

Enhancing Outcomes for Black and Minority Ethnic Social Work Students in Scotland

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Project background

This project was funded by the *Economic and Social Research Council* (ESRC) and was conducted in partnership with the *Institute for Research and Innovation in the Social Services* (IRISS), the *Scottish Social Services Council* (SSSC), *Multi-Cultural Family Base* (MCFB) and seven universities that provide social work education in Scotland. The project was directed by a steering group made up of representatives from each of the partner organisations. The University of Stirling provided ethical clearance for the project.

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Chapter 1: Context and Methodology

Introduction

The *Enhancing outcomes for black and minority ethnic (BME) social work students in Scotland* project is a response to evidence which suggests that a higher percentage of BME students fail or take longer to complete their studies in comparison to the white Scottish student population. The project aimed to:

- Increase awareness of the issues and barriers that BME social work students in Scotland face
- Increase awareness of strategies that help to overcome these issues and barriers with a view to maximising outcomes for BME social work students in Scotland
- Decrease barriers to successful outcomes for BME social work students in Scotland
- Promote a more diverse social services workforce in Scotland

Literature Review

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), with its widening participation objective, has noted that a higher percentage of BME students fail or take longer to complete their studies in comparison to the white student population. Recent evidence from England confirms this as a UK-phenomenon with the General Social Care Council's report on social work education in England in 2009-10 identifying a long-term pattern of black students taking longer to progress through training (GSCC, 2012). It is important to note that Scotland's universities and social work services are devolved matters and therefore they have at times similar and diverging paths. The key Scottish contextualising document is *Changing Lives* (Scottish Executive, 2006), which contained the recommendations by the 21st Century Social Work Review Group for the future of social services in Scotland. Recommendations included the need for a more culturally diverse workforce in Scotland as part of its strategy for renewal and innovation.

The workforce should reflect the diversity of the population. Social workers should come from all sections of the community, e.g. the deaf community and minority ethnic communities, etc. (2006: 64)

There are a considerable number of UK based research studies and reports which address the admission and retention of BME students in higher education more generally (Jacobs et al, 2007; Care Council for Wales, 2010; Berry and Loke 2011; Singh, 2011; Equality Challenge Unit, 2008, 2011, 2012b). There are also a number that address social work education in particular (Aymer and Bryan, 1996; Cropper, 2000; Bartoli et al, 2008; Channer and Doel, 2009; Finch 2009; Wainwright, 2009; Thomas et al, 2011; Williams and Parrott, 2012). In addition there is a vast body of

research and pedagogical literature, which explores international students' experiences (e.g. Cree, 2011; Equality Challenge Unit, 2012a).

The social work community in Scotland has a strong history of responding to racial inequalities, notably through the now disbanded, *Scottish Anti-Racist Federation in Community Development and Social Work* (Brown and Brearley, 1989; Brown et al, 1991, 1994; Scottish Anti-Racist Federation, 1998; Glasgow Caledonian University, 2001; McPhail and Sidhva, 2008). In more recent years, particular attention has been given to investing in mentoring for BME students (Multi-Cultural Family Base, 2006; Sidhva, 2008; Robinson and West, 2009).

Few research studies have been conducted in Scotland. There are, however, three key exceptions. In 1999, Satnam Singh, an Open University social work tutor, conducted a piece of research 'to establish the current position in Scotland regarding access, recruitment, training and support for Black and Minority Ethnic people in social work training' (Singh 1999: 4). Whilst he reported high levels of interest in Scotland, Singh also found that policy and practice was 'piecemeal' and 'uncoordinated in strategy' (1999: 20).

In a further piece of action research, Singh (2005) raised concerns about social work education including Eurocentric bias, structures of racism and discrimination, the dilution of anti-racism in generic approaches and the pathologising of black students. He advocated building partnerships between community-based agencies and social work education providers, to provide mentoring schemes as part of a range of activities to attract candidates from BME communities into social work. A strengths-based model, rather than a deficit or remedial model, was advocated.

More recently, an article on international social work students by Cree (2011) again points to BME students' academic, social and cultural differences and argues for a re-think about how they are supported and valued in social work education. Cree highlighted challenges including stress, social isolation, financial insecurity, language difficulties and different academic conventions and expectations. She suggests that international students need to be affirmed and supported, acknowledging the additional pressures that they may be facing. She also suggests that practical help should be provided to build students' academic skills.

Multi-Cultural Family Base (MCFB), a voluntary sector agency which places social work students in a range of voluntary settings (often, but not exclusively in BME settings), has hosted a mentoring support project for BME students since Singh's research report of 2005. This offers small group, peer support three times a year to BME students studying social work degrees throughout Scotland, and is supported financially by the HEIs (at a minimal level). On the basis of this project and its own concerns about black African students on placement in the agency, MCFB presented a paper to the SSSC/HEI Heads of Social Work bi-annual meeting in November 2010, alongside another by the University of Stirling highlighting a series of issues experienced by BME students. These included: different educational experiences and different approaches to learning; unfamiliarity with the Scottish context; lack of

culturally-specific support for students; financial difficulties and experiences of racism. Following the meeting, a steering group was convened to take this forward, with two key objectives: to determine levels of awareness and action across the social work education sector in Scotland, and to see whether it might be possible to agree a Scotland-wide strategy to enhance support for BME students.

The legal framework for this discussion is the Race Relations Act 1968 (amended 1976 and 2000) and the Equality Act 2010. The Sex Equality Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2006 are also of relevance. The challenge to tackle racism on a societal level comes from the 1999 Macpherson Report (Dominelli, 2008).

This discussion fits broadly in the theoretical framework of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory social work (Thompson, 2006; Dominelli, 2008; Bhatti-Sinclair, 2011) and the related discourse of diversity and equality (Gaine, 2010; Gast and Patmore, 2012). Discrimination and racism are concepts that are central to this discussion. Discrimination is unfair treatment on the basis of an identified difference. This can play out on a psychological, sociological or political level (Thompson, 2006:13). Racism can be defined as,

a specific form of oppression that stereotypes and negatively values people's ethnic and cultural attributes. It interacts with other forms of cultural oppression like classism, ageism, sexism and heterosexism. (Dominelli, 2008: 10)

Another relevant concept is that of cultural competence (Parrott, 2009; Kohli et al, 2010; Adital and Strier, 2010; Gilligan and Furness, 2010; Harrison and Turner, 2011). While cultural competence has been described as a 'murky concept', one of the most common definitions comes from Cross et al (1989, in Harrison and Turner, 2011):

a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals that enable effective interactions in a cross-cultural framework.

