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Lincoln Equality of Attainment Project

LETSS

Lincoln Education Toolkit
for Student Success

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Acknowledgements

LETSS Begin

Purpose: Why We Need This Toolkit

Within all higher education institutions, there is strong evidence of a differential outcome between white students and BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) students achieving 'good honours' degrees at graduation (2:1 and above). This is known across the sector as the BAME attainment gap. The University of Lincoln (UoL) has a strong strategic commitment to creating a culturally diverse community where different ideas, values and beliefs are acknowledged, valued and respected equally and embedded into all of its core business. The Lincoln Equality of Attainment Project (LEAP) embodies this position within the institution's mission and strives to help the university better understand its own context-specific reasons why differential student outcomes exist and persist. A common observation across research into attainment gaps and differential student outcomes has shown that there is no single reason why this gap exists and persists. This toolkit aims to address differential student outcomes from an educational and pedagogical perspective to help improve BAME student experiences and support their achievement and success at the University of Lincoln.

While the University as a whole, and individual Colleges or Schools, may have low numbers of BAME students overall, this can lead to the mistaken idea that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in teaching, learning and assessment is of little importance. Nothing could be further from the truth. Embedding EDI is part of good practice that not only benefits BAME students and staff but all students and staff as it enables open mindedness and diversity.

The *Lincoln Education Toolkit for Student Success (LETSS)* provides a resource of activities and advice for staff to facilitate the application and promotion of EDI in their practice. *LETSS* also aims to raise staff awareness of BAME issues at local level and incorporates bespoke activities and support that will help to streamline the variety of pedagogies available. This seeks to help address attainment gaps or differential outcomes by ethnicity and improve BAME students' academic experience. This is a dynamic, evolving and collaborative process engaging colleagues and students across the institution to share best practice in supporting student success.

Using This Toolkit

Imagine this toolkit as a menu. As with any menu, you may occasionally want to substitute ingredients to suit your needs. Here, you can adjust any *LETSS* activity to meet the needs of your local context and disciplinary discourse, or feedback from students and colleagues. *LETSS* is not a blueprint on how equality should be addressed within teaching and learning, however, it is designed to assist staff through a sometimes difficult and complex journey of understanding, reflecting, embedding and promoting EDI into their day to day and longer term work.

Within the toolkit, LETSS activities are divided into three main sections:

- ***LETSS Engage***
- ***LETSS Reflect***
- ***LETSS Act***

As an evolving toolkit, if you have something you feel could be included please do get in touch by contacting Xiaotong Zhu xzhu@lincoln.ac.uk and Rhianne Sterling-Morris rsterlingmorris@lincoln.ac.uk.

LETSS Engage

This section of the toolkit provides activities that allow you to engage with your students and the pedagogy and curriculum and your own contexts.

LETSS Get Back to Basics

CORE ACTIVITY

In order to best support your students, you need to understand the basics of the terminology relevant to the BAME attainment gap, race equality and other relevant areas in order to develop a shared understanding with your team. Basics also include understanding different data sets regarding student attainment, the diversity of your students and Office for Students (OfS) requirements.

1. What does 'BAME' mean in the University and AdvanceHE definition?

BAME stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Sometimes BME standing for Black and Minority Ethnic is used interchangeably.

Although it is generally perceived that these terms refer only to non-white people and do not consider white minority ethnic groups, they <u>do</u> include people who are white minorities.

We should be mindful of the limitations in terminology. For example, here it is implied that BME/BAME individuals are a homogeneous group. Labels can be perceived as convenient and placed on minority ethnic groups of people, rather than identities with which people have chosen to identify. Feedback from some BAME UoL students suggests referring to them by specific groups e.g. black or Chinese, or if you need to categorise a large group of non-white students, they prefer the use of 'people/person of colour (POC)'.

2. What is the 'attainment gap'?

The attainment gap is commonly referred to as the degree attainment gap. It is the difference in 'top degrees' – a First or 2:1 classification – awarded to different groups of students. In general, the student attainment data used and monitored by the sector measures degree outcomes of <u>UK-domiciled</u> graduating students at the <u>first-degree level</u>.

The biggest differences are found by ethnicity. As AdvanceHE notes, '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 <u>British students</u> receiving these degree classifications compared to U<u>K-domiciled students from minority ethnic groups</u>.

Feedback from some BAME UoL students suggests using 'differential outcomes' instead of 'attainment gap' is better as the term 'differential outcomes' does not fall into the trap of problematising students with a student deficit model that focuses negatively on BAME.

3. What is UoL's target in relation to the BAME attainment gap?

The Lincoln Equality of Attainment Project (LEAP) is working together towards the targets set in the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) in relation to the 'success' stage of the student lifecycle. With regard to the success of BAME students, the institutional target is as set out below:

> *'Taking our lead from the OfS KPM4 Success measure, by 2024-25 Lincoln aims to eliminate the absolute gap in degree outcomes between BAME and White students.'*

4. What is the absolute gap?

The absolute gap in degree outcomes is caused both by structural and <u>unexplained factors</u>. Office for Students notes that 'some of the factors that contribute to the non-continuation and attainment gaps are structural, such as entry qualification, subject of study or age of students [and that] once such structural factors are taken into account, there remain significant unexplained differences which are referred to as unexplained gaps'.

