

Eliminating the BAME Awarding Gap: Guidance for Departments

Update September 2022

1. Purpose of document

This document summarises MAPS faculty activities in addressing the BAME Awarding Gap up to September 2022. It includes a summary of the things we have learnt through discussion of module-level data with departments in November 2021, including highlighted best practice. We also discuss future plans. As with the previous departmental toolkits, this document distils advice from the (very long) [UCL BAME Awarding Gap Toolkit](#). All of the actions listed in this document will improve the education experience for all of our students, as well as levelling the playing field to allow equal opportunities for all.

2. Past and Ongoing Faculty Activities

Support for BAME students

- Working with UMO we have established a group coaching programme for BAME students that started running in January 2022 and continued for 10 sessions.
 - The Programme has now finished (16 students completed) and has reported its findings including key themes discussed.
 - Competitive environment of UCL, workload, imposter syndrome and perceived perfectionism were repeating themes.
 - Students were anxious about perceived future discrimination in the workplace and hiring processes.
 - Students report positive outcomes from the programme, including providing safe space in which to discuss and developing strategies to help with studies and future careers.
 - Recommendations from the programme:
 - Audit and review how Diversity and Inclusion is being addressed in MAPS (and across UCL) and identify any additional education needed to support all staff in delivering agenda.
 - Develop coaching or mentoring programme focussing on building skills and resilience to cope with the academic demands of UCL with nuanced consideration for the additional pressures of ethnically diverse students.
 - Engage with student body to find appropriate initiatives to address the social isolation felt by ethnic diverse students.
 - Proactively address the confidence issues faced by ethnic diverse students in relation to study and workplace.
 - Amplify information and resources already available to student body so that they can make use of services and highlight resources and schemes targeting BAME students.
- Summer Research Internships funded and run by the faculty had 20 internships ring-fenced for WP and BAME students.
 - 364 students made 627 applications for 39 positions.
 - 58 students classed as BAME/WP.
 - Top shortlisted WP/BAME student for each position automatically interviewed.
 - 32 WP/BAME students interviewed.
 - 10 WP/BAME students successfully placed.
 - 25% of positions filled by WP/BAME students (made up 16% of initial applications).
 - Scheme will be evaluated and run again. Possible improvement is automatic practice interview for WP/BAME students.

Inclusive Assessment

- To ensure all students have equal support for exam preparation, a faculty task-group developed principles on access to past papers and answers and expected level of formative feedback support students should expect for modules with significant exam component. A [Student Guide](#) was developed and disseminated to students in February 2022. Departments should ensure the [baseline recommendations](#) are implemented in 2022.
- We also have an agreed faculty position that assessment deadlines should always fall within termtime and within standard working hours (with the exception of some fieldwork activities).
- See also the recent guidance for [Improving Assessment and Feedback Practice Across MAPS](#).

Support for Departments

- A simple analysis of the module-level Awarding Gap was carried out for key modules for most departments and disseminated along with the distilled toolkit (see section 6).
- Follow-up discussions were held with all departments to discuss the module data, tool-kits and other issues. Discussions included teaching, student support, EDI and PS staff as well as Heads of Department.

Seminars and Workshops

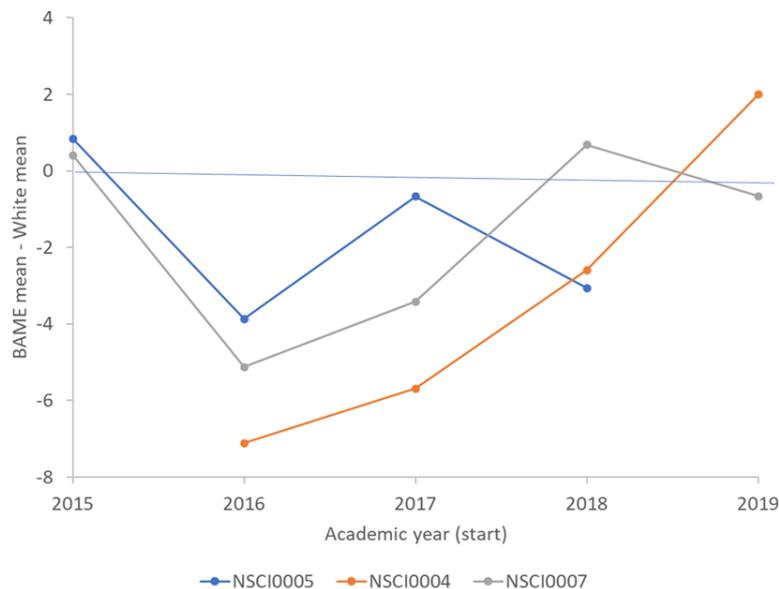
- Dr Neil Williams from Kingston University gave a very informative seminar on '[Closing the BAME Awarding Gap in Chemistry](#)'. The talk covered the [importance of internships](#), project-based learning, active learning and co-development of the curriculum. It also covered practical suggestions for improving inclusivity e.g. more pre-lab activities and smart worksheets to provide immediate formative feedback; changes to start times to support commuter students.
- A useful paper cited in the seminar is a review of the effectiveness of [Active Learning](#) strategies for reducing or eliminating awarding / attainment gaps.
- A follow-up internal discussion session was then held to follow-up on themes from the seminar and from discussions with departments. This was not recorded but [slides are available here](#).

