

Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC)

**Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) – Uniting
Perspectives: Staff Accountability Partnerships within
the STRIVE 100 Programme**

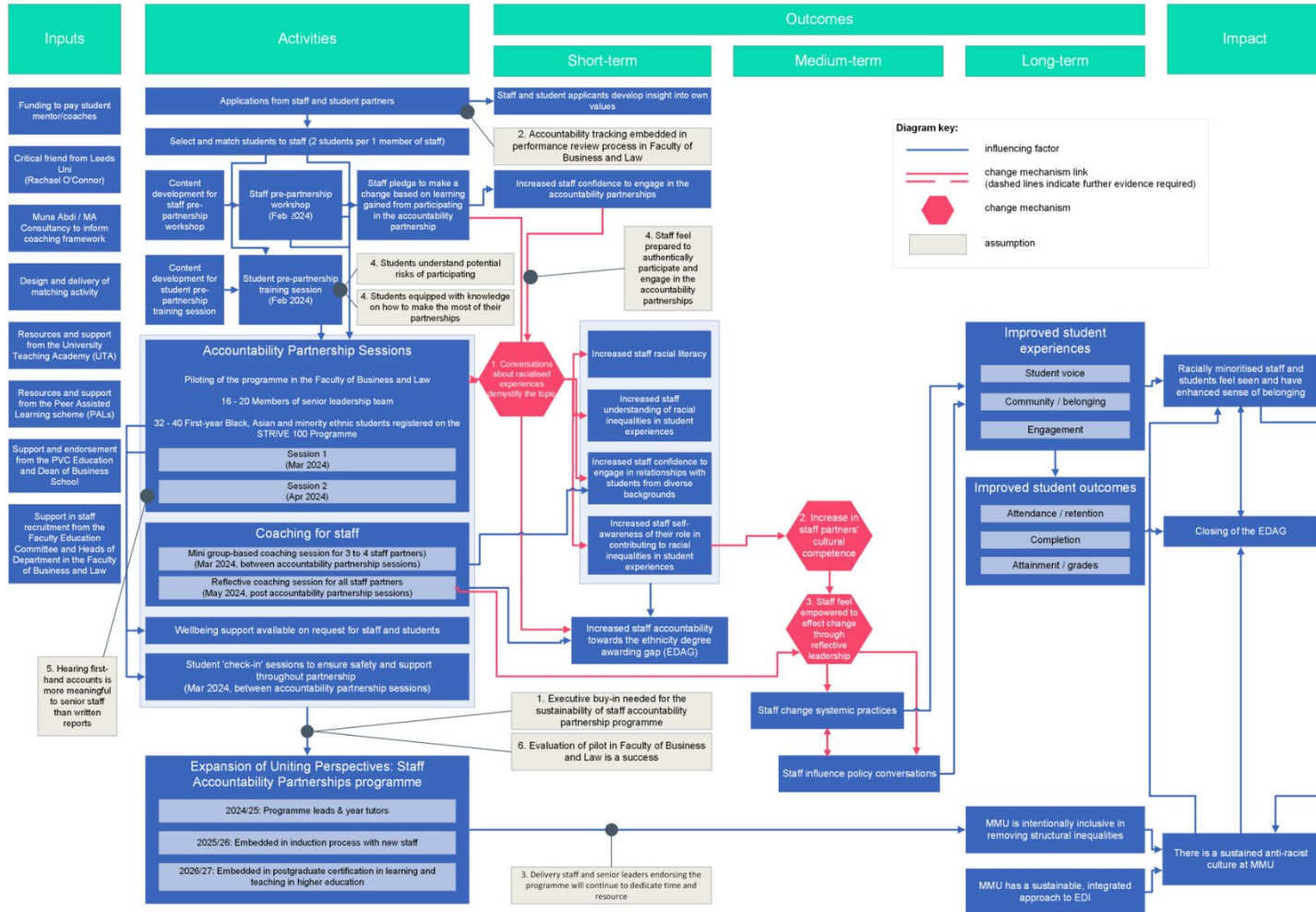
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Uniting Perspectives: Staff Accountability Partnerships in the STRIVE 100 Programme

Enhanced Theory of Change



1_ Click to view larger version of diagram

ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE

VERSION

V3 – March 2024

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NAME

Uniting Perspectives: Staff Accountability Partnerships within the STRIVE 100 Programme

WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?

