



Coventry
University

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‘Time for change’ - findings from four action orientated projects to improve the progression and degree attainment of widening participation students in HE.



Courses



Business



Research



International



News and Events



Alumni



The City



The University





“Coventry is an evolving and innovative university”

The University

- ▶ **About us**
 - History
- ▶ Our campus
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About the University

We are a forward-looking, modern university with a proud tradition as a provider of high quality education and a focus on applied research.

Our students benefit from state-of-the-art equipment and facilities in all academic disciplines including health, design and engineering laboratories, performing arts studios and computing centres. We have been chosen to host three national Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning which has enabled us to invest substantial sums of money in health, design and mathematics.

Our city-centre campus is continually developing and evolving, and we have plans for further investment in it over the next few years. We are a major presence in Coventry, which contributes to the city's friendly and vibrant atmosphere and also enables us to foster successful business partnerships.

Through our links with leading edge businesses and organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, our students are able to access project and placement opportunities that enhance their employability on graduation.



2010-15 Mission Statement

‘We are a dynamic global enterprising University. We work in partnership with external organisations through our research and engage our students as partners in a community of learners.’





- About me...

- Background
- Current interests
- Applied Research Fellowship



The Open
University



Session aims

- To briefly set the UK context for Widening Participation
- To examine models of explanation for lower progression and achievement
- To explore the findings of four action research projects at Coventry
- To reflect on a model of change

The UK HE Sector

- 250,000 students each year
- 18,000 do not continue
- 7.4 per cent
- Coventry = 200 students/approx 9 per cent



The UK/Coventry context

- The Dearing Report 1997
- Widening participation
- Non-continuation rates more like 20 per cent



Current Economic and Political Climate



- Public sector facing substantial cuts from 2010 irrespective of who is in Government
- HE is not immune – cuts of up to 20% anticipated through to 2013. Phasing not known
- Lord Mandelson “In a more constrained public spending environment, some will argue we will have to choose between excellence and opportunity. This Government rejects the need to make this choice...The Government will not relent on its commitment to wider participation and fair access to our universities.”

What do we know about our WP students?



Low SES groups

- UK 50% - 29% in HE
- Australia 25% - 15% in HE
- Less economic benefit
- Live at home, debt issues, work, less study, high drop out
- Social engineering
- Troublesome
- £231 million in 2009/10
- \$433AU/four years

One solution: only take on students who are likely to stay the course.



