INTRODUCTION

Higher education (HE) has the potential to break intergenerational poverty by bringing about social mobility. Thereby, transforming the lives of many, the wider society and particularly the minority ethnic groups in the UK. Yet inequality of access to university for socio-economically disadvantaged students remains a major policy challenge. Substantial progress has been made in relation to widening participation, inclusion and social change, however, challenges remain to build on and sustain the progress that has been made; to ensure the participation and success of deprived groups and to deliver fair access.

In recent years the student population has changed massively; the success rates of different groups of students in HE (BAME), have come under considerable scrutiny, with gender and ethnicity identified as key attributes predicting differential achievement of 'good degrees'. This study is attempting to identify and explain the attainment gap for BAME students at the University of Northampton.

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This research is carried out in order to explore the Factors that Impact on Low Grades of BAME students at the University of Northampton.

University of Northampton
AN INVESTIGATION INTO
BAME ATTAINMENT

KEY OBSERVATIONS

• BAME students are not a homogenous group and it was clear that the BAME students all faced different challenges depending on the cultural group they represent. (Black British, Indian, Chinese, Black African).
• "That is not me", student from some BAME cultural groups were reluctant to participate in the project because they felt that the attainment gap does not relate to, reflect, affect or impact them.
• While there is an attainment gap for all ethnic groups, it is consistently worst for Black (Black African/Black Caribbean/Other Black Background) students across the university.
• There are differences in attitudes to learning between various groups within the BAME student population. This was varied between subjects areas.
• There is a very negative impact/effect of commuting on attainment as a relatively large number of our students live in London and must travel regularly to Northampton to attend classes.
• Students feel that University is inclusive but Northampton as a town is not.

• Students sighted examples of what they felt was evidence 'microaggressions' targeted towards them prior to coming to UoN and during their time at UoN.
• There is a clear lack of BAME staff representation in most departments
• BAME students find it difficult to relate to the majority of course and module content. In some cases, students highlighted that they passively engage/d with some course content
• There is/was also the impact of negative prior learning experience on learning
• Academic support services not diverse in staff
• All staff who participated, highlighted the fact that the interview made them think and will help them reflect on their practice.
• The attainment gap is different amongst various cultural and social groups
• Through interviews and conversations with staff, the realisation of the value of 'white privilege' was mentioned on a few occasions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

➜ To understand BAME students' experiences at UoN
➜ To examine the factors influencing their performances
➜ To explore issues relating to low BAME attainment at UoN
➜ To explore the barriers impacting on their grades
➜ To explore ways to improve communication highlighting support service available to students

METHODOLOGY

➜ Qualitative research
➜ Opinion-based and subjective in nature
➜ Video and audio recording
➜ Semi-structure interviews with Academic, support staffs & Alumni
➜ Focus groups with current undergraduate students at UoN

STEPS NEEDED TO REDUCE ATTAINMENT GAP

☆ Providing strong leadership
☆ Making the uncomfortable comfortable, having conversations about race and changing the culture (e.g. book clubs)
☆ Developing racially diverse and inclusive environments
☆ Getting the evidence and analysing the data
☆ Understanding what works
☆ Further research into attainment of specific groups within BAME
☆ Training around inclusion, diversity and bias
☆ Decolonisation and internationalisation of the curriculum
☆ Future consideration of REC