

Kingston's Approach to tackling the BME attainment gap using the value added scores

Three years ago Kingston University invested in a number of initiatives that were aimed at reducing the Black and minority ethnic (BME) attainment gap. For example, through the re-design of the academic promotion and progression criteria we ensured that reducing the gap was at the heart of the academic's job purpose (2014 Guardian Diversity Award). We also funded Beyond Barriers, a mentoring programme for second year BME students which pairs students with external professionals so they gain confidence and self-belief (2014 Best Preparation for Work award). In 2013/14 the attainment gap was reduced by 4%, but to sustain and even accelerate this rate of reduction we decided a more radical approach was needed.

Over the past 2 years Kingston University has designed an institution wide improvement programme, which aims to address the BME attainment gap and improve performance. The programme comprises a basket of measures, which include adopting an innovative value added (VA) score. Originally created for The Guardian newspaper league tables by Kingston University's Head of Planning, it has been altered for the University. It provides meaningful data at subject and module level, introducing early warning/diagnostic information, awareness raising and provides planning targets for the University. The Higher Education Academy are particularly interested in the VA score and as part of this project looking at methods to address the BME attainment gap wanted to investigate the possibility of rolling out this innovative data across other institutions such as Wolverhampton and Hertfordshire Universities.

The key to the VA approach is that it enables the institution to create a story for each student by taking account of prior entry qualifications and subject of study when assessing his or her degree attainment. The KPI is aligned with raising BME students VA scores to 1.0 (achieving their expected degree outcome) rather than closing the attainment gap by a particular percentage. This, when combined with the evidence provided by the VA score, has proved to be a very compelling argument and powerful way of presenting the attainment gap and communicating it to staff.

Dissemination of the VA data and overall approach has been through a series of meetings with academic teams, creating a safe environment in which to discuss the attainment gap and facilitating conversations around influencing factors and the support available. Subsequent workshops addressing subjects such as unconscious bias and inclusive curriculum have seen unprecedented attendance and resulted in enhanced awareness, changes in teaching practice and co-curricular creation with students. To date 76 meetings have been held with academic teams and the team looking after the BME KPI and VA score at Kingston University have weekly invitations to boards of study, away days and team meetings. All meetings and training sessions have been evaluated for training impact and to assess what changes have been made as a result of attendance. Participants fed back that 'using the VA in this way will help dispel lingering questions regarding the student

deficient model' and 'having multiple years of data enables course teams to interrogate changes in VA score and work backwards to see what was happening within the course and the university at this time and determine what impact this has had on the student success'.

Based on feedback, VA data has proven to be a powerful way of engaging staff on the BME attainment gap as it dispels myths, allows comparisons, provides different levels of analytical data and enables trend analysis. While face to face meetings are resource intensive they have been effective and almost universally colleagues have responded that the VA data has brought the extent and persistence of the attainment gap into much sharper focus. As a result we feel at Kingston University that there is now a real determination to try to address the attainment gap.

Key takeaways:-

- The VA score provides a robust metric for measuring the attainment gap that drives action.
- Face to face meetings with course teams is key for staff engagement.
- Kingston University's key performance indicator (KPI) is to raise BME students VA score to 1.0 by the end of the 2017/18 academic year.
- For more information on the use of the VA score at Kingston University please contact Owen Beacock, BME Attainment Gap Institutional KPI Manager on O.Beacock@kingston.ac.uk.

