

# Closing the **BME ATTAINMENT GAP**

## CONFERENCE

**16 September 2019**

Mary Ward House, 7 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SN

## Welcome

Welcome to this conference on closing the BME attainment gap – a culmination of 18 months of collaborative work across five partner institutions, funded by the Office for Students.

The BME attainment gap is a longstanding sector issue and, whilst the passage of time has brought with it advancements, there is still a long way to go. When the BME attainment gap came to my attention over a decade ago, I was surprised that little was being done to address this systemic failure of the UK higher education system. It was almost as if the gap was being 'ghosted'. There was pervasive sector resistance to taking active steps to identify and address possible shortcomings of the institution rather than a 'student-deficit' approach.

Thankfully, though, various reports have convincingly challenged the student-deficit approach. Consequently, there has been a call to move away from focusing solely on student interventions and instead to take into account all aspects influencing the student life cycle. Many advocate for a whole institution approach to addressing the attainment gap. At Kingston, the whole-institution, whole-student-life-cycle approach to the BME attainment gap has been facilitated primarily through detailed work to engage staff in discussions and actions using the 'Value Added' (VA) metric and 'Inclusive Curriculum Framework' (ICF), both developed at Kingston.

We wanted to explore whether our approach at Kingston could be transferred to other institutions and, as part of the Office for Students' 'Catalyst Student Success' project, we were delighted to join up with the University of Hertfordshire, the University of Greenwich, University College London, De Montfort University and Wolverhampton University. We have become partners through this process and it has been an absolute pleasure to work alongside the project leads. We have learned – and are continuing to learn – from each other about what works and how to adapt the VA and the ICF approaches used at Kingston to suit different contexts.

This conference is part of that project process and I hope that our combined experiences, activities and reflections, have the potential – with appropriate implementation – to reduce the attainment gap at your institution.

### **Nona McDuff**

*OBE, MSc, BA Hons, PFHEA, Cert Education  
Project Lead  
Director of Student Achievement,  
Kingston University*

## Thank you

Thank you for the genuine commitment of the project leads: Helen Barefoot (University of Hertfordshire), Phil Gravestock (Wolverhampton University), Julie Evans and Paulette Williams (University College London), Kaushika Patel (De Montfort University) and Christine Couper (University of Greenwich); and the absolute tenacity of the very brilliant Emma Fegan who, as the Project Manager, has driven this project through to its end.

Thank you to the stellar team at Kingston who have supported the project, conference and created the website – Owen Beacock, John Tatam, Annie Hughes, Kristina Ellis, Cheryl Jordan and Nicole Lane.

A huge thanks to the OfS for this opportunity and long may you continue to invest in such important work. And finally, I would like to thank you all for attending, for listening and for committing to action. I hope you find the day interesting and informative.

# Conference Agenda

TIME	ACTIVITY	ROOM
09:30–10:00	Arrival and registration	LG Reception
10:00–10:15	Welcome, project overview and outputs	Brewer & Smith (LG)
10:15–10:35	Keynote speaker Steven Spier   Vice Chancellor, Kingston University	Brewer & Smith (LG)
10:35–11:05	Introducing the Value Added Score	Brewer & Smith (LG)
11:05–11:25	Introducing the Inclusive Curriculum Framework	Brewer & Smith (LG)
11:25–11:45	Tea and coffee	Arnold (LG)
11:45–13:00	Applying the Value Added Metric and Inclusive Curriculum Framework at partner institutions	Brewer & Smith (LG)
13:00–14:00	Lunch Additional spaces to eat: Morris (floor: LG) & Emerson (floor: G)	Arnold (LG) or Hershel (G)
14:00–15:00	Student partnerships in addressing the BME attainment gap	Brewer & Smith (LG)
15:00–15:45	Parallel workshops (choose one)	
	Generating and facilitating challenging conversations around race	Morris (LG)
	Making connections between the BME attainment gap and other institutional agendas	Brewer and Smith (LG)
	Measuring impact	Hershel (G)
15:45–16:00	Room transition	
16:00–16:30	Student panel	Brewer & Smith (LG)
16:30	Closing plenary Kirsty Johnson   Office for Students	Brewer & Smith (LG)



### Introducing the Value Added (VA) Score

John Tatam and Owen Beacock,  
*Kingston University*

Kingston's VA metric highlights differences in attainment which cannot be explained by student entry qualifications or subject of study both of which are arguments used to explain the BME attainment gap. The VA uses the actual degree outcomes of all students graduating across higher education in the last five years by subject of study and one of fifty entry qualification bands to identify whether student groups achieve their predicted outcomes and the BME attainment gap. Delegates will gain an insight into how the VA is derived and how it was used at Kingston to generate changes in the BME attainment gap closing the gap from 29% in 2014/15 to 13% in 2017/18.

### Key Note Speaker

Professor Steven Spier,  
*Vice Chancellor,  
Kingston University*

Professor Steven Spier was appointed as Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University in May 2017, having been Acting Vice-Chancellor. Prior to this, Professor Spier was the dean of the university's Kingston School of Art for four years as well as Pro Vice-Chancellor for Culture and Civic Engagement. He has worked in higher education in Switzerland, Germany, Scotland and Northern Ireland and holds a degree in liberal arts from Haverford College, Philadelphia, and completed postgraduate studies at the Southern California Institute of Architecture. Steven is educated as an architect and has published extensively on architecture and on choreography as a spatial organising system.