A range of training courses has been designed to build cultural competence, including *information training, cultural awareness training, racism awareness training, anti-racism training* and *diversity training* (Williams and Johnson, 2010). Also relevant to this discussion is the wealth of literature on black and African perspectives to social work (Ahmad, 1990; Singh, 1992; Graham, 2002, 2009)

Terminology

The term 'black and minority ethnic' was chosen for this project on the basis of its popular usage. It has become commonly understood to describe 'people from minority groups, particularly those who are viewed as having suffered racism or are

in the minority because of their skin colour and/or ethnicity' (Universities Scotland, 2013). *Black*, *minority* and *ethnic* are concepts that are value-laden. Williams and Soydan explore these concepts in detail and suggest that, '[l]anguage in use reflects particular theories, values, political ideologies and popular thinking of the day and should therefore properly be the subject of constant review and clarification' (1998: 3).

There has been particular debate over the appropriateness of *black* as some suggest that it is less all-inclusive to the broad range of ethnic minorities who experience discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity. The acronym BME was an attempt to be more comprehensive, but it has become less popular, as some people perceive it to be 'cumbersome or bureaucratic' (Universities Scotland, 2013; also see Cree, 2010: xviii).

Some of the difficulty with terms was reflected in the project interviews. One tutor suggested that using BME as a label '*singles out people*'. They said it was a '*homogenizing terminology*' that groups diverse ethnic groups together. They suggested we need to be '*critically aware*' of the connotations of these terms and while we use them, '*we use them problematically*'. Similarly, a practice teacher was strongly opposed to the term BME:

'I actually have a problem with the term BME... I think it's rather depersonalising, and I think it's also tending to construct people as a homogenous group'.

So while Black, White, minority, ethnic and BME are used in this report it is recognised that they are problematic. The concept of *race* is similarly problematic and will be used sparingly in the report (Williams and Soydan, 1998; Williams and Johnson, 2010). BME will be used to refer to people from minority ethnic groups. They may be black or white minority ethnic. *Ethnicity* will be used to mean a person's sense of identity that may be associated with a community of shared religion, culture, geographic origins or physiological characteristics. *Culture* describes the behavioural aspect of a person's ethnicity that includes a shared system of 'ideas, norms [and] values' (Williams and Soydan, 1998: 6; also see Williams and Johnson, 2010: 9).

BME students include both international students, home and domiciled students (e.g. 2nd or 3rd generation minorities) and asylum seekers. The term *educators* will be used to refer to both tutors and practice teachers.

Ethnicity in Scottish Social Work

While Scotland's BME population is smaller than in other parts of the UK, it is an increasingly *multicultural* society. Between 1991 and 2001 there was a 62% growth in the BME population (MECOP, 2011). The 2011 census is likely to reveal further growth as a result of high levels of migration from around 2005 (SSSC, 2010). Based

on the 2001 Census the *Black* minority ethnic population in Scotland is 2.01%. This does not include those who may be *White* minority ethnic such as 'White Irish' (0.98%) and 'Other White' (1.54%) (MECOP, 2011).

Ethnicity is under-reported in the social services workforce in Scotland but approximately 4% are from an ethnic minority, 1% in the public sector and 6% in the private sector (SSSC, 2012a). This suggests that ethnic minorities in statutory social work are under-represented when compared to the current figures for ethnicity in Scotland, along with the likely growth of ethnic minorities in recent years.

In 2010/2011 around 3% of students admitted onto social work degrees had a black or minority ethnic background. This was a 1% decrease from 2009/10 and a further 2.8% decrease on 2008/09 (SSSC, 2012b). These figures include both UK and international students, making them more difficult to interpret. It may also be that international students have been deterred from coming to the UK to study because of tightening immigration policies. Why there has been a fall in the number of BME social work students needs to be considered carefully.

The number of BME social work educators in Scotland is also relevant to this discussion. The proportion of BME staff, based on unsystematic evidence from 7 out of 8 higher education institutions, ranges from 0% in one HEI to 23% in another, with an average of 10.5%. This suggests that some institutions may need to consider how their teaching staff might better reflect the increased multiculturalism within Scotland and the globalisation of social work.

Methodology

The project consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews with three groups of people. Firstly, ten BME students, or recently qualified students, were interviewed from five Scottish universities. The specific ethnicity of the students is not disclosed to protect their confidentiality, but they represented heritages from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Only one was British born. Secondly, seventeen tutors/lecturers were interviewed from six universities. Two identified themselves as being from a black minority ethnic group. Thirdly, ten practice teachers were interviewed who worked within both voluntary and statutory social work settings in the central belt and north east Scotland. Two identified themselves as being from a black minority ethnic group minority ethnic. Full details of the sample are listed in Table 1.

Participants were recruited through the contacts of steering group members. The interviews consisted primarily of open-questions such as: how has your [social work] course been? (to students); can you tell me about your experience of working with BME students? (to educators). Participants were also asked more directive questions about what they perceived as challenges, what they believed BME students brought to the education experience and what strategies could

support students better. A thematic approach was taken to data analysis to explore the commonalities and variances of experience.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	Students	Tutors/Lecturers	Practice Teachers
No. Interviewed	10	17	10
Female / Male	7 / 3	8 / 9	6 / 4
BME	10	2	2

Chapter 2: Key Themes

The students interviewed for the project represented a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as individual experiences, beliefs and values. The diversity of BME students was further reflected in the stories and observations shared by the educators. Whilst BME students had varied experiences within social work programmes, a number of common themes emerged from the interviews. These will be explained under the following categories: language literacy, cultural differences, perceptions of social work, personal pressures, social issues, discrimination, placement issues and students' strengths. Participants will be identified by a number only to preserve their confidentiality (ST = student; TU = tutor; PT = practice teacher).

Language Literacy

One of the most common challenges that emerged from the interviews was that of language. This applied specifically to those with English as a second language (ESL). Some students struggled to communicate in spoken and written English whereas others struggled with one or the other. Most of the universities require a relatively high level of written English with an *International English Language Testing Skill* (IELTS) score of between 6 and 7. The *social* nature of social work requires sophisticated interpersonal communication skills, so while a student may meet the written language requirements, their spoken English may lack proficiency. All of the educators mentioned the challenge of language. This is one tutor's explanation:

The challenges of the social work degree, from a language point of view anyway, are significant. The students who have English as a first language struggle with some of the things we ask them to do, struggle with the writing, struggle with the articulation of certain things, report writing, letter writing, essay writing, and I think if you then are doing that in your second language, not only working with the language, but working with the subtleties, I think it adds an additional layer of difficulty. (T1)

The students with ESL had varying levels of difficulty with social work terminology:

Even though I attended a summer school... my skills weren't up to scratch still, I really struggled. I knew I could, but I just felt like social work language is so different, you've got to write, you've got to use the right terms, you've got to write properly, your language has got to be proper... so it was very, very difficult. (ST5)

Another student expressed their difficulty understanding the lectures during the first year. Some also struggled to join in with group work. One student with ESL explained how they *thought* in their native language. They believed that in the process of translating and interpreting written material, some of the meaning was lost, as course material was interpreted through different cultural understandings.

