

Identifying and addressing differential Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student experiences at a post-1992 institution

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Abstract The University of Brighton commissioned a university-wide study to identify some of the factors contributing to the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic degree awarding gap at UK Higher Education Institutions from the perspective of the students that it impacts. An Action Research focus-group approach was used to inform the planning for the institutional 2020–2025 Access and Participation Plan and an application for the Advance HE Race Equality Charter. This project focused on students who were identified as British and/or qualified for home (UK-resident) tuition fees. This paper presents the positive and negative factors identified from the focus groups as having a potential impact on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student experience. Findings are separated into two categories, the academic student experience and the non-academic student experience, and the paper highlights those factors which were consistent across the institution's provision. The paper also discusses the multifaceted, whole-institution approach which has been taken in response to these findings and the principles underpinning the actions and interventions. Final remarks share reflections on the learning, both at an institutional and sector-level, and next steps that the University of Brighton intends to take to improve the student experience and address degree awarding gaps.

Key words Degree Awarding Gap; Student Attainment; Student Success; Student Belonging; Widening Participation; Race Equality; Differential Student Outcomes; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students; Inclusive Curriculum; Action Research; Student Experience

Introduction

'A student's race and ethnicity can significantly affect their degree outcomes. Of the disparities that exist within higher education, the gap between the likelihood of White students and students from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds getting a first- or upper-second-class degree is among the most stark – 13% among 2017–18 graduates. The sector must partner meaningfully with students and

robustly demonstrate its commitment to addressing the BAME attainment gap.’ (UUK/NUS, 2019)

There is a significant degree awarding gap that negatively impacts Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students at UK universities, even after controlling for academic qualifications upon entry. The gap is particularly stark for Black students (UUK/NUS, 2019), as demonstrated by the Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plan Dashboard (2021), where the English sector gap in degree attainment (degree awarding) between white and black students, who qualify for English University ‘home fees’ (UKCISA, 2021), was 24.7 percentage points in 2015–16, narrowing to 21.1 percentage points in 2018–19 and to 18.3 percentage points in 2019–20. This is the widest gap of any student demographic group.

In their guidance to institutions submitting an Access and Participation Plan (APP), the statutory document which sets out how Higher Education Institutions will improve access, experience and outcomes for underrepresented groups, the Office for Students has set a clear target for English Higher Education Institutions to eliminate the unexplained attainment gap between Black and White students at their institutions by 2025, with a view to eradicating the absolute gap by 2031 (OfS, 2019a). Although many universities were already undertaking work in this area, the OfS’s target has renewed commitment and added impetus to reassess and redefine approaches to eliminating degree awarding gaps impacting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students.

The University of Brighton is a post-1992 multi-campus institution¹ located on the South Coast of England with three campuses within the vicinity of the City of Brighton and Hove and a fourth campus approximately twenty miles along the coast in Eastbourne. The local population is predominantly White in both Brighton and Hove and in Eastbourne. The city is also a popular commuter line into Central London, and living costs in the vicinity of the city campuses reflect this. The University has a population of circa 18,000 students, across undergraduate, postgraduate full-time and part-time courses and in the region of 2400 staff (2020/21 data), split into twelve academic schools. 70% of all students identify as White, 11% Asian, 6% Black, 11% Other and 2% unknown/information refused (University of Brighton, 2021a).

The Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) is a partnership between the University of Brighton and the University of Sussex with around 1000 students studying clinical medicine (HESA, 2021).

The University was awarded the Advance HE Race Equality Charter (REC) Bronze Award in December 2019 (Advance HE, 2021a). The research and consideration of the data on attainment gaps, reframed as awarding gaps, formed part of the institutional REC self-assessment. Data from 2017/18 was used in the preparation for the REC submission, being the most current. The data showed the most challenging gaps were between Black/White UK domiciled students with a 24%-point gap and Asian/White students with an 18%-point gap.

