

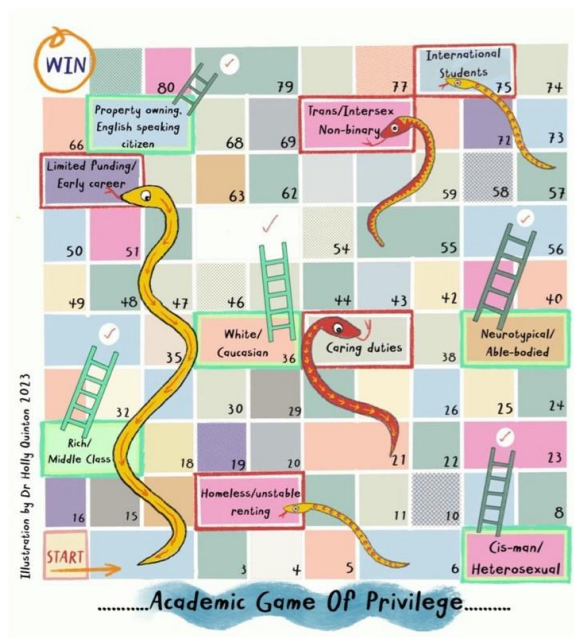
# The Game of Academic Privilege: Exploring Differential Attainment at the University of Manchester

## Short summary

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## What is Differential Attainment?

Differential Attainment (DA) refers to the variation in academic achievement between groups of students with protected characteristics (such as race, disability, or socioeconomic background) and those without. These disparities persist even when prior attainment and background factors are accounted for. DA is most commonly discussed in terms of 'awarding gaps,' meaning differences in the proportion of students achieving a First or 2:1 degree classification. The largest disparities are observed by ethnic background, with Black

students, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds consistently underperforming compared to their White peers. The University of Manchester is held accountable for these awarding gaps by the Office for Students (OfS), making it a critical issue that must be addressed.

## **What is the problem we're exploring?**

Despite efforts to create inclusive learning environments and level playing fields, disparities in academic outcomes persist across Higher Education. Like most institutions, the University of Manchester has awarding gaps that it is working hard to close. To do so, it is of paramount importance that the causes of differential attainment are explored. Too often, institutions are told to 'close the gaps' with little consideration given to the origins of and contributing factors to the problem. Thus, this research sought to explore students and staff perceptions of the causes of differential attainment at the University of Manchester.

We were interested in the three most significant awarding gaps: black vs white students; Asian vs white students; disabled vs able students.

## **What do we need to consider before exploring the findings?**

It is important to consider the framing of this research. Participants were specifically asked about their perceptions of a problem, so a predominance of negative responses is to be expected. The purposive sampling strategy, inviting students with protected characteristics aligned with the institution's problematic awarding gaps, meant that many participants may have self-selected based on their negative experiences. However, this approach is crucial for effectively addressing differential attainment. Participant candour was actively encouraged throughout the process on negative experiences or perceptions. However, recognising institutional shortcomings, blind spots, and the potential for misunderstanding or miscommunication is vital if meaningful change is to occur.

Attention must also be paid to the identities of those involved in the study. As mentioned above, we sought to explore the three most significant awarding gaps. However, students hold multiple intersecting micro-identities. Students will cross many demographic groups, such as home or international, lower socio-economic status, being a care giver, or a care leaver. These identities, interactions and experiences result in their unique experiences that presented useful viewpoints that can be used to address differential attainment.

## **What did we do?**

Ethical approval was awarded for this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with students and staff at the University of Manchester regarding their perceptions of differential attainment. There were 123 participants who were interviewed, 91 of which were students. Participants were from a range of demographics, with intersecting identities.

The study utilised a methodology known as Realist Evaluation, which seeks to understand how, why, for whom, and under what circumstances something is occurring. In this study, we sought to explore student experiences of their learning journey to identify key mechanisms that may lead to differential attainment.

Realist reports findings as contexts, mechanisms and outcome, leading to the development of a programme theory. A technical summary of this methodology is available within the [full](#)

**report.** In short, the central tenant is that outcomes are produced by mechanisms that are triggered in specific contexts. This short report does not present the data in context-mechanism-outcome configuration. Rather, it presents the data briefly by theme with short exemplary quotes. Creative outputs developed using the qualitative data, including poetry and animations are also linked.

In addition to the interview data, we conducted a **secondary data analysis**, which considered data from institutional dashboards, misconduct cases, and student surveys to triangulate the findings. **Workshops and learning events** were held with key stakeholders to share findings, gather feedback and co-create practical responses.

## What did we ask?

We asked our participants a range of questions, for example:

- How students' attainment relates to their protected characteristics (e.g., widening participation, ethnicity, religion, domicile/international, in care, ability etc.)?
- Why is there a gap in attainment?
- What are the contributing factors to this gap?
- What privilege exists within the system? How can we counter it/ build awareness?
- How can UoM help students improve their attainment?

## What did we find?

When people consider differential attainment, and the gap in degree awards, they often think that the issue is one of assessment. The findings of this research clearly indicate that differential attainment is not solely an issue of assessment; it is the product of a much broader ecosystem of structural, cultural, and socio-economic factors that influence student outcomes. While inconsistencies in marking, feedback, and curriculum design certainly play a role, the disparities in attainment are deeply intertwined with students lived experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Financial insecurity, lack of representation, inaccessible learning environments, and mental health challenges all intersect to shape a student's ability to thrive academically. These issues are especially pronounced for Black, Asian, disabled, and international students, who face unique and compounding barriers throughout their university journey.

