

Supporting BAME students during challenging times

The purpose of this resource is three-fold.

1. To engage staff in the work UCL is undertaking to address racial inequalities
2. To raise staff awareness around the challenges facing students as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and increased momentum of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement
3. To provide advice on how you can support UCL students in this difficult time

Whilst the resource focuses on BAME students, the challenges and tips are relevant for all students.

As an institution, we must remain aware there are systemic elements in our approach that impact the experiences and outcomes of BAME students. If we are not careful, our actions during the COVID-19 outbreak may have significant and long-lasting effects which exacerbate existing inequalities at UCL. Be mindful, be kind and take time to think through the potential impact of your actions and decisions during this challenging time. Key advice includes:

- Listen to students and offer them the space and opportunity to speak, even if you do not have all the answers
- Complete Equality Impact Assessments to evaluate whether a new policy, procedure or practice being implemented as a result of COVID-19 is likely to have a discriminatory impact on people from protected groups
- Increase your knowledge of inclusive remote pedagogy
- Keep up to date with the support available for UCL students during the outbreak and signpost them accordingly

This resource takes inspiration from Dr Gurnam Singh's (2020) 6-point guide, [*Supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic \(BAME\) students during the Covid-19 crisis*](#).

The challenges and advice are broken down into four sections:

- Teaching, Learning & Assessment
- Finance
- Technology
- Wellbeing & Belonging

Existing challenges at UCL

The COVID-19 outbreak has changed the way we educate and support our students at UCL. We have moved to online teaching, learning and assessment. However, behind this shift in our delivery methods remain:

- existing structural inequalities,
- institutional racism;
- the lack of an inclusive curriculum.

These are factors that all contribute to the enduring BAME awarding gap in higher education ([Universities UK & NUS, 2019](#)). As an institution, it is imperative that we not only acknowledge that our BAME students and staff are at greater risk from COVID-19, but also act to minimise the potential for the virus to exacerbate existing structural inequalities at UCL.

The broader context:

Whilst it is too early to fully understand the scale of the impact of COVID-19, we do know that individuals from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are dying in disproportionate numbers from the virus ([Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2020](#)). Possible causes for this include, the over-representation of BAME populations in lower socio-economic groups, living in intergenerational or multi-family households, and the disproportionate employment of BAME populations in frontline or key-worker roles ([Razaq et al. 2020](#)).

In addition to the impact of COVID-19, many students may be feeling heightened emotions due to the raised profile of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). Following the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, global anti-racism protests have led to more awareness and acknowledgement of the issues and challenges faced by Black communities. These protests build on a long-standing history of campaigns against systemic racism, which we must acknowledge also exists in our education systems.

Whilst the current protests present the opportunity for positive change, we must also recognise the additional emotional strain this places on our students and staff as we also continue to deal with challenges resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak.

How is UCL addressing racial inequalities?

UCL's work towards race equality and structural cultural change has been institution-wide and ongoing. Students, from all ethnicities, will increasingly ask what is happening at UCL to support BAME students. We encourage staff to read and familiarise themselves with this work, but to avoid simply forwarding links on to students without acknowledging their concerns. Moreover, it is vital to

recognise that whilst this work is underway, there is still much more to be done to advance the representation, progression and success of BAME students and staff at UCL.

- [UCL Education strategy 2016 – 2021](#) – The strategy commits to making UCL more welcoming for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students
- [Race Equality Charter Mark](#) – UCL was one of the first universities in the UK to be formally awarded for its efforts to understand, and take steps to address, racialised inequalities in the academy.
- [BAME Awarding Gap Project](#) – UCL undertook a three-year project to address the disparities in outcomes and experience of undergraduate BAME and white students. This work will be continuing as UCL works towards its aim to eliminate the awarding gap by 2024. The project includes developing an inclusive curriculum; faculty leadership; resources and training; and student engagement.

Challenges and advice

Teaching, Learning & Assessment

We already know there are a range of factors associated with the BAME awarding gap, including, unconscious bias, the lack of inclusivity in the curriculum and racial stereotyping. These factors and other issues are discussed in [UCL'S BAME Awarding Gap Toolkit](#).

