Bridging the awarding gap for students from under-represented groups: insights and recommendations from the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics

Korina Giaxoglou, Qian Kan, Prithvi Shrestha, Ebony Carberry

Background
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which requires HE institutions to meet their duty of promoting equality of opportunity and ensuring a positive experience of students and staff of all ethnic backgrounds.

Research Focus
The aim of this project is to develop a better understanding of the disparities in LAL and make recommendations for small steps towards eliminating these.
1. Drawing on evidence from dashboard analytics data for the Board of Studies and student performance on the highest population Level 1 module, LB170, what trends in pass rate gaps and disparities among different groups of students are noted?
2. Drawing on students' comments in a student consultative forum (June 2021), how do students view their sense of belonging, given its importance in improving the learning experience and success of students, esp. from under-represented groups (Cureton and Gravestock, 2019)?

1. Insights - BOS dashboard data and Level 1 module (LB170) student performance from 2018/19 to 2020/21

- LAL BoS: Year on year fluctuations in the pass rate gaps across all student groups with **a notable decrease** in the black student gap (**-8.8%** in 2020/21 vs. **-14.3%** in 2018/9) and the mental health pass rate gap (**-6.7%** in 2020/21 vs. **-15.7%** in 2018/9).

- LB170: **students with mental health issues have the lowest pass rates** across these three years of presentation, while **Black students achieved a 78.8% pass rate in 18J and 19J,** reinforcing the importance of a non-deficit approach to student groups.

2. Insights – Student Consultative Forum

- the majority of participants (2/3rds) noted that their experiences around **their sense of belonging had negatively changed during the pandemic**
- **a third of students confirmed they had a high (strong) sense of belonging** and was correspondingly reflected by experiencing far less (or no) loneliness and isolation.
- some students were extremely clear in stating **how they did not need to feel a sense of belonging or for greater connection through their distance learning experiences** - they did not feel this was an expectation on them as self-directed learners, or on us institutionally as a distant learning education provider
- **students related their sense of belonging to the creation of supportive learning communities and noted a range of factors contributing to it, including** tutor relationship, tutorials (online & F2F), Tutor Group Forums and module wide Forums, 1-2-1 correspondence and pastoral care, self-supported study groups, residential schools, Student Support Teams, interaction with the wider OU community, online VLE and resources and support

Recommendations:

1. Avoid using the designation BAME in favour of developing more granular and intersectional understandings of disparities across different student groups
2. Need for developing ways of accessing student voice from students from diverse groups, while avoiding entrenching a deficit approach
3. Need for dashboard data analysis training to support School-level monitoring of BoS and module-specific data across time and across student groups
4. Need for LAL BoS to continue and systematise work in this area using the Theory of Change

References

Cureton, Debra and Phil Gravestock (2019) 'We belong': differential sense of belonging and its meaning for different ethnic groups in higher education. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching.*