To address challenges of degree-award gaps and an inequitable student experience at the University of Brighton, we undertook an Action Research project to develop and support a university-wide approach to tackling these issues and to identify some of the factors contributing to the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic degree awarding gap from the perspective of the students that it impacts. The project also provided qualitative student evidence for the REC submission (University of Brighton 2019a) and significantly influenced the development of the strategic institutional Action Plan related to Education and the Student Experience.

Aims of the project

The University were keen to listen to the student voice to ensure that approaches and actions taken towards reducing degree awarding gaps were reflective of their lived experience (UUK/NUS, 2019). This was the first time a cross-institutional project of this nature had been undertaken. This project endeavoured to address this by running focus groups with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students across the university to capture the student voice.

The five keys aims of the project were:

- To identify positive and negative factors that impact the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student experience whilst at University of Brighton.

- To identify interventions that have benefitted current Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students that have the potential to be rolled out more widely across the university/schools of study.
- To identify potential new interventions to improve the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student experience and better support their attainment.
- To use the findings to make recommendations to the academic schools and/or university for interventions to reduce the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic degree awarding and continuation gap.
- To use the findings to support academic schools to design and develop interventions and appropriate evaluation methods to assess their impact.

The project was funded by the institution and ethical approval granted by the University of Brighton Social Sciences Cross-School research ethics committee in April 2019.

This project focused on students who would be identified as British and/or classed as 'home' students (UK-resident or settled) based on their tuition fee status (UKCISA, 2021). Whilst we acknowledge that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students from outside the UK also face a marked gap in degree outcomes, the international experience is generally different from the experience of British students and so would require a separate study to be most effective.

The findings and recommendations from the focus groups have underpinned and shaped the work focused on education and student experience and provided the evidence to implement a Theory of Change model (Thomas, 2020; TASO, 2021). The recommendations formed a significant section of the REC Action Plan for the areas which focused on 'student progression and awarding' and 'diversity in the curriculum' (Advance HE, 2021b). At the same time the University developed its approach to meeting its commitments to reduce differential attainment in its APP (University of Brighton, 2019b) and fulfilling the pledge made by the Vice Chancellor to use the five steps in the Universities UK/National Union of Students #ClosingTheGap report (UUK/NUS, 2019) to address differential degree outcomes.

Methodology

Action Research was the chosen methodology for the study, as it provides the platform for change and improvement to practice (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006; Bell, 2018; Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2017). Action Research takes a cyclical approach in which the problem is identified, an intervention is planned and carried out and the outcome is analysed (Cohen et al., 2017). The analysis of the outcome then brings about a change, and the cycle of Action Research is repeated (Denscombe, 2010). The findings from the Action Research would provide us with evidence to then implement a Theory of Change model using contemporary approaches to evaluation of interventions and initiatives (Thomas, 2020; TASO, 2021).

The initial project consisted of thirteen focus groups – one per academic school plus one additional ‘wash-up’ session for any student that wanted to participate but had not been able to attend their school-level focus group. The focus groups were held at the campus at which the school was based, so that students were in their ‘home territory’ for the session to help make them feel more comfortable. At least one focus group was scheduled to take place at each campus, and students were provided with refreshments during the focus group and a £20 voucher for an online retailer to incentivise participation. The focus groups took a semi-structured approach, allowing students to flesh out avenues of inquiry with their own thoughts rather than being guided towards responses. As outlined in the section above, the participants were students that would be classed as ‘home’ students for the purposes of their tuition fee charge. The full list of participant criteria comprised of:

- be undertaking an undergraduate degree programme
- self-identifying as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
- spent at least the last 5 years of pre-university schooling (Years 9–13) in the UK

Focus groups took place in semester 2 of the 2018–19 academic year so that all students participating had completed at least fifteen weeks of study prior to participation. A total of forty-two students, representing all twelve schools, participated in the focus groups. Further focus groups were then undertaken the

following academic year, in February and March 2020, with medical students from the BSMS under ethical approval from the BSMS ethics panel. Unfortunately, due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, only two of the three focus groups were conducted with six students.