There is a persistent ethnicity degree awarding gap (EDAG) at MMU, which is currently 19.5% and 16.1% for Black and Asian students, respectively. There is a high-level structure and strategic approach to enhancing student experience and outcomes, but there is a lack of unit-level leadership within these. Work is happening to address this across the institution - for example under the overarching education strategy of the university there is an awarding gap working group and a series of related interventions – but these activities are compartmentalised, and for the most part, focused on students' contributions to awarding outcomes rather than staff. Access to institutional data shows a story that this can be attributed to culture issue within the institution, particularly amongst staff in terms of their understanding of the awarding gaps, their own accountability towards these and how they can contribute to their narrowing. At the institution level, the university has a strategic aim to develop a whole-institution approach to addressing racialised inequalities in degree outcomes by acquiring a 'critical mass' of anti-racist staff and fostering a culture of collective accountability.

The objective of the staff accountability partnership programme is to contribute to this overarching institution-level aim of acquiring critical mass and changing the culture at MMU by increasing staff awareness of racial inequalities and their role in contributing to and removing them. The partnerships centralise the student voice and diversity of student experiences.

WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

The pilot participants include first-year students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME*) backgrounds who are currently enrolled in the STRIVE 100 programme and senior leaders from the Faculty of Business and Law.

*Throughout this ToC we will use the acronym BAME to refer to these students. This is because it is a term that is commonly used and understood by those outside this space, however it is important to recognise that this is a heterogeneous group, and that – where relevant – it is important to recognise the specific ethnic heritages of individual students.

WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?

The intervention comes within the scope of work of the interventions working group, which seeks to implement interventions to support our institutional work on differential outcomes. The accountability partnerships are part of the [STRIVE 100 Programme: Rise](#) at MMU, a university-level intervention to enhance the student experience and academic success of first-year BAME students. The partnerships invite students from the STRIVE 100 programme to build a relationship with members of the senior leadership team (SLT; e.g., Heads of Department, Department Leads, Programme Leaders, Unit Leads). Initially, the intervention will be piloted with SLT members from within the Faculty of Business and Law and limited to students registered on the STRIVE 100 programme. The piloting of these partnerships in 2023-24 will inform the ongoing development of how these relationships are established and maintained as well as how they can be expanded across the university to (i) programme leads and year tutors in 2024-25; (ii) new staff as part of the induction process / probation period in 2025-26; and (iii) Postgraduate Certification in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGC LTHE) in 2026-27. The pilot in the School of Business and Law will start in the second semester of 2023-24.

The accountability partnerships combine reverse mentoring and mutual mentoring approaches to build reciprocal relationships between STRIVE 100 students and senior leaders. The purpose of the accountability partnerships is to reconnect senior leaders with the experiences of current students, and particularly BAME students, to provide them with the opportunity to learn about the diversity of student experiences first-hand, in a space built on mutual respect. Specifically, these partnerships aim to introduce predominantly white senior leaders to first-hand racialised experiences of students. By engaging in these partnerships and actively listening to BAME students' lived experiences, it is hoped that senior leaders

will: (i) develop their understanding of racial inequalities in student experiences; (ii) allow them to reflect on these; and (iii) harness the influence they have in their current position to drive change.

Each SLT member of staff will be paired with two STRIVE 100 students. In total we expect to recruit 16 to 20 members of SLT and 32 to 40 STRIVE 100 students to form 16 to 20 tripartite groups. Led by the EPIB Departmental Education Lead, staff recruitment will take place via the Faculty Education Committee, asking each Head of Department (n = 4) within the Faculty to recruit four to five members of their SLT. STRIVE 100 students will be recruited by the STRIVE 100 Programme Manager. Both staff and students will complete a short application in which they describe their values, which will form the basis of the matching criteria to pair staff and student partners. Resources to create the application and matching process will be based on existing resources from the University Teaching Academy (UTA).

