

Using Value Added Data to create institutional awareness and engagement with the BME attainment gap (0317)

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Introduction

The difference in attainment between white and BME students is a major challenge for UK Higher Education. Of all UK domiciled students graduating in 2014 across the UK 75.6% of White students achieved a 1st or 2:1, but only 60.4% of BME students – a gap of 15.2percentage points (Equality Challenge Unit 2015). Or, to put it another way, 25% more of the white student cohort received a 1st or 2:1 than the BME student cohort.

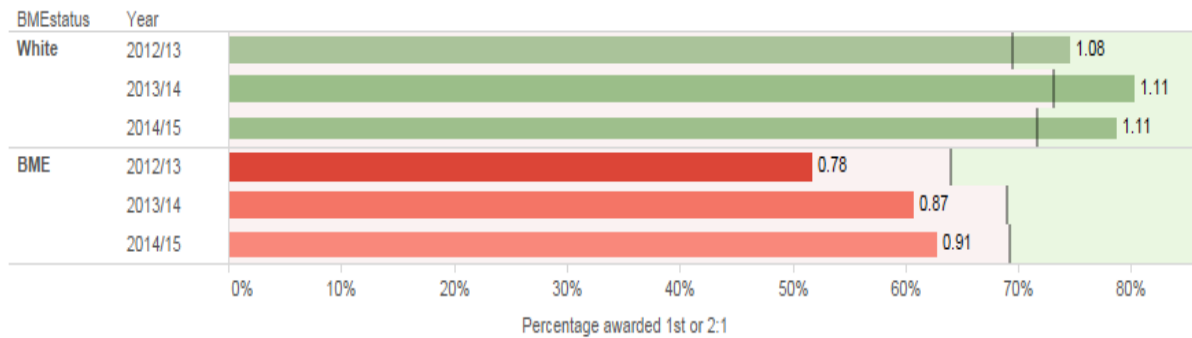
The causes of the gap are clearly complex and multifaceted. One explanation often cited is that BME students may have lower entry qualifications or choose different fields of study from white students. At Kingston University we have developed value added (VA) data, which controls for entry qualifications and subject of study, as an outcome measure for student attainment. This has proved a very powerful way of engaging academic staff by highlighting unexplained differences in attainment. This is work in progress and we envisage the round table will provide an opportunity for colleagues to discuss and interrogate the approach as well as raise questions for research.

Developing Value Added data for faculties, schools and courses

We have calculated VA scores by taking degree outcome data for all graduates across HE for the last five years, broken down by fifty different entry qualifications and the subject of study, to arrive at a probability that a given student, with given entry qualifications studying a given subject will achieve a 1st/2:1 degree. Aggregating these probabilities produces an 'expected' percentage for a given cohort of students who should achieve a 1st/2:1 degree. If the cohort achieves this percentage, the VA score is 1.0. For percentage attainment above or below the expectation the VA score is proportionately greater or less than 1.0.

