

<b>Institution:</b> Kingston University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 23 – Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving equality in higher education through the Inclusive Curriculum Framework and Value-Added metric		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Names:</b>	<b>Roles:</b>	<b>Periods employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Nona McDuff OBE	Director of Student Achievement (former Head of Equalities)	2007 – 2019
Annie Hughes	Head of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre (former Associate Professor Inclusive Curriculum)	1995 – present
Fiona Ross CBE	Professor in Health Care (former Dean)	2014 – present
Theresa Nash	Associate Professor Primary Care	1996 – present
Panagiota Paliokosta	Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education	2009 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> Aug 2013 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

## 1. Summary of the impact

The inclusive curriculum framework (ICF) and Value-added (VA) Metric, produced by a nine-year programme of equalities research at Kingston University, have changed public understandings of the “attainment gap” between BAME and White UK domiciled students. These conceptual tools have provided HEIs with a new way of understanding and addressing inequality in higher education, benefiting HEIs, their students, staff, and other stakeholders. The sector regulator has recommended ICF and VA, based on a study of their use in 5 HEIs other than Kingston. This research resulted in i) improvements in BAME student attainment (ii) influence on national policies for equality in HE (iii) improvements in inclusive teaching and learning that centres on student engagement and co-creation of curricula (Inclusive Curriculum Consultants) and (iv) better staff and student awareness of awarding gaps and attitudes towards inclusive practices.

## 2. Underpinning research

The gap between white and BAME UK domiciled students awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2.1 is a major and long-standing issue across the sector. Of 2019 graduates 80.9% of white students were awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2.1 but only 67.7% of BAME students – a 13 percentage point gap, Kingston University (KU)’s interdisciplinary research on equality in HE challenges assumptions about so-called ‘student deficit’ as an explanation for the gap. KU research has demonstrated that awarding gaps have less to do with students’ characteristics (e.g., entry qualifications and social class) than they do with institutional cultures. This work turns the focus towards what HEIs can do to improve inclusion. By rethinking curriculum design in terms of student engagement and inclusion, this research developed a metric to accurately assess the attainment gap and points the way towards closing it.

### ***Research on inclusive curricula and student engagement in curriculum design***

In 2012 a study by Hughes, funded by the Higher Education Academy, used critical race theory to explore differences between the experiences of white and BAME geography and earth sciences students on fieldwork trips. The study, which surveyed students about their experiences of fieldwork, revealed that even seemingly neutral questions about accommodation reflect cultural biases and the hegemony of whiteness. There was no need for conscious discrimination—the procedures of fieldwork themselves can encode racialized power relations.

### Impact case study (REF3)

The study argued for increased awareness of the needs of diverse student groups and to consciously adopt inclusive pedagogic practices [R1]. Concurrently, McDuff was developing a curriculum framework to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion across KU. These strands of work were brought together in an iterative process of gathering, testing and review, to create a theoretically informed framework for inclusive curricula, building on the insights of Hughes's study and McDuff's own work. The framework defined three core principles [R2]. These are (1) to create an accessible curriculum; (2) To ensure that students see themselves reflected in that curriculum; (3) to equip students to positively contribute to a global and diverse environment [R2]. The Inclusive Curriculum Framework (ICF) is an evidence-based, practical toolkit which informs the academic planning cycle from concept to review. One key innovation is curriculum co-creation in collaboration with student representatives, including Student Unions and paid and trained student Inclusive Curriculum Consultants (ICs). Over 100 ICs have been trained at KU in the period up to the end of 2020.