Importantly, the research highlights that attainment gaps are rooted in systemic inequities, from culturally unresponsive mental health services to a curriculum that fails to reflect diverse perspectives, to a lack of role models among academic staff. The challenges students face are not just academic; they are structural, social, and emotional. Without addressing these underlying conditions such as housing instability, cultural isolation, sponsorship pressures, and the absence of inclusive support systems, institutional efforts to close attainment gaps through assessment reform alone will fall short. Achieving equity in higher education, specifically at the University of Manchester, demands a holistic, intersectional response that considers the full spectrum of the student experience. Figure 1 depicts a brief summary of some of the key findings:

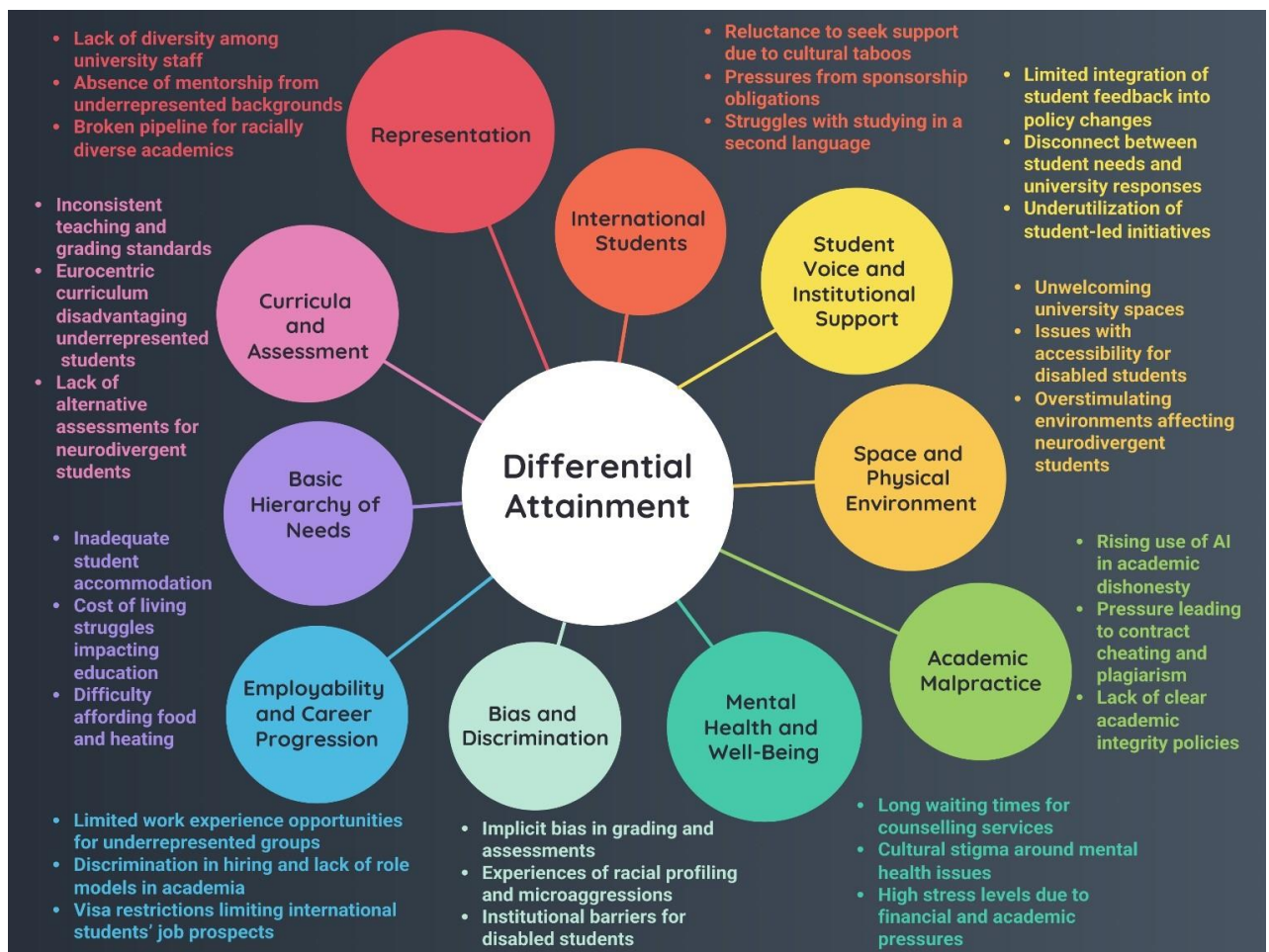


Figure 1. Summary graphic of the main themes found within the interview data.

Below are some examples of the themes that arose from the data within this study:

### Financial insecurity

- Many students, especially from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or international students, struggle to meet basic needs such as food, accommodation, and study materials.
- Financial pressure forces students to work excessive hours, limiting their time for study and university engagement.
- Some students experience stress due to housing conditions, fines, or gaps between loan payments and rent deadlines.

*"I've seen people around me who have challenges, you know, financially, and that really impacted on the ability to, you know, pursue their studies. I mean, there have been instances where people would go to work when they are supposed to be in school. And the issue is that if they don't go to work, they can't pay their school fees, and then they might be kicked out."*

[Black, International, Staff, Former Student]

### Mental health and well-being

- Students report high levels of stress, burnout, and anxiety, particularly during assessment periods.
- Long waiting times and limited culturally appropriate mental health services are common.
- There is stigma around help-seeking, especially among students from Black, Asian, and international backgrounds.
- Many students suffer in silence, fearing academic consequences or being misunderstood by staff.

