



# **Student Mental Wellbeing within our BAME and LGBTQ+ Learner Communities: Collaborative Cluster Final Report**

**July 2021**

**Dr Heather Gray, Head of Physiotherapy & Paramedicine, Glasgow  
Caledonian University (Project Lead)**

**Rachel Simpson, Project Officer for Student Mental Health,  
Glasgow Caledonian University (Deputy Project Lead)**

## Context and background

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, research highlighted that one in four students experienced a mental health difficulty, with 71% reporting that academic work from university was their main sources of stress (Brown, 2016). The pandemic has had significant impacts on mental health and wellbeing, with young people evidencing higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Wang et al, 2020), 83% expressing worsening of pre-existing mental health conditions (YoungMinds, 2020) and a rise in isolation-induced loneliness (a recognised suicide risk) (Grubic et al, 2020).

In addition to the influence of the pandemic, students with protected characteristics such as ethnicity (in particular Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic [BAME]) and gender/sexual identity (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and others [LGBTQ+]) are further impacted negatively regarding student mental wellbeing and sense of belonging.

The main, and indeed only guaranteed, point of contact between a University and students is through the academic learning experience, and the impacts of this on health and wellbeing should be considered. Systematic review evidence shows that an inclusive curriculum that enhances both the way students learn, and academics teach, promotes mental wellbeing (Fernandez et al, 2016), and the design of the curriculum has a significant impact on the way that students from different ethnicities respond to their course and academic staff. Therefore, universities need to consider the role of curricula, including the role of academic staff, in supporting good student mental wellbeing (Hughes et al, 2018).

Work conducted by UUK and NUS (2019) found that 42% of BAME students said that they did not feel that the curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination. They reported a lack of BAME-specific content and a 'mainstream' way of thinking, resulting in feelings of discomfort, isolation and a 'sense of not belonging'. The result is that, in the UK, white students are more likely attain 1st or 2:1 degree (81%) compared to BAME students (68%), highlighting the attainment gap, which is even more prevalent in STEM subjects (Joice & Tetlow, 2020). The lowest rates of continuation being amongst Black students (Keohane, 2017), culminating in a 'broken pipeline' to postgraduate and doctoral studies (Williams, et al., 2019). Additionally, Black people are more likely to drop out of science at all points of the career path (Joice & Tetlow, 2020).

When considering matters relating to gender/sexual identity and the curriculum, LGBTQ+ students also experience a wide range of barriers that can lead to isolation, poor mental health and low attainment. This is especially the case for Trans students, who are more likely to experience exclusion, bullying, harassment and violence (Stonewall, 2019; McKendry & Lawrence, 2017). 45% of LGBTQ+ students report that they have experienced mental health difficulties, twice the prevalence of their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Aronin & Smith, 2016). This can have a profound impact on them during their university studies, leading to approximately twice the 'dropout' rate amongst LGBTQ+ students compared their non-LGBTQ+ peers (University of Birmingham, 2017).

Furthermore, heterosexism and heteronormativity is prevalent in educational institutions (Hudson-Sharp & Metcalf, 2016). This affects inequality in a number of ways: it reinforces the alienation/exclusion of LGBTQ+ students; fails to check homophobia and biphobia; and leaves the support needs specific to LGBTQ+ students unaddressed. This evidence indicates a need for training for academic staff to address these issues.

Many BAME and LGBTQ+ curriculum development toolkits and guidance resources have been developed over the last decade; however, these have not universally been adopted, resulting in a rather piece-meal approach across the HE sector, with some Institutions

investing heavily in the co-creation and adoption of good practices, with others perhaps being slightly more tokenistic in their approach to date. Through inclusive teaching and learning practices, for example, by providing opportunities for students to work in diverse groups, learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills and understanding to succeed in global working environments (University College London [UCL], 2020). Furthermore, delivering an inclusive curriculum, sensitive to BAME and LGBTQ+ students, results in a positive effect on the experience and outcomes of all students, not just those with protected characteristics.

## Collaborative Cluster aim

The aim of this Collaborative Cluster was to build the capabilities of academic staff to create inclusive curricula and learning communities that promote a sense of belonging and mental wellbeing for students from our BAME and LGBTQ+ communities.

The key areas highlighted from the aforementioned literature upon which this Collaborative Cluster aimed to impact were:

- Staff knowledge and capabilities regarding creating inclusive curricula and learning communities;
- Staff and students' attitudes and beliefs;
- Institutional culture;
- Student (and staff) mental wellbeing.

## Terminology

As described in the Mental Health Continuum Model, mental health, mental wellbeing, and mental health problems are often used interchangeably, but differences in each of these should be understood and supported for individuals to experience optimal wellbeing. Mental health is often an umbrella term referring to mental wellbeing, and mental health problems, whereas a mental health problem refers to symptoms that meet the criteria for a clinical diagnosis. Mental wellbeing refers to an integrated and holistic approach in which other factors are considered, including life satisfaction, resilience, sense of control, and more. Therefore, for the purposes of this Cluster we used the holistic definition of mental wellbeing for our student communities, cognisant of the wider student learning experience.

