Widening access: next steps

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This research builds on an earlier quantitative study of the progression and degree outcomes of Widening Participation (WP) students (Croxford et al 2013).

This report considers staff’s perceptions about the experience of WP-indicated students at the University of Edinburgh and their views on the factors which can help or hinder successful progression and degree outcomes. In line with the Croxford study, this research focuses on the outcomes of young students (under 21). The student perspective is examined in another study (Minty 2015).

A programme of interviews was carried out with a cross-section of staff in eight Schools in the University; a small number of staff in specialist roles were also interviewed. A total of 48 member of staff were involved.

Ch. 2. Issues for Widening Participation Students

Support for widening participation but lack of awareness

Staff were supportive of the University’s commitment to widening participation (WP) but their awareness and knowledge of it was limited. Even staff involved in some WP activities did not necessarily have a broad understanding.

Staff generally perceived widening participation activity as being focused on the pre-entry and admissions stages, few saw it as an on-going process. It tended to be regarded as the responsibility of a specific member of staff.

The research itself was raising staff’s awareness about WP and staff were open to discussing how their School might respond to issues that might be identified in the research.

Students’ integration and sense of belonging

Staff generally thought that students from less advantaged backgrounds often find the experience of being at Edinburgh University ‘daunting’. In some Schools, staff spoke of the differences in dress and social activities between different student groups.

Initiatives such as LEAPS and Pathways to the Professions were seen as useful by those aware of them but opinion varied as to how far they could help overcome some students’ feelings of not belonging.

The impact of being the first in family to attend university

If a student is first in the family to attend university, this was seen as likely to increase feelings of not belonging, to make their transition to university more difficult and potentially to have a negative impact on their performance,

Coming from a more advantaged family background was generally seen as conferring a substantial advantage by providing these students with valuable ‘social capital’ and ‘cultural capital’ that those from less advantaged backgrounds might lack. Some suggested the need for greater awareness of this among staff and Personal Tutors.
**Living at home makes a difference**

A common view was that if a student lived at home, this could make a successful and ‘complete’ transition more difficult. It was thought (but not known) that WP-indicated students are more likely to stay at home.

Perceived issues included: missing out on informal discussion with other students and building up a supportive network; time spent travelling; family issues and caring responsibilities.

The University’s Accommodation Bursary was praised by several staff.

**Lack of confidence and its impact on progress and outcomes**

An issue that came up time and again was some students’ lack of confidence. This was identified as vital to achieving a good degree in various respects such as asking questions and seeking feedback and support.

While staff recognised that confidence is not simply about background, most thought that WP-indicated students are more likely to suffer from lack of confidence than their peers. In discussing this, some staff were speaking about students who had taken part in LEAPS but others were referring more generally to students from Scottish comprehensive schools.

**Readiness for university study**

Staff stressed that the transition to university is a challenge for virtually all students. Nevertheless, an issue is the extent to which WP-indicated students are ready for university study due to the preparation provided by their secondary school, their entry qualifications (Higher rather than Advanced Higher or A level) and, relatedly, their age.

**The incidence and impact of part-time work**

Part-time employment was seen as commonplace. Interviewees were almost unanimous that long working hours are detrimental to students’ academic performance.

The University does not have comprehensive data on the incidence of part-time work among students in general or WP-indicated in particular. Generally staff assumed that WP-indicated students will be more likely to have part-time jobs, to work excessive hours and to continue with their job into 3rd and 4th years because of economic necessity. Certainly other research shows that employment rates are higher than the average for students who live at home, who come from lower socio-economic groups and that students from the lowest social classes were more likely to work because their families could not support them financially.

One School had changed the timing of hand-ins in recognition of the prevalence of part-time work and the disadvantage that might result for some students.

**Critical time points?**

Staff were asked about time points that are likely to be pivotal and where support could be targeted. First year was identified as vital for all students and staff were concerned to design courses to aid students’ transition.

The move from 2nd to 3rd year is another critical time when students can struggle to respond to increased demands although they may have been performing adequately in 1st and 2nd years. This was perceived to be an issue for some WP-indicated students.
Identifying students who could ‘do better’

It was thought that the assessment and student support systems are not geared up to identifying and responding to students who are ‘getting by’ but could do better. Staff generally focus on students at risk of failing and students often do not seek out feedback.

The Personal Tutor was identified as the person - in theory - able to have an overview of an individual’s performance and to support students in achieving more highly. But whether the Personal Tutors are able to do so in practice was questioned.

Very mixed views were expressed about the impact of the (relatively) new student support system.

Do WP-indicated students face more or different issues?

Responses tended to fall into three, sometimes, overlapping categories: (i) not all WP have particular issues or difficulties; (ii) other students as well as those who are WP indicated can have problems; and (iii) WP-indicated students may well experience more problems or do so on a more sustained basis with fewer resources or support on which to draw.

Ch. 3 The institutional context

Academic student support within the University

The unanimous view was that support should not be targeted at specific student groups but available to all. Schools were making considerable efforts to develop a range of study skills support.

Awareness of the provision of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) was patchy.

Engagement by students was a commonly identified issue, especially where provision was not embedded or not assessed and graded. Avoiding timetabling clashes or making provision appear compulsory could encourage students’ participation.

It was suggested that where academic support staff also teach, students are more inclined to approach them for individual help.

Schools were developing feedback to students but take up was a problem. Several reasons were suggested such as whether students feel they know staff and the impact of the move to anonymous marking. These issues tended to be raised more often in the larger Schools and/or those with a high level of graduate students employed as tutors.

The status of teaching and its impact

Staff were clear about the importance of good teaching for all students, including helping weaker students to improve. Small group teaching was seen as a particularly valuable approach since it enables staff to respond to individuals, especially important in 1st year.

In most Schools staff expressed the strong view that while they give teaching serious attention, it is not valued sufficiently at institutional level and this lack of status has negative repercussions for students.

The University and senior management were thought to give higher priority to research in their recruitment and promotion decisions and in the increasing use of doctoral students as tutors.

