BAME Attainment, Student Experience and Mental Health.

Research into BAME student experience and the effect that racial inequality has on attainment.

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What is the attainment gap?

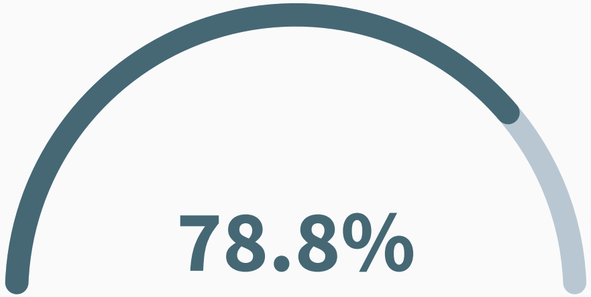
The degree attainment gap is the difference in ‘top degrees’ – a First or 2:1 classification – awarded to different groups of students.

(AdvanceHE, 2020)

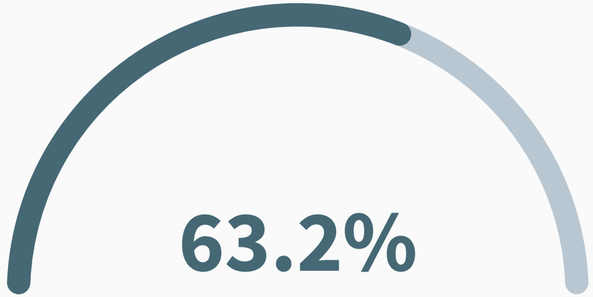
What is the BAME attainment gap?

While overall proportions receiving a First or 2:1 have increased over the past decade, there continues to be a considerable gap between the proportion of white British students receiving these degree classifications compared to UK-domiciled students from minority ethnic groups.

BAME attainment gap



White Qualifiers receiving a 1st or 2:1 degree



BAME Qualifiers receiving a 1st or 2:1 degree

A 15.6 percentage point gap.

(AdvanceHE 2015-16)

Shifting the terminology

Attainment Gap

The use of the term 'attainment gap' carries the connotations that the onus of the disparity of outcomes is a direct results of a student's inability to attain a good grade.

Degree Awarding Gap

Whereas, using the term 'degree awarding' gap places the responsibility back onto the institution to make tangible institutional, structural and cultural changes, in order to combat the gap in degree outcomes.

Implications of terminology

BME stands for Black and Minority Ethnic. BAME stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic.

Although these terms are widely used, there are profound limitations which arise when further considered:

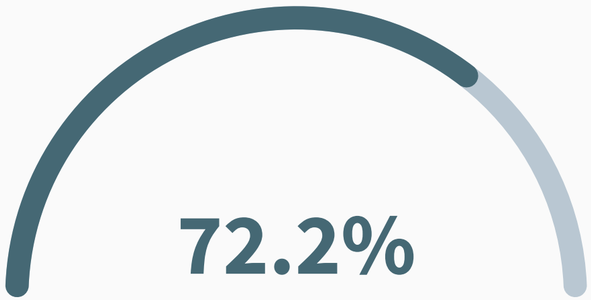
- Homogeneous approach to understanding ethnic minorities
- Divisive and exclusionary
- Consequential convenience
- Disregard for white minority ethnic groups

Deconstructing BAME

The government have characterised BAME as any individual from the following background:

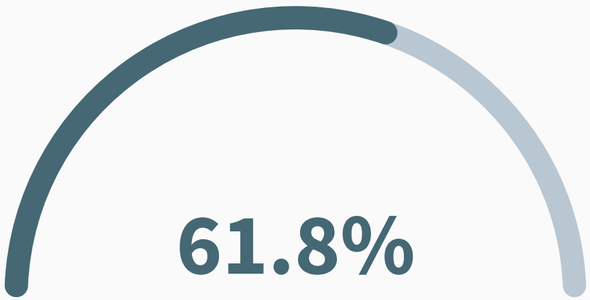
- Arabic people
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Asian or Asian British people
- Black (African/African Caribbean) or Black British people
- Chinese people
- Irish people (‘White Other’)
- People of mixed heritage
- Travellers and Gypsies
- People who identify as ‘White Other’ e.g. White Australian, White European

Outcomes vary considerably by ethnic group, with particularly wide gaps observed between white and black students in relation to degree attainment.