Throughout this report the terms BAME and LGBTQ+ have been used. We have used these terms in alignment with existing sector research but are cognisant that neither of these communities are homogenous groups, and recognise that exploration and recommendations should be considered within the context of the intersectionality of identity.

## Project team

The project team's members are listed in the table below; its comprehensive membership included student representative bodies, academic staff, academic developers, development consultants, and a BAME postgraduate student. Three of the project team were also involved in the Collaborative Cluster on Decolonising the Curriculum in the Time of Pandemic. These are indicated with an asterisk in the table below.

Name	Role	Institution
<b>Heather Gray*</b> (Project Lead)	Head of Dept. Physiotherapy & Paramedicine	Glasgow Caledonian University
<b>Rachel Simpson</b> (Deputy Project Lead)	Project Officer for Student Mental Health	Glasgow Caledonian University

<b>Yazeed Qashwa</b> (Project Research Assistant)	BAME representative GCU International Student Ambassador	Glasgow Caledonian University
<b>Pauline Hanesworth</b>	Head of Learning & Teaching	SRUC
<b>Megan Brown</b>	Development Consultant	sparqs
<b>Stef Black</b>	Development Consultant (mat leave)	sparqs
<b>Katie Gilbert</b>	Student Health Project Co-ordinator	Think Positive about Student Mental Health (nus Scotland)
<b>Catriona Cunningham*</b>	Academic Development Partner	University of Stirling
<b>Marita Le Vaul-Grimwood*</b>	Academic Development Partner	Edinburgh Napier University

## Organisation of work

The project team, and sub-sets of it, had multiple team meetings to operationalise the project plan and organise the Professional Development webinars and nominal group. A Microsoft Teams site was established to facilitate communication/collaboration, host meetings, and act as a repository for resources sourced by the team.

## Deliverables

The key deliverables of the Collaborative Cluster were:

- 1 Four free to access professional development webinars with capacity for up to 300 delegates at each.
- 2 Collation and review of sector resources including those from professional development events (presentations, case studies, multimedia, briefing notes, or other materials) for uploading to the Enhancement Themes website.
- 3 Data collection and analysis from higher education student representatives to identify barriers to inclusive curricula and recommendations for academic staff.
- 4 Short project progress report, for submission to QAA Scotland, summarising status of agreed deliverables and outlining early findings of project.
- 5 Project report including summary of aims, activities, outputs, and outcomes, as well as key recommendations, and an evaluation of the project and its impact.
- 6 Presentation of paper or delivery of workshop based on work of project at a QAA event(s).

## Professional development webinars

In order to promote/advertise the professional development webinars the project team worked hard to disseminate information as broadly as possible via the following channels: QAA Scotland website/social media; NUS Scotland, sparqs and 'Think Positive about Student Mental Health' mailing lists/social media; project team's HEI's/Students' Associations' communication channels; personal contacts; SEDA@JISC and SHED@JISC mailing lists; and LinkedIn.

The webinars were scheduled monthly between March to June 2021 hosted using QAA Scotland's Zoom licence. Across all four webinars, there was a total of 814 registrants, with around 200 (range 196-210) per webinar. There were 600 attendees that joined the webinars live, with the remainder, presumably, accessing the recordings asynchronously later. Table 1 summarises the topics, speakers and registrant numbers. All webinar recordings, with accompanying presentation slides, are freely available on [QAA Scotland's Enhancement Themes website](#).

**Table 1: Webinar topics & speakers**

Webinar Date	Registrants	Event Focus	Speakers & Organisations*
3/3/21	210	Key issues that impact upon the mental wellbeing of BAME/ LGBTQ+ students	<b>Amatey Doku</b> NOUS Group Consultant  <b>Dominic Smithies</b> Student Minds
20/4/21	208	Issues impacting BAME/ LGBTQ+ students in STEM	<b>Katie Nicoll Baines</b> University of Edinburgh  <b>Lara Lalemi</b> University of Bristol
10/5/21	196	Issues impacting Trans students and BAME students & Paying for the work of racial equality in higher education	<b>Mel McKenna</b> Glasgow Caledonian University  <b>Sara Turkington</b> Ayrshire College  <b>Churnjeet Mahn</b> University of Strathclyde
10/6/21	200	Inclusive curriculum design principles & supporting the mental wellbeing of both staff & students	<b>Gareth Hughes</b> University of Derby/ Student Minds

\* See Appendix 1 for speakers' biographies and work

The webinars were organised specifically so that each one addressed content that represented issues from both BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities in recognition of potential intersectionalities. Across the four events there were seven presentations from eight presenters covering a wide variety of factors that can impact upon student mental wellbeing for BAME and LGBTQ+ students, such as: inclusivity in STEM subjects; undertaking a whole institutional approach for the student learning experience and curricula; the mental health impacts on BAME and LGBTQ+ students of teaching practices and curricula; and practical recommendations on how to meaningfully engage specific learner communities, e.g., Trans students.

The use of webinars, rather than face to face events, brings many advantages, such as widening access, engaging participants in chat and question and answer functions, and facilitating recording and curation. Therefore, it is recommended that these are continued in future professional development events, making use of ever-ongoing technological enhancements as they become available.

