



UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH

THE MOMENT OF AWARENESS

What Happens When PGM Students
Discover the Awarding Gap?

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Session Outline

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What is the awarding gap, and where Portsmouth stands

From attainment gap to awarding gap

Outdated Framing: Attainment gap (the student deficit model).

Implicitly places responsibility or failure on individual students. It frames differential outcomes as a result of lacking capability, effort, or preparation.

Modern Framing: Awarding Gap (institutional accountability)).

Forces focus onto systemic barriers. It identifies institutional issues.

Where Portsmouth stands



13%

National awarding gap is around 8.8% - 10.5%.

The size of the UoP 'awarding gap' from 2020/21-2024/25) has reduced in the two most recent years
11%, 17%, 17%, 15%, 13%

Progress is real. It is also unfinished.

But do students know?

The gap is well documented inside the institution.

What do students actually know about it?

How we found out: A Mixed-Methods Research Design

Quantitative Scale

- Evaluating raw trends and baseline perspectives via the University of Portsmouth's Race Equality Charter (REC) Student Survey.

Qualitative Depth

- Unearthing narratives through anonymised student focus groups, listening circles.

Ambassador Reflections

- First-hand ethnographic observations capturing student intersections.

58%

of students do not know what UoP is
doing on race equality

Is this an effort problem, or a communication problem?

One moment, two very different reactions

Empowering & Validating	Destabilising & Excluding
Awareness confirms experiences are not personal failings	Awareness challenges assumptions about meritocracy
Encourages critical engagement and advocacy	Triggers self-doubt and mistrust
Creates motivation to challenge barriers	Leads to silence, withdrawal and disengagement
Build confidence through understanding	Raises questions of belonging and worth

Underneath it: conditional belonging and the cognitive load of identity management.

"I started questioning whether I really belong here"

PGM Students Reflections

"It helped me realise my experiences weren't just in my head"

PGM Students Reflections

"Overt discrimination does not have to be present for a student to feel structurally excluded."

PGM Students Reflections

We are not alone in this

Addressing this challenge is a nationwide priority

University	Key Approach	Example Initiatives
Manchester Metropolitan University	Staff capability & student development	STRIVE100 programme; Race Equity Toolkit
University of Reading	Data-informed action	Live awarding gap dashboards; Student Inclusion Consultants
University of Southampton	Student-led change	Paid Black undergraduate panel designing interventions
University of Portsmouth	Strategy, support & partnerships	Access & Participation Plan, Race Equality Charter, PGM Ambassadors, Black Student Scholarships, Inclusive Assessment and Curriculum Development

The strongest work pairs institutional action with student voice.

What students told us they want

Portsmouth's REC Survey reveals a crucial metric: 79% of students feel respected by staff, but only 44% feel connected

- **Trusted Reporting Routes**
- **Staff Competence on Race**
- **Natural Curriculum Representation**
- **Dedicated Belonging Spaces**
- **Visible action, not just statements**

What you can do tomorrow

Focus Area	Immediate Action (Tomorrow)	Structural Transformation (Long Term)
1. Race-Conscious Pedagogy	Commit to zero unsolicited targeting. Do not put PGM students on the spot.	Critically review, diversify, and structurally audit reading lists to naturally include non-Western frameworks.
2. Demystify Reporting	Normalise and embed 'Report & Support' directly onto Moodle module banners.	Establish transparent investigation timelines and provide reassuring feedback loops to lower reporting anxiety.
3. Relational Teaching	Learn how to correctly pronounce every single student's name on your roster.	Transition from email-only comms to informal drop-ins, treating students as individual partners.
4. Structural Redesign	Recognise student cognitive loads during assessment design.	Redesign high-stakes assessments toward continuous, inclusive methods.

Practical actions, not accusations.

Awareness Alone Changes Nothing

The moment of awareness is a critical turning point for our students. What Happens next is entirely up to us as an institution.

So, what will you do with this?

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