. They were asked to identify the needs driving their policy suggestions. In order to jog their memories, students were provided with a short document outlining previously discussed issues. Aside from this aide-memoire, they were encouraged to write their ideas without interference from the facilitator.

### 3. STUDENT VOICE – WHAT THEY SAID IN THEIR INITIAL WRITEUP

In addition to the final session (*What is to be done?*), the students were given some extra time to correspond with others who couldn't attend the last session. The result of their groupwork was a list of suggestions. Here is exactly what they said:

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Parents understanding student experience:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Came to campus</li></ul></li><li>2. Peer/Group mentoring:</li></ol> |
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- University life navigation
  - ACADEMIC MENTORING: Pairing based on individuals backgrounds to make things less intimidating
3. Everyone talking to Dean (meet the Dean event)
    - Too filtered down, too many layers, non-accessible
  4. Student awareness
    - Open campus debates
    - Book section -> to bring BAME & non- BAME students together
    - Address/framing attainment conveying message because it can get political and emotional (CLARIFICATION)
    - When students are told about the awarding gap, understanding how to deal with negative response [blame, demotivation]
    - A more personable approach; breaking the misconceptions of what the attainment gap/awarding gap is.
  5. Alternative skills from GCSE, A LEVEL + BTEC
    - Support into the transition [study skills course] for everyone in the uni. Make it interesting and not like how schools do it
  6. Staff bias:
    - Staff & student engagement
    - Biases
    - Accountability for staff's training.
    - Blind Marking as a standard across the university
    - Staff talking about themselves, so they are more personable to students
    - Orientation to address anxieties that students feel [staff-student 'speed meeting' each other to reduce bias] and meeting someone of a different background to you and mix with different people [social activities inside and outside class]
    - Ensure more interactions between students and staff members; enough interactions to form true, unbiased views or opinions that encourage staff/students to write up feedback, whether positive or negative... Plausible enough to act on when needed.
  7. Support for placements and work experience
    - Different criteria of work for different courses (can't fully rely on Careers because they can't tailor job experiences to each and every student looking for placement)
    - Maybe prepare contact lists that students can refer to for self-applications for placements.
  8. BAME isn't blanketed -> minorities within minorities,
    - for instance, there are extremely different culture between Korean and Japanese among the category of Asian! There needs to be understanding of cultures within the BAME community, to break some misconceptions and ignorance
  9. Cohesion in accommodation
    - Current situation is students being very divided/cliq-u-y
    - Discrimination amongst on-campus students
    - Recommendation: uniting activities (i.e. SU celebrating festivities at the Oval, Club & Societies planning events and inviting all)
    - Cross-cultural interaction through neighbours
  10. Unconscious bias training for all
    - The discussions about bias will allow for more confident about
  11. **'0-tolerance policy'** when it comes to racial discrimination (ENFORCEMENT & AWARENESS)

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- Currently in place under Equality Office
  - Bring to light issues like COVID-19 racism cases; support those whose families affect and study abroad
  - More support for those who have been discriminated against, as well as the accountability for those who act negatively
12. Food
- International students can't get the taste of home
  - Restaurants: PRICEY / DON'T TASTE LIKE ORIGINAL / Good effort for Street Food on Tour but make it authentic
  - Corner shops: DON'T SELL INTERNATIONAL GOODS (only American goods)

#### 4. WHAT WE THINK THEY HAD IN MIND AND WHY

The original ambition was that the students would identify precise recommendations using both lived experience and educational theory. Evidently, their proposals are not all clear from this list. Having listened to the conversations, we could interpret some of their responses. For the rest, we had to reengage with the team, after the group had dispersed, in order to establish fuller answers. The students were happy to develop their ideas. Here is the result of that additional communication. The text that follows the *original bullet points* is our attempt to unpack the students' intentions, without evaluation:

##### 1. *Parents understanding student experience:*

- *Come to campus*

Not only are those from minority ethnic groups often first-generation students to HE, but their parents are often first-generation immigrants. This can pose a double cultural barrier to families understanding the pressures their children face at university. It is not just that higher education may present a student with demands that their parents have little or no experience of, but the parents' lived experience might be considerably different from that of their child. Students expressed feeling additional strain and a "pull in two directions" because their family life was disconnected from university life. The expectations that their family had of them didn't always take into consideration their educational commitments. In order to address this disconnect, students requested more opportunities to include their parents in university life. Increased instances where parents could come to learn the experience of their children would lead to an increase in understanding, and improved home support for BAME students.

##### 2. *Peer/Group mentoring:*

- *University life navigation*

Students understood that the university already provides academic support by way of academic coaches, but they asked for mentoring support to aid with the social transition into university life as a means of helping students to feel included, welcomed, and not alone – especially if they were the first-generation in their family to go into HE. A "don't be lonely buddy" would help them feel fully supported and part of the student body from the moment they join the university.

- *ACADEMIC MENTORING: Pairing based on individuals' backgrounds to make things less intimidating*

While academic mentoring schemes already exist in the university, students requested more consideration of how mentors and mentees are paired. As BAME students often have to struggle with impostor syndrome and stereotype threat, they were more likely to feel shame before an academic mentor who is not from a similar ethnic background to

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them. This in turn could form a barrier to students taking full advantage of their assigned mentor. Mentors from similar ethnic backgrounds might pose less of a threat in triggering psychological barriers to academic success.

### 3. *Everyone talking to the Dean (meet the Dean event)*

- *Too filtered down, too many layers, non-accessible*

While much work has been done to listen to the student voice and respond proactively, students were still concerned that their voices are not being heard. Too often they are unable to see where their feedback goes, or how it is acted upon – if at all. This is discouraging and leads to apathy. Fewer levels of communication and more direct audiences with staff members with the authority to make and implement decisions would not only combat a feeling that the student voice is not properly heard, but also lead to changes being actually applied. One student spoke warmly of one-to-one meetings with the dean of the Law School.

### 4. *Student awareness of awarding gap*

- *Open campus debates*

The awarding gap should be talked about more openly and widely across the university. Students should have a heightened awareness about what it is, and what is being done about it. Without the all-important general understanding the danger is that the issue can be misconstrued or misinterpreted in a way which puts BAME students in a negative light. There is also a danger that unless the awarding gap is discussed and debated university wide, it will become a specifically non-white problem causing additional racial divisions and pressures.

- *Success stories from BAME role models*

Beyond university, BAME students continue to be unfairly tested when finding their feet in professional employment. One way of supporting BAME graduates is to expose them, as undergraduates, to role models and success stories from BAME graduates in professional roles. This is invaluable when cultivating a positive psychological frame of reference. Guests who have had to face similar obstacles are also better positioned to transfer practical knowledge when it comes to supporting BAME students in the navigation of the challenges that lie ahead of them as graduates.

- *Book section -> to bring BAME & non- BAME students together*

Part of creating a community where students are able to have aspirational pride is to celebrate the achievements of those they feel connected with – particularly if those connections are academically accomplished. More needs to be done to highlight the successes of BAME academics. A book section which celebrates BAME achievement, as well as library staff and students talking about these books by way of online book reviews to stimulate positive discussion was recommended, along with increased numbers of BAME authors in the syllabus. Students have enjoyed initiatives such as [Connect](#), where books are discussed and shared which relate BAME experience. They would like to see this increased across the university.

- *Address/framing attainment conveying message because it can get political and emotional*  
(CLARIFICATION)

Framing the awarding gap and ensuring a sensitive approach to it was a deep concern amongst the group. The group didn't say how they would like this done, but they were acutely aware of how detrimental the effects of thoughtless messaging could be. They did have a sense of what works well and what doesn't. For instance, it was unanimously agreed among the group that they preferred to refer to the gap as the *awarding gap* rather than the *attainment gap*. More needs to be done in ensuring that clarification is sought from students about what they feel comfortable with when it comes to discussing the sensitive issues surrounding the awarding gap.

