

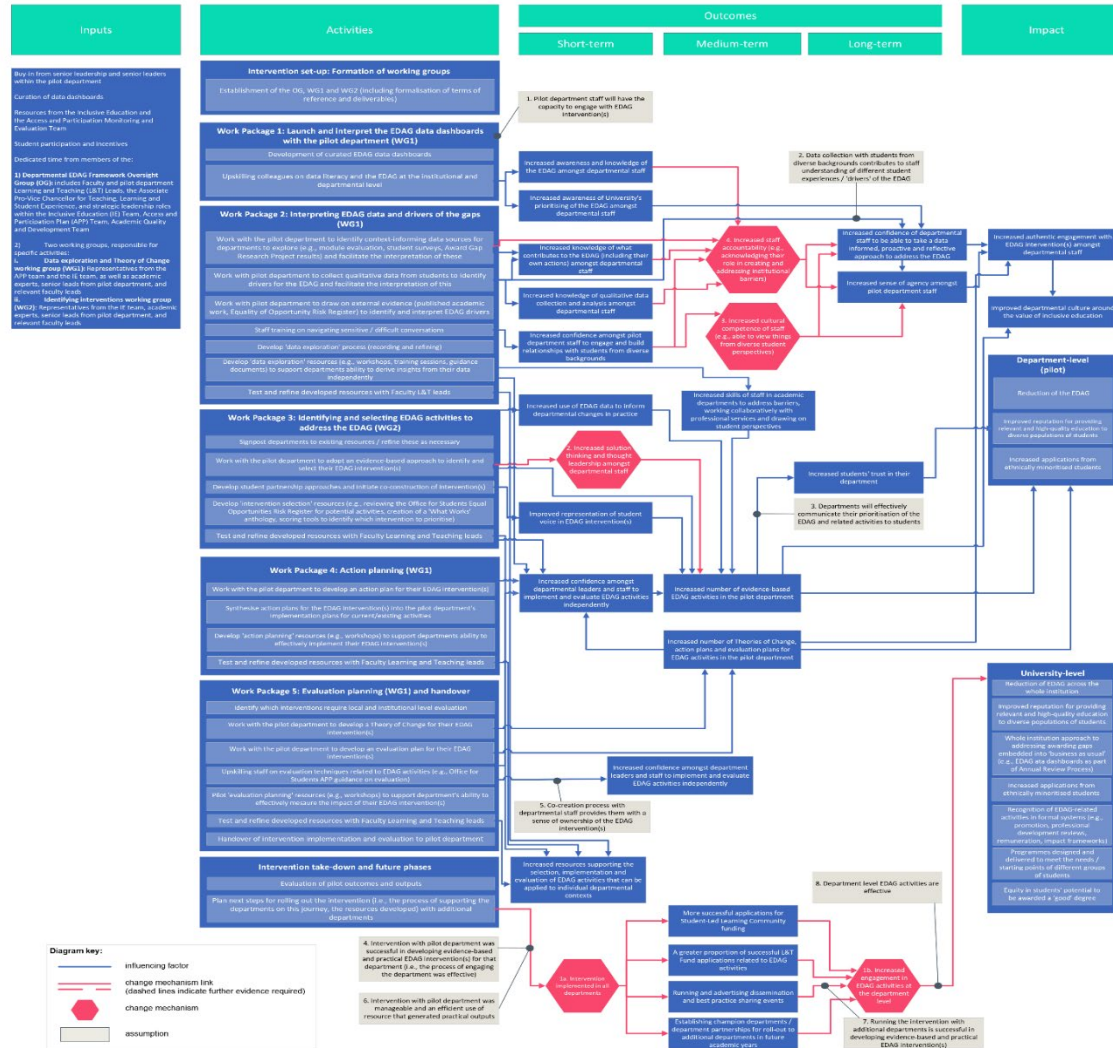
Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC) University of York – Departmental Ethnicity Degree Awarding Gap (EDAG) Framework

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Departmental EDAG Framework
Enhanced Theory of Change



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ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE

VERSION

Version 3 – March 2024

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NAME

University of York – Departmental EDAG Framework

WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?