Students were recruited using a range of media and platforms, including centrally via the main student Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and departmentally via emails from course administrators. In all recruitment communications and in the focus groups themselves, we consciously chose not to use the BAME acronym and, instead, spelt out the acronym in full. This was because we acknowledged that 'BAME' is a problematic sector term and may be terminology that students were not familiar with or did not identify with.

Questions were themed around the student experience across the complete student lifecycle, from pre-entry perceptions to transition, on-course support and careers guidance. The project focus was around both the academic and non-academic experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students, acknowledging that both aspects affect student outcomes, and discussed what might directly or indirectly affect engagement.

Findings

The focus groups were thematically analysed. Using Microsoft Excel, we manually grouped and assigned comments according to similarity and frequency to draw out regularly occurring issues and patterns. The researchers initially looked at themes emerging at a local level, within schools of study, before identifying themes that were consistent across several or all schools and need to be addressed at an institutional level. Whilst there were some findings that were specific to each school of study, there were some noticeable trends across all schools that we were able to identify and prioritise for central interventions, and it is these that we will focus on in this paper. We were able to broadly split the shared findings into two categories: academic issues and non-academic issues of greatest concern.

Academic issues of greatest concern

There were four key issues identified by a large proportion of participants as affecting them and their peer groups:

- Eurocentric curriculum and tokenistic attempts at diversity
- Reading lists
- Induction processes
- Careers education and support

Eurocentric curriculum and tokenistic attempts at diversity

Students really struggled with the lack of diversity in their course curriculum and were often very frustrated by it. This came over more strongly in some schools than others, with non-science-based courses voicing the greatest concerns, but observations were made by most students that they were not really taught anything beyond a Western curriculum.

'I think [there are] a lot of lies within ... the curriculum, and I feel like a lot of readings and everything we look at next year are so, like, euro-white, euro centric, it's so like, there's literally nothing like, outside of that ...'

Tokenistic attempts at diversity were highlighted and seemed to upset students further. For example, having an "African week" in a subject rather than normalising and using African references throughout the curriculum was not something that was seen as an inclusionary practice. There were also incidents of students following up with academic staff regarding references made to more diverse texts or topics, either to find out more or ask for further suggestions that students could explore, only for staff members to not be able to offer a more in-depth response or suggestions. This was particularly distressing for students as they felt that the text or reference had been included as a box-ticking exercise, and the staff members had no real interest in this work or expanding their own knowledge of different cultures or viewpoints.

In a similar vein, students were frustrated that reading lists were not diverse and included predominantly White, Western males.

Induction processes

Several issues were raised around the induction and transition (orientation) experience at the university, with many reflecting an assumption of knowledge such as jargon and acronyms. There was also an assumption of HE-level study skills in terms of *how* to study and manage time effectively and understanding, for example, the nuances that separated a lecture from a tutorial, seminar or workshop.

Students that reached out for support in understanding some of these and other terms were often told to refer to the course handbook. In many cases, however, students were reaching out for support because they had already read the handbook and claimed that they still didn't understand or were getting things incorrect. This heightened their stress levels and made them feel inferior. Whilst many of these issues would be likely to impact all students, regardless of ethnicity, areas of the induction process that were perceived to disproportionately impact Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students included social/networking opportunities and cultural awareness.

Social and networking opportunities

Students felt that all opportunities to develop friendships came in the first two weeks of first year and then, after that, there were no further school-level opportunities to develop social networks. They also felt that there were not enough wider opportunities to network within schools or academic buildings and that they would like opportunities to get to know students outside of their course or year group. This was something particularly noted by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students as difficult if they had arrived at the university unprepared for the lack of diversity and how much they stood out due to their ethnicity. They felt that by the time were confident enough to socialise, easy opportunities to do so had passed. Many people had already developed their social groups, and so they felt isolated. Students felt that providing more inter-school social opportunities would increase their chances of seeing themselves represented in the wider student body, particularly where they felt underrepresented in their own school.