It is imperative we consider and address these issues in our move to remote teaching, learning and assessment. “One of the benefits of online learning spaces is that we can step back and develop, design, implement and evaluate strategies for promoting equitable learning environments” ([Singh, 2020](#)).

The English Housing Survey shows that BAME groups are more likely to live in overcrowded households. For example, in 2014 to 2017, 30% of Bangladeshi households, 16% of Pakistani households and 15% of Black African households experienced overcrowding, compared to 2% of White British households ([Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018](#)).

Not only does living in an overcrowded household increase the risk of transmission of COVID-19, but a ‘living space that is too small puts people’s mental and physical health at risk’ overall ([Clifford, 2020](#)). Those of our students living in overcrowded conditions, are likely to face additional obstacles to learning, such as finding a quiet space to study. The UCL survey of student experience of remote teaching and learning found:

- 127 students out of 141 said having a suitable place or environment to study was a challenge since the transition to remote learning
- 129 students out of 141 said difficulty focusing or paying attention to remote instructions, or activities was a challenge since the transition to remote learning

How can we support our students?

1. [Complete Equality Impact Assessments \(EIA\)](#)

The COVID-19 outbreak has changed teaching, learning and assessment practices across the institution. UCL has a legal duty to consider equality in policy and decision-making, in order to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act, 2010
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Foster good relations between different groups

The Equality Act 2010 gives protection on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sex or sexual orientation.

The EIA uses evidence (quantitative and qualitative) and informed judgement to evaluate whether a policy, procedure or practice is likely to have a discriminatory impact on people from protected groups when implemented. Any policy, practice or procedural change affecting students, staff or service users, requires an equality impact assessment to be undertaken. It is best practice to conduct an EIA at the early stages of policy development or review, so any potentially negative impact can be accounted for in subsequent drafts, prior to management approval. The equality impact assessment should be regularly monitored after the policy, practice or procedure has been implemented by reviewing relevant data and feedback.

Further information on equality analysis will be available in the upcoming EIA toolkit, which is being specifically developed in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. The toolkit includes the EIA form and advice on staff and students issues which have arisen during the outbreak.

2. [Encourage students to apply for Extenuating Circumstances \(EC\) if needed](#)

- Students may be reluctant to submit an EC and will not want to perceive their circumstances – e.g. looking after a family member as a reason to ask for help
- Let students know they can self-certify (which means they do not have to provide evidence) if they have an EC for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year.

- Inform students they can submit a self-certified claim for *any* valid EC, not just those related to COVID-19, and that an EC claim should be submitted within 7 days of the EC taking place.
- Inform students that whilst Late ECs will always be considered, they will need to provide evidence of why it was impossible to submit the EC on time, as per normal procedure.

Whilst the EC request will be automatically granted, the decision on the most appropriate form of mitigation i.e. to offer an extension or deferral, is at the discretion of UCL, typically the Faculty or Departmental EC Panel. It is in decision-making processes such as these, that we encourage all staff to be especially aware of any unconscious biases they may hold. It is mandatory for all new staff to take [UCL's Unconscious Bias Training](#), however, the course can be retaken if you would like to refresh your knowledge.

3. Increase your knowledge of inclusive remote pedagogy

Remote teaching presents a number of pedagogical and technological challenges. However, it is vital that we continue to prioritise inclusivity in our courses, regardless of whether they are delivered face-to-face, online or a combination of the two. UCL's new Connected Learning Essentials staff development course has sections on Securing student engagement (including ensuring teaching is accessible and inclusive of all students regardless of location and individual circumstances) and Ensuring a consistent learning environment for students (including advising students about their physical working space, equipment, well-being, and study habits)

There are also online resources that examine inclusivity in remote learning environments. Links to some of these resources are provided below. Some tips include:

- Conduct an informal assessment of students' experiences in online learning

Conduct a baseline assessment to understand students' experiences of learning in an online environment. This will help you understand how students are accessing your course and any concerns they may have. For example, you could ask, whether this is their first time taking an online course, what device they are using to access the course, whether they have a reliable internet connection and so on. Not all students have access to high-bandwidth technologies, such as newer computers, fast and reliable internet access and unlimited data plans. Teaching that requires frequent use of high-bandwidth technologies (such as video calls) videos or streaming can prevent students who do not have access, or have limited access to high-speed connectivity, from fully participating in course activities ([Stanford](#),

[2020](#)). Use the information from this baseline assessment to help you decide on the balance between asynchronous and synchronous teaching in your course.

