

LSE Widening Participation: Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy 2017/8

Background

Over the past 18 months, the LSE Widening Participation team has developed significant additional capacity in three core areas of:

- Data
- Evaluation
- Research

This strategy sets out what we have achieved so far and how we plan to take this forward over the next 12 months, and into the longer term.

What have we achieved so far?

Data

- Following our subscription to HEAT (the Higher Education Access Tracker) we have a robust, reliable and complete dataset about the performance and characteristics of most UK schools; we are also now able to easily generate and use data about the characteristics of an area where a WP participant lives (e.g. POLAR3, Acorn, IMD, IDACI).
- Our new CRM system has streamlined collection and reporting of data for participants in our individual-applies WP projects, as well as providing a more integrated platform for monitoring and targeting the schools that we work with.

Evaluation

- We have reviewed the outcomes we expect to see on each of our WP projects, linking them to a new overarching set of aims and objectives for the programme as a whole. We have redesigned our evaluations of each project so that we have more consistency across projects, and can now evaluate at a programme level.
- We have moved our evaluations from Bristol Online Surveys to Qualtrics, which has allowed us to construct more sophisticated and engaging surveys for project participants.

Research

- We have established and developed a network of WP evaluators/researchers across several London universities, and are working together on collaborative projects to understand more about the impact of WP work in different settings.
- We have built relationships with LSE academics to collaborate on research projects that will deepen our understanding of the structural issues which underpin much of our work.
- We have completed stand-alone research projects into parental attitudes to student financial support and the experience of Black and Minority Ethnic HUK students in choosing and joining LSE.
- We have explored the ways in which a more systematised way of identifying applications from WP students to LSE undergraduate programmes has affected offer rates for this group.

Plans for 2017/8 and beyond

Our research, monitoring and evaluation programme for 2017/8 is designed with the following objectives:

- Meet our obligations under the LSE Access Agreement, performing beyond expectations wherever possible.
- Support the development of LSE WP projects, so that they reflect our best understanding of
 - (a) the challenges we should be seeking to address; and
 - (b) the best ways of doing so.
- Be at the forefront of research into Widening Participation and related issues within the wider sector
- Demonstrate our commitment to research, monitoring and evaluation as a core part of our work.

To meet these objectives we have a set of outcomes we plan to achieve by the end of the 2017/8 academic year.

This work will all take place against a background of 'business as usual' for Widening Participation research, evaluation and monitoring at LSE. Such activity includes:

- Continued review and analysis of annual evaluation data to understand the impact of our programmes year-on-year, and support project development and review by the WP team;

- Ongoing review of our aims and objectives and evaluation framework/questions to reflect changing priorities and best practice in the sector more widely;
- Updating and revising research activities such as the Admissions analysis to reflect new data available and to explore the impact of new policies/metrics;

A portfolio of work undertaken in partnership with external bodies will also support both our 2017/18 plans and our ‘business as usual’ activity.

- Work with Alterline on a cross-institution project looking at university aspirations among 6-18 year olds
- Work with London Russell Group universities looking at crossover between our Widening Participation project participants.
- Work with CACI exploring the usefulness of new metrics such as their disposable household income data for targeting/supporting WP students

These three strands of activity will work together to strengthen the evidence base for our work and to ensure that research and evaluation are embedded in every aspect of widening participation activity both pre- and post-entry to LSE.

	Access agreement	WP team	Other LSE teams	Extension
Data	Pre- and post-event evaluation data collected for all WP projects	All processes for annual data-related work documented (e.g. collating HEAT data for CRM, running the destinations survey)	CRM data used wherever appropriate to inform projects or activity which relies on school performance or postcode-based data	Demonstrate relevance of new data points for WP (e.g. Acorn, UCAS applications/acceptances data)
	All WP project selection uses school and/or individual data in the CRM to help select participants	WP data collection and storage is compliant with the GDPR and team understand their responsibilities in relation to this	Guidance available for other teams who want to find schools and contextual data in the CRM	Knowledge bank of matched pre- and post-event evaluation responses that can be interrogated and analysed by project managers housed in (for example) a Qualtrics panel or Tableau
	LSE Undergraduate Admissions uses school and/or individual data to identify WP applicants, ideally from the same data source as WP team		Demonstrate how other departments’ data can be linked to WP data to explore how LSE services are used by WP participants	
	Participant destinations recorded via annual survey			
	Participant data recorded in HEAT, where we have correct permissions			
	Data collected from schools on Tutoring project about pupils’ pre- and post- participation attainment			

Evaluation	LSE can demonstrate we are making a contribution to sector-wide knowledge about WP impact	All processes for annual work around evaluation (e.g. reviewing aims and objectives, reviewing evaluation questions) documented	Evaluate whether participation in LSE services has a particular impact on outcomes for WP students	Views from external stakeholders including e.g. WP Operational Group feed into development of WP projects
	LSE performing at, or beyond, OFFA's expected levels for WP evaluation	Evaluation reports feed into ongoing development of individual projects		
		Evaluation report provides recommendations for the programme as a whole		
Research	Develop a robust attainment-raising target for next Access Agreement	Sustained engagement with LSE academics to support analysis/research that will help LSE and the wider sector with their understanding of WP	Evidence base to support identification of students with worse outcomes during their course of study	WP research directory published and available to answer questions and shape research, and used as a primary source for all information shared about WP performance at LSE
		Research across more than 1 LSE WP project on a thematic aspect of WP research we would like to know more about (e.g. financial considerations, parental influence etc)	Research outputs from WP used by other departments to inform and support their activities	

Specific activities to support outcomes

Many of the outcomes are 'business as usual' for the WP Data and Policy Analyst and/or the WP and/or other teams. However, some will require specific projects with more intensive input from colleagues within and outside WP.

1. Develop and initiate a project with at least one other LSE department (not academic), possibly under the aegis of the WP Steering Group, to identify:
 - a. Whether and how their administrative data can be linked to existing WP datasets on LSE students, to support identification of WP students. This will permit more effective targeting of on-course activities; it will also support proper calculation of LSE's spend on on-course support for WP students in relation to the Access Agreement and Monitoring Return.
 - b. Whether participation in such activities has any impact on student progression for WP students.
2. Commission a piece of research from LSE academics or external consultants to develop a robust and evidence-based attainment raising target for inclusion within the next Access Agreement. This research will be focused on identifying a suitable set of measures/scale for inclusion within project evaluations on relevant projects (e.g. LSE CHOICE, tutoring) and will reflect developments in the wider sector, including (for example) The Access Project and The Brilliant Club.
3. Develop and initiate at least one project with LSE academics to pilot more robust evaluation of WP projects, including long-term outcomes for participants. Depending on data availability, research may also be conducted over the next year.
4. Commission at least one research project from LSE academics or external consultants investigating an area of interest to LSE Widening Participation and the sector more widely.
5. With the wider WP team, identify a key theme for investigation on our projects over the course of the next year, and design a research programme building on existing evaluations and incorporating at least two WP projects to gather data. This will **not** be (as with our existing evaluations) an attempt to measure change through project participation; rather, it seeks to understand the wider environments/attitudes of the young people that we work with so that we can ensure our projects continue to meet their needs. We may also consider extending this project into research among post-entry students.