Five of the eight Schools in the study made considerable use of hourly paid staff, often doctoral students, as academic tutors, especially in 1st and 2nd years. Few opposed the employment of doctoral
(or post-doctoral) students in principle but many were concerned about its extent and raised questions about the training, support and conditions of service of tutors.

Although the need to support teaching assistants is becoming more recognised, there was considerable variation both across and within Schools in the extent of their training, integration in the course team and levels of monitoring and support.

Ch. 4 The role of data in improving the student experience

A limited picture of the nature and diversity of the student body.

WP-indicated students are not generally identified either at an aggregate level or on an individual basis in seven of the eight Schools in the research. A very large majority of staff were unaware of the proportion of widening participation students in their School. Most Personal Tutors did not know whether their tutees were WP-indicated unless a particular student had informed them. Many staff were uncertain whether such information exists.

It is important to distinguish between aggregate level data where individuals are not identified and individual level information. There was general support for the idea of Schools being given aggregate data each year that would provide staff with an overview of the composition and diversity of their student body.

Little monitoring and tracking the progress of WP-indicated and other student groups

There appeared to be little systematic, regular monitoring in most Schools of students’ progression and outcomes in relation to widening participation status or other characteristics. Nevertheless a tracking study of WP-indicated students’ progress by one School had been influential in changing opinion there about widening participation. A range of data problems, however, meant it had been a difficult and time-consuming exercise; the School’s problems with data mirror those experienced by the wider quantitative study of WP-indicated students at the University (Croxford et al. 2013).

Most interviewees, especially senior academics and academic administrators, saw the value of more systematic and regular monitoring of student outcomes by a range of characteristics.

Should the allocation of students to Personal Tutors be informed by their WP status?

Three Schools already used information such as students’ participation in LEAPS or entry with minimum qualifications to inform their allocation to Personal Tutors. Opinion among staff was divided on the merits of such an approach. Nevertheless most Schools did operate, albeit informally, some degree of targeting when allocating students to Personal Tutors.

Should Personal Tutors be aware of the WP status of their tutees?

Whether Personal Tutors should be informed of the WP status of their tutees and be able to readily check this generated much debate amongst staff; the risk of labelling students was a key concern. However, the issue of unconscious assumptions was also pointed out. Certainly, it was common for interviewees to make certain assumptions about WP status: it was typically conflated with attendance at a Scottish comprehensive school or assumed from a student’s appearance or accent.

It was noted that young WP-indicated students entering from school are less visible compared with, for example, mature students.
A proportion of staff supported the idea of Personal Tutors being informed of their students’ WP status or being able to access this information easily. They stressed that access to such information on University systems should be restricted to certain staff and not be obvious to the student.

**The training of Personal Tutors**

Coverage of widening participation is very limited in the training for Personal Tutors. Senior staff were open to having additional inputs to raise awareness about widening participation but were concerned to avoid stereotyping WP-indicated students. A possible approach might be to do this as part of a wider consideration of the increased student diversity in the University overall.

**Ch. 5 Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter discusses the key findings of the research which have been outlined in the preceding sections of this Summary. It suggests that a successful widening participation strategy needs to go beyond the admissions stage; it also needs to take account of both individual and institutional factors.

It makes a range of recommendations covering: the need for better and more accessible data on WP-indicated students; the development of systematic monitoring of student progress in relation to various student characteristics; discussion of the desirability of the (limited) identification of WP-indicated students; the training and role of Personal Tutors; the position of teaching in the University including the use of hourly paid staff; the University response to students entering with qualifications at Higher; the need for data on students’ part-time work and the value of updating the previous quantitative study of WP-indicated students’ progress and outcomes.
Chapter 1 Introduction

The University of Edinburgh is committed to widening participation and, as part of its strategy to recruit more students from under-represented groups, it has used contextual data in admissions since 2004. This enables applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter degree study with the minimum entry requirements or above (see Appendix 1 for information on the University’s contextualised admissions policy and relevant initiatives). Its policy of using contextual data in making admissions decisions is informed by research evidence that prior qualifications alone do not provide an adequate measure of the “potential” of disadvantaged students. In particular, the research shows that students from state schools and/or schools with low levels of HE participation tended to perform better than would have been predicted from their prior qualifications (Naylor and Smith 2002, Ogg et al 2009, Hoare and Johnston 2010).

However, a quantitative study on the progression and outcomes of young (21 and under) students at the University of Edinburgh did not give the same results (Croxford et al 2013). Instead it found that in most subject areas there was no evidence that widening participation (WP)-indicated students achieved different outcomes from their peers once prior qualifications were taken into account, that is, they did not achieve better outcomes than would be predicted from their prior qualifications was expected from the previous research. The quantitative study also found variation in outcomes across subject areas and, in particular, identified a small number of subjects where WP-indicated students achieved different outcomes to their peers even after prior qualifications were taken into account. The picture is a complex one with differences between Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and GCE qualified students: in one College (HSS) the relatively small number of GCE qualified WP-indicated students perform better than would be predicted from their prior qualifications. The study raises the question why WP-indicated students with SQA qualifications at the University of Edinburgh did not achieve as highly as might have been expected from the research elsewhere.

While there is a considerable body of research on widening participation elsewhere in the UK, some of which may offer useful pointers and insights into these questions, the context of the University of Edinburgh is very different to that of most institutions in which research has taken place. For example, much of the existing research is concentrated in post-92 institutions, and is concerned with issues relating to access and entry and/or participation rather than attainment and degree performance. Also, much of the existing research focuses on the student experience with less attention to staff views and practices.

It was decided, therefore, to undertake qualitative research specifically within the University of Edinburgh and to include the staff as well as the student perspective to explore why WP-indicated students within the University do not achieve the degree outcomes that research elsewhere in the UK would suggest. In line with the quantitative study, this research focuses on young students (under 21) and therefore does not include the experiences of mature students.

