

# **Bridging the Gap: BME student achievement at UCL**

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## Aims

- Background
- BME project on Undergraduate student achievement at UCL 2014
- Outcomes
- Faculty of Brain Sciences Change Maker project
- Future directions

## UCL BME Undergraduate Achievement Project 2014

- All of these people were involved!
- Teresa McConlogue (Senior Teaching Fellow in CALT), Shanell Johnson (Black and Minority Ethnic Students' Officer, UCLU), Dr Julie Evans (Faculty Tutor for Brain Sciences) , Dr Alastair McClelland (Programme Director BSc Psychology), Dr Sylvia Vitello, Dr Matthew Jones and Dr Francina Clayton from the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences

## Background

- Recent research has found a consistent achievement gap in terms of final degree grades between white and BME undergraduate students in the UK.
- This size of this gap varies but is around 17% - though smaller in Russell group universities and for some subject disciplines.
- The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU, 2013), analysing Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for the 2011-12 academic year, reported that 71.5% of UK White students graduating 2011-2012 did so with a good degree (1<sup>st</sup>/2:1) vs 53.8% of BME students.
- Differences between different BME groups, BME covers hugely diverse communities so crucial not to make generalisations.

## What did we do?

- We looked at the final degree % mark for students who graduated from 2011-2013 in all faculties except Medical Sciences.
- This was complete data where ethnicity and degree mark were available - 7,542 students of a possible 8,742.
- We carried out some statistical analyses (ANOVA) looking at white vs BME achievement generally and then separately for UK white vs BME students.
- We looked at any differences in achievement between BME groups
- We looked at non-completion rates for white vs BME students.

Ethnicity	Domicile Type			Total
	UK	EU	Non-EU	
1. White	3117	660	176	3953
2. African-Caribbean (AC)	181	4	36	221
3. South Asian	765	12	160	937
4. Chinese (mainly non-EU)	209	10	1053	1272
5. Other Asian	227	5	331	563
6. Mixed: white and A-C	55	3	2	60
7. Mixed: white and Asian	136	17	27	180
8. Other (mixed, other ethnicity including Arab)	257	18	81	356
<b>Total</b>	<b>4947</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>1866</b>	<b>7542</b>

## What did we find?

- There was a small but statistically significant difference between the achievement of white students vs BME students (including international BME students), 66.2% vs 64.5%, though both cohorts would have been awarded the same degree class.
- When we looked at the data for UK students only, there was still a small but statistically significant difference between white vs BME students, 66% vs 64.8%.

## What did we find?

- The size of the difference varied across Faculties with no difference for Arts & Humanities and Laws.

Brain Sciences: 1.6%

Built Environment: 3.6%

Engineering: 3.4%

Life Sciences: 2.6%

MAPS: 2%

SHS: 2.4%

- Completion rates were comparable, 6.9% of white students did not complete vs 6.7% BME



## Interview data –why?

- In line with the evidence from previous literature, key was a lack of a feeling of belonging in some cases.
- Some students raised issues of curriculum not being inclusive, not reflecting issues of diversity, equality or discrimination.
- Other studies have shown that compared to white students some BME students may have more family and cultural obligations.
- Rigorous research is rare!

## What did we do?

- Plan of action and guidance approved by UCL Education committee relating to
  - Annual monitoring of BME achievement statistics – now part of the ASER process.
  - Student experience now part of the compulsory Faculty Diversity and Equality plans
  - Curriculum development: Liberating the Curriculum steering group, ongoing.
  - Belonging interventions – e.g. BME alumni, mentors, films of BME students, ongoing.
  - Review BME student recruitment and retention, ongoing.

# What is ChangeMakers?

- Enhancing the learning experience
- Working in partnership (staff-students)
- Innovation / new ideas



# ChangeMakers / BME Project

Enhancing the student experience, academic achievement and support for career ambitions of BME students



## Aims of project

- Build on previous quantitative research carried out at UCL through a qualitative approach
- Build on existing research from national policy reports and academic literature
- Obtain a richer insight into UK BME student issues
- Develop strategies and design interventions for any problems identified
- Explore UK BME issues with a larger group of students covering UG and PGT

## What does the project entail?

- Collaboration with the UCLU BME Student Officer
- Two student leads
- Two focus groups
- Amazon vouchers for participants!

# Exploring the BME student life cycle

Admissions



Graduating and beyond



# Themes

- Experiences when applying to UCL
- Realities on arrival
- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Relations with staff (academic and admin)
- Social experiences / inclusivity and belongingness
- Perceptions and perceived differences
- Barriers to career progression including doctoral studies





## What will we do with the findings?

- Disseminate findings to staff and students across the Faculty and the wider UCL community, including VP Education & Student Affairs
- Raise at central UCL committee level
- Use data collected to inform action plans, possibly through further staff-student collaborations and ChangeMaker projects
- Consider and develop ideas that can feed into the Faculty's long term Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Look at exploring staff views to gain an alternative perspective

## **BME student experience**

- Positive environment
- Misunderstandings – dealt with swiftly by existing checks and balances

### **My motivations for taking part in the project:**

- Unique issues
- Proactivity
- Enhancement of future student experience