



# Academic leadership at the programme level to address the BME attainment gap

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# Executive Summary

The black and minority ethnic (BME) attainment gap (ie the difference in the percentage of white students achieving a first or upper second class degree (2.1) compared to the percentage of BME students achieving a first or 2.1 degree) has been a long-standing concern within the higher education sector. Many initiatives and projects have identified the need for institutional commitment and senior leadership to develop inclusive practice strategies but there has been limited discussion on the importance of localised leadership to ensure that strategies are operationalised and enhancements are embedded and sustained.

Within the university we have recognised the crucial role of the programme leader and the impact of localised leadership on the student experience. This project provided us with an ideal opportunity to consider how programme leaders reviewed their programmes and identified inclusivity-related enhancements. The consideration of programme level data (value added (VA) scores) enabled programme leaders to consider ethnicity-related attainment gaps within their courses and to discuss appropriate actions with their programme teams.

The aim of the project was to support academic leadership at the programme level to enable inclusive curriculum enhancements and subsequent improvements in outcomes for students from BME backgrounds. The project thus enabled the integrated discussion of leadership, equality and learning and teaching.

Programme leaders and up to three members of their programme team attended workshops that focused on promoting inclusive curriculum approaches. We then conducted structured interviews with 30 programme leaders. The aims of the interviews were to explore examples of inclusive practice and actions identified by the programme leader as well as any potential challenges they perceived in trying to enhance inclusive practice. Objective review of annual monitoring and evaluation reports (AMERs), plus follow-up discussions with programme leaders, enabled us to identify the range of actions implemented by programme teams. We also considered any benefits and challenges associated with implementing inclusive practice changes.

Analysis of the initial interview transcriptions resulted in the classification of responses into one of three categories based on their expressed intention, or lack of intention, to influence change.

The three categories were:

- Effecting programme level change
- Personal commitment to inclusivity
- Limited action

**Effecting programme level change:** some programme leaders had an in-depth understanding of the challenges associated with ethnicity related attainment gaps. They had engaged in training previously and were aware of national data and, in some cases, discipline-related data. They had already made some changes to their own practice and identified clear actions to influence change across the programme. Some examples included: programme leaders raising the profile of BME authors by reviewing reading lists and resources to ensure they were inclusive and representative; increasing the use of BME case studies in the curriculum; and showcasing BME role models within the programme.

**Personal commitment to inclusivity:** for some programme leaders, the workshop stimulated personal change, for example, in their own teaching, and/or within their module. They identified the need for enhancements but were not yet influencing change in the wider programme team. Barriers identified by programme leaders in this group included the challenge of leading without line management responsibility.

**Limited action:** A number of programme leaders identified limited actions or no actions. Lack of action seemed to relate to one of four themes: i) general lack of awareness; ii) competing priorities and discussion of other issues such as gender equality; iii) deficit approaches where actions focused on student support; iv) deflection of responsibility.

Reviewing AMERs enabled a range of actions associated with inclusive practice to be identified. Follow-up discussions with programme leaders provided details on how actions were being implemented as well as the challenges associated with implementing change.

Despite all programme leaders having attended a very similar workshop there was variability in approach when considering inclusive curriculum actions. Programme leaders had different levels of understanding based on their own previous experiences as well as the amount of race-related staff development in which they had previously engaged and their willingness to consider their practice and their own privilege.

To support programme leaders in leading change at the programme level, 11 case studies of good practice have been produced. The case studies provide different examples of race-related actions and are drawn from programmes reflecting a range of disciplines, size of cohort and level of study. ■

# 01 Background and rationale

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## Aim

To support academic leadership at the programme level to enable inclusive curriculum enhancements and subsequent improvements in outcomes for students from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

It has been known for more than 20 years that the proportion of BME students achieving a 'good degree' is significantly lower than the proportion of white students (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Berry and Loke, 2011; Equality Challenge Unit, 2017). Within the University of Hertfordshire we have a very diverse student body with 45% of students from BME backgrounds and our attainment gap is higher than the sector average (eg in 2009, the university's attainment gap was 27% compared to a sector average of 19%).

The University of Hertfordshire has been fully committed to reducing the attainment gap since 2009 and, following successful initiatives at institutional level, we have reduced the attainment differential by 10% (attainment gap between home/EU white and BME students in 2009 = 27% and in 2017 = 17%).

Institutional activities have included:

- Setting institutional equality objectives to reduce the gap.
- University committee away days to raise awareness.
- Implementation of anonymous marking.
- An annual learning and teaching conference themed around BME student success.
- Discussion forums with students and staff.
- Encouragement of staff to attend unconscious bias training (over 700 staff members have attended).

Institutional data and school level data have been available to our 10 academic schools with deans of schools asked to identify school level actions. However, it has been challenging to influence change at the level of the programme.

In 2017, the university embarked on a Hefce-funded collaborative project with six other institutions (Kingston University (project lead), University of Wolverhampton, University of Greenwich, University College London, Nescot College, De Montfort University) to use the value added (VA) metric to enable comparison of statistically expected attainment and actual attainment for white and BME cohorts (taking into account entry qualifications and subject choice). Kingston's VA metric uses the actual degree outcomes of all students graduating across higher education in the last five years by subject of study and one of 50 entry qualification bands. This allows a statistically expected percentage of first/2.1 degrees to be calculated for any cohort of students which can then be compared with the actual attainment of that cohort (be it BME versus white; male versus female etc). Where the attainment exceeds the 'expected', the VA score is proportionately above one and, conversely, where the outcome is below expectation the VA score is below one. Kingston has developed a Tableau dashboard showing VA scores and versions of the dashboard have been developed by each institution to enable visual presentation of the data at programme level with the aim of enabling myth-busting and focused discussions with programme teams.