## Webinar evaluation questionnaire

A short Microsoft Forms evaluation questionnaire was sent to all webinar registrants after the final webinar in which they were asked to respond to questions on: a) their understanding of mental wellbeing within BAME/LGBTQ+ student communities following the webinar(s); and b) their confidence in taking some positive change action(s).

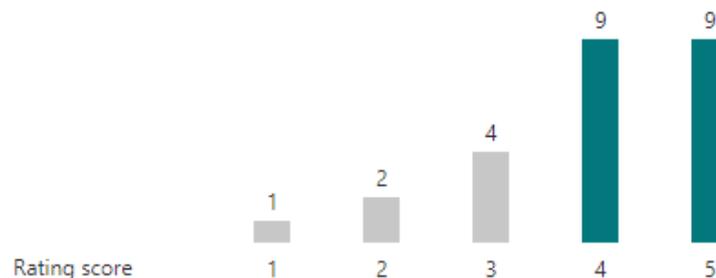
There were only 26 respondents to the questionnaire, representing a very low (4.3%) response rate; therefore, results should be considered with caution.

The survey indicated a continuing appetite and expressed need for work in this area to raise awareness of student mental wellbeing and disproportional impacts on student communities and to equip staff and students in designing inclusive curriculum through further events, resources, working groups and collaborative research.

### Increased understanding of mental wellbeing

When asked to respond to the question 'How much do you feel the session(s) increased your understanding of mental wellbeing within BAME/LGBTQ+ student communities? (Rate 1-5 stars)' 72% rated their response between 4-5, indicating that they felt they had attained knowledge and understanding of the topic area.

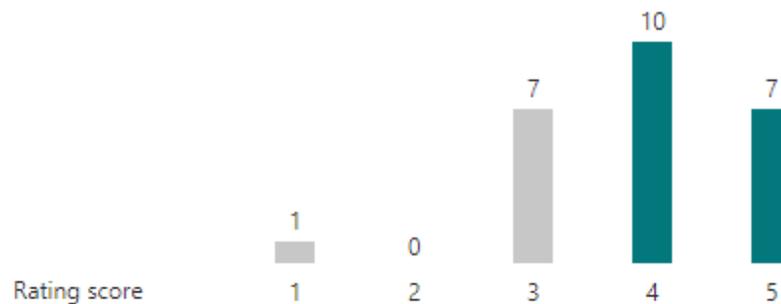
Score distribution



### Confidence in taking positive action(s)

When asked 'How confident do you feel in taking some positive action(s) that will enhance the mental wellbeing within BAME/LGBTQ+ student communities? (Rate 1-5 stars)', 68% rated their response between 4-5. This indicated that the majority felt that they would be confident to take some positive actions following the webinar(s).

Score distribution



## Key messages from webinars

Delegates found the sessions interesting and engaging with many positive comments, as per below:

- 'Lots of very practical advice, which felt really accessible and eminently do-able.'
- 'Really helpful discussions and very interesting research mentioned too.'
- 'Many key messages from excellent speakers.'
- 'Great speaker - very reassuring message. Backed up with professional staff and student facing resources.'
- 'I would like to attend more of these types of webinars.'
- 'Thank you so much for organising these webinars, they were very inspiring.'

Some key messages that delegates gained from the webinar(s) included:

- Developing more inclusive curricula.
- BAME and LGBTQ+ role models in Higher Education are essential.
- Resources used and identified in courses need to be diversified.
- There needs to be greater development of resources and training for all HE staff on inclusive and mentally healthy curricula, highlighting the importance of the hidden curricula.
- Mental Wellbeing is at the heart of learning and needs to be embedded in the curriculum and all that HE staff do.
- There continues to be a struggle for institutions to implement meaningful ways to address systematic inequalities for BAME/ LGBTQ+ groups.
- Small changes to teaching material, etc., can make a significant difference in promoting visibility, diversity and inclusion.
- The significance of embedding inclusive practices and languages (e.g., pronouns) and visibility in creating an inclusive curricula and culture is essential.
- There need to be tailored approaches to establish inclusive curricula for student communities.
- It is important that HE staff understand the importance of how exclusion can affect mental health and academic experiences.

### Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

- Mental Health and Wellbeing provisions must be accessible, inclusive, and representative with tailored support resources for BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities.

- Programmes need to contextualise the support offered to students which meet the students 'where they are' rather than assuming people will just fit in to the 'programme'.
- Further clarity on the role of Academic Staff and Support Service Staff is required.
- Normalising and acknowledging distress/anxiety is a valid and valuable response when working with students in academic settings, whilst embedding support that is easy to access and is joined up across institutions.
- Clear signposting and understanding of the services which are available in HEIs needs to be improved.
- It is important to recognise that student communities are not homogenous groups, and that students are impacted by several intersectional and individual experiences that can impact on their health, wellbeing and learning experience.

## Suggestions for the future

Some suggestions were provided for the future professional development of staff, including more in-depth case study materials, how to manage change, intersectionality and students with challenging socio-economic situations. Some participants felt that the materials provided in the webinars should be used during induction for all new staff at universities.

