



*NEON Establishing Evidence & Measuring Impact Working Group*  
**Conference on the New Widening Participation Data Landscape**

**Kate Howell (UCAS):** What UCAS can offer widening participation practitioners and the resources they are looking to develop

- UCAS offers five admissions services which currently operate independently
- Developing system so that service is less cumbersome and more user friendly whereby information is seeded across some one application to another.
- Lots of user testing currently happening- as the learner should be the centre of the process.
- UCAS approach to WP is that they aim to promote the benefits to HE to everyone who has the potential to benefit from HE has the opportunity to do so
- WP runs through all UCAS' strategic policies
- Need for more information about the different routes through and into HE- UCAS have produced a section of work on this under their 'Progression Pathways Project'. There is an online tool to assist with this on the UCAS website.
- STROBE is now free if you are able to demonstrate its use is in the public interest
- Variety of I&A resources which can be used by students, practitioners etc. to help them navigate their way through the HE process but also provide useful information for those who are not looking to enter HE
- Specific toolkits are available for care leavers
- Lots of changes currently occurring within the schools system which UCAS are able to help unpick and advise on- for example changes to GCSE and A-Levels within the 4 nations
- Currently developing QIPs and EIPs to help practitioners and students navigate their way through the changes
- UCAS Progress- for students post-16 to help them explore ideas of what they might do post-16. In LA areas who have signed up to the full service learners are able to use the system to apply to post-16 providers. Schools are also able to keep an eye on and track what and where their students are applying.
- Recent UCAS report following on from a survey of 18/19 year olds to find out about the motivations and barriers to HE is available on UCAS website

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**David Morris (WonkHE):** What we can learn from the recent UCAS Admissions data

- Data wars- two sides arguing there is and isn't bias in university admissions
- Which are perpetuated in the media- and sometimes both arguments are given by the same sources- for example Times Higher Ed

- There has been discussions about name blind admissions to help elevate any potential bias that may or may not exist
  - There have also been discussions about the release of individualised UCAS data- as this was previously available and then removed by UCAS under the guise of 'student data privacy'. Discussions are now ongoing about adding this data to the ADRN.
  - Latest UCAS data release can be read in 2 ways: likelihood to attend, and difference in offer rate (see WONKHE slides for details)
  - Lots of different interpretations of the data, as such WonkHE attempted to clarify the actual facts based on what the data told them from an unbiased perspective
  - Ratios and analysis need to be interpreted with caution as some are affected by external factors such as location (geography) rather than any overt bias in the admissions process at certain institutions.
  - There are also issues with the sample sizes- which are smaller in some institutions than others. Further caveats include the disputed control method which affects the ratios produced (and ultimately the conclusions which are drawn) depending on method used.
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#### **Jenny Allen (HEFCE):** HEFCE's work on widening participation policy and evaluation

- Goals:
  - doubling participants from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2020
  - Addressing differential outcomes
  - Increasing BME %ages
- Means:
  - Strengthening guidance to DfA and role within new OfS
  - Focus on student outcomes in QA and TEF
  - More targeted funding (DSA, SO)
  - More loan finance
  - Improving advice (UUK Advisory Group) and access to data (UCAS)
  - Role within DfE (schools and apprenticeships)
- SO has been repurposed- NCOP, Student Premium, and incentivising inclusive learning
- HEFCE gaps analysis- Extensive analysis enables us to see at ward level where there are higher or lower than expected rates of HE participation given prior attainment for those areas at KS4.
- NCOP- has used gaps analysis to suggest where activity should be targeted. Should continue to focus on collaboration and should complement broader outreach. Programme will operate for 4 ears- funding has been guaranteed for the first two years with a review to ascertain if targets are being met in 2018/19.
- Learning from the NNCOs- solid basis for NCOP (in terms of infrastructure, relationships and experience); have developed improved communication strategy and tools which will help when establishing NCOPs, from NNCO monitoring and evaluation it's clear HEFCE need to provide clarity on what is required and when.
- HEFCE acknowledge that existing broader outreach work should happen alongside NCOPs via institutional AA funding

- Differential outcomes review- Four explanatory factors:
    - Interventions
    - Inclusive practice
    - Social and cultural capital
    - Identity Factors
  - Presented the Conceptual framework for evaluating widening participation suggested by CEF (see slide for more details) which incorporates the following elements:
    - Inputs
    - Resources
    - Activities
    - Outputs
    - Outcomes
    - Impacts
  - Along with suggestions of evaluative techniques and the levels of the evaluation framework that they can provide evidence towards- see slide
  - Key challenges in demonstrating impact (see slide for details)
  - There are a number of objectives which could be achieved by having a national framework:
    - Accountability
    - Impact assessment
    - Return on investment
    - Benchmarking
    - What works
  - Joint guidance on evaluation between HEFCE and OFFA will be out in time for the start of the NCOP programme, which should help to explain to the sector different ways of carrying out evaluation at an appropriate level for the intervention.
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**Will Cooling (University of Leicester):** The implications of the Higher Education Bill for those evaluating widening participation

### **Introduction**

1. The Higher Education Bill confirms that the Government will seek to play a greater role in setting the strategic objectives for widening participation over the coming five years than they have in the preceding period. At the heart of this approach is an attempt to strengthen the ability of public bodies to hold universities to account for their performance in the field of widening participation through enhanced regulation and greater availability of data.

