Inclusive versus targeted support for BTEC-holding students: What are the issues?

University of Lean to

Dr Lavinia Mitton, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy

(L.Mitton@kent.ac.uk)

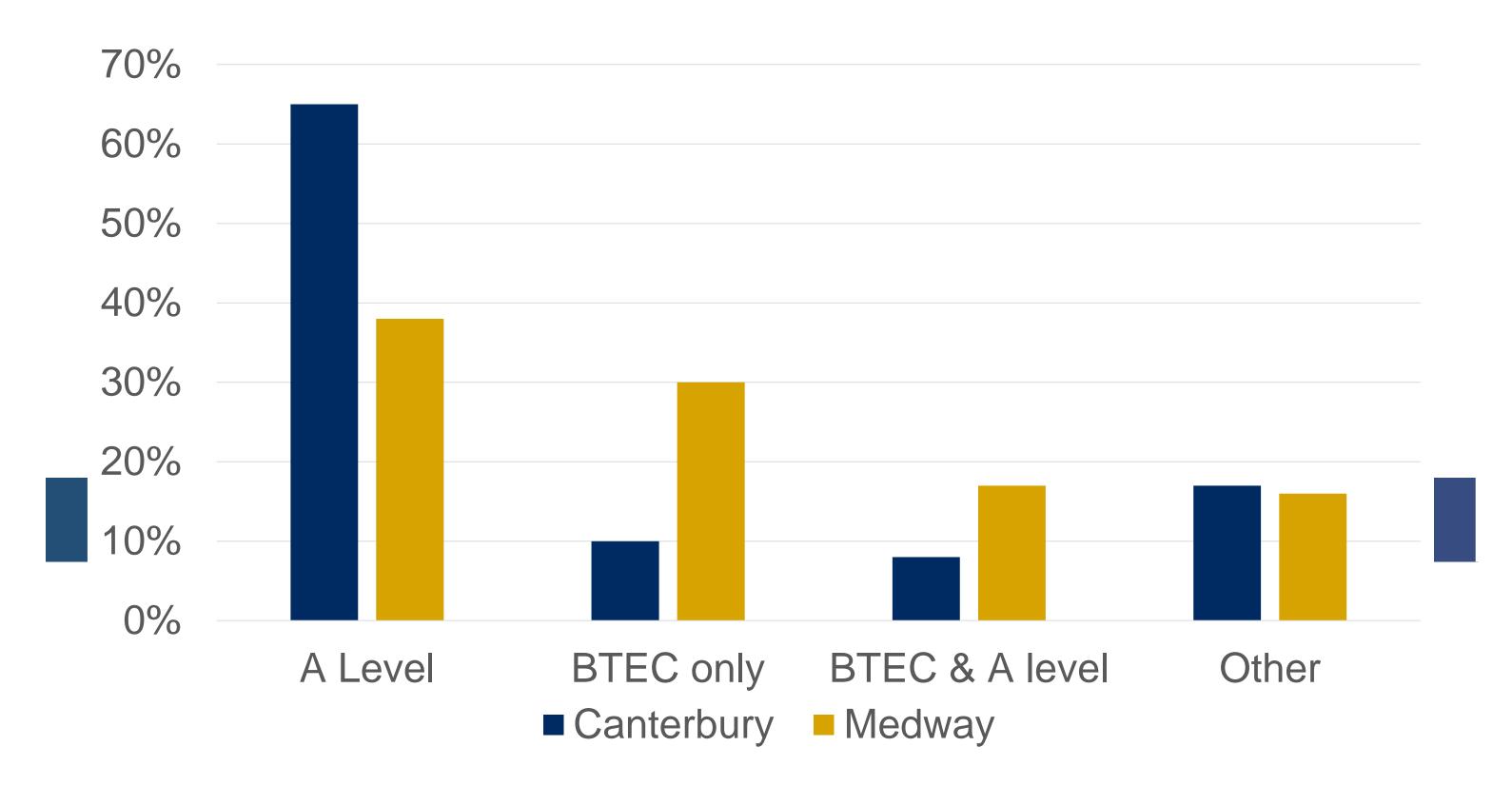
The problem

Staff who organise student support face a dilemma. Should they target BTEC students specifically? Or should they involve all students?

Who am I?

I have investigated the academic attainment gaps at the University of Kent between students who followed a Level 3 BTEC qualification and students who did A levels. This was part of a wider set of on-going institution-wide activities that won Kent the Outstanding Support for Students award at the Times Higher Education Awards in November 2017.

University of Kent: Highest Educational Qualification of entrants, by campus (2016/17 and 2017/18 entrants combined, UK domicile)



My sources

Over 12 hours of interviews with BTEC-holding students were audio recorded. The questions were open-ended and focussed on experiences of studying at the University of Kent so far. I analysed the transcripts borrowing concepts from research on supporting BME students.

All students able to benefit

Inclusive

- Avoids negative impact of 'special treatment':
- Students already feel a hierarchy of qualifications within their peer groups.
- It is important to their palatability that support doesn't start from a 'deficit' perspective linked to students themselves.
- Negative perceptions of student ability by staff and students discourage learning.
- Doesn't label students on the basis of group membership, which is stereotyping.
- It's not only BTEC entrants who have academic development support needs!

Vs

Targeted

More efficient use of resources.

 Can focus on specific academic development needs of BTEC entrants (possibly in exam technique and maths).

Therefore if support must be targeted it's best provided pre-registration.

"Of course, there has been a stigma, it is like BTECs are for people that have less ability, which is true."

(JAMES, Law)

"Everyone's like, BTEC, like you're dumb or something because you're doing a BTEC. And I don't know, I thought that as well."

(MEGAN, Psychology)

Study skills separate from content modules

Mainstreaming

Embedding in the

curriculum, integrated

 Increases take up. Add-on workshops may suffer an awareness and promotion problem, with those most in need of the service being either less likely to know about it or seek it out, or its presentation being too generic to directly speak to those who need it most.

Vs Add-ons

Any advantages of add-on support???

Can be optional or compulsory.
Opt-out is better than opt-in.
Promotion of study skills support should use language that is appealing to those who think they already have 'study skills' or doubt its relevance e.g. 'advanced skills', 'step up'.

VS

'advanced skills', 'step up'.

www.kent.ac.uk/studentsuccess