Existing research indicates that staff views on WP-indicated students and their awareness and understanding of their institution’s WP policy affects their teaching, learning and assessment practice (McDonald and Stratta 2001; Stevenson et al 2010). This is in a context where there is clear evidence that an institution’s learning and teaching practices and relationships between students and teaching staff impact on student success. It is also notable that in the small number of studies which included

1 This report follows the same terminology and uses the term ‘WP-indicated’ to refer to students who fall into one or more of the categories used for the purposes of contextualised admissions.
the staff perspective, there was significant mismatch between staff and students views, for example, in several studies on early withdrawal, students focused on learning and teaching issues while staff identified reasons relating to individual student circumstances (Davies 1999, Young et al 2007). It was also recognised as important that the research includes those engaged in day-to-day teaching since their views can differ from those of senior staff and those in specialist support roles (Thomas 2002; McDonald and Stratta 2001; Young et al 2007, Stevenson et al 2010). Understanding the staff perspective is a pre-requisite to determining how to address the relative under-performance of WP indicated students at the University of Edinburgh.

Aims and methodology

The study aimed to:

\begin{itemize}
  \item investigate the reasons for the differences in the type and class of degree attained by WP indicated students
  \item identify the factors that contribute to successful outcomes and provide the basis for the development of strategies to address the issue
\end{itemize}

Eight Schools across the three Colleges in the University were selected to give a mix of those where the gap in the degree outcomes between WP indicated and traditional students was found to be large in the quantitative analysis and those areas where the gap was small. The subject areas selected were:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Architecture
  \item Biological Sciences
  \item Business
  \item Chemistry
  \item English Literature
  \item History
  \item Law
  \item Medicine
\end{itemize}

The main element of the study was face-to-face semi-structured interviews with academic staff in the eight selected subject areas. The emphasis was to gain a picture of the specifics of study in each subject and the day-to-day teaching, learning and student support that WP-indicated, and other, students experience rather than focus only on specific WP initiatives.

The aim was to interview a cross section of staff in each subject area: one member of staff at the level of the HoS/Head of Group/ Head of Teaching Organisation or equivalent, two senior lecturers and two lecturers/teaching assistants, academic administrator as well as any other relevant staff such as those in student support or with a WP remit. Most of the academic staff were also Personal Tutors.

In each subject area the Head of School or School Administrator provided the names of possible interviewees who were then contacted and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. The process of setting up the interviews proved to be a lengthy one. Most of the School staff interviewed did not have a particular role in respect of widening participation; nine had some limited degree of involvement through participation in LEAPS and/or Pathways activities.

In addition, specialist staff in the WP Team, EUSA and Student Experience Project were interviewed to ensure that all relevant issues were identified for discussion in the interviews with School staff and to gain their perspective on the attitudes and practice of School staff.
A total of 48 members of staff were interviewed. The interviews varied but generally covered:

- Awareness of WP policy and initiatives
- Data issues and identification of WP-indicated students
- Particular demands of subject and attributes needed to succeed
- Readiness of WP-indicated students when they start their degree (vs traditional entry students)
- Issues (traditional entry and WP-indicated students):
  - prior qualifications; SCQF level of 1st year
  - particular demands of subject
  - teaching, learning and assessment
  - finance; part-time work
  - social integration; institutional habitus
- Critical time-points
- Monitoring and tracking of all students
- Personal Tutors and Student Support Officers
- Peer Assisted Learning
- Aspirations, Personal Development Planning etc
- Further developments to support WP-indicated students (pre-entry, on course)

The Schools are not identified specifically in the text to protect the anonymity of interviewees; job titles have been standardised since some Schools have particular terms for certain members of staff that would make them easily recognisable.
CHAPTER 2 Issues for widening participation students

Varied knowledge of widening participation

A central aim of the research was to explore the issues that staff thought that WP-indicated students can sometimes face and how far they perceived that this experience might differ from that of traditional entry students. It did not aim to examine staff attitudes to the principle of widening participation but it is worth noting that the very large majority of those interviewed did express their support. However, their awareness and knowledge of widening participation (WP) varied. This matters since as noted in chapter 1, staff awareness of WP has an influence on their teaching, learning and assessment practice.

Overall, a majority of interviewees did not know about the contextualised admissions process and, among those who did, the level of understanding varied. While a small number had a sophisticated understanding of contextualised admissions, it was more commonly seen as “getting in with the minimum entry requirements”. LEAPS had a higher profile. Staff were more likely to be aware of it although with varying levels of understanding; a minority had not heard of it. The Pathways to the Professions programme which is focused on widening entry to the professions was familiar to most but not all staff in relevant subject areas. Even staff involved in some WP activities did not necessarily have a broad understanding of the area, for example, some of those who made inputs into the LEAPS Summer School did not know about contextualised admissions and did not mention the LEAPS admissions pledge.

It is clear from the interviews that the term “widening participation” means different things to different members of staff. Most commonly it was taken to refer to the LEAPS scheme and/or Access and Swap courses.

Few staff knew the proportion of WP-indicated students in their School overall or the WP status of individual students of their students. When asked about the topic of WP it was common for interviewees to make certain assumptions about the characteristics of a student who would have WP status and there was a tendency to conflate WP status with having attended a Scottish comprehensive secondary school or to make assumptions based on students’ appearance or accent or seen in general terms of ‘coming from a less advantaged background’. It should therefore be borne in mind when reading this chapter that some comments may not necessarily relate only to WP-indicated students.

A focus on pre-entry activities and the admissions stage

The University’s commitment to widening participation was perceived by a majority of interviewees as being focused on pre-entry activities and the admissions stage and only a small number, mainly in one particular School saw it as an on-going process. This School had a specific member of staff with a full-time remit relating to WP whose remit extends across all stages of a degree programme. Several interviewees who had previously worked in other universities contrasted the lower profile of widening participation at the University of Edinburgh compared to their previous institution.

It appeared from the interviews that, with exception of one School, widening participation was not seen as a mainstream activity or as something which was taken account of or informed everyday teaching, learning and support practices. When contacted about taking part in the research, a common response from staff not directly involved in widening participation was to ask “why do you want to speak to me?” because they felt that they did not know much about the topic and would not have much to contribute to the research. Widening participation tended to be “compartmentalised”,

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being seen as the responsibility of a specific member of staff, frequently due to personal interest and commitment.

“No one talks about widening participation, it’s not an issue here” (lecturer with WP remit)

“WP doesn’t really impinge on everyday consciousness (senior lecturer)

“the Department is more or less aware of WP but not focused on it and could do more” (Head of School)

It was very clear that the research in itself was raising staff’s awareness about WP, as one senior lecturer commented “this conversation has made me think”.