There is a persistent ethnicity degree awarding gap (EDAG) between white and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students at the University of York. Specifically, there is a 13.7 percentage point gap between white students and Black students, and a 10.5 percentage point difference between white students and Asian students. These gaps are also present amongst mature students and students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 and 2, both individually and intersectionally (e.g., the EDAG is widening for the most disadvantaged BAME students compared with the most advantaged white students). The University of York has already developed a range of inclusive learning, teaching and assessment initiatives designed to address the EDAG, including the Inclusive-learning@York toolkit, student-led learning communities projects, the Award Gap Research Project and the decolonising and diversifying the curriculum project. Findings from the Award Gap Research Project indicate that Black and Asian students feel less connected with their academic department and the curriculum content, and do not always feel that their lived experiences are recognised or represented with learning, teaching and assessment.

The 'drivers' of the EDAG at the University of York include:

- That the need to address the EDAG is not embedded within existing accountabilities and processes.
- That support is offered for staff to implement best practice, but the uptake of this support is optional and the support is delivered by a variety of teams.
- That there are too few incentives/drivers to change practice on a systematic basis.
- That the culture is rooted in existing traditional research cultures and Western culture.

Some of these drivers have been uncovered through feedback from staff across the annual review process.

There is a need to join-up processes, define accountabilities and provide support as part of a formal process and to systematically draw-on and enhance knowledge at departmental level.

WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

The intervention targets university departments to address the 'drivers' outlined in the situation. Specifically, the intervention aims to improve staff understanding of existing racial inequalities, and enable them to take action to address the awarding gaps. By facilitating informed and targeted action at the department level, the intervention ultimately aims to improve Black, Asian and minority ethnic students' feelings of connectedness and belonging to their department and the content of the curriculum. It also aims to improve students' feelings of being recognised and represented. With regards to this pilot, students in the School of Business and Society (SBS) are expected to be shorter-term beneficiaries of this intervention.

With regards to staff participating directly in the intervention, the more immediate beneficiaries of this pilot include:

- Members of the Oversight and working groups (described in the 'Who is delivering the intervention' section).
- Department leadership teams (SMTs) including Learning and Teaching leads.
- Student services managers
- Departmental and central professional support staff services
- Departmental staff (e.g., opportunities for professional development, increased job satisfaction, more effective ways of working, and so on).

WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?

The 'intervention' is the piloting of a new process for engaging departments in actively reviewing their EDAGs and guiding their selection of appropriate interventions to address the EDAG in their own context. Piloting this new process with a single department enables the *Departmental EDAG Framework Oversight Group* (herein referred to as the Oversight Group) to co-create resources to support departments through this journey in subsequent years. This Enhanced Theory of Change covers this initial piloting, though the intention is to roll-out this process with the rest of the university's departments, refining the activities and resources developed along the way and formally integrating it into the university's annual review process. The pilot department is the School of Business and Society within the Faculty of Social Sciences, as this department received its EDAG data in the most recent annual review cycle. This department has volunteered to participate in the pilot as members of its senior leadership team overlap with the Oversight Group and Working Group (WG) members. Their involvement is anticipated to facilitate easier buy-in and effective engagement with the pilot programme.

The intervention (i.e., the process that is being piloted) will be delivered via a series of progressive activities grouped into work packages:

Intervention set-up: Preparing and forming the Oversight Group and confirming the members of the two delivery working groups.

Work package 1 (WP1): Launching the EDAG data dashboards with the pilot department.

Work package 2 (WP2): Working in collaboration with the pilot department to *understand their data* and explore what might be driving EDAGs in their context (e.g., contextualising with existing data, the collection of new data, examining external evidence, etc).

Work package 3 (WP3): Facilitating the identification and prioritisation of department-level interventions to address the 'drivers' of their EDAG.

Work package 4 (WP4): Synthesising departmental action plans (both new and existing interventions to avoid overstressing resources and assign responsibilities).