## Introducing the Inclusive Curriculum Framework

Nona McDuff and Dr Annie Hughes,  
*Kingston University*

The Inclusive Curriculum Framework is a key strategy to address the BME attainment gap. It is simple and practical and at Kingston has been adopted as an institutional tool to support student success. Within the context of their VA scores, course teams are challenged to consider the extent to which their curriculum is (i) accessible (conceptually and practically) (ii) reflects the needs of diverse students and (iii) prepares students to contribute positively to a global and diverse economy. Delegates will gain an insight into how this multi-dimensional framework identifies intervention points at which the principles of inclusivity can be enacted to ensure effective education at Kingston University.

## Applying the Value Added Metric and Inclusive Curriculum Framework at partner institutions

This session enables delegates to gain an insight into the approach that each partner institution took to adopting the Value Added Metric and Inclusive Curriculum Framework.

Presenters:

- **Dr Helen Barefoot**  
*Hertfordshire University*
- **Dr Christine Couper**  
*University of Greenwich*
- **Kaushika Patel**  
*De Montfort University*
- **Dr Phil Gravestock**  
*University of Wolverhampton*
- **Dr Julie Evans**  
*University College London*







## Student partnerships in addressing the BME attainment gap

Student partnership is essential to the work of a university that is seeking to create an inclusive environment. In 2016, Kingston University introduced the Student Inclusive Curriculum Consultants to bring different student voices into curriculum design and delivery. Although not part of the original brief, all the partners have adapted this approach in varying ways. In this session, delegates will learn how student partnerships have been adopted by the partners and will be able to consider whether this approach could be used in their own institutions.

Presenters:

- **Dr Phil Gravestock**  
*University of Wolverhampton*
- **Sara de Sousa**  
*University of Hertfordshire*
- **Dr Annie Hughes and Franklina Owusu Brobbey**  
*Kingston University*
- **Bernadette Gregory**  
*De Montfort University*
- **Sukhi Bath**  
*University College London*
- **Mandy Stevenson**  
*University of Greenwich*

## Generating and facilitating challenging conversations around race

Conversations about race, racism and the academy are a common feature of the partners work to address the BME attainment gap. Delegates will hear how the partners navigated the challenging conversations and consider whether these approaches can be used in their own institutions.

Presenters:

- **Kaushika Patel**  
*De Montfort University*
- **Nona McDuff**  
*Kingston University*
- **Simon Leggett**  
*University of Greenwich*

## **Making connections between the BME attainment gap and other institutional agendas**

Eliminating the BME attainment gap requires sustained effort and this can only be achieved cost effectively if it is an integral part of the fabric of an institution. Delegates will gain an insight into how the work on the BME attainment gap has connected with other initiatives within the partner institutions to promote a holistic and sustainable way forward.

Presenters:

- **Dr Helen Barefoot**  
*University of Hertfordshire*
- **Paulette Williams**  
*University College London*
- **Dr Phil Gravestock**  
*University of Wolverhampton*
- **Mark Prescod and Kaye Towlson**  
*De Montfort University*

## **Measuring impact**

With an increasing focus in the sector on student outcomes, the purpose of the project was to create change which positively impacted the BME attainment gap. Whilst it is not yet possible to identify final outcomes, there are a number of lead indicators which will provide delegates with useful evaluation measures, next steps and connections with other institutional activities to ensure the sustainability of focus beyond the project end.

Presenters:

- **John Tatam**  
*Kingston University*
- **Dr Lucy Ansley**  
*De Montfort University*
- **Dr Christine Couper**  
*University of Greenwich*



## Student Panel

A whole institutional approach to the BME attainment gap necessitates the involvement of students in all aspects of a higher education provider's work and at all stages of the student life cycle. This session begins with a statement on the role of students and student unions in addressing the attainment gap followed by a Q&A session. Delegates will be able to consider steps they can take to optimise student participation in their own institutions.

Facilitated by:

– **Kamal Mohamed**, *former officer of the Union of Kingston Students*

Panellists:

- **Muna Ali**  
*Kingston University*
- **Gabriella Otim-Oyet**  
*De Montfort University*
- **Danecia Barrett**  
*University of Hertfordshire*
- **Sandra Ogundele**  
*University College London*



## WHAT NEXT?

Visit our project website for information, insights and ideas on how to close the attainment gap.

**[ClosingtheAttainmentGap.co.uk](https://ClosingtheAttainmentGap.co.uk)**

Here you can also find contact details of the leads for each institution involved in the project.





















## Further helpful links:

View the project website:

[ClosingtheAttainmentGap.co.uk](http://ClosingtheAttainmentGap.co.uk)

*Partners:*

- [dmu.ac.uk](http://dmu.ac.uk)
- [gre.ac.uk](http://gre.ac.uk)
- [herts.ac.uk](http://herts.ac.uk)
- [kingston.ac.uk](http://kingston.ac.uk)
- [ucl.ac.uk](http://ucl.ac.uk)
- [wlv.ac.uk](http://wlv.ac.uk)