Ice breakers and cultural awareness

Students felt that ice breakers during induction could be improved to help students get a better sense of cultural awareness and improve understanding of each other's backgrounds. Students suggested timetabling in opportunities to discuss different cultures. They felt that providing a platform for people to ask questions openly and honestly, without judgement – conversations that at a later stage might become uncomfortable or affect friendships or projects groups – would help provide a better sense of community for all.

Careers education and support

A large majority of students felt that they did not get enough support in the first two years of their studies to guide and support their career aspirations. Some felt unsure about where their course may take them and what careers would be open to them and wanted further guidance on this. Several students also felt that they didn't get timely guidance on postgraduate opportunities or application deadlines. A substantial number of students were also unsure of where they should or could go to get careers advice. Students felt that they wanted more support and information from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic role models about how to overcome the challenges of accessing professions and/or senior roles in professions where diversity is lacking and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation is low.

Non-academic issues of greatest concern

Focus group participants were asked to reflect on their student experience as a whole and what they had found, or are finding, most challenging in relation to the non-academic aspects of their time at the university.

There were five key issues identified by a large proportion of participants as affecting them and their peer groups:

- Accommodation
- Financial health
- Mental health provision
- Student Union presence and engagement

- Communication

It is acknowledged that all of these issues were likely to affect all students at the university, regardless of ethnicity. However, there were circumstances in which some of these issues may be exacerbated for students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, as indicated below.

Accommodation

At the time the project took place, the university did not have a first-year accommodation guarantee for students. Shortage of University-owned and/or -managed accommodation forced students into house-sharing scenarios which exacerbated feelings of loneliness and isolation. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students stated that they faced racism and/or a sense of otherness in accommodation.

'Living here you really realise how much you stick out [as a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student].'

They also intimated that they were unlikely to raise these issues in fear of either having to find somewhere else to live or being ostracised. For other students, hearing about these types of negative experiences in accommodation resulted in opting to commute to the university instead.

Financial Health

Students seemed to feel very underprepared for the cost of living in Brighton, including travel costs to and between campuses and, in the case of some courses, the on-course costs. This issue was particularly exacerbated for those who had to pay additional upfront costs to letting agents. There are a marked number of courses with significant costs for things such as printing (particular to an 'industry standard' specification) or material costs. Students felt they should have been better prepared for these costs in respect to pre-entry information. A considerable number of students worked in addition to their studies to support themselves but still found they were struggling to make ends meet. Students felt that the university did not offer enough support with regards to financial health and management. They often did not know where they could go to seek advice if they were struggling financially or required support in budgeting.

Mental Health Provision

Students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds also highlighted the lack of diversity or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic provision within student support services as a whole and, in particular, with mental health services. Students struggled to relate or identify with staff who they felt were less likely to understand their experiences or be empathetic to their situation. This generated a reluctance (in some cases) to seek support, particularly if they had come from a culture where seeking support at all is not seen as 'normal' practice.

Student Union presence and engagement

Students felt that some student societies did not follow up on communication with them because of their ethnicity. This was particularly so where societies were predominantly made up of White students, and so students perceived that they had not been allowed to join because they wouldn't 'fit in'.

'I saw the [student society] and they were all just white males and it means that he [society leader] didn't reply to my message [to join society] because I'm a black female. ... I found that quite disheartening to be honest ...'

Students also did not feel that there were a particularly diverse range of societies available to them. For example, there is an Afro-Caribbean Society, but not everyone felt that they fitted into that category or society, and they did not feel that there were very many other options.

Communication

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students perceived that they were sometimes spoken to differently or spoken down to by staff because of their accent and/or ethnicity. They felt ridiculed, condescended or like they were being spoken to as if they were less intelligent due to the way that they spoke.