*"I think poor mental health can be used to describe almost every student at some point in their 3-4 years in this University, but the difference is that white peers will have a white counsellor whereas brown and black people will be expected to explain their feelings to a white counsellor as well. The problems and causes of poor mental health are different."*

[Disabled Asian British Student]

*"...in terms of mental health support, there are a lot of cultural taboos. There are cultural barriers to seeking help and to sharing information about. Their well-being or lack of well-being, because it's not culturally a thing which is done for people to speak out. And so definitely we're seeing that in numerous cases."*

[Student support leader]

### **Lack of representation**

- Students, especially Black, Asian, and disabled, do not see themselves reflected in academic staff or curricula.
- This contributes to feelings of isolation, otherness, and imposter syndrome.
- The lack of role models reduces aspirations to pursue academia and affects students' sense of belonging.

*"Being from [an] ethnic minority background, or whatever, or being from a low socio-economic background, would impact your relationship with teaching and staff. Because you feel like you can't relate to them, can't really open up, they're not from the same background as you"*

[Black Student, Home]

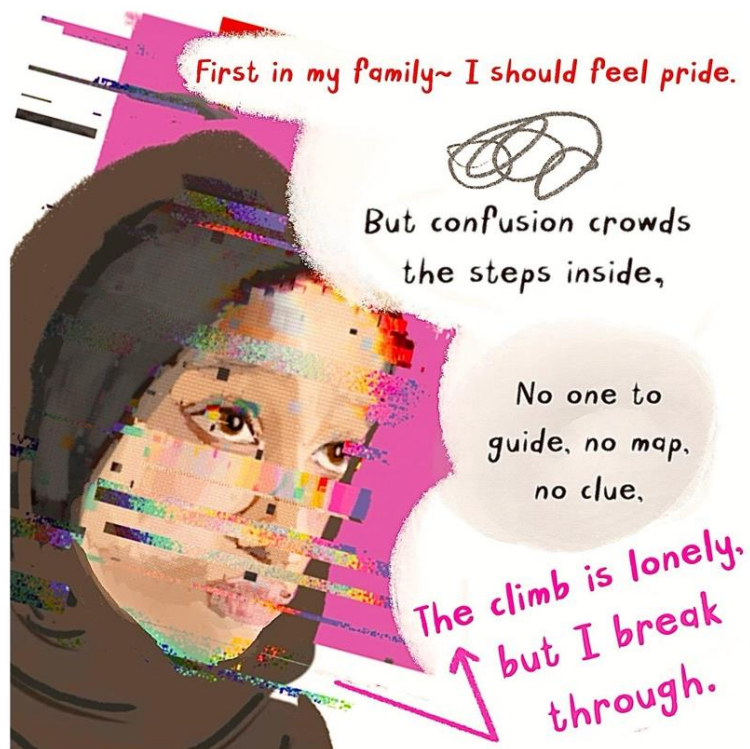
*"I'm a Chinese student and then I go to a particular office that is supposed to help students overcome certain challenges. And I don't see anybody that I really directly identify with, it's sometimes very difficult to go in for the kind of support that I need. So, I'm saying that maybe there should be a lot more diversity in terms of the arrangements that they invest in to support students."*

[Asian, International Student]





**Figure 2: Illustration portraying the impact of lack of representation in universities.**



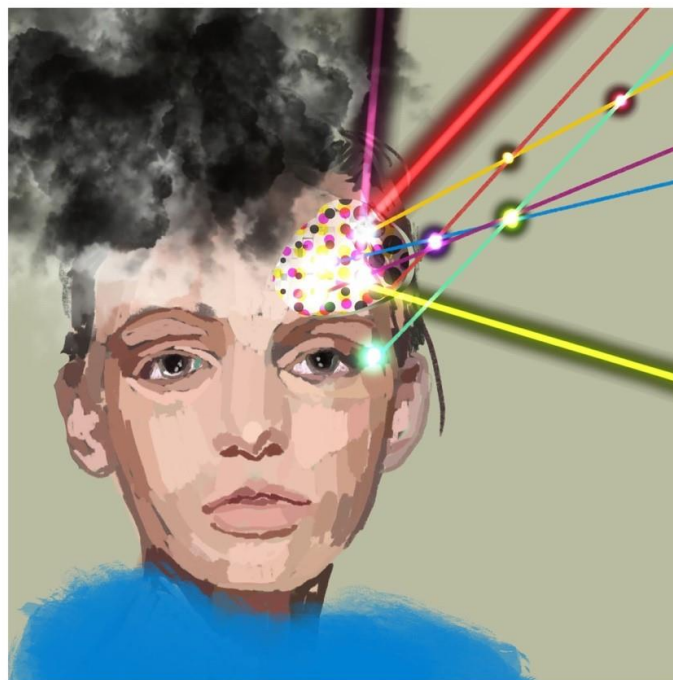
**Figure 3: An illustration and poem to portray the impact of being the first in a family to attend university.**

## Inaccessible physical and learning environments

- Campus spaces (e.g., libraries) are often overstimulating or physically inaccessible for neurodivergent or disabled students.
- Assumptions that shared learning spaces benefit everyone can exclude students needing quiet, structured environments.
- Inconsistent implementation of reasonable adjustments across faculties further disadvantages disabled students.

*“...everyone would think that a library is a great place for an autistic person, because it's nice and quiet. And you there's no expectation of a lot of social interaction. But actually, it's got whacking great big fluorescent lights in it, which autistic people, sometimes not always, but I certainly do have trouble processing fluorescent light it so if I spend too long, and I ended up having what looks like a panic attack, feeling really dizzy and sick and faint.”*

[Disabled Staff Member]



**Figure 4: Illustration portraying the effect of external stimuli for neurodivergent individuals.**

## Curricula and assessment challenges

- Students report inconsistent marking, unclear expectations, and a lack of actionable feedback.
- Traditional assessment methods (e.g., timed exams) disadvantage neurodivergent, disabled, and international students unfamiliar with the UK system.