Some quotes are provided below:

- 'Future sessions might move to a more advanced level e.g., by exploring case studies of actual actions taken [by Institutions/individuals]. Being able to reflect on more difficult issues and how to resolve them (e.g., resistance to change/equality) would be practical and allow people to learn from those challenges so we can create better environments for everyone.'
- 'If they could be linked with other factors that impact intersectionality - social and economic factors, access to services and provision of them.'
- 'These [webinars] should ... be required for induction at universities for all new staff, and for current staff.'

Therefore, it is recommended that continuing professional development work is carried out across the higher education sector in the aforementioned areas, with consideration to focussing on specific groups of learners for whom mental wellbeing is evidenced as a particular concern.

## Nominal Group with BAME & LGBTQ+ students

When exploring the impacts of curricula on student experience and wellbeing, it is essential to consult those with lived experiences of these to ensure that students are at the heart of co-creating any recommendations for making curricula more inclusive. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is a consensus development methodology that has its roots in co-creation in communities, therefore, was considered an appropriate data collection method.

Research ethics approval was attained from GCU's Academic Quality and Development Research Ethics Committee to carry out the NGT with students who self-identify within, and/or represent those from, LGBTQ+ or BAME student communities. Recruitment invitation communications were circulated via sparqs, QAAS and NUS Scotland, alongside other networks to engage students from across the HE sector in Scotland. The aim was to recruit around 16-20 participants.

Once students responded to the call for participants, they were sent a participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix 2) and a link to a short Microsoft Forms survey to collect

demographic data on age, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, University, course and year of study, and current role in their university. The aim of collecting this information from participants was to ensure that they were from as diverse experiences as possible given the limited numbers.

There were 22 students who expressed interest in participating via the Microsoft Forms survey and were sent information about the date/time of the group meeting. However, on the day of the nominal group only six students (4 female, 2 male, 0 no-binary) from three Scottish HEIs were able to attend; their demographic details are in Table 2. There were three participants from LGBTQ+ student communities and four BAME students.

**Table 2: Nominal Group participants' demographics**

Level & Mode of Study	Year of Study	Role	Disability	Gender Identity	LGBTQ+ Community	Ethnicity
Postgraduate Full-time	Fifth	Student	No	Female	No	African American
Postgraduate Full-time	First	Student	No	Female	No	Asian - Indian
Postgraduate Full-time	First	Student	No	Female	No	Indian
Postgraduate Full-time	First	Student	No	Female	Yes	Asian
Undergraduate Full-time	Third	Student	Yes	Male	Yes	White European
Undergraduate Full-time	Third	Class Representative	Yes	Male	Yes	White British

The nominal group was conducted online, during which participants had the ability to remain anonymous, should they wish to. Participants were asked to generate as many responses as they could to two set questions and type them synchronously in a shared Google spreadsheet, after which the items generated were clarified and similar responses were amalgamated. The two questions students to which participants generated responses were:

- 'What factors have you experienced within the academic curriculum that have impacted negatively upon your/other students' mental wellbeing?'
- 'What key suggestions do you have for academic staff to consider when developing inclusive curricula?'

From the lists of generated responses each participant selected and ranked their top five most important items from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important). Equal rankings were permitted. Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel to establish the items that were top ranked by the most participants; thereby reaching a level of consensus. Median rank scores were also calculated for each item.

All participants were very engaged in the group and generated a wide range of items and recommendations for practice. For the first question, about aspects of the academic curriculum that negatively impact upon BAME/LGBTQ+ student's mental wellbeing, 54 responses were generated, with 44 remaining after amalgamation of similar items. 20 items were ranked by at least one participant, and the top ranked items are outlined in Table 3.

Many of the items raised by the participants concur with those in previous research that impact specifically BAME/LGBTQ+ students. Whereas some of the items would likely be stressors for all students, e.g., those related to poor communication and lack of access to appropriate mental health support services/personal tutor.

**Table 3: Academic curricular aspects negatively on BAME/LGBTQ+ students' mental wellbeing**

Item	Ranking of Item	% of group	Median Rank
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The use of mostly white, western, middle-class participants in case studies.</li> <li>Curricula that do not include different gender and sexual identities and promote an idea of "normality".</li> </ul>	1	67%	1.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of examples about minority groups/ LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum.</li> </ul>	2	50%	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The institution and staff not understanding that everyone has NOT been impacted by the pandemic in the same way; some [minority] groups of students have been affected more.</li> <li>We all in the same 'sea' but we all have very different 'boats' because of intersectional identities.</li> <li>Neglecting Minority [groups'] mental health when making key decisions.</li> </ul>	3=	33%	1.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lack [of] communication and coordination within class due to virtual classes.</li> </ul>	3=	33%	1.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of class activities apart from [those delivered by] academics.</li> </ul>	5	33%	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of mental health professionals on campus (e.g., psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, etc.), excluding counsellors</li> <li>[lack of] mental health resources;</li> <li>[lack of] assign[ing] a personal tutor and mental health supporter for each student.</li> </ul>	6	33%	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff not understanding that LGBTQ+ individuals are more prone to mental health problems because we (as also other minority groups) are still largely rejected, this increases isolation (particularly during lockdown).</li> </ul>	7	33%	5

For the second question, about key suggestions for academic staff to consider when designing inclusive curricula for BAME/LGBTQ+ students, 32 responses were generated, with 26 remaining after amalgamation of similar items. 18 items were ranked by at least one participant, and the top ranked items are outlined in Table 4. Many useful, and often easy to implement, recommendations were suggested by the participants, e.g., creating more diverse case study materials; using pronouns; and assigning matched personal tutors/mentors/alumni.