The staff and student partners will participate in two group-based **accountability partnership sessions** that bring together the two student partners, the staff partner, and a representative from MMU's Peer Assisted Learning (PALs) scheme method. Pairing two students to each member of staff allows SLT members to reflect on the students' experiences more generally as well as specifically within this first year of their studies at MMU. This approach also minimises risk to students (as these conversations are likely to be emotive, potentially requiring students to 'relive' previous experiences of racism or prejudice) and exposes staff to multiple student voices.

In addition to the two partnership sessions, staff will also participate in:

- A **pre-partnership workshop** prior to being matched to their student partners. This is an Ubuntu session based on the Human Library concept, which is fundamentally based on exploring values, principles, and bringing existing biases to light. The workshop is intended to increase staff confidence to engage in the partnerships and to build relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. At the end of the workshop, staff will be asked to make a pledge regarding how they will use this experience to make a change in their behaviour.
- A **mini group-based coaching session** for three to four staff partners (depending on interest, availability and budget) that will support staff partners in working towards the pledge made during the pre-partnership workshop.
- A **reflective coaching session** to provide staff with the opportunity to reflect on their experience of the accountability partnership and embed what they have learned from this experience.
- Additional wellbeing support is available to staff on request via MMU's Hope services.

For student partners, there will be a **pre-partnership training session** to ensure that all participants are equipped with the necessary tools to make the most of the partnerships and to feel safe while doing so. Specifically, this session will include a necessary focus on safeguarding and signposting reporting processes, as well as discuss the opportunities that these partnerships present (e.g., networking opportunities, learning about senior leadership structures, influencing change and improving student experience, developing their own leadership skills) to ensure that these are mutually beneficial for all partnership participants. In between the two partnership sessions, the STRIVE 100 Programme Manager will conduct '**check-in**' sessions with the students to make sure that their wellbeing and development are being fully supported. Additional wellbeing and support needs will be provided on request to students via MMU's Health Ambassadors and Chaplaincy.

The partnerships will culminate in a face-to-face **celebration event** to which all staff and student partners will be invited. This event will highlight the successes of the programme as well as provide an opportunity for staff and student partners to engage with the evaluation of the pilot.

WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?

The intervention will be co-led by the leader of the STRIVE 100 programme and the EPIB Departmental Education Lead. The recruitment of staff and students to the partnership will be coordinated by the EPIB Departmental Education Lead and the STRIVE 100 programme manager.

The staff pre-partnership workshop will be delivered by the leader of the STRIVE 100 programme and an external collaborator. The reflective coaching session will be delivered by [MA Consultancy](#). The partnership sessions will be facilitated by the EPIB Departmental Education Lead and the Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Additional support will be provided by UTA.

The pre-partnership training session for student partners will be delivered by the EPIB Departmental Education Lead and the Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with input from the Student Peer-to-Peer Support Manager, and a LEED scholar. Additional support will be provided by PALs.

HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The intervention's delivery through multiple formats is summarised below.

Staff:

- Pre-partnership workshop: face-to-face, 2-3 hour session, group-based.
- Mini group-based coaching session: online, 2 hours, small groups of three to four staff partners.
- Reflective coaching session: online, 2-3 hour session, group-based.

Students:

- Pre-partnership training session: online, 2-3 hours, group-based.
- 'Check-in' sessions: online and scheduled individually.

Both:

- 2 x Partnership sessions: online, 2 hours, tripartite groups of one staff partner and two student partners, as well as a representative from PALs.

Additionally, the STRIVE 100 group on the Slack platform and STRIVE 100 communications methods will be used to recruit participants.

WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The majority of the sessions will be delivered online and the face-to-face workshop for staff will take place at MMU (exact location to be confirmed).