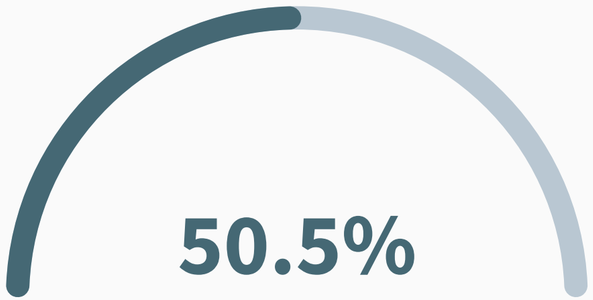


Chinese Qualifiers receiving a 1st or 2:1 degree

Indian Qualifiers receiving a 1st or 2:1 degree



Pakistani Qualifiers receiving a 1st or 2:1 degree



Black other Qualifiers receiving a 1st or 2:1 degree

(AdvanceHE 2015-16)

Implications of this gap

Post-university employment

Disillusionment of the next generation

Impact on mental health

Continued study/under-representation in academia

Social inequalities

Undermining of university values and mission

"BME Attainment at Nottingham Trent University" Research into BME student experience and the effect that racial inequality has on their attainment.

2019 insight report

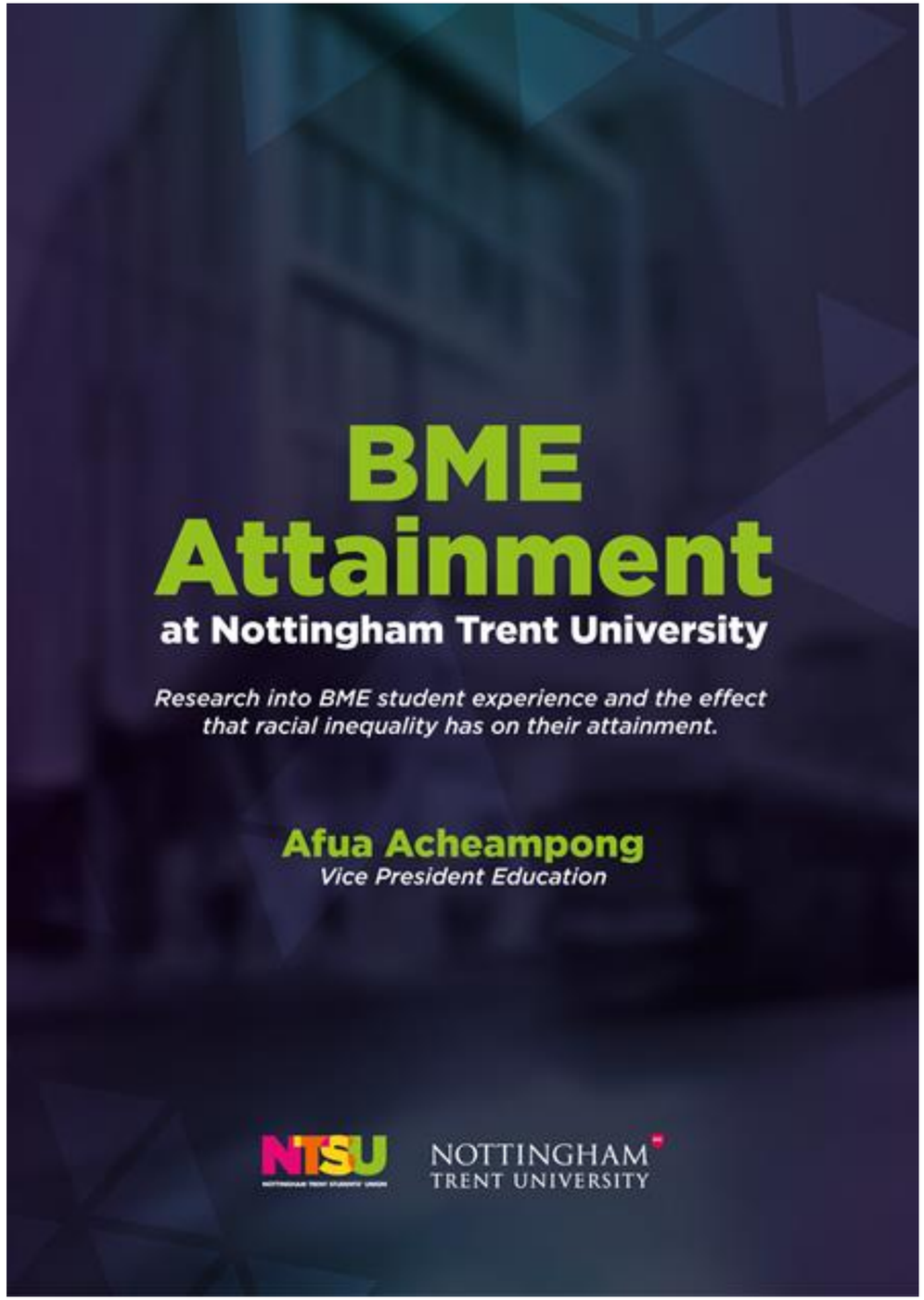
University-wide research

Qualitative Research

100+ multiple ethnicity staff and students engaged

