



## **SQELT PROJECT**

### **SUSTAINABLE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AND TEACHING. Integrative Core Dataset and Performance Data Analytics**



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## **Intellectual Output 1: Summary Report**

### **Benchlearning Report on Project Partner HEIs' Performance Data Models**

#### **Performance Data Management Model – Birmingham City University (BCU)**

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## **Introduction**

Birmingham City University (BCU) is a large, inner-city university that was formerly the City of Birmingham Polytechnic (later Birmingham Polytechnic). It achieved University status in 1992, changing its name to the University of Central England in Birmingham. The University re-branded in 2007, becoming Birmingham City University, adopting a new logo, a reworking of the tiger crest used by the University of Central England in Birmingham, which itself originally came from the Birmingham College of Commerce, one of the Polytechnic's founder institutions.

BCU has three main campuses serving four faculties, and offers courses in art and design, business, the built environment, computing, education, engineering, English, healthcare, law, the performing arts, social sciences, and technology. The university has around 24,000 undergraduate and (post)graduate students.

Given its provenance, the institution has tended to focus on vocational courses although there has been a concerted effort in recent years to embed a focus on research. Recently, the University has emphasised its links with the heritage of the city of Birmingham and its industries. This is evidenced in the University's Social Responsibility statement, which notes:

We play a key role in supporting the economy and public sector in Birmingham and the West Midlands, as the University for the City of Birmingham (BCU, 2018).

## **Birmingham City University: Digital Performance Data Management**

The University, like most others in the UK, collects a wide range of data digitally, but it is not always clear how much this data is actually being used to improve the quality of the student experience. Currently, data is available and is used on a range of different issues and this is shared with relevant individuals, often at senior level. However, there are also classroom level activities that are seldom shared with a wider audience, such as classroom feedback approaches that are used by individual lecturers to improve their teaching.

### *Contexts and challenges*

The University is also subject to a range of national data collection compliance requirements. The University is required to provide information routinely to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The University takes part in national surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE) and also takes part in the (voluntary) Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The NSS, particularly, causes much anxiety and heartache. Position in this league table is a priority for BCU as with most other institutions. In addition, the University is subject to the teaching excellence framework (TEF) and submits to the research excellence framework (REF). TEF, as a new instrument for judging teaching, causes much anxiety.

In addition, the University faces two specific challenges relating to the type of students traditionally recruited by the institutions: black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and 'commuter' students (those who have to travel from home to study). Nationally, these specific issues relate to widening participation; locally, they relate to the nature of the University's recruitment strategy.

## Birmingham City University Position

As has been made clear above, BCU collects a large amount of data relating to its students and its institutional performance; much of this data is required by statutory bodies. In addition, other data relating to student experience is collected at a local level, or to investigate specific student issues as they arise. These two approaches form the basis of both the strengths of the institution and the challenges it faces in the future. The current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Preliminary SWOT analysis of BCU's performance data management

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Mature system of data collection</p> <p>Existing data collection can be mapped across and form the basis of performance indicator development</p> <p>Recognition that all staff need to be able to access data to inform personal and institutional progress</p> <p>Willingness to build systems that work for all staff</p> <p>Recognition of the importance of data analysis/ development of performance indicators</p>	<p>No shared institutional understanding of the purpose of collecting data</p> <p>Little joined-up working within the institution</p> <p>Existing data collection fails to adequately address current needs</p> <p>Relevant data is not available to all stakeholders</p> <p>Diversity of the institution lends itself to 'silo' working</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>An opportunity to improve the situation: to start from scratch if necessary</p> <p>To harness existing functions to support the development of a new system</p> <p>To ensure that the right data is getting to the right people</p>	<p>Development of performance indicators that do not reflect the reality of the institution</p> <p>Excessive reliance on the collection of data: less reliance on interpretation</p> <p>Policy changes relating to current debates in UK HE: i.e. student fees, value for money etc.</p> <p>Partnership working/collaboration in the wake of Brexit</p>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### *Conclusion*

There is currently no overall model of digital performance data management at Birmingham City University that relates to learning and teaching. However, an institutional strategy is being developed, based on accepted wisdom on learning analytics that relates to all aspects of learning and teaching at the institution. The

University faces challenges that are similar to other institutions in the UK and much is driven by the issue of fees: what are students actually getting for their money?

### *Recommendations*

In light of these conclusions, a set of key recommendations can be drawn from the existing situation at Birmingham City University. These are as follows:

1. BCU must engage in **sharing and exchange** ideas on learning analytics with partners from across Europe. This is vital both to learn from the experiences of other institutions but also to share the good practice it has developed. This is a key learning expectation of BCU from the SQELT project and will help inform BCU's future direction at a key turning point;
2. BCU staff should have more confidence in the institution's **established achievements** in data collection. Not only is there a long history of collecting and using student-generated data, the University has many examples of innovative and best practice in learning analytics, learning and teaching practice;
3. There is a need to **review performance indicators** for learning and teaching, especially in the current context of re-building the institution's data management system. Stimulation and support in this regard are key expectations of BCU from the SQELT project;
4. There is a need for developing a **total data collection and management system**. BCU expects that other partners in the SQELT project will have experiences in managing such systems;
5. There is a need for a balance between data requirements for **compliance** and that which is collected to **support change and improvement**. Compliance and improvement should not be separated but considered as having the same goal. The SQELT project will highlight the different experiences of institutions in this regard;
6. It is clear that one person or area must be allocated **ownership** and **leadership** of data management. BCU expects that other partners will have had experiences of this issue;
7. It is vital that data is **accurate** and **consistent**. Currently, weaknesses have been identified in the accuracy and consistency of data collection. It is expected that other partners in the SQELT project will have experiences of this significant issue;
8. Data must be kept **secure**. Data security is a key concern across the sector and applies to BCU as it will to other higher education institutions in the SQELT partnership;
9. Appropriate **access** controls must be used, so that people who need the data can access it and people who don't cannot. Currently, it is not always clear who has access to data. The biggest problem identified by staff is that many academic staff who need access are not given it. The SQELT project will highlight the varying degrees this is an issue;
10. It is vital that a **culture** is created where data is everyone's asset and everyone's responsibility. Currently, data collection and management are activities that are limited to some individuals. For BCU, this is expected to be an important role of the SQELT project;

11. It is essential to develop good **data capability** among their staff. It is expected that the research undertaken in SQELT project will help identify staff needs and current awareness.