- *When students are told about the awarding gap, understanding how to deal with negative response [blame, demotivation]*

BAME students are at the centre of the debate that highlights them as vulnerable to systemic institutional inequalities. As they are already under pressure due to the attainment gap, they should be protected from additional pressures such as having to defend themselves against criticism from others because of it or defend themselves from their own

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negative psychology because thinking about these issues can be demotivating. There should be adequate support for BAME students when it comes to knowing how to respond to the potentially negative reactions from peers and staff when critically engaging with issues surrounding the awarding gap. Students suggested that in order to avoid the potential of naïve or hurtful responses to discussions surrounding the awarding gap, all members of staff and students should undertake diversity training. BAME students should possibly have additional support, on entering the university in their first year, by way of targeted training when it comes to dealing with negative responses surrounding the attainment gap issue.

- *A more personable approach; breaking the misconceptions of what the attainment/awarding gap is.*

Staff should have an inclusive and friendly manner to enable students to feel at ease in approaching them with the social and academic struggles they may be facing. For example, staff should be patient when presented with students who may not be fluent in English.

- *Staff talking about themselves, so they are more personable to students*

Likewise, it is easier to be vulnerable and let your guard down when presented with a person who is prepared to do the same. Getting to know staff members on a human level by sharing of personal information about themselves would most likely lead to a greater chance in BAME students feeling comfortable with talking to staff members when they need learning support.

### 5. *Alternative skills from GCSE, A LEVEL + BTEC*

- *Support into the transition [study skills course] for everyone in the uni. Make it interesting and not like how schools do it*

Better signposting of the academic skills sessions which are currently available and who has access to them is needed to help those who may have come through an educational route which has not fully prepared them for university study. There should be more access to academic support at school level. Services in the LRC are insufficient. To avoid a deficit model or a situation where students feel as though they are being singled-out as not appropriately skilled to study at HE level, an opt-out system rather than an opt-in system should be applied. Every student should have access to additional skills-training, and it should be expected that all students undertake it – that way there is no stigma attached to it.

### 6. *Staff bias:*

- *Staff & student engagement and biases*

Increased student and staff communication would enable conversations to take place surrounding biases and how to overcome them. For example, biases which could be easily challenged are instances where staff do not care to learn how to pronounce a student's name or assume that the student is likely to be difficult in class due to their ethnic background. Opportunities to break down these preconceptions while creating opportunities for staff to know students in a more personal way, should be maximised.

- *Accountability for staff training.*

The students requested implicit bias training but were concerned that the current online implicit bias training is insufficient. There was also a strong feeling that everyone in the university should receive this type of training, including non-academic staff and fellow students – and that it should not be optional. An effective report and feedback system to support BAME students who might have experienced issues with a member of staff was identified as something currently lacking. A safe and reliable reporting system would provide a feeling of being valued and backed by the university should a student have a poor experience due to their race or background. This reporting system could involve Student Support Officers personally taking feedback from students when complaints

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against members of staff are made. The students requested greater opportunity to talk directly with Associate Deans, or other staff members who have influence, when reporting on these issues.

- *Blind Marking as a standard across the university*

Blind marking must be best practice across the university sector, and it must address the varied ways of assessing student performance so as to minimise the opportunity for discrimination. This would not only ensure a fairer marking system but would cultivate a feeling of ease in the academic performance of BAME students when they know that racial issues have been removed from grading.

- *Orientation to address anxieties that students feel [staff-student 'speed meeting' each other to reduce bias] and meeting someone of a different background to you and mix with different people [social activities inside and outside class]*

Although there is already opportunity for a lot of student mixing during freshers' week and induction, an ongoing need for the type of mixing and exposure to people from different social groups, and different levels of study was identified as something desirable, and something which would lead to an increased understanding and identification between different groups. A second wave of orientation later in the academic year might be helpful in inviting later starting students into the university and exposing them to a wide variety of peers.

