

# How can you thrive if you don't feel you belong?

## What departments can do to include Black and minority ethnic students in all aspects of learning and teaching.

Maximising students' sense of belonging at UCL is imperative to support their learning, university experience and ultimately their achievement. Yet Black and minority ethnic (BME) students have a lower sense of belonging compared to white students. We need to address this so BME students are not disadvantaged.

You can use the practical examples below to support inclusive teaching and create change. They are based on input from students themselves about their experiences and solutions they believe will work.

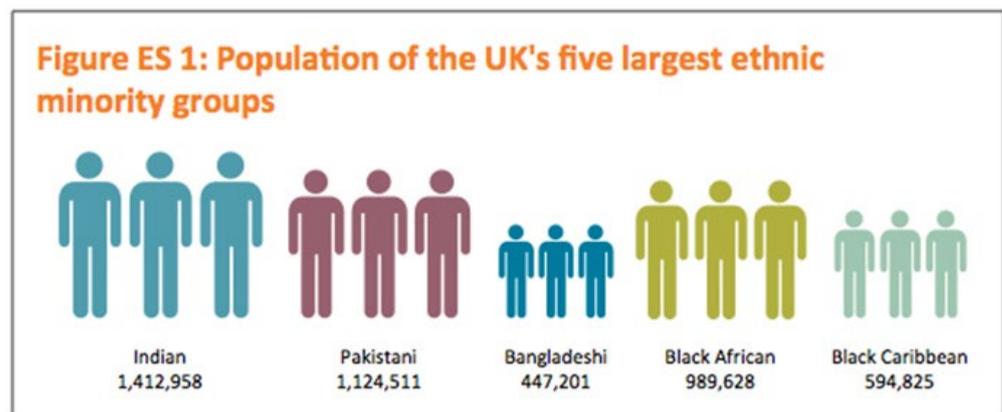
Use the content to stimulate discussion: please share any thoughts or good practice to support this initiative as it evolves.



# 1. Practical examples to implement

## Be aware of your personal responsibilities as a teacher

- Be aware of your own influence as a role model.
- Be aware of and refrain from perpetuating racial stereotypes.
- Consider how 'race' relates to your subject matter and be open to discussing this.
- Be open about not knowing everything about 'race'; encourage challenge and debate.
- When instigating a debate or posing questions relating to 'race', encourage all students to engage. Do not look on BME students as a default for comment.
- If you are white british consider how this impacts on your views: read about 'White Privilege'.
- Ensure anonymity in marking and moderation as set out in Section 7 of the Academic Manual are adhered to.
- Share good practice within your department and Faculty and beyond through the Liberating the Curriculum Forum.



## Use inclusive teaching to support students being active in their own learning

- Ask students to remind you of their names and how to pronounce them if necessary. Encourage students to use their given name rather than anglicising names.
- Suggest your department provides teaching staff with student's names and photos, if this would be helpful (Department of Greek and Latin use a phonetic guide).
- Provide a variety of access routes to personal tutors e.g. published office hours, email, online bookable appointments.
- Provide a basic etiquette guide in induction material with examples of how to address staff in person and via email, to avoid anxiety resulting in a barrier to interaction.

- Provide openings for your students to tell you about themselves; e.g. if you are giving feedback or answering a question one-to-one, tag on an informal 'how are you?' or stop for a quick chat if passing in the corridor. This will help you get to know your students as individuals beyond their perceived identity.
- Make a particular effort to call on a variety of students during discussions and when inviting opinion. Consider whom you usually call upon, allow to speak, and listen to.
- Appreciate BME students may have different experiences and needs. Treating everyone the same can mean needs are not met. Some students may need extra encouragement to seek your advice, or for you to allocate team roles in group work to help them fully participate.
- Use interactive teaching methods to learn about students and help them learn about each other. Pair/small group work with feedback avoids isolating individuals or putting them on the spot. Mixing up pairs/groups - rather than grouping together those already sitting next to each other - encourages students from different ethnic backgrounds to interact.

## **Create inclusive events**

- Ensure events cater for a wide range of interests. Vary what is on offer so everyone gets an opportunity to participate.
- If an event will provide a specific opportunity such as information about how to apply for a scholarship, ensure it is inclusive e.g. held during the day and without alcohol.