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

The pilot of the staff accountability partnerships will take place over the second half of the 2023-24 academic year, starting with ethical approval for the intervention and recruitment. Given that the aim of the programme is to build a sustainable approach to creating a 'critical mass' of anti-racist staff, the pilot will be followed by a phased roll-out of the programme to include additional roles (i.e., programme leads and year tutors in 2024-25, induction of new staff in 2025-26, and embedding the partnership paradigm into the PGC LTHE programme).

Within the initial pilot, there will be a single group of staff and students participating in the partnerships, all within the Faculty of Business and Law.

- Staff will participate in 1x pre-partnership workshop (Feb 2024), 2 group-based partnership sessions (Mar 2024, Apr 2024), 1x optional mini group-coaching session (Mar 2024), and one reflective coaching session (May 2024).
- Students will participate in 1x pre-partnership training session (Feb 2024), 2 group-based partnership sessions (Mar 2024, Apr 2024), and one 'check-in' session (between the two group-based partnership sessions, scheduled individually).

All participants will be invited to the final celebration event (Jun 2024).

WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

In this initial pilot, the intervention will not be personalised beyond the values-based pairing of staff/student partners. The intention of this pilot is to explore the learning outcomes associated with participating in the partnerships and how these could be heightened through additional support or resources (such as coaching sessions) in their expanded form in 2024-25 and 2025-26.

HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?

The main risk for this intervention is the recruitment of SLT members from within the Faculty of Business and Law, as the intervention requires a significant degree of commitment. As such, recruitment will take place through the Faculty Education Committee and the Dean of Business School, asking each of Head of Department to nominate four to five members of their SLT. Additional endorsement of the partnerships from the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Education and the potential of including participation in staff performance development reviews will add weight to the importance of this programme. The Developing Education Excellence (DEE) project will also be used to increase visibility and resource the delivery of the intervention. DEE is a faculty wide initiative that enables colleagues on the Education, Pedagogy and Citizenship (EPC) pathway to receive up to 0.4FTE workload buy out to work on a DEE project. The Faculty of Business and Law has been awarded a two-year DEE project for 2023-24 to pilot a reverse mentoring scheme. This project is aligned with the staff development and support work package of the faculty strategy on addressing differential outcomes. This project will provide the basis for the accountability partnerships to be piloted in the Faculty of Business and Law. The accountability partnerships will adopt the reverse mentoring scheme and wrap around coaching for the senior leader being mentored by the two STRIVE 100 students, and the work will then be evaluated as accountability partnerships (with the DEE project as an integral part of that).

The senior leader being reverse mentored sets a pledge that they are accountable for to their STRIVE 100 students. Additionally, the pledges will be reviewed by the EDI delivery group and revisited in staff PDRs as part of an ongoing development process. The DEE intervention is optimised as it is enveloped into the accountability partnership work,

receiving evaluation support and broader support from the STRIVE team and critical friend to the partnerships (Associate Professor and University Lead for Personal Tutoring at University of Leeds).

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?

The key stakeholders to be involved in the design, set-up and delivery of the staff accountability partnerships include:

- Centre for Learning Enhancement and Educational Development (LEED) Scholar (Differential Outcomes & Chair of Interventions working group)
- Economics, Policy and International Business (EPIB) Departmental Education Lead
- Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Faculty Planning Officer
- Head of Academic and Study Skills
- Senior Lecturer in Academic Development, Chair of Culture and Voice working group
- Deputy Head Department of Nursing
- Faculty Director of Education
- Student Peer-to-Peer Support Manager
- Deputy FPVC and Dean of Business School
- STRIVE 100 Programme Manager
- Inclusive Communities Service Manager
- Business Analyst
- PVC Education

The mini group-based coaching sessions and reflective coaching sessions will be delivered by external consultants.

Internal collaboration between the PVC Education, Dean of Business School, and Heads of Department within the Faculty of Business and Law will also be integral to recruiting staff to the partnerships.

