

# Attainment Gap – a case study

## Union of Kingston Students & Kingston University

The causes of the Black and minority ethnic (BME) attainment gap are complex and multiple. Historically it has been common to focus on the student deficit model, but research has clearly shown that the gap can only be partly explained away solely by student factors and it is necessary to consider the interaction between the institution and BME students.

### Our vision

Kingston's approach, which is based upon race and change management theories and literature, focuses on three strands of work:

1. Improving institutional policies and processes
2. Enhancing knowledge and skills of staff and students
3. Better supporting BME students

In early 2014, Kingston's Board of Governors took an unprecedented step of adopting the BME attainment gap as an institutional Key Performance Indicator. Natural concerns about risk and reputation were mitigated by the assurances of the Vice Chancellor, the development of a robust Value Added metric and an achievement plan that delivers sustainable cultural change.

There are three notable aspects to our approach: the Value Added Metric, the Inclusive Curriculum Framework and the involvement of students and the student union.

### The Value Added metric

One of the arguments most frequently cited for differences in attainment is differences in entry qualifications. Kingston has adapted The Guardian's value added methodology to produce data on attainment which controls for entry qualifications and subject of study and

thus removes these issues from the argument. The data has been produced at the level of the university, faculties, schools, and courses for the last seven years. When staff see that many of their BME students are performing less well than their white students with the same entry qualifications it has proved a very powerful way of engaging them in discussion and exploration of what factors might be causing this.

Rather than simply distribute the data, we have met with those course teams with larger gaps and are developing the skills of directors of learning and teaching to extend our reach.

### Kingston's Inclusive Curriculum Framework

The framework is based upon both literature and the experiences of working with staff and students to explore inclusivity in learning and teaching. It is a practical and simple multi-level framework (teaching session, module, programme, institutional and we would argue sector level also) that not only develops staff skills but also shapes quality enhancement processes. We have run three-part workshops, planning sessions and internal conferences, and in all but a handful of cases staff have said the framework is clear, de-mystifies and is very helpful in shaping their practice to be more inclusive. The Deputy Vice Chancellor,

Education and the Dean of Learning and Teaching have adopted the Inclusive Curriculum framework within the Education strategy and mainstream quality enhancement processes. This means that course teams and panels involved in validation, course monitoring and internal subject reviews must use the framework to demonstrate and assess how inclusivity is built into learning and teaching.

## Working with students and the student union

We feel it is critical to raise the awareness of students about the sector's struggle with the attainment gap, the approach their university is taking and the ways they can get involved in making change happen.

We have taken an operational and strategic approach to encouraging our students to be informed agents of change. On the ground we have for example held briefing and discussion sessions with over 200 senior course representatives, employed students to design online diversity training modules and trained and paid students to co-deliver the new Inclusive Curriculum Framework with academic teams. Strategically, our collaboration with the student union has been an important feature in creating efficient and coherent messages and activities that avoid wasteful use of resources and confusing messages for our students. We have also 'mainstreamed' the co-creation of the inclusive curriculum so it is part of the new Centre for Graduate Excellence we are developing for all students.

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