Institution:	**GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**
Unit of Assessment:	**22: Social Work and Social Policy**
Title of case study:	**Diversity and Progression Among Social Work Students in England**

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The diversity and progression research project investigated the particular circumstances of black and ethnic minority, disabled, and lesbian, gay and bisexual students to identify the specific factors that contribute to their experiences on social work programmes. The research findings have been used to inform the development of a Toolkit of resources for social work educators, placement providers, employers and students to use to enhance the quality of learning experience of diverse student groups. The Toolkit was developed from the findings from the research, to provide guidance on ways of addressing common challenges in the curriculum, learning and teaching.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The research that underpins this ICS was carried out at Goldsmiths between 2007-2011 by Dr Claudia Bernard (Senior Lecturer in Social Work; appointed at Goldsmiths in 1994); Anna Fairtlough, Lecturer in Social Work, first appointed at Goldsmiths in 2001; and Joan Fletcher, Lecturer in Social Work, first appointed at Goldsmiths in 2005.

The diversity and progression research has focused on equality issues for black and ethnic minority, lesbian, gay and bisexual, and disabled students on social work courses in England. Previous research on students' experiences of social work courses highlighted that these groups of students face particular obstacles to their learning, and were at greater risk of non-completion or took longer to complete their courses. The quantitative data on student progression rates in England showed wide variations in the completion rates for this group of students, and there were concerns within the social work education community about their progression. We sought through our research to find out what factors were impacting on students' experiences. The research therefore used a qualitative approach to investigate the particular circumstances of black and ethnic minority students, disabled students, and lesbian and gay students, to identify how individual and institutional factors contribute to their experiences on social work courses.[1]

This particular research group was selected on the grounds of a proposal to the Department of Health (DH), which funded the project – £106K - as one of nine research projects in the Social Care Workforce Research Programme covering recruitment and retention; graduating in social work; skills, training and qualification; and new ways of working. The project was therefore about change from the outset, as the Department of Health (which was the government department responsible for social work education at the time) was keen to generate knowledge that could be used to bring about change in workforce development.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups from a total of 95 students including 66 Black and ethnic minority, 16 disabled and 13 lesbian gay and bisexual students.[1,3,4] Nine focus groups were conducted and they included one with lesbian, gay and bisexual students, six with black and ethnic minority students, and two with disabled students. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a wide range of education providers (programme directors, tutors, practice learning coordinators, and student support services' staff).

The study found that areas of inequality in social work education could still be identified, despite the introduction of a range of initiatives and policies designed to counteract them. The study highlighted a number of factors that had a bearing on student engagement, which in turn could affect timely progression.[5] The cumulative effect of combined and intersecting disadvantage, (for example, for dyslexic black and ethnic minority students with financial as well as caring responsibilities), meant that certain students were particularly vulnerable to delayed progression. However, many participants were able to overcome cumulative disadvantage and barriers to progression, suggesting levels of persistence and resilience, which rendered them well suited to the demands of contemporary social work practice (6). Participants from all three target groups experienced feelings

of marginalisation and reported divisions in the learning environment. However, black and ethnic minority and disabled students were more likely to report that this had affected their academic confidence. Factors mitigating feelings of marginalisation included: support provided by personal tutors and practice assessors; more opportunities to work in small groups; anonymous marking; effective use of the VLE and internal resources of self-belief and determination.[4]

The primary output of this research has been a substantive report submitted to the Department of Health on 11 February 2011.[1] The initial findings were presented at the Social Care Workforce Research Initiative at the Department of Health in November 2010.

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3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Indicators of international research quality: The *British Journal of Social Work* (refs 4, 5, 6) is an international rigorously peer-reviewed journal whose purpose is to both document and evaluate theoretical and empirical developments in social work.

1. Bernard C, Fairtlough A, Fletcher J, Ahmet A. (2011) *Diversity and Progression among Social Work Students in England*. *[Report]*

2. Fairtlough A, Fletcher J (2010) "Social Work Education as an Expedition to the Antarctic". 12th UK Joint Social Work Education Conference, University of Hertfordshire, 30/06 – 02/07/10. *[Conference presentation]*

3. Fairtlough A, Bernard C, Fletcher J, Ahmet A (2013) Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students on Social Work Programmes: Developing a Framework for Educational Practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43 (3): 467-485. [doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcs001]. *[journal article]*.
   Submitted as REF output: available from REF2.

4. Bernard C, Fairtlough A, Fletcher J, Ahmet A (2013) A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning, *British Journal of Social Work*. First published online March 25, 2013. [doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct055] *[journal article]*.
   Submitted as REF output: available from REF2.

5. Fletcher J, Bernard C, Fairtlough A, Ahmet A (2013) Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: the role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students, *British Journal of Social Work*. Accepted 2nd April 2013. [doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct081] *[journal article]*.
   Submitted as REF output: available from REF2.