#### ***Research on BAME degree awarding gaps***

In 2014 KU initiated a 5-year programme of institutional change, supported by Access agreement initiative funding. The programme, underpinned by reviews of the literature, a theory of change model and action research methods, brought together a team of education researchers, equality and diversity practitioners and the planning directorate to assess the scale of the awarding gap and institutional measures to remedy it. Using BAME student experiences, assessments and outcomes, they were able to assess improvements in equality outcomes, associated with inclusive intervention [R3]. Central to understanding the effectiveness of measures to promote inclusivity is the Value Added (VA) metric the team developed. This calculates a VA score by taking actual degree outcomes for all UK domiciled graduates over the last five years, broken down by one of fifty entry bands and subject of study, to arrive at a probability that a given student, with known entry qualifications and subject studied, will achieve a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2:1. Aggregating these probabilities produces an 'expected' percentage for any given cohort of students who should achieve a 1<sup>st</sup> or 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. The VA metric, presented as a dashboard system, provided a methodological breakthrough by demonstrating where differentials in attainment were not due to student characteristics and thus reflected institutional practice and opportunities for change [R4].

#### ***Research on institutional factors influencing equality***

Since 2018, this research programme has focused on building knowledge about specific institutional dimensions of equality. The chief example is the project to maximise student success through the development of self-regulation, part of the OfS Addressing Barriers to Student Success Programme, funded by HEFCE. Adopting a research-informed inclusive pedagogy (the EAT Framework) it supported students' understanding and self-regulation to improve equality through assessment such as opportunities for students to discuss assessment criteria [R5]. It revealed that there are not significant differences in the assessment and feedback literacies of UK domiciled White and BAME students as they enter higher Education. Secondly, the Higher Education Academy funded KU to test transferability to the universities of Hertfordshire and Wolverhampton. This paved the way for the third large scale 3-year study which aimed to embed the ICF and the VA metric in 5 HEIs (Hertfordshire, Wolverhampton, University College London, De Montfort and Greenwich) [R6].

### **3. References to the research**

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The quality of the journal outputs **R1**, **R2**, **R3**, **R4** and **R5** is assured through peer-review. **R1** and **R2** are part of Kingston University's REF2 submission.

**R1 – Hughes, A.** (2016) Exploring normative whiteness: ensuring inclusive pedagogic practice in undergraduate fieldwork teaching and learning. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 40(3), 460-477. DOI: [10.1080/03098265.2016.1155206](https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2016.1155206) REF2:23-14-1291

## Impact case study (REF3)

**R2 – McDuff, N., Hughes, A., Tatam, J., Morrow, E., and Ross, F.** (2020) Improving equality of opportunity in Higher Education through the adoption of an inclusive curriculum framework. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 22(2) 83-121. DOI: [10.5456/WPLL.22.2.83](https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.22.2.83)  
REF2:23-17-1292

**R3 – McDuff, N., Tatam, J., Beacock, O., and Ross, F.** (2018) Closing the attainment gap for students from BME backgrounds through institutional change. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20(1), 79-101. DOI: [10.5456/WPLL.20.1.79](https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.20.1.79)

**R4 – Ross, F., Tatam, J., Livingstone, A., Beacock, O., McDuff, N.** (2018) The great unspoken shame of UK Higher Education: addressing inequalities of attainment. African Journal of Business Ethics, 12(1), 1817-7417. DOI: [10.15249/12-1-172](https://doi.org/10.15249/12-1-172)

**R5 – Balloo, K., Evans, C., Hughes, A., Zhu, X., and Winstone, N.** (2018) Transparency isn't spoon-feeding: How a transformative approach to the use of explicit assessment criteria can support student self-regulation, Frontiers of Education, 3 (69) 1-11.  
DOI: [10.3389/feduc.2018.00085](https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00085)

**R6 – McDuff, N. et al.** (2019) Use of a Value-Added Metric and an Inclusive Curriculum Framework to address the BME Attainment Gap. OfS Report.

#### Key Grants (competitive, peer-reviewed)

- OfS Catalyst funding (PL04), 2017-2019, GBP1.2million with in-kind costs, partnership with De Montfort, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, University College London and Wolverhampton universities.
- HEFCE Catalyst Strand B (L16), 2017-2019, GBP1million with in-kind costs, GBP144K awarded to Kingston University, with University of Surrey and Southampton University.
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund 2016-2018 GBP77K with Kingston Centre for Independent Living, Heritage2Health, St Philip's School, and Kingston Archives.
- Higher Education Academy 2015-2016 GBP25K with Hertfordshire and Wolverhampton universities.

