



# BME Student Experiences of Practice Placements

**Julie Nightingale  
Jackie Parkin**

With thanks to Faculty BME Placements working group and colleagues:

Dave Lomas, Pete Nelson, Jacqui Brewster, Laura Holt, Marie Hollingworth

# Background

- "the diversity profile of the current health workforce in England is not representative of the general population that it seeks to serve..."

HEE 2014. Widening participation - it matters!

- Imperative that we support students from diverse backgrounds to enter and then successfully complete their education for H&S Care professions
- In 2015-16 (England): 15.6% gap between BME and white students in achieving a 1<sup>st</sup>/2:1 degree

AdvanceHE, 2019

## In our Faculty

- no significant BME academic attainment gap
- BUT over-representation of BME students in Fitness for Practice investigations
- AND high number of BME students raising placement concerns with student union advisors:

'tip of the iceberg'

# Project outline: 'Placements Uncovered'

- Multi-professional qualitative research study -
  - Allied Health Professions
  - Nursing and Midwifery
  - Social Work, Social Care and Community Studies
- What challenges and barriers do pre-registration BME students experience on placement?
- What strategies can mitigate against any of the identified challenges, facilitating all students to achieve their placement objectives?
- Focus groups with 4 key stakeholder groups

# Focus groups

Stakeholder Group	No. focus groups	No. participants
BME Students	3	13
Academic Staff	4	16
Placement Lead Educators	2	16
Student's Union Advisors	1	4

- 1 more student focus group arranged
- At least 2 people reviewed each transcript
- Key quotes and emerging themes highlighted
- Categories, themes and sub-themes developed

# Categories

1. Is there a problem?
2. How does this manifest?
3. Why haven't we done anything about it?
4. What could we do about it? [Phase 2]

# Category 1 - Primary Themes



# Acknowledging concerns

## Sub-Themes

Similar FtP  
demographics

Student behaviours  
leading to FfP concerns

Placements amplify  
behaviours

Classroom 'cliques'

Culture shock to  
placements - changes  
in student profiles



# Acknowledging concerns

## Sub-Themes

Similar FfP demographics

Student behaviours leading to FfP concerns

Placements amplify behaviours

Classroom 'cliques'

Culture shock to placements - changes in student profiles

**FfP referrals:** 9/10 focus groups - not a surprise that BME students were over-represented:

*"what made me concerned was that I was doing very, very similar referrals for almost identical students" [AHP PLs]*

*"...out of the last probably six [referrals], I would say probably five would be BME and it is a concern" [AHP PLs]*

**Behaviours:** Timekeeping, reliability, not following processes, abrupt/ confrontational manner, poor communication.

The **placement amplifies** student behaviour seen in classroom into FTP:

*"I think the attitudes we see in placement are the same as we see in the classroom" [AHP PLs]*

# Cultural Norms

## Sub-Themes

High Expectations +  
Superman/woman  
syndrome

Internalising problems

Back stories

Un-learning cultural  
heritage

# Cultural Norms

Some BME students come from cultures which have **high expectations** of success.

Others students are from cultures where **problems are internalised** and not shared.

*"...can you say at the beginning what's the matter and then we can adjust your placement accordingly...people don't feel they can say that." [supervisors]*

**The 'back story'** is often hidden from view, yet explains and often justifies behaviours:

*"There are some really harrowing, harrowing stories...They don't want to talk to you about it. It's really hard for them, because they've kind of dealt with that part of their life and tried really hard to move on". [Advisors]*

## Sub-Themes

High Expectations +  
Superman/woman  
syndrome

Internalising problems

Back stories

Un-learning cultural  
heritage

# Cultural Norms

## Sub-Themes

Expectations of others  
+ Superman/woman  
syndrome

Internalising problems

Back stories

Un-learning cultural  
heritage

**Un-learning educational and social cultural heritage:**

*"From a cultural perspective it's often frowned upon for them to, not so much challenge supervisors, but to question supervisors" [NM PLs]*

*"It seems to be worse in male Afro-Caribbean cultures ... they really don't like being told how to do something by a female'. [NM PLs]*

*"two or three male students that have struggled to be assessed by female mentors" [placement leads]*

## Sub-Themes

Placement and  
organisational culture

Placement Geography

Challenging Settings

Challenging patient  
groups

## Sub-Themes

Placement and organisational culture

Placement Geography

Challenging Settings

Challenging patient groups

**Organisational and placement culture -**  
supervisors can easily damage trust:

*"There are some organisations that have put in really good support mechanisms" [placement leads]*

*"whether [leaders] actually reinforce a culture which may be quite negative"[placement leads]*