Core factor for NTU joining Advance HE's Race Equality Charter

Led to organisational and institutional policy development



Factors contributing to the gap

01

Knowledge of the gap

02

Lack of representation

03

Racism and Microaggressions

04

Sense of belonging

05

Comfortable conversations

06

Conversations with staff

1. Knowledge

There is still a lack of widespread knowledge among students surrounding the Black and Minority Ethnicity attainment gap and terms like ‘BME’ or ‘BAME’. This lack of awareness and understanding hinders efforts to close the gap.

75% agreed with this statement

Racism from lecturers and other students is still a problem at universities these days.

67% agreed with this statement

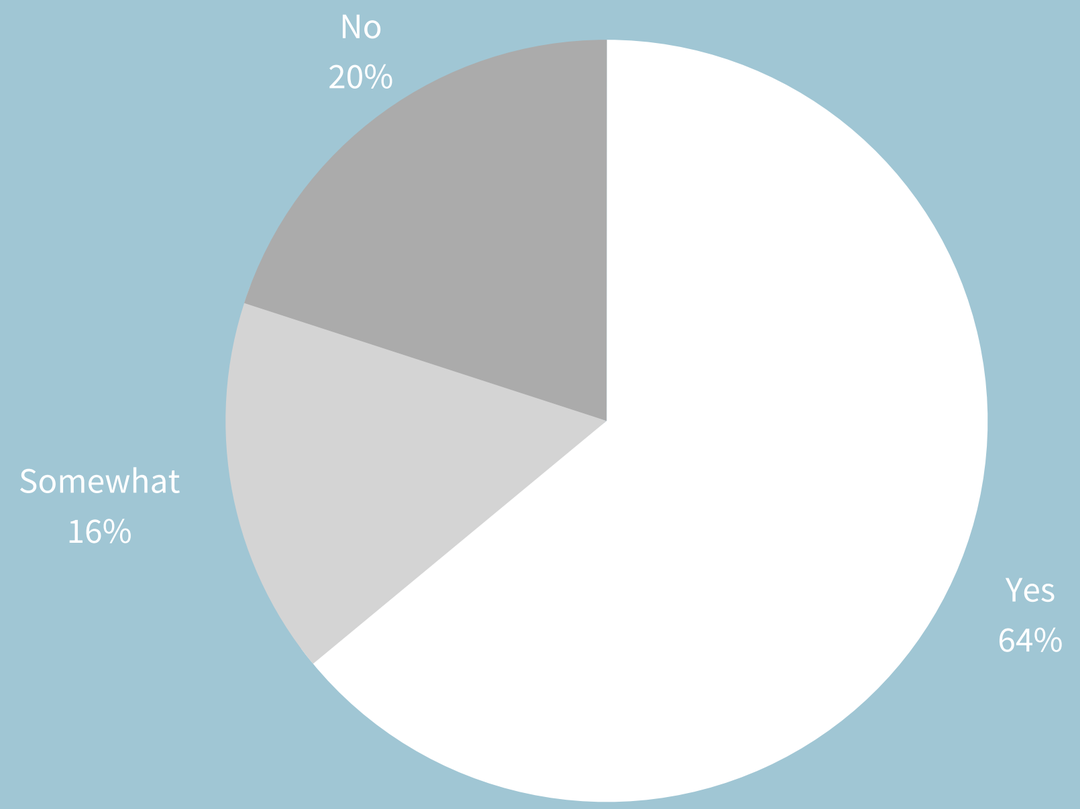
BME students have a higher drop-out rate than White students.

