

OpenLearn Animation

Degree Awarding Gap

Narrator:

What is the degree awarding gap in higher education? A degree awarding gap refers to the difference between the proportion of students from one group awarded a first class or upper second degree compared with another peer group. The widest gaps are between the groupings of disabled and non-disabled higher and lower socioeconomic and white and black and minority ethnic students.

The largest awarding gap currently exists between black and white student peers. Even when a student's age, gender, socioeconomic status, and entry qualifications are similar. The degree awarding gap still exists, making this a concern for institutions. In England, the Office for Students, part of the Department for Education, states that the differences in degree award outcomes may be the consequence of a lack of diverse environments and a non-inclusive curriculum.

Degree awarding gaps become more pronounced if students belong to more than one category, like being a woman from a low socioeconomic background and being from an ethnic minority. This is the impact of intersectionality. Historically, universities have adopted what is known as a student's deficit model, blaming the individual for academic weakness, or perhaps choosing the wrong course. This lack of achievement was entitled The Attainment Gap.

The contemporary term awarding gap rather than viewing the students as deficient, places the onus on the institution to review, consider and action their policies and practices as to why the awarding gaps persist. What are the causes? There are many complex reasons behind the gaps between distinct groups. A higher Education funding Council for England report suggested the limitations of teacher expectations of students as having an impact on grade outcomes.

However, focusing on the largest awarding gap between whites in black and minority ethnic students, some of the causes suggested by Universities UK and the National Union of Students include institutional culture. The culture of an institution is identified as a crucial factor in relation to the degrees awarded to students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic diversity among role models and staff.

Having small numbers of black, Asian and minority ethnic staff has been acknowledged as limiting institutions' capability to address the awarding gaps. Curriculum contents, design and delivery. The design of the curriculum, its contents, the way it's written and how it's taught can have a significant impact on the way that students from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities respond to their course, lecturers, and tutors. Belonging. A strong theme in literature is the importance of inclusion and belonging. The National Union of Students found that when black, Asian and minority ethnic students were asked why they were less likely to be satisfied with their experience and felt less likely to get a first or upper second respondents repeatedly cited feelings of discomfort, isolation, and a sense of not belonging.

Social, cultural, and economic capital. Access to advice, guidance and resources and finance can depend on whether a student's parents or guardians have the knowledge and experience to support them. These obstacles can be made worse by schools and colleges, not providing sufficient information or guidance resources. How do we reduce the awarding gap? AdvanceHE recommends higher education institutions should adopt a project approach which focuses on three key elements to close the awarding gaps. Organizational change, improving institutional processes, enhancing the knowledge and skills of staff, and better supporting students are important to address unequal outcomes for students.

Institutions can do this through developing mentoring schemes or workshops, embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in promotion criteria, and measuring the impact of contemporary initiatives. Inclusive Curriculum. An inclusive curriculum is one that is student centred and allows students to draw on their own experiences and prospects so that students are leading the learning and are learning from each other. It includes multi-sensory delivery strategies which expose students to a variety of mediums that are exciting, engaging and interactive, inviting speakers from different cultural and social backgrounds to cover additional aspects of the curriculum or different perspectives also enriches the curriculum.

Student Support. Student support services are a key area for addressing black and minority ethnic awarding gaps. There are many examples of student support activities, student co-creation training, student partnership and mentoring schemes, Student course representative training and partnering with a student union. Degree Awarding gaps can have a lasting impact on people's lives, families, and communities. Many companies and postgraduate courses require a first class or upper second degree for graduates Employment or study, so the gap can limit people's life, chances, opportunities, and incomes.

By working to close degree awarding gaps, we are creating equitable outcomes for all students.