# Report

## **Report**: FoM: An exploration of differences seen in pass rates for students with different demographic characteristics

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1. **Project Overview**

* The Faculty of Medicine was awarded £5000 from the Research and Action Fund to explore students’ experiences of teaching and assessment across modules in years 1 and 2 of the BM5 programme, with a view to understanding more about the attainment gaps between black/white students, students from IMD Q1/Q5 and mental health/no disability.
* A workshop event was held on 22 September in which groups were formed based on these demographic characteristics. Groups were first asked to discuss potential reasons for the attainment gap among themselves and then as part of a larger group. Data from this event were analysed and are presented in ‘Project Findings’. Ethics approval was granted for this evaluation (ERGO 73680).
* There were some discrepancies in the data because of the change from modular to synoptic assessments in 2017/18

1. **Study Design**

Participatory Action Research was decided for this project. This method, ‘involves

examining an issue systematically from the perspectives and experiences of the

community members most affected by that issue’.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Workshop Participants and Recruitment**

* Student participants were in Year 2 or 3 of the BM5/6/EU programme; this was decided due to the larger attainment gap noted in Y1 and Y2 modules. Staff participants were involved in Y1 and Y2 teaching.
* Students were recruited through posters shared in their introductory lectures; they were asked to complete a questionnaire in which they declared demographic information which allowed them to be sorted into groups. Students who were not eligible were invited to support the workshop delivery. All students involved were given a £20 online shopping voucher to thank them for their time.
* Staff were recruited by email.
* Small groups were organised by demographic, as shown in the table below.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Group | Role | Numbers | Primary demographic(s) | Secondary demographic |
| A | Student | 2 | White, IMDQ5, No disability (2) |  |
| B | Student | 3 | Mental Health diagnosis (3) | IMDQ1 (1)  Black (1) |
| C | Student | 0 | IMDQ1 (0) |  |
| D | Student | 3 | Black (3) | IMDQ1 (1) |
| E | Staff | 7 | n/a | n/a |

**Workshop Protocol**

* **Introduction**A short presentation was delivered to all participants outlining the reason for the workshops and the workshop schedule.
* **Small-group Discussions: Part 1**Groups were directed to separate rooms in which they were provided with a definition of the attainment gap and flipchart paper and asked to discuss and take notes on what they thought were reasons for the attainment gap. Groups B and D were encouraged to focus on ideas related to their own demographic characteristics, but also invited to consider those related to all specified characteristics (mental health diagnoses, IMDQ1 and Black).
* **Small-group Discussions: Part 2**

After 30 minutes, a workshop facilitator provided each group with a sheet of flipchart split into four prompts derived from Jones et al 2

These prompts were:

* Student experience of teaching
* Student-student/student-teacher relationship
* Psychosocial and identity factors
* Cultural/social capital

Definitions of these were also provided (ibid) Each group was then asked to discuss and take notes on reasons for the attainment gap related to these prompts; these could either be taken from their original notes or could be new.

* **Networking Lunch/Collation of Notes**A buffet lunch was provided for all participants and two of the project leads collected the flip-chart sheets from each group and typed up the notes into a PowerPoint presentation.
* **Plenary Presentation and Clarification of Notes**

The PowerPoint of notes was presented to the whole group. Participants were encouraged to address points if there was misrepresentation or clarification needed. This was done both verbally and via an anonymous Padlet in case participants didn’t feel comfortable addressing the group.

* **How to Address the Attainment Gap**All participants were then asked, based on everything that had been discussed, what measures could be put in place to help minimise the attainment gap for the groups in question. A Padlet link was provided for participants to raise points anonymously – these could also be ‘upvoted’ or commented on. Points raised verbally were also typed up on this Padlet in real-time by one of the workshop facilitators to ensure all data were captured accurately.