- Curriculum content is perceived as overly Eurocentric and disconnected from diverse experiences.

*"I think lecturers assume that everyone has come in understanding how to write grammatically correct essays and they assume that they can teach people one thing in a plenary and it to be understood by the entire cohort. They don't bother holding smaller group seminars or listening to the actual struggle we have with writing essays."*

[Disabled Asian British Student, Home]

*"But I guess like in terms of feedback is because I don't know firstly, it just feels weird because you've never even met your lecturers whatsoever and then they give feedback, and it doesn't really feel personalized."*

[Disabled International Student]

### **Cultural and linguistic barriers for international students**

- International students often face difficulties navigating a new academic culture, language expectations, and UK academic writing conventions.
- Cultural taboos about approaching authority figures or asking for help limit engagement with support services.
- Sponsorship obligations and visa conditions create additional stress and pressure to succeed.

*"Every country [has a different] education system. And yeah, this city is home to I mean, a lot of students from different countries...I guess, doing more workshops for the transition period [into university life], cultural awareness, workshops, and even a transitional workshop [would help integrate students]."*

[International Student]

### **Poor employability support and opportunities**

- Some students lack access to volunteering, internships, or career networks due to work or caring commitments.
- International students are particularly limited by visa restrictions, which block access to unpaid opportunities.
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*"[The] pretty interesting thing is volunteering is considered as work which is not work it's not paid, but it also hinders international students from not only make a living were living when they're struggling but also hinders them from gaining employability skills and UK life skills because that they're not even allowed to engage in unpaid works, which is not very promising."*

[International Student]



*"I think something which would benefit students as well, more broadly is, having more open conversation or peer mentoring schemes or anything like that, not necessarily just focused on academics, but focused on [employability]."*

[White British Student]

## **Bias and discrimination**

- Subtle biases in teaching, assessment, and university culture contribute to a feeling of exclusion and lower attainment.
- Experiences of microaggressions and racial stereotyping are common among Black and Asian students.
- Perceived lack of fairness discourages students from reporting problems or engaging fully in university life.

*"It's like, quite difficult, and where my course is very white, very, you know, overwhelmingly white, it's sort of it does feel it's very uncomfortable, to like, sit in a seminar and discuss racism or colonialism and then have like, all eyes on you to like, speak for a whole country or speak for a whole nation or whole period of time. And it's just that sort of, like, feeling of, like discomfort, when I'm supposed to be learning, which, like, when people won't have in the same way, if that makes sense that obviously, the history like history can make most like, should make everyone uncomfortable, because it's, like, difficult history."*

[Black Student, Home]

*"...being the only black person in a room being the only person of colour in a room. It's really difficult to like, be. Yeah, and just that, yeah, I think just generally, even if we're not dealing with particularly difficult material, it's just it's sort of like weighs in, in a sort of, like impostor syndrome way."*

[Black Student, Home]