- *Ensure more interactions between students and staff members; enough interactions to form true, unbiased views or opinions that encourage staff/students to write up feedback, whether positive or negative... Plausible enough to act on when needed.*

Feedback from students, however seemingly insignificant should be properly considered by members of staff. This feedback should be reliable because students have been given the opportunity to get to know their lecturers and so are more likely to form fair and unbiased judgements about them. Having better relationships with lecturers will also be more likely to lead to students providing honest feedback.

### 7. *Support for placements and work experience*

- *Different criteria of work for different courses (can't fully rely on Careers because they can't tailor job experiences to each and every student looking for placement)*

Aware that BAME student are often presented with further challenges when starting a professional career, the students would like to see more ongoing careers support such as additional help with workshops which take graduates through writing cover letters and developing their CVs. They would like to see more Careers Events and Employment staff specifically geared towards catering for BAME students. They would like this advice to be less generic and catered to the employment fields of the different Schools within the university. The students advocated career sessions which actively point out BAME-friendly firms. They would like these companies listed so as students can approach them for placements and self-applications.

### 8. *BAME isn't blanketed -> minorities within minorities,*

- *for instance, there are extremely different culture between Korean and Japanese among the category of Asian! There needs to be understanding of cultures within the BAME community, to break some misconceptions and ignorance*

This blanketing isn't helpful when it comes to referring to BAME students as one body when coming up with programmes, solutions, and events to support BAME students. It glosses over the complexity of the issues experienced by a large body of disparately different people, with vastly different personal and cultural experiences.

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- *International students have very different needs from BAME HOME students*

Students feel blanketed within this category as though the problems, issues and solutions are the same for all. It would be helpful if further studies, such as the one currently underway by University of Hertfordshire Student Union (UHSU), were conducted where the needs of international BAME students and BAME home students are distinguished. This might be done at a course level as well as an institutional wide level. There aren't enough BAME Student Advocates at present which means that International BAME students are not currently adequately represented. Better recruitment of international BAME advocates needs to happen as well as inclusivity training for SCOs, Student Advocates and UHSU on how properly to engage with International students.

- *Get cultural/ethnic societies involved to plan intercultural events*

The issue of blanketing the complexity of the students who fit under the BAME umbrella doesn't just lead to a misunderstanding of the different social needs students might have, it also glosses over their differing academic needs. Recognising that students might have different educational and academic needs because of their ethnic background might go a long way in providing good Learning and Teaching support. For example, international students might benefit from handouts when being lectured by native speakers of English. This enables them to follow the talk without the extra challenge of decoding colloquial language. A variety of methods could be used to aid students in developing their English skills and it should not be assumed that writing and reading are the only options. More small events, group tutorials and one-to-one slots with academic staff would permit students who are not fully confident in their English understanding to practice their language skills in small and safe groups. It would also provide a context where lecturers are not singling out students or putting them on the spot in front of a larger and more intimidating room of people.

### 9. *Cohesion in accommodation*

- *Current situation is students being very divided/cliq-u-y*

More could be done to promote a sense of home and belonging within living spaces. BAME students may experience continual othering or exclusion outside the classroom.

- *Discrimination amongst on-campus students*

A situation such as this can be very demoralising for students and can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and studies. Better monitoring and support systems need to be put in place to make sure that microaggressions and discrimination is confronted outside of the classroom as well as within it. One recommendation is to expand unifying activities with cross-cultural celebratory activities where the SU, and student-led societies plan events which invite and include everyone. Improved opportunities for mixing with neighbours within living accommodation would expose students to new cross-cultural interactions.

