

Learning Gain Project: a focus on students?

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Institutional Context – Birmingham City University

- Post 1992 University
- ~24,000 Students
- 8 Campuses moving to 2/3
- Vocational approach to learning
- Multicultural student population
- Commuter students (69%)



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What is 'Learning Gain'?

- ▶ The Office for Students (formerly known as HEFCE) characterise 'Learning Gain' as the following:

*An attempt to measure the improvement in **knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development** made by students during their time spent in higher education.*

- ▶ In our case - what level of skills do students enter and leave with when they undertake their course of study?
- ▶ How do curriculum and extra-curricular activities contribute to the development of these skills?



Project Overview - Revised Proposal

- Original Proposal – longitudinal study, 1,000 students with 4 testing points.
- Later – focus on cross-sectional study
- Recruitment challenge
- Why? Wrong focus?



Methodologies

- ▶ **Standardised tests** - These measure the skills students acquire, which may be generic or specialised (for example, a skill specific to a discipline).
- ▶ **Self-reporting surveys** - Such surveys ask students to report the extent to which they think they have gained knowledge and developed skills.
- ▶ **Other qualitative methods** - These encourage students to reflect on their learning, acquired skills and skills gaps.
- ▶ **Mixed methods** - This draws on a range of tools and indicators to track improvement in performance, (for example through a combination of grades, student learning data and student surveys).



Emergent approaches

- ▶ **Cognitive gain** – what students think and know
- ▶ **Soft skills development** – affective measures of attitudes and how students feel
- ▶ **Employability and careers readiness** – mainly behavioural measures of activities students have undertaken in preparation for the world of work





The Council for Aid to Education (CAE)

- ▶ In 2002, CAE, a not for profit based in NYC, launched a national effort to assess the quality of undergraduate education.
- ▶ CLA+ (Collegiate Learning Assessment) is a **web administered, value added** assessment programme.
- ▶ The aim of CLA+ is to provide an **objective assessment** about the critical-thinking skills a student possesses as they enter and exit college.

cla+



CAE



The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+)

- ▶ The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) is a performance based test that measures **critical thinking, problem solving, analytic reasoning, and writing skills.**
- ▶ The CLA+ uses a **Performance Task (60")** and 25 **Selected-response Questions (30")**.
- ▶ Can take up to **2 hours** to complete - Tutorials and Demographic Survey.
- ▶ **PT responses** are **scored (1-6)** by staff leads in each institution - requires scorer training.



CLA+ post 2011

- ▶ Generates an individual student report based on a Mastery Level (1-5)
- ▶ Mastery Levels are formed via a combination of scores for the Performance Task and Selected-Response Questions.
- ▶ Key point - Emphasis on highlighting areas of development for **the student.**



How have we embedded the CLA+? – Optional vs Compulsory

- ▶ 1st and 2nd year of testing - financial incentives
- ▶ Low attendance - first two years
- ▶ Successful engagement with the Birmingham City Business School
- ▶ Embedded into Professional Studies Module as formative assessment.
- ▶ Importance of engaging programme and modular level staff



Findings from Optional Testing – Focus Groups

- ▶ Structure – Issues with lack of spell check and viewing content.
- ▶ Most students believed that the test was not subject independent.
- ▶ The time the test was taken in the academic year was an issue
- ▶ Students would take the CLA+ test if employers and other HEIs valued the scores from it.
- ▶ Students who had taken the test twice noted enhancement of other skills e.g. time management



Autumn 2017 Testing – Compulsory

- ↓ 201 L4 students tested (81% response rate) in a week with focus on one participating School - **Birmingham City Business School**
- ↓ Previous issues with recruitment no longer encountered
- ↓ Testing embedded into a core module
- ↓ Tied directly to summative assessment – E-Portfolio
- ↓ These students being tested again in March 2019



MKT4020 - Professional Development

- ❑ Developed via the University's Transforming the Curriculum (TtC) process
- ❑ CLA+ embedded into Week 2 of the Module, focusing on Critical Thinking:
 - LO1 - **Undertake an audit of skills and capabilities, reflecting on the outcomes and engage with a programme of professional development.**
 - LO3 - **Evidence skills in the context of professional development and evaluate impact.**
- ❑ Other sessions include:
 - Building competency with contemporary IT software e.g. Microsoft Office
 - Enhancing presentation skills
 - Forming a professional portfolio and profile via e-portfolio and Social Media