3. Planned and Future Faculty Activities

- The central UCL BAME Awarding Gap project has funding guaranteed for the next year.
- The Statistics department hosted a faculty-funded 4 week undergraduate internship this summer, to analyse module level data with respect to the BAME Awarding Gap. This will inform how we analyse and present data in the future, to ensure that we use and disseminate it most effectively.
- There is good evidence that [Peer to Peer learning](#) (peer assisted learning) helps attainment, and we'll investigate how best to implement this within MAPS. We plan to support departments in piloting peer study / peer assisted learning groups.
- We will work more closely with the faculty EDI and WP teams to ensure that our Education strategy is aligned with Faculty EDI and WP policy and practice. We have developed actions that will feed into the next Faculty EDI strategy.
- We will work with faculty student societies to ensure their recruitment and planned activities are inclusive and supportive of the whole student body.

4. Case studies of Best Practice

4.1. Natural Sciences: bucking the trend!



- Trends for NSCI0004 and NSCI0007 show that the module awarding gap for BAME students has decreased steadily from 2016 to 2019. This is different to trends observed in other departments, so it was essential to hear what (if anything) has been changed in module delivery that could explain this positive change.
- It should be noted that these are non-exam assessed modules so need to be compared to other comparable modules in other departments for a true reflection.
- Discussion with the department revealed no significant changes had been made in the delivery or assessment of these modules (literature project and a computational / maths) over this timescale.
- However the following positive actions were identified that may have attributed to elimination of the awarding gap:
 - Lots of work has taken place on community building within the Natural Sciences cohort. This was in response to student feedback that they lacked the sense of belonging to a particular department.
 - Information on the literature project was given very early – at the start of the summer for the module running in the next academic year. Most students do not take any action at this point but at least they are aware of the requirements.
 - Multiple sources of support – informally from students in year above, more formally through module organiser, literature project supervisor and academic subject stream representative and also PGTA students.
 - Formative feedback has been introduced within the module.
 - Deadlines have been moved to avoid clashes.
 - Group work is included in these modules.
 - Flexibility – student can focus on what they are interested in and choose a literature project based on their interests.

4.2. Inclusive teaching

- STS have carried out diversity reviews of curriculum content for years 1 and 2 and are now moving to Years 3 and PGT.
- In modules in STS where the reading lists could not be diversified further an explanation has been provided as to why not.

- Some modules in STS that cover sensitive topics have introduced 'contracts' or set of guidelines on how issues will be discussed within the module.
- Statistics department are also looking at introducing inclusive teaching statements for modules.

4.3. Group work and peer to peer learning

- Chemistry have removed a lot of summative coursework exercises and marks for submission of tutorial questions and replaced with equivalent formative feedback opportunities. This has started to change the culture from students working alone (as their work counted towards assessment) to learning together (as they no longer need to worry about collusion).
- Physics have timetabled tutorial and lab groups so that students remain in the same groups, with the same cohort throughout the year. The aim is to provide a sense of community and belonging post-Covid.
- Maths have recently introduced group work in the form of presentations. This is assessed but low-stakes and is felt to be successful in giving students the opportunity to work together.
- Several departments mentioned the challenge of organising group work – in particular that students often do not like it if allocated into random or 'engineered' groups or that they self-select into groups with students who are similar to themselves (both in background and ability). An idea from Pete Fitch is to allow students to pair up and then form the group (either randomly or engineered) from the pairs. In this way students will always have one person in the group that they have chosen to work with.