### **Reform of Higher Education Regulation**

2. The Higher Education Bill delivers the proposed streamlining of the regulation of higher education floated in the White and Green Papers. With regards to widening participation the most noteworthy announcement is that the Office of

Fair Access will be merged with the Higher Education Funding Council for England to form a new 'Office for Students'<sup>1</sup>.

3. The proposed merger between OFFA and HEFCE is a less dramatic change than it superficially appears. At the operational level the two organisations are already highly co-dependent. Not only is OFFA based within HEFCE's offices and complies with its internal procedures, but the two organisations have increasingly sought to work together when interacting with universities. For example, universities are asked to report back on their OFFA-countable and Student Opportunity Allocation expenditure in the same monitoring report. The merger should therefore be seen as the logical evolution of the current working arrangements between the two organisations.
4. Where the merger will have a significant impact is providing greater strategic direction to HEFCE's widening participation work. Currently HEFCE's widening participation work is led by the Head of Student Opportunity who is appointed and managed through the organisation's internal structures. After the merger these will be placed under the Director of Fair Access<sup>2</sup>, who will continue to be directly appointed by the Secretary of State. They will also be a member of the OfS Board of Directors. It is reasonable to assume that by placing HEFCE's widening participation functions under the independent Director, the Government is paving the way for a more active and high-profile regulatory presence in this area. Therefore contrary to concerns that the merger would undermine OFFA's autonomy, this enlarged remit for the Director of Fair Access will actually strengthen the autonomy of national widening participation funding and regulation.
5. As first announced in the White Paper, there will be a tweak to nomenclature to confirm that the widening participation agenda covers the whole student lifecycle. It is proposed that the Director of Fair Access and Access Agreements be renamed to also include the word 'participation' to stress that the activities covered go beyond outreach and scholarships but also include in-reach services designed to support student retention, academic success and graduate employability. As Access Agreements already cover the whole life-cycle this change should be considered a formalisation of existing practice, albeit one that speaks to the greater emphasis being placed on student retention and success. It is expected that Professor Les Ebdon will continue as the new Director of Fair Access and Participation, as per his contract renewal last year.
6. The Higher Education Bill creates the new 'Teaching Excellence Framework' to better regulate the quality of teaching and learning by universities. This was something promised in the Conservative Party Manifesto. All universities that wish to charge higher tuition fees will be required to meet the TEF's minimum standards and those that wish to increase their fees in-line with inflation will need to pass at a higher level. Those who are judged to be outstanding will be allowed to increase their fees to £9,250 from 2017-18.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, the Office of Fair Access is responsible for ensuring that each university charging higher tuition fees is investing enough of this income in supporting disadvantaged students through the Access Agreement system. HEFCE directly funds widening participation activity through the Student Opportunity Allocation and the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (soon to be National Collaborative Outreach Programme). It also developed and owns the POLAR.

<sup>2</sup> To be renamed Director of Fair Access and Participation – rationale for change to be explained in the next section.

7. The technical consultation on the Teaching Excellence Framework released alongside the White Paper explains that the TEF assessment will be based on Teaching Quality, Learning Environment, and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain. The White Paper states that widening participation will be a key emphasis of when assessing universities' performances in areas such as student satisfaction, development of key skills and graduate employability. The technical consultation also proposes that universities' performance against the TEF's core metrics<sup>3</sup> will be broken down by the following demographics; Age on Entry (Young vs Mature), Sex (Male vs Female), Ethnicity (BME vs White – with intra-BME differences also being flagged) and Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods (Low Participation Neighbourhoods<sup>4</sup> vs Other Neighbourhoods). This widening participation dimension of the TEF further demonstrates that supporting the student retention and success of disadvantaged learners will become an increasingly important part of the widening participation agenda.

### **Enhancing Data and Setting National Targets To Better Hold Universities To Account**

8. The White Paper emphasises improving the quality of data so to better measure progress in this area. The proposed measures promise to provide greater transparency about the performance of universities in recruiting and supporting disadvantaged students. In addition to making it easier for public bodies to hold universities to account, these proposed measures should also make it easier for universities to benchmark themselves against their peers and for researchers to investigate issues related to educational disadvantage<sup>5</sup>.
9. The White Paper proposes that universities should be legally required to publish gender, ethnicity and disadvantaged breakdowns<sup>6</sup> of their application, offer, acceptance and progression rates. The depth of the data that universities are being required to publish goes beyond the current HESA WP Indicators by exposing institutions where those from certain demographic groups are less likely to receive an offer or progress into graduate employment. The White Paper makes clear that they expect this data to cause institutions to address any inequalities that are discovered<sup>7</sup>.
10. The White Paper pledges legislation to compel UCAS to make its data accessible to the Government and researchers for the purpose of improving policies focused on enhancing social mobility. It does not say whether the legislation will make it easier for universities to access UCAS data. Considering the challenges that the 2014 tightening of UCAS's data sharing procedures has caused those trying to track outreach participants into higher education this is potentially a significant and welcome development.
11. The Government will link higher education and tax data together to better monitor graduate destinations, measure the graduate premium and inform