CHANGE MECHANISMS

Change mechanism 1

Engaging in conversations with students with lived experiences of racialised inequalities will 'demystify' the topic for staff partners.

- Staff training will help build their racial literacy and confidence to engage in the accountability partnerships and conversations with students from diverse backgrounds.
- The accountability partnerships offer staff a 'safe space' in which they can learn from the students and their experiences (Akinkunmi & Chapman, 2022; Chapman, 2021).
- Assume that it is a lack of knowledge around students' racialised experiences that inhibits the consideration of these experiences in decision-making at the senior level.
- Once senior leaders are aware of the discrepancies in the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds, this will be taken into consideration when executing the responsibilities of their role.

Change mechanism 2

Increase in staff partners' cultural competence (i.e., their ability to view things from diverse student perspectives).

- Participating in the partnership conversations, training and coaching will not only expose them to the perspectives of their student partners, but also develop the tools they need to continue to engage in wider conversations with students and staff from diverse backgrounds.

- Increased cultural competence can lead to increased sense of responsibility and a personal commitment to promoting an inclusive environment (Kruse, Rakha & Calderone, 2018).

Change mechanism 3

Staff feel empowered to effect change through reflective leadership.

- The accountability partnership conversations, training and coaching are designed to highlight how these senior leaders can use their position to instigate change, generate awareness and contribute to a gradual change in staff culture.
- Feeling as though their actions will have a meaningful effect will shift their mindset to that of being able to make a difference through the responsibilities associated with their role.
- The actions that they can take will be explored in the reflective coaching sessions, which are aimed at improving their reflective leadership practices (Taggart, 2005).
- Reflection is a key competency for effective leaders as it allows individuals to integrate what they have learned from an experience into current practice (see Roberts, 2008, for a review)

References for all change mechanisms:

Akinkunmi, S., & Chapman, C. (2022). Reverse mentoring programme with facilitated psychological sessions South-East: Evaluation report summary.

Chapman, C. (2021). BAME Reverse mentoring: A national collaborative and evaluation.

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.

Roberts, C. (2008). Developing future leaders: The role of reflection in the classroom. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 7, 116 – 130.

Taggart, G. L., & Wilson, W. A. (2005). Promoting reflective thinking in teachers. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

ASSUMPTIONS

Assumption 1

Executive buy-in needed for the sustainability of staff accountability partnership programme.

- As a pilot, this programme needs to be endorsed by senior leaders and integrated into other processes like annual performance reviews, accountability tracking and workload allocation models.
- Otherwise staff who would potentially participate in the partnerships may not engage in the programme due to a lack of recognition for this effort and a lack of capacity.

Assumption 2

Embedding of accountability tracking in the annual performance review process within the Faculty of Business and Law will encourage senior leaders in the Faculty to apply to the piloting of the partnerships.

- This is related to assumption 1 and why the Faculty of Business and Law was selected for the piloting of the programme.

Assumption 3

Delivery staff and senior leaders endorsing the programme will continue to dedicate time and resource.

- Staff time to deliver the programme is not currently accounted for in workloads of the 'key actors/stakeholders'.

- Senior leaders from the Faculty of Business and Law need to endorse the programme to enable the recruitment of staff partners.

Assumption 4

Staff and student partners will actively engage with the programme.

- Related to assumption 1, this assumption is based on the time commitment required by staff and student partners to attend multiple sessions over a short period of time.
- This assumption also relies on the training sessions and workshops being an effective approach to making:
 - Staff feel confident and prepared instead of worried or fearful of 'saying the wrong thing.'
 - Students feel safe in the conversations with their partners.
 - The programme mutually beneficial.

Assumption 5

In order for the staff accountability partnerships to generate a change in the onus of responsibility and motivate staff to change their current practice, the first-hand accounts of the students' racialised experiences need to have an impact on their staff partners.

- As senior leaders, these staff will be familiar with evidence of racialised differences in student outcomes and experiences, but this intervention assumes that giving these reports a voice and tangible experiences of current MMU students will have a greater impact on staff perceptions.