### **Placement Geography:**

Variation in placement experiences often related to geography:

- Challenges of working in '*overwhelmingly white*' communities.
- Seeing the same '*repeat offenders*' [student advisors]

## Sub-Themes

Placement and organisational culture

Placement Geography

Challenging Settings

Challenging patient groups

## Challenging Settings:

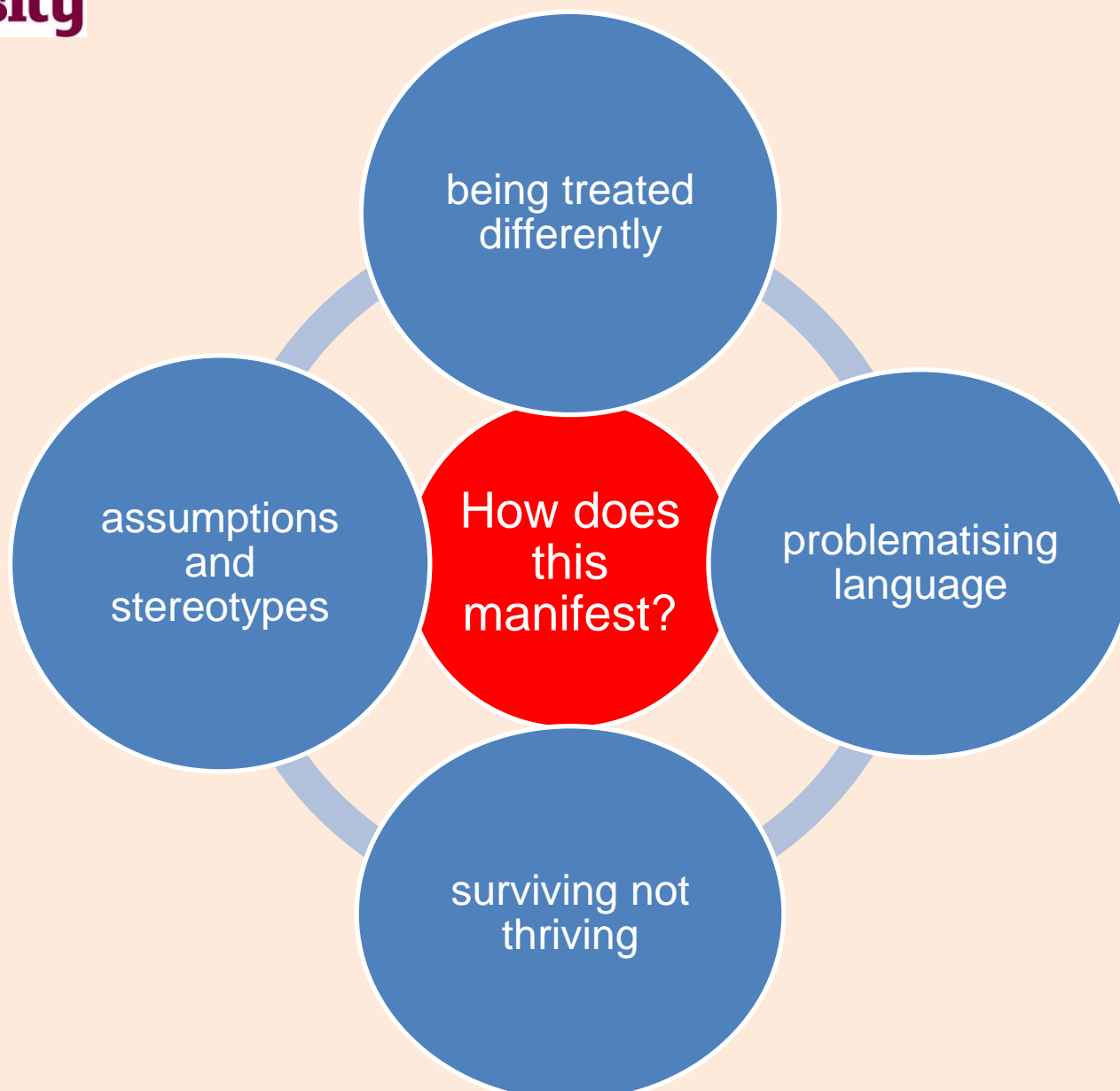
- rapid and frequent communication challenges
- fast paced clinics vs one to one settings
- single mentor vs departmental supervision

## Challenging Patient Groups

- elderly, cognitive impairment, high stress environments (theatre)