Work package 5 (WP5): Identifying which interventions require local and institutional level evaluation, co-constructing Theories of Change and evaluation plans for these interventions.

Intervention take-down: Evaluation of pilot outcomes and outputs, planning of next steps for rolling out the tested process.

These activities will be delivered through two working groups, with oversight from senior leadership, who will work closely with the pilot department to signpost and develop the necessary resources to successfully complete each step. More specifically, the Oversight Group will lead the development of curated EDAG data dashboards, including dissemination and training on their use, and then work with the pilot department to help them understand their awarding gaps by considering other data sources (e.g., the National Student Survey (NSS), module evaluations), collecting their qualitative data to identify 'drivers' of their EDAGs, drawing on external evidence, and so on. Within each of these sub-steps, the Oversight Group will translate the input from the pilot department into a curated set of resources (e.g., guidance documents, workshops, wikis, scoring tools, etc) that can be used in the next phase of the project, when the process is rolled out to all departments.

While it is unclear exactly what these outputs will look like, as their content will be determined through the piloting of the intervention, we anticipate that this intervention will yield the following resources:

- Guidance document on “Exploring and understanding awarding gap data”.
- Training workshops on navigating sensitive conversations with staff and students from diverse backgrounds.
- Reflective workshops that facilitate departments' interrogation of other data sources such as findings from the university's Awarding Gap Project, NSS results, module evaluations, and so on, to gain an understanding of why their gaps exist.
- 'What works' resources or wiki-type tool that enables departments to explore potential interventions to address the factors underpinning their EDAG and select which are appropriate / can be adapted to their context.
- Action planning workshops to move departments forward in implementing their EDAG interventions.
- A scoring tool for departments to rate and prioritise possible interventions.

- Signposting (and possibly updating) existing resources offered by the Research and Evaluation Officers.
- Signposting additional training and professional development opportunities to staff (e.g., on inclusive education and assessment, building cultural competence, anti-racism training, and so on).

WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?

The intervention will be delivered through:

- 1) A *Departmental EDAG Framework Oversight Group* who will have oversight of all activities and include Faculty and pilot department Learning and Teaching (L&T) Leads, the Associate PVC for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience, and strategic leadership roles within Inclusive Education (IE) Team, Access and Participation Plan (APP) Team, Academic Quality and Development Team.
- 2) Two working groups, responsible for specific activities:
 - i. **Data exploration and Theory of Change working group:** Representatives from the APP team and the IE team, as well as academic experts, senior leads from pilot department, and relevant faculty leads (responsible for WP2 and WP5).
 - ii. **Identifying interventions working group:** Representatives from the IE team, academic experts, senior leads from pilot department, and relevant faculty leads (responsible for WP3).

The shelf life of these groups will initially be the duration of the pilot with the possibility of extending these as the intervention is rolled out to all departments. The make-up of the working groups and Oversight Group will be reviewed at the end of the pilot based on whether there is additional expertise or input required to expand the intervention to more departments.

HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The individual activities in this intervention will be delivered as appropriate; for example, workshops and training sessions for departmental staff will take place face-to-face or online, depending on staff availability, learning outcomes of the sessions, etc. It is expected that several of the initial workshops will be delivered in-person given the sensitivity of the topic and the data being discussed. All resources developed throughout the pilot will be housed on the university's [Inclusive-Learning@York website](#).

WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The intervention will be delivered through the Oversight and working groups that include colleagues from across the university's central services teams and pilot department. Working Group meetings will be held virtually or in-person depending on colleagues' availability and the purpose of the meeting. For example, meetings aimed at developing a resource to include in the framework, such as reflective workshops, will be co-created in a face-to-face session, while regular update meetings can be conducted online.

HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?

The piloting of the intervention will be delivered with a single department within the 2023-24 academic year. In 2024-25, the intervention will be implemented in all departments and the EDAG data dashboards will be fully integrated into the university's annual review process.

WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

Initially, the intervention (both the process and the resources developed within the pilot) will be relatively tailored to the context of the pilot department. However, the intention is that these resources will be 'live', undergoing continuous expansion, refinement and review, to enable the intervention to be rolled out to all departments and integrated into the university's annual review process.

HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?

The implementation of the intervention will be optimised through the iterative co-creation of support and resources with the pilot department. By allowing staff on the working groups to develop these resources and refine the process in smaller steps, it reduces the amount of staff resource required overall, which is paramount given there is a high degree of overlap in the members of the two working groups and the Oversight Group. It optimises the quality of the resources developed by incorporating the 'departmental voice' and ensures that these account for the multiple demands departments currently face and the need to develop and build upon existing knowledge and resources (especially in race equality). It provides the department with a sense of ownership and accountability by including them in the process but does so with the support of colleagues with expertise in inclusive education and evaluation.

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?

The key actors are the members of the **Oversight Group**:

- Faculty and pilot department Teaching and Learning Leads
- Associate PVC for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience
- Strategic Leadership roles within Inclusive Education Team
- APP Team
- Academic Quality and Development Team

Two working groups will be delivering the activities:

- **Data exploration and Theory of Change working group:** Representatives from the Access and Participation Plan (APP) team and the Inclusive Education (IE) team, as well as academic experts, senior leads from pilot department, and relevant faculty leads (responsible for WP2 and WP5).
- **Identifying interventions working group:** Representatives from the IE team, academic experts, senior leads from pilot department, and relevant faculty leads (responsible for WP3).

CHANGE MECHANISMS

For each link/connection that is characterised as a change mechanism in the diagram, please outline the mechanism below:

Change mechanism 1a and 1b

After a successful pilot, the intervention will be implemented in all departments, in turn leading to increased engagement in EDAG activities at the department level.

- This change mechanism emphasises the importance of a pilot as it aims to ensure effective adaptation and integration of data health checks and of development/implementation of interventions and across diverse disciplines.
- Piloting processes before roll-out is considered best practice in Higher Education as they provide crucial information on feasibility and potential challenges, ensuring interventions are adapted effectively for broader implementation (Institute of Education Services, 2021).

Change mechanism 2

Increased solution thinking and thought leadership amongst departmental staff through identifying and selecting activities to address the EDAG (WP3) by:

- Signposting departments to relevant existing resources.
- Working with pilot department to adopt an evidence-based approach to identify and select EDAG intervention(s), and
- Developing student partnership approaches and initiate co-construction of intervention(s), departmental staff will be enabled to increase solution thinking and thought leadership. This will, in turn, lead to an Increased number of evidence-based EDAG activities in the pilot department.

- This process encourages a culture of decision-making based on evidence rather than assumptions or traditional practices. As the pilot department implements these interventions, it will serve as a model for other departments, showing the benefits of an evidence-based approach.
- University students hold knowledge and experiences that can advance widening participation practices, yet these insights are often ignored in discussions about forming and executing these practices for enhanced equality of opportunity (Pahl & Evans, 2018). Student partnership in the development and implementation of interventions ensures that the strategies are grounded in the actual experiences and needs of those most affected by EDAG. This can lead to more tailored, relevant and effective interventions.

Change mechanism 3

Increased cultural competence of staff (e.g., able to view things from diverse student perspectives) leads to:

- Increased confidence to proactively address the EDAG amongst pilot department staff; and
- Increased sense of agency amongst pilot department staff.
- This will increase authentic engagement with EDAG intervention(s) amongst departmental staff and improve departmental culture around the value of inclusive education.
- Increased cultural competence can lead to increased responsibility for performance (including instructional expertise), increased personal commitment, and promoting an environment of inquiry and acceptance that leads to greater organisational effectiveness (Kruse, Rakha & Calderone, 2018).

Change mechanism 4

Participating in the various support sessions and utilising the resources encompassed in WP2 will generate an increased sense of accountability amongst staff as they gain an understanding of and acknowledge their role in creating and addressing institutional barriers.