**Table 4: Key suggestions for academic staff in designing BAME/LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula**

Item	Ranking of Item	% of group	Median Rank
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add diversity in curriculum by including different minority groups.</li> <li>• Include examples, case studies, research projects and theories that are inclusive of different minority groups (e.g., LGBTQ+, BAME, disabled, etc.).</li> </ul>	1	67%	1.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't always expect minority groups to come forward voicing the difficulties we are facing. Being from a marginalised under-represented group, that can be difficult at times</li> </ul>	2	50%	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular offline event/activities (when possible) for individualised support.</li> <li>• Just have casual activities online as well.</li> </ul>	3	50%	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include your pronouns on lecture slides and when you introduce yourself (if you feel safe doing so).</li> </ul>	4	50%	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite external speakers to talk about academic topics related to LGBTQ+ issues.</li> </ul>	5	33%	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students the chance to have a personal tutor/mentor with similar background (e.g., LGBTQ+).</li> <li>• Assign any alumni reference who comes from the same country or similar background to be [a] 'go to' person.</li> </ul>	6	33%	2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise comprehensive inclusion and diversity training for staff, maybe led by students themselves.</li> </ul>	7	33%	4

Following completion of the nominal group, participants were sent follow up resources from MIND and Student Minds, which provided information of contextualised support resources for those from BAME and LGBTQ+ Communities.

## 1 Collation & review of inclusive curricula resources

A key deliverable of the project was to source, collate and review resources and toolkits in relation to developing inclusive curricula for BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities. For this purpose, the project team's BAME representative/research assistant carried out this piece of work. Resources were sourced via searches in Google and also via word of mouth from project team members, webinar speakers, and webinar participants. It is envisaged that this spreadsheet can be used as a resource for the sector and could be updated as further resources become available, as there is continual work going on in this area.

The following information was extracted and summarised in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for each resource: Title; Author(s); Publisher; Year; Source web link; Type of Resource (toolkit/ guidance/ framework); Focus of Resource; Format of Resource (electronic/ hard copy/ video); Length of Resource; Development of Resource (lit review/ research based/ anecdotal); Type of Protected Characteristic addressed; Purpose of Resource; Summary of Resource; Cost of Resource; Target Audience; and Other Comments.

## Evaluation

### What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity)

We envisage that the outcomes from this Cluster will aid the HE sector in inspiring the creation of more inclusive curricula. Although we are yet to disseminate outcomes from the report, the project has been discussed at multiple sector forums including NUS Scotland's 'Think Positive about Mental Health' Forum, QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme's Theme Leader Group, and the QAA's 'Evolving Student Engagement' Conference in June 2021. Locally, within GCU, the project has provided regular updates to the GCU Academic Quality Department, Student Wellbeing Advisory Group and GCU/GCU Students' Association Student Mental Health Agreement.

We hope that materials and topics presented and discussed in our professional development webinars, and accompanying freely available resources, will provide a stimulus and catalyst for HE staff to review and enhance their curricula practices, making them more inclusive and creating a culture of diversity and inclusion.

### Why have we made it?

As outlined in Section 1, research across the higher education sector has demonstrated that current curricula practices are exclusive to a number of student communities, including BAME and LGBTQ+ students. The outcomes from this are numerous, including: impacts on sense of belonging and community, mental health impacts, attainment gaps, retention in higher education, and more.

The need for curricula which is responsive to the diverse needs of our students is essential, and should form not only good pedagogy practices, but be incorporated into the whole institutional approaches to supporting the health and wellbeing of staff and students.

### What difference has occurred/will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

We hope that as a result of the project, in particular the professional development webinars, that participants will have had knowledge, attitudes and beliefs challenged, providing a stimulus for active change. Practical recommendations were made and resources were shared during each webinar, and afterwards on QAA Scotland's Enhancement Themes website; therefore, the aspiration is that these resources will be used by HE staff in their practice when developing inclusive curricula.

### How do we know? (How is the change measured)

Judging by the feedback that we received following the webinars, both in the chat function in Zoom and via the evaluation survey, participants seemed to indicate that they felt inspired to instigate changes, even small ones, in their everyday practice. Additionally, we received very positive feedback from the students who participated in the nominal groups.

## **Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)**

Webinar participants, project team members, feedback from QAA Scotland liaison representative.

## **Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)**

The involvement of students as part of the project team was invaluable, especially as the student was BAME; therefore, had insights into the topic of the project. Additionally, the involvement of NUS Scotland and sparqs facilitated access to student representatives. Running the student nominal groups provided insights into the key factors of concern for BAME/LGBTQ+ student communities. The student participants also appeared to be extremely grateful that their voices had been heard.

The use of webinars, which were recorded, with chat function for questions and also sharing of information provides many advantages over face-to-face sessions.

## **Any things you have stopped/need to stop doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)**

No.

## **Dissemination of work**

The connections provided by our Cluster members have been invaluable in disseminating the work of the Cluster both internally to GCU, and across the sector.

