SEDA Grant holder: Project Abstract

**Centering the voices of our BAME students towards creating a more inclusive learning environment**

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Background: We formed a staff-student partnership working group at the Sheffield Medical School in response to the Black Lives Movement (BLM) and worked together to conduct a mixed-method study to explore student experiences with regard to belongingness and equity of experiences. We administered a survey that was completed by 262 Medical students in all years (January-March 2021; 26% response rate) and conducted three focus groups (April-September 2021). Students shared their personal experiences with racial equality in their learning environment and their views on how these inequalities could be addressed.

We used the study findings to facilitate discussions in the working groups to derive key recommendations that will improve equity in learning environments. These recommendations were shared via the Medical Schools Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee and incorporated into the department’s race equality remit. Some of these recommendations include:

* An investment into staff development activities that improve staff confidence of what inclusive practices means, how to hold themselves and colleagues to account; and to support students.
* The Curricula needs to be decolonised to reflect the diversity of its various stakeholders
* Staff and student inductions need to explicitly incorporate stance on antiracism – that racism is unacceptable.
* A transparent raising concerns process that is safe to use with speak up champions with lived experiences of racism and discrimination to support this.

One of the outcomes based on these recommendations was improving visibility and support for reporting racial discrimination. This included revising the current reporting process by introducing an anonymous reporting option as well as training students as ‘speak out champions’ to support others with safe reporting.

Another area that has taken off is around decolonising the curriculum which has led to the organisation of a face-to face event for staff to share best practice with decolonising the curriculum in our school and bring people together to discuss challenges and opportunities.

Finally, we utilised the study findings to develop a freely accessible, interactive eLearning resource for staff. This was supported by the SEDA funding. The resource has the following aims: 1) raise awareness about racial inequalities in the learning environment that impact on students' sense of belonging and 2) Examine and reflect on one’s own practice in relation to facilitating an inclusive learning environment and 3) Identify strategies to address inequalities in the learning environment. The resource uses case-based learning to explore unconscious bias and microaggressions that impact on the students’ sense of belonging in their learning environment and build skills to promote inclusion.

We are currently developing a plan to evaluate what impact the resource has on improving current practice to become more inclusive and hence promote belongingness for all students.