

NEON Widening Participation in Postgraduate Study Network

Tuesday 30th June 2020, 10am - 12 noon

Present: Abigail Tisdall, South Essex College University Centre; Alice Brereton University of Bristol; Anthony Hudson, University of East London; Becki Cobb, University of Lincoln; Ben Rutter, SLC; Bethan Ford, University College Birmingham; Cherryl Jones, University of Warwick; Chloe Marshall, University of Leeds; Claire Bowen, Cardiff University; Deanne Hallam, South Essex College; Diane Gill, University of Edinburgh; Eirini Tatsi, UWL; Felicity Wicks, University of Manchester; Helen Claxton, University of York; Jack Fox, Queen Mary, University of London; Jenn Coates, University of Leeds; Jo Astley, University of Derby; Joanne Watson, University of Cumbria; Katherine Parsons; York St John University; Katherine Meehan, University of Law; Katherine Powlesland, University of Cambridge; Katrina Roberts, The Brilliant Club; Louise Banahene, University of Leeds; Lucy Bentley, University of York; Martin Thompson, University of Cambridge; Natalie Wint, Swansea University; Rachel Van Krimpen; University of Nottingham; Rebecca Oliver, Bournemouth University; Samantha Dyer, University of Exeter; Stephanie Lee, University of Manchester; Sue Edwards, Lancaster University; Susie Burpee, Commonwealth Scholarships; Varan Houghton, University of Southampton.

1. **Welcome** (*Louise Banahene, University of Leeds, Chair*)
2. **Previous Minutes and Actions** (*Louise Banahene, UoL*)

Louise shared the minutes from the last meeting.

Actions from the last meeting:

Action Number	Action	Who	Deadline	Status
3.1	Slides from PC and GYR's presentation to be circulated to members of the working group	JC	With minutes	Complete
4.1	Colleagues to share the capture criteria used within their institutions to the Google Drive to create a picture of the indicators or measures used to define WP at PG level.	ALL	Before next meeting (May 2020)	Rolled over to next meeting
5.1	Slides from KM's presentation to be circulated to members of the working group	JC	With minutes	Complete
5.2	SLC to provide data on the gap between UG and PG study		Before/at next meeting (May 2020)	Rolled over to next meeting
6.1	CM to circulate tool kits and resources from the AGCAS group and make the chair of the AGCAS PGR group aware of this NEON Working Group	CM	Before next meeting (May 2020)	Rolled over to next meeting

3. Supporting the career development of PGT and researchers *(Louise Banahene, UoL)*

Noted:

- The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is a national initiative. It highlights a commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion; there is an expectation for institutions, funders and managers for researchers to reflect on it. It is useful from both a PGT and PGR perspective. The group were given 10 minutes to read through the concordat. <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/full>

Discussed:

- University of Leeds, University of Nottingham and University of Cambridge have signed up for the concordat.
- It is important to embed equality and diversity into PGT and PGR recruitment. How can we use these principles to support progression to postgraduate study? University of Leeds highlighted that when reflecting on their data, there does appear to be a lower acceptance rate for PGR for BAME students. The institution already offers training on equality and inclusion, but is there more training to be done about selection process specifically?
- University of Manchester noted that prior to lockdown, they had been working on a plan to implement a 'fair admissions framework' for PGR in one faculty, as a trial. This will be picked up for the next cycle
- University of Nottingham provided an update on this area in one DTP in particular. They are reviewing all marketing materials for inclusive language and role models from diverse backgrounds. They run a 'transferable skills interview' that allows applicants to demonstrate their broader skill set. In this interview the interviewer will have no prior knowledge of the student and there will be anonymity throughout the process. Having reviewed socio-economic data from the first year of the process, later rounds of recruitment appear to include more diverse applicants than first rounds, in particular more students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2. BAME acceptance rates are also higher than the previous year.
- It was also noted that if any group members have other thoughts or ideas - these can be shared on the Google drive.

4. Ensuring on-course success

- **Building PG student communities in a virtual space - Rachel Van Krimpen, DTP Manager, University of Nottingham**
 - Rachel from University of Nottingham presented on 'building PG student communities in a virtual space during the lockdown'. This includes input from all cross-faculty DTP managers at the University of Nottingham.

Notes from the presentation and discussion:

- Being effectively inducted into a supportive postgraduate community eases transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies for students.
- WP students may be disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 crisis.
- Some of the challenges of remote learning for PG - students being able to build peer relationships, building a sense of belonging, study space for students, health issues.
- Postgraduate students are asked to embrace several layers of identity- academic school, DTP cohort, their university etc. How can we navigate this in an online world?
- Distance learning is rooted in initial face-to-face meetings, which allows students to form a sense of belonging to their course group, and make friends with their peers. Due to Covid-19 these kind of meetings may not be possible.

The group then heard about the planned practice from the University of Nottingham.

Pre arrival:

- Students will receive regular communications offering reassurance re start of year arrangements.
- There will be 1-2-1 calls to establish links with DTP team where the team will try to identify any barriers to access. University of Nottingham have some budget to help people with access issues.
- There will be videos including staff and students as part of the welcome session.
- Physical 'welcome bags' will be distributed, tied in with a social media campaign.
- Facebook group for new students.
- Currently training current cohort of students as online peer mentors for new students.

