



Worried that students were missing out on a vital part of the student experience by not participating in a diverse campus culture, Theo Gilbert created a framework that gets students from different backgrounds to mix – and also helps to reduce the attainment gap. For that, he has been named Most Innovative Teacher of the Year.

Drawing on his research into student psychologies, the teacher and researcher in academic communications at the University of Hertfordshire developed a way to embed compassion in the higher education curriculum.

He began his work on what he calls compassion-focused pedagogy after becoming concerned by the tendency of students to study and socialise in separate ethnic groups, meaning that they did not benefit from the cultural diversity on campus. Using his framework, students at Hertfordshire were taught positive group-work skills and then incentivised to use them as part of a trial.

Where implemented, not only at Hertfordshire but across the UK and internationally, Dr Gilbert's framework was shown to shrink the black and minority ethnic student attainment gap and to provide measurable improvements in students' engagement and critical thinking.

Dr Gilbert has created a website and produced articles, video content and practical materials to support staff who want to use the framework. He has also set up an international Compassion in Higher Education Network with colleagues from 16 universities and colleges in the US, Canada, Sweden, Greece and Spain.

The judges said that Dr Gilbert's sustained commitment to advancing and positively influencing the student experience was "inspirational".

"The additional commitment to actively disseminating his work globally, including the practical and research aspects, is wonderful and shows him to be a truly exceptional educator," they said.