The placement experience seemed to provide pronounced difficulty in students' attempts to communicate effectively. A student expressed frustration at not having the time or energy to work on her English while on placement:

English doesn't change in one day, I was really struggling with that, I can't change my English ability; I don't have any time to read and to study English at the same time. (ST6)

As well as the challenge of social work terminology, several students found Scottish accents, dialects and colloquialisms to be an unanticipated challenge. One international student found the accents of Scottish service users difficult to understand. This led to doubts about the decision to come and study in Scotland at great financial expense, as well as causing considerable stress.

Cultural Differences

It became clear that many of the students carried cultural values with them that were different to those of Scottish culture. Sometimes these values created a *clash of values* that could produce inner turmoil for the student or contribute to interpersonal problems. The common aspects of cultural difference that emerged were religious values, social values, perceptions of time, traumatic experiences, perceptions of authority and educational differences.

Religious Values

Religious values and beliefs were important to several of the students. One student noted that cultural background, and specifically religious belief, could sometimes clash with British laws relevant to social work practice:

[I]t's kind of a struggle between religion, culture and Scottish culture... that can be really difficult when it comes to social work. (ST1)

Another student talked about the difference between religious culture in Scotland and their home country which related to family values and 'the way you bring up your child':

I'd say I'm quite a religious person, not too religious, I don't go to church, but I think here, like, it's almost like people are not, they kind of hide it whereas in [my country] it is really shown your religious, everybody's really religious. (ST2)

For a number of the students religious beliefs and values were also a significant resource for their social work practice.

Religious belief is important to me...as much as I stick to the ethics and values of social work... my religious belief has been a strong backbone, because based on my religious belief I was able also to, you know, have

that kind of empathy... It helps me to relate to people, it gives me that emotional stability to... support and assist people. (ST4)

Social Values

A number of the students were aware of cultural differences in how people are cared for in Scotland. This gave them an alternative perspective to reflect upon the pros and cons of different perspectives.

We are more kind of family-centred, for instance, within my family if there is someone with a learning disability we don't, actually expose that individual... it's more within the family, whereas over here... people are able to talk about it freely... and I think that helps, that's really good. (ST4)

In [my country] we try to emphasize more on community spirit and community cohesion, and depending upon the family and the community to build and support. While in Scotland it will be trying to help the child to be more independent and to rely... self-reliance. (ST7)

Perceptions of Time

One of the cultural differences that was perceived by several educators as problematic was a different concept of time. Most often, this was in respect of African students. This is one practice teacher's description:

D was a brilliant student, could do the work, there wasn't a problem with that, could do the professional writing... but in terms of keeping appointments or arriving for appointments... D was frequently late... that was a big issue. (PT5)

Traumatic Experiences

A recurring theme was the different perspective that some international BME students brought as a result of the trauma they had experienced in their country of origin, as a result of war or genocide, for example. Whilst this was not a topic brought up by the students, a number of the educators shared examples. Some educators thought that these extreme life experiences could adversely distort a student's understanding of *risk* in the care and assessment of service users. More positively, other educators suggested that being able to share such experiences could enrich the learning of the student cohort.

Perceptions of Authority

Another recurring theme was BME students' difficulty in taking on 'the authoritative role'. This seemed to be a problem especially, but not uniquely, for some BME women. One tutor noted that some BME students found it difficult to be 'challenging of people,' particularly 'parents in their care of children'. For some of the women, challenging men was difficult because, in their culture, they wouldn't have had experience of this. It would be interpreted as 'disrespectful,' in their culture.

Allied to this some BME women have to deal with the added dimension of greater gender inequalities. Some women struggled with a 'sense of self-worth,' because in their culture, women were seen as subordinate to men. This added to the challenge of taking on an authoritative role. As a consequence, being a BME female could make them feel more vulnerable to discrimination in Scottish society on top of other inequality factors, such as poverty, class and disability.

For some students, perceptions of academic authority hindered the student's ability to ask for help from their tutor. Two students had similar experiences in which they were initially hesitant in asking for help, but slowly learned to be open with and trust their personal tutor. One of them recounted:

I think she helped quite a lot, I felt comfortable talking to her... for more than two months, I struggled, I didn't know how to ask, I didn't know if it would be okay to ask her... I'm not used to asking things when I was in [my country], I didn't really ask about my assignment to my professor... we don't really ask... the lecturer is just too, authority. My tutor... she made this place that I could feel easy to talk, I was able to talk to her, yea, talk to her or just even cry in front of her. (ST6)

Education Differences

Some of the educators suggested that some students had difficulties with the style of Scottish university education. Some students had difficulty with reflective styles of learning, being more used to didactic teaching methods in their culture. Students from an African background appeared to have a particular challenge in understanding and avoiding plagiarism. This may be due to different experiences of education styles and difficulty in writing in a second language.

Another common theme raised by some students but more so by educators was the ethnocentric or Eurocentric nature of Scottish social work education. The theory and research that informs social work in Scotland has a strong Western bias, originating chiefly from Britain and the USA. Students and educators suggested that there should be a more international emphasis, allowing students to explore social work perspectives originating from a range of cultures.

Perceptions of Social Work

Both students and educators reported that a limited knowledge of the nature of Scottish social work caused confusion, frustration and difficulty for students. One practice teacher reflected as follows:

[They had] perhaps some expectations of the role of the social worker that didn't quite fit with social work education in this country... I think there was a general ignorance about the role of social work because [they] hadn't experienced it in this country, I think that [they] had an academic understanding of the role of the social worker but very little else, and I think those issues arose during the placement. (PT1)

In addition to a lack of familiarity about the *role* of social work in the UK, there was often limited understanding of the Scottish social work *context*:

This is a course about social work... rooted in Scottish legislation and policy, so I think often the reason they struggle is a lack of familiarity with political, social and legislative context. They quite literally struggle to make sense of a lot of the material or issues that we're talking about. (TU14)

Similarly, another tutor mentioned that a number of partner agencies had raised concern about BME students being 'very, very unfamiliar... with the things we would take for granted,' such as the benefits system and how services are delivered. The tutor could recollect four instances where BME students had failed their placements, at least in part, because of this issue.

In addition to lack of understanding about the nature and background of social work, it seemed that some minority ethnic communities had a negative view of the social work profession. A student who had previously worked as a befriender with people from her ethnic community shared how they were received when they disclosed their desire to be a social worker:

The minute you say I'm studying, I'm doing social work, you can actually feel it, you can feel the tension, you can see it from their body language... I think a lot of [my ethnic community], or parents especially, the ones I've met of [my ethnic] origin, even young people, they've got a very negative attitude towards social workers... they look at me as an enemy. (ST5)

This negative perception of social work may have an impact on the number of BME people coming forward to study social work.

