The Great Unspoken Shame of Higher Education: Tackling the BME attainment gap

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But isn’t there much to be proud of?

- UK HE has had some considerable success in widening the participation of BME students

- Between 2003/4 and 2013/14 the proportion of UK domiciled BME students at UK universities increased from 14.9% to 20.2%.

- A higher percentage of BME school leavers now go to university than white students (though these are very unevenly distributed across HEIs)

- But HE has manifestly failed in ensuring their success
The scale of BME student disadvantage

- BME students are less likely to achieve a degree; gain a first or upper second; move on to graduate employment or research; or obtain any employment.

- Our focus is on the gap between white and BME students who obtain a first or upper second.

- Of 2015 graduates across the UK 78.4% of white students gained a 1st or 2:1 against 63.4% of BME students – a 15 percentage point gap.

- Put another way - 24% more of the white cohort achieved a 1st or 2:1 than the BME cohort.

- While the numbers of students overall gaining a first or 2:1 has increased the gap between BME and white students has stayed much the same.
There is a gap at all entry levels

Source: HEFCE, 2015 Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics
The BME attainment gap: too long neglected

- The BME attainment gap dwarfs the more widely discussed gender and class attainment gaps.

- While there is a variation across ethnic groups all perform less well than white students in striking contrast to schools.

- Yet, until recently, the BME attainment gap has received relatively little attention.

- However the attainment gap is a key recommendation of the recent ministerial Social Mobility Advisory Group’s report and a priority for OFS.
Why the neglect?

- The belief that it is about the student not the institution?

But a 2015 Hefce report on 280,000 2014 graduates found that the attainment gap was only reduced from 16 to 15 percentage points by controlling for entry qualifications, age, disability, gender, subject studied, school attended and an area participation measure.

- Universities see themselves as liberal institutions and are uncomfortable talking about race and their possible contribution to racial disadvantage?

- It is a complex issue with no obvious solutions?
The causes are complex

- Lower satisfaction with user-friendliness of curricula/learning, teaching/assessment practices

- Relationships between staff and students and among students
  - Sense of ‘belonging’
  - Students need to feel supported and encouraged in their daily interactions

- Social/cultural/economic capital: networks and external support

Source: HEFCE (July 2015) Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes, Report to HEFCE by King’s College London, ARC Network and The University of Manchester

Essentially this is about the relationship between the student and the institution and the response needs to be an institutional one
Kingston’s approach is institution-wide

There are three key components

- A Board level KPI which ensures an institutional commitment

- A value added (VA) metric which brings focus on the problem by eliminating the effects of entry qualifications and subject of study and has helped greatly to engage staff down to course level

- An inclusive curriculum framework (ICF) which has helped all staff to think constructively about diversifying the curriculum
The value added methodology

- Actual degree outcomes for all UK domiciled students for the last five years are categorised by one of fifty entry bands and subject of study

- Around half the entry bands are based on UCAS points the rest cover other areas such as foundation degrees

- From this we can calculate a probability that a given student, with given entry qualifications and studying a particular subject, will get a first or upper second.

- These probabilities can be aggregated for any cohort of students (male/female; BME/White etc) to arrive at a statistically expected percentage who should get a first or upper second in that cohort

- This can then be compared with the actual degree outcomes to give a VA score
Measuring the Gap: Value Added (VA) score

- 5 years sector attainment data
- Entry qualifications & subjects of study
- Probability of attaining 1st or 2:1
- Aggregation of probability
- Expected % of cohort attainment

VA = >1
Attainment > Expectation

VA = 1
Attainment = Expectation

VA = <1
Attainment < Expectation
VA Dashboard – University wide

Population: 1,632
1st / 2:1 Expected: 71%
1st / 2:1 Actual: 70%
VA score: 0.99

Population: 1,292
1st / 2:1 Expected: 73%
1st / 2:1 Actual: 81%
VA score: 1.13
The data can be disaggregated by courses and years.
This dashboard shows the VA scores for BME and white students for any pathway selected for any of the last five years but unlike dashboard 1 it does not offer a further breakdown of the BME group as numbers become too small.

Breakdown by Pathway -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Awarded Good Degree</th>
<th>Expected % Good Degree</th>
<th>Value Added Score</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Awarded Good Degree</th>
<th>Expected % Good Degree</th>
<th>Value Added Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VA Dashboard – Entry profile
Ethnicity overwhelms differences of gender or class
What is an inclusive curriculum?

“learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all” (Hocking, 2010: 1)
Kingston’s Inclusive Curriculum Framework

**Our principles:**

1) Enable students to see themselves and their backgrounds reflected in the curriculum

2) Equip students with the skills to positively live and work in a global and diverse world

3) Create an accessible curriculum
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Create an accessible curriculum</th>
<th>Enable students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum</th>
<th>Equip students with the skills to positively contribute to and work in a global and diverse environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the content (case study: question, discussion)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In the assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the feedback/forward</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ICF can be used at different levels
University
Programme
Module..
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module Example: Teaching Rural Geographies at Kingston University</th>
<th>Create an accessible curriculum</th>
<th>Enable students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum</th>
<th>Equip students with the skills to positively contribute to and work in a global and diverse environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the concept</td>
<td>Globalised and internationalised</td>
<td>Students from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to use their personal experiences and perspectives</td>
<td>Critical thinking and global awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the content (learning outcomes, reading lists)</td>
<td>Case-studies were taken from both the global north and the global south</td>
<td>Reading list included a diverse range of authors – including perspectives from the Global South Non-academic perspectives</td>
<td>Understanding of globalisation and interlinkages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the delivery (learning and teaching strategy)</td>
<td>Engagement strategy Follow up on non-attendance</td>
<td>Encourage discussion from personal experience Using names to encourage discussion and viewpoints</td>
<td>Seminars classes – discussion based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the assessment (assessment strategy)</td>
<td>Unseen exam was replaced by seen exam</td>
<td>Formative assessment – debate style with students selecting the position that they wish to defend</td>
<td>Oral presentations part of the assessment (in addition to written skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the feedback (feedback strategy)</td>
<td>Detailed feedback – sectionalised by indicative marking criteria Deadlines and assessment set at start of academic year</td>
<td>Feedback was individualised and oral and written – oral feedback was in-class Ensured I knew all names</td>
<td>Students encouraged to reflect on feedback comments and mark – exercise of self reflection and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and In the review/evaluation</td>
<td>Module review evaluated differential</td>
<td>Involve students in the review and evaluation</td>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies going forward: case-studies of inclusive practice

Content
(Decolonisation/internationalisation of curriculum)
• Co-creating
• Alternative perspectives
• Auto-ethnographic strategies

Learning and Teaching
• Reflective practice
• Work around understanding privilege/diversity amongst all students (UB)
• Strategies to encourage diverse group working
• Classroom based feedback strategies (PA)

Assessment
• Peer-assisted marking panels
• Inclusive and authentic assessment
  – Debates not (just) essays
• Interventions to build assessment literacies (staff and students)
Some Case studies

- University–wide: The Big Read

- Construction Management: Group work to take a real world unfinished project plan and see it through from planning to closing

- Politics and International Relations: Diversifying the curriculum by going beyond ‘dead white’

- Sociology and Music/drama: combining a sociology module on race with music and drama students’ perspective through joint visits to exhibitions and performances

- Nursing: Building BME students confidence in themselves and their caring perspectives through story telling and learning sets

- Physiotherapy: Exploring the role of touch and communication in support of a niqab wearing student
Curriculum Consultant Project

Aims:

• Train students in the key principles of the Inclusive Curriculum Framework
• Students act as ‘consultants’ to offer advice to course teams on the inclusiveness of their module/course/programme
• Curriculum = engagement and not simply content (Barnett and Coate, 2005)
• Consultation extended to professional directorates
Impact

- Engagement with over 120 academic teams
- Institutional conversation on race and differential attainment
- Adoption of an inclusive curriculum framework from concept to review
- Students co-creating curricula
- Increased BME VA score from 0.87 to 0.99
- Closure of attainment gap from 29 to 11 percentage points
Thank you

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Student focused initiatives to improve progression:

- Compact scheme: 84% progression rate for BME students, higher than the 80% overall UG population.

- Research internships: 100% of BME interns progressed compared to 78% of all BME students in 2013/14.

- Student integration scheme: 91% of BME students progressed compared with 77% in the overall population.

- Student leadership project: 88% of BME students progressed compared to 79% of non participating BME students.