Integration and belonging

In all but one School, staff thought that students from less advantaged backgrounds often find the experience of being at Edinburgh University ‘daunting’, and one that is different from that which they would experience at most other Scottish universities:

‘the kind of environment at Edinburgh is a big jump [for WP students], it contrasts with their background but also contrasts with what they would experience at Glasgow, Dundee or Aberdeen ‘lecturer

‘Even when people get into Edinburgh they can still have the feeling that it’s not the place for them unlike Glasgow or Dundee” PT

The high number of RUK students from the independent sector and increasing numbers of very well-qualified and competent European and other international students were identified as key factors in creating the particular character of the University that can be daunting to other students. Several expressed concern that the fee regime for RUK students is further increasing the proportion of students from an independent school background:

‘Students from around the world, from public schools and whose aspirations and cultural understanding far outstrips the [WP]student.’ Senior lecturer

‘WP students are going into an environment where they are in a minority and they have got to be tough. It’s an enormous culture shock.’ Senior lecturer

‘They find themselves in with a group of very articulate young men and women....so they find themselves in a situation where they feel they don’t fit in.’ HOS

In addition to the particular profile of students in the University, several interviewees highlighted the impact of the nature of the staff body in most Schools:

‘They don’t see someone who looks or sounds like them so they can feel that they don’t belong.’

lecturer

In a number of Schools, staff spoke of the differences evident between students in their dress, the equipment they could afford, their social life and the holidays and/or the voluntary work they experience:
‘You can see some [in tutorial] curling up at the edges when someone is describing their gap year in Thailand.’ Senior tutor

‘There’s quite strong distinctions between those who have really expensive laptops and others’. senior lecturer

‘There’s a real dichotomy between the two groups…. they occupy a very different social milieu.’ lecturer

The minority of staff familiar with the initiatives such as LEAPS and Pathways to the Professions designed to encourage less advantaged students to think of higher education and to introduce them to the University generally saw them as useful but opinion varied as to how far they could overcome feelings of not belonging:

‘LEAPS activities try to expose potential students to the University so can see what it’s like yet they can still feel they are not in the right place and not fitting in. senior lecturer

‘if they’ve done Pathways they will already know people and be familiar with the University… Also they may have had some mentoring by senior students before coming.’ Student support staff

The impact of being the first in family to attend university

Being in the first generation to consider higher education (HE) is one of the criteria used in the LEAPS programme and was an aspect covered in the interviews. The common response from staff was that if a student is the first in their family to attend university and possibly also from a school where few pupils go on to higher education, then this could increase feelings of not belonging:

‘Independent school students have a wee bit sense of entitlement… they’ve always taken for granted they would go to university compared to those who are wondering “what’s this all about?”’. Student support staff

‘For some students university is a ‘done deal’ but for others it’s not a “natural space ‘for them.’ senior tutor

Staff were clear that the transition to university is challenging for all students, nevertheless many also recognised that for ‘first in family’ students , the transition was likely to be more difficult since they were far less likely to have gained an understanding (both directly and indirectly) from parents and/or siblings about university life and its demands and expectations. Although their family might be supportive, it was suggested that they might well not be in a position to understand the experiences that their child was going through or to be able to answer questions or offer advice based on a knowledge and experience of the demands of university:

‘They’re expected to do a huge amount of work and it’s difficult if no one in family has done that.’ personal tutor

‘if [the student is]first in family, their family can’t provide the same informal advice and support about dealing with University and their studies.’ Senior lecturer

Being less familiar with the demands of university was identified as a factor that had a bearing on students’ performance and ultimate success:
‘They don’t realise what coming to University will mean and if don’t have parents or other relatives to tell them what it’s like, it can make a massive difference RE a 2:1. Not so much direct advice but someone who can be a sounding board, knowing enough to be able to ask relevant questions or have connections who can advise a student. This sort of help and support can make the difference between [doing] okay and getting a first class. Academic tutor

‘The really successful students understand how to work the system... they can identify and carry out the sort of behaviour that will reap the benefits that they want - if they want to be an academic, they know about doing good presentations... to chum up with the professor who’s going to a conference and so on.’ sr tutor

Staff also noted the very practical help that some parents are able to give their child, for example, in commenting on and proof-reading essays or other work which could make a real difference to their progress. First in family students would be unlikely to have such assistance.

‘They don’t necessarily have parents as a resource to ask about career, applying for jobs etc. First generation students lose out on a lot of things that others take for granted like 4th year dissertations - most parents comment and proof read but first-generation don’t...may seem tiny but the students feel they have even more work to do and presentation and style of writing can make the difference between at 2:2 and 2:1.’ lecturer

Coming from a more advantaged family background with university educated or professional parents was generally seen as conferring a substantial advantage on students compared with their peers from a different sort of background. Several staff referred specifically to the concepts of ‘social capital’ and ‘cultural capital’. As one senior lecturer commented in talking about the extent of students’ family support ‘one can see the Bordieuan social capital in action’. This was especially evident in the arts and social science subjects where greater exposure to literature, art and architecture and the related concepts and language by virtue of family interests and experiences were seen to provide some students with a valuable grounding for their university study:

‘There’s a disadvantage built in, students from more connected backgrounds.... have better access to pre-university placements and through foreign travel, museum visits, visits to buildings...they develop a hinterland - “cultural capital” - compared with those from more circumscribed horizons who need to do a lot more heavy lifting at the beginning of the course .... Not so much about students doing badly as the difference between passing and doing well.’ HOS

‘They don’t have the same cultural awareness and other students accelerate away from them fast.’ Lecturer

But the benefit gained from coming from a more advantaged background was not limited to the arts and social science subject areas. A number of staff in scientific subjects also identified the benefits that some students gain from coming from a family where there might be more discussion of ideas, where students had been encouraged to express their ideas and defend their views:

‘Some are used to having academic conversations around the dinner table, disadvantage re-confidence and ability to communicate. How someone speaks/language is important in terms of how they come across, some are more articulate and some staff make judgements based on this.’ Teaching Fellow
Opinion was mixed as to how staff might respond, a number thought it is perhaps inevitable and were unsure how they or the University could respond:

‘I’m conscious that some students don’t have a family support network...if they don’t they’re at a disadvantage about how to approach things, how to write. I don’t know what you do about this.’ Senior lecturer

But others highlighted the need for greater awareness on the part of staff so that they did not make assumptions that all students would have certain knowledge:

‘they [first in family] do have some difficulties. The Department could do more in being aware that not all students will be familiar with technical language.’ HOS

Staff in several Schools suggested that Personal Tutors could help in this situation by providing some extra guidance or support:

‘If the Personal Tutor was aware of this, they may deal with the student differently, for example, give them more guidance to help them think through their thoughts.’ Student support staff

**Living at home makes a difference**

A common view was that if a student lived at home, this could make it more difficult for them to make a successful transition. While remaining at home was seen to be an issue for any student ‘all students feel they’re missing out if they’re living at home’, it was thought that the incidence of living at home was much higher among WP-indicated students than other students:

‘I assume LEAPS students are living locally and so are subject to social constraints.’ HTO

None of the interviewees had any data on the proportion of home domiciled students; national level data shows that a higher proportion of students from less advantaged backgrounds do live at home [add figures]. While it was thought that living at home was not an issue for some, staff also drew attention to the fact that for at least some WP-indicated students, their home circumstances had been part of what had limited their academic performance hitherto:

‘the context of the home environment – as well as the school and area- is sometimes what’s inhibited their performance’ HOS

‘the impact [of living at home] depends on where they live, it’s not just about living at home but the neighbourhood and environment, for example, a student living at home where most of her friends had babies and their own small flats’ dean pastoral care

Living at home was perceived as compounding the difficulties some WP-indicated students had in feeling that they belonged at university, in building up their identity as student and in making friends:

‘it’s a massive transition from school and people who live at home and travel really struggle. It’s probably one of the most challenging things for WP students, you don’t integrate as well, you stick to your pals that you’ve got at home... If you stay at Pollok you have to make friends, you have to integrate to build a social life.’ Personal Tutor

‘It’s a question of identity and feeling part of the academic community...it’s about being in the university environment rather than dipping in and out...they’re not going to get that sense of belonging.’ Student support staff
‘I’m aware those living at home have a different experience... often don’t feel they are integrated, some are trying hard but find it difficult. I’m not sure as a tutor what to advise, I can suggest joining clubs but even so they’re just not as integrated as other students.’ lecturer

With only a few exceptions, staff thought that students living at home missed out on the informal discussion with other students outside of the tutorial, lab or studio which is a valuable part of their learning:

‘[living at home] has an impact on learning because the sharing of ideas and getting different perspectives outside the classroom is important. They’re missing out on these “informal tutorials”.’ Senior lecturer

‘It’s the importance of the incidental learning - where students are chatting in halls but someone is at home and missing that.’ HTO

‘living at home and commuting is a problem if they don’t have the routine of coming in and being involved with others in the studio. Students who work in the studio get better results, they see other’s work and may realise they need to step up or be inspired.’ Senior lecturer

Students now have access to a wide range of materials on–line and, in all but one of the Schools, this included lectures. No-one knew which students are more likely to access lectures on line but the perception was that that students living at home might be more inclined to do so since it would save them the time and expense of travelling into the University. Certainly, looking at lectures on line rather than attending them in person was viewed as problematic:

‘A lot of material’s now on the web but students who attend lectures tend to do better. It’s obvious in assignments where someone has looked at the lecture PowerPoint slides...they have the material but not what connects them.’ lecturer

‘Lectures are available online but students who don’t attend do less well in exams... I pay attention [in the lecture] to whether students are following and if not I’ll adjust what I’m saying but I don’t get this feedback from those watching online.’ lecturer

Living at home was frequently seen as hindering students from building up the sort of supportive network of friends which can be critical to students’ academic success and to their well-being:

‘A strong peer network is usually what pulls students through, staff can’t always know there’s a problem or intervene.’ lecturer

‘The ones who have problems are those who don’t integrate, maybe commute from Fife, come in and do their work and go home and don’t mix with other students. May be academically able but by end of 2nd year they’re having difficulty because they’re not part of the community. It makes the work harder if they’re not really mixing informally and forming relationships even if they are working in pairs in tutorial groups.’ HTO

Another negative aspect of living at home, staff thought, was that it can get in the way of studying because of the distraction of friends who do not need to study or simply due to the travel time it might involve:

‘The time spent travelling is critical given the massive workload in 1st year.’ Personal Tutor

‘It’s a recognised issue with commuting students...they may be more likely to be WP but some students just want to maintain their roots... but they don’t bond with their year group . If a student commutes this is a marker of likely problems.’ Sr tutor
‘Living at home can be a big problem since students need to work in the evenings and weekends, there’s a problem if going out with friends.’ Senior lecturer

A theme in staff’s comments was that students who lived at home were less likely to make a ‘complete transition’ which not only could hinder their integration and progress but also make it easier to contemplate dropping out, especially when they encountered difficulties:

‘Students who live at home tend to harbour more thoughts about dropping out - they see former classmates working while they’re accumulating debt.’ Lecturer

‘If they’re at home and in a part-time job, it’s much easier to simply drop out and work full-time...it’s easier to slide into the alternative...they see the route out easier than others. These students haven’t made a complete transition to University’. Senior lecturer

For some students living at home could mean dealing with various family issues including the care of parents or siblings which made demands on their time and emotions:

‘They may have caring responsibilities and therefore time issues.’ Teaching Fellow

‘If you move away from home you can distance yourself from family issues, the occasional phone call is very different from having to live with that every day’. Lecturer

Nevertheless, a few staff thought that potential difficulties caused by living at home could be overstated or pointed out that some students were able to adopt certain strategies to minimise the difficulties associated with living at home:

‘Certainly it’s an issue, but it is an issue that students themselves recognise, know how to deal with it and we help them. As a Personal Tutor I’ll be encouraging them to get involved although some find it more difficult than others to be able to make the effort to get involved.’ Senior lecturer

‘Some WP students save up and go into halls in 1 year to meet people and then move back home but by then have a strong peer network.’ Lecturer

The University’s Accommodation Bursary was praised by several staff while another wondered if the University should be doing more to develop affordable housing for WP-indicated students to help them ‘get more out of their time at University’.