Personal Pressures

Students shared that they experienced a variety of personal pressures. Several students talked of experiencing stress and anxiety as a result of pressures that were external to their education, yet which had a significant impact on their ability to

perform academically. These included pressures from relatives and family problems, visa requirements, financial and housing pressures and social isolation. Such stressors sometimes resulted in homesickness, feelings of alienation, depression and occasionally more severe mental ill health.

While it could be argued that most of these personal pressures are not uncommon to white British students, the stories of the students suggest, that at least for some of them, the pressures were more acute because of ethnic or cultural difference. One student explained it this way:

Honestly, if I think about first year I really can't have anything to say - positive things. It was just so miserable. It was so hard. That's why I really find it difficult to do even reflective account. We do reflective account after a year... and I find it really difficult to even bring my memory back and write about it. It was really hard. It was just, like my stress level was just too high... it was really stressful. (ST6)

Some international students have made significant financial and personal sacrifices to study in Scotland. Those who bring their family with them face additional pressures. Childcare, visa issues and problems accessing benefits can accentuate academic pressures. A practice teacher shared the example of a student whose partner was also undertaking study. There was a great deal of pressure on them to complete on time, specifically because of visa requirements and, 'there were potentially some mental health issues in relation to stress for that particular person'. Another student 'was under an enormous amount of pressure' because they were working and studying at the same time, as well as facing 'major family demands,' because of issues of ill health and redundancy. Their cultural background placed a special emphasis on their responsibility to care and provide for their family. Such pressures are accentuated for international students by the demands of British immigration policy:

The UK border agency, you know, have got strict requirements, strict deadlines to be met... and if the person is unable to find work that comes within their definitions then they're thrown out of the country. (PT5)

Social Issues

A number of the students talked about the pressures they faced in relation to their social life. It was clear that many of the international BME students experienced some kind of social isolation since they were physically removed from their *home* social support networks, their family and friends. One student who had English as a second language saw family and friends as an important source of support for proof-reading assignments. However they did not have any family in Scotland and most of their friends, who were also from the same country, had similar levels of English proficiency. As a result the student felt that the university and placement provider had to provide extra help:

We're kind of alone, not with relatives around, so if I don't get help from the uni, or when I was at placement, there's nowhere I can get help... this is not my country so I might not get help from anywhere else. (ST1)

Some of the students found support from their course peers but others seemed to find it difficult to maintain relationships with Scottish students. This may be down to cultural differences:

The students, I think, were not that tolerant... I found it very difficult to maintain relationships with them. I'm not sure if it's the cultural differences. (ST9)

I think Scotland is quite difficult to live as a foreigner though... maybe because I am a student as well, I don't have any Scottish friends, it's quite difficult to make friends even, I have friends from different countries but not from Scotland... I don't know I think it's maybe the culture... I never felt I'm part of Scotland. (ST6)

A number of educators reflected these sentiments, suggesting that some regions in Scotland could be less easy for BME students to integrate into, because of low levels of ethnic diversity and strong parochialism.

Discrimination

All students may face some kind of social discomfort on entering university or placement for the first time. As one student put it, 'everybody's new... we don't know each other, you don't know where somebody is coming from... you actually don't know what's going to happen'. While *direct* forms of racism were generally rare among students' experiences, some of them did think that they experienced *indirect* forms of racism. How this manifested itself was often difficult to express, but several students were aware of the presence of racism:

People don't know how to talk to you, or how to approach you... it's there, even though it's not shown... It's really hard to explain... people judge you before you actually do anything... a kind of superiority, it's there. (ST1)

I don't want to be naïve. These things are there. You're not gonna to say that discrimination is not there. You're always, you're different and people will always look at you differently, and that's just how society is. We've formed these things. (ST6)

One white minority ethnic student shared a situation where they believed they had experienced direct discrimination in a discussion about racism with some black students:

This was the first time I felt people were racist against me because I was white, because I was white they didn't perceive me as a BME, so they wouldn't let me talk or say my views... they wouldn't let me speak actually, they were like, "you don't know, you don't know, you don't know... like... I don't know how it is to be a BME". (ST9)

Another student said they felt discriminated against when students laughed at their pronunciation in class. They also shared what she perceived as discrimination from another student who didn't want to meet with her for some group work. Placements offered particular challenges for some students. Several students experienced racism from clients. One student experienced racism from a client on a home visit but through the support of his practice teacher, practice staff and his tutor he was supported through the experience. He said, 'it was quite difficult for me to deal with, but I had a lot of support... that helped me cope emotionally'. Another student acknowledged that while she did not experience discrimination from clients, their reaction to her displayed, 'recognition that you're not White Scottish.' Perhaps less predictably, some black students who were born in the UK were observed to face discrimination, not based on the colour of their skin, but on their regional origin and accent. This illustrates some of the complexity of racism in Scotland.

Several educators suggested that racism was *institutional* and embedded in Scottish culture. A practice teacher shared an instance of a local authority refusing to work with a BME student 'because of the language difficulties'. Their justification was that they felt it would be 'unfair on the service users'. While the practice teacher believed it was the right decision, this could be interpreted as discrimination. A tutor also shared that there was some struggle in arranging placements because some placement providers 'were being quite vocal about, "we can't take that student"'. The tutor interpreted this resistance as discrimination. In relation to a particular placement termination she believed that the agency had failed the student and that they were essentially being 'racist'. This tutor thought that while, 'it's not that people aren't helpful or willing or whatever, it's just that they are not tuned in, because it's unusual or more unusual'.

Placement Issues

There were mixed reports about placement experiences and the level of support received from practice teachers, link workers and practice staff. Some students didn't have any problems with placements. Others had some good experiences and some bad ones. Some of the students interviewed had placements terminated or failed. Educators also shared several stories of other students who had failed their placements. This reflects evidence from GSCC (2012) that BME students take longer to progress through their course.

The reasons for terminations or failures were often hard to define and they were sensitive situations for the students, practice staff and educators. For one student there were evidently cultural and language issues involved. Whether or not there

was discrimination involved is hard to say. One student was clear that there was not appropriate support during the termination process:

They terminated it... First, we had a meeting after that because I was so upset... and they were having meeting and they said, "ough it's going to be okay, we are going to support," and then I think very next week they came to me, when they terminated it, they stopped talking to me. (ST6)

The termination of a placement can be a very stressful experience for a student, and while terminations are not unique to BME students, some students have made more sacrifices to allow them to study in Scotland, while often lacking the support that most white Scottish students have. This is portrayed by the same student:

I was really stressed, and I cried a lot, I couldn't do it in front of them but when I went home, and also I had pressure from my home as well because of doing the masters work. Masters here is quite expensive, and then it's time consuming, so I didn't want to fail it, and I couldn't say anything to my parents, so I couldn't, didn't get much support from them, because I couldn't tell them, yea so that's why it was so troubling. (ST6)

This same student went on to a second placement where they received a lot of support from their practice teacher, especially additional language support. They said, 'it really makes a difference if the staff are supportive, and if they trust you'.