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<sup>3</sup> Student Satisfaction (NSS), Non-Completion and Graduate Destinations

<sup>4</sup> POLAR3 Quintiles 1 and 2

<sup>5</sup> The White Paper also expresses the hope that this greater transparency will ensure students are better informed about which universities are most effective in supporting students from different demographic groups. It's possible that universities as being poor in supporting certain demographic groups would be avoided by prospective students from these groups. However it should be noted that students have not shown to be this sophisticated in their use of data (i.e. the KIS) in the past.

<sup>6</sup> Not explicitly stated, but based on the TEF criteria we should expect this to be POLAR3 Quintiles 1 and 2.

students about which universities have strong records on employability. It does not confirm whether this information will be provided to universities, and if it will form the basis of the progression breakdowns that they will now be required to publish. There is currently a consultation about the replacement for the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey that will presumably feed into these proposals.

## **Conclusion**

12. The White Paper is a rigorous attempt to strengthen the ability of public bodies to hold universities to account for their performance in the field of widening participation. In particular, it has taken clear steps to better equip regulators to identify which universities are failing to support the retention and success of disadvantage students.

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**Catherine Kelly (HEAT) and Emma Church (EMWPREP):** Future developments in targeting, monitoring and evaluation of outreach activities.

The group were presented with details of new evaluation practices and procedures currently being implemented and developed by HEAT and EMWPREP.

EMWPREP are developing a new questionnaire capture system to sit within their bespoke M&E database, whilst HEAT are developing a new evaluation planning tool.

EMWPREP- allows institutions to collaborate in pooling resources to secure a range of services enabling them to devise a systematic way of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their programme of outreach interventions by tailoring the offering to meet their specific needs.

EMWPREPs evaluation framework has four main steps:

- Targeting of appropriate learners / groups of learners
- Monitoring the effectiveness of targeting procedures
- Evaluating the impact of interventions
- Tracking the outcomes of engaged learners

They can be approached individually, together or as in our framework a continuous evolving cycle to help strengthen WP activities and impact overtime.

Currently EMWPREP evaluation of outreach activities and their participants is twofold- firstly they use a database to assess the number and types of activities different types of pupils are taking part in, and monitor the effectiveness of certain targeting measures; and then they utilise, for certain activities, more in-depth forms of evaluation such as impact questionnaires, focus groups and case studies.

As it's important to have a consistent approach when collecting feedback on activities they are currently developing a series of activity feedback and evaluation forms for use alongside their M&E database. These will be used to highlight what

participants find useful, what they enjoyed and what they have learnt during the course of the interventions.

Hoping to develop three types of forms to measure:

- To use **feedback** forms to record the **success** of the events
  - Feedback can be collected to ascertain general levels of success of an activity and help advice of where changes need to be made. This will predominately be for Cat 2 events
- To use **questionnaires** to record the **impact** of the events
  - Questionnaires should be used where activities have easily understandable and measurable objectives wherein questions which relate to the main objectives and aligned with the activity. The group needs to decide which activities questionnaires will be used for - questionnaire may not be appropriate for every activity. It is suggested that specific activities which may benefit could be attitudinal ones. An element of feedback can also be included in the questionnaires so as to avoid duplication.
- To use **longitudinal** evaluation to record **change** over time
  - Longitudinal aspirational evaluation will used carried out in YR7, repeated in YR9 and YR11 – aside from activity questionnaires and feedback forms- and will look to ask at set of tracking questions at these three stages to look at any changes in attitudes and aspirations which may occur. These will be linked to individual records.

This information will then be fed into their interim and end of year activity and participant reports as well as in the future being available to schools via the school biography portal of their database.

**HEAT 2** revamping including new tools that are user friendly to more rigorously evaluate and encourage more evaluation across the membership

Evaluation planning tool, interactive and embed within the framework

Wizard that takes you through the evaluation process, it will link to the reports and output data

CDC Framework for Programme Evaluation 1999

- Engage stakeholders – e.g. planning, practitioners what type of data will they need
- Focus on evaluation plan – planning activity, formative or summative purpose (a wizard to take you through the process)
- Describe the programme – by visualising the process, you can evaluate so things are linked and connected
- Gather credible evidence by using similar questions and tools
- Justify conclusions and recommendations – providing reports to share what is being done.

- Ensure use and share lessons learned

Catherine is keen to hear what work members are currently doing to plan for their evaluation, and if they would like to discuss the development of the tool further, they should feel free to get in touch with her.