88% agreed with this statement

BME students feel more socially isolated due to their backgrounds.

92% agreed with this statement

White students have a higher chance of acquiring higher-paid jobs after university than BME students.



Was it difficult to get your course to engage with the topic of race?

2. Representation

There was a lack of diversity within the ethnic makeup of the workforce on campus. This lack of diversity also extended to that amount of course material that is from authors from a minority background. Factors affecting this include proportionally lower numbers of minority ethnic professors and a pay gap between white and minority ethnic staff.

Representation at NTSU

•Between 2011 and 2020, 55 individual officer positions were filled at the Students' Union. 11 of those 55 officers, or 20%, were from minority ethnic groups, a figure which broadly echoes UK census data and the demographics of NTU's student body.

Representation at NTU

•In most instances, the only minority ethnic members of senior meetings at NTU had been NTSU's student officers. Success for All and ASQC currently had only two BME members, both of whom are officers from the Students' Union. At the time, there were 3 BME members on Academic Board out of a membership of 39.

3. Racism and Microaggressions

•Racism is often assumed to be aggressive and overt, however this is not always the case. It manifests through symptoms like microaggressions, which are defined as “a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.”

•Due to their subtle, indirect nature, microaggressions are difficult to tackle and often go unreported. When they are reported, complaint handling can be inconsistent due to lack of staff training. This problem is compounded by the lack of representation within the staff body.

•This is a sector-wide issue, with secondary research identifying an over-reliance on signposting people to policies on the university website, and an under-reliance on developing BME networks, ongoing campaigns and proactive students’ union activity.

4. Sense of Belonging

•According to the Universities UK report on addressing BME attainment, the culture of an institution is an important factor that affects the attainment of students from BAME backgrounds and is strongly associated with students' sense of belonging. By surrounding students with a diverse student body and academic staff team they can relate to, a more inclusive environment that contributes to their sense of belonging is created.

•Many NTU students can attribute their sense of belonging to a sports club or society they may be a part of. BME students typically show lower than average engagement in extra-curricular activities, which may contribute to a reduced sense of belonging. Improving this sense of belonging could improve future attainment.

5. Comfortable Conversations

•Sociologist Dr. Robin DiAngelo uses the term ‘white fragility’ to describe the disbelief and defensiveness that people exhibit when their ideas about race and racism are challenged. This fragility creates a social cost for the members of minority ethnic groups who point out discrimination when they see it, as they often feel compelled to justify the fair and equitable treatment that is their right.

•Encouraging sensitive discussions around campus requires students and staff to be bold and willing to resist the urge to respond defensively, and to listen and learn instead.

6. Conversations with staff

All staff play an integral role in the attainment of the students at their institution. Insight from interviews with NTU staff included:

•There is a lack of diversity in the membership of the Success for All working group.

•Home students often appear hesitant to work with international students for fear that their inability to communicate fully in English may hinder academic success in group work.

•There is a need for more awareness raising and training regarding unconscious bias to be rolled out across the institution.

•Consideration should be made regarding how to help staff and academics understand their role in addressing and combating the attainment gap.

•Multi-mentoring schemes, including non-academic mentors, may help with understanding and supporting diverse students.

•Learning communities for first- generation students with similar cultural backgrounds may help these students and foster a sense of belonging.

Effect on student mental health

1. Trauma

2. Feelings of loneliness, disconnect, hopelessness

3. Attainment and progression

4. Imposter syndrome

5. Intersectional effect

6. Mental and Physical burn-out

Recommendations

1. **Black History Month needs to become a university-wide priority**. In recent years, the Students' Union has offered a diverse programme for students but there is an absence of a similar offer from the University. The University has historically supported other campaigns and festive celebrations, such as Global Week and LGBT History Month, but support for Black History Month is arguably not at the same level.
2. A **diverse offer of activities and events throughout the year** should be the norm. Celebrating black culture should not be limited to one month of the year.
3. NTU and NTSU should both aim to have a **workforce that is representative** of the student body. This is particularly important in the membership of working groups. An external consultancy should be engaged to audit current recruitment processes and recommend how to diversify the body of staff.
4. **A leadership programme for students.** More needs to be done to encourage BME females into leadership positions both in the university and beyond.
5. There is a need for **more effective, consistent methods for reporting racism**. Awareness of existing mechanisms needs to be improved.