A student whose placement was terminated believed that there was 'some source of bias' involved in the decision. This was a complex situation as there were other issues involved, but the student felt insufficiently supported on raising the question of the suitability of the placement leading to feelings of isolation. There were issues around being able to discuss cultural differences openly without them being misinterpreted.

I felt a little isolated there and during the supervision there most of the discussion was concentrated on the differences between the different cultures... It was a good thing to discuss, and helped me to understand the differences and make me aware of it, but in the minutes of the meeting [the practice teacher] was writing in a negative way, in the sense that [they] appeared to have an impression that I was not appreciative of the Scottish culture. (ST7)

This student thought that they did not experience overt racism, but discrimination was felt in the way people acted around them. They also felt that the way his practice teacher had approached the topic of ethnicity was insensitive and presumptuous.

While some students came to placements with a lot of potential, a good level of English and positive values, sometimes the cultural difference that service users

presented were too much for students to cope with. Trying to understand Scottish culture, slang and dialect in their work with service users caused a lot of stress and was a factor in some placement terminations or failures.

Students' Strengths

Despite the challenges faced by the students, they exhibited a wide range of strengths. Most of the students interviewed displayed great resilience and maintained an attitude of enthusiasm and positivity in their studies:

I think it's been interesting, challenging and exciting. (ST4)

I just got to believe in myself and said well I'm going to go for it, I'll do it, I'm really it, enjoying, social work is fun... it's interesting while you're out there you actually don't know what social work is all about, but until you're in there and actually study and understand why social workers have got to do what they do, you actually appreciate and you're really humbled, the powers you're gonna have as a social worker. (ST5)

The qualities and skills that students brought to their social work education were acknowledged by tutors and practice teachers:

She was confident, she was well prepared, she could manage in terms of her writing.

From the [twenty plus nationalities] that I've worked with, they have all carried a determination, that, "I need to get through this, and I need to manage it," and with the appropriate support they can do it' (PT5)

Both [students]... had excellent reflective skills, far better than the white Scottish students. They were far more adept at working autonomously, at going and finding knowledge.

One student reflected on the positive aspects of coming from a mixed cultural heritage. Their parents originated from two distinct black cultural heritages. They thought that this diversity brought 'an understanding'. This theme was repeated by many of the tutors. One tutor wanted to emphasize, 'the richness different cultural knowledge brings'. They said this richness, 'shouldn't be lost, it should be emphasised'. Another tutor talked about BME students bringing, 'richness of experience and diversity,' which they can bring to the 'cohort as a whole'. Practice teachers also supported the view that BME students could broaden the learning that students bring to placement agencies.

I think I learned a huge amount, I really do. I'm very grateful to have had both those placements... I found the alternative perspectives that were being offered really helpful in terms of questioning some of my and our practices. So it's through a very helpful reflective lens on what I think

we're far too ready to take for granted. Just because that's what we're dealing with on a day to day basis. (PT10)

Despite the struggle many students with ESL faced, one practice teacher noted that the bilingual ability of one student was a positive resource. The student's bilingual abilities were able to be used to within the placement, much to the appreciation of agency colleagues.

Also, as highlighted under cultural differences, many students carried with them cultural values, beliefs and varied life experiences that might enrich learning and practice. Some also brought specific social work practice experience and social work qualifications from their own countries.

Chapter 3: Strategies and Support Resources

The varied challenges faced by many BME students highlight the need for action to be taken. As one tutor stated, 'doing nothing and expecting integration is naive'. Students and educators had a wide range of suggestions for how BME students could be better supported. These included strategic approaches and specific support resources. In response to the diversity of student experience, the majority view was that there should be a generic and tailored response to student support with specific support resources for BME students. Strategies and support will be addressed under the following headings: recognising diversity, generic and tailored support, strengths-based approach, challenging discrimination, multicultural education, supportive tutors, language support, mentoring, admission strategies, placement matching, recruitment, and other strategies and support.

Recognising Diversity

The range of experiences represented in the project, through both the students' and educators' stories and reflections highlighted the diversity of BME students' experiences. Each person had their own particular set of characteristics based on their ethnic and cultural background and a whole range of personal differences, including belief systems, gender, sexuality, age, 'ableness', class and economic status.

Using labels like *black* or *BME* uncritically can encourage us to think that everyone with a similar skin colour, or from the same country, is the same. Academic institutions did not always recognise this diversity of experience. One student recounted that they were 'seen in terms of [her] race,' but there was no recognition of their country of birth:

[T]here was no kind of sensitive recognition of that, or of the diversity of experience, just kind of a blanket... reference to race... there was always good intentions behind it but it just felt like, everybody was put in the same bucket... there is a very different experience, there are differences, and I don't think that's very, dealt with that well. (ST10)

A number of educators suggested that when a BME student is seen to be experiencing difficulty it is often assumed that it is because of their ethnicity or culture. They believed that students should be seen as individuals:

If you do see a student who is experiencing difficulty, that is seen as a student who is experiencing difficulty, and that may or may not be because they are from a BME group, they may just be having a difficulty with social work, and seeing the person. (TU12)

BME students are not a homogenous group. Each student needs to be considered as an individual, while acknowledging their ethnic and cultural origins, and the potential implications of these influences.

Generic and Tailored Support

Most of the participants suggested specific support resources for BME students such as proofreading or mentoring. However, there was a dominant view that issues of difference, including those of ethnicity and culture, should be addressed for all students, not just for BME students. The majority of educators also stressed the importance of a student-centred, tailored approach. The support needs of BME students need to be assessed on an individual level, along with the whole student group. Three educators expressed this in their own way:

I think issues of culture have to be addressed across the whole student population, in issues of difference, I think that has to be something embedded in our curriculum, rather than as something separate... There's a need for system level interventions and individual, tailored interventions. (TU1)

I'm not sure that I would make much distinction between what I would see as being beneficial and supportive to black students than I would look for as being beneficial and supportive for white students. (PT1)

I think they need to be person-centred, because I think no one size fits all, and I think one can't make assumptions. (PT8)

Strengths-Based Approach

As highlighted above, BME students bring many strengths to social work education. Many of the educators suggested that there was a need to focus on the positive qualities that BME students bring to social work and 'celebrate diversity', rather than 'pathologise' them, as one tutor put it. What may happen is that it is assumed that students lack the ability to provide a positive contribution and they should conform to fit into the Scottish context. One tutor discussed how some placement providers saw BME students as problematic rather than focusing on their strengths:

"It's different here in Scotland, so how can this person understand?" The onus is on that student to get their head around Scotland, rather than the onus being on people in Scotland saying, "well, actually what do you bring?" you know, "there's some interesting experiences you've had, some interesting ways of looking at things that actually we can learn from as well." It was almost an, "Oh, this is how we do it in Scotland and you have to learn what we do." (TU12)

Another tutor shared a similar experience where a student's placement was terminated. They thought that the student felt unable to be themselves and contribute their skills and values 'for fear of being challenged'. They concluded:

I don't think we really do make it explicit or even permissible sometimes, for people to bring the diversity of their experiences, and actually work proactively with them. (TU4)

Despite these negative examples, many placement experiences were positive and affirming of students' ethnicity and cultural background. Some, for example, allowed students the opportunity to share their cultures with the service users and/or staff. But the negative examples highlight the need for educators and workplaces to be proactive in affirming the diversity of experiences that students bring to their social work education and practice. A strengths-based approach, as one practice teacher explained,

takes into account the student's life experience, and gives them credit for what they are bringing into a placement, as well as being able to relate life experience and their own learning and skills that they're bringing into the placement. (PT1)

Challenging Discrimination

Social workers have traditionally championed anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice. Social work has perhaps lost some of its critical edge in recent times but racism and discrimination is still a part of everyday life for black and minority ethnic people (Dominelli, 1997; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; CRER, 2008). Unfortunately social work education and practice are not immune to the trends manifest in Scottish society. As one tutor put it, BME students are often 'pathologised, as if it's their problem... [but] it's a wider societal problem, which we are all somehow embedded in and responsible for'.

Thompson (2006:176) suggests that there is no middle way. He says that social work cannot avoid 'the question of discrimination and oppression'. How we respond will either challenge and undermine, or tacitly condone and reinforce discrimination. One practice teacher was aware of the challenge of inequality and the importance of addressing it:

We don't exist in some vacuum that promotes equality. We exist within a society that doesn't necessarily promote equality for lots of people, and if we are ignoring what might make you unequal in this society, in our relationship, how are you gonna address that issue with service users, and for service users if they themselves... are at a disadvantage, for whatever reason in relation to power, whether it be about ethnicity or poverty, or gender, or ability, disability. Then we need to be able to talk openly and frankly about discrimination in our relationship, so that you can then go and do that elsewhere, learn how to do that. (PT1)

One tutor was adamant that 'entrenched' white Scottish norms, assumptions and values that promulgate discrimination need to be 'tackled' head on. Some educators thought anti-racist theory was 'watered-down' within the current curriculum. Most

thought anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice in particular should be more prominent.

Multicultural Education

Scottish social work education was perceived to be too ethnocentric by many of the participants. Cree (2010: 200) suggests that we need to beware of ethnocentrism, or in her words,

judging other people and societies from our own perspective without seeing that our way of thinking and being is simply that – it is our way; not the best way, and certainly not the only way.

This was echoed by students with one describing it as, ‘the learning of diversity and multiculturalism’ especially in response to the growing number of immigrants settling in Scotland and the associated multiculturalisation of Scottish society. They said about social workers, ‘when we practice among ethnic minority cultures they need to be very sensitive and they need to understand the cultures and practices of these people’.

Making social work education more multicultural in focus could be important, firstly to facilitate more sensitive and effective social work with Scotland’s growing BME communities. Secondly, to meet the needs of the growing number of international BME social work students – many of whom may want to return to their own countries to practice social work. It may also be an important response to the globalisation of social work (Khan and Dominelli, 2000; Cree, 2013).

There was a range of suggestions on how social work education could incorporate different cultural perspectives into the curriculum. One student suggested that students could have discussions and presentations about different cultural backgrounds and social work practice in other cultures to ‘broaden their outlook’ of other students and social work, then ‘even after their qualification, they can go on and work elsewhere.’

Both students and educators supported the idea of open discussion about issues of culture. Some tutors said that it was important to have these kinds of conversations from the beginning of tutoring relationships. These conversations should be about, ‘who they are and how their ethnic background will shape their practice experience’. A number of tutors also proposed that ethnicity and culture should be part of the regular dialogue between staff. A student acknowledged the sensitivity of the topic, yet argued that if people don’t talk about it, the issue is perpetuated. They said,

If you don’t say anything then you never learn, and then how on earth are we going to have anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory social workers. (ST10)

As well as facilitating discussion about ethnicity, culture and difference, some participants proposed that there should be more teaching content ‘around culture

and race, within the programme'. As mentioned above, a number of educators suggested that anti-racist practice was 'watered-down' in the curriculum, and therefore should be a more 'embedded' part of teaching and academic dialogue. There were also many participants who suggested that teachers should receive better training in this area. As one student suggests:

Social work educators could be better educated... in the sense that, understanding how they can help, better help and support students from ethnic minorities, they need to understand the issues students can potentially face in the work placement, like racism, and their difficulty with regard to the culture differences. (ST7)

Participants suggested training around racism, anti-discriminatory practice, ethnicity, culture and cultural sensitivity, awareness or competence. One student was hopeful that social work education would produce 'culturally competent social workers', who are 'aware of the diversity of culture, and race and ethnicity'. While there may be specific training courses that could be drawn on, one tutor suggested that cultural awareness should be built through the teaching and learning strategy.

Supportive Tutors

The focal point for student support in all of the universities was a personal tutor system. Tutors highlighted the importance of personal tutors for student support and many of the students were full of praise for the support that they received from their personal tutors.

We kind of discussed all the issues that were going on, I think it was to do with missing home, and I did feel supported, yea, I had a meeting with my tutor who then sort of made me look into things I wouldn't have looked at... I think the staff are good here. If you do need help they are there. (ST2)

I know I've got the best tutors, I've never experienced anything, I've never seen anything negative from my tutors. If anything, I've really been blessed. They've encouraged me, they've told me... you have the potential, your writing skills have improved, your attitude. (ST5)

I remember the advice she was giving me... how she mentored me, how she gave me the confidence I needed. (ST8)

Each university has a slightly different tutoring policy. One undergraduate pointed out that she didn't get a personal tutor until her third year. She would have liked a personal tutor from the beginning of her course, especially to get support with written work.

A practice teacher highlighted the importance of having a positive, trusting relationship with practice teachers, link workers and tutors. Several tutors suggested that tutoring support could be improved through being able to spend *more* time

with students either on a one-to-one basis or in groups. This should be *proactive* rather than reactive. This is challenging because of tutors' work-loads.

Language Support

Most students with ESL need additional support with written academic and spoken English, including understanding local dialects and colloquialisms. Tutors are not necessarily the best source of language support; as one tutor acknowledged, she 'wasn't always the best person to provide the help and support,' because she lacked the appropriate level of linguistic knowledge. However, tutors can signpost language support services. One student expressed special gratitude for how her tutor directed her to a proofreading service. Universities provide different types of language support services. Some provide a proofreading service for all international students, sometimes at a cost. Some have university-wide academic skills support services and others have departmental services.