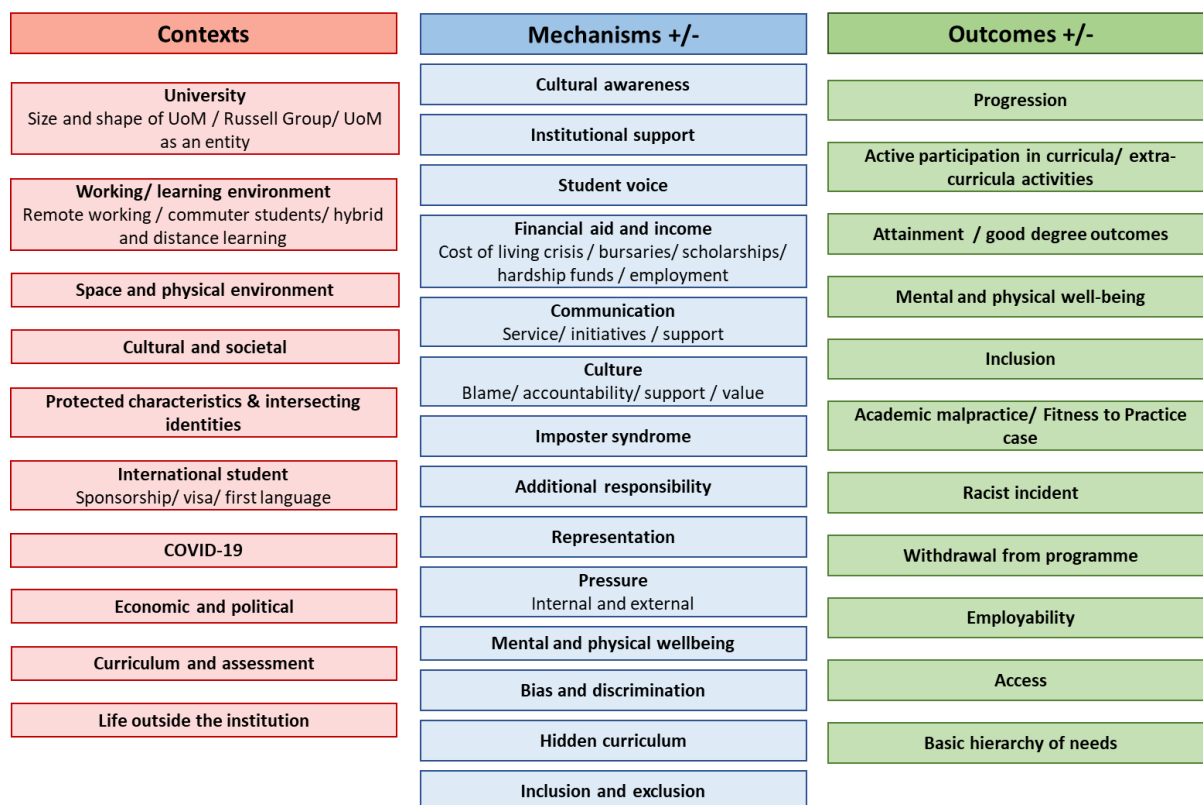
### **I am not your deficit**

Don't reduce me to a gap on your dashboard.  
A percentage point on your action plan.  
I am not your deficit.  
I am not the problem you whisper about in strategy  
meetings,  
the 'hard-to-reach' student you never reached for.  
I am here. Complex.  
Brilliant in ways your rubrics never learned to read.  
You say "evidence-based."  
Here's your evidence:  
I worked two jobs,  
navigated racism in silence,  
and still showed up.  
Not for your stats.  
Not for your league tables.  
But for me.  
So don't call me a data point when you never asked  
for the story behind the number.



**Figure 5: A poem - 'I am not your deficit'**

The realist nature of this study required a programme theory to be developed. Figure 6 delineates the programme theory, providing the contexts, mechanisms, and outputs associated with differential attainment. However, this linear mapping does not centre the complex nature of our findings. For this reason, we worked with an illustrator to represent the programme theory diagrammatically. The illustration of Snakes and Ladders (Figure 7) serves as a powerful metaphor for the unequal structures and outcomes inherent in higher education. It represents the academic journey not as a level playing field, but as a game where progress is often shaped by systemic privilege or disadvantage. Ladders symbolise the supports and advantages that some students experience, such as financial security, cultural familiarity, or representation, enabling them to climb more easily, while snakes represent the barriers disproportionately faced by marginalised groups, including racism, inaccessible environments, inconsistent assessment practices, and lack of institutional support. The use of loaded dice further emphasises the impact of intersectional identities, as students from underrepresented backgrounds do not roll the same dice as their more privileged peers, making it harder to progress and more likely to encounter setbacks. This metaphor challenges the assumption that academic success is purely merit based, highlighting instead how structural inequalities shape educational trajectories. It calls on the institution not merely to support students in navigating the game, but to fundamentally question and reshape the board itself.



**Figure 6.: Final programme theory**



**Figure 7: Final programme theory as illustration**

## What is already working?

There are many schemes and interventions already in existence at the University that go some way towards addressing the issues raised within this study (see appendi 1). Some

students may not be aware of the existing initiatives, some may choose not to access them, or there may not be sufficient resource to assist all students.

Over the period of data collection for this study, the University has introduced several targeted initiatives in direct response to this data and the ongoing work around access and success, and assessment. These include:

- **Student Voice Strategy:** Co-developed with the Students' Union, this strategy aims to ensure students feel seen, heard, and empowered across the institution.
- **Representation Toolkit:** Focuses on embedding racial and disability representation within curricula and assessment practices, using principles of universal design.
- **Assessment for the Future (AFF):** Strategic change project running projects to ensure more inclusive assessment methods, such as optionality in formats, and better feedback tools to improve student confidence.

These efforts mark important progress, but more structural and systemic changes are needed to close the attainment gap, thus we present recommendations below.

## What do we recommend?

The full recommendations mapped to the themes within the findings is provided at the end of this summary report (appendix 2). Some recommendations may seem obvious or being occurring in places, however, students report variable experiences. In sum, to reduce DA and create a more equitable academic experience, the following actions are recommended:

- **Boost financial support:** Expand scholarships, bursaries, and hardship funding to relieve financial burdens on students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Enhance mental health provision:** Provide culturally aware counselling and reduce waiting times to help students access timely and appropriate support.
- **Increase diversity in staff and content:** Hire more racially diverse staff and decolonise the curriculum to reflect the lived experiences of all students.
- **Improve accessibility:** Make physical and digital spaces more inclusive for students with visible and invisible disabilities, and train staff accordingly.
- **Support international students:** Offer targeted orientation, academic tutoring, and cultural integration activities to ease their transition into the UK system.
- **Reform assessment:** Standardise marking, ensure transparency, and promote flexibility in how students are evaluated.
- **Promote inclusive employability:** Increase access to placements, mentoring, and career support for underrepresented students.

## How are we sharing this work?

This work will be shared widely amongst the University of Manchester, and higher education community. Creative outputs, including talk-show panels, infographics, and poetry have been developed to engage a diverse audience in the important findings of this work. Further, the use of creative approaches enables confronting issues to be presented in a less adversarial manner.

- Soundcloud UoM Voiced Poetry: <https://soundcloud.com/uom-voiced-poetry>

- Multimedia content, including [student panel videos](#) and [animations](#), relating to this project can be accessed using the hyperlinks.

Below are some of the formal academic outputs to date:

- From Gap to Growth: A Realist Evaluation of Differential Attainment. Assessment in Higher Education (AHE) Conference, Manchester, UK, June 19 & 20, 2025.
- Birds of a feather DO NOT flock together: the nuances of black students' experience and attainment at University of Manchester." Assessment in Higher Education (AHE) Conference, Manchester, UK, Thurs 22 June, 2023.
- A realist evaluation exploring differential attainment in health professions education. Association for the Study of Medical Education conference 'Developing a diverse workforce' 12th July 2023, Birmingham, UK.
- A realist evaluation exploring differential attainment in health professions education. The Clinical Teacher: Volume 20, Issue S1. Special Issue: Annual Scholarship Meeting 2023 - Developing a Diverse Workforce.
- <https://asmepublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/tct.13657>
- Brown, M. E., & Finn, G. (2024). Shut up, or Set Free: Poetic Inquiry into Disabled
- Students' Experiences of Differential Attainment. Perspectives on medical education, 13(1), 561. <https://pmejournal.org/articles/10.5334/pme.1392>

In table 1, we present a collection of poems were written by Professor Gabrielle Finn and Dr Megan Brown, before being recorded by Dr Emmanuel Oladipo, a member of academic staff, former student., and spoken word poet. The recordings can be found [here](#). The individual links to each recording can be found by clicking the link on each title below. The poems were created through a secondary analysis of the data and provide a critical, emotionally resonant exploration of DA using poetic inquiry. The methodology for this poetic inquiry is available within the full report.

