



## **Great expectations: practical actions to overcome psycho-social barriers to attainment**

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# This session

- Sector differences in student outcomes
- Sector research on how to address these differences
- Focus on psycho-social processes
- Practical actions in our own context(s)

# Differences in student outcomes

- Across the sector, black and minority ethnic (BME) students, male students, and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to attain a good degree than their white, female and non-disadvantaged counterparts (HEFCE, 2013), (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015).
- [Higher Education White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy; teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice](#), 16 May

*“We will promote transparency by opening up data held by the sector, informing choice and promoting social mobility, by **putting a duty on institutions to publish application, offer, acceptance and progression rates broken down by gender, ethnicity and disadvantage.**”*
- [Success for All](#) – improving the student experience for all students.

# Causes of differences in student outcomes?

*"The evidence points to a complex range of differently connected factors" (Singh, 2009, p24)*

*"No single cause has been found to solely explain why there is a gap" (Richardson, 2013, p11)*

- Explanations and strategies have considered:
  - role of institution;
  - role of student; and
  - "the quality of students' learning and in particular their conceptions of learning" (Sanders, 2014, p13)
- Multi-intervention approach.
- What works in one context may not always work in another (Thomas, 2012) (DiSA, 2013).
- Solutions tailored to your own context and resources.

*"One intervention type does not fit all students equally" (Eddy and Hogan, 2014, p463)*

# UK research

Two key reports:

- [Disparities in Student Attainment \(DiSA\) Project](#) (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)
- [Causes of Difference in Student Outcomes](#) (HEFCE, 2015).

Four key themes:

- improving relationships;
- building social and cultural capital;
- curricular, learning, teaching and assessment; and
- **psycho-social processes**

*“little research has specifically focused on the individual psychological factors of ME [minority ethnic] students ... This is probably unsurprising since **locating**, even in part, **the ‘cause’ of ME student underachievement within individuals themselves runs the danger of collapsing explanations for the attainment gap back in to a deficit model** of blaming ME students for their academic ‘failures’ (Stevenson, 2012, p104).*

# Psycho-social processes

## UK research

- Tendency to 'group think' (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)
- 'Pygmalion effect' – lower expectations borne out in reality (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)

## USA research

- Stereotype threat - *"worry that one could be perceived through the lens of a negative intellectual stereotype... can undermine academic performance"* (Yeager and Walton, 2011, p279)
- Belongingness uncertainty – *" the fear, often signalled by one's identity, that one does not belong in a setting where academic ability is prized"* (Spitzer and Aronson, 2015, p4)

*"Social identity processes like stereotype threat and belongingness uncertainty create markedly different subjective experiences for students targeted by stereotypes, which in turn can lead to significant differences in performance"* (ibid, p4)

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# UK research and suggested actions

- Importance of individualisation (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)
  - Interlocutor - relationship with staff with high expectations and belief can achieve them.
- Importance of communicating high expectations and challenging low expectations (Open University HEA funded project)
- Lecturer/student expectations differ (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)

# UK research and suggested actions

- Help seeking behaviours
  - [Male students: Engagement with academic and pastoral support services](#) different help seeking behaviours (ECU, 2012)
  - Possible selves (Stevenson, 2012), (Stevenson, 2013)
  - Practical steps to achieve goals (Oyserman, 2004)
- Role models and increasing staff diversity
  - Use of student alumni (University of Hertfordshire)
  - Student stories - Edgehill University [University success through BTEC study](#)
  - Caution 'photo opportunity' diversity and active/passive roles in images (Stevenson, 2013)

# USA research

## Social psychological interventions

- **Stealthy, brief and reinforce message** – so students **actively participate** in intervention.
- Wise feedback
- Help seeking behaviour
  
- You may also be interested in:
  - Belonging (Walton and Cohen, 2007);
  - Values intervention (Harackiewicz et al, 2014);
  - Social-Psychological Interventions in Education: They're Not Magic (Yeager and Walton, 2011)

# Summary of ideas

- Awareness of group think and Pygmalion effect
- Individualisation
- Tutor/student expectations
- Communicating high expectations and challenging low expectations
- Appealing to different help seeking behaviours
- Practical steps to achieving goals
- Role models and potential of student body and alumni
- Using student stories

- What can we take from this research and apply in our own context(s)?
- Is there one thing that you can do differently (however small)?

# Where can I find out more about Success for All?

- Contact your Success for All School Lead:
  - Julia Davies (ARES), Adam O'Rourke (ADBE), Christine Hardy (A&D), Lloyd Pettiford (A&H), Belinda Ferguson (ED), Melanie Currie (NBS), Jo Boylan-Kemp (NLS), Sam Murphy (SSS), Karen Moss and Jon Tepper (S&T)
- Sign up for the [Success for All Newsletter](#)
- Visit the [Success for All SharePoint](#)
- Upcoming events (book through [CADQ events](#)):
  - 15 September, TILT BTEC Symposium (City).
  - 16 September, Understanding disparities in progression and attainment workshop (Clifton)
- Unconscious Bias Toolkit  
The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team online Unconscious Bias toolkit.  
For access to the module please contact [Amanda Dury](#)

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