5. Other observations from departmental discussions.

- Chemistry noted that many BAME students in the department were also Commuter students while many White students live in halls or shared houses. This could result different experiences in finding community, studying together and learning from each other. The experience of [Commuter Students](#) in the SHS Faculty has recently been studied by Caroline Garaway and the observations and suggested actions could be equally applicable to students in MAPS.
- Several departments noted the loss of community as cohort sizes had got larger. This is compounded by the small available social spaces (e.g. common rooms) within departments.
- Several departments now have a large overseas cohort (>50% of the year group) mainly from mainland China. This has changed the way that students interact and engage with each other and perhaps has led to Home BAME students becoming a 'minority within a minority'. There has also been a large focus on supporting these international students in recent years and perhaps Home students are being overlooked.
- There was suggestion of an 'entitlement gap' and that some BAME students are not aware of what support they are entitled to, or even when they are aware, fail to fill out the necessary forms as they don't feel they deserve to ask for more help. This [video](#) produced by SSW for Access and WP students covers support available and may also be helpful for students who do not identify as Access / WP.
- Several departments mentioned active departmental student societies as being important for community building but some voiced concern about how representative and inclusive such societies were.

6. Distilled advice from UCL BAME Awarding Gap Toolkit

The UCL toolkit is broken down into four key themes. This document distils the information most relevant and useful to your department to enable you to develop bespoke plans for eliminating the awarding gap.

6.1. Theme 1: Inclusive curriculum

The definition of an inclusive curriculum is:

'The process of developing, designing and delivering programmes of study to minimise the barriers that students regardless of educational, dispositional, circumstantial or cultural background may face in accessing and engaging with the curriculum'

Addressing this requires a cultural shift to anticipate and eliminate the barriers students may encounter and which prevent them from fully engaging. At the moment we expect all students to 'deal with' the way we organise and teach and we respond to their needs ad hoc when issues arise. We tend to blame the students when they struggle with how we do things because that's how things have always been done. However, students are arriving at UCL from a range of backgrounds, with different experiences and differing degrees of social or emotional support. Students are entitled to have equal access to the opportunities we offer, so we must examine our programme design and delivery critically – do we inadvertently have barriers in place and what can we do to remove them?

The [2010 HEA Physical Sciences Inclusive Curriculum](#) guides give example case studies relevant to Themes 1 and 2. A useful example is how to meet entitlements of students with Asperger's Syndrome as it contains advice (much of which we do but could be improved) that would support *all* students and reduce awarding gaps.

- Planning ahead: provide clear information about assessment requirements and revision examples.
- Group work: consider assigning specific roles so all students know what is expected of them.
- Provide information about changes as early and clearly as possible.

Is an 'inclusive curriculum' the same as 'decolonising the curriculum'?

The idea of the inclusive curriculum is sometimes (wrongly) conflated with 'decolonising the curriculum' and many MAPS departments can find suggestions such as modifying reading lists and using a diverse range of resources unhelpful. Many of us use standard textbooks and accepted theories that in many cases do not have a racial context. However, MAPS departments should instead consider how and where in their programme to address questions such as: '*What knowledge is included in the curriculum, who selects it and why?*'. This does **not** need to be an in-depth examination of the history and philosophy of scientific thought (unless the department is STS!) - a light touch acknowledgement of this question at different points in the programme will go a long way to allowing students of different backgrounds to engage with the curriculum content. For example (if applicable):

- How did our curriculum become dominated by the work of European male scientists / mathematicians? What is the context for this and was there an alternative?
- What have we decided is high value and impactful research and why? Is this different in Europe / North America / China / the Global South? This could also be discussed in the context of open science, open access publishing and access to facilities and resources.

In addition, you could (among other examples):

- Use research materials, examples and papers from a range of perspectives and authors in teaching.
- Provide literature project titles that encourage discussion of the points above or research that goes beyond that of European / North American groups.
- Neil Williams at Kingston has a nice example of using [student-created case studies](#) of the effect of environmental pollution / atmospheric chemistry on the Global South.
- Invite seminar speakers that represent diversity (this is already happening as part of EDI initiatives).
- There are some great examples of ongoing projects funded by the MAPS 'Take bold action for inclusion' [EDI Project Grants](#).

These small things can build up to have an impact, but we still will need a cultural shift towards identifying and eliminating barriers as discussed above.