The ongoing work of the Cluster has been disseminated at QAA Scotland's Theme Leaders' Group (TLG) meetings and newsletters.

Additionally, through their involvement in the Student Wellbeing Advisory Group, Student Minds University Mental Health Charter Working Group, and Student Mental Health Agreement Working Group, the Project Officer for Student Mental Health, Rachel Simpson, has been able to ensure the progress and findings of the Cluster have been embedded into GCU's ongoing mental health activity.

Other Cluster members have aided in providing support throughout their networks across the Higher Education sector. For example, 'Think Positive about Student Mental Health' and sparqs were invaluable in facilitating students' engagement with the Cluster project and discussing progress of the project at sector student mental health events. Additionally, the Decolonisation of the Curriculum Cluster members were able to promote and share the work of this Cluster, and vice versa.

The work of the Cluster, including nominal group results, was presented at the QAA Evolving Student Engagement Conference on 29 June via a seminar presentation and discussion panel. The recordings from these two sessions will be housed on the QAA's Membership Resources website.

The key resources from this Cluster are the webinar recordings with accompanying resources, which are housed on [QAA Scotland's Enhancement Theme's website](#). In addition to this, the collation and review of key resources in relation to creating inclusive curricula for

BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities will also be made freely available to the HE sector, again, housed via QAA Scotland's website.

## Collaboration outwith GCU

Throughout project we engaged with several external HEIs and sector body experts. Engaging with NUS Scotland's 'Think Positive about Student Mental Health', QAA Scotland and sparqs provided us with many innovative suggestions on how to enhance the student voice and engage with and recruit students for our nominal group.

Additionally, we have benefitted greatly from the involvement of two our cluster members in the 'Decolonisation of the Curriculum' Collaborative Cluster, as this facilitated dissemination, sharing of information and promotion of professional development webinars.

## Supporting staff and student engagement

We have aimed to engage staff and students in several ways throughout our project:

### Sector Events

The Collaborative Cluster project lead presented at NUS Scotland's 'Think Positive about Student Mental Health' event, which brought together staff and students/student representatives from Universities, Colleges and Students' Associations across Scotland. The event focused on exploring the aims of the project cluster, and encouraging attendees to become involved in the project's work.

### Student Researcher & Representation

To ensure that there was student co-creation throughout the project, a postgraduate BAME student was engaged as a research assistant involved at all stages and events of the project. This ensured the student voice was at the heart of the project, and proved invaluable.

### Student Nominal Groups

When exploring the impacts of curricula on student experience and wellbeing, it is essential to consult those with lived experiences of these to ensure that students are at the heart of co-creating any recommendations for making curricula more inclusive. Ensuring the project's elements included the involvement of student consultation from those with lived experiences via a nominal group was essential to embedding sector involvement into the project.

### Staff Engagement

Staff from across the higher education sector were encouraged to become involved in a number of different opportunities. In addition to the aforementioned conference presentation, staff were encouraged to become involved through calls for expressions of interest circulated through the networks at QAAS, and in conversations with attendees post professional development events.

## Processes

Outcomes from this report will be shared with GCU's Student Wellbeing Advisory Group. This cross-institutional Group at GCU was formed in 2018 to continue the work to support

student mental health and wellbeing. The Group has representation from across the GCU Community, including academics, GCU London, GCU's Students' Association and GCU London's Students' Association. A member from the Group is involved in the Collaborative Cluster and the recommendations will expand on the Group's work, which has already been embedded into the Student Mental Health Action Plan, and Student Mental Health Agreement with GCU's Students' Association.

## Recommendations for future work

There continues to be an appetite, and professional development need, for continuing work across the HE sector in relation to student mental wellbeing, particularly as mental wellbeing remains a pervasive issue for both staff and students following the pandemic onset.

Having addressed the key issues related to students from BAME and LGBTQ+ student communities this session, additional consideration should be given to the intersectionality of student experiences. Another group of students who experienced difficulties that impact upon their mental wellbeing is those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, who can represent around one in five students (UCAS, 2020). This number has increased over the past five years (including those in the lowest SIMD quintile), especially with the efforts of Universities to widen participation; however, equal efforts perhaps have not taken place to address the mental wellbeing needs of these students with their particular needs.

Other groups of students with additional challenges at university that impact upon their mental wellbeing include those who are care experienced and also international students. Further work could be conducted to explore the university experiences of these groups of students and how they impact upon their mental wellbeing.

