



Degree attainment, ethnicity and gender: surveying policies and practices in English HEIs

FINAL REPORT

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Executive summary

A sample of 61 HEIs were surveyed throughout June and July 2007 to look for references to student attainment in race and gender equality policies and schemes. Documents were located through a systematic search of websites, and staff contacts were followed to locate any that were not readily available. Key findings were:

- not all HEIs had schemes or policies available at the time of the survey
- only a small minority of schemes or policies mention attainment by ethnicity or gender
- few of these have specific actions, objectives or named staff with responsibility, and fewer still report on progress
- there is little evidence of (or, among staff contacted, knowledge of) specific projects within universities addressing issues of differential attainment
- website structure, content and level of maintenance was a key barrier to obtaining information
- location of policies and responsibility for them varies. Human Resources is the most common location, and many other universities have a separate Equality and Diversity unit.

A number of recommendations are made that encourage universities to address attainment in their policies, and to resource action and monitoring.

Introduction

Background

HEFCE and the DfES (subsequently DIUS) commissioned the Higher Education Academy to lead a one-year project working with HEIs in England to address issues relating to differences in degree attainment between students of different ethnic backgrounds, and between males and females. The project is seeking evidence underpinning the development of understanding and practical recommendations relating to these differences, to raise awareness across the sector of the needs of students from all ethnic backgrounds, and to promote greater engagement in issues concerning ethnicity and gender in relation to degree attainment. The Academy is working closely with the Equality Challenge Unit on the project.

The first phase of the project is investigating current understandings, policies and practices that inform how HEIs are addressing, or considering how to address, differences in degree attainment in respect of ethnicity or gender.

Analysis of Policy and Practice Documents

It is a statutory requirement that universities monitor progression of students, publish (and make publicly available) documents outlining their policies and schemes on race, gender and disability, and have associated action plans and annual reports.

These are:

- **Race Equality Scheme** (or **Race Equality Policy for HEIs**)
- **Gender Equality Scheme**
- **Disability Equality Scheme.**

These may be combined into a **Single Equality Scheme**. (At present this is not mandatory, but it may become so following discrimination law review.)

Policies and plans relating to students (including attracting them, retention, support, attainment and employment) are also likely to be found in:

- **Widening Participation (WP)** strategies and plans
- **Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA, or sometimes ALT)** strategies and plans.

The Access Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University has been commissioned to undertake an extensive sample of HEIs across England, analysing publicly available documents for initiatives relating to degree attainment by ethnicity and gender.

Objectives of this project were to:

- collate race equality policies and schemes and gender equality schemes (or single equality scheme) and action plans for each HEI through web-based searches (for those who have published their schemes on their website) or via contact with appropriate staff
- collate relevant strategies (e.g. ALT, WP)
- collate any published Impact Assessments

- undertake documentary analysis of schemes, policies and impact assessments to examine how *attainment* (rather than simply attraction and retention) of BME students (and by gender) is addressed
- establish the nature of any projects addressing attainment within HEIs including, for example, more detailed data analyses, further research, or changes to curriculum or assessment. Collate any project reports, with documentary analysis to determine scope and depth of activities, any evaluation of impact, exit strategies and how they become embedded in practice if judged successful.

Process

1. Selection of HEIs

The time and resources available to the project team meant that it was not possible to survey all HEIs in England. In order to provide a representative sample of HEIs, a stratified sampling process was employed, using membership of university groups as a base (Russell Group; 1994 Group; Campaigning for Mainstream Universities; The University Alliance; and “other” for those non-affiliated HEIs). Within each university group, HEIs were selected to ensure appropriate geographical coverage and to reflect the diversity of types of HEI: rural; city; campus; size; age etc. The Project Team also requested that those HEIs chosen for intensive study by other research teams were included. A list of those selected (61 in total) appears in the Appendix, together with the numbers represented in each of the university groups.

2. Web-based search for documents published on university web pages

A systematic search of selected university websites was undertaken using the criteria in Table 1, below, during June and July 2007. The word “achievement” was also used as a search term as it became apparent that several universities were using it when referring to attainment. Appropriate links from pages located by the search were followed. The survey was initially performed by a research assistant with no previous experience of the topic, whose results may perhaps therefore represent the outcome of a member of the public attempting to access the information. Subsequent checking by one of the investigators skilled in the area, suggests that up to 10% of key policy documents may have been missed because they were not immediately obvious.