Assumption 6

The evaluation of the pilot in the Faculty of Business and Law shows that this programme successfully increased staff knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the diversity of MMU students' racialised experiences; increased staff confidence to engage in conversation with and build relationships with students from diverse backgrounds; and motivated staff to address racialised inequalities for students at MMU.

- This assumption is necessary for the phased expansion of the accountability partnerships in subsequent academic years.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

This evaluation plan applies to the piloting of the staff accountability partnerships in the second semester of 2023-24. It adopts an exploratory method to establish whether these initial partnerships have contributed to the expected outcomes identified in the Theory of Change, and whether there were any unexpected outcomes and recommendations for improvement that need to be considered in future iterations of the programme.

This evaluation will be used to identify the justification for the continuation of the accountability partnerships into 2024-25 and beyond, with different staff roles within MMU. If findings from this pilot evaluation suggest the partnerships are beneficial then this will be disseminated to the University Executive Group (UEG) to request renewed resource to continue and build on the programme.

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

Primary:

- Did participating in the accountability partnerships increase staff knowledge and appreciation of the diversity of MMU students' racialised experiences?
- Did participating in the accountability partnerships increase staff confidence to engage in conversation with and build relationships with students from diverse backgrounds?
- To what extent did participating in the accountability partnerships increase staff accountability and motivate staff them to address racialised inequalities for students at MMU?
- Did staff feel safe and supported throughout the process?
- What worked well and where could staff have used additional support?

Secondary:

- Did participating in the accountability partnerships increase students' knowledge and appreciation of racialised inequalities in higher education?
- Did participating in the accountability partnerships increase students' understanding of staff experiences of working in higher education and the policies underlying decision-making around student experiences?
- Did participating in the accountability partnerships increase students' confidence to engage in conversations and build relationships with senior staff?

- Did students feel safe and supported throughout the process?
- What worked well and where could students have used additional support?

Exploratory:

- Could the programme's structure (e.g., the 2:1 student-to-staff ratio) or content (e.g., of the training sessions) be improved?
- Did staff and students actively and authentically engage with the programme?
- Were there unanticipated outcomes not captured in the core or enhanced Theories of Change for this intervention (e.g., additional opportunities for students to gain work experience within the institution, or negative consequences for students having to describe experiences of racism)?

WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

Exploratory mixed-methods approach based on the following data:

- Reflections from delivery staff
- Interviews with staff partners
- Focus groups with student partners

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS	
RISK AND LIMITATION	MITIGATION
Lack of applications from senior leaders within the Faculty of Business and Law.	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).
Student partners exposed to trauma in retelling their experiences within the accountability partnership sessions.	<p>Obtain ethical approval to ensure all safeguarding precautions and risk management procedures are in place.</p> <p>Continuously signpost wellbeing and support resources.</p> <p>Clearly communicate the purpose of the accountability partnership sessions to ensure that students understand what the session will entail.</p> <p>Check-in with students in 1-to-1 sessions in between the two accountability partnership sessions.</p>
Staff may resist the proposed changes due to comfort with the status quo, leading to poor implementation fidelity.	<p>Intervention has been designed to undertake this change gradually and with targeted support throughout, so staff are not having to abruptly change current practice.</p> <p>Employ change management practices to help staff understand the benefits of these changes and equip them with skills to adapt.</p>

<p>There may be limited financial, human, or time resources to deliver all sessions and 'check-ins' with student partners.</p>	<p>Draw on existing resources from within the UTA and PALs programmes.</p> <p>Align activities with those currently being delivered within the STRIVE 100 programme (e.g., engaged sample of students to recruit from).</p> <p>Align activities with those taking place in the Faculty of Business and Law (e.g., timing of Faculty Education Committee meetings for recruitment, annual performance reviews for staff, etc).</p>
<p>Staff may not be adequately trained or prepared to navigate in conversations about racialised experiences with students.</p>	<p>Pre-partnership training session and coaching sessions to support staff through the partnership programme.</p>