- [Consider the immediacy of your teaching](#)

Immediacy refers to how quickly we expect our students to respond when interacting with us and their peers. Whilst immediacy lends itself to face-to-face teaching, it can feel like ‘more of a burden than it has to be’ in online learning ([Stanford, 2020](#)), particularly as students are living in different time zones and many are facing increased pressures at home following the COVID-19 outbreak.

Examples of low immediacy tools include readings with texts and images and discussion forums, whereas high immediacy tools might include ‘real-time’ group chat or messaging services. Set clear expectations on how quickly you expect students to respond when interacting with you and their peers.

- Establish or update ground rules for remote teaching

Establishing ground-rules or a code of conduct with your students ‘helps to foster community by balancing the learning needs of the individual with those of the group’ ([Cornell University Centre for Teaching Innovation, 2020](#)). Ground rules established for face-to-face teaching should be updated for remote teaching and learning. For example:

- Should students keep their audio muted, when not contributing during synchronous discussions?
- How can students contribute, or provide feedback during synchronous and asynchronous teaching?
- Can they post anonymously in discussion forums?
- How quickly are they expected to respond in asynchronous discussions?
- If you are establishing the ground-rules yourself, be transparent about the reasoning behind your requests or expectations.
- Alternatively, involve students in establishing ground-rules with you. Make use of the tools available on MS Teams, which can encourage students to participate in different ways during synchronous teaching, such as the “hands-raised” function or chat box.
- You can also ask students to confirm their understanding, or answer quick questions using icons like thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

- Offer multiple ways for students to contribute during synchronous and asynchronous teaching in order to increase participation and engagement.

4. [Contact your BAME Awarding Gap Faculty Lead](#)

You can contact your BAME Awarding Gap Faculty Lead if you have concerns about the inclusivity of your curriculum. Also encourage students who are interested in enhancing the inclusivity of the curriculum, to contact their Faculty Lead to find out how they can get involved with BAME awarding gap project.

Links to resources at UCL:

- [Creating accessible academic content for online course by Dr Manjula Patrick \(UCL Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre\)](#)

External resources

- [Equity-Minded and Culturally-Affirming Teaching and Learning Practices in Virtual Learning Communities Webinar](#) hosted by the Center for Organizational Responsibility and Advancement (CORA) through San Diego State University, Drs. Frank Harris III and J. Luke Wood
- [Maintaining Equity and Inclusion in Virtual Learning Environments, San Diego State University](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning Online: Principles & Practices During a Global Health Crisis by Columbia University](#)
- [Bridging the Digital Divide: Teaching for Equity and Empathy in the Wake of COVID-19 webinar](#) by hosted by Indiana University's Dr. Carmen Henne-Ochoa, Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, College of Arts and Sciences

Finance

The UK poverty rate is twice as high for BAME groups compared to White groups ([Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017](#)). We already know that BAME groups not only face a greater risk of mortality from COVID-19, but are also more likely to suffer the economic consequences of the UK's lockdown ([Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2020](#)). So BAME students are more likely to face financial hardship during this challenging time. This is backed up by applications to UCL's Emergency Assistance Grant, which was set-up to support students in urgent need of funds for living costs arising from the COVID-19

outbreak. The fund opened on 25 March and closed on May 1 2020. Analysis of the application data shows:

- UK BAME undergraduates account for 75% of applicants, despite representing only 50% of UCL's UK undergraduate population
- Asian British and Black British students were more likely to request funding for a laptop
- 61% of applicants were UCL Bursary holders with two-thirds of these in receipt of the highest band bursary.