The university has been interested in localised leadership and the importance of the role of the programme leader. Collaborative research between our Centre for Academic Quality Assurance (CAQA) and our Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre (LTIC) – 'Exploring the role of the programme leader' (Cahill et al, 2015) – highlighted the complex range of activities in which programme leaders engage: decision-making on complex academic, pastoral, moral, administrative and pragmatic issues, as well as demonstrating continuous enhancement of programmes according to student feedback scores and responding to institutional and national initiatives. The research included a number of recommendations associated with training and support for programme leaders with opportunities for self-reflection, debriefing and the sharing of experiences

with peers. The subsequent instigation of an annual programme leaders' symposium provided opportunities for programme leaders from across the university to meet together to share practice and discuss similar challenges.

At the 2016 symposium we discussed the BME attainment gap and recognised the challenges of having only school-level data and not programme level scores. The lack of granularity hid some of the attainment gaps and provided excuses for inertia on the part of programme teams. Involvement in the Hefce-funded project and the development of the VA dashboard has enabled data to be displayed and investigated at the level of the programme and enables trend data (four years worth of data) to be considered.

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (Leadership Foundation; now Advance-HE) project and our interest in the role of the programme leader in relation to localised leadership provided us with an ideal opportunity to consider how programme leaders are reviewing their programmes and considering VA scores to identify inclusivity-related enhancements. ■

# 02 Objectives

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- | To support programme leaders in identifying and implementing improvements to their programme to ensure inclusive teaching practices and inclusive curricula.
- | To promote distributed leadership and enhance the skills of programme leaders who are usually in a position of leadership without line management authority.
- | To improve outcomes for BME students through improvements to academic programmes and academic practice. ■

# 03 Research methodology/approach

As part of the institution's involvement in the collaborative project on VA scores, programme leaders were invited to inclusive curricular workshops to review their current practice and to consider VA scores. The project focused on undergraduate programmes as the VA scores are based on degree classifications and hence postgraduate course data was not available in the VA database.

Programme leaders were invited to attend a three-hour workshop with at least three members of the teaching team/module leaders. The project team also invited them to bring along a student from their programme if possible, appreciating that this would be difficult as the timing of the workshops coincided with the end of term and exam time. It was very important to invite members of the programme team to attend alongside the programme leader as previous work on leading without authority had identified the importance of creating opportunities for collegiality and discussion.

Programme leaders were informed that the workshop would include consideration of the VA data at programme level as well as other institutional, school and national data to explore attainment gaps. The workshops were designed to enable programme teams to analyse their practice in relation to inclusivity and to facilitate open discussions of race and racism. The latter part of the workshop focused on examples of good practice, including work on compassionate pedagogies and consideration of the importance of personal tutoring and student-staff relationships.

Each workshop accommodated up to five programme teams and workshops ran from 6 April to 5 July 2017. Facilitated by the chair of the BME student success working group, Helen Barefoot and Nathan Ghann, student transformation lead in Hertfordshire Business School, the workshops challenged attendees' thinking and also enabled the sharing of good practice across disciplines. Preliminary disciplinary-specific research had also been carried out by the workshop leaders to further contextualise the issues for the programme teams.

To help develop an initial understanding of inclusive practice, programme leaders (and other workshop attendees) were asked to work through the 'Inclusive Teaching' strand of the University of Hertfordshire Curriculum Design Toolkit<sup>1</sup>, before attending the workshop. They were asked to complete the related diagnostic task to self-assess their own practice in relation to inclusive teaching. The toolkit was then considered in more detail during the workshop and individuals' results were shared within the workshops. Attendees were also introduced to Kingston University's Inclusive Curriculum Framework and were encouraged to review and critique their programme according to the framework.

Following attendance at the workshop the VA database was emailed to the programme leader to enable them to further explore their data and also to compare their values with all undergraduate programmes within the university. Slides from the workshop were shared with all attendees and links to videos and other resources associated with race and racism were disseminated.

## Programme leader interviews – part 1

Members of the project team contacted all programme leaders to arrange follow up interviews (July–November 2017). The interviews were carried out by project team members all of whom have been, or are currently, programme leaders and part of the university's BME student success working group. Recognising the importance of not only BME student success but also BME staff leadership, two members of the project team are from BME backgrounds.

The structured interviews explored the challenges associated with leading inclusive practice changes, and facilitating discussions of the sensitive topic of race as well as surfacing examples of good practice and identifying intended actions for the academic year 2017–18. The interviewees' experience of programme leadership ranged from less than a year to more than

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://prezi.com/cibi5tp5pa3d/curriculum-design-toolkit/> [accessed 16 April 2018].

five years. The size of the student cohort for which they assumed responsibility also demonstrated huge range with some programmes having only 20 students and other programmes having more than 800 students.

To collect qualitative data, structured individual interviews were chosen over focus groups to ensure that programme leaders were comfortable discussing any challenges associated with the sensitive topic of race, which may have been inhibiting in front of other programme leaders. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder,

and all recordings and transcripts were stored in a safe locked place accessible only to the research team. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The interview was structured around five key questions (see table 1 below) and wider discussions were facilitated if the interviewee wished to raise further issues. Ethical approval for the interview stage was gained (University of Hertfordshire ethics approval number: SSAH/SF/UH/03096).

**Table 1: Part 1 interview questions**

	Questions
1	Having attended the inclusive curriculum workshop, what are your initial thoughts about the BME attainment gap and the potential for enhancement of inclusive practice within the programme to reduce the gap?
2	What actions have you, and your colleagues who teach on the programme, identified to enhance inclusive practice?
3	What potential challenges do you think there will be in enhancing inclusive practice within your programme?
4	What do you think will be the specific benefits for your students (and colleagues) within the programme?
5	Are there any support requirements/materials/activities that you think would help you in leading the inclusive curriculum enhancements?