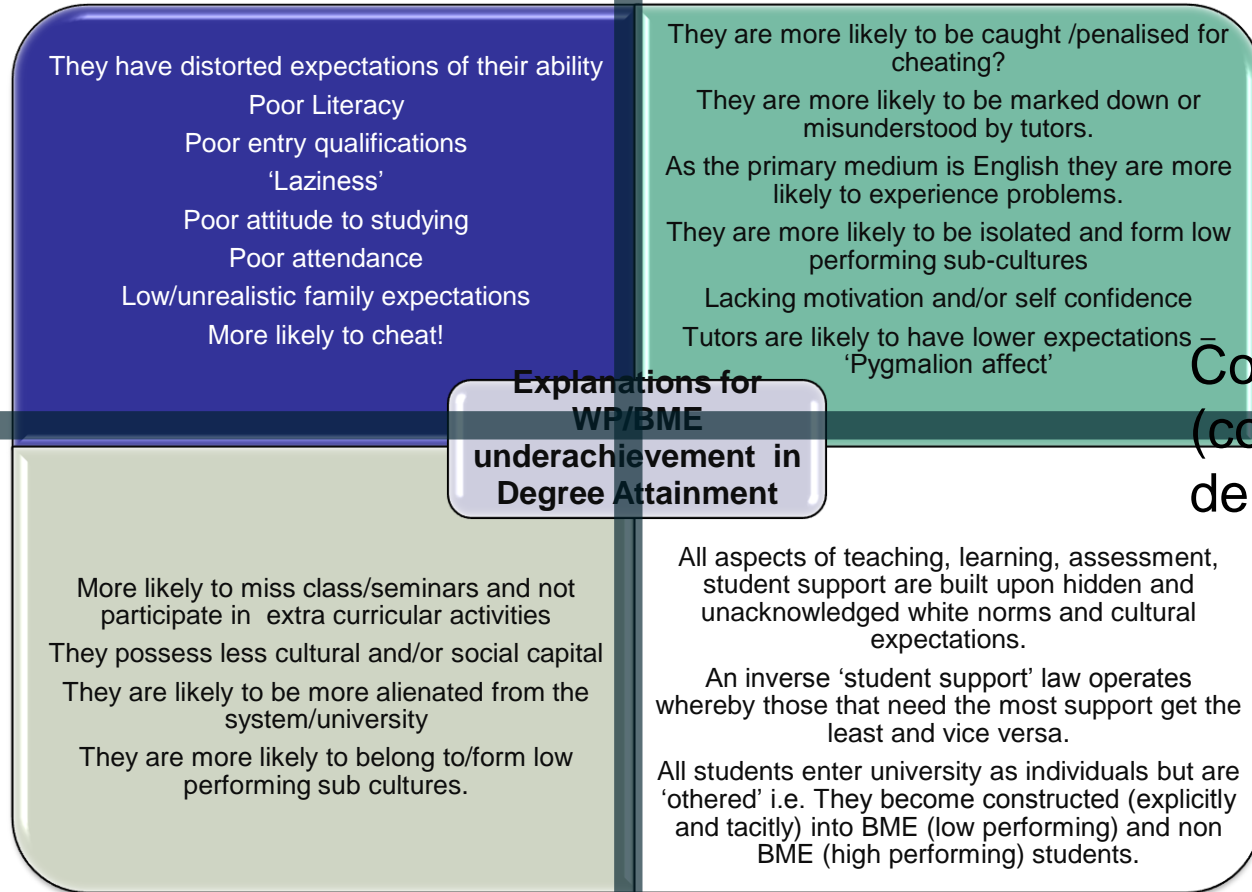
WP Case study

- 2008 Report
- “...even after controlling for the majority of contributing factors, being in a minority ethnic group was still found to have a statistically significant and negative effect on degree attainment” (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007)
- HEA Summit programme

Why do WP/BME students do less well than 'standard entry'/'white' students i.e. how can we explain the gap in degree attainment?

- If we assume that the statistics are in fact highlighting a phenomena, then we can posit 2 broad hypothesis to explain the causes.
 - It is due to individual factors
 - It is due to structural factors
- Each one of these can be examined in terms of essentialist and constructivist conceptions of WP/BME students

Individual



Challenging assumptions about BME students and differential degree attainment

Group Work Task

For each of the 4 broad explanations for the gap in degree attainment, consider briefly:

- How plausible is this explanation?
- Why might this be happening?
- How does this compare to my institution's perspective?
- What are the implications and challenges for:
 - research?
 - policy?
 - practice?