MKT4020 – Professional Development

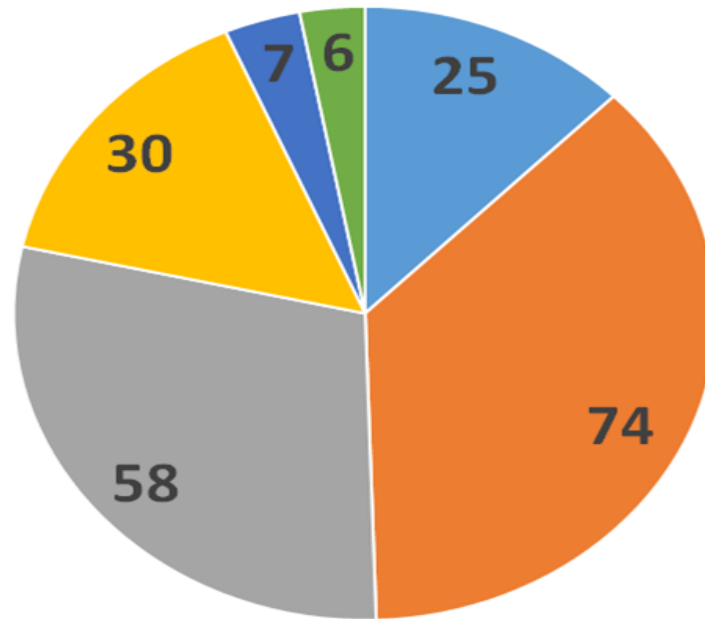
- ❑ Reports distributed in Week 7 employability week in bespoke activity
- ❑ Tied into extra curricular awards framework – Graduate+
- ❑ Majority of the reports collected!
- ❑ CLA+ individual student report submitted as evidence for summative assessment
- ❑ Electronic copies also available to send to students who could not attend.



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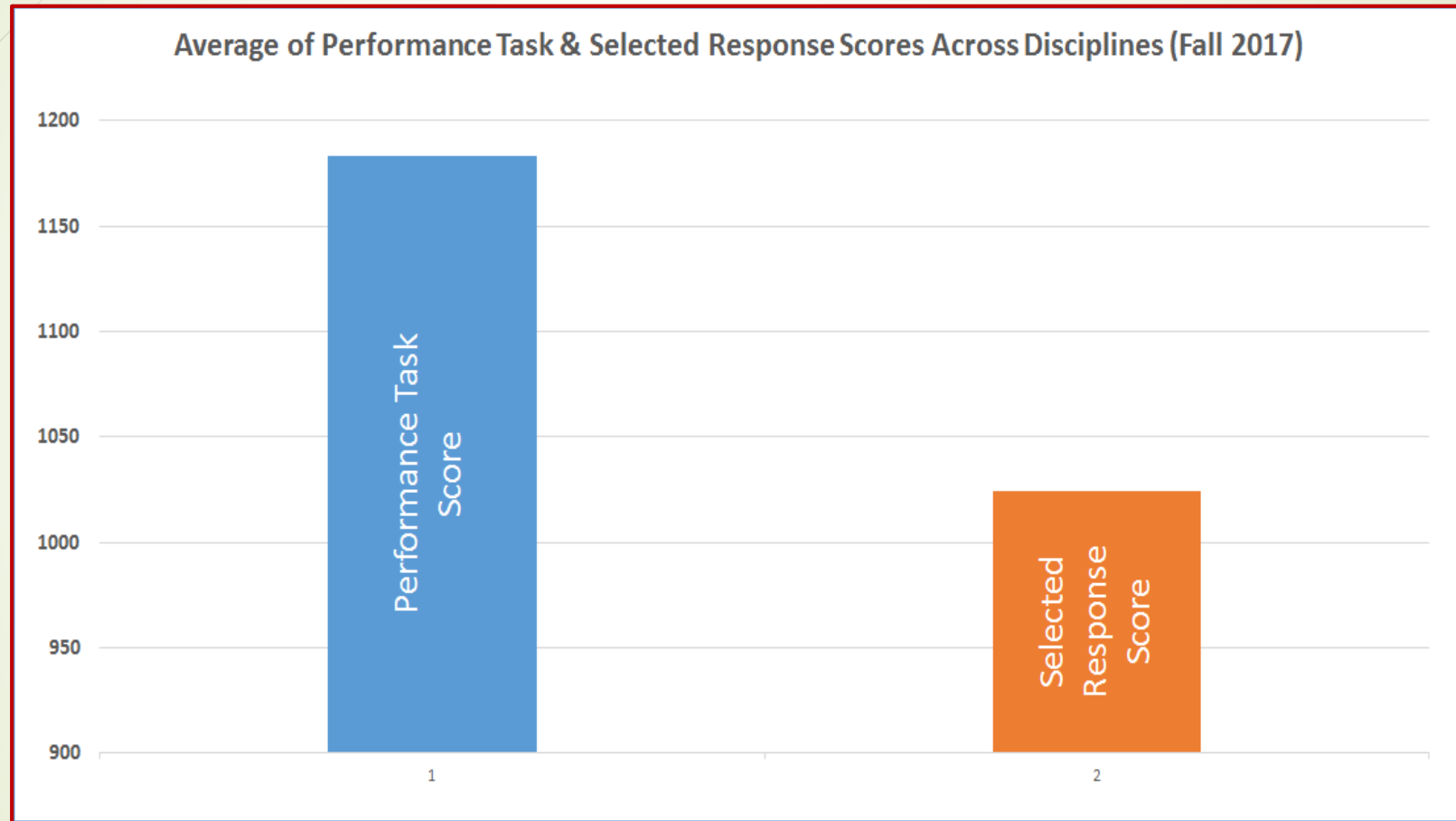
Results – Autumn 2017