## Objective analysis of action plans

As part of the university’s quality assurance processes, each programme leader must produce an Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report (AMER) each November. The AMER provides a reflective report of the programme and includes commentaries on student module feedback as well as key comments from external examiners (academic year 2016-17). As well as reporting on the previous year’s action plan, the AMER includes an action plan for the current academic year (2017-18) and is agreed by the programme committee (which includes student membership).

All members of our Centre for Academic Quality Assurance (CAQA) attended an inclusive practice workshop and, through working with CAQA, we have reviewed institutional processes to embed inclusive practice requirements. One example of this was to amend the AMER template for 2017-18 to include a prompt for programme leaders to comment on attainment gaps as identified within value added scores.

After completion of the first round of programme leader interviews, programme leaders were asked to send their AMER action plans to the project team who reviewed the plan to see if any actions spoken about during interviews made it into the programme teams’ agreed action plan.

## Programme leader discussions – part 2

To determine how the implementation of actions was going and any challenges the programme leaders were facing, the project team discussed progress with programme leaders via telephone interviews or through group discussion in a workshop session to which all the programme leaders were invited. The part 2 discussions were specifically interested in the implementation of the inclusivity actions and any leadership challenges they had experienced (Table 2).

**Table 2: Prompt questions for part 2 discussions**

	Questions
1	You identified actions to help reduce the BME attainment gap. How has the implementation of those actions gone so far?
2	What has been working well?
3	What challenges have your colleagues had in implementing change?
4	What leadership challenges have you experienced (if any)?
5	What support would be beneficial?

## Data analysis

A modified version of the data analysis method advocated by Chenitz and Swanson (1986) was employed to examine the data. Initial analysis of the part 1 interviews was carried out in two phases: a scanning phase followed by a more microscopic examination of the data to identify relevant themes and working hypotheses.

Individual analysis and then group discussion by the project team led to the grouping of data according to three categories:

- Effecting programme level change
- Personal commitment to inclusivity
- Limited action

Review of action plans was carried out to determine the degree of congruence with interview responses. Analysis of part 2 discussions then enabled implementation actions and challenges to be identified. ■

# 04 Results

Twelve workshops were held with a total of attendance of 162. Thirty seven programme leaders attended from the programmes identified in table 3.

**Table 3. Programmes represented at the workshops**

Diagnostic Radiography *	Accounting and Finance *	Physiotherapy *	Music Industry Management *
Physics *	Engineering *	Joint Honours *	Computer Science *
Tourism *	PGCert in L&T in HE *	BA Management *	Law *
Sports Science *	Pre-registration Nursing *	Economics *	Pharmacy *
Midwifery (long programme) *	Midwifery (short programme) *	Fashion *	Mass Communications *
Geography *	Sports Studies *	Business Administration - Supported Distance Learning mode *	Bioscience *
Event Management *	Humanities *	Marketing *	Maths *
Paramedic Science *	MSc Social Work *	Dietetics and Nutrition	Human Resources Management
Finance	Business Administration	Radiotherapy	Sports therapy
Education			

\* Asterisks identify programmes for which the programme leader was interviewed

## Part 1 interviews

Thirty programme leaders were interviewed between 11 July and the 30 October 2017 (in the table above, asterisks identify programmes for which the programme leader was interviewed). Not all programme leaders responded to requests for interviews despite repeated requests.

Although the VA data was available only for undergraduate programmes, two postgraduate programme leaders (plus team members) attended workshops to consider inclusive practice within their programmes (MSc Social Work and PGCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education).

Analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in examples of good practice being identified as well as examples of inertia in instigating inclusive practice change. It was evident from reading the transcripts that programme leader responses could be classified into one of three categories on the basis of their expressed intention, or lack of intention to influence change associated with inclusive practice.

The three categories were:

- Effecting programme level change
- Personal commitment to inclusivity
- Limited action

### Effecting programme level change

Analysis of the qualitative data demonstrated that some programme leaders had an in-depth understanding of the challenges associated with BME attainment gaps. They had engaged in training previously and were aware of national data and, in some cases, discipline-related data. They had already made some changes to their own practice and, in some cases, had embarked on programme leadership to enhance inclusivity.

The programme leaders whose responses fell into this category had reflected personally after the workshop. There was evidence of extended reading and examples of examination of their own privileges:

*"It's how you kind of feel guilty for being who you are, I think I'm not helping, I look at the age, the age profile of the university and think 'oh we're too old' and 'yeah, I tick that box', I'm too white, I am all of these things, but I think also*

*doing some of the reading around it, acknowledging my whiteness is an important part of being able to deal with this in the classroom isn't it."*

*"I think Stephen Brookfield, who's someone I read hugely and influences my practice of teaching, one of the things he is becoming increasingly aware of is the importance of acknowledging white privilege in the system, and the structural thing that goes way beyond the individual and prejudice."*

It was evident that programme leaders had met with module leaders and additional members of the programme team to define shared actions and commitments to reducing the gap as identified within VA scores.

Early examples of good practice as shared actions for the programme team included:

- Arranging whole team meetings which focused on presentations and discussions on BME attainment.
- Challenging module leaders to review their module reading lists to include more BME authors.
- Clear expectations that all members of the programme team should do unconscious bias training and attend inclusive practice workshops.
- Developing the confidence of programme team members to enable them to talk explicitly about race within the context of their disciplines.
- Promotion of staff development opportunities to colleagues.