- Motivation and “action on the ground” for initiatives in HE are often driven by metrics and quantitative data (Hubbard, 2021). This data will give staff a greater understanding of where and how they can make an impact.

References for all change mechanisms:

Hubbard, K. (2021). Using Data-Driven Approaches to Address Systematic Awarding Gaps. In *Doing Equity and Diversity for Success in Higher Education: Redressing Structural Inequalities in the Academy* (pp. 215-226). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Institute of Education Services (2021). Learning before going to scale: An introduction in conducting pilot studies. US Department of Education.

Kruse, S. D., Rakha, S., & Calderone, S. (2018). Developing cultural competency in higher education: An agenda for practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(6), 733-750.

Pahl, K., & Evans, P. (2018). Virtual centrality: Young people making meaning from research in a widening participation context. *Research for All*, 2(2), 393–410. <https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.02.2.15>

ASSUMPTIONS

For each link/connection that is characterised as an assumption in the diagram, please outline the assumption below:

Assumption 1

We assume pilot department staff will have the capacity to engage with EDAG intervention(s).

- This intervention is being embedded into “business as usual” processes (i.e.; Annual Review and health checks).
- Interventions will be tailored to the pilot department’s needs and enable them to meet existing targets, KPIs, etc.

Assumption 2

We assume data collection with students from diverse backgrounds contributes to staff understanding of different student experiences / 'drivers' of the EDAG.

- To improve staff understanding of ethnically diverse students’ experiences at UoY, monitoring of existing data sets (e.g.; attainment, engagement, etc) and research findings into their lived experiences can be disseminated to relevant colleagues. Using data effectively can contribute to staff understanding of these topics and their institutional context.

Assumption 3

We assume departments will effectively communicate their prioritisation of the EDAG and related activities to students.

- Departments can use learner analytics to inform student-facing interventions and communicate these interventions (and their impact) to students, closing the data loop (Clow et al. 2012).

Assumption 4

We assume the intervention with the pilot department will be successful in developing evidence-based and practical EDAG intervention(s) for that department (i.e., the process of engaging the department was effective).

- Data-driven HE interventions can reduce gaps in student group's access, participation, attainment and graduate outcomes (Hubbard, 2021).
- Improved institutional data analysis can support and inform planning and decision-making in HE (Wong et. al 2017).

Assumption 5

We assume the co-creation process with departmental staff will provide them with a sense of ownership of the EDAG intervention(s).

- Genuine buy-in, particularly through times of change management, require some element of co-creation (Hubbart, 2022).

Assumption 6

We assume the intervention with the pilot department will be manageable and an efficient use of resource that generates practical outputs.

- Through systemic engagement with centralised support (e.g. IE team, Academic Quality and Development, the Learning & Teaching Fund, etc.) the pilot department will more effectively engage with existing resources.
- Interventions will be tailored to the pilot department's needs, enabling them to meet existing targets, KPIs, etc. This ensures that outputs are informed by and made for the local department's data and context, in turn making them more effective.

Assumption 7

We assume running the intervention with additional departments will be successful in developing evidence based, practical EDAG interventions.

- See references in Assumption 4.

Assumption 8

We assume the department-level EDAG activities will be effective.

- Research shows there are variations in EDAGs across institutions' departments (Gutman and Younas, 2023). Due to the variation, also evident from internal data at UoY, department-level interventions tailored to specific disciplines and contexts may be more effective in reducing the EDAG.

References for the assumptions:

Clow, D. (2012). The learning analytics cycle: closing the loop effectively. In Proceedings of the 2nd international conference on learning analytics and knowledge (pp. 134-138).

Gutman, M & Younas, F. (2023). Research helps address ethnic disparities in degree awards. LSE Business Review.

Hubbard, K. (2021). Using Data-Driven Approaches to Address Systematic Awarding Gaps. In Doing Equity and Diversity for Success in Higher Education: Redressing Structural Inequalities in the Academy (pp. 215-226). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Hubbart, J. A. (2022). Organizational change: considering truth and buy-in. Administrative Sciences, 13(1), 3.

