

NEON Widening Participation in Postgraduate Study Network

Thursday 28th April 2022, 13:00- 15:00

Present: Louise Banahene (University of Leeds, Chair); Jo Armstrong (Lancaster University); Iqra Arshad (University of Leeds); Pallavi Banerjee (University of Exeter); Helen Claxton (University of York); Kate Davy (University of Oxford); Alex Ferguson (University of Leeds); Clare Isham (Office for Students); Kirsty Janes (University of Exeter); Cherryl Jones (University of Warwick); Richard Kemp (University of Leeds); Louise MacRae (Edge Hill University); Rebecca McKelvey (In2scienceUK); Jo McNeill (University of Liverpool); Nuala Murray (University of Cambridge); Sally Osei-Appiah (University of Leeds); Claire Prendegast (University of Cambridge); Martin Thompson (University of Cambridge); Charmaine Valente (SLC); Jeffrey Vernon (Imperial College London); Lydia Wakefield-Yeung (London Business School); 2Anthony Walker-Cook (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine);

Apologies: Jenn Coates (University of Leeds)

1. Welcome and apologies

LB welcomed everyone to the meeting and new members introduced themselves.

LB invited the group to comment on or raise any inaccuracies from the previous minutes. None were raised.

All actions from the previous meeting have either been actioned or are in progress.

2. Topic Discussion, following previous meeting highlighting areas for future discussion (Louise Banahene)

The group was split into breakout rooms to discuss ideas on various topics relating to Postgraduate Study.

A [Padlet](#) was created and all breakout groups were asked to provide their thoughts there before feeding back.

During the feedback, the following points were made, expanding on the notes on the Padlet:

Is introducing contextual admissions a useful way to support access to PG study for under-represented and diverse groups?

- The definition of what contextual admissions means at PG level relates to some work done by Paul Wakeling, finding that some barriers students face in reaching UG study carry over to PG but not all.

Thinking about the range of barriers that might exist for WP PGTs, how might a contextual admissions scheme help them to overcome these? What could be developed to help students in the process to overcome these barriers?

- There is an information barrier, PG study needs demystifying for many groups in terms of how to access it and the benefits in the same way UG study is.
- The need to self-identify and explain why they may have received a lower degree classification arguably puts too much onus on the students when we know certain

awarding gaps exist in particular groups. Contextual information vs contextual evidence we can collect.

- Wording on Admissions pages is important. Some Universities use 'you must have a good first degree', which could put people off without a first class or 2:1 degree.
- The short, intensive schedule of a PGT programme can be off-putting to WP students as many will struggle to work alongside it.

What are the main elements (strategically and operationally) that we would need in place for contextual admissions at PG to succeed?

- Widening access for Postgraduates in general needs to be a strategic priority for the institution, which is important to consider when thinking about stakeholders and who you need to have buy-in from.

What are the main challenges likely to be in setting up contextual admissions at PG level? What are the potential solutions to these?

- Developing a culture that makes prospective WP students believe that PG study is for them. This involves everything from marketing to actually creating opportunities.
- Working around the issues of Widening Participation only looking at UK students when a large number of PG students are international.

3. Workstream updates

- **Data and Admissions Workstream - PG Admissions Data project update (Charlene Taylor)**
 - The group has been working to identify a common set of criteria at PG level for admissions to ask which would help for contextual admissions, with 9-10 institutions involved in a trial.
 - Collaboration and data sharing agreements have been established
 - The group has been investigating, on a practical and operational level, how easy it would be to change admissions processes to capture more of this info.
 - The group's work is currently going through ethical approval and are user-testing the wording for different questions.
 - Adding this info to September 2022 admissions is still the target.
- **Strategy and Research Workstreams - (Louise Banahene)**
 - The results from the literature review completed last summer (viewable on the Teams page) came with recommendations to improve diversity at PG level.
 - A strategy blueprint has been created to help institutions improve diversity at PG level, based on these recommendations. This is with UKGCE at the moment. Edits and comments are expected in May. Further case studies will be requested in the future.

- Next steps are to combine everything into a shareable PDF document, collating the best learnings and ideas from this group.
- **Success Workstream (Rachel Van Krimpen)**
 - A bid for funding from UAA, looking at success in PGR across three institutions, has been successful. The initial research stage is now underway.
- **Employability Workstream (Stacey Mottershaw)**
 - The group has been working to put together a funding bid to identify the different needs of WP and non-WP students. Iwi Ugiabe-Green is leading the project, involving 6 institutions.
 - A grant from Prospects has been awarded to conduct a mixed methods study in January. This will begin with a survey to all PGT students followed by five cross-institutional focus groups made up of WP PGT students.
 - A report will be due to Prospects by the end of 2023 with a presentation in January 2024.

4. NEON PG Summit plans (Louise Banahene)

The PG Summit is due to take place on 13th July 200 from 10:00-16:30 at the University of Leeds.

LB ran through a document with further plans, including a draft schedule, which will be shared on the Teams group.

5. AOB

N/A

Summary of Actions

N/A