<p><b><u>Over a wall</u></b></p> <p>I am over a wall they built.</p> <p>I am behind and below</p> <p>and cannot see what they see</p> <p>but what they see is “unsatisfactory”.</p>	<p><b>First in family</b></p> <p>First in family – I should feel pride. But confusion crowds the steps inside, No one to guide, no map, no clue. The climb is lonely, but I break through.</p>
<p><b><u>Not this, but that.</u></b></p> <p>Not dropped out, but thrown out. Not silence, but noise. Not passion, but overwhelm. Not brief, but detailed.</p>	<p><b><u>Accessing support is...</u></b></p> <p>Hearing a passed-down whisper, or hearing nothing at all.</p>

<p>Not guided, but indefinite. Not enough, never enough.</p> <p>Not accessible, Not supported, Not more than one thing. Not me, but here.</p>	
<p><u><a href="#">“If you try hard, you will do well”</a></u></p> <p>I became strange when all my symptoms lined up. I became forgotten in huge competition, lingering in my head. Not knowing how to do well. Tackling! Forcing! Struggling! The impossible cost</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Starting, failing</a></u></p> <p>I started, Not keeping up, I failed. Not speaking up. I started, Living backwards, I failed. An old half. I started, Looking for help, I failed. Not able to talk.</p> <p>“Just say the word!” Just say the word. But with everything, I couldn’t.</p>
<p><u><a href="#">My Thing</a></u></p> <p>Ya know that’s my thing; Struggling.</p> <p>I’m trying to make me better – social, but what if I can’t?</p> <p>What if no matter how much help I get There is always Struggle Holding me back?</p>	<p><b>I am not your deficit</b></p> <p>Don’t reduce me to a gap on your dashboard. A percentage point on your action plan. I am not your deficit. I am not the problem you whisper about in strategy meetings, the ‘hard-to-reach’ student you never reached for. I am here. Complex. Brilliant in ways your rubrics never learned to read. You say “evidence-based.” Here’s your evidence: I worked two jobs, navigated racism in silence, and still showed up. Not for your stats. Not for your league tables. But for me. So don’t call me a data point when you never asked for the story behind the number.</p>

**Table 1: Student voiced poetry.**

N.B: Those with blue underlined titles have accompanying recordings that can be accessed by clicking on the hyperlink.





## **Appendix 1: What are we already doing?**

### **Our Access and Participation Plan (APP) and supporting student success:**

- Our new APP includes targets, objectives and interventions directly designed to support students with success - particularly those from underrepresented, marginalised and global majority backgrounds.
- Alongside the TEF, the APP seeks to ensure positive outcomes for all, bringing together all areas of the University for a whole institution approach to achieve this.
- The APP includes specific calls to action to improve, innovate and introduce new interventions, policies and accountability to address our award gaps for both Black, South Asian Heritage and Disabled Students

### **Updating and improving our financial support model:**

- We've increased the bursary amount we provide through the Manchester Bursary (MB) and the Undergraduate Access Scholarship (UAS) to help students meet the increased cost of living.
- For 2025E, we updated the thresholds for the Manchester Bursary to provide support for students reporting household/familial income of under £43K per annum
- We've piloted projects to support care leavers, sanctuary seekers and other communities in need of 52 week accommodation support with grants to support private summer accommodation costs.
- We've piloted a laptop voucher scheme for Manchester Bursary and other low income student communities in UG Year 0 and Year 1 to support digital equity in line with our new Digital Equity Policy.
- We continue to support low income students with a myriad of employability schemes, including our Work Experience Bursary.

### **Building community and sense of belonging:**

- Within our PS teams and our Faculties a variety of initiatives are under way and in development to support students with a sense of belonging, including our Manchester 10/10 programme.
- We've increased and improved our welcome offer for many student communities including BAME students, commuter students and more.
- We have opened a new Commuter Student Space on Floor 4 of the Booth Street East Building and are working with the Commuter Society to ensure the space continues to meet the needs of our commuter students.
- FSE launched the Student Experience Action Fund to provide funding and support for students seeking to run their own community events.

### **Involving students in our work:**

- The University and the University of Manchester Students' Union continue to work closely together on amplifying and incorporating the voice of our BAME student communities across the institution.
- A number of the Faculties have now Student Partner Interns (SPIs) representing different ethnicities within our BAME student community who are undertaking projects to explore how we can uplift, support and maximise the

academic and co-curricular experience of our BAME students, both Home and International.

- Our Faculties have also been engaging in action to support our neuro divergent students. For example, FSE has increased the SPI work to include the neurodiverse student community with the aim of community building and improving our welcome offer.
- The University of Manchester Library Student Team are a diverse and representative cohort of students that are full partners in all teaching and learning activity in the Library.