#### 4. Details of the impact

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The implementation of the ICS and VA was independently evaluated by OfS for its impact and published in a full case study promoting the ICF and VA to other HEIs. The benefits of the ICF and VA have been communicated in the press, online and through professional networks, to policymakers and education practitioners, resulting in significant impact on the way HEIs address the awarding gap.

##### (i) Improvements in student attainment

The most significant impact for students has been improvements in their results. At KU, where the ICF and VA have been in use for 6 years the degree awarding gap between white and BAME students achieving a first or 2:1 has reduced 18 percentage points (pp), from 29 in 2011/12 to 11 in 2018/19 (over the same period the national average decreased by 3pp, from 16 to 13pp) **[R6]**. The VA score for BAME graduates changed from 0.72 to 0.96, bringing it very close to the level for all UK students irrespective of ethnicity. Over the last 5 years, 279 BAME students (5.4%) at KU have achieved a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2:1 degree that might not have otherwise. Despite the newness of adoption by the 5 partner HEIs, there are significant improvements in VA scores for BAME students **[R6]**. The independent OfS evaluation concluded that *'The project had a positive impact. Early findings show that the degree attainment gap between black and white students has narrowed in three of the partner providers. A fourth partner saw an improvement in BAME VA scores but because white attainment also increased the gap was not reduced.'* **[S1]**. By clearly demonstrating that the ICF promotes inclusion and helps students to overcome barriers to success, the research has informed the OfS Equality and Diversity objectives for 2018-2022. The ICF was also used in

an OfS briefing for the sector as an example of 9 actions for institutional change on inclusion. 10 HEIs have said in their Access and Participation Plans (2019-2020) that they have adopted a version of the KU's ICF, that draws on its principles, strategies and/or interventions [S2].

### **(ii) Influence on national policies for equality in HE**

The VA scores generated at 6 HEIs have raised policymakers' awareness of the scale and nature of institutional factors in student success and the need to encourage institutional change to improve inclusivity and maximise social mobility outcomes. In 2016 KU outcomes were cited in parliamentary debates on issues of BAME people in the workplace [S4]. In an interview for The Guardian in 2017, Les Ebdon, former Director of the Office for Fair Access, pointed to Kingston's efforts as exemplary and stated: *'Kingston University has made closing the BAME attainment gap a matter of institutional strategy and measures the vice-chancellor's performance on that basis.'* The influence of KU's research on national policy is evidenced by McDuff's appointment to the ministerial Social Mobility Advisory Group (2015-16) and briefing to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on HE on diversity. Ministerial visits to KU and endorsements in the media have further raised awareness and promoted the ICF. For example, speaking on Channel 4 News in 2019, Nadhim Zahawi, former children and families minister, praised KU's support for students from care, saying *'I went to visit Kingston University and they have two dedicated staff to work with care leavers at university. Why? Because when children get to university, it's a lonely place, it's a difficult place'* [S5]. KU retains 100% of students from care compared to a national average of 70%. Soon after, Chris Skidmore, UK's universities and science minister wrote in the Times Higher Education (and on Twitter): *'Kingston University is leading the way through its KU Cares team in supporting students who have been in care throughout their time at university and beyond'* [S6].