Lack of confidence and its impact on progress and outcomes

An issue that came up time and again in discussion about the experience of WP-indicated students at Edinburgh University was lack of confidence in a context where many other students are highly confident because of their social background and/or schooling. As one interviewee remarked ‘there are so many confident students at Edinburgh’. Confidence was seen as vital if a student is to be successful in their study:

‘There’s an issue about those from less privileged backgrounds having the necessary confidence to do well in a very participatory environment’ HOS

‘The attributes required to be a successful student and also to get a 1st class degree are related to confidence.’ Lecturer

‘The teaching methods and system generally rewards students who are confident and articulate’. Lecturer
It is notable that when discussing what distinguishes a student who achieves a good degree, confidence was identified by staff as a vital underpinning attribute. This operates in a variety of ways: providing the basis for a student to think critically and independently; making them more prepared to take a risk rather than ‘play safe’; enabling them to see themselves as active participants in the learning process or to be prepared to seek out support:

‘[a successful student] needs to be able to stand by their own interpretation, to think critically, producing independent thought even at 1st year stage, not regurgitating—this requires a certain confidence.’ lecturer

‘[...getting a 1st rather than a 2:1] it’s about trying to go further or a bit deeper even if initially it doesn’t come off – again this comes back to confidence. Also students who are aware of the process that they are going into and see themselves as active participants in it. not passive recipients.’ Senior lecturer

‘They need the ability to find and take support from tutors or other students.’ lecturer

Staff recognised that confidence is not simply about background and a few believed it is a purely ‘individual attribute’ but the predominant view was that WP-indicated students are more likely to suffer from lack of confidence than their peers. In reflecting on the question of confidence some staff were speaking about WP- indicated students, or at least those who had taken part in LEAPS, but in other cases they were referring more generally to students from Scottish comprehensive schools. They typically spoke of less advantaged Scottish students being intimidated in tutorials, seminars and group work by more confident, articulate and often more competitively-minded students.

‘They’re less socially confident so find group work more difficult...they’re more reticent in class.’ Senior lecturer

‘they lack confidence to speak out especially in the context of increased numbers of international students.’ lecturer

‘Working class students are not conditioned to take space in the classroom, to ask questions’ Teaching Assistant

‘being articulate in tutorials is to do with confidence and the nature of their previous education and teaching experience.’ Senior lecturer

Smaller tutorial and seminar groups were seen as helpful to less confident students and a number of staff tried consciously to encourage all students to participate:

‘it’s demanding teaching students from really wide range of backgrounds, you need to be conscious of this and how to facilitate the less confident student. Senior lecturer

‘staff do try to respond appropriately in tutorials’. HOS

‘I try to ensure everyone contributes in tutorials but I know others don’t try to make their classes accessible.’ Teaching Assistant

In two Schools, several staff raised the issue of the impact of the background of tutors on the experience of less confident students:
‘There’s a different approach of tutors from the independent sector…they value competitive contributions compared with tutors from the US who recognise a range of different contributions.’ Senior lecturer

‘WP students find more difficulty operating in the hothouse of competitive attitudes of public school educated students and post grad tutors.’ Lecturer

‘10% of students’ mark is their performance in tutorial but tutors mark differently – some assess the general contribution [made] compared with individual presentation - and I can’t insist on a particular approach.’ Senior lecturer

Staff typically commented that it is the more confident student who is comfortable engaging with staff whether to ask questions or to seek feedback, both of which can be important in students’ progress:

‘More confident students from advantaged backgrounds or stronger schools [offering better preparation for HE study] will approach staff to ask questions if they don’t understand and engage actively in their own learning. WP students lack confidence to ask questions and for feedback’. Senior lecturer

‘Students from private schools are a lot more confident interacting with staff. They’re more likely to approach staff to know how they’re doing. Scottish students are not confident enough to ask.’ Lecturer

‘Scottish students are less likely to approach staff unless they are very good. Don’t want to share the problem or assume lecturer will think they are stupid.’ Teaching Fellow

For a number of staff, the confidence to approach staff was related to whether students felt empowered and entitled to be at the University:

‘I’m really keen for students to look at exam scripts and feedback… I’m very happy to go through scripts and explain in detail what’s wrong but many students don’t take up the possibility because they don’t see themselves as empowered customers, they’re just grateful to be here.’ Senior lecturer

‘How they respond to [the very large] numbers in first year depends on an individual’s feelings of self worth, the difference between thinking “I deserve to be here” and feeling they’re here under false pretences.’ Student support staff

Confident students who feel that they are entitled be at university were seen as being more likely to overcome any hurdles they encounter. This might be because they are more inclined to ask for help (as already noted) or are able to recognise they need to develop certain skills but without blaming themselves or feeling inadequate, or be more likely to blame their tutor or lecturer rather than themselves for any difficulty. This was seen as contrasting with the response of those less confident about their position at university:

‘they can end up internalising it and feel a fraud rather than taking the message that they need to learn and develop these skills.’ Senior lecturer

‘if a working-class student doesn’t understand, they will think it’s because they’re stupid, don’t have the confidence to ask questions, whereas those from more affluent background, think it’s because the lecturer is bad, and in independent schools they’ve been encouraged to ask questions.’ Teaching Assistant
Opinion varied both across and within Schools as to whether staff thought that differences in the level of confidence of students from different backgrounds eventually evened out:

Scottish students are less confident compared with students from independent schools – they’re very confident and do well in first and second year. Scottish students struggle especially with crits but performance evens out by third year. ‘Lecturer

but

‘WP students encounter more confident students familiar with technical language and will think they are better... even by 4th year students can admire style over substance and those from more advantaged backgrounds tend to have more ornate style’ HOS

‘Among 4th years, there’s a lack of confidence to apply for certain sorts of jobs or go through certain selection processes e.g. assessment centres’. Lecturer

Readiness for university study

Staff stressed that moving into the university environment and becoming independent, self-directed learners is a challenge for virtually all students:

‘Students generally struggle with study skills moving from a structured environment to where they need to be independent learners’. SSO

Nevertheless, a theme that emerged is the extent to which WP-indicated students are ready for university study because of the extent of preparation provided by the school they have attended, their entry qualifications and, relatedly, their age. These are in addition to the impact of other issues on their readiness for university such as being first in family to go on to higher education.