### 10. *Unconscious bias training for all*

- *The discussions about bias will allow for more confident about*

This was a recurring theme. It was strongly felt that unconscious bias training should be mandatory for ALL staff in a student-facing role and not only academic staff. This was to reduce the opportunity for misunderstandings, microaggressions and unfair treatment to arise through the potential unconscious biases of staff who regularly come into contact with BAME students – who often rely on these staff to cooperate in helping them with administrative and personal issues. Unconscious bias training for ALL students was advised, not only to educate non-BAME students on potential biases which might be driving non-inclusive behaviour, but to also address the unconscious biases which might be driving poor behaviour between different sets of ethnically diverse students who themselves fit under the BAME umbrella. Unconscious bias training needs to be taken seriously, done well and done thoroughly. This means a

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proper course and not just a video lecture. Information could be inserted into student handbooks and advertised more widely.

### 11. *'0-tolerance policy' when it comes to racial discrimination (ENFORCEMENT & AWARENESS)*

- *Currently in place under Equality Office*

There currently appears to be no direction or advice in place when students and staff need to make a complaint or raise a concern in relation to discrimination. This leaves students feeling unsupported and vulnerable. If processes do not exist, they need to be put in place, and if they do exist, accessible information needs to be distributed so that students know how they're being supported by the organisation and what they can do about it should such a discriminatory situation arise. Information on the level of reporting and what actions were taken should be published and accessible. This would promote trust, transparency and a sense that general cooperation on this matter makes a difference for those reporting cases, as well as for those responsible for discriminatory behaviour.

- *Bring to light issues like COVID-19 racism cases; support those whose families affect and study abroad*

The recent Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China is one instance of how events abroad can impact on racial feeling in the UK and in UK universities. During the initial stages of the Covid-19 outbreak, racial abuse and discriminatory views towards those of Chinese heritage increased. The university must be especially attentive and proactive when dealing with discrimination at a time when certain students might be feeling particularly vulnerable.

- *More support for those who have been discriminated against, as well as the accountability for those who act negatively*

Emotional support services should be coupled, if the situation were to arise, with legal advice for students who wish to pursue particularly bad cases of discrimination. All these actions combined will give a clear signal that the university will not tolerate, under any circumstances, unfair and unequal treatment of staff or students. It presents an unequivocal message that inclusivity is backed at all times, in all cases, and for all persons within the organisation. There was a concern that systems for reporting of racially motivated instances are not in place, and that students and staff are therefore not properly protected if they do choose to make a complaint. A good reporting system might think about anonymous reporting and psychological support for the victim.

### 12. *Food*

- *International students can't get the taste of home*

Food is essential in promoting a feeling of home and belonging. Although the university regularly runs international days which celebrate different cultures and countries – often with food – students pointed out that these make their food novel and not generally accessible. Access to international food stuffs should be normalised and not exoticized. Food is one of the surest and easiest ways to make a person feel welcome and happy and yet certain cooking apparatus such as rice cookers are not permitted in dormitories. Student societies could play a role in identifying good purchasing sources. For instance, Chinese Soc might know the best London suppliers for Chinese cuisine.

- *Restaurants: PRICEY / DON'T TASTE LIKE ORIGINAL / Good effort for Street Food on Tour but make it authentic*

While the gesture of the refectory having introduced culturally themed days such as Indian and Chinese food days is pleasing, the dishes which are served are not traditionally made. They tend to have a Eurocentric taste to them. In order to get that all-important "taste of home", more effort needs to be made in sourcing authentically cooked dishes at a price that's economical so as those students with a tighter income can afford to enjoy them. Again, restaurant management should consider authentic international food chain suppliers and work with them to obtain, for example, "proper African cuisine."

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- *Corner shops: DON'T SELL INTERNATIONAL GOODS (only American goods)*

Campus shops are heavily Eurocentric in their food stores and don't properly cater for a variety of diets and cultural needs. BAME students, who make up around 50% of the total student cohort, are unable to source the produce they would normally eat at home with their families. For instance, one second generation Jamaican student despaired that she couldn't get hold of some of the ingredients needed to make the dishes she enjoys and associates with family, belonging and home.