Table1: Search criteria and information recorded

Search location	Search engine on university home page
Primary search terms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Single Equality Scheme" 2. "Race Equality Scheme" or "Race Equality Policy" 3. "Gender Equality Scheme" or "Gender Equality Policy" 4. "Disability Equality Scheme" or "Disability Equality Policy" 5. "Ethnic minority student attainment" or "Ethnic minority student achievement" 6. "student attainment" or "student achievement" 7. "Widening participation strategy" 8. "Learning, teaching and assessment strategy" or "LTA strategy" or "ALT strategy"
Items recorded	Date of search URLs of relevant schemes/strategies/policies URLs of action plans and reports relating to the above Any other relevant projects or links Contact details of responsible person(s) Location of schemes/strategies/policies
Secondary search of any documents retrieved: search terms	"attainment" or "achievement" or "outcome" "ethnic minority" "gender"

3. Follow-up contact

Where key documents could not be located, follow-up telephone or email contact was made with what appeared to be the most appropriate named person on the website or via the university switchboard if none were available. When an appropriate person responded, they were asked both for the "missing" documents, and whether they were aware of any projects or initiatives across the university in the area of interest.

Results

First results of website searches are indicated in Table 2, below. Search activity (and follow-up contact) ceased on 1 August. At this point, there were still several universities who had not responded or who had not yet sent any information because the individuals contacted were waiting for approval from a senior figure within the university. Up to seven attempts at contact were made, via email or messages left on answering machines, and often the enquiry had to be forwarded as the contact information was incorrect. While it was difficult to get replies in many instances, it should be remembered that the timing of the project (June and July) meant that examinations, graduation and annual leave affected staff availability. Many individuals were very generous with their time and helped to locate the appropriate people and documents, but a number of documents that are required to be publicly available were still not found by the end of the survey.

Table 2: Results of searches for documents available on 61 university websites, and searches of those documents for references to attainment. (Numbers in brackets are those that were available via the initial web search.)

	Scheme/policy/ document available	Attainment ^a mentioned
Single Equality Scheme	5 (4)	1
Race		
<i>Equality Scheme</i>	47 (45)	5
<i>Action Plan</i>	21	1
<i>Annual Report</i>	6	1
Gender		
<i>Equality Scheme</i>	52 (43 ¹)	4
<i>Action Plan</i>	17 (16)	2
<i>Annual Report</i>	-	-
Disability		
<i>Equality Scheme</i>	56 (54 ¹)	
Widening Participation	32 (25)	
<i>Ethnicity</i>		2
<i>Gender</i>		1
LTA	14 (4)	
<i>Ethnicity</i>		1
<i>Gender</i>		0

^a Attainment or achievement

¹ Plus one in draft form

While not part of the project, availability of the Disability Equality Scheme was noted as this seemed to be readily available most often, perhaps as a consequence of the broader publicity across society of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA 2005). As can be seen in Table 2, all 61 universities had a Disability Equality Scheme available, either as a distinct scheme (56), or as part of a Single Equality Scheme (5). From the 61 universities, nine policies relating to race and four relating to gender were not seen.

In three cases, documents were apparently available but only on campus, so they could not be downloaded by external users.

Fewer than half of the Gender or Race Equality Schemes or policies had associated Action Plans, and only a small fraction (or none) had Annual Reports indicating progress.

There were fewer WP or LTA documents available on websites, perhaps reflecting that there is not a statutory obligation to make these publicly available. While the WP documents unsurprisingly mention attracting ethnic minority students (among others), there is little or no mention of attainment, perhaps reflecting the unfortunate view that WP “stops at the gate”, and is not about deepening participation and ensuring these groups of people achieve equally.

There are not enough data for reliable quantitative statistical analyses, but there is no indication that those universities with (or without) accessible policies and reports are more likely to be from any particular type of university or grouping.

Of the 61 universities, 28 had the schemes and policies seen located within the Human Resources (or Personnel) areas. A further 19 were located in an Equality and Diversity unit (this may also be variously described as Diversity and Equality, or Equal Opportunities) that did not seem to be within HR, and for 11 the responsible area was not clear. The remaining three were in units of the Vice-Chancellor's Office, or the Registrar or Secretary's Office.

Many of the equality schemes seen address student recruitment issues, and there is usually a focus on staff recruitment, development and promotion. That responsibility for the schemes is often located within university Human Resource areas may contribute to the concentration on staffing issues.