6. Fairtlough A, Bernard C, Fletcher J, Ahmet A (2013) Black and ethnic minority social work students' experiences of practice learning: Understanding differential progression rates, *Journal of Social Work*. [doi:10.1177/1468017313500416]. *[journal article]*.
   Submitted as REF output: available from REF2.

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4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

A Diversity and Progression Toolkit was developed for use by academics and practice educators to assist them in addressing common challenges. The material provided in the Toolkit consists of exercises, literature, guidance, and video excepts that can be used by HEIs, placement providers and employers to develop good practice in working with diverse groups of students to address common challenges in the curriculum and learning environment.

In 2011 the research team began actively disseminating the research through various media,[1,2,3] and created a web resource in the form of a virtual advisory group made up of academics, practice educators, trainers, users of services and students to contribute to the development of the Toolkit and offer reflections on its resources. It also commenced its engagement with the social work academic community by presenting the findings at the Joint University Council's Social Work Education Committee Conference. This is the key forum at which the international social work

academic community debate teaching and learning. As a direct consequence, a number of HEIs registered an interest in using the Toolkit and the activities it suggests.**(4)**

The Toolkit has been rolled out in two workshops hosted at Goldsmiths during 2012 and 2013. These workshops brought together a range of stakeholders including academics from the USA, Canada, Spain and the UK who are interested in social pedagogy for transformative practice. The workshops created a space to get the research messages into practice, and to communicate the benefits of the research. They have stimulated motivation and new ideas amongst social work educators. It became evident at the workshop in 2013 that an incidental outcome of the Toolkit has been to create communities of practice formed of social work educators, practice educators, practitioners, students and users of services to engage in development and change.**(5)** One participant had this to say:

"the development of the virtual Toolkit is invaluable in helping to identify small and larger steps which can be taken at different levels within social work programmes and HEIs". [Lecturer, Royal Holloway, University of London]

In terms of reach and significance, the research messages are getting into both policy and practice. In 2012 the research team participated in a Higher Education Academy-sponsored debate on Race in Social Work, at Salford University. The purpose of this event was to bring together social work academics from HEIs across the UK who have a commitment to developing inclusive learning and teaching to engage diverse student groups. These debates are part of wider discussion about race and the learning environment, intended to develop pedagogic approaches that might contribute to good outcomes for students.**(2,5,6)**

The findings from the research underpinning the Toolkit have been presented at major national and international conferences and published in reputable peer-reviewed journals. They have therefore informed an international research, teaching and learning network. The Toolkit is being used by a number of universities, including Middlesex University, Royal Holloway, University of London, Bedfordshire, and Buckinghamshire New University. In terms of reach, the Toolkit material is having influence beyond HEIs in social care agencies that provide work-based learning opportunities for social work students. For example, the London Boroughs of Ealing, Southwark, and Lewisham, and third sector organisations such as St Mungos, Homeless Services and Equinox, a provider of support services for people with mental health problems, are all using the Toolkit material to support students' learning.**(3,5)**

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5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. *Coverage on Radio Programmes:*
   a. Discussion of the research on Sunrise Radio, London September 2011
   b. Discussion of the research on Colourful Radio, Digital Station, September London 2011

2. *News item:* Higher Education Academy Newsletter, 29 April 2013

3. *Coverage of the research by Government Departments:*
   a. DH Social Care Workforce Research Initiative 2007-11, Overview and Synthesis
   b. Coverage in the Department of Health Newsletter, *Social Care Workforce Research Initiative*, No 3, Spring 2011

4. *Evidence of HEI Beneficiaries:*
   a. Discussion of the research at the ESRC Researcher Development Initiative Launch Event *"How do we know our Social Work Practice is Effective"* 15-16h September 2010, Middlesex University.
   b. Discussion of the research at the *9th International Conference on Practice Teaching and Field Education in Health and Social Work, Bournemouth University.* April 2011.
   c. Discussion of the Research at the *Beyond Horizons': African Social Work students look to the future* – Conference held at the University of Northampton June 2012.

5. <u>Relevance of Toolkit to current learning and teaching in social work</u>*:*

   [a collated set of the information below is available on request from Goldsmiths Research Office]

   a. Attendance list for knowledge transfer workshop on 16th May 2013
   b. Evaluation statements from knowledge transfer workshop. 16th May 2013
   c. Statement from one university currently using the Toolkit Material

6. <u>Educators inspired by Bernard et al's research</u>:

   There is a discussion of the research in Bartoli A (Ed) 2013, *Anti-Racism in Social Work Practice* [Critical Publishing, St Albans; available on request from Goldsmiths Research Office].

   The authors of this book provide a summary of the research findings as an example of a piece of research that has advanced current thinking and ideas about social work education. Importantly, this is more than simply a citation. The chapters each showcase a piece of research to illustrate a particular theme, and the diversity and progression research was used as an example in Chapter 4 to advance thinking about student support in the learning environment. The authors recognised the research to be important in terms of esteem and as a result the research has gone out to a wider domain.