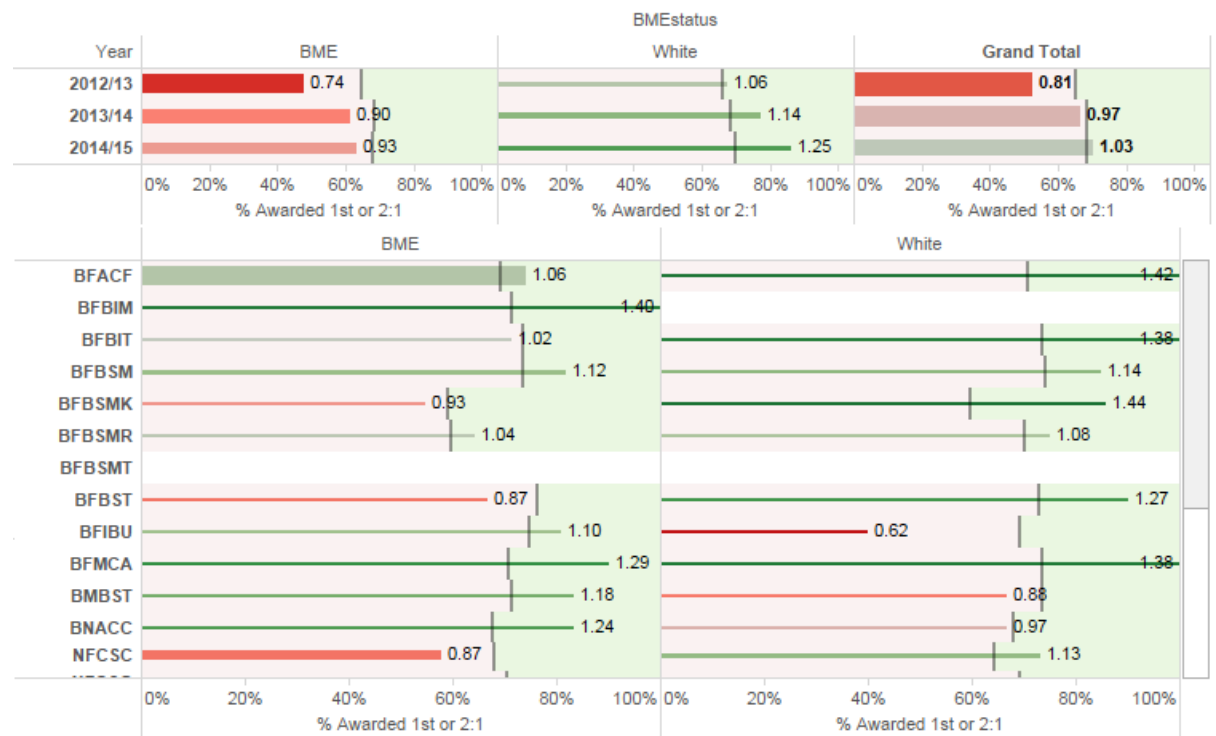
For Kingston as a whole in 2014/15, given their entry qualifications and subjects of study and based on the previous five years results across HE, 69% of our BME students would have been expected to get a 1st/2:1 degree. Ultimately, only 63% did, giving a Value Added Score of 0.91. In contrast, while 72% of our white students were expected to get a 1st/2:1 degree, 79% did, giving a Value Added Score of 1.11. This is shown in the figure below together with the previous two years data.

Kingston University Value Added scores for White and BME graduates 2012/13 to 2014/15.



The University has set an institutional KPI is to achieve a VA of 1.0 for BME students graduating in 2018/19 i.e. BME students should achieve the same percentage of 1st/2:1 degrees as the national average for all students with the same entry qualifications studying the same subjects. To support this the VA data has been made available for six years broken down to University, Faculty, Department and Course levels. For easier presentation only three years data is shown below.

VA data for a department and associated pathways by White and BME graduates 2012/13 to 2014/15.



This can also be shown in numbers.

Dashboard 3: Value Added scores for BME and white students by course

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 -

BMEstatus	Year					
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
BME	0.68	1.01	0.77	0.66	0.99	1.23
White	1.30	1.12	1.03	1.17	0.98	1.10

Breakdown by Pathway -

Year	BME				White			
	Population	% Awarded Good Degree	Expected % Good Degree	Value Added Score	Population	% Awarded Good Degree	Expected % Good Degree	Value Added Score
2014/15	10.5	87%	72%	1.23	24.8	81%	76%	1.10
2013/14	8.8	77%	77%	0.99	42.6	75%	78%	0.98
2012/13	15.3	48%	69%	0.66	50.5	90%	77%	1.17
2011/12	29.9	49%	64%	0.77	51.3	73%	70%	1.03
2010/11	11.5	73%	71%	1.01	42.2	77%	69%	1.12
2009/10	17.9	41%	63%	0.68	47.0	91%	71%	1.30

All this data is available to all staff on a searchable dashboard.

During the round table we will demonstrate on line the dashboard in full.

Using the VA data to engage staff

This VA data when presented to staff has proved very powerful in leading to a recognition and acceptance that the attainment gap is not just a general issue for HE but affects their students on their courses. This has then opened up the opportunity for a discussion about potential causes of the gap, actions which staff might consider as solutions and how the VA outcome data can be used in evaluation.

In conclusion we believe that VA approach has wide potential across HE. The Higher Education Academy has recognised this and funded us to share this methodology with Wolverhampton, Hertfordshire and De Montfort universities. However, we would wish to emphasise that the data is only likely to be effective if it is carefully presented to staff. We have held over seventy meetings of targeted course leads, schools and departmental away days. Though labour intensive, the opportunity and safe environment that these meetings provide for discussion - to allow initial scepticism to be heard and addressed; for the research evidence to be explored; and the support available to be explained – is crucial. It is too early to show definitive progress on attainment for our BME students, although the VA score did improve overall for 2014/15 BME graduates. What we can claim is that the VA data, and its presentation, has supported staff to move beyond denial and arrive at a level of engagement and readiness to take responsibility for addressing the gap.

References

Equality Challenge Unit statistical report 2015

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2015/>