Resilient Communities in Transition: the experience of widening participation students through undergraduate and into postgraduate studies

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Shaping the Student Experience Together: 20 Years of Enhancement

Session Overview

- Our research so far – thank you to QAA

- Our challenges – two steps forward, one step back?

- Where we are now – and how this research has been pivotal to keep us motivated to make change

Our Research Journey

- 2015 - "Widening Access Students' Transitions" (QAA funded)

- 2019 - "WA Students Transition into PG Studies" (Uni funded)

- 2021 – "Resilient Learning Communities' (QAA funded)

The QAA has funded two out of our three projects on Widening Access.

Allowed us to research the experience of our own students and have conversations with the sector and start asking questions that can help us shape future practices at Strathclyde.

Widening Access Opportunities Through and Beyond University (2015)

- 2015-2016 'Widening Access students transition through university' - funded by QAA Transition Enhancement theme – we employed 2 UG interns

- Focussed on History UG students

- Surveyed 145 students – 90 WA and 50 non WA

Key findings:

- need for more information and better access to student services;

- lack of confidence in academic skills;

- Financial concerns: 21% WA students listed it as main worry and leading to potential withdrawal compared with 10% non WA students

Findings - 2

Employability

- limited opportunities for work experience and international studies;

- limited engagement with Careers Service (only 17%) and notion of employability

- 42% WA in part-time employment, 46% non-WA in part-time employment but only 30% of WA students confident about their work experience – 46% non WA students confident

- Very limited understanding about what to do with a History degree

- 81% believed work placement would enhance employability

Outcomes

- Focus on employability – introduction of work placements at UG and PGT level in History, School of Humanities and HaSS Faculty

- Dedicated careers and alumni sessions at the start of the academic year (induction) and throughout the year for both UG and PGT students

- Dedicated academic skills sessions for direct entry students

Widening Access Transitions to Postgraduate Study, (2019)

- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS) funded project – Widening Access students transition into postgraduate studies. One researcher for six months. Survey, interviews and 1 focus group

- 107 students took part in the survey

- 22 one-to-one interviews and 1 focus group also took place

- First generation students face similar barriers to other WA groups, and yet are often not included in widening access initiatives

- PGT cohort is more diverse than UG one but some findings are consistent with those of previous research

- Concerns about academic abilities and imposter syndrome
- Providing more avenues for information around postgraduate study (what to expect, how to apply, etc.) is critical for encouraging students to apply & succeed in PG - Leaky pipeline
- Concerns about finances and limited awareness of support structures
- Employability – knowledge gap and limited engagement with Careers Service at PG level - 'Everyone is now starting to ask me, "What do you want to do?" and I'm like, "What can I do?" I have no idea' - highlighted in both 2015 and 2019 research
- But awareness of Careers service at UG level improved from 2015 (92% in 2019)
- Transition into PG is not to be treated as insignificant
- Don't just default to supporting SIMD students

Resilient Learning Communities (2021)

- Successfully achieved QAA Resilient Learning Community funding (HaSS Faculty, Widening Access and Careers)

- Hired a PGT student to support project

Outputs

- Collection of resources – academic and support service resources (from across UK)

- Redevelopment of PGT pages - without singling out WA applicants

- Creation of PGT WA strategy with Associate Principal for Social Inclusion (targeted funding, employability activities, tailored Careers support, new online info)

Challenges

- Not been able to set out what planned specifically for the PGT website

BUT

- We are having real input with strategic committees
- We have focussed on employability to make a tangible difference to students' outcomes

Employability

- Agreement to create university wide Employability Strategy through successful Careers and Employability Working Group (CEWG)

- Current developing front facing employability webpage – a shop front to showcase the variety of ways students can develop

AIM: to showcase opportunities, and support, at Strathclyde to enhance employability

Please note: this is a mock up of the site with initial ideas.
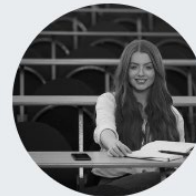
Collaborative Working

Working jointly to create and promote employability opportunities with:

- Strath Inspire (Entrepreneurship for All),
- Centre for Sustainable Development
- Strath Union