It should be noted that some staff felt unable to comment on this because they were unfamiliar with the secondary education system in Scotland and/or did not know students’ entry qualifications and/or were unsure how these mapped onto the level of first year of university study (SCQF2).

Qualifications at Higher (SCQF level 6) are the basic entry requirement for Scottish domiciled students while English based students generally enter on the basis of their A level awards. Subjects varied in the extent to which they required or recommended that Scottish domiciled applicants should have Advanced Highers (SCQF 7) in addition to Highers. Science subjects generally did so, but even so they recognised the variety of starting points of students:

‘first year is to bring everyone up to speed...we’re very conscious of the diverse background of students.’ DTO

‘The 1st semester is a soft option – 1st year is officially level 8 [SCQF level] but semester 1 is more like 7.5. Students get a lot of support in tutorials and notes are designed to be recognisable to students with Highers.’ Teaching Assistant

While several staff thought that there was little difference evident in the performance of students with Highers compared to those with Advanced Higher or A level, most of those who commented on this held the opposite view. The advantage was generally perceived to be the approach to learning and study that Advanced Higher or A level entails. In addition, the extra year of study means students

2 Launched in 2001, the SCQF aims to cover all Scottish qualifications. It describes them in terms of 12 levels of study and credit points indicating the volume of learning. First year courses in the University are formally at SCQF level 8 with only a very few exceptions.
are older with the likelihood of some greater degree of maturity. All of which might be particularly advantageous for students coming from less advantaged backgrounds:

‘Not many [enter from] 5th year but it can be an issue because of the level of maturity required to keep on top of the work load, maybe staying on for Advanced Higher would be useful, it means another year to mature.’ Senior tutor

‘If a student comes straight from Highers, they’re disadvantaged because [of their] age and therefore maturity. A student with Advanced Higher is older’ HOS

‘There is a distinct difference in maturity between students with Highers and with Advanced Higher... you can see that in participation in tutorials... the benefit of Advanced Higher is a combination of knowledge and maturity.’ Lecturer

‘Higher or Advanced Higher shouldn’t make any difference since first year is designed to bring everyone up to speed. But if someone is from a different background, the whole University experience is even more different than all students find it, maybe the jump from school to university would be less extreme if they had Advanced Higher.’ Senior lecturer

Most interviewees did not think they had the knowledge to compare A level and Advanced Higher but, with very few exceptions, both qualifications were generally seen as requiring greater depth of study and more independent learning than Higher:

‘the approach to studying [Advanced Higher] in 6th year is different from the two-term dash to Higher...they’ve longer to do their own independent research and [it’s]more research focused – all great preparation for University.’ HOS

‘the advantage of A-levels is the amount of essay writing and personal reading that the student has had to do. Students need to produce a 2000 word essay after three weeks, students with Highers find this daunting, they’ve not been taught this skill... they spend more time trying to work out how to write the essay....rather than reading more widely and spending time actually writing. Others can devote time to independent study.’ Teaching assistant

‘Advanced Higher is the key to more independent learning and the skills that this gives for first year at University.’ lecturer

It would seem that WP-indicated students would be well-advised to study at Advanced Higher level but the issue is that, in practice, WP-indicated students have limited opportunity to do. This is evident from a comparison of the average number of Advanced Highers provided in schools with the highest proportion of pupils going on to HE (Band A) and those who have the lowest proportion (Band E schools). Band A schools, on average, offered Advanced Highers in 15 subjects compared with only five subject areas being available at Advanced Higher in Band E schools (quoted in Croxford et al 2013).

More generally, the type of preparation that students’ secondary schools were able to provide was identified as another relevant factor in addition to the perceived benefits of A level or Advanced Higher:

‘It comes down to the time taken to equip students with the ability to write a good essay as well as pass exams, this requires attention on the one to one basis in class...so probably independent schools [make the difference]’. lecturer

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3 The data, provided by the Scottish Government, refers to publicly funded secondary schools in Scotland; information is not available for independent schools
‘Advanced Higher does help but more than this, students at private schools get a huge amount of preparation.’ student support staff

**Part-time work**

Interviewees were almost unanimous that if students worked part-time work for long hours, this is bound to be detrimental to their academic performance. Schools generally discouraged students from working for more than a certain number of hours a week, especially in the later years of their degree. In relation to the progress and outcomes of WP students the question is whether they are more likely than their peers to have a part-time job and to work longer hours. Certainly there is research evidence which shows that employment rates were higher than the average for students who live at home and those from lower socio-economic groups (Carnery et al 2005; Callender 2008).

There are in fact, no figures available on the incidence of part-time work within the University. In trying to answer this question, interviewees were drawing on a general impression or referring to the experience of a small number of students they knew whose part-time jobs had been an issue. In addition, as already noted, most staff did not know the WP status of students and so could not be sure if the students they had in mind were, in fact, WP-indicated. As one interviewee said:

‘Personal Tutors have raised the issue about part-time work but no one knows if they are WP or not. I’m surprised at the hours of some and there is a problem with attendance but we haven’t matched up non-attendance with part-time working.’ Academic administrator

‘I’d expect this would be an issue for LEAPS students but we don’t have any data on their part-time working.’ HTO

One interviewee who did know which of her tutees are WP-indicated, was clear that they are both much more likely to have part-time jobs and to continue them into their third and fourth year. Other staff were not able to comment so specifically about WP-indicated students but did think that certain student groups were more likely to work excessive hours with a negative effect on their study:

‘[part-time work]is a problem...especially Scottish students work far too many hours, there are examples of non-attendance at lectures because they can’t ask for their shifts to be changed.’ Lecturer