#### **Supporting academic and personal skills development:**

- Through a myriad of initiatives we are supporting students to improve confidence in their academic and personal skills development, including providing bespoke additional activity for some BAME student success initiatives.
- Within our belonging and coaching schemes like Manchester 10/10, the Black Leadership Programme and Grow Beyond Limits, we have provided students workshops on employability, personal branding, leadership, study and revision, and referencing.
- We are working to better understand engagement in Peer Support by demographic and other metrics.
- Using internal and external research and targeted intervention to improve BAME participation careers and employability initiatives like global graduates, Team Rwanda and opportunities like study abroad

#### **Addressing student wellbeing:**

- The GM Universities Mental Health Service continues to provide UoM students with access to an integrated single referral pathway for students to access mental health support, whether they have existing conditions or develop problems during their university career.
- The Six Ways to Wellbeing Scheme has provided students with advice and suggestions on how they can engage in small actions that help them with their wellbeing.
- The exam breakfast offer is embedded across the university providing students with free breakfast items during the exam window and additional drop-ins with wellbeing staff.

#### **Research, and monitoring and evaluation:**

- We are committed to using existing data and research (both quantitative and qualitative) to improve student success and the broader student experience.
- We have created a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for access and success activity to improve the quality of intervention design, delivery and evaluation.
- We have been working to ensure the student voice is incorporated into intervention design where possible. We have also looked to create opportunities for student co-creation.
- Our Strategic ITL Fellowship-led Evaluation and Impact Project was created to ensure the Theory of Change model is used to support the measurement and reporting of teaching practice.

#### **Supporting our staff to support our students:**

- In our new APP we have committed to reviewing and revising our current academic advising model to improve our ability to provide tailored guidance and comprehensive support.
- Our Faculties are working with students to improve representation and diversity in our curriculum. For example, using a peer support programme; Peer Action Learning, FSE teaching staff have worked with staff and students to review course units with an aim to embed inclusivity within the curriculum, and Humanities has launched a Hidden Curriculum Project.
- Seas of the University have introduced Inclusion of UKAT training to support academic advisors in working with diverse communities.
- CANVAS templates have been designed based on student feedback with staff being supported by eLearning teams to ensure online teaching materials are consistently and clearly presented to aid accessibility for students.

## Appendix 2: What do we recommend?

Theme	Recommendations	Action Plan
<b>Academic Support and Learning Resources</b>	Develop studying spaces that are suitable for all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct audit of study spaces to ensure that they are fit for purpose for all students (taking into consideration the needs of disabled and neurodivergent students and staff). Allow students to participate in this process for a holistic approach.</li> <li>• Develop more quiet zones and focus on acoustic improvements (e.g. noise-dampening materials) to reduce ambient noise.</li> <li>• Designate sensory-friendly spaces that consider lighting, ambient noise and reduced crowds.</li> <li>• Provide more spaces that are open later, as many students work and need the additional time to study.</li> <li>• Integrate environmental well-being (e.g. quiet areas, sensory spaces, etc.) into mental health strategy</li> </ul>
	Make learning materials and recordings available to all students (not just DASS registered students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all lectures are recorded and available so that anyone can view them.</li> </ul>
	Develop more opportunities to introduce students to the higher education environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate important onboarding information throughout the academic year to avoid bombarding students during welcome and induction activities. This also supports students who join late.</li> </ul>
	Develop targeted support systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish support groups where students can share experiences and strategies for overcoming self-doubt.</li> </ul>
	Develop Introductory sessions for new students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are not clear on the expectations of university study when they begin, thus creating clear communication systems around what the expectations are related to study, resources, and tools available needs to be prioritised.</li> <li>• Create more opportunities later in the year to introduce students to what Manchester has to offer, this reduces</li> </ul>

		the fear of “missing out” if you don’t engage at the start of the year.
<b>Representation, Mentoring and Pastoral Support</b>	Hire lecturers and staff from underrepresented groups e.g., Black, Asian and Disabled to increase diversity within the workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review diversity initiatives to ensure that underrepresented groups are hired in all areas of the University.</li> <li>• Encourage staff to share their backgrounds with students as students want to interact with people who ‘look, think, and sound’ like them</li> <li>• Review diversity initiatives to ensure that underrepresented groups are hired in all areas of the University, especially those where underrepresentation is a prominent issue.</li> <li>• Hiring panels should also be diverse to enhance fair hiring practices.</li> </ul>
	Increase inclusive student social events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create events that are not centred around alcohol use</li> <li>• More lunchtime events to ensure commuter and students with caring responsibility can attend.</li> </ul>
	Mentorship programs should be reflective of the diversity of the University.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a diverse environment where students see themselves reflected in the staff members that they engage with; this can also include developing visible role models for underrepresented groups.</li> <li>• Create mentorship programs that pair international and minority students with senior peers or faculty members who have overcome similar challenges.</li> <li>• Reverse mentoring to upskill senior colleagues.</li> </ul>
	Provide support opportunities that are less formal and provide expedient support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up a help booth in the heart of the campus, such as an outdoor prominent position on Oxford Road, to signpost students to support services and rapidly deal with queries.</li> <li>• Reform student support services to focus on helping students flourish, not just avoid failure.</li> </ul>
	Improve communications to students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a programme of work with the Communications team and student content creators which portrays the experiences of minoritised student groups. For</li> </ul>



		example, many colleagues are unaware of the additional pressure's sponsorship leads to for student recipients.
	Culturally inclusive design approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and redesign the displayed artwork and displays to reflect the diversity of the university population.</li> </ul>
	Enhance cultural competency in student support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student support officers should be as diverse as the student population to ensure that students can discuss problems with individuals who understand their unique circumstances.</li> <li>• Ensure that mental health support is appropriate for all cultures.</li> </ul>
	Promote disability disclosure and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a safe space for students to disclose disabilities with clear communication to showcase how they will be supported (academics can also inform others on the sunflower lanyard system)</li> </ul>
	Enhance support systems for students with caring responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a formalised system of support, offering the option for flexible study e.g. offering extensions, remote work options or subsidised childcare services.</li> </ul>
	Culturally sensitive services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer access to services that cater to all cultures e.g., related to hair care, culturally specific dietary options, etc. in university owned facilities and student unions.</li> </ul>
<b>International Student Experience</b>	Provide assistance and guidance to those who are new to the UK education system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce more targeted academic mentoring and support schemes designed to address the barriers that students face including access to resources, fostering a sense of belonging, English language support, financial guidance, etc.</li> <li>• Provide academic transition assistance to international students who are unfamiliar with the UK system.</li> <li>• Focus on national and ethnic differences when developing support programs.</li> <li>• Develop language confidence building workshops where students can practice their speaking skills in a supportive environment.</li> </ul>