### 13. *Wider community relations*

- *Better relations for BAME students within the Hatfield area*

In order to minimize racism and provide a feeling of inclusivity and home for BAME students, the university could help to make BAME students feel welcome in the area they live in as well as the university campus. Things to consider are working with religious societies around the area to help with integration issues and working closely with local police to ensure the safety of their BAME students. Involving the wider Hatfield community to take part in university and School events will assist in student-resident relations.

We make no attempt to assess the students' perceptions and judgments. In some cases, the suggestion may be impractical for some reason, but the identified problem is nonetheless real. In other instances the students seem to be calling for something that already exists—but this too is informative, since it suggests that there is, at least, a communication problem.

## 5. PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

The students were volunteers and were committed to the aims of the project. This was especially evident when the students were approached after the fourth meeting to elaborate their list of points (see box above). Nevertheless, there were some shortcomings:

### *i. Not enough students participated*

Citizens' assemblies aim to recruit a large and diverse body of people. This project was widely advertised in the university through BAME Advocates, student societies, Student Community Organisers and using email lists. Posters were put up around the campus. Even so, we recruited no more than around 16-20 students altogether.

### *ii. The student turnout wasn't consistent from week-to-week.*

Not having the same students every week meant that students didn't gel as a group and limited the level to which participants were able to engage with the theory presented to them.

### *iii. Student-participants didn't reflect the diverse social and ethnic population of the university.*

The participants were already BAME advocates or involved / invested in the issues discussed. We had one male postgraduate student of Chinese origin who happened to also be an international student. While his experience offered a unique perspective, we had to rely on his contributions to represent both Chinese and international students – regardless of their ethnic origin and gender - across the university.

### *iv. Not enough critical engagement*

Due to the limited number of participants and the lack of diversity within the group, there was not enough disagreement. While the group worked well to develop ideas together, there was little critical examination of emerging views. Moreover, they did not refer to the research reports in the common folder, preferring rather to rely on their own experience.

### *v. We didn't set aside enough time to understand the managerial documents.*

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In the third session of the project *'What Has Been Done?'*, students were given an informationally rich handout which was designed for management, academic and organisational dissemination, with forty-two boxes labelled with abbreviations (see appendix, below). Due to limited time for unpacking the boxes, students struggled to engage with current UH strategies. Consequently, we didn't get the hoped-for detailed critical commentary on current UH initiatives.

vi. *The final document produced by the Assembly was a bare list.*

It was terse and failed to justify suggestions by identifying a need. We rescued the project by writing paragraphs to express what we thought the bullet-points meant and then asking the students whether we had caught their meaning.

### 6. HOW TO CARRY THE PROJECT FORWARD

While there were shortcomings in the project's design, we think that it is worth running a second iteration. Here are some improvements we'd like to make:

- i. Student participants should be paid for their time, as recommended in the joint UUK/NUS report [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at Universities: #ClosingTheGap](#) (May 2019, p. 58). Apart from respecting students' time, this would have permitted us to insist on engagement with existing written research.
- ii. More time given to understanding existing research and policy.
- iii. Wider outreach and advertising, including teaching sites (Canvas) and social media.
- iv. A report template that invites identification of needs, solutions and evidence might have helped students to structure their thoughts.
- v. Supply the students with samples of the sort of document we want them to write.
- vi. Fuller records of discussions held during the first three sessions would have better supported the final session, dedicated to writing.
- vii. Feedback from UH management on the students' proposals during the life of the project, as an integral part of the process. Some of the students' suggestions are more feasible than others, and they deserve to hear the reactions of management to their ideas.

## 7. APPENDIX: THE FORTY-TWO BOXES

UH strategy for race equality and reducing the awarding gap (February 2020)