Some of the programme leaders in this category had programmes with no attainment gaps and through the interviews they reflected on what worked well within their programmes and how they were keen to continuously monitor attainment to ensure no gaps developed. Examples of good practice already in place included:

- Staff having studied critical race theory in their own degrees and discussing critical race theory within their own teaching, including recognising their own privilege.
- The communication to all students of a belief in their abilities and the promotion of self efficacy.
- The inclusion of BME role models within the teaching materials/and or the inclusion of guest lecturers from BME backgrounds.
- Increasing diversity within the teaching team.

- Promotion of diversity and leadership schemes to students.
- Shared sense of care for all their students and development of cohort belonging.

## Personal commitment to inclusivity

For some programme leaders, the workshop stimulated personal change, for example in their own teaching, and/or within their module. They identified the need for enhancements but were not yet influencing change in the wider programme team. Barriers identified by programme leaders in this group included the challenge of leading without line management responsibility. They were concerned about identifying actions for the whole programme team when, in the majority of cases, they were not the line manager for individuals teaching on the programme. There was a concern of a lack of awareness across the wider team about attainment gaps alongside recognition of their own lack of awareness of some of the other gaps in data beyond degree attainment.

*"We haven't had a chance to have a team meeting so it's not something widely disseminated among the team."*

*"Personally, while I was aware of the attainment gap in terms of number of good degree, I was not aware of the attainment [gap] when it comes to, for example, securing a placement."*

Within this category there was a tendency to identify individual actions but not programme-wide actions. These included examples to enhance their own teaching or programme activities which were the direct responsibility of the programme leader and did not require the action of others. Examples included:

- Looking individually for case studies or journal articles for their own teaching.
- Personal exploration of project options to enable students to choose project titles which interested them.
- Encouraging BME students to become programme representatives.
- Personal intent to understand BME students' experiences more.

Good intentions were central within this theme but a number of programme leaders said their capacity for action was limited by the gap they perceived between their own identity (eg "white"/"female"/"old"/"young") and that of their students.

## Limited action

A number of programme leaders identified limited actions or no actions. Lack of action seemed to relate to one of four themes. The first being a lack of general awareness and no evidence of having considered the topic at all. Despite attendance at the workshop, for some programme leaders there was lack of understanding of the key issues associated with racial discrimination, a lack of consideration of self-action and a lack of ownership of the attainment gap.

A second theme within this category was 'competing priorities'. The project and workshops clearly focused on the attainment gap between white and BME students, which is where the university has the largest attainment gap but some programme leaders chose to focus on other issues such as gender (even though there was no evidence of gender attainment differentials within their programmes) or discussed other student groups eg "Irish students", "Nigerian students". There were also arguments regarding not wanting to think about students from different groups in different ways:

*"The approach we use is to try and do all of the right things with all of the students, whichever backgrounds, so we don't, we're not aware of the students and their backgrounds or ethnic groups or whatever... we deal with all students in the same way."*

A third theme identified deficit approaches where actions focused on student support and the language of 'struggling students' was prevalent. Discussions focused on personal tutoring and helping students with, for example, their self-development, or academic skills and suggestion of offering extra classes. Some programme leaders made assumptions about BME students and indicated that they thought the BME students needed extra support and that 'they' had more challenges on their time than other students.

*"...especially the BME cohort, have other things outside their degree maybe they have to do, like working or high-level working, also a lot of them commute..."*

The final theme was deflection of responsibility. Some programme leaders stated challenges with management structures and time pressures as reasons not to identify actions and others suggested that staff behaviours were the responsibility of line managers and not the programme leader.

## Action plans

After the first round of interviews and subsequent analysis of the qualitative data, programme leaders were asked to send their AMER actions plans to the project team. We received 18 action plans. Follow up requests were sent but, for mostly valid reasons, we did not receive actions plans from all programme leaders. However, all AMER actions plans were reviewed by associate directors of the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance and we asked the associate directors to challenge any programme leaders to review their actions if they:

- Had not identified any actions.
- Had only identified limited actions.
- Had listed actions which take a deficit approach (eg focus only on 'student support' or the 'flagging' of BME students for support).

This is particularly important for programmes with significant attainment gaps evident via the value added data.

## Action plan congruence with interviews

Of the 18 action plans submitted, 10 identified specific actions to reduce the BME attainment gap.

There was consistent alignment with what was said in the part 1 interview and actions translated into the AMER plan. Interestingly, one of the programme leaders who had struggled to identify actions during the interview phase and had adopted a 'deficit' approach identified a number of excellent actions with the AMER plan, including ensuring teaching staff attended unconscious bias training and a review of the representativeness of case studies used within the programme. Three programme leaders identified actions to 'improve a sense of belonging within the cohort' but this was not specifically related to reducing the attainment gap or identified as an inclusivity action.

## Part 2 discussions

### Implementing actions

The part 2 discussions provided an opportunity for programme leaders to consider the implementation of actions.

It also enabled the project team members to challenge programme leaders who hadn't identified any actions for enhancement. Discussions were very positive with programme leaders reporting well on the implementation of activities. These included:

- BME industry leaders invited to give guest lectures.
- Teaching team members having the confidence to move students beyond their friendship groups during group work.
- Module leaders having reviewed their reading lists to include BME authors.
- Better understanding of the experiences of BME students via improved personal tutoring.
- Programme leaders developing their confidence to talk explicitly about race within the context of their disciplines.
- Increased involvement from careers staff to support BME students in planning for future careers.
- Promotion of unconscious bias workshops for staff teaching on the programme and subsequent open discussions about race.
- Better understanding of barriers for BME students through working with BME student advocates.

