**NEON Widening Participation in Postgraduate Study Network**

**Thursday 20th January 2022, 13:00- 15:00**

**Present:** Louise Banahene (University of Leeds, Chair); Felicity Wicks, University of Manchester; Jenn Coates, University of Leeds; Janice Simpson, University of York; Helen Claxton, University of York; Kirsty Janes, The University of Exeter; Nadia Pollini, University of Oxford; Rachel Van Krimpen, University of Nottingham, Stacey Mottershaw, University of Leeds; Alex Ferguson, University of Leeds; Prof Simon O’Leary, Canterbury Christ Church University; Chantel le Carpentier, Russell Group; Jamal Kinsella, In2scienceUK; Amy Longsden, University of Leeds; Karen Western, Brunel University; Seetal Jassal, University of Sheffield; Penny Sucharitkul; Katrina Roberts, The Brilliant Club; Nicola Critchlow, Edge Hill University; Lucy Clague, Sheffield Hallam University; Becki Cobb, University of Lincoln; Charmaine Valente, Student Loans Company; Katherine Graves; Charlotte Claydon, BIMM Bristol; Cherryl Jones, The University of Warwick; Mae Harkness, Writtle University College; Maria- Anna Petrou, NEON

**1. Welcome and apologies**

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

**2. Findings from the research project - Widening Participation in Post-Graduate Teaching and Research (Penny Sucharitkul)**

LB explained the background to the research project, which took place over the summer and was carried out by Penny Sucharitkul, an intercalating medical student at the University of Leeds. The research and academic studies subgroup had identified the value of undertaking a literature review to understand what has already been done to address PG diversity. Penny delivered a [summary](https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Penelope-P-J-Sucharitkul.pdf) of her report.

Comments following summary:

To ensure feedback is received from a wide range of voices, more students should be made aware of the opportunities for them to get involved. There should be a range of ways for students to feedback such as short surveys rather than weekly meetings.

PS said that flexible working was a theme that repeatedly came up for WP students. Flexible working allows for more diversity in the student community. Recorded lectures enable students who having caring responsibilities and might not be able to do the typical nine to five to watch lectures in their own time.

SO suggested that when validating programmes, how flexible a course is could be built in.

PS added that how flexible a course is, such as whether it fits round students’ caring responsibilities or disability, does not currently appear to be part of course feedback but is something that could be looked at in future.

One of the recommendations from the project is more research on experiences of PG study for neuro- diverse learners.

**3. Updates from workstreams**

**i.WP PG criteria (Louise Banahene)**

Unlike at undergraduate level, institutions do not tend to collect data on characteristics of students in a systematic way at postgraduate level, which makes it difficult to draw comparisons and pick up on trends. Ten institutions have expressed interest in participating in the project which will look at what criteria should be collected as a sector and will be trialled by being embedded into PGT and PGR application processes. Datasets will then be pooled for analysis by The University of York, led by Paul Wakeling. The subgroup will meet again next week to firm up timings and logistics.

**Action 3.1: Members interested in getting involved with or hearing more about the WP PG criteria project should contact JC and FW.**

**ii. Careers and Employability (Stacey Mottershaw)**

The subgroup is still thinking about doing a research project, but is refining this as WP in PG with careers is very broad. The group began with a student journey analysis, considering what questions they had about each stage of the student journey that relates to PGT, WP and careers.

A longitudinal study has now been identified with WP PGT students across multiple institutions, featuring multiple interventions through their programme, which will enable the group to develop case studies and narratives from students to see how students from under-represented groups may differently experience careers and employability support, and how it influences their thinking about that. The group is particularly interested in students’ motivation for study, career needs during PGT and experience of post study activity- be that work or further study.

The study is likely to run from September 2022 to give time for plans to be refined and for ethics approval and funding to be secured. The group is considering applying for Prospects Luminate funding, which offers up to £5,000 for careers research.

The subgroup is keen to find out what WP in PGT might look like as this will help identify students to work with.

Whilst the study will have a careers and employability focus, there is an opportunity for other aspects to be included in interventions and for further information to be requested. The wider group was asked to consider what they might like to know about from this project.

**Action 3.2: JC to share PG criteria & definitions document with SM.**

**Action 3.3: Members to let SM know if there is anything they would like to be included in the study.**

##### iii. On-course success (Rachel Van Krimpen)

##### The subgroup has secured funding from QAA for a collaborative enhancement project called defining, measuring and supporting success for PGRS from diverse backgrounds. The plan is to fund PG students to work on placements to develop consultation and some research into current practice across the sector in terms of how to define success for PGR, how to measure it, and how it is currently supported. This will then lead to recommendations and pilot activity at the start of next academic year. The University of Nottingham, University of Leeds, and University of Edinburgh are partners on the project.