'That's a massive thing. When you're talking to someone who is not BME, it's very different. You have to kind of change yourself [to be seen as equal].'

'It would be good if everyone was told to be respectful to each other. ... I have come across a few people ... where they've made weird comments.'

Key themes for recommendations

The first half of this project concluded by drawing out recommendations made by students who participated in, and the analysis of, the focus groups. These recommendations were included in a report that went to the University Education and Student Experience Committee in May 2020.

Key themes for recommendations from the project that applied to all schools of study included:

- Training, resources and developing knowledge
- Frameworks, policy and transparency of information
- Student platforms for communication
- Academic structures and processes
- Induction processes and supporting student belonging and progression

Training, resources and developing knowledge

Students wanted more formal and prevalent engagement of all staff and students in understanding and supporting the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community both at and beyond the university to help develop a more inclusive environment.

Recommendations included:

- Developing a suite of staff resources and training opportunities and mandating engagement from all staff in understanding the experiences and negative incidents that the university's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community endure which may shape their attitude, response and progress at university.
- Reviewing reading lists, case studies and library provision to ensure diversity and opportunities for wider reading materials across subject areas/fields and around the topic of race equity.
- Providing realistic preparation resources for students who undertake placements. This includes providing information and strategies on how to manage and/or report incidents of racism whilst on placement both as a victim and a bystander.

Frameworks, policy and transparency of information

Students wanted to see strategies and initiatives formalised into accountable frameworks and clearer policies and procedures for both staff and students. Whilst they were confident that many policies may already exist, they were less confident that they would know how to find or use them. Recommendations included:

- Developing clear processes for staff to follow if passing student queries on or signposting students elsewhere, including developing an accountability chain to ensure that students get a timely and satisfactory response and students are not signposted on to webpages, handbooks or other services unnecessarily.
- Providing more transparent pre-entry information on costs of non-university accommodation, travel and living in Brighton, particularly to clearing students who miss out on applicant visit days and information.
- Developing a framework which takes a student lifecycle approach and considers the academic transition to HE.
- Clearer timescales communicated to students regarding access times and processes for mental health services.

Student platforms for communication

Students were overwhelmingly positive and grateful for the opportunity to engage with the focus groups but made clear that they wanted to be able to have more regular dialogue and opportunities to influence the agenda and work taking place at the university around enhancing the student experience for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. Recommendations included:

- Providing accessible and approachable platforms for students to discuss their experiences of issues such as racism or sense of otherness in the classroom.
- Setting up school-level themed forums to allow a platform for students to raise concerns and offer their experiences and suggested solutions, designed around key areas such as assessment feedback, staff-student engagement and curriculum diversity.

Academic structures and processes

A number of discussions around various aspects of the student academic experience were raised, and students wanted to see much more engagement with inclusion and diversity and recognition of the structures that disproportionately have a negative impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. Recommendations included:

- Ensuring that measures to decolonise and diversify the curriculum are embedded in institutional quality processes and that students are engaged as (paid) partners to co-create.
- Improving implementation of the Personal Academic Tutoring system and providing regular, dedicated time for this process so that all students get a consistent experience. The Personal Academic Tutor provides overarching academic guidance which is not related to specific module (unit of study) content, this includes supporting them to understand the value of feedback, and working with them to reflect on their own skills and experience with relation to professional development. The roles and responsibilities of the tutor/tutee relationship should be made clear to both parties, particularly in relation to pastoral support.
- Timetabling sessions around careers education from the first year of study with clear support and guidance on internship and placement opportunities. Steps to provide level 5 and 6 (undergraduate second and third years) with formal and wide-ranging information about postgraduate study opportunities or options at an early stage.
- Information for final year – and particularly around dissertation processes – should be disseminated towards the end of second year to better support preparation for final year.
- Developing lecture capture capability so that students can access recordings of lectures to revisit as part of revision.

Induction processes and supporting student belonging and progression

Transition to the university and sense of belonging were significant discussion points, and students felt induction was a key area for improvement to support a more positive student experience – not just for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students, but for all students.