## References

- Aronin, S. and Smith, M. (2016) One in four students suffer from mental health problems <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/09/quarter-britains-students-are-afflicted-mental-hea/> published 9 August 2016
- Brown, P. (2016). *The Invisible Problem?: improving students' mental health*. Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute.
- Fernandez, A., Howse, E., Rubio-Valera, M., Thorncraft, K., Noone, J., Luu, X., Veness, B., Leech, M., Llewellyn, G. and Salvador-Carulla, L., 2016. Setting-based interventions to promote mental health at the university: a systematic review. *International journal of public health*, 61(7), pp.797-807.
- Fox, W. M. (1989). The improved Nominal Group Technique (NGT). *Journal of Management Development*, 8(1), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM0000000001331>
- Grubic, N., Badovinac, S. and Johri, A.M., 2020. Student mental health in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic: A call for further research and immediate solutions. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, p.0020764020925108.
- Hudson-Sharp, N., & Metcalf, H. (2016). *Inequality among lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender groups in the UK: a review of evidence*. London: National Institute of Economic and Social Research.
- Hughes, G., Panjawni, M., Tulcidas, P., & Byrom, N. (2018). *Student mental health: The role and experiences of academics*. Student Minds
- Joice, W. & Tetlow, A. (2020) *Ethnicity STEM data for students and academic staff in higher education 2007/08 to 2018/19, conducted on behalf of the Royal Society*,
- Keohane (2017) *On course for success? Student retention at university*, <http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UJP-final-report.pdf>
- McKendry, S. & Lawrence M. (2017) *TransEdu Scotland: Researching the experience of trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Scotland's colleges and*

universities, <https://www.trans.ac.uk/Portals/88/TransEdu-Scotland-Report-2017.pdf?ver=2017-10-31-142716-560>

Stonewall (2019) Delivering LGBT Inclusive Higher Education, Stonewall, London.

UCAS (2020) More students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds across the UK are set to start degrees this autumn, <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/more-students-most-disadvantaged-backgrounds-across-uk-are-set-start-degrees-autumn>

Universities UK & NUS (2019) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK universities: #CLOSINGTHEGAP <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

University College London (2020) BAME awarding gap project staff toolkit, UCL

University of Birmingham (2017) LGBTQ–inclusivity in the higher education curriculum: a best practice guide, <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/teaching-academy/documents/public/lgbt-best-practice-guide.PDF>

Wang, C., Pan, R., Wan, X., Tan, Y., Xu, L., Ho, C. S., & Ho, R. C. (2020). Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(5), 1729.

Williams, P., Bath, S., Arday, J., Lewis, C., (2019) The broken pipeline: barriers to black PhD students accessing research council funding, <https://leadingroutes.org/mdocs-posts/the-broken-pipeline-barriers-to-black-students-accessing-research-council-funding>

YoungMinds 2020 Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs, YoungMinds, London. [https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report\\_march2020.pdf](https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf)

## Appendix 1

### Webinar speakers' biographies & links to work

#### Webinar 1

**Amatey Doku** is a consultant at Nous Group, an international consultancy with expertise in higher education. Prior to joining Nous, Amatey was Vice President Higher Education at the National Union of Students' leading on work to tackle the BME attainment gap. This culminated in the [#ClosingTheGap report, a collaboration between NUS and Universities UK](#). Amatey continues to contribute to discussions on race in higher education and last year chaired the Black Lives Matter webinar as part of the Wonkhe @ Home series.

**Dominic Smithies** joined Student Minds in August 2017 after a year as the Community and Wellbeing Sabbatical Officer at the University of York's Students' Union. Dom takes a lead on Student Mind's equality and diversity work, student engagement and co-production. He is also involved in their work with Students' Unions, supporting the campaign groups and understanding and tackling health inequalities. Dominic led the project and final [Student Minds report on LGBTQ+ Student Mental Health: The challenges and needs of gender, sexual and romantic minorities in Higher Education](#).

#### Webinar 2 – STEM subjects

**Katie Nicoll Baines** has a PhD in Human Genetics and worked as a computational biology research fellow before moving into researcher development. She is the co-chair of the University of Edinburgh Staff Pride Network for LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies, works with [The STEM Village](#) to support visibility of LGBTQ+ researchers and is part of the team delivering the [2022 LGBTQ+ STEMinar](#). Her work focuses on addressing barriers to inclusive cultures in HEIs, delivering action-oriented training workshops as well as conducting research and designing policy & practice recommendations for HEIs and research funders. This [blog](#) provides insights into her work in supporting inclusive cultures for LGBTQ+ academics.

**Lara Lalemi** is a researcher at the University of Bristol studying Aerosol Science. She organised the 'Diversity in STEM' event and was subsequently awarded the position of student representative of the [BME 100 List in 2018](#). The [Being BME in STEM](#) event, that resulted in a widely used report with the University of Bristol was a stepping stone in understanding the barriers that BAME groups encounter within STEM and identifying positive interventions for each. Lara has led a group of academics, from Keele to Cambridge Universities in decolonising science workshops, worked with the British Antarctica survey as a consultant and given talks to universities and institutions from across the UK. Currently, as the CEO of [Creative Tuition](#), Lara is striving to increase accessibility and opportunities for young people from all backgrounds within STE(Arts)M.

#### Webinar 3

**Mel McKenna** is part of the Student Wellbeing team at Glasgow Caledonian University and [co-chair of the Trans Edu Community of Practice](#), which brings together colleagues from across Further and Higher education to look at how to better support trans and gender diverse staff and students. They co-wrote a thought piece for [Advance HE's 'The Hidden Curriculum of HE' publication entitled 'Is the Hidden Curriculum Binary?'](#) and recently produced a podcast for the Social Science programme entitled 'Beyond the Binary'.