##### Action 3.4: Members to let RVK know if they would like their PGR population to be involved in the consultation.

**iv. Approaches to strategy and implementation (Louise Banahene)**

The workstreams looking at strategy and research recently met. The two groups took a number of the recommendations in PS’s report to develop a proposed [strategy blueprint](https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/NEON_Postgraduate-Diversity-Strategy-Blueprintv2.pdf) that could be useful for the wide sector. The document provides a framework on how to develop a postgraduate diversity strategy within an institution. LB thanked members who had been involved in compiling and editing the draft blueprint document.

##### Members were asked to consider the audience for the blueprint. The document is currently focussed at the HE sector, but views were sought as to whether this should be widened. It was suggested that the focus remain the HE sector and that any future iterations could be directed at other groups.

##### UKGCE will be contacted for feedback on the document and asked about the possibility of endorsement or further involvement.

##### Action 3.5: LB to share document with Owen Gower and RVK to it take to the next UKCGE Exec meeting.

##### It was suggested that the document could be shared with a student audience to demonstrate what is happening in the sector. LB said that it is important to acknowledge within the document that it has come from PS’s research. There are other ways to consult with a wider range of students.

##### There were no comments on the stakeholder mapping section.

##### For the auditing, consultation and co-creation section, members were asked whether it would be best to combine the section on student engagement and financial or split them out and merge aspect of recommendation 3 with recommendation 4? Views were sought on the importance of reinforcing the value of financial support alongside other elements of support. FW said to keep any reference of financial support in as it can be a barrier that stops people pursuing it further.

##### The case studies in the blueprint are largely taken from PS’s report; it would be good to have other examples from members.

##### Action 3.6: Members to let LB know if they have any case studies that could be included in the blueprint.

There is an opportunity to merge in work from other subgroups.

**Action 3.7: Members were invited to send through any edits to the blueprint, including work from subgroups that could be added to the document or used to expand recommendations.**

**4. Opportunity to share good practice and challenges from 2021/22 (all)**

Members were invited to respond to the following questions via Menti:

**What new approaches/activity have you trialled this year?**

**Guaranteed interview scheme**

RVK said that the guaranteed interview scheme was put in place in the DTP she manages, to address issues in recruiting black candidates, who were their most underrepresented group. The scheme ran for first time last year and is running again this year. Candidates can opt into the scheme if they meet the criteria for the programme and identify as black British or black mixed British. Ten candidates opted into the scheme last year, of which five would have been shortlisted using the usually shortlisting criteria. The other five received guaranteed interviews and two of these candidates received offers and accepted places on programmes they would not usually have been shortlisted for.

Whilst not being something that could be measured, FW wondered how many people applied knowing of the scheme’s existence and the institution’s inclusive attitude, and if that in itself acted as a recruitment tool. RVK said that the number of candidates from those underrepresented backgrounds increased last year, but could not say what that was due to.

As of last year, a candidate’s previous institution is anonymised. A candidate may not have been shortlisted previously due to the way they had written their application form. RVK said that they try to make it so that the application form captures motivation and potential rather than relying on awards and lab experience. The interview gives candidates the opportunity to be judged in a different forum.

**Redesigning supervising training**

RVK said that supervisor specific PGR focused mental health training was brought in last year and was well received. Funding has recently been received from BBSRC to create EDI projects. Students are interested in working with an organisation to co-design training for supervisors, looking at what students would like their supervisors to know about their experiences.

Anything common from the Menti responses could be focussed on at a future meeting.

All responses to this question can be viewed below:

<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-1.jpg>

<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-2.jpg>

<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-3.jpg>

**What challenges have you encountered and what have you done to try to overcome them?**

**Governance of PGT-linked it in as part of the pipeline to PGR**

JC said that at the University of Leeds PGT is not officially owned anywhere. The importance of diversity at PGT as a stepping stone for some students onto PGR has been highlighted.

**Lack of understanding on how PG courses are funded**

PS pointed out that students should be made aware in their first year how PG courses are funded as it is too late to find this out when applying for PGR. Students should know what they need to do to secure funding, such as internships, which some students may not be able to experience due to having to work over the summer.