*"He was working in an elderly area and the patient working with him referred to him as a man from the colonies; ... none of the staff challenged that or checked that he was OK and it was just accepted ...he kind of found the funny side and got on with it, but he shouldn't have to, should he ?' [NM PLs]*

# Category 2 - Primary Themes





# Being Treated Differently

## Sub-Themes

Active avoidance

Perceived  
discrimination

Held to a different  
standard

Lack of respect

# Being Treated Differently

## Sub-Themes

Active avoidance

Perceived  
discrimination

Held to a different  
standard

Lack of respect

**Active Avoidance:** Students feel alienated by staff who avoid working with them and avoid "chit chat"

*'...so when they see a [white] student having a chat and having a laugh with staff, and they are not welcomed in the same way...' [NM PLS]*

*"And you will want to [get involved] but they don't seem interested ...because they don't talk that much with you". [AHP students]*

*It's sort of bullying by exclusion, isn't it, not including them. [NM PLs 2]*

# Being Treated Differently

## Sub-Themes

Active avoidance

Perceived  
discrimination

Held to a different  
standard

Lack of respect

### Perceived discrimination:

*"...quite a lot of students tell us that they feel that they're being prejudiced against on placement in particular. And it tends to be cultural reasons and it tends to be the students that we see are of a certain age, a certain background". [advisors]*

*"We had this one [BME] lad and they just made him into a laughing stock really. And they made him do every [case] just to get a kick out of it really and just to laugh at him, and they were like setting him up to fail". [AHP students]*

# Being Treated Differently

## Held to a different standard:

### Sub-Themes

Active avoidance

Perceived  
discrimination

Held to a different  
standard

Lack of respect

*But I think they've got double to prove... to prove themselves twice. [NM PLs]*

*"I feel like I have to do twice as much as the 'locals' to prove myself". [AHP students]*

*'If other students ask (for help) there was no problem, but if I ask it they were taking me as if I'm not understanding what I'm saying ... [Nursing students]*

## Lack of respect and professionalism:

*"where [staff] have been talking and there's a student in the room ... and they are BME and that they're not good. But no form of support offered." [AHP students]*

*"spoken to like a child" [AHP students]*

## Sub-Themes

stereotyping based on  
name

stereotyping based on  
skin colour

stereotyping based on  
previous experiences

assumptions of  
community

demeanour

not just a BME student

# Assumptions and Stereotypes

## Stereotyping:

### Sub-Themes

stereotyping based on name

stereotyping based on skin colour

stereotyping based on previous experiences

assumptions of community

demeanour

not just a BME student

*"And so it's already the name is a barrier, because ...everyone is thinking how we are going to say that, how are we going to pronounce that?"  
[Nursing students]*

*" [they] felt that they were being unfairly treated based on the colour of their skin. [NM PLs]*

*'she said we really struggle with these types of students'. [NM PLs]*

**Demeanour:** expecting students to change their inherent personality

*"I think in terms of quietness ... I don't think you can change my behaviour I think within just these three years... but am I communicating well, am I doing the job effectively". [AHP students]*

## Sub-Themes

problematizing accents

writing ability

thinking in another  
language

miscommunication,  
misinterpretation and  
mixed messages

seeing through a  
different lens

# Problematizing Language

## Sub-Themes

problematizing accents

writing ability

thinking in another  
language

miscommunication,  
misinterpretation and  
mixed messages

seeing through a  
different lens

**Accents** are a major issue - colloquial language and BME student accents:

*'But as a human being you feel down if someone is telling you off about your accent, because you don't know how to present yourself any more' [Nursing student]*

*"it was sad that my supervisor dwelled more on my accent and she laughed about it."  
[Nursing student]*

*'she mocked how he spoke ...and I thought well if you're doing that when I'm here, what are you doing when this poor student's there on their own... he said as soon as I turn my back I know they're talking about me and laughing at me'. [NM PLs]*



# Surviving not thriving

## Sub-Themes

withdrawing mentally

feeling like an alien

keeping a low profile

consequences of  
isolation

concealing concerns

# Surviving not thriving

## Sub-Themes

withdrawing mentally

feeling like an alien

keeping a low profile

consequences of  
isolation

concealing concerns

**withdrawing mentally** - self protection. Even before the placement students anticipate prejudice, based on previous experiences.

