

NEON Widening Participation in Postgraduate Study Network

Tuesday 11th October 2022, 14:00- 16:00

Present: Louise Banahene (University of Leeds, Chair); Arinola Adefila (Staffordshire University); Jo Armstrong (Lancaster University); Kathryn Arnold (University of York); Iqra Arshad (University of Leeds); Sanja Bahun (University of Essex); Adam Blackmore (University of Gloucestershire); Lauren Bramley (The University of Manchester); Laura Bromley (Lancaster University); Denise Brooks (University of Sheffield); Laura Cattell (University of Edinburgh); Cherry Chorlton (Coventry University); Becki Cobb (University of Lincoln); Nicola Critchlow (Edge Hill University); Hope Duncan (Envision); Hannah Falvey (University of Leeds); Alice Ferns (University of Bristol); Jack Fox (Queen Mary University of London); Chloe Halls (Leeds Beckett University); Alice Haslam (University of Nottingham); Leeonnie Hayles (KCL); Ann-Marie Houghton (Lancaster University); Poppy Hudghton (Queen Mary University of London); Sherry Iqbal (University of Leeds); Ali Jackson (University of Leeds); Kirsty Janes (University of Exeter); Emma Jennings (University of Leeds); Cherryl Jones (The University of Warwick); Roxanne Kelly (University of Gloucestershire); Jamal Kinsella (In2scienceUK); Ingrid Lee (University of Cambridge); Rebecca Lindner (UCL); Felicity Long (University of Oxford); Katrina Longhurst (The Brilliant Club); Amy Longsdon (University of Leeds); Oliver Matikainen (King's College London); Jo McNeill (University of Liverpool); Katya Moncrieff (University of Leeds); Nuala Murray (University of Cambridge); Nadia Pollini (University of Oxford); Liv Powell (University of Leeds); Samuel Ratzer (University of West London); Mar Ruiz (University of Bristol); Lauren Russell (Nottingham Trent University); Ben Rutter (SLC); Katherine Sela (University of Surrey); Janice Simpson (University of York); Rebekah Smith McGloin (Nottingham Trent University); Eirini Tatsi (University of West London); Charlotte Thackeray (University College of Estate Management); Jeffrey Vernon (Imperial College London); Anthony Walker-Cook (LSHTM)

1. Welcome, previous minutes and actions

LB welcomed everyone to the meeting. New members were invited to post introductions in to the chat and to comment on or raise any inaccuracies from the previous minutes.

No actions were logged at the previous meeting.

LB highlighted a number of discussion points from the previous meeting.

- Within the breakout discussions there was an appetite to discuss contextual admissions and what that meant in a PG setting.

Points to note were;

- Importance of communications – contextual admissions is far less understood in PG settings
- Admissions was not the only barrier. This needs to be approached in conjunction with a range of other interventions.
- Recognition of the value of a strategic approach, giving clarity of purpose and clear measurables.
- Real culture change required to implement contextual admissions.

- More detail in the previous minutes.
 - The launch of a Strategy Blueprint and conference planned and delivered in July.

LB confirmed that the conference went ahead and was incredibly successful, bringing real collaboration throughout all attendees, including staff and students, with conversations continuing to take place. LB thanked all involved.

Sanja Bahun (University of Essex) shared positive feedback from their PG research attendees, and acknowledged the importance of including students in the conference.

2. Terms of Reference and change to working group name

LB – explained the history and subsequent growth of the group. One of the key changes was to add in work streams, some with outputs coming to a conclusion at the end of the last academic year. These were;

- Desire to create a strategy blueprint.
- Recognition of the gaps in research on how we widen access to, and progression within PG study.

LB proposed a potential group name change to '**NEON Postgraduate Diversity Working Group**'. This recognises the need to diversify access, but also the experience and success of students in PG study.

LB asked the group for comments on the group name change and any subsequent ToR wording that may benefit from review.

- Concerns were raised that the remit was being extended considerably from the initial scope and becomes about diversifying PG students and this felt much broader than widening participation.
- There was the concern that the WP expertise would be 'watered down' within EDI, when there are already other forums specialising in EDI. Could it blur the EDI/WP lines?
- It was also felt that the name may deflect away from WP and allow distraction from meeting the WP PG needs.
- Confirmation was given that NEON are focussed on UK students only at this time.
- A number of the audience were comfortable with the change and at some institutions 'diversity' is being used more often as the lines between WP/EDI are blurred.

LB – agreed that the remit has naturally increased over time and the work that has been done highlights a need to consider a wider group, this is reflected in the blueprint and agenda items.

It was decided to leave the group title as is and revisit later in the year.

LB – asked if people were comfortable with the wording in the ToR.

- It was suggested that under C '*To bring together widening participation practitioners and careers staff (i.e. those with a remit for providing information,*

advice and guidance to UG students). that this could be broader and should focus on collaboration rather than specific roles.

- Acronyms will be removed from the updated ToR.
- Point E *'To consider ways to widen participation in PG study from two perspectives: both impartial IAG to current UG students, and considering equity of access to institutions' existing portfolios of PG programmes.* needs to be widened to the current remit of the group.
- Can D and G being combined?
- The importance of student voices and consultation being included was raised and agreed.
- Making sure that all points are relevant for both PGT and PGR.

Action 1: Leeds to update the Terms of Reference prior to the next meeting and bring for discussion and approval.