Wong, B. T. M. (2017). Learning analytics in higher education: an analysis of case studies. Asian Association of Open Universities Journal.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

The aim of the evaluation is to determine whether the intervention (i.e., the support from the WGs and the resources developed) enabled the pilot department to develop and plan evidence-based activities to address the EDAG in their own context. As this is a pilot, the evaluation will be exploratory, investigating whether the support and resources developed were aimed and delivered at the appropriate level, and if these, in turn, produced a greater sense of empowerment and an increase in evidence-based EDAG-related activities within the pilot department.

Also within scope is identifying whether the individual elements (e.g., sessions on data literacy, workshops, etc) generated the expected outcomes in terms of staff understanding, knowledge, confidence and skills. Essentially, in addition to increasing evidence-based EDAG-related activities, the current evaluation tests the association between the work package activities and changes in staff knowledge, confidence and skills.

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

Primary

- Did the support provided by the WGs increase the number of evidence-based activities to address the EDAG in the pilot department (compared with the previous academic year and comparable departments)?
- Did the support result in Theories of Change, action plans and evaluation plans for the evidence-based EDAG-related activities selected by the pilot department?
- With regards to implementation, was the workload associated with supporting the pilot department manageable for the members of the WG and the Oversight Group and were these the correct individuals to have deliver the intervention?

Secondary

- Did participating in data literacy sessions and data exploration sessions increase staff knowledge of the EDAG in general and in their own department?
- Did working with the WGs to identify and select relevant EDAG activities increase staff confidence to implement and evaluate these activities independently?
- Did working with the WGs increase departmental leaders and staff confidence to engage with EDAG-related activities?

Exploratory

- Has the intervention resulted in the production of resources that are fit-for-purpose and applicable to other departmental contexts?

WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

A large degree of the evaluation will focus on implementation and process to understand whether a whole institution approach to address the EDAG and be embedded within core university processes. However, triangulating evidence from surveys, observations and semi-structured interviews over the course of the pilot will strengthen the conclusions that can be drawn about the impact of this intervention and provide invaluable information to guide the implementation and evaluation of rolling out the intervention with additional departments in the future.

Methods will include:

- Pre- and post-session feedback surveys with staff
- Feedback from Faculty L&T Leads
- Semi-structured interviews with reflective prompts conducted with staff in the WGs and the Oversight Group

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS	
RISK AND LIMITATION	MITIGATION
<p>Resistance to Change: Staff may resist the proposed changes due to comfort with the status quo, leading to poor implementation fidelity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intervention has been designed to undertake this change gradually and with targeted support throughout, so staff are not having to abruptly change current practice. ● Involve staff through stakeholder engagement during the planning and decision-making process to foster ownership and reduce resistance. ● Employ change management practices to help staff understand the benefits of these changes and equip them with skills to adapt.
<p>Resource Constraints: There may be limited financial, human, or time resources to fully implement the work packages of the intervention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure clear responsibilities and accountability structures for the working groups, departmental staff involved in the pilot and the Oversight Group. ● Allow for flexibility in the timeline for running each work package to make it easier for key staff to engage (i.e., prioritise engagement over speed).
<p>Lack of Engagement: Staff in the pilot department may not engage with the intervention or support from the working groups due to a lack of capacity, competing demands, or a lack of endorsement of its purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As above to address issues around capacity or competing demands. ● If lack of engagement is due to lack of endorsement of the intervention's purpose (i.e., staff do not see the benefit of addressing the EDAG), explore why they feel this way and whether this can be addressed through additional support, training or resources (e.g., possibly alleviated through L&T funding).
<p>Insufficient Training: Staff may not be adequately trained or prepared to embark on developing and implementing EDAG-related activities and interventions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One of the overarching aims of piloting this intervention with a single department is to explore and identify the various forms of support and training that departmental staff may require to feel more prepared and confident to implement EDAG-related

	<p>activities. Thus, when insufficient training is encountered, an additional activity for the working groups is to source and deliver this support to staff.</p>