One practice teacher noted that a student who had attempted to access language support at her university had difficulty accessing it. She said that while, 'on paper and policy they looked good, in practice they didn't really come to anything'. Students on placement faced additional challenges in accessing university language courses, as they would be away from the campus for weeks at a time.

Educators should be aware of the language support services that their institutions offer and be proactive in making students aware of them. Educators may also need to take steps to encourage their institutions to provide more appropriate services, designed to meet the needs of students doing practice-based degrees like social work. Departments may also need to provide additional initiatives to help students to become familiar with social work jargon. Placement providers may need to play a special role in helping students understand their service users' language, especially since dialects can vary greatly from region to region (e.g. the Doric in Aberdeenshire).

Mentoring

There are a considerable number of reports evidencing the value of mentoring for BME students, especially from a Scottish perspective (Robinson and West, 1999; Cropper, 2000; MCFB, 2006; Sidhva, 2008). Both students and educators suggested that mentoring could be helpful however there was some debate over how this could be best facilitated. MCFB facilitates a national mentoring group for BME students and one university has its own mentoring scheme. Both mentoring schemes appear to have had limited usage in recent years and there have been challenges in promoting them.

A couple of the students interviewed had experience of mentoring. One of them was positive about mentoring. She thought that 'continuous mentoring' would make life easier, and rather than having a mentoring group for people from her own country, region or ethnicity she would include, 'anybody who has got English as their second

language... it's just to have somebody who's going through what I'm going through, academically.'

Some educators suggested that one-to-one mentoring or befriending should be used more. One of the challenges of mentoring is how to present it. Should they be targeted to BME students, or advertised to all? Some educators thought mentoring schemes for BME students could marginalise students or contribute to stigma. Some students do not want to be seen as different because of their ethnicity. Some of the suggestions for improving mentoring schemes were better training for mentors, more locally based schemes and better publicity.

Admission Strategies

A number of the educators raised issues about the admission of BME students to social work programmes. There are pressures from the university authorities to get international students onto courses, especially for their added economic value. Undergraduate programmes allows students more time to familiarise themselves with Scottish social work, language and culture. However, Masters' programmes can be especially challenging for students because there are only short periods of time in university before students are required to go on placement. International students face intensified stress because of the high cost of studying in the UK and pressure from the Home Office to meet visa requirements. Decisions about admitting international BME students therefore need to be carefully considered.

Other educators shared stories of international students, admitted on tentative grounds, who ultimately failed their course. As one tutor stated, it 'wasn't right for him', admitting him 'created a lot of unnecessary anxiety for him'. This tutor was aware of the tension between economic demands and uncertainty about the ability of some students. She concluded that it was unethical to admit students, 'when you know they may not succeed academically.'

One practice teacher said, 'I think the admission processes need to be really robust'. She suggested that the move from admission by interview to admission by paper meant that more 'unsuitable' students were being admitted. While there were mixed views about the benefits of interviewing for admission, it is difficult to assess a person's interpersonal skills on paper:

I do feel strongly that where people are coming, for the first time from another country, another culture, and haven't lived and worked here, I do think it's the university's duty, because this is a practice based degree, to possibly be a bit more thorough in terms of admissions processes, so that they're not setting students up to fail... [and] making sure people know what they're coming to. (PT8)

The phrase *setting students up to fail*, (or similar) was used by several tutors in relation to admitting BME students. The range of concerns about the admission of international BME students suggests that extra attention should be given to admission strategies and processes. Academic skills, verbal communication skills,

practical social work experience and cultural differences all need to be taken into account.

Placement Matching

The difficulty that several students faced in placements perhaps suggests that there is a need for more sensitive placement matching. This was suggested by a number of students and educators. This is challenging considering the limited number of placements and competition between universities for placements. One practice teacher expressed the tension between matching a student's ability to a placement and the requirement to train students for all social work contexts.

Particular thought had to be given to which practice setting she would cope, she would work best in... in terms of where she was as a person, and her language and her ability to understand, and as a practice educator that is something I struggle with because on the one hand, you know, I think we're training people to be qualified social workers in whatever field, we're saying, "you're good enough, you can go into a front line children and families team, or you could go and work in a voluntary organization doing a completely different role," but essentially we're signing off people as having good enough practice to work... as a social worker. (PT8)

Another practice teacher suggested carrying out an 'equality impact assessment' when assigning students to placements. This would be designed to protect students from being discriminated against in their placements.

Recruitment

Some of the participants suggested that there is a need for more BME social work students, tutors/lecturers, practice teachers and social workers. Since the 1980s, there have been drives to recruit more BME students; however the focus seems to have drifted off. As discussed above, the growing population of immigrants to Scotland along with the apparent decline in numbers of BME social work students is a point of concern. In response to debate prompted by this project, one university has taken steps to propose a positive-action approach to the recruitment of BME students (Equality Challenge Unit, 2012b). This approach could offer the other universities a way of improving the number of BME students in social work education.

Other Strategies and Support

The above data highlights the need to improve the recruitment and support of BME students before and in the early stage of their course, as well as what can be done as the course progresses. Some of these are addressed in the recommendations for action (below). The following are some examples of specific strategies and supports that were suggested by the participants:

- Training and resources about Scottish society and culture for students
- Pre-study placements
- Pre-placement orientations
- Use of BME community leaders in teaching
- Accommodating religious practices and festivals
- Providing space for peer support networks, including social media
- Professional skills training for students such as
 - *communication skills*
 - *stress management*
 - *conflict management / mediation skills*

Chapter 4: Summary and Recommendations

Black and minority ethnic social work students are a diverse group of individuals from a wide range of geographical origins, ethnic communities and cultural backgrounds. They encompass international and home students, black and white students, asylum seekers and UK born ethnic minorities. The diversity of BME students therefore makes generalisations difficult. However, despite the differences between students this investigation has highlighted that there are a series of factors that are common to many BME students. International BME students in particular face language problems, challenges due to cultural differences, unfamiliarity with Scottish culture and Scottish social work and potentially greater personal and social challenges. For many BME students, international and home students, racism is a real experience. Many of these challenges come to the surface in placements. Despite the challenges that many BME students face, they bring many positive qualities and a richness of experience to social work education.

Most social work educators provide very good support to BME students but this project suggests that more needs to be done to respond to the needs of BME students. There may also need to be some fundamental changes in attitude and approach, from educators and practitioners, in working with BME students. These may include: recognising the diversity of BME students; a generic and tailored approach to student support; taking a strengths-based approach to student learning; actively challenging discrimination on a personal and institutional level; implementing a more multicultural approach to education; utilising and improving support systems and services (personal tutors, language support, mentoring etc.); making admissions strategies and placement matching more culturally sensitive; and taking action to recruit more BME students, educators and practitioners.