'... There should be more support at the beginning of the year. ... I think they forget ... a lot of people are moving away from home and that's quite overwhelming to have all that stuff in the first couple of weeks. ... As an introvert, if you miss attending a couple of things ... then you just don't make friends.'

Recommendations included:

- Developing an induction framework which fosters a sense of belonging and considers opportunities for social integration, cultural awareness and transition to HE and includes budget management advice and support and time management.
- Providing opportunities for those students who are not living on campus to be attached to a hall of residence so that they are included in social events and can contact a residential advisor for advice or to discuss issues in accommodation.
- Working with the Student Union on communication and engagement strategy to reach a wider audience both at the beginning of and throughout the year. This should include marketing of the services that they provide as well as proactive strategies to engage students in societies and committees.
- Improving exposure to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic role models via e-mentoring, career guidance videos and speaker invitations.

Positive experiences

Although we have highlighted the areas where improvements in the student experience are needed, the students highlighted

several areas as having a positive impact on their experience. Students cited the Student Support and Guidance Tutors (SSGTs) as being a supportive model where this had been accessed. The SSGTs are school based, with at least one per academic school, and provide support for all students. Students can self-refer to the SSGT or be referred by their Personal Academic Tutor. They work with the student to address any issues which impact on the students' wellbeing, including:

- homesickness / loneliness
- problems with accommodation
- problems with adapting to study – particularly for mature students
- difficulties with your course / wanting to intermit or change course
- stress-related issues
- mitigating circumstances, applications and processes
- bullying and harassment

Where relevant, the SSGTs will then onward refer students to further specialist support services or their Personal Academic Tutor for guidance related to their academic studies.

Where it was fully delivered in the spirit of the University policy, Personal Academic Tutoring was also noted by the students as supportive. Students who had engaged with the Disability and Dyslexia Team had also had a positive experience. Students who had engaged with one of the mentoring programmes were also positive about their experiences with it, although some students were not aware that they could access a mentor or that this would be regarded as positive and not a deficit. The University was also regarded as having a friendly staff and student body, and overwhelmingly the students felt that Brighton was a great place to study.

Subsequent Actions

The findings and recommendations from the focus groups informed and shaped the strategy to take a whole-institution approach to education and student experience, which recognised that some of the issues raised by the students were experienced

by students from other disadvantaged groups and were not necessarily due to a student's ethnicity. The action plan, developed to deliver on the REC and APP, focused on three intersecting areas:

- Staff Development
- Data/Policy and Governance
- Supporting Students

The five principles from the #ClosingTheGap (UUK/NUS, 2019) report, outlined below, provided the underpinning framework:

- Providing strong leadership
- Having conversations about race and changing cultures
- Developing racially diverse and inclusive environments
- Getting the evidence and analysing the data on the attainment gap
- Understanding what works

Drawing on sector best practice in developing inclusive curricula, taking a whole-institution approach, fostering a sense of belonging, enhancing engagement, student partnership and student voice (Thomas, 2012; Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015; Richardson, 2015; Smith, 2016; Cooper et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2018; McDuff et al., 2018; UCL, 2018; Advance HE, 2019; HEPI, 2019; Hughes et al., 2019; UUK/NUS, 2019; OfS 2019b, Bale et al., 2020) and embedding transition pedagogies (Kift, 2009), a multifaceted action plan was developed as outlined in Table 1 with an aim to respond to as many of the recommendations from the focus groups as possible. Work is ongoing to address issues raised around student wellbeing. The SSGTs continue to be a visible frontline and accessible resource for all students. Additionally, the university has recently opened new Halls of Residence which will alleviate the experiences of students in private accommodation. The Brighton Student Union have also developed their own actions to address issues raised. The actions detailed below are ongoing and are regarded as a long-term strategy across the period of the REC Bronze Award and the subsequent resubmission and for at least the lifetime of the current Access and Participation Plan (2020–2025).