6.2. Theme 2: Inclusive Teaching, Learning and Assessment

This theme is related to the one above, but rather than focussing on programme and curriculum design, it addresses *active* steps you can take during delivery and when interacting with students. All lecturers should be encouraged to undertake some of these steps. Some suggested actions are:

- Reflect on your assumptions about students and create opportunities to get to know them.
- Set explicit expectations – help students to understand course aims, objectives and expectations including assessment criteria.

- Explicitly identify and explain discipline-specific conventions (that seem obvious to you but are new to them), otherwise students may analogise from other experiences or fields.
- Explore ways of encouraging *all* students to use office hours or provide alternate ways to communicate.
- Avoid singling out or ignoring particular students or groups of students.
- Learn student's names, build rapport, share your own experience.
- Provide students with opportunities to get to know each other, e.g. through group work.

Some specific examples of activities are:

- If unsure of student prior knowledge, set a formative assessment to test this and give feedback allowing students to address any knowledge or skills gaps.
- Design groupwork so students from diverse backgrounds work together. Establish expectations that promote inclusive and respectful interactions among students. Consider allocating group roles.
- Use a diverse range of assessment methods and ensure that students are supported in preparation for high stakes assessment such as exams.
- Consider introducing Peer assisted learning into your programmes as this has been shown to improve progression, retention and module marks.

6.3. Theme 3: Belonging

Research indicates a sense of belonging is critical to students' academic motivation, success and well-being. Students who feel they belong are more likely to see the value in the required work and have higher self-belief in their chances of success. Studies have shown that White students can be more strategic and purposeful in how they seek help and support from lecturers. In contrast, studies show some BAME students devise strategies for 'getting by' without direct contact with lecturers, by trying to cope alone or through peers. We need to appreciate that there may be cultural differences in how students perceive and act on seeking help and support. Research also shows that strong peer relationships promote students' sense of belonging and their confidence as learners, as well as their academic integration and motivation to succeed. Departments should play a role in encouraging positive peer relationships e.g. through collaborative teaching and learning, peer learning, peer mentoring, group work etc. This is important for students without opportunity to develop friendships in other settings (e.g. commuter students, those with work/family commitments). Tips for fostering a sense of belonging:

- Model inclusive behaviour and attitudes e.g. avoid using idioms unfamiliar to students who do not speak English as their first language, use language which acknowledges different lived experiences.
- Host inclusive events – e.g. those which do not exclude student who do not drink alcohol or who need to commute long distances.
- Expose students to potential role models from BAME backgrounds. Invite guest lecturers from a BAME background.
- Develop positive student-staff relationships: out of classroom interactions can make students more connected to the university.
- Develop norms around how to interact with academic staff from the outset e.g. in induction.
- Integrate social aspects into academic activities e.g. collaborative activities, group work, peer to peer mentoring.
- Review departmental personal tutoring processes to ensure all students have equal access to their tutors and equality of experience.

6.4. Theme 4: Creating safe spaces

A 'safe space' describes an education experience that allows students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views and share and explore knowledge. It is known that racial microaggressions negatively affect student mental health and are harmful to self-esteem. Microaggressions are typically subtle and are 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults

towards people of colour'. This can include inappropriate jokes, stereotyping, exclusion from groups, being dismissed or ignored, not learning names or denial of racial reality. Some tips for creating safe spaces:

- Learn and pronounce students names correctly and provide opportunities for students to learn each other's names. Ask the students directly how to pronounce their names and do not be afraid to ask more than once.
- Address microaggressions and alienating behaviours head-on as students take cues from lecturers on how to react to such situations.
- Use microaffirmations:
 - Active listening: focus on what is being said, reinforce through use of eye contact, nodding, open body language, using summarising statements / questions to confirm understanding.
 - Affirm the student's emotions: acknowledge their feelings regarding their experience e.g. 'I appreciate this is frustrating'; 'I can see you are excited by this opportunity'
 - Recognise and validate students' experience: this does not mean you have to agree with their interpretation of the experience! Focus on making clear you understand the challenge of their experience and you are willing to help them find productive ways of dealing with it.

7. Summary

Not all of the content of this generic document will be helpful to everyone but try to identify some concrete changes you can make to your programme or practice. Consider how to disseminate this information in your department. We will be working on providing further resources (support and funding) to address the BAME awarding gap in MAPS so please make suggestions for anything you would find helpful.