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Working towards an inclusive learning culture: Exploring the experiences BAME students who live at home and commute to the university: how does it affect the engagement of BAME students with the university and their learning?

Keywords: students, stories, degree attainment, BME

Abstract

The reasons for the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) poorer learning experience, the degree attainment gap and their reduced employability are complex and multifactorial (Richardson 2008 a & b; Allen, (2016);Newbold et al, (2011). This inequality that may be compounded in the case of those disproportionately high numbers of BAME students who also commute to the LBU campus (Thomas & Jones (2017).

This poster outlines findings from a qualitative project at Leeds Beckett University (LBU) focusing on commuting BAME undergraduates and explores how their needs have been addressed through a range of cultural, infrastructural and curricular interventions generated from ideas from the students themselves. It explores the key issues addressed by the university in partnership with the group of commuting BAME students.

Method

An interpretive approach was adopted for this mixed methods project focussing on qualitative enquiry (Cresswell, 2007) and action research (Healey et al, 2010) to explore commuter students' experiences.

Findings

The findings from 2 focus groups with 20 self-selecting BAME students are identified. It is clear that some difficulties faced by BAME commuting students are identical to those faced by all commuting students: stress and impractical timetabling and assessment deadlines.

Conclusion

University action must be situated within a broader framework of inclusive academic practice, drawing on a "holistic engagement vision" (Pickford, 2016,) of infrastructural support and partnership working between students and staff to build a more inclusive learning culture. Thomas and Jones, (2017) showed that commuting BAME students prioritise academic engagement but may be unaware of the wider social and cultural capital that enhances social mobility) gained from participating in extra-curricular activities.

Students were invited to offer solutions to issues raised and a series of actions were agreed with the aim of building an inclusive learning culture for all but which aimed to specifically solve the problems the commuting students had raised.

The actions (below) are points for discussion – are they transferable to other universities?

- i) the maximising on-campus time;
- ii) the building of activities which could be undertaken in the working day which develop students' social and cultural capital;
- iii) a focus on induction and transition;
- iv) facilitating access to online resources;
- v) estate measures (more dwell space) which facilitated an all day, on-campus stay;
- vi) targeted academic advising and
- vii) building of an online student support framework accessible off-campus.

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