3. Update from work streams

PG Data Capture – George Gisborne (University of Leeds)

- George shared the data capture criteria with the group. There has been a formal signing of the data capture agreement between 6 institutions. Data collection began on 1st Oct.
- Professor Paul Wakeling (University of York) will receive the data March 2024, review and findings will be shared with the group in June 2024 and published thereafter.
- 27th Oct will be the next workshop which will cover how data collection is going, and issue spotting. The institutions are using different methods of collection, so there will be a review of the productivity of each method.

A guide will be drafted for new partners wanting to be involved in data capture from Oct 2023. Cycle 1 will be reviewed in Jan 2023, cycle 2 begins Oct 23.

Contact George for more information.

LB thanked everyone involved for getting them to the agreement and acknowledged the difficulty and challenges.

Question was raised on how this will be disseminated?

LB – acknowledged that Phase 2 should be more straightforward due to lessons learnt as part of Phase 1. Work is ongoing on how and when the findings are disseminated, and how to have the most meaningful impact for the group and wider institutions.

Careers and Employability – Janice Simpson (University of York)

In April the group secured funding from Luminate to look at career planning needs of WP and non WP PGT students, and the differences in behaviours. This will inform the right questions around systems of support in place for under-represented students.

7 universities are involved. The study will consist of a survey initially, then cross institutional focus groups. Currently at the start of delivery and are working on a literature review which should help inform the survey. Ethical approval is needed, which will go through the lead institution, with remaining institutions able to review. Survey circulation should be Jan 2023.

Report to be produced in December 2023 followed by a dissemination event Jan 2024.

On Course Success Project – Alice Haslam (University of Nottingham)

The group has been working on a QAA funded enhancement project entitled *Defining, measuring and supporting success for PG researchers from diverse backgrounds*.

Good progress has been made over the last few months, a survey has been carried out, along with focus groups in each institution. PG placement students have been analysing the data and the group are now entering into the final phases – which are the design and delivery of intervention based on outcomes, written as a case study; a report and recommendation PDF for presentation; and the dissemination of findings in early 2023.

University of Nottingham will pick up the final phase with a view to publishing in Jan 2023.

Some of the lessons learned included the time taken to gain ethical approval, and recruiting for the project roles. Finance featured heavily in the focus groups.

Question raised on other themes from the focus groups?

- What is success for you? – Very individual success criteria, there are wide themes, do we frame opportunities based on how we view success?
- Supervisory relationships, compulsory training for supervisors?
- Meaningful and timely inductions.

4. Strategy blueprint, next steps – breakout groups

LB reminded colleagues to sign up to the blueprint if they haven't yet.

Break out rooms were opened to give attendees an opportunity to shape what we want to achieve this year and a share views on future planning. These conversations will shape the future agendas of this group over the remainder of the year.

The 3 key questions for discussion were;

- What areas do we need to focus on?

Key themes from a number of the groups were funding challenges and accessibility of information, signposting is key. Are current funding levels sufficient in today's climate?

Also for the work to become action orientated; a lot of work has been done on research and identification, the focus should move to implementation and evaluation of interventions.

A holistic approach – training for staff on hearts and minds?

- How do we prioritise these areas?

Many ideas were shared on collaboration, having a bank of collective resources, lobbying as a group rather than individual institutions.

Recording conversations that are happening, sharing best practise, capturing learnings.

- How do we drive it forwards?

The theme of collaboration continued with suggestions of a database of opportunities and contacts, to allow sharing of information and opportunity. Sharing what 'now' looks like, even if it looks different post project evaluation.

A toolkit managed by a central entity for example, NEON, for institutions to use when needing ideas on implementing change.

Encouraging standardisation, already in progress with the data capture work stream.

The groups were encouraged to add group ideas to the Google docs for review after the meeting.

The Google doc is available [here](#) for review.

5. Student Loans Company update on Customer Experience Division – Tim Battye

Tim Battye is a service owner in the SLC CX function, this is a new area focussing on customer experience.

Tim presented on the role of a SO in the SLC, role is to manage and ensure the best customer experience, that the customer voice is understood and provide leadership and points of escalation for customer incidents.

PG strategy, underpinned by 3 enablers - Engagement, Insight, Technology. Ensuring that PG study has the same relevance and importance as UG.

TB acknowledged that there were some gaps in insight into what happens within the HE provider, key themes that PGs are talking about in regards to funding, the issues that are being faced. SLC are keen to understand how they can help.

Conversation to continue post meeting and TB invited back to present a future agenda item.

6. Student Loans Company factsheet project – Cheryl Jones

The University of Warwick were approached to have input into a fact sheet on PG loans for masters students and doctoral candidates that the SLC were pulling together.

A full meeting has not yet been possible, but on 1st Nov a subgroup, including SLC representatives, are meeting to go through the fact sheet and barriers to loans for PG study.

A provisional Padlet was created to capture the barriers prior to the meeting, findings were clear that there is still a lot of confusion on what PG finance looks like and a lot of support needed. The group have identified that there is a need to signpost PG students to alternative funding and supplements to their fees or living expenses.

Summary of Actions

Action 1: Leeds to update the Terms of Reference prior to the next meeting and bring for discussion and approval.

Agenda Items for the next meeting;

- Revisit the potential group name change & updates to Terms of Reference
- SLC and PG Funding (Tim Battye)