	Provide support in languages other than English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider providing pivotal information for international students setting up in the UK in languages other than English. This might include banking, registering with healthcare providers, or visa requirements.</li> </ul>
	Create introductory sessions focused on life in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International students require assistance with basic living requirements in the UK, surrounding for example, payment systems (banking), putting household bins out on the curb, GP registration, etc. which are often overlooked.</li> </ul>
	Create an International Student Help Desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a place where students can easily come to discuss academic and non-academic problems.</li> </ul>
	Reduce burden in first few weeks at university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International students struggle with the administrative and regulatory requirements in the first weeks at university, setting up a 'one stop shop' for all these requirements would ease the burden.</li> </ul>
	Provide targeted employability support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International student should have a unique and targeted approach to improving their employability due to visa restrictions. This should support their transition into the workforce.</li> </ul>
<b>Bursaries, Scholarships and Financial Support</b>	Provide university subsidised options for the basic needs of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheaper food options on campus.</li> <li>Providing free or affordable societies, collectives, and events.</li> </ul>
	Review the bursary payments provided to students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the bursary payments provided to students.</li> <li>Expand access to emergency fund support.</li> <li>Develop financial literacy workshops where students can develop their understanding of budgeting and their options for work during study.</li> <li>Provide stipends to Widening Participation students at the start or during semesters to alleviate financial stress.</li> </ul>
	Provide more paid opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide students with more research and industry-based projects which are paid, as this would aid in future employability and reduce financial pressures.</li> </ul>
<b>Student Accommodation</b>	Provide adequate housing for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase capacity of student housing offered by the University.</li> </ul>

	Improve accommodation quality and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure maintenance of accommodation is improved so that the burden is not left on the student.</li> </ul>
	Current accommodation offered to students meets their basic hierarchy of needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit the current facilities to ensure that students can study within their rooms.</li> </ul>
	Adjust bursary payment schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust initial payment schedule to align with payments that are required for housing.</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum and Assessment</b>	Ensure assessment feedback is standardised within a course and increase the level of constructive feedback to ensure that students can progressively improve during their course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit current assessment policies to highlight inconsistencies in marking and feedback.</li> <li>• Academics should be given adequate resources to provide this feedback.</li> <li>• Provide formative feedback throughout the semester.</li> <li>• Assessment induction provided at the beginning of a course.</li> <li>• Hire more teaching assistants to reduce the marking burden on academics.</li> <li>• Advocate for fairer evaluation methods that do not disproportionately disadvantage minority students.</li> </ul>
	Standardise the feedback given between Schools/Faculties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise meetings where program directors create a standardised approach to feedback and assessments.</li> <li>• Publish detailed assessment information publicly.</li> <li>• Provide student clear explanations of the purpose of feedback and focus on actionable improvements.</li> <li>• Implement a feedback tracking system where students can compare past feedback across modules to identify patterns for improvement.</li> <li>• Develop feedback guidance support and training for students and staff.</li> </ul>
	Improve clarity surrounding mitigating circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communication about mitigating circumstances policies to ensure students understand their options.</li> </ul>
	Improve Accessibility in Timetables and Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardise timetables to be accessible, avoiding bright colours and ensuring chronological clarity.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide multiple formats (text-based, visual, digital) for timetables and key documents to accommodate different needs.</li> <li>• Make unspoken academic expectations explicit, as disabled students often struggle with navigating unwritten rules.</li> </ul>
	Create introductory material to assessment and study in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research led teaching is not the norm in all countries, thus, it would help students (particularly PGT/PGR) to have information provided that explains the UK ethos around teaching and assessment.</li> </ul>
	Enhance diversity and equity of curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce diversity into course curriculum to align with Student Union's Decolonise the Curriculum Strategy</li> </ul>
<b>Communication Strategies and Staff Training</b>	Develop effective communication channels with students to receive timely feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop streamlined student communication plan.</li> <li>• Organise Town-Hall style open meetings with students and staff where student concerns can be heard.</li> <li>• Develop a feedback approach for underrepresented groups to ensure that their voices are heard.</li> </ul>
	Develop a university wide approach to communicating support services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadcast the support that is available and focus on engaging underrepresented communities.</li> <li>• Engage staff in improving transparency of support services and to normalise the use of these services.</li> </ul>
	Create student voice feedback loop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a space where students can provide feedback around the university services offered to ensure that the University receives timely feedback.</li> </ul>
	Develop Awareness and Staff Training on Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement regular training programs for staff that showcases the unique needs that students with disabilities have, especially students with hidden disabilities or mental health issues.</li> <li>• Offer training for staff on creating accessible materials and engaging disabled students in co-designing learning resources.</li> </ul>

	Create reporting and monitoring of differential attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop routine reporting for differential attainment and awarding gaps and showcase solutions to staff.</li> <li>• Develop metrics that showcase differential attainment so that decisions are data driven.</li> </ul>
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