**Feeling like an alien** - suspicion. Consequences of your fears being realised.

*"...you just feel like I'll just ignore that, I didn't hear that. But at the same time in the back of your mind you do feel a bit alien. You don't know who's on board with these opinions and who is not on board: who's against you or not against you.*

*[AHP students]*

**Keeping a low profile** - coping strategies).

*"don't rock the boat"*

*"keep your head down"*

*"stay in the corner and go with the flow"*

*"take it on the chin" [AHP / NM / SW students]*

# Surviving not thriving

## Concealing concerns:

Fear stopping action, reluctance to whistle blow

*"how many people are brave enough, because so much hangs on them passing their placement, doesn't it?" [NM PLs]*

*"you've got to fake it to make it...it's just smiling and gritting your teeth because you have to do it because you don't fit in, but you've got to get through, so you have to do it". [AHP students]*

## "Once only disclosure":

*"People are internalising it...they absorb it. They come to us as a confidential service and they will disclose it and then might just never say it again to anyone else". [Advisors]*

## Sub-Themes

withdrawing mentally

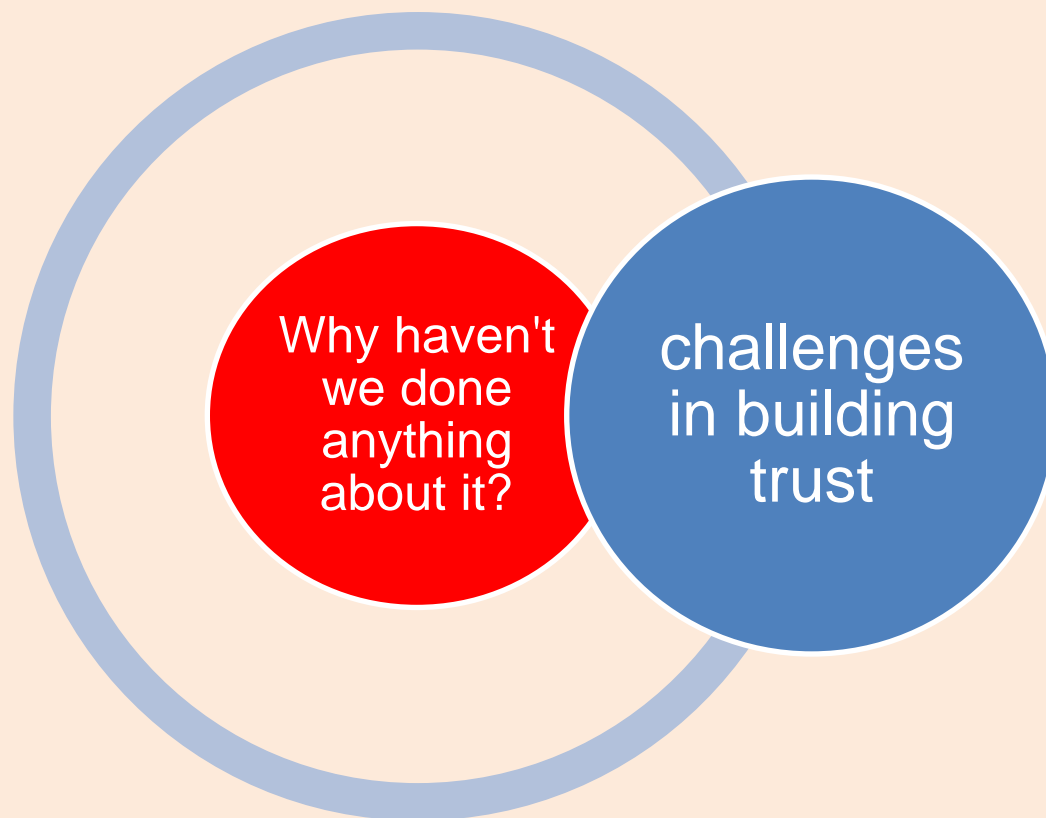
feeling like an alien

keeping a low profile

consequences of  
isolation

concealing concerns

# Category 3 - Primary Themes



# Challenges in Building Trust

## Sub-Themes

white faced organisations

conflicts of interest

culture of non-disclosure

challenging assumptions

unclear processes and  
lack of consistency

### **Organisational whiteness:**

- faculty staff, placements, FfP panels

### **Conflicts of interest:**

- Placement Educator as gatekeeper
- Link Lecturers - clinical-academic collaborations

### **Non-disclosure:**

*culture of privacy related to:*

- *the back story*
- *current issues affecting placement*
- *incidents and concerns*

# Challenges in Building Trust

## Challenging assumptions:

*"It is just I feel very uncomfortable I suppose with the whole race issue." [NM PLs]*

*"what I realised also some white staff are also very nice. They just come to you straight and you feel like you bond with them straightaway." [AHP students]*

## Unclear processes:

*"I wouldn't even know who to go to report to anyway" [AHP students]*

*"But you don't know how to go about it, whether you report it or not, because if you report it you don't know what the management's opinions are. And if you do report it, does that stand against you and affect your learning for the rest of the year?" [AHP students]*