1. **Workshop Findings: Small-Group Discussions**

* **Group A** provided a bullet pointed list of general reasons why students may not perform well such as ‘attendance to lectures’ and ‘well-being status’ with little explanation as to why this might be more relevant to the demographic groups identified as having an attainment gap.
* **Group B** provided comprehensive notes categorised by a diagnosis and/or symptom, providing specific ways in which a mental health condition can impact a student’s learning and attainment. For example, ‘fatigue and cognitive effect’ was identified and its impact on ‘memory impairment’, as well as, ‘low mood and anxiety affecting willingness to attend lectures’.
* **Group D** wrote extensive and specific notes categorised by, ‘*Race*, *Cultural*, *Institutional* and *Money’* sub-headingsbefore the prompt sheets were provided. The complexity of their responses was also apparent as they included contradictions, for example, around families with little HE experience being unable to offer academic support but exerting pressure through expectations. Another area this group identified was the importance of having black role models to encourage aspiration and a suitable work ethos, as well as PATs and peers who were relatable, as this impacted on the likelihood of them asking for help when necessary. Also, the issue of representation in the learning environment was raised regarding materials and resources. Additionally, finance was referred to regarding the use of paid platforms for revision, the length of the programme and the cost of participating in extra-curricular activities.

* **Group E** wrote mostly in short bullet points which were later transferred into subheadings of, ‘*Transition to University* and *Career Advice’*. The data queried the university’s assumption that, ‘assessment types are suitable for all groups’, particularly in relation to students with mental ill health. Reference was mainly made to transitional difficulties and ‘culture shock’ as well as, ‘ties to home’. **‘**Impostor syndrome’was also referred to and staff identified students’ low self-esteem, lack of resilience and not asking for help as potential reasons for the attainment gap.

1. **Discussion:**

As is to be expected, Groups B and D provided much richer data than Groups A and

E, who do not meet the characteristics being discussed. Group B provided very detailed ideas about reasons why students with a variety of mental health diagnoses and associated symptoms may underperform, showing the benefits of engaging with this group in trying to understand the attainment gap.

Group D also provided detailed points which illustrated the wide and complex nature

of disadvantage reflected in the literature2 and the difficulty of establishing

correlations between outcomes and demographic characteristics. This was particularly

noted in relation to ethnicity and social class, as well as intersectional factors, again providing insights which only students within this demographic group could give.

Group E’s data focused on schooling, preparation for university and medicine, and transition, attributing the attainment gap to ‘student deficit’ and lack of adequate preparation for university, academically, domestically and personally.

5. **Plenary Presentation: Clarification of Notes and ‘How to address the attainment gap’**

The second part of the workshop focused on presenting the small group data to all groups, getting further elaboration and clarification, and gathering suggestions put forward by participants.

Post meeting the project group separated suggestions into three categories:

1. Suggestions that were flagged as already happening to be shared with relevant faculty staff, with a view to raising more awareness among students eg report and support and disability process for placements
2. Suggestions that were not in evidence and would be fed back to relevant faculty staff such as having a university subscription to an educational resource (e.g. Osmosis, Passmed, Quesmed) that is available and accessible to all from year 3 onwards
3. Suggestions that would benefit from further research and development stated below:

* Staff development regarding how demographic characteristics might impact learning, assessment, and placement learning
* Work in partnership with students with similar characteristics to co –create workshops and safe spaces to share experiences, network, uplift one another and gain access to targeted support and guidance and relatable role models.

**6. Conclusion:**

Clearly, the small sample of staff and students limits the conclusions that can be drawn from this workshop data. However, of most interest is the difference between staff and student perspectives on reasons for the attainment gap. Student group B focus on how students’ mental health conditions impact learning and student group D consider the complex factors that impact attainment, while the staff group focus on students’ preparation for the programme.

Additionally, the value of the lived experience and of doing action research with affected groups is apparent as, ‘representation among staff’ (from student group A) is described more comprehensively from student group D in, “*When you don’t see people that look like you in a space you wish to occupy, it makes it difficult to aspire to that role because it almost seems unattainable”.*

**7. Costs:**

The table below outlines the costs incurred so far for this project.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| £1,729.68 | Confirmed staff costs | 2x Research Assistants and 1 Research Coordinator were employed for this project. All supported with workshop planning, recruitment and literature searches to support the workshop methodology. Research coordinator organised the workshop event and did most of the data collation, analysis and write-up. |
| £484.25 | Participant incentives | Student participants were given a £20 voucher as a thank you for participating. |
| £450.00 | Catering expenses | Lunch was provided to all participants, and relevant discussion and networking occurred during the allotted lunch break. |
| ~£1,000 | Continued staff costs | Staff costs from 28 November have yet to be processed. These include much of the time allocated to analysis and follow-up. |

References:

1. Savin-Baden M, Howell Major C. Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice. Oxon: Routledge. 2013: 248-254.
2. Jones S, et al. Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes. London: HEFCE. 2015: 8-10.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)