Table 1. The multifaceted institutional action plan. Each column represents an individual strand of activity.

Student Focused Activity	Staff/Student Partnership Activity	Staff Focused Activity	Policy/Governance/Strategy
<p>Belong at Brighton Transition and Induction Framework. The Programme includes sessions on money advice and opportunities to develop social connections across the first 6 weeks of study. Timeline Developed in 2019/20 and implemented for entrants in September 2020.</p>	<p>Inclusive Practice Partnerships (IPP) Scheme roll out at UG level: focusing on decolonising and diversifying the curriculum. Timeline IPP Scheme developed during 2019/2020 for implementation in 2020/21 following a pilot project undertaken during 2018/19 and 2019/20.</p>	<p>Staff Development at course level - Race Equity, Face to Face Unconscious Bias Workshops, Race Literacy and new resources for Personal Academic Tutors (University of Brighton, 2020) Timeline initiated in 2019/2020 and ongoing.</p>	<p>Inclusive Practice and Accessibility Policy Development and Implementation Timeline Policy development in 2019/2020 and implementation ongoing.</p>
<p>Development of Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Student Training Timeline developed during 2020/21 for</p>	<p>Student Voice – Anti-Racist Action Forums partnering with the Brighton Students’ Union and enabling students to</p>	<p>Budget resources secured for Inclusive Practice Partners Scheme including evaluation</p>	<p>Anonymity in Assessment Policy Implementation Timeline commenced during 2019/20 and ongoing implementation.</p>

<p>implementation in 2021/22.</p>	<p>engage directly with the University Executive board. Commitments made were added to the REC Action Plan, Timeline Held in July 2020 and March 2021 and ongoing forums planned twice a year.</p>	<p>Timeline secured from the 2020/21 budget for the duration of the Access and Participation Plan.</p>	
<p>Identity Match Mentoring Scheme and Evaluation Timeline existing scheme expanded in 2018/19 to include all academic schools.</p>	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment for COVID-19 Blended Learning (all protected Characteristics) Timeline completed in August 2020 and September 2021.</p>	<p>Additions to the REC Action Plan from Student Forums for staff consideration and implementation Timeline following the Forum in July 2020.</p>	<p>Lecture Capture Roll Out and Policy implementation Timeline from August 2020.</p>
<p>COVID-19 – 6-point guide to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students and implementation Timeline August 2020 and throughout the online</p>	<p>COVID-19 Checking in Survey, data split by protected characteristics. Timeline throughout the pandemic, 2019/20 and 2020/21.</p>	<p>Monthly Race Awareness Speaker Series on Microsoft Teams (creating a safe space to talk about Race)</p>	<p>Blackboard Ally implementation to support students with a disability and those who commute the opportunity of downloading study</p>

teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic		Timeline established in February 2020 and ongoing.	materials in a variety of formats. Timeline implementation during 2020/21 and ongoing.
Belong at Brighton Extra – fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion through providing opportunities for co/extra-curricular activities to address issues of isolation as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown. Timeline January 2021 and ongoing.	Continued implementation of the recommendations from the 2019 focus groups (used in the REC submission) Timeline from the publication of the internal report in 2019/20 and ongoing.	Annual refresh of the #ClosingTheGap UUK/NUS progress against the 'checklist' - mapping the activity. Timeline from the publication of the report and checklist in May 2019 and ongoing.	Curriculum Design Principles development – focus on Inclusive Practice and Transition Pedagogies (Kift and Nelson, 2009) Timeline developed in 2020/21 for implementation in 2021/22.
Focused Careers Support and 'Be More' employability skills weeks including progression to Postgraduate taught and research study. Supporting Black students	Commuters Students survey and recommendations. The University definition of commuting is students that live 15+ miles from their campus. Commuting	Resources to support staff in considering the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students Timeline from 2019/20 and ongoing.	Attendance and Engagement Policy Development and associated digital solutions Timeline policy development 2019–21