### **(iii) Improvements in inclusive teaching and learning that centres on student engagement and co-creation of curricula**

Research outputs from the ICF are incorporated into a chapter in a leading textbook (*A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, fifth edition) reaching an international audience of academic practitioners. The ICF and VA tools and resources are freely available via KU's ICF webpages and promoted via YouTube, leading to shared learning with 7 universities through the European Association of Universities and 5 universities in Europe, Indonesia, and the USA through the International Network of Universities. The VA has been adopted by HEIs beyond the five partner HEIs including: Queen Mary University of London, Southampton Solent and London Metropolitan University. As the former CE of the Higher Education Academy explains: *'I believed that these tools should be disseminated more widely across the sector and I provided £25k for a project to spread this learning to the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Hertfordshire. This demonstrated the transferability and value of these approaches'* [S7]. The National Educational Opportunities Network's (NEON) with 126 member HEIs gave KU a commendation for widening access in 2020 [S8]. At a KU 2019 conference to showcase the ICF and VA, 84% of participants (136 people from 55 HEIs) said they were "likely" or "very likely" to adopt the VA metric. As one participant said: *'The VA metric provides the evidence for HEIs to 'see' the problems of inequality within their own institutions and the value of data as a driver for engagement and change when staff are reluctant to talk about race'*. Evidence on translation of the VA and ICF to 5 other universities, has demonstrated how HEIs can develop their own approaches to inclusive curricula and institutional change. The impact on practice across the 5 HEIs has been: over 60 projects and practical changes to the curriculum, changes to student services, 39 new institutional policies/policy documents, commitment to use and incorporate the VA and ICF into future planning, monitoring, guidance, evaluation, training, and review [R6].

#### (iv) Better staff and student awareness of awarding gaps and attitudes towards inclusive practices

In 2017 KU won The Guardian Award for teaching excellence because of its evidence-based approach to inclusive teaching and learning. At KU, the impact of the research extends across the entire institution [R6]. The partner HEIs also show substantial evidence of improvements in staff awareness of awarding gaps and attitudes towards inclusive practices. The independent evaluation funded by the OfS says of the VA metric that *'Value-added data at this level has proved a very powerful means of engaging staff in discussion around the attainment gap'* [S9]. In interviews with academic staff in the partner institutions, staff have described the VA and ICF as *'sophisticated and visually powerful'* (Wolverhampton), *'a game changer because it challenges the student deficit model'* (Hertfordshire), *'practical, understandable tools which help staff to recognise the problem and offered them some ways to respond'* (De Montfort) [R6]. Through webinars and conferences organised by KU's Special Interest Group on Inclusion and Social Justice, staff and students are supported to discuss sensitive and complex equality issues. Student participants in the "Fighting for Our Rights" project, one of the key inclusive curriculum projects, gave overwhelmingly positive responses about the move towards inclusive education, which has also raised awareness in schools through a co-created Disability Awareness Resource. All partner HEIs have developed case studies of working with ICCs/students to change curricula, broaden reading lists, improve assessment, and promote student interaction. The positive impact on student engagement is illustrated by the YouTube ICC video [S10]. As a former Senior ICC at KU, explains: *'The inclusive curriculum framework gave the university and me the accessible tools we needed to implement change. It made difficult conversations possible, but more importantly, it improved the experience of our students.'* [S11]

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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S1 – [OfS summary of the independent evaluation of the ABSS projects](#)

S2 – Access and Participation Plans (2019/2020) from 10 English HEIs using KU's ICF

S3 – The research is used as evidence in [OfS briefing on the BAME attainment gap](#)

S4 – [Ministerial speech on BAME workplace issues](#), 3 May 2016 describes KUs inclusive approach.

S5 – Channel 4 News, [8 May 2019](#), 1:26 – 1:37

S6 – [Ministerial praise of the impact of inclusive practices on students from care at KU](#) in the Times Higher Education 14 March 2019.

S7 – Testimonial on the impact of the ICF and VA by Vice Principal (Education) Queen Mary University of London and former Chief Executive of the Higher Education Academy

S8 – In [2020 NEON Widening Access Initiative](#) awarded KU a commendation for the ICF

S9 – Evidence of the impact of the Value-Added metric/VA dashboard on student attainment has been [published](#) by KU and Advance HE

S10 – ["Introducing Kingston's Inclusive Curriculum Consultant Programme"](#) video

S11 – Testimonial from a Senior Inclusive Curriculum consultant