Recommendations

6. **Staff training**. The institution needs to make sure that staff are better equipped to identify and tackle racial discrimination. Bystander and unconscious bias training as well as training for dealing with complaints should be prioritised.

7. NTU Community. Research best practice from other institutions as to how they have been able to incorporate cultural communities and / **or create a greater sense of belonging for their diverse students.**

8. **Interventions** may help students fulfil their potential for attainment. These could be facilitated through use of NTU's dashboard. Any such **action must be approached with sensitivity** to avoid negative perceptions and a sense of being destined to fail.

9. **Mentoring.** Opportunities need to be available for students from underrepresented groups to **have support and guidance on how to do well.**

10. Conversations around race and culture. The institution needs to start **consulting students and leading the conversations around race and culture**. Academics are often uncomfortable addressing race and culture and students mirror this behaviour. Students need more opportunities to talk directly about race, racism and the gap. There needs to be a clear institutional message that issues of race are embedded within wider strategic goals and the culture on campus should reflect this message.

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Black Leadership Programme

Empowering a new generation of leaders

JANUARY-APRIL 2020

Black Leadership Programme 2021

Empowering a new generation of leaders

NTU Nottingham Trent University

NTSU
NOTTINGHAM TRENT STUDENTS' UNION

UNDERSTANDING BLACK LEADERSHIP

Leadership Development

Community Development

Mentoring

Conversations around race & culture

Interventions

Project Aims and Objectives

The project aims are to provide positive outcomes for black students through an increased sense of:

- belonging,
- empowerment
- entitlement & mattering.

For the pilot year, 40 UG black 2nd & final year students were recruited. These students were either low or partially engaged according to the NTU dashboard data.

In 2021, 50 black undergraduate second year students were recruited. Those who showed as lowly or partially engaged according to data dashboard were prioritised.

Programme Launch

Programme Content

GRIT Workshop Day

Brought to you by GRIT, this day-long workshop will enable participants to create community and safe spaces to explore sense of belonging, empowerment, entitlement and mattering.

A further tailored Grit workshop towards the end of the scheme to reflect on accomplishments and developments in sense of community, belonging, empowerment and mattering.

The Leadership and Mindset Development Workshop (delivered by Elaine Powell)

This is a highly interactive training programme designed for future leaders to discover what they are capable of achieving, what stands in the way of them performing to their best abilities, how to bring the best out of others and themselves by equipping them with the tools to be unstoppable in their role. During the session, the trainer will introduce mindset disciplines. Participants will be posed challenging questions, discussions of real-life scenarios that will take them out of their comfort zone and discover new things about what is possible. The leaders will experience a new-found freedom, self-expression and power in themselves.

Inspirational speaker and speed mentoring event

This session will comprise of members of NTU staff, NTU Alumni and members of the community who will be invited to speak about their background and career journey, before giving key advice for future progression. This will then be followed by speed networking where speakers will visit small groups of students for Q and A at student tables.

Creating International Opportunities

In collaboration with the Diversity Office at Leiden University, ECHO: Centre for Diversity Policy and Utrecht University respective students were invited to discuss leadership, authentic representation and crisis management.

Originally planned as a four-day program to develop black leadership and encourage knowledge exchange among students in Nottingham, Leiden and Utrecht, we wanted to provide a digital forum to share knowledge, experiences and strategies in this specific historical moment. The objectives of this forum would also provide safe spaces for these students to share experiences and have the opportunity to influence policy, both nationally and internationally.

#BLACKLIVESMATTER
BLACK LIVES
MATTER

Turning paper to practice

There is a lot of interest and research in this area and various different views on how to tackle the attainment gap. Issues and solutions will vary depending on the culture of each institution, but generally:

- The degree attainment gap has persisted for at least the last decade, and it will require a variety of different initiatives and approaches to address entrenched racial inequalities

- Any initiatives or actions are likely to take time to have any significant impact. In implanting actions, institutions will need to be patient and commit to long-term resourcing

- Students must be at the centre of any actions that are taken. Students should be partners in addressing the gap and involved in the discussions from the beginning.

- Action needs to focus on institutional barriers and inequalities, rather than ‘improving’ or ‘fixing’ the student. Traditionally the language of the attainment gap has focused on students’ underachievement or lack of attainment, whereas it should focus on the institutional culture, curriculum and pedagogy.

Thank you!

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