There are examples of references to:

- inequalities in achievement and attainment between ethnic groups or gender (e.g. University of Derby¹, Sheffield Hallam University²)
- the need for monitoring and target setting (e.g. University of Manchester³, Hertfordshire University⁴, Bishop Grosseteste University College⁵)
- the need for Impact Assessments (e.g. Edge Hill⁶, NEWI⁷) to identify/understand issues of differential progression and achievement
- other action required to explore differentials such as research (e.g. Leeds Metropolitan University⁸).

Only a minority of schemes, policies or other relevant documents mention attainment or achievement (see Table 2). Of these, most instances are not directly relevant to this project (e.g. one encourages staff to provide examples of achievements by people from different ethnic backgrounds in their teaching). Others note that degree attainment is to be monitored by ethnicity and gender (a routine occurrence anyway for HESA returns), but none of these make any mention of targets or actions to be taken if the results are deemed unsatisfactory. One HEI (of those available and analysed so far) explicitly identifies staff with specific responsibility for ensuring that inequalities in achievement/attainment are addressed (University of Bolton, see below).

Projects

There was little evidence of particular projects being undertaken regarding attainment, or at least, those people contacted were not aware of any. We found (or were made aware of) only two examples of internally commissioned research that examined in detail ethnic minority achievement data.

The search of the University of Cambridge website revealed a paper⁹ reporting on a project paper entitled "The undergraduate experience among three ethnic minority

¹ http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/0506_report.pdf

² <http://www.shu.ac.uk/university/diversity/documents/raceequalitypolicy.doc>
<http://www.shu.ac.uk/university/diversity/documents/raceequality04.doc>

³ <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/policies/race-equality-policy.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.herts.ac.uk/secreg/upr/pdf/GENA5-v5-15Mar06.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.bishopg.ac.uk/docs/Corporate%20Documents/Race%20Equality%20Policy%20July%202005.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/Sites/StuServices/pdf/RaceEqualityActionPlan.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.newi.ac.uk/en/aboutNEWI/corporatedocumentsandpolicies/TheFile.6852.en.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/about/keydocuments/Version32AssesmentTeachingLearningStrategy1.pdf>

groups”, funded by the Joint Committee on Academic Performance (JCAP) in response to concerns about the academic performance of specific British minority ethnic groups at Cambridge. This was completed in September 2005, and the research and recommendations were presented to JCAP. A notice from the Council and General Board dated March 2006 notes that “the appropriate intercollegiate bodies are considering the findings of the research”. A summary of the research also appears in the “Little Black Book¹⁰”, a handbook produced by and aimed at ethnic minority students.

Royal Holloway forwarded to us a paper presented to the College Board of Examiners Executive Committee in February 2007 analysing student attainment from 2001 to 2006. The attainment gap experienced by ethnic minority students was evidenced, which, the report noted, the “college will need to monitor carefully and, if appropriate, act upon”. The DfES statistical survey on attainment is cited in this paper, suggesting the research may have been prompted by the report.

Examples of Good Practice

In our view, an ideal approach to the issue of addressing ethnic minority (or gendered) student attainment might include:

- collation of data, and analysis at Faculty level or subject area as appropriate
- recognition of the issues (if present)
- policy to address the problem
- action plan to address the problem, with specific objectives, named individuals responsible, and a timescale
- initiation of appropriate projects where necessary
- regular reports on progress.

There may be variations on this theme, but, taking this basic framework, none of the documents seen from the universities sampled in this project evidenced this comprehensive approach.

Probably the most thorough description of activity to be taken in relation to students' achievements and progress is outlined in the University of Bolton Race Equality Policy¹¹. Here the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) has been designated as the Lead Officer for Student Assessment, Teaching and Achievement (LOSATA) and been given overall responsibility to:

“eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. This will include the setting of race relations targets and training. The specific areas of responsibility of LOSATA are: teaching and course design... teaching arrangements with third parties ... academic decision making ... achievement levels (including subsequent employment)... and retention levels.”