## Specific challenges

Programme leaders identified a number of challenges that their colleagues had experienced in implementing change associated with race equality and inclusive practice. These included:

- Lack of understanding of students' personal circumstances (eg belief and culture/family commitments/commuting issues) and trying to avoid stereotyping.
- Feeling helpless.
- Generational divide.
- Lack of awareness of the attainment gap and some staff members not recognising that there is a problem.
- Deflections to other equality issues.

## Common challenges

In addition to challenges for programme leaders relating to the discussion of race and inclusivity, common challenges were articulated:

- | Competing time pressures.
- | Complexity of programmes.
- | Communication across large programme teams.
- | Responding to emergency issues within the programme.
- | These common challenges have been identified in general terms by programme leaders irrespective of the issue under consideration (Cahill et al, 2015).

## Support suggestions

Programme leaders were also asked for any suggestions on how they could be supported to help them in their leadership of inclusive curriculum enhancements. Suggestions included:

- | Holding a regular informal forum to support discussion of approaches to reducing the attainment gap.
- | A resource bank of articles/videos by BME authors for staff to use if appropriate within their discipline.
- | Further discussions of the timetable to enable better flexibility.
- | Continued support of the university's BME student advocate scheme.
- | A BME student network.
- | Feedback on inclusive curriculum changes. ■

# 05 Discussion

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It has been proposed that staff need to engage repeatedly in development associated with race and BME attainment before individuals change their own practice (Morgan, 2016). Morgan (2016) suggests that higher education staff should attend six workshops associated with inclusive practice to reduce BME attainment gaps. The first workshop includes arguments for the need for change and the subsequent workshops include considerations of psychological processes which affect BME student outcomes (eg stereotype threat, fixed mindset and unconscious bias) and progress on to considering wider issues which may impact on student success (eg socio-economic factors and parental backgrounds).

Meta-analysis of the outcomes of diversity staff development programmes suggest that diversity training has small-sized to medium-sized effects (Kalinowski et al, 2013). Further investigation categorised changes associated with skills, cognition or affective-based outcomes. Kraiger et al (1993) defined affective-based outcomes as measures of internal states that drive perception and behaviour which include attitudes, self-efficacy and motivation. Skill-based outcomes include changes in behaviour and cognitive-based outcomes include verbal knowledge and knowledge organisation (Kraiger et al, 1993). Kalinowski's (2013) meta-analysis indicated that diversity training had larger effects on cognitive-based and skill-based outcomes compared to affective-based outcomes. It is therefore not surprising that some programme leader responses suggested limited actions as attitude, motivation and, perhaps, mindsets would not be changed following attendance at one workshop. ■

# 06 Conclusions

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Having made good progress in reducing the attainment gap through our work at institutional and school level we recognised the need to influence change at programme level. The Leadership Foundation project enabled us to properly consider the role of academic leadership to implement curriculum changes and embed inclusive teaching practice.

Understanding that programme leaders have wide-ranging and complex responsibilities, it was not surprising that different programme leaders were at different stages of understanding, and action, associated with leading change in inclusive practice with the aim of reducing BME attainment gaps, despite all programme leaders having attended a very similar workshop.

While we recognised that programme leaders' different levels of understanding were based on their own previous experiences, as well as the amount of race-related staff development in which they had previously engaged, we also recognise that higher education providers would find it very difficult to ensure that academic staff attend six workshops as proposed by Morgan (2016). However, it could be argued that staff should do unconscious bias training with an aim to stimulating personal affective-based outcomes and then progress to inclusive practice workshops to encourage curricula enhancements and other cognitive-based changes. ■

# 07 Outputs

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To support programme leaders we have developed case studies and identified examples of good practice specifically relating to inclusive practice and the influencing of colleagues on the sensitive topic of race-related student attainment. In addition to the case studies we have also developed guidance on leading and influencing colleagues without line management responsibility, recognising the challenge that this can be for those in distributed leadership positions.

Appendix 1 includes 11 case studies of academic leadership to reduce the BME attainment gap. The case studies provide different examples of race-related actions and are drawn from programmes reflecting a range of disciplines, size of cohort and level of study.

Appendix 2 includes University of Hertfordshire's Top 10 Tips for leading and influencing colleagues without line management responsibility.

Based on suggestions from the programme leaders we have started to develop a resource bank which we will add to throughout, and beyond, the duration of the project. We are also planning three lunchtime forums during the academic year to which staff will be invited, thus enabling the further sharing of good practice and ideas. The first forum is scheduled for 24 January 2018 at which we will publish the case studies and thank the programme leaders for taking part in the study. ■

# 08 Longer term outcomes

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The ultimate outcomes of the project will be improvements in BME student attainment. However, this will take at least three years to be evidenced. Through our own institutional monitoring processes and the Hefce-funded project we will monitor VA scores to identify any improvements in BME student attainment at programme level. ■

# 09 Impact

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As this project, focusing specifically on academic leadership at the programme level, relates directly to institutional commitments to reducing the BME attainment gap and a collaborative project to use the value added metric, we have ensured a synergistic approach with widespread benefits for both the university and the sector. ■

# 10 Dissemination

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In addition to communication of activities throughout the project via social media, the project team has disseminated the case studies within the university at a forum in January 2018. Initial findings have also been shared at a Westminster Forum event in December 2017 and the project team plan to attend one or more sector-relevant conferences on academic leadership and BME success to further disseminate findings. Resources and guidance will be published via the Leadership Foundation's website and promoted via the University of Hertfordshire's open access Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre (LTIC) site. The project team also aims to publish a journal article further exploring these specific challenges of academic leadership at programme level. ■

## 11

## Recommendations for the sector

The Leadership Foundation project has enabled us to explore academic leadership at the programme level to address the BME attainment gap. As the attainment gap is prevalent across the higher education sector we would like to make a number of recommendations when considering institutional actions and staff development activities to reduce the attainment gap.