5. What is LEAP's focus?

While the LEAP project seeks to understand and address attainment gaps in relation to a range of protected characteristics, its immediate priority is the attainment gap by ethnicity at UoL. We aim to achieve this by raising staff awareness of BAME issues at a local level and providing bespoke support.

Further Reading

Advance HE: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/student-recruitment-retention-and-attainment/degree-attainment-gaps

Office for Students: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-glossary/

LETSS Explore Context

In order to support BAME student success and reduce differential outcomes by ethnicity, it is critical to explore your context at local level (e.g. School, Department, Programme) to better understand context specific issues.

How many BAME students are in your School/Department/Programme?
What is the BAME attainment gap in your School/Department/Programme?
How has it changed from the previous years?
Which programme has the largest BAME attainment gap and which programme/s have the smallest?
Is it different from previous years, and how has it changed?
Based on local data and feedback from BAME students (including but not limited to e.g. NSS, module evaluations, Speak Week), what are their perceived barriers to learning?
What has been done in your School/Department/Programme to mitigate these perceived barriers to learning?
How have BAME students been involved with these mitigation initiatives?
Have any of these activities made an impact on engaging and supporting BAME students and is there any evidence to support this impact?

LETSS Reflect

LETSS Talk about Microaggressions in Teaching and Learning

This activity could be conducted among colleagues and also with students in a comfortable and practical environment (e.g. personal tutor sessions).

What is microaggression?

Microaggression is a term used for verbal, behavioural, or environmental occurrences whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups. The videos below give further details around microaggressions and how they can be presented in daily life and in teaching and learning.

Why not be respectful and Microaggressions in the classroom

Discussing microaggressions

- What did you learn from these videos?
- Can you give examples of microaggressions in a teaching and learning environment that you are familiar with – these can be examples that individuals have personally experienced or observed.
- How might you address and mitigate microaggressions and their effects in teaching and learning?

Understanding microaggressions categories

How do the examples discussed earlier fall into the following five categories of microaggressions:

- **Alien in one's own land:** When people look different or are named differently from the dominant culture are assumed to be foreign-born
- **Ascription of intelligence:** Assigning intelligence to a person of colour based on his/her race
- **Colour blindness**: Statements that indicate that a white person does not want to or need to acknowledge race.
- **Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles:** The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/white culture are ideal/ "normal".
- **Second class citizen**: Occurs when a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group; for example, being given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of colour.

Practical tips to address microaggressions in teaching and learning

1. Avoid placing blame on either party involved
2. Recognising and acknowledging the moment and immediately take the lead in addressing the situation (slow down or stop the conversation).
3. Hold everyone accountable for their actions and ask for clarification. Explain why the incident is problematic. Support students in critical reflection on the situation.
4. Acknowledge the emotions in the room, both visible and invisible.
5. While acknowledging the impact, make sure to validate and support those who have been targeted
6. Follow up as needed (e.g. revisit in next class or see individuals after class. Identify other people as sources of support)

Further Reading

Derald Wing Sue (2010) *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. John Wiley & Sons.

LETSS Set Actions based on Context

CORE ACTIVITY

The College of Social Science has embedded the following action plan within each School which feeds into various College committees with a focus on the overall institutional LEAP objectives. This template will help develop and coordinate the contextualised actions your School is planning to undertake based on the core activities *LETSS Explore the Context* and *LETSS Get Back to Basics* to support BAME student experience and success.

School/Department (Differential Attainment) ACTION FOCUS

School/Department: _____   Student Success Champion: _____

Overall institutional LEAP Objectives:

1. To raise staff awareness of differential learning outcomes and enhance their understanding of the BAME student experience and local attainment data
2. To develop context-specific action plans at College and School level in order to better support BAME student success in an innovative and effective manner
3. To collectively develop, disseminate and embed the *Lincoln Education Toolkit for Student Success* (*LETSS*) with a significant contribution from students (BAME students in particular)
4. To promote student engagement and obtain positive student feedback
5. To develop a set of educational resources to raise understanding of anti-racism and improve cultural competency across the campus

Summary of differential attainment within the School (with reference to specific protected characteristics and extent of difference)

Proposed Activity	Relevant LEAP Objective	Target Group (e.g., BAME students, all students, specific modules)	Outcome Measure of Success	Key School Leads	Timeline (When activity will be completed)
To engage with LETSS activities	1, 2 & 3			Student Success Champion	
To demonstrate where the outcomes from the toolkit have been successfully used/applied within the school	3, 4 & 5			Student Success Champion	