How can we support our students?

Whilst the Emergency Assistance Grant has closed, let your students know they can still apply for financial support via the following three funds:

- [\(Covid-19\) Emergency Assistance Fund for postgraduate research students \(EAF-PGR\)](#)
- [\(Covid-19\) Emergency Assistance Fund for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students \(EAF\)](#)
 - The Emergency Assistance Funds are restricted to students in priority groups in financial hardship relating to COVID-19. The maximum awards that can be made from the EAFs are £2500 for students without dependants and £3000 for students with dependants. Encourage students from priority groups, which includes students from low-income families, to apply if they are in urgent need of financial support as a result of COVID-19.
- [Financial Assistance Fund](#)
 - The Financial Assistance Fund (FAF) is to support students with unforeseen financial hardship that is not related to Covid-19. A recent update from the Provost confirmed the FAF limit has been increased to a maximum of £3000 to support PGR students currently in need in 2019/2020. For all other UCL students up to £2,000 can be awarded for those without dependants and, depending on circumstances, up to £2,500 for students with dependants

Technology

Research suggests that social disadvantage and digital exclusion are strongly related ([Dutton et al, 2009](#)). 'Digital exclusion points to the group of people on the negative side of the so-called digital divide' ([Khalid & Pedersen, 2016](#)). Whilst the term 'digital divide' itself is contested, it commonly refers to the division between those who have access to new information and communication

technologies, including the internet, and those who do not have access or have limited access ([Clark, 2003](#)).

Our move to remote teaching, learning and assessment means that student access to the internet and necessary technology is more important than ever. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as well as those living in rural areas of the country, are at greater risk of poor internet connectivity. Dr Paul Feldman (Chief Executive of Jisc) states: “We know, that for many learners, broadband is a problem, either due to low bandwidth or because they’re sharing bandwidth with other members of the family.”).

Access is a significant issue in a National Union of Students (NUS) survey conducted in April 2020. The survey of 9,872 students found that 20% of respondents who had been provided with online learning did not agree they had adequate access to complete their studies ([NUS, 2020](#)). UCL also recently conducted a survey on the student experience of remote teaching and learning in . The survey showed that 118 students out of 184 found access to reliable and usable internet connection a challenge, since the transition to remote learning.

How can we support our students?

1. Let students know they can request a laptop loan

Let students know they can borrow a laptop if needed through [UCL’s laptop loan scheme](#). To request a laptop loan, students can either log a ticket with IT services by email itservices@ucl.ac.uk, or phone +44 (0)20 7679 5000. All requests are assessed on a case-by-case basis. IT services may be able to send a laptop to students currently overseas, depending on their circumstances

2. Let students know there are resources available to help them [improve their digital skills](#)

Make students aware they can also self-enrol onto the following two Moodle courses to improve their digital skills:

- [ISD Digital Skills Development Moodle course](#)
- [Digital Skills Development at IOE](#)

3. Keep up to date with the Education e-newsletter

[Sign up to the monthly UCL education e-newsletter](#) to get the latest teaching news, events & resources.

Wellbeing & Belonging

COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak is having a significant impact on people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. A survey conducted by [Simetrica-Jacobs and the LSE \(2020\)](#), found there are substantially worse levels of wellbeing and psychological distress amongst the U.K. population in April 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. The survey also revealed higher levels of psychological distress and larger decreases in wellbeing amongst BAME groups, compared to White respondents.

In 2018, the Office of National Statistics published a report on children and young people's experiences of loneliness. The report found that ethnicity had a significant effect on young people's (aged 16-24) loneliness. Young people who identified as BAME reported higher levels of loneliness compared to young people who did not identify as BAME ([Office for National Statistics, 2018](#)). It is likely that the effects social distancing and self-isolation will have a greater impact on individuals who are already more vulnerable to loneliness.

The outbreak has also seen a sharp rise in hate crimes against individuals from East and South East Asian backgrounds, including UCL students and staff. A Freedom of Information request submitted to the UK's 45 territorial police forces and British Transport Police (BTP) revealed 267 offences against Chinese victims were recorded between January and March 2020, compared to 375 hate crimes throughout the whole of 2019 and 360 offences in 2018 (Mercer, 2020).

