



Transforming Student Experience: A Holistic Approach to Addressing the Degree Awarding Gap

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Abstract

The degree awarding gap (DAG), defined as disparities in academic outcomes across student demographics, remains a persistent and stubborn feature of UK higher education, shaped by intersecting structural, institutional and individual factors (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015). Despite sustained sector-wide attention, progress in reducing the DAG has been limited, highlighting the shortcomings of fragmented, short-term and often deficit-oriented interventions. Addressing this complexity requires a coherent, whole-school approach. Within the School of Biosciences and Chemistry at Sheffield Hallam University, the Hubbard and Gawthorpe Inclusive Education Framework (Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2024) was adopted to align initiatives across key domains, including curriculum, assessment, institutional processes and student belonging. Grounded in culturally responsive pedagogies, this work seeks to challenge exclusionary practices by embedding equality, diversity and inclusion across the student experience through outreach, peer-led networks, visible role models, and inclusive curriculum and assessment design. The work presented here critically reflects on selected initiatives and their impact, while acknowledging the limitations of localised change and arguing that meaningful progress requires sustained institutional commitment, shared accountability, and structural transformation.

Keywords

degree awarding gap, belonging, inclusive education, curriculum design, higher education

References

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