The issue

BME attainment at Coventry

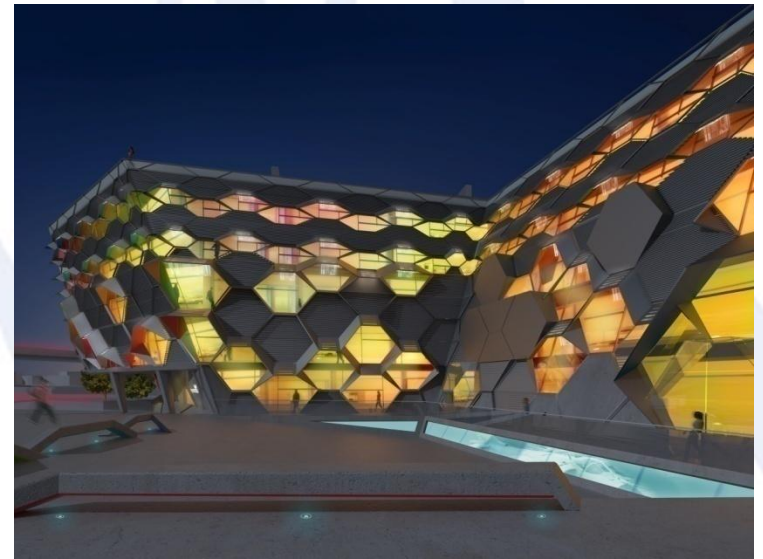
Projects in brief

The Library

Economics, Finance and
Accounting

Biomolecular and Sports
Science

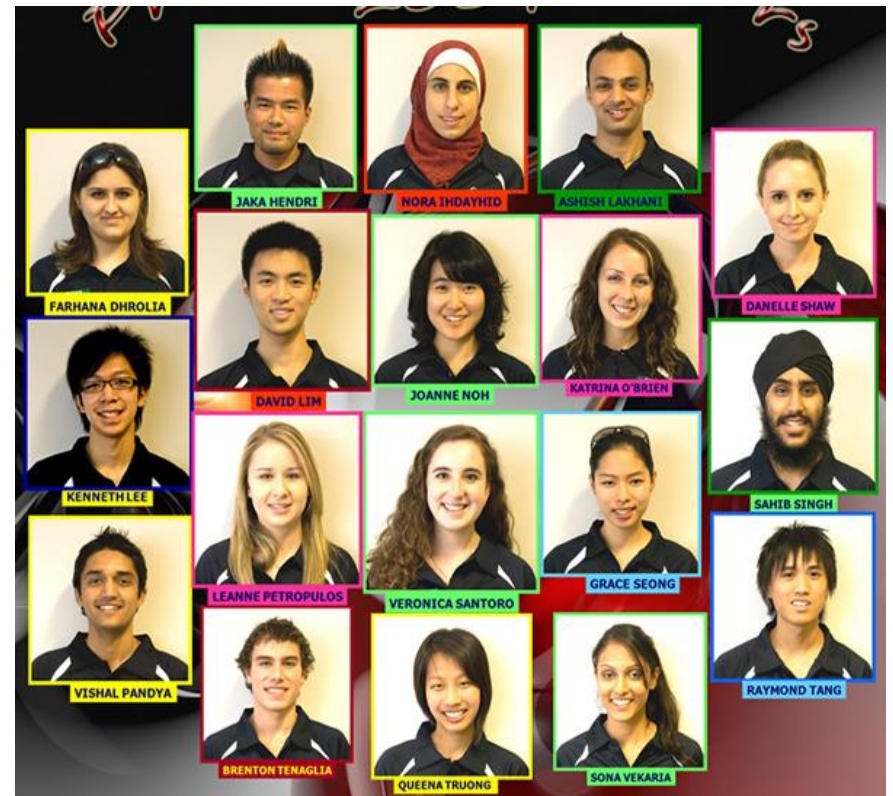
Computing and the Digital
Environment



- Tackling the issue
 - A strategic approach
 - E&D committee
 - Summit Programme
 - Community – cuba.coventry.ac.uk/
 - Mini projects
 - National Conference
 - National Teaching Fellow/PhD students

The library: Develop inclusive student mentoring support services

- Avoid any suggestion that academic support is only for 'failing students'.
- Recruit and train mentors from different backgrounds.
- Most effective mentors are ones that facilitate best academic practices.
- Use mentors to inform your pedagogical strategies.



Economics, Finance and Accounting: Recognise that teacher bias is real and take steps to reduce/eliminate this.

“There are many determinants of a teacher's expectation of her pupils' intellectual ability. Even before a teacher has seen a pupil deal with academic tasks she is likely to have some expectation for his behaviour. If she is to teach a 'slow group,' or children of darker skin colour, or children whose mothers are 'on welfare,' she will have different expectations for her pupils' performance than if she is to teach a 'fast group,' or children of an upper-middle-class community. Before she has seen a child perform, she may have seen his score on an achievement or ability test or his last years' grades, or she may have access to the less formal information that constitutes the child's reputation. (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968 p. viii).

- Try to maximise ethnic mix in teaching and assessment teams
- Invite reflection on potential teacher bias (e.g. Through peer review, external examiners, student feedback)
- Diversify assessment methods.