Similarly, the University of Sunderland has a published Gender Duty Action Plan 2007-09¹², with actions including to “monitor student achievements and drop out rates by gender”, and an outcome to “develop actions from data gathered”. However, there is no

⁹ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2005-06/weekly/6031/5.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/campaigns/blackstudents/littleblackbook/littleblackbook.pdf>

¹¹ http://data.bolton.ac.uk/personnel/hr/equal_and_div/Race%20Equality%20Policy%20Jan%2006.doc

¹² <https://docushare.sunderland.ac.uk/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1898/Gender+Duty+Action+Plan+2007.pdf>

timescale indicated or person responsible named¹³ (and there appear not to be similar plans relating to ethnicity).

Recommendations

Based on the universities sampled in the project, the following observations and recommendations might be made:

- While most universities have equality schemes available, only a minority had publicly available associated action plans and very few had annual reports on progress. Universities need to ensure there are the resources available actively to implement and monitor the schemes.
- Very few schemes mentioned attainment or other ALT issues. Universities need to consider the whole student cycle (not just recruitment) when updating schemes and developing action plans relating to gender, ethnicity and disability.
- Where responsibility for equality and diversity issues resides in HR departments, universities need to ensure academic staff with knowledge of ALT matters are represented to make certain that student-related issues like attainment are addressed.
- Documents relating to equality and diversity issues may be scattered throughout different areas of a university, and therefore different areas of the website. It would be helpful if they were located in one area, or had links maintained. A key factor in the accessibility of documents is to have easy and intuitive ways of navigating towards those required by law to be in the public domain.
- It is evident that universities need support to produce comprehensive schemes and plans that do incorporate attainment and other student-related issues. A good practice guide or template produced by the partners on the Academy/ ECU project would assist.

¹³ This was based on the document seen at the time of the survey, however a timescale and responsibility have been added subsequently.

Appendix

Table A1: List of universities selected

University	Group	University	Group
University of Bath	<i>1994</i>	University of Kent	<i>UA</i>
University of Bedfordshire	<i>CMU</i>	Lancaster University	<i>1994</i>
University of Birmingham	<i>Russell</i>	University of Leeds	<i>Russell</i>
Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln	<i>other</i>	Leeds Metropolitan University	<i>CMU</i>
University of Bolton	<i>CMU</i>	University of Leicester	<i>1994</i>
Bournemouth University	<i>UA</i>	University of Lincoln	<i>UA</i>
University of Bradford	<i>UA</i>	University of Liverpool	<i>Russell</i>
University of Brighton	<i>other</i>	Liverpool Hope University	<i>other</i>
University of Bristol	<i>Russell</i>	Liverpool John Moores University	<i>UA</i>
Brunel University	<i>other</i>	London School of Economics and Political Science	<i>Russell</i>
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	<i>other</i>	Loughborough University	<i>1994</i>
University of Cambridge	<i>Russell</i>	University of Manchester	<i>Russell</i>
University of Central England in Birmingham	<i>CMU</i>	The Open University	<i>UA</i>
University of Central Lancashire	<i>CMU</i>	University of Oxford	<i>Russell</i>
University of Chester	<i>other</i>	Oxford Brookes University	<i>UA</i>
University of Chichester	<i>other</i>	Roehampton University	<i>other</i>
Coventry University	<i>CMU</i>	Royal Holloway, University of London	<i>1994</i>
Cranfield University	<i>UA</i>	University of Sheffield	<i>Russell</i>
University of Derby	<i>CMU</i>	Sheffield Hallam University	<i>UA</i>
Durham University	<i>1994</i>	Southampton Solent University	<i>other</i>
University of East Anglia	<i>1994</i>	Staffordshire University	<i>CMU</i>
University of East London	<i>CMU</i>	University of Sunderland	<i>CMU</i>
Edge Hill University	<i>other</i>	University of Teesside	<i>CMU</i>
University of Essex	<i>1994</i>	University of Warwick	<i>Russell</i>
University of Exeter	<i>1994</i>	University of the West of England, Bristol	<i>UA</i>
Goldsmiths College	<i>1994</i>	University of Westminster	<i>CMU</i>
Harper Adams University College	<i>other</i>	University of Wolverhampton	<i>CMU</i>
University of Hertfordshire	<i>UA</i>	University of York	<i>1994</i>
University of Hull	<i>other</i>	York St John University	<i>other</i>
Imperial College London	<i>Russell</i>	North East Wales Institute of HE	<i>other</i>
Keele University	<i>other</i>		

Table A2: Summary of university affiliations

Group	Number represented
Russell	11
1994	11
CMU	13
UA	11
other	15