## Sub-Themes

white faced organisations

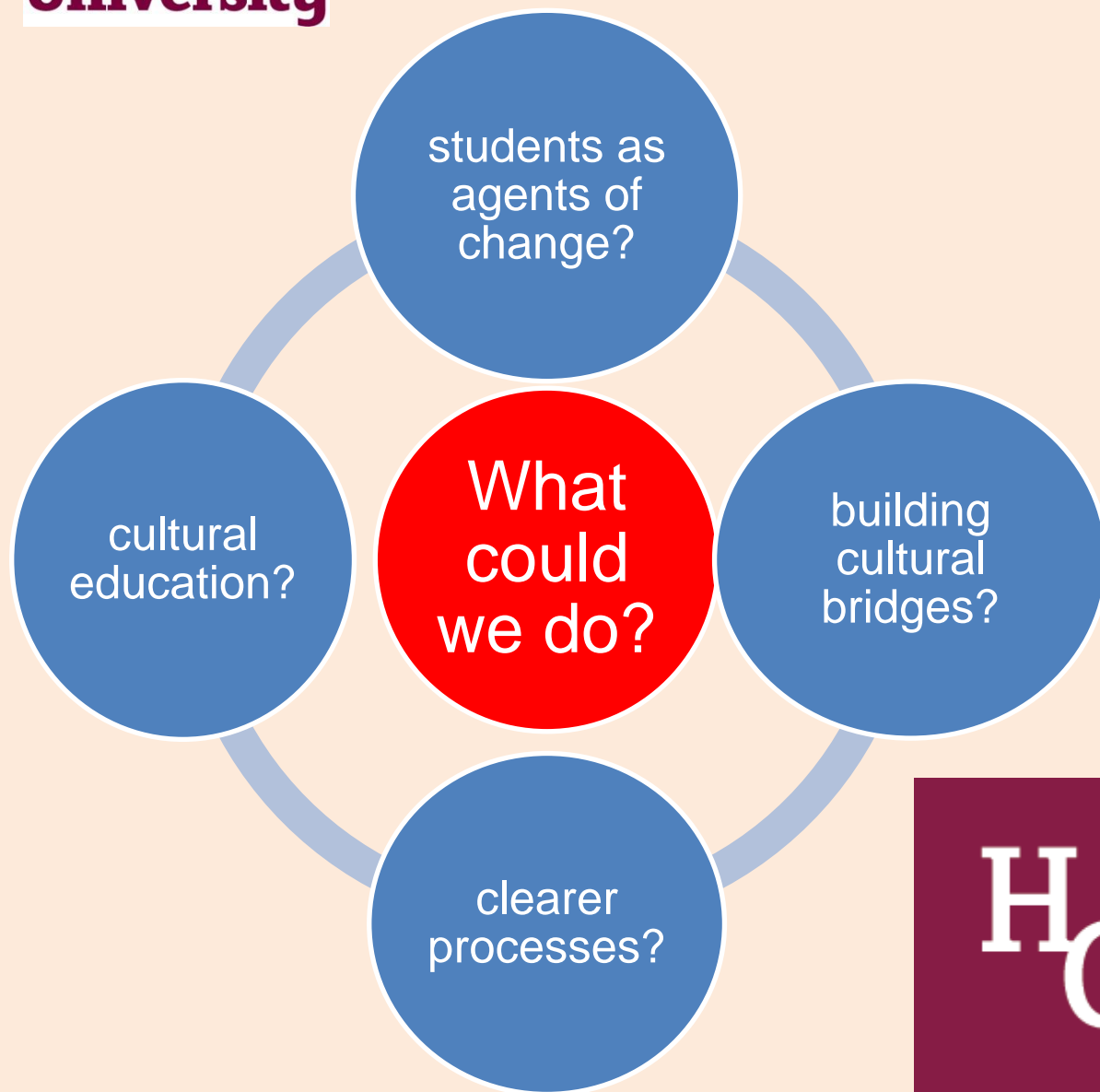
conflicts of interest

culture of non-disclosure

challenging assumptions

unclear processes and lack of consistency

# Category 4 - Primary Themes



# Summary

- some BME students encounter specific challenges with potential to affect placement success / experience
- not all these issues are unique to BME students
- some excellent but also some poor student experiences outlined
- systems and processes (and culture) for reporting concerns need clarifying
- range of suggestions made by participants are under review



# Final thoughts

We have a Duty of Care:

to whom?

Email: [J.Nightingale@shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Nightingale@shu.ac.uk)