**1. Provide accurate data at the appropriate level of granularity**

Discussing national, institutional, faculty/departmental level data is important to provide context. However, to simulate change at programme level, teams need data relating directly to their programme. Institutions should manage the provision of this data to ensure adherence with data protection act regulations.

**2. Provide multiple opportunities for engagement with the agenda**

The most effective leadership to stimulate programme level change came from programme leaders who had previously engaged in staff development activities associated with race equality and BME attainment. Personal action plans could include staff development such as: attending unconscious bias training; reading literature associated with BME attainment gaps; attending university conferences or workshops; considering changes to their own practice through using top tips for BME student success and/or inclusive practice guidance; reading about critical race theory and white privilege.

**3. Target appropriate people**

In addition to ensuring attendance by programme leaders, it is important to engage with other members of the teaching team (eg module leaders and year tutors). Ensure teams attend training together and, if possible, encourage students from the programme to attend. Students from BME backgrounds, if given the opportunity to share their experiences, can provide personal context and aid understanding for staff. Students will also have excellent ideas and suggestions for changes within the programme.

**4. Set expectations for actions and follow up on progress**

Ask for actions to be identified but also embed expectations into quality assurance processes. Annual monitoring reports should include inclusivity-related actions to reduce BME attainment gaps and periodic review and programme validation processes should include requirements for demonstration of inclusivity as part of programme design. Having a monitoring process, or perhaps peer review of action plans, should ensure that actions are implemented. If not, programme leaders should expect challenge as to why changes have not been put in place.

**5. Remember that change takes time**

Affective-based changes such as mindset changes and attitudinal changes take time. Not only will the programme leader need to recognise their own affective-based change but they will then need to influence others on their programme team. ■

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# Author biographies

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## Dr Helen Barefoot

Helen Barefoot is the deputy director of the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre (LTIC) where she leads continuing professional development for academic staff. Her research is centred on inclusive teaching and student success. With a specific interest in reducing the attainment gap between white and BME students, Helen works to improve policies, processes and teaching practices. Through her work in the LTIC, Helen has also published articles and book chapters on assessment and feedback, learning and teaching scholarship within the disciplines and quality assurance and quality enhancement of the student experience.

## Judy St John

Judy St John is the programme leader for the University of Hertfordshire's joint honours programme. As the most complex programme with the university, Judy works with staff and students in all academic schools and draws on her comprehensive understanding of quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. Judy works with programme leaders to stimulate critical reflection on their practice and to consider the inclusivity of their programmes. She also helps them identify specific actions for improvement. As a leader of race equality within the university, Judy is core member of the BME staff network, the BME student success working group and has presented institutional approaches to reduce the attainment gap on behalf of the university.

## Amanda Yip

Amanda Yip is a learning and teaching specialist within the University of Hertfordshire's Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre (LTIC). Amanda works with staff from all academic schools to enable their continuing professional development. Amanda's expertise is within curriculum design and, as the module leader for one of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) modules, 'Designing and Enhancing the Curriculum', she draws on her recent experience as the programme leader for BSc Computer Science as well as her in-depth understanding of student learning. With a specific interest in reducing the attainment gap between BME students, Amanda promotes and advocates inclusive practice. She is also currently researching the specific challenges facing commuting students and working to improve logistical processes within the university (eg timetables, transport and accommodation options) to improve the experiences for these students. ■

# Appendices

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## Appendix 1

### Accounting and Accounting and Finance, Hertfordshire Business School

Dominic Keating, programme leader and Rexford Obeng; year tutor  
[d.keating@herts.ac.uk](mailto:d.keating@herts.ac.uk); [r.obeng@herts.ac.uk](mailto:r.obeng@herts.ac.uk)

#### Context

- Approximately 800 students
- 80% of students are from BME backgrounds
- 25 staff in the teaching team
- Have been trying to get to know students better over last few years (eg questionnaires, surveys, induction activities)
- 50% of students commute
- Tutorial system not really working - one tutor looking after 250 students
- Instigated mini mid-module feedback two years ago

#### Actions

- Accounting subject group meeting following the workshop - presented data and portrait of student cohort as well as asked BME staff who are UH alumni to present
- Created a group shared vision and shared commitment - all focused on student's point of view
- Identified BME attainment as one of four group priorities - identified a BME champion
- All staff implementing top 10 tips
- Understanding student experiences more - student reps are all BME students
- Trialling a personal tutor system
- Moving away from attendance and focusing on engagement - all lectures will be podcast and team are using technology enhanced learning tools to enable engagement beyond the classroom

#### Challenges

- Staff time and workload issues to fulfil personal tutor role effectively
- Wanting to measure everything immediately yet having to wait for outcome data

#### Intended benefits

- Students feel part of wider learning community
- Creating sense of belonging – can be 'virtual belonging'
- All staff aware of their unconscious biases
- Staff having better understanding of students' backgrounds and experiences – more empathetic
- Compassionate behaviours from everyone

#### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Is informed by professional development

## PGCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre

Karen Clark, programme leader

[k.clark@herts.ac.uk](mailto:k.clark@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 50 students
- No value added data available for the programme as a PG course. However, all university data is relevant as 'students' are university lecturers
- The programme attracts new lecturers from all university schools and endeavours to model good practice in inclusivity
- Programme tutors recognise the importance of having open and honest conversations about the attainment gap in an inclusive way as the programme helps to shape the next generation of lecturers