Many students may also be experiencing a loss of sense of belonging at UCL following our transition to remote teaching and learning. This is particularly problematic as research indicates a sense of belonging is positively associated with academic success and motivation ([Freeman, Anderman & Jensen, 2007](#)). We know all our students will be facing additional challenges during this pandemic, therefore, it is vital that we do our utmost to support their mental health and wellbeing during and after this difficult time.

Black Lives Matter

UCL and some faculties have released statements to express solidarity with Black students and staff, and to highlight the work we are doing towards advancing equality at our institution.

It is important to note that many of the university led activities are targeted at Black Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) students. As an institution, we acknowledge and stand against racism towards any of our students and staff, however, we must remember the manifestation of racism is not the same for all ethnicities. The BLM movement specifically addresses the experiences of Black people globally. Whilst this does not mean we cannot use this moment to further the work towards equality for all BAME students and staff, we must be clear about the purpose and mission of the BLM movement.

How can we support our students?

1. Listen to students and offer them the space and opportunity to speak, even if you do not have all the answers.
2. If you are a personal tutor or a PhD/project supervisor, check in with your tutees or supervisees and let them know your virtual office hours. If you know you are not going to be available due to caring commitments or illness, make sure your students know who they can contact, this might be their programme lead or Departmental (Graduate) Tutor.
3. [Signpost students to relevant support](#)

Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW) have collated a range of information, advice and guidance for students to support their mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak. The [webpages](#) include links to support services (internal and external), online events and activities for students, FAQs and so forth.

Internal support includes the [Student Psychological and Counselling Services](#) (SPCS) who can provide a variety of free counselling, therapy and support options for students. Let students know they can also request a BAME male or female counsellor when they register with the service if they wish to do so, and that there are also a range of other [specialist support services available for BAME groups](#). Try to familiarise yourself with the range of support available, so you can easily signpost students to the most relevant services.

4. Let students and staff know that The Students' Union have published an article with links to helpful resources for allies and students: [Black Lives Matter & what solidarity really looks like](#).
5. Let students know how they can report a hate crime

Students can report hate crimes they have experienced and/or witnessed via the [UCL Hate Crime Reporting Centre](#). Students can report the incidents anonymously, or provide their details if they wish to receive follow up advice or support. Students and staff can also report incidents of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct using [UCL's Report and Support system](#).

6. Encourage students to join networks

Encourage students to join a network at UCL to help foster their sense of belonging. There are a range of networks available, including the [BME Students Network](#), [LGBT+ Students Network](#), [Disabled Students Network](#) and [Women's Network](#). Also, let students know that the Students Union have set up a [Community Group](#) on Facebook, to provide support through this difficult time.

7. Keep up to date with the latest official guidance on COVID-19

The circulation of incorrect and false information regarding that COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in an ‘infodemic’ ([The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2020](#)). The spread of COVID-19 misinformation is harmful in many ways, it can lead to individuals following dangerous or unsubstantiated health advice, generate mistrust in public authorities and fuel racism. One health related example, is the circulation of misinformation concerning vitamin D and COVID-19. There is ‘no evidence that vitamin D reduces the risk of developing COVID-19 or modifying its clinical course’ ([Royal College of Physicians, 2020](#)). This is particularly relevant to BAME groups, as ‘the higher the amount of melanin in the skin the less it absorbs UV radiation, which converts vitamin D into its active form’ ([Royal College of Physicians, 2020](#)). Students may approach you with queries or concerns regarding the outbreak, therefore it is critical that we are aware of the latest official guidance, or can signpost students directly to the appropriate sources.

8. [Let students know that 24/7 support is available through Care First](#)

UCL works in partnership with Care First to provide staff and students with telephone and online counselling support. Care First counsellors, who are all professionally qualified and accredited by the BACP, are currently available 24/7 during the outbreak.

Let students know they can contact Care First for free by calling +44 (0)800 197 4510.

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