Key Observations

Black and minority ethnic students are not a homogeneous group. BME students come from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There are international students who are visiting the UK and come from across Europe and other continents. They may come from settled countries and settled family backgrounds but also may come from areas that have seen war and upheaval, and they may have personally experienced traumatic events. Some will be parents, and have children with them; others will have left children at home in their countries of origin. Then there are BME students who were born or have lived most of their lives in Scotland or within other parts of the UK. While all students face challenges in completing their social work education, some BME students face a particular set of difficulties.

Courses working with diversity within the student group

Whilst BME students bring a breadth and richness of experiences and skills, this does not seem to be consistently acknowledged within Scottish social work education. In addition, teaching on anti-racist practice and cultural sensitivity seems less apparent in the classroom than in the past, as issues of 'race'/ethnicity and racism have increasingly been 'mainstreamed' alongside other structural issues such as disability and gender. Also tutors appear to have variable insights and ability to engage with these issues directly with students on a one-to-one basis.

English as a second language

For students with English as a second language, English language literacy is a particular challenge as the SSSC and universities require proof of written and verbal literacy. However, there seem to be variable levels of support for helping students with this aspect. Moreover, whilst everyday language might be deemed as suitable by the university as a whole, this can fall short of the standard of spoken and written English required for the social work profession, yet there appears to be limited recognition of the need for support for this. There are, in addition, particular difficulties for some students in communicating with service users with strong accents or dialects.

Different cultural beliefs

Some BME students face challenges because of the differences between their cultural beliefs, value-systems and experiences and that of what is experienced as 'mainstream' Scottish social work, for example, religious ideas and spirituality. These may not be valued in the strongly secular cultural setting that is modern social work in Scotland. Students may be afraid to share their own views because there appears to be a presumption that the 'Scottish' way is the right (and only) way. However, open exploration of different viewpoints can be helpful for workers, students and placement agencies. This means that BME students are vulnerable to experiences of discrimination as a result of their ethnic or cultural difference.

Scottish culture and social work education

Allied to the above point, staff can under-estimate how Scottish-focussed their courses might be and therefore how inaccessible they may be to students who were not brought up or have worked here. This issue is compounded by immigration issues that prevent students from entering the UK well ahead of their studies.

Extra pressures

Whilst all social work students may have financial, personal and family pressures, many BME students, especially those from other countries, can experience additional pressures because of a complexity of cultural but also practical issues. They are paying large fees, they may have no family support in the UK, they may be working to support family in their home countries or here, there are strict

requirements attached to their visa and they may be concerned for the welfare of their friends and family if they have come from a country where there is civil unrest.

Practice placements

The practice placement aspect of social work education brings particular challenges for all students in terms of the language and culture within different agencies and the population they serve and often there is little time and limited support to help students acclimatise to these new settings. Students have voiced concerns that agency staff, at times, have not been welcoming of their presence and there have been instances of direct and indirect racism that they have had to contend with. There are also issues about the nature of the practice teacher/ student relationship based on different views about the role and status of 'teachers' and how supervision should work. It is often the case that students are most aware of differences between their culture and understanding of helping relationships than those of the workers around them. Some students have been well supported but others have felt isolated and unsupported.

Recommendations for action

It should be stressed again that BME students are a diverse group and some may individually benefit from different types and levels of support. Many of these recommendations might well be regarded as good practice for all students undertaking social work education. Some initiatives might also be developed collaboratively across the universities. However, some factors are unique to BME students such as visa restrictions for international students. Nevertheless, many of the observations noted above demonstrate the collective responsibility across Scottish social work services and education for improving BME SW students' experience as not one institution can achieve the desired changes on their own.

The recommendations below have been grouped together to identify where, how and by whom change may take place. They begin with orientation of new students and then move on to the interaction between educators and students, through social work programmes to wider university services. In addition, it identifies where coordination between Universities and leadership by the Scottish Social Services Council and the Association of Directors of Social Work (Scotland) might help to support systemic change within qualifying and post-qualifying social work education and training. Recommendations do not affect entry requirements and are set within the current requirements for social work education and the standards of practice student are required to meet.

Support for BME students in the early stages of training

- 1) Develop learning materials on Scotland as a country, UK social work and social work education for students that are accessible prior to commencing

the course. This might be a shared online resource between Scottish HEIs and the SSSC.

- 2) Consider whether and how pre-course experience within Scotland might be possible to help orientate overseas students. This would be separate to any readiness-to-practice that is undertaken within the SW programmes.
- 3) Extend within the undergraduate programme, the personal tutor system to the start of year one in those courses that currently only have the tutor system in the professional studies component.
- 4) Expand opportunities for mentoring and peer group support.

Support for university tutors and practice educators

- 5) Develop and expand the nature of materials and accessibility to learning resources on anti-racism and cultural competence.
- 6) Create training opportunities to share ideas and learning with others, either through workshops or online resources shared between IRISS and the SSSC.

Social work programmes

- 7) Develop more effective supports for students who require assistance with achieving the level of written and verbal English required for social work practice.
- 8) Increase the international dimension to teaching: developing a common discourse, based on social justice models, drawing on the best international research and practice, whilst recognising nation specific difference.
- 9) Re-establish a more differentiated approach to diversity. For example reintroducing specific work on anti-racist practice. The aim should be to strengthen cultural and anti-racist competence.
- 10) Include content and teaching methods early on that encourage debate and discussion between students and between staff and students around ethnicity and culture. An exploration of understanding and experience of risk is particularly important.
- 11) Improve pre-placement planning and placement support for BME students by taking more account of the extent to which they might be familiar with the culture, nature of work and technical language within the specific agency.

Central university systems

- 12) Share this report with the wider university, with particular reference to support with writing and speaking English for students on professional courses and the availability and accessibility of proof reading services, mentoring and peer support, which are preferably free at the point of access, similar to those services available to disabled students.

National bodies

Scottish Social Services Council

- 13) Consider how they can support social work programmes to address the recommendations and draw upon this research in the continuous learning framework for qualified social workers.

Association of Director of Social Work (Scotland)

- 14) Share the report with ADSW to raise awareness of the issues around practice placements so they can consider how support and training for practice educators, link workers and general staff might develop their culturally sensitivity and, more specifically, to better understand the pressures that some BME students can experience.

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Resources

Universities Scotland - Race Equality Toolkit

<http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit/>

Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

<http://www.crer.org.uk>

Equality Challenge Unit

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk>

Higher Education Academy – Black and minority-ethnic students

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/black_minority_ethnic_student_resources

Scotland Against Racism

<http://www.scotlandagainstracism.com/onescotland/73.html>