**Sara Turkington** is the [Equality and Inclusion Adviser at Ayrshire College](#). She is currently the co-Chair of the Trans Edu Community of Practice for colleges and universities in

Scotland and co-lead the development of the Ayrshire LGBT+ Education Network. In her current role she champions LGBT+ visibility and inclusion. In recognition of this, in 2019, Sara was nominated for the prestigious Robert Owen Award, previously, having been awarded the Rising Star: Diversity award at the Herald Diversity Awards.

**Churnjeet Mahn** is a [Reader at the University of Strathclyde](#) with expertise in race, sexuality, queer and gender studies, and decolonising the humanities.

## Webinar 4

[Gareth Hughes](#) is a psychotherapist, researcher and the author of [Be Well, Learn Well](#), a book for university students published by MacMillan. He is also the clinical lead for [Student Space](#), a site hosted by [Student Minds](#) to support student mental health during the pandemic and is the development lead for the [University Mental Health Charter](#). He is currently working on an Office for Students funded project to develop guidance for academics on the relationship between student wellbeing and the curriculum. Gareth led the development of [The Wellbeing Thesis](#), an online resource for Postgraduate Research students and is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

## Appendix 2

# Nominal Group participant information sheet & consent form

QAA Scotland Collaborative Cluster & GCU



University for the Common Good

### Participant Information Sheet *Supporting the Mental Wellbeing of our BAME & LGBTQ+ Student Communities*

*You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you agree, it is important for you to understand why the study is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.*

### **Why is this study being carried out?**

In the UK, pre Covid-19 pandemic, one in four students experienced a mental health difficulty, with 71% reporting that the academic curriculum is their main sources of stress (Brown, 2016). The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has placed an unprecedented mental health burden on students (Grubic et al, 2020), evidencing higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Wang et al, 2020).

In addition to the presence of the pandemic, students with protected characteristics such as ethnicity (in particular BAME) and sexual/gender identity (LGBTQ+) are further impacted negatively with regard to student mental wellbeing and sense of belonging.

This study is being carried out to build the capabilities of HEI staff to create inclusive curricula and learning communities that promote a sense of belonging and mental wellbeing for students with protected characteristics, with a specific focus on BAME and LGBTQ+ Students - <https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resilient-learning-communities/collaborative-clusters/student-mental-wellbeing-within-our-bame-and-lgbtq-learner-communities>

We recognise that BAME and LGBTQ+ student Communities are not homogeneous groups and the study will aim to highlight recommendations to the Scottish Higher Education sector which can explore inclusive curricula with race and sexuality.

### **Why have you been chosen?**

You have been chosen as you have been identified as a student representative of BAME or LGBTQ+ students. You have been contacted alongside other student representative across the Scottish Higher Education Sector.

### **Do you have to take part?**

No, you do not have to take part, your involvement is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time prior to data analysis starting on 1 June 2021.

## **What will happen if you take part?**

If you decide to take part, you will be involved in a consultation event using the nominal group technique. This method will involve participation in one online event. During the event you will be asked to provide responses to two research questions in relation to your lived experiences, and the experiences of those you represent in relation to the inclusivity of the academic curriculum through the lens of BAME and LGBTQ+ student experiences.

You will be asked to type your responses anonymously into an online shared spreadsheet, and once all responses have been collected, then you will individually rank what you believe to be their top five items. You do not need to discuss or justify any of your responses to anyone else in the group.

## **How long will it take?**

Participation in the nominal group event will take 1.5 hours of your time.

## **What will happen to the information that you provide?**

The information that is collected during the group will be summarised and themed and no individual will be identified from any of the data collected. Data will be stored on a GCU's secure server on a password protected computer.

This project is part of work conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Scotland (The agency which safeguards academic standards and enhances the quality of the student experience offered by Scottish higher education institutions). The outcomes of this project will be disseminated to the sector through various channels including publications, conference presentations, the Theme Leaders Group which has Academic Quality Leads and Student Representation from across Scotland and more.

## **Will you benefit directly from this research study?**

You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study; however, the views of students collected during the consultation events will be used to build the capabilities of HEI staff to create inclusive curricula and learning communities that promote a sense of belonging and mental wellbeing for students with protected characteristics.

## **What to do now**

If you would like more information before you decide about taking part, please contact the Project Lead: Dr Heather Gray, [h.gray@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:h.gray@gcu.ac.uk), or Deputy Lead: Rachel Simpson, [rachel.simpson@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:rachel.simpson@gcu.ac.uk) .

If you would like to take part, a consent form is enclosed.

**QAA Scotland Collaborative Cluster & GCU**

**Participant Information Sheet**



University for the Common Good

**Supporting the Mental Wellbeing of our**

**BAME & LGBTQ+ Student Communities**

1. *I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.*
2. *I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time prior to data analysis on 1 June 2021 without giving any reason.*
3. *I agree to take part in the above study.*
4. *I am over 18*

<i>Please Initial</i>

\_\_\_\_\_ *participant name*

\_\_\_\_\_ *date*

\_\_\_\_\_ *signature*

**Please keep a copy of this form for yourself, and return a signed copy electronically to:**

*Dr Heather Gray, Head of Physiotherapy & Paramedicine, School of Health & Life Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, G4 0BA - [h.gray@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:h.gray@gcu.ac.uk)*

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2021  
18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 0141 572 3420

Web: [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)