## Provide BME role models

- Ensure some teaching is delivered by BME teaching staff – use visiting lecturers at least once a term if there are no in-house staff.
- Seek to include BME academics when profiling those who have contributed to your field of work or those with successful careers in your field.
- Direct students to Liberating The Curriculum resources such as videos of BME Alumni.
- Look for opportunities to display diverse imagery so spaces are inclusive and reflect UCL's global image, for both physical and online spaces.

## Ensure an inclusive and diverse curriculum

- Ensure reading lists reflect diverse authors and subjects.
- Within the context of your subject, extend content beyond European culture or history to include a wider view of the world; avoid presenting European culture as the default best.
- When using UK, European or Western material, look to reflect the diverse identities and influences that constitute these areas.
- Be aware of the underlying values and assumptions in your field when selecting material. Pay attention when students bring material from other perspectives.
- Ensure images used in lectures reflect contemporary UK society and support UCL's position as a global university. Avoid only using images of white people, or only using images of BME people when talking about 'race'.
- After an initial review of your reading list consult students to gain their input. Consult them about and encourage them to consider the cultural and historical context in which content was developed e.g. when racial inequality was an accepted norm or colonialism was dominant.

## 2. Background

UCL holds a Bronze Race Equality Charter for Higher Education. In achieving this UCL committed to implement a Race Equality Charter Action Plan during 2015 to 2018.

The action plan was informed in part by a study conducted in 2014 on BME student attainment. Wider research shows that British BME degree students do less well even when a range of factors, including their socio-economic background, are taken into account.

One factor contributing to this, is a lack of feeling of belonging for BME students. Differential student attainment and sense of belonging could be seen as examples of Critical Race Theory<sup>1</sup> in practice.

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1 Rollock, N. and Gillborn, D. (2011) Critical Race Theory (CRT), British Educational Research Association online resource. Available online at [<https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/critical-race-theory-crt>] Last accessed [May 2017].

Making progress on student belonging and attainment is not about students fitting in and making do – it is about delivering undergraduate education in an inclusive way so that all students benefit from what UCL has to offer.

Practicing inclusion is a legal requirement of Higher Education Institutions under Section 91 of the Equality Act<sup>2</sup>.

The practical tips contained in this paper were informed by a focus group of UCL BME students, facilitated by Challenge Consultancy. Quotes below are from this focus group.



### 3. Belonging interventions

#### a. Personal responsibilities

We all have a responsibility to deliver inclusion. However, we have heard from BME students that they often feel obligated to bring challenge to curriculum content or mode of delivery. This makes them feel like a lone voice, and if in the minority in the student group this will increase feelings of isolation and disconnectedness.

Students reported experiencing negative ‘micro messages’ from staff, which may not have been intended as such but nevertheless have a negative impact. This was in relation to use of language; stating stereotypes as fact; attitudes and reaction toward BME students during discussions and debate e.g. indicating that their input is of less value or factually incorrect if it differs from the lecturer/tutor; reluctance to engage in conversations about race.

**“At the beginning of the year, the whole course were told that BME students always do worse in the practical exam. This was announced as a fact to everyone!”**

#### b. Positive affirmations

BME students may feel isolated and disconnected from peers, lecturers and the curriculum. They will not benefit from the positive affirmations that white students experience as a matter of course.

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<sup>2</sup> Equality Act 2010 Technical Guidance on Further and Higher Education

Students have reported that sometimes lecturers avoid using their names. They acknowledge that this may happen when teaching staff are unfamiliar with certain names or struggle to pronounce them and are anxious not to cause offence. However, this reduces interaction, decreases the likelihood that those students will be called upon to contribute and leads to exclusion.

Where a student is from a visible minority, and the onus is on them to make their voice heard - it is likely to discourage their participation.

A colour-blind approach to students is seen by some as equality in practice. However, this does not acknowledge the lived experiences of BME students. Those students who feel isolated and excluded (from the curriculum and/or in other ways) stated that they would feel supported if teaching staff checked that they were okay, showed consideration and vocalised an interest in their wellbeing. They called for an acknowledgement that BME students experiences where different to their white counterparts.

It would be positive for BME students to see people who share their identity or background in reading lists and reference material. If students perceive reading lists as flawed because they represent a monoculture this will risk demotivating and disengaging them.