Once arrived, how do we deliver induction?

- Split into 1-hour daily sessions within a week.
- Identify cohorts within a cohort - research area, physical location.
- Virtual tours of industry partners
- There will be work to replace social aspect which would have occurred naturally during in person induction e.g. online quizzes, virtual coffee and cake meetings.

Ongoing

- Use of existing online platforms.
- Highlight availability of support teams at university.
- Regular town hall meetings to allow students to feedback and ask questions
- Support student-led activity e.g. online 'write club'
- Monitor engagement and put in place outreach where lack of engagement.

Group discussion arising from this:

- DTP cohort in University of Nottingham is predominately home and a few EU students but the methods listed above could be adapted to an international audience.
- The group discussed the logistics of sending out items out to students during the pandemic. University of Nottingham have a 'grab and go' scheme which allows staff to collect items from university. The bags that Nottingham are sending out can then be dropped off at the post room to be sent out to offer-holders. It was discussed that receiving something in the post creates a sense of belonging.
- The group discussed whether they had had many enquiries from prospective PGR students. Members has received enquiries regarding what the virtual start to the year means for the student experience. It was agreed that there is only so much

reassurance we can give because the answers aren't available to us but students seem comforted at the fact that universities are engaging with their concerns.

- The group then discussed whether any careers advisors had seen any change in interest? It was noted that in a normal PGT recruitment cycle the questions received are not normally careers focussed. This year there has been a lot more questions regarding where PG qualifications can lead. Members have noted that a lot of careers guidance appointments have centred on where a masters or PhD can take them. It was noted that at the University of Manchester's PGT Virtual Open Week, taking place this week, the careers talk was the one with the most registrations.
- It was also noted that identity and a sense of place are particularly important for both younger and mature students, so creating an online environment is important for developing a sense of community. Sometimes it is assumed that because a student has a first degree the barriers to education are no longer as relevant, however; this is not the case.
- At present there are worries for all students applying for PG but there may be particular challenges for WP cohorts.
- Louise summarised that we need to work to eliminate barriers and this all links back to the concordat.

No disadvantage policy at the University of Manchester:

- Stephanie Lee updated the group on the 'no disadvantage' policy at the University of Manchester for the summer exam period. Any marks achieved in the summer assessments will only be used towards their final grade if it is to the student's advantage.
- There is a laptop loan scheme; dongles are also provided support students who do not have a good internet connection at home. The scheme prioritises PGT, PGR and final year UG students.
- UoM are looking to open up study spaces on campus in August in a limited way and prioritise PG students who may still be writing up dissertations throughout the summer. Having no access to appropriate study space disproportionately affects WP students.
- It was highlighted that there is a Student Living Cost Support fund which is available to PG students too. This fund was increased significantly by alumni donations. Criteria has changed to apply for the fund as the university recognises that many students have not been able to access forms of income.
- The group acknowledged that there would need to be some thought as to how to support students who may need to re-sit exams.

6. Next meeting date and location (Louise Banahene, UoL)

7. AOB

- The group discussed whether there are particular groups within WP that have a big attainment gaps and was noted that there is more information in the terms of reference and in Paul Wakeling's presentation delivered at the last meeting. **ACTION - Stephanie to share Paul's presentation.**
- There are similar challenges with under representation in UG and PG but we have less data on PG applicants to help identify when support needs to be put in place. What indicators are institutes using to identify WP students? University of Exeter added that their Institute of Coding is giving out bursaries which is difficult because there is sometimes not enough data to identify students eligible for bursaries.

- The group asked University of Nottingham how they will measure engagement with their new cohort of PG students (DTP). It was noted that attendance will be monitored for the first 6 months of the programme by downloading the attendance list for all activities and staff will try to monitor whether students are taking part and engaging not just 'turning up'.
- It was noted that at the University of Cambridge there is a lot of variation across departments and schools which makes PG very complex. Action needs to start small and focussed and then build up from there.
- The use of mixed terminology was discussed – EDI tends to be used in terms of research / PGR, and WP in UG. Both have the same meaning, but highlight the disparity between research / PGR teams and WP teams.

ACTION - Sharing best practice and data via the google drive

- The benefits of working with students across the whole cycle (UG to PG) was noted from University of Warwick – raising awareness of opportunities early on in the UG student journey. We can then monitor and track progression rates to PG study and advertise alumni discount schemes.
- The University of Cambridge highlighted that a lot of their PG students come from Russell Group universities which could be bad for WP students. How can research money be distributed more equally between institutions? Will post 92 universities want to invest in research if students are going to go elsewhere for PG study?

Future Agenda Item - 'Collaboration with Russell Group and post-1992 institutions with particular reference to the forthcoming Research England and OfS funding competition to reduce inequalities in postgraduate research study' <https://re.ukri.org/news-opinions-events/news/notice-of-a-joint-research-england-and-office-for-students-funding-competition-to-reduce-inequalities-in-postgraduate-research-study/>

Summary of ACTIONS:

- **ACTION** - Felicity to circulate link to Google Drive so members can share ideas and best practice.
- **ACTION** - Stephanie to share Paul Wakeling's presentation from the last meeting.