Mastery Level by the number of participants

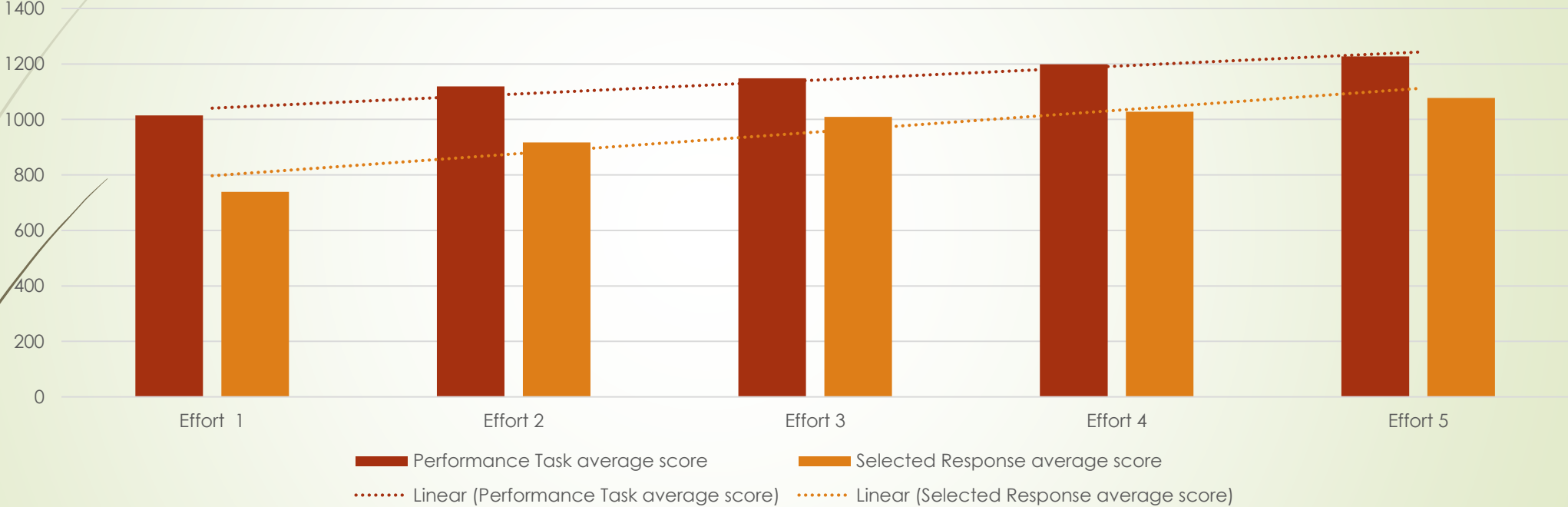


■ Mastery Level 1 ■ Mastery Level 2 ■ Mastery Level 3
■ Mastery Level 4 ■ Mastery Level 5 ■ Mastery Level N/A

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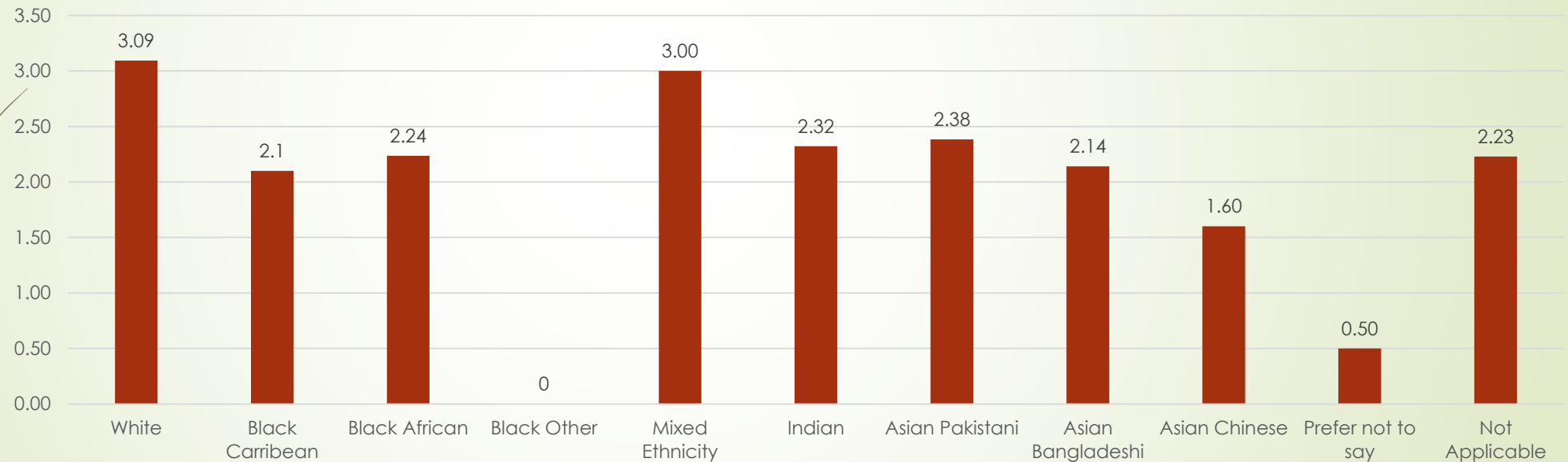


Average scores vs Effort



Fall – Mastery Levels by Ethnicity

Average Mastery Levels Across Ethnicity (Autumn 2017)



Native vs 2nd Language


Average of Performance Task & Selected Response Scores Across Language (Fall 2017)



CLA+ as a diagnostic tool – Future Developments

- Interest from numerous staff at BCU on utilising the test as part of a foundation degree.
- Could also provide comparative data if L4s are tested.
- Assessment Centre??





Future Plans - The Student Journey through the Birmingham City University Assessment Centre

Diagnostic (level 3&4)

Academic Skills;
Numeracy testing,
Wellbeing; Disability
assessments; English
Language tests; Self
awareness; digital literacy

Developmental (levels 3-7)

Module MCQs; Ongoing
target setting tests; Career
development; summative
examinations; English
Language development

Destinations (levels 6&7)

Professional exams
practice & delivery;
interview practice; group
exercises; employer tests;
summative examinations



**Thank you for
listening!**