**“I’ve received comments from professors about how my English is ‘very good’ apart from some things a ‘native speaker’ would not say....I am a native speaker! There are variations of English outside of British English. Comments like these reinforce my sense of being perceived as an inferior ‘Other’.”**

### **c. Inclusive spaces**

BME students reported not seeing themselves represented in the style/look of the spaces they occupy on campus. They feel it is not visibly evident that UCL is a global university. This creates a mismatch between students’ expectations before arrival and their lived experience after arrival. This discourages a sense of belonging and increases a sense of not being entitled to be within the particular space.

A key issue under this theme was the emphasis on alcohol for all events, including those run for students by teaching staff. Students reported that this sometimes was used as an incentive for attendance e.g. free wine. The link to alcohol also impacts upon access to tutors, with students reporting tutors stating they “can be found in the pub” when not in their office.

A review by another London university discovered international students were reticent in approaching teaching staff as they were unsure of the etiquette in addressing them.

Students reported other factors relating to inclusive spaces including: not valuing BME student perspectives and making jokes at the expense of international students.

**“Teaching staff poke fun at international students – knowing they will not get the joke...”**

#### **d. Role models**

Being able to see one's own identity represented within teaching staff has a very positive impact on students. BME students do not benefit from the positive affirmations that white students experience as a matter of course, such as seeing people like them delivering lectures or progressing within the career path that they are aspiring to. This may have a negative impact on BME students' sense of belonging and aspirations.

Lack of staff diversity can impact on other areas of concern such as general attitudes of current staff and what is felt by some students as being a fear of discussing 'race'.

Where BME teaching staff are present, students reported feeling that they favour white students (possibly responding to stereotype threat and not wishing to be seen to favour BME students).

**“All of the lecturers are white”**

**“I don't feel represented at all in this university, in terms of the systems and the people that go to this university.”**

#### **d. Curriculum**

Representation in the curriculum seems to be an overwhelming concern for students. This underlines the work already underway by Liberating the Curriculum to ensure that knowledge from marginalised knowledge producers is fairly represented in UCL curricula and acknowledged as mainstream, rather than 'other' and different from that produced by the dominant social category.

The following were highlighted by students:

- References/suggested reading
- Lack of willingness to have a conversation about 'race'
- Lack of diversity in those assessing/marking practical assessments – impacting work content and judgement when marking.

Students reported material used in lectures only containing images of white people. This does not reflect contemporary UK society nor our position as a global university. Doing so diminishes a BME students' sense of belonging and increases their sense of 'otherness'. This could result in detachment from the taught material purely on the basis of the imagery that is used to present it. One student reported never seeing a person of colour (over a two year period) used in teaching material except in one topic that particularly related to a specific 'racial' group – which was far from evidence of inclusion.

**“All we do is talk about dead white men.”**

**“Every image I saw used, all year, were of white people.”**

**“A political view can be marked as wrong, this is then reflected in the grading, when it was simply a critique of the thinking of the tutors preferred author.”**

## 4. Resources and further reading

A discussion of race, equality and education in the UK: British academia's colour-blind problem: an interview with Dr Nicola Rollock

Research into fitting in and belonging presented as a lunch hour lecture: Game of clones: why it matters if our friends are the same as us by Dr Katherine Woolf - Senior Lecturer in Medical Education at UCL

Exploration of ethnicity and achievement among medical students: a study conducted by The University of Manchester by Suzanne Vaughan

A blog penned by a Black person responding to a question on what 'white privilege' is from an old school friend who is white Got privilege?

Article by Stanford University academics testing their hypothesis on why capable Black college students fail to perform as well as their white counterparts. Steele.C.M. (1991 August) Thin ice: Stereotype threat and Black college students. *Atlantic Monthly*, 284(2), 44-47, 50-54

Exploration of 'stereotype threat' and its impact: Steele,C.M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52, 613-629

Discussion of racial colour blindness, its emergence, what it looks like and its impact on tackling racism.

An exploration of variances in students' strategies for academic success including seeking support from lecturers, by ethnicity Stevenson, J. (2012) An exploration of the link between minority ethnic and white students' degree attainment and views of their future 'Possible Selves', *Higher Education Studies*, 2 (4), pp. 103-113.

A discussion of Critical Race Theory in education: Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), pp. 69–91

Resources from Liberating the curriculum working group at UCL

For more information contact: [equalities@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:equalities@ucl.ac.uk)