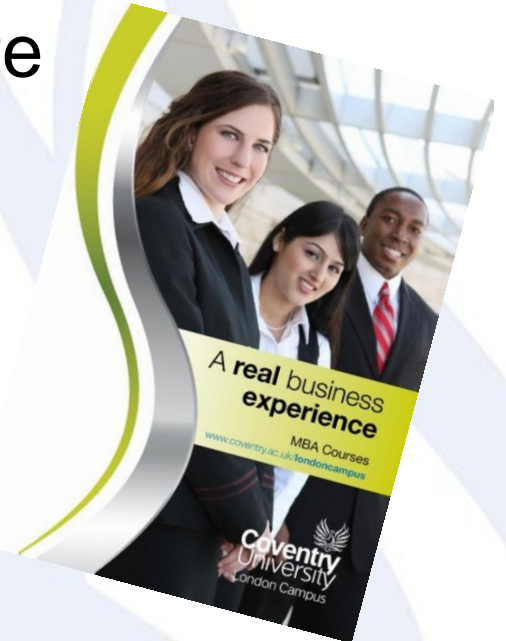


Biomolecular and Sports Science: Counteract the 'inverse support law'

- Provide proactive support for students.
- Consider technological solutions e.g. Video capture, module guides/readers provision ICT equipment.
- Manage expectations for equality.
- Manage make-up of group work projects to avoid segregation in class.



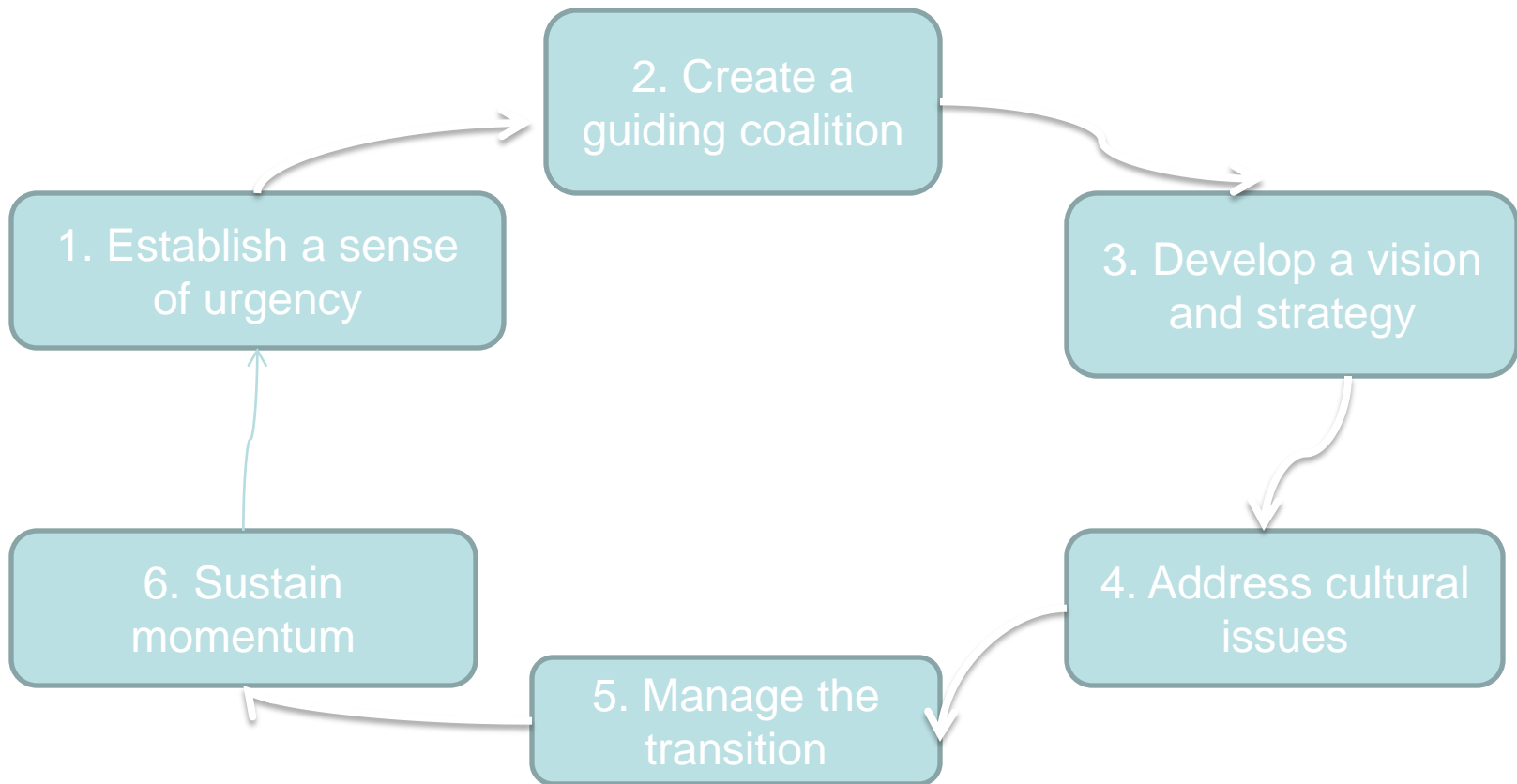
- Computing and the Digital Environment
 - Developing a pre-course website
 - Developing learners
 - Encouraging group work
 - Meeting others
 - Associating with the University