### Actions

- Finding educational theorists from a wide range of backgrounds with examples of good practice and using these to inform the programme design
- Reviewing reading lists and resources to ensure that these are representative
- Inviting expert staff from diverse backgrounds to speak to students on the programme
- Increasing the diversity of the teaching team
- Capturing diverse student voices by asking recent 'graduates' to discuss their experiences on video for dissemination to current cohorts
- Instigating open discussions on race and ethnicity with the programme team

### Challenges

- Being prepared to have difficult conversations
- Helping each member of the team grasp the importance of this within their personal practice and within their modules
- Ensuring that the deficit model is challenged
- Having a sufficiently contextualised understanding to connect with all the disciplinary perspectives represented on the programme

### Intended benefits

- Staff being confident in having difficult conversations and being able to challenge negative behaviour
- An inclusive curriculum both within the programme and beyond in the programmes on which the 'students' teach.
- Willingness to think about things differently but also understanding that some changes require persistence and will take time

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Takes a coherent approach which is anticipatory and proactive
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Is informed by professional development

## Sports Studies, School of Life and Medical Sciences

David Turner and Lena Hatchett Programme leader and learning and teaching lead  
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### Context

- Approximately 40 students
- An awareness of racial and sporting stereotyping in the sports industry
- Difficulty of engaging all staff to attend the workshop and to raise awareness of the issues as a team
- Cultural buy-in from the team

### Actions

- All members of the team encouraged to attend unconscious bias and cultural awareness workshop
- Get to know students better and understand their particular circumstances and experiences
- Encourage students to investigate BME athletes from a diverse range of sports
- Identify a BME champion
- Raise the profile of BME authors and increase use of BME case studies in the curriculum

### Challenges

- Lack of cultural buy-in from staff
- Recognition of the changes in the student cohorts and the need to adapt to those changes
- Wanting to measure everything immediately yet having to wait for outcome data

### Intended benefits

- A more inclusive curriculum
- Bringing the team together to create a sense of belonging and to work more collaboratively
- Potentially, all staff more aware of their unconscious biases
- To raise awareness of the issues and for staff to have a better understanding of students' backgrounds and experiences
- To celebrate BME role models

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Is informed by professional development

## Mass Communications, School of Humanities

Peter Thomas, programme leader  
[p.thomas@herts.ac.uk](mailto:p.thomas@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 130 students
- Getting students to reach their full potential by forming good friendship groups
- Understanding the importance of peer role models

### Actions

- Creating opportunity for students with BME backgrounds to be role models
- Showcasing graduate success stories from different cultures
- Getting to know our students eg spending time to know their names and how they want them pronounced

### Challenges

- Growing student numbers
- Limited diversity within the teaching team
- Staff unaware that they still retain a bias

### Intended benefits

- Enriching the experience for all
- Having the possibility of learning from other cultures that in turn helps one to learn more about oneself and one's own culture

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all

## Pharmacy, Pharmacology and postgraduate Medicine, School of Life and Medical Sciences

Nina Walker, student experience lead

[c.2.walker@herts.ac.uk](mailto:c.2.walker@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 650 students
- Having greater awareness given the significant proportion of BME students
- Coming up with quick wins and some longer-term plans

### Actions

- Increasing awareness within wider academic teams through a BME workshop
- Getting academic teams to embrace changes and recognise the benefits they will bring
- Having conversations with students and building a partnership with them to come up with most effective ways to close the attainment gap

### Challenges

- Addressing the BME attainment gap sensitively without inferring deficiency

### Intended benefits

- Increase in BME students considering taking up postgraduate studies
- BME students excel in their studies, returning to be visiting lecturers creating the instant visual role models to current BME students

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Is informed by professional development

## MSc Social Work, School of Health and Social Work

Karen Mills, programme leader  
[k.mills@herts.ac.uk](mailto:k.mills@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 110 students
- Diverse teaching team
- No attainment gap between white and BME students
- During their training, staff members studied critical race theory
- Staff have an excellent understanding of critical race theory and facilitate discussion of white power and privilege within the curriculum

### Actions

- Own understanding informs teaching. Discussion of race is prevalent throughout the course
- Focus on raising student confidence – group activities within induction to strengthen the cohort at course level, social work level and institutional level
- Students form action learning sets
- Building discussion of learning from peers

### Challenges

- Having the time to get to know students individually and really understand their backgrounds

### Intended benefits

- Excellent staff-student relationship
- Cohesive and supportive cohorts
- Confidence in discussing race and white privilege in both students and staff
- Benefits for service users – if the students are committed to equality and understand the importance of discussion of race then their behaviours and work with vulnerable people at the end of their course will be enhanced

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Is informed by professional development

## University Joint Honours, School of Humanities

Judy St John, programme leader  
[j.g.stjohn@herts.ac.uk](mailto:j.g.stjohn@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 450 students
- Cohort consists of quite a large proportion of BME students
- Students on the programme are taught in different schools
- Students may feel disadvantaged or isolated from other taught programmes in schools

### Actions

- Looking at how to influence change at programme level and also getting schools to engage with the initiative
- Encouraging BME students to put themselves forward to apply for roles such as student representatives or student ambassadors
- Encourage BME students on the programme to form friendship groups and/or study buddies
- Celebrate success stories of BME students on the programme

### Challenges

- Lack of engagement from some field tutors
- Finding ways to work with field tutors and schools across the university to develop an inclusive curriculum

### Intended benefits

- Programme team and schools working together to acknowledge the need to address the BME attainment gap
- Creating a level playing field and being inclusive in our practice across all schools involved with the programme.
- Able to celebrate diversity and success stories on the programme

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Is informed by professional development