<p>into the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) and #100Blackinterns programme Timeline introduced in 2019/20 and ongoing.</p>	<p>students are more likely to be Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Timeline implemented recommendations in 2021/22 following the return to in-person teaching post COVID-19 pandemic.</p>		<p>and implementation from 2021/22.</p>
<p>Developed and delivered a bullying and harassment reporting tool Timeline 2019/20.</p>	<p>Enhancing implementation of the Personal Academic Tutoring Policy and developing staff CPD resources Timeline from 2018/19 and ongoing.</p>	<p>Developing Inclusive Practice and Inclusive Curricular supporting materials Timeline from 2019/20 and ongoing.</p>	<p>Information on course costs provided on the course webpages (externally facing) Timeline available for entrants from 2020/21.</p>

The *Inclusive Practice Partnerships Scheme*, launched in 2020/21, was a key strategic project developed in response to the student voice. Students were paid to work in partnership with academics to review module content, pedagogy, reading lists or address the impact of colonialism on the discipline. An impact evaluation of the scheme is taking place following the TASO (2021) Theory of Change model, and the outcomes of this will be disseminated in due course.

Staff have welcomed the opportunities, offered in the Race Awareness speaker series and the staff development workshops, to reflect on the lived experiences of others and develop confidence in talking about race and ethnicity. Staff noted that

[the speaker series] helped me understand things from a different perspective, made me aware of issues I'd never considered and [has] generally been a growing experience ...'

The impact of the whole-institution approach and the actions which took place in the academic year 2019/20 can be surmised to have had an impact on the recent Office for Students (2021) attainment data, with a significant reduction in the gap between White and Black students (Table 2). Although this improvement in the metrics coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of a 'no detriment' policy (University of Brighton, 2021b) and a shift to remote assessment, the protection offered by the no detriment policy would have affected the outcomes all students and, whilst further data analysis and research is needed to ascertain the impact of no detriment policies and remote assessment across the sector, it cannot be sole cause of a closing of the degree awarding gaps between Black and White students in particular.

Table 2. Percentage point gap in good degree attainment (first and upper second class honours degrees) between White and other ethnic groups

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Black (Brighton)	32	28	24	30	18
Black (All English HE Providers)	24	23	23	22	18.3
Asian (Brighton)	20	15	18	10	14
Asian (All English HE Providers)	12	10.5	10.2	10.8	7.7
Mixed (Brighton)	5	10	1	6	5
Mixed (All English HE Providers)	6.5	5.8	4	4.8	3.6
Other (Brighton)	24	28	17	9	13
Other (All English HE Providers)	13.5	13	13.2	14.3	9.9

Conclusion

The actions discussed in this paper are the starting point for the University. The institutional discourse around race equality will continue as confidence in talking about race develops (University of Brighton, 2019; UUK/NUS, 2019). The action plan is designed to take a whole-institution approach to culture change without taking a deficit approach (Singh, 2011) and is intended to have a greater impact across the wider student body. The actions respond directly to the voices of our students and are heavily influenced by the strong institutional leadership and a strategic approach (UUK/NUS, 2019).

Whilst these actions are relevant for the context at Brighton, they complement and add to the range of activity currently taking place across Higher Education Institutions as the sector works collaboratively, sharing good practice, to address the sector-wide issue of the Ethnicity Degree Awarding Gap (OfS, 2019c) and the underlying student experiences. However, we are aware that the experiences of students who identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic cannot and should not be homogenised, that experiences at course level and individual level will vary and that the curriculum will be experienced differently by each person.

This research project has responded to the voices and data available, which may not have captured all experiences but has provided a base from which to make impactful and sustainable changes to the culture. This has been a positive project for the institution, helping develop a roadmap to effect change and build confidence in addressing the issues.

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ⁱ An institution which was formerly a Polytechnic and given University status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Post-1992 institutions teach both academic and professional vocational subjects.

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