**WP in PGR/YCEDE**

JS said that in considering WP in PGR/YCEDE they are starting to develop ideas for doing more work around PGR study with their PGTs.

**Surfacing skills project**

AL commented on the lack or perceived lack of time on PG courses. The idea of the surfacing skills project at the University of Leeds is to show students what they are doing on courses, which is particularly helpful for students who may not have time to take on anything else.

**Trialling new activities**

JC said that after good engagement last year, she is now finding it more difficult to get PGT students engaged in trialling new activities. PS said that this may be due to burnout.

All responses to this question can be viewed below:

<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-4.jpg>

<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-5.jpg>

**Is there anything shared that you would like to see more information on through these meetings or that you would like to share more info on?**

**Helpful to hear what is happening at other universities as often we are all facing similar obstacles.**

**Action 4.1: Members to share examples of obstacles to enable a discussion to take place at a future meeting.**

All responses to this question can be viewed [here](https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-6.jpg).

**5. Opportunities for promotion of PG WP scholarships/ scholarships targeting under-representation (Jenn Coates)**

Work is currently taking place at the University of Leeds on studentships for PGR and PGT, specifically around recruiting diverse students using protected characteristics such as ethnicity. JC noted that it can be a challenge to get the message out to diverse students outside of the usual channels used by universities to recruit students, particularly as some of the studentships are in niche subject areas and/or schools that have historically struggled to recruit diverse student.

JC asked if other institutions offer these scholarships and if so whether they are experiencing similar challenges in recruiting the right students? She also asked how other institutions go about promoting their scholarships, if anything has been trialled that has worked well. Would like to look at opportunities for the group to work collaboratively to share details of PGR studentships on offer.

Members were invited to share their plans or experiences of targeting opportunities to diverse communities:

* Collaborative UKRI/OfS project (YCEDE)- virtual network targeting Black, Asian and minority ethnic students. On Twitter @YCEDENetwork and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14054108/). Network will promote targeted scholarships.
* KW promotes a care leaver PG bursary at [Brunel](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/scholarships/page?id=f634a0dd-a3c0-4e8a-9215-d504a182dcb0n) and would be interested in advertising similar bursaries at other institutions, as it can be difficult for students to know where the opportunities are. It was noted that, particularly at PGR, students are interested in going to specific institutions based on discipline, it is not just about students staying within an institution. Being able to share what other institutions are doing may also increase the number of bursaries that are available.
* Advertising that more is online and flexible may attract more applicants.
* Research councils are collating good practice. EDIs plans expected for studentship bids. [NERC best practice principles in recruitment and training at doctoral level.](https://nerc.ukri.org/skills/postgrad/policy/dei-best-practice-principles-in-doctoral-recruitment/nerc-best-practice-principles-in-doctoral-recruitment-and-training/)
* Use current student social media networks.
* With government pressure to make universities return to face to face learning, need to be clear when online teaching has pedagogical/access benefits- that it is about access to learning.

Further examples can be found in the [chat](https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Chat-Feature-20th-Jan-2022-WG-PG.pdf)

**6. SLC factsheet update (Felicity Wicks / Charmaine Valente)**

CV gave an update on the draft PG Master’s loan and PG doctoral loan factsheets.

The PG doctoral loan factsheet includes: what the loan is; who is eligible; which courses are eligible; personal eligibility; nationality and residency; previous study; additional funding- such as from the research council; disabilities; change of circumstances; repeat study and withdrawals; repayment process; more detail about other domiciles

The PG Master’s loan factsheets includes: personal eligibility; course eligibility; link to gov.uk; additional funding- from universities (encourage students to research this); disabilities; change of circumstance; repayment information

The factsheets would be a useful resource to have at Open Days. Making use of the factsheets at undergraduate level would give students time to look into things further and speak with their advisers.

CV is hoping to speak with personal advisers on a number of points including what NEON is doing, what the Student Loans Company has done, and how we are working together so that there is awareness of what is happening in the wider sector.

FW and a small group will review the factsheets. CV suggested that PS could also look at it to give a student perspective on the information provided.

**7. End of year event to showcase the work of this group (Louise Banahene)**

It would be a good opportunity to launch the resources spoken about during the meeting and to present some of the good practice from members at either a future NEON conference or at a standalone event. Would be keen to have participants for this from the wider group.

**8. AOB**

MP highlighted the NEON [Widening Participation to Postgraduate Education](https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/events/widening-participation-to-postgraduate-education/) event on 2nd March.

LB thanked PS for her presentation & thanked members for their contributions.

**Summary of Actions**

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