## Economics and Business Economics, Hertfordshire Business School

Tassos Patokos, programme leader  
[t.patokos@herts.ac.uk](mailto:t.patokos@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 90 students
- 16 members of subject group, most of whom teach at UG level
- No attainment gap between white and BME students
- Excellent NSS scores
- Some members of staff teach students at all levels so get to know the cohorts very well

### Actions

- Ensure all year tutors know each student by name
- Students are very willing to ask for support if they need it
- Be conscious about inclusivity when preparing for open days
- Raise awareness with all members of the team (including those who don't teach on the programme)
- Promote self efficacy - communicate high expectations at the very beginning and encourage all students to think of themselves as someone who can get a first
- Promote the degree classification calculator so students can see what they are likely to get and what they could do to improve to the next grade band
- Fair assessments with clear feedback

### Challenges

- Contacting students who do not reply to emails
- Disengaged students

### Intended benefits

- Excellent staff-student relationship
- Self-belief and self-efficacy in all students
- Very friendly environment
- Cohesive cohorts

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Uses assessment which enables all students to demonstrate their learning

## Physiotherapy, School of Health and Social Work

Jayne Bartholomew, programme leader  
[j.e.bartholomew@herts.ac.uk](mailto:j.e.bartholomew@herts.ac.uk)

### Context

- Approximately 50 students
- Keen to have a greater understanding of individual students within the student population

### Actions

- Changes in patient scenarios to create greater diversity
- Re-structure admission processes to ensure inclusivity
- Changes in outreach work to encourage applications from students from diverse backgrounds

### Challenges

- Creating opportunities for students to mix with students from other backgrounds
- Trying to encourage diversity within the teaching team

### Intended benefits

- Increase awareness within the student population of different cultures and religious beliefs within the subject and profession
- Teaching team become more confident in talking about race and ethnicity

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Provides environments for effective learning for all

## Music Industry Management, School of Creative Arts Maria

Thomas, programme leader  
m.thomas@herts.ac.uk

### Context

- Approximately 35 students
- The industry is not very diverse – senior managers are usually white and male
- Students not feeling confident to raise difficult topics
- Students were slightly segregated within the cohort
- Talk by head of equality two years ago stimulated action

### Actions

- Instigated a 'masterclass series' to bring in aspirational BME role models
- Actively increased the diversity of the teaching team
- Explored different parts of the music industry (eg Asian music)
- Brought alumni back to speak to current students
- Discussion of race and gender within the curriculum
- Planned debates for all music students to consider race and gender chaired by Music Industry Management students
- Staff openly discuss topics (some of which there is disagreement on) so students see critical discussion modelled and are confident to voice their own opinions

### Challenges

- Students are sometimes uncomfortable raising difficult topics
- Encouraging people to discuss topics opening but then also managing the situation if people use inappropriate language

### Intended benefits

- Cohesive and confident cohort
- Open-minded students and staff
- Willingness to think about things differently and from other points of view
- Student employability
- Staff learning from the students

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Is informed by professional development

## Business Administration (Supported Distance Learning [SDL]), Hertfordshire Business School

Leonor Silva De Mattos, programme leader

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### Context

- Approximately 100 students
- Current materials and case studies examples are very white and UK centric. Not many examples from minority and diverse backgrounds
- A diverse and international student body – cohort of students study online across the globe
- The use of local tutors using relevant examples and local resources enables students to do well as they feel well represented and they have a connection with the tutors
- The home students for this programme are mostly from a BME background
- The SDL students achieve better results than the home students
- Tutor has good connections with the BME students on the home programme

### Actions

- Develop a range of materials that represents the diverse student body
- Use examples from the remote team to influence and encourage curriculum changes to the home team
- Peer teaching between the new and more established members of staff
- Conscious about inclusivity and support for BME students when preparing materials and resources
- Raising awareness with all members of the team

### Challenges

- Programme team initially reluctant to make changes to the curriculum to reflect diversity
- Challenge the mindset of more established members of the team to make those changes

### Intended benefits

- Exchange of good practice between the home and the remote programmes
- All members of the team working collaboratively to reduce the attainment gap
- The use of cross-cultural examples to inform both programmes

### Curriculum Design Toolkit Principles

- Good practice in inclusive teaching
- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Provides environments for effective learning for all

## Appendix 2: Top tips for leading without authority

- 1. Create an effective team.** Be confident in your knowledge and expertise and identify, share and capitalise on the skills and experience of team members.
- 2. Communicate a commitment to collegiality.** Promote opportunities to facilitate discussion and action planning. Identify formal and informal modes of communication and communicate with others not to others. Listen with respect and interest.
- 3. Be inclusive.** Create an environment without blame which ensures everyone's contribution is recognised and valued. Give praise and encouragement, welcome feedback, support mentorship and promote reflective practice.
- 4. Lead with enthusiasm.** Be passionate about your ideas and the ideas of others. Raising the energy in the group will help people to commit to shared goals and achieve a common purpose.
- 5. Create allies not competitors.** Cultivate relationships and mediate conflict and dilemma when necessary.
- 6. Lead with questions.** Use questions to remove assumptions. Questions could include "what if...?", "have we considered...?", "what have we possibly overlooked...?"
- 7. Take responsibility.** Members of the team need to be able to trust you, so be prepared to answer 'why' questions and don't be afraid to share learning from previous experiences.
- 8. Develop your emotional intelligence.** Recognise and understand your own emotions and the emotions of others, to guide thinking and behaviour.
- 9. Recognise the boundaries of your role.** Know when to ask for guidance from others and when to refer onwards.
- 10. Build a reciprocal network of those doing the same job.** Purposeful networking provides you with opportunities to discuss good practice and challenges as they arise.





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