Achieving institutional change

- Staff as gatekeepers and drivers
- Tackle the issue at all levels
- Support and community

Six-step model of change (Mabey, 2003)



Step 1: establish a sense of urgency

- Task: list six reasons why your department might be too complacent and fail to see an urgent need for change their attitude towards WP students
- You might have included: poor evidence/statistics, fear of being called 'racist', need for cover-up, fear of rocking the boat, 'happy talk' among senior managers, perceived inability to deal with the issue, lack of ownership – someone else's problem, aversion to risk, too comfortable, preoccupation with fire fighting.

Step 2: create a guiding coalition

- List the key individuals associated to this change situation
- Rank them on two dimensions: importance and likely alignment with your change objectives.
- Place them in one or other of the four cells in the matrix

	Low importance	High importance
Oppose	Problematic	Antagonists
support	Low priority	Advocates

Step 3: develop a vision and strategy

- Task: list reasons why individuals in your department might fail to identify with the strategic vision and intent of improving the degree attainment of BME students.
- Things you might have said...insufficient personal benefit from its successful outcome, might mean personal loss, scepticism as to whether it can be fulfilled, requires too great a sacrifice and too much investment, fails to inspire, other pressing issues, feel it was imposed without consultation, someone else's problem

Step 5: manage the transition

- Ambiguity regarding roles etc.
- Natural desire for the status quo
- Need to for more regular feedback

- Task: as the 'change agent/champion' for your department what kind of skills do you think you will need to manage the transition?

Key skills of change agents

- Issue awareness
- Sound judgement
- Analytical ability
- Self-awareness
- Interpersonal skills
- Consultancy skills
- Influencing skills
- Leadership skills
- Process skills

Step 6: sustain momentum

- Identify the criteria for success
- Identify milestones in the change process
- Feed back positive outcomes
- Revisit stages if things aren't going to plan
- Keep it high on the agenda
- Ensure policies and procedures are embedded
- Normalise the issue

Improving WP/BME student attainment - Key Issues

1. How do I conceptualise the problem and has this changed?
2. How does the institution conceptualise the problem and has this changed?
3. What is my resolve to make a difference?
4. What is my institutions resolve to make a difference?
5. What is the most effective way to enable individuals to change?
6. What is the most effective way to change the institution?
7. What are the levers for change, internal and external?
8. What is the role/responsibility of front line staff?
9. What is the role of leaders?
10. How will we know when real change has taken place?



Final Thoughts

- "The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a 'circle of certainty' within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side."
- *Paulo Freire (1976) Pedagogy of the Oppressed*