Focus on Graduate Outcomes of WA Students in HaSS

Positive outcomes for WA students were higher at Strathclyde than in Scotland
Positive outcomes for WA students were higher in HaSS than the university of Strathclyde's average
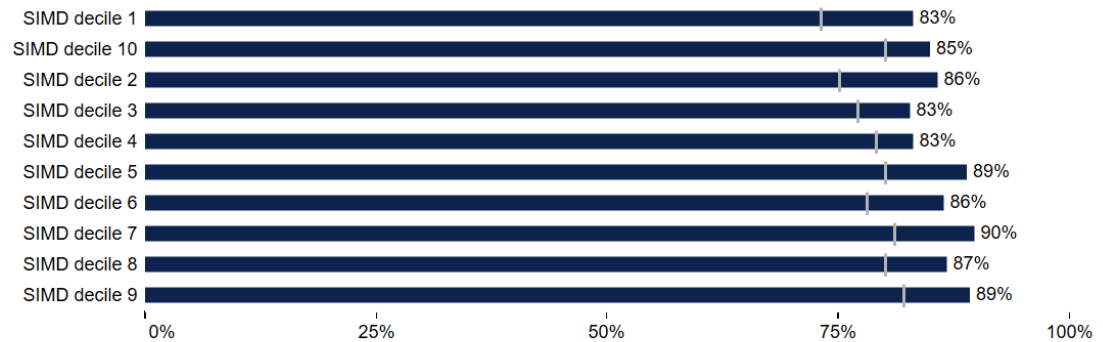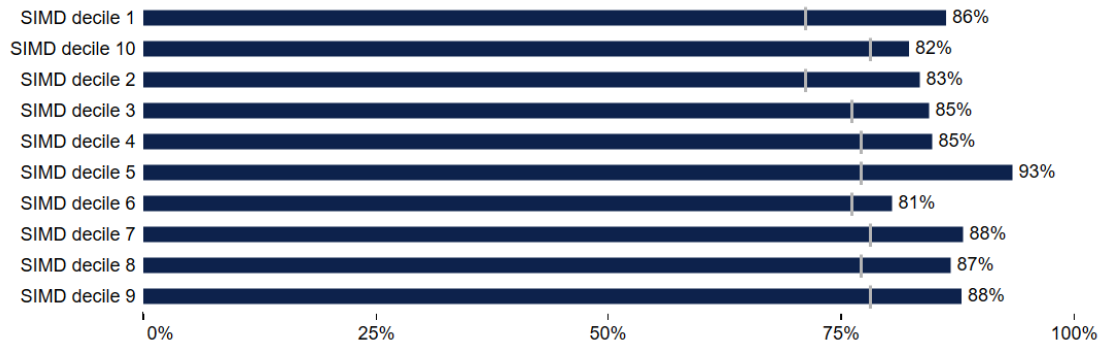
Positive outcomes

SIMD decile	Value
SIMD decile 1	83%
SIMD decile 10	85%
SIMD decile 2	86%
SIMD decile 3	83%
SIMD decile 4	83%
SIMD decile 5	89%
SIMD decile 6	86%
SIMD decile 7	90%
SIMD decile 8	87%
SIMD decile 9	89%

Positive outcomes by SIMD at High level of detail. Range: values range from SIMD decile 3 with 83% to SIMD decile 7 with 90%.

High skilled employment

SIMD decile	Value
SIMD decile 1	86%
SIMD decile 10	82%
SIMD decile 2	83%
SIMD decile 3	85%
SIMD decile 4	85%
SIMD decile 5	93%
SIMD decile 6	81%
SIMD decile 7	88%
SIMD decile 8	87%
SIMD decile 9	88%

High skilled employment by SIMD at High level of detail. Range: values range from SIMD decile 6 with 81% to SIMD decile 5 with 93%.

Focus on Graduate Outcomes of WA Students

HaSS Faculty

- Placement classes (with support of Careers Service)
- HaSS Employability pages
- Interdisciplinary classes (e.g. Sustainable Development)
- Graduate Case studies Graduates | University of Strathclyde

Focus on Graduate Outcomes of WA Students

HaSS WA students **do** engage with Careers Service

- They want one to one support - (48% of guidance appts are with WA students)

- Careers Service work closely with other students services to support referrals

- Changes to service to support e.g. CV checking sign up, online drop ins,

- Careers and Employability module embedded in some courses

- Creation of Careers and Employability module for Student Carers

Challenges

- Fine tuning of central systems to capture information on WA applicants through their journey

- Resources – WA want to engage on one to one basis, but don't have unlimited appointments

- Students not engaging throughout degree, not using student services/asking for support

- Careers Service the only support service grads can access after university

Next Steps

- Scotland wide collaboration on WA employability?

- Creation of AGCAS Scotland Social Mobility/Widening Participation group

Thank you