‘[part-time work]has a real impact on degree performance. Students – the non-affluent - can be working ridiculous hours, some are doing 40 hours as care assistants.’ Senior lecturer

Nevertheless, another perspective, albeit a minority one, questioned why part-time employment should cause particular difficulties when most students now work part-time, it’s the ‘new norm’:

‘why would it be an issue - so many have part-time jobs now.’ Senior lecturer

A related view was that many students have difficulty with time management, that it is not something unique to WP-indicated students:

‘I often see students who have issues about time management...while WP students may need to get paid work, others feel pressure to get voluntary work ...they have similar issues irrespective of background about how to balance activities.’ Student support staff
While many students have part-time employment, a number of interviewees drew attention to the different reasons students had for doing so and thought it is important to distinguish between those working to ‘finance their social life’ and those who did so to help their family finances:

‘Contributing to family finance is sometimes relevant even for young students who work to support family and siblings. I don’t know but I assume WP students are more likely to be in this situation.’ Student support staff

The different motivations for undertaking part-time work might be relevant when it came to decisions about giving up work in later years of degree study or reducing hours, those doing so from economic necessity might have no real choice but to continue. Other research points to different motivations for part-time work, twice as many students from the lowest social classes stated that they worked part-time because their families could not support them than did those from the highest social classes (Callender 2008).

One School drew attention to the fact that they had changed some of their arrangements in recognition of the prevalence of part-time work and the disadvantage that might result:

‘we’re aware of part-time work and students are asked to do less than previously, for example, we’re trying not to expect them to study in the vacation time since some students will have to work full-time. All hand-in times are in term time so that those who don’t have a part-time holiday job don’t have any advantage.’ HOS

It would be extremely useful to have data on students’ part-time employment to enable analysis of its impact on students’ attendance and performance and assess whether it is a particular problem for WP-indicated students or, indeed any other student group.

**Critical time points?**

The quantitative study of the outcomes of WP-indicated students demonstrated that the key issue is the class of degree obtained rather than failing to graduate. In thinking about this, a relevant question is whether there are particular time points that are likely to be pivotal and where support could be targeted. Staff responded to this question in relation to students in general rather than WP specifically. They pointed to the importance of getting first year right:

‘1st year is critical because of the adjustment, the transition.’ Senior lecturer

‘It needs to get them to build up confidence in the first years so they can progress, otherwise they either just survive or drop out.’ Student support staff

It was clear from interviewees that all the Schools were concerned to design their courses to aid students’ transition:

‘With the new curriculum the idea is to make 1st years get used to the University system and become responsible learners.’ Senior lecturer

‘The course is planned in a coherent way so students start with fundamental concepts, they complete a series of circumscribed projects which gradually introduce them to different ideas, first year is designed as a series of steppingstones.’ Senior lecturer

In two Schools, staff perceived a considerable jump in demand between year 1 and 2 because they try to keep the 1st year relatively low in demand. Overall, however, it was the move from 2nd to 3rd year that was identified as the other most critical stage (after 1st year) for students due to the increase in demand and because marks became more important in most subjects (although not all):
‘Also the jump to Honours can be difficult for less confident students... the increased pace and volume and more independent learning expected by tutors.’ HOS

‘In 1st and 2nd years they only need to pass at a certain level but in 3rd year everything counts towards the degree, there’s also a shift then in the way they are taught, the kind of materials and courses they have to deal with.’ Senior lecturer

In several Schools, in discussing the progress of WP students, staff made the point that while different students might appear to be doing equally well in 1st and 2nd year, some will have been putting in considerably more effort to do so than others but that differences are exposed in the increased demands that 3rd year brings:

‘The step up from 2nd to 3rd [is a critical time] ... A lot of students have a “reservoir of skills behind them” and can coast but then “step up” in 3rd year. They can really accelerate away and that comes as a surprise to state educated Scottish students.’ Senior lecturer

Identifying students who could ‘do better’

In discussing the finding of the previous research at the University that WP-indicated students are less likely to achieve a good degree and how this might be addressed, the most common response from staff was that the system is not geared up to identifying and responding to those who are ‘getting by’ but could do better. There appears to be a lack of systematic monitoring of students' progress and outcomes. Attendance at tutorials is generally monitored and Personal Tutors informed if necessary but this does not address the question of students who may be under-performing. The students themselves generally do not seek out feedback and staff are more likely to be focused on students who are in danger of failing their course so that:

‘The issue of [students] doing less well than they could comes way down the list of things to worry about.’ Senior lecturer.

One aspect of whether staff can monitor if students are performing to potential is having an overview of an individual’s performance across their courses and across years but tutors and lecturers generally do not have this:

‘In 1st and 2nd year they get written feedback on 1st essay so it’s possible to look at their next essay to see if they’ve developed from that feedback but they have a different tutor in 2nd year so there’s no continuity... essays are given back to students who may ignore them and are not held centrally.’ Lecturer

The Personal Tutor was most likely to be identified as the person in the position, at least in theory, to notice and respond to students who could be achieving at a higher level:

’ Unless students come for feedback, there is no obvious way to pick up on students. It would only be if the PT is looking at their marks.’ Lecturer

‘There ‘s a role for Personal Tutors in terms of students just doing OK.’ Student support staff

‘In their interview [with PT], students are encouraged to reflect on their progress and any issues.’ Sr tutor

Not all interviewees were convinced that that the Personal Tutor system operates like this in reality. In some cases this was seen as because the students themselves do not contact their Personal Tutor unless there is a problem or, given staff workloads, students who are not having obvious difficulties are likely to be overlooked. One Personal Tutor described such students as the ‘breathe -a -sigh -of -
relief, don’t- give -you -any -hassle student’. Another described a scenario that appeared to be a common experience of Personal Tutors:

A lot of time [is ] spent with a small number of problem students and you may be a bit involved with those doing very well. Those in the middle can be a bit disenfranchised. They don’t see the point of meeting [with their PT]... it can be a bit routine, tick box exercise.’ ‘Personal tutor

‘helping students realise their potential? A PT has access to all their results... and in meetings will go through the peer feedback with them, their own personal diaries but the sad thing is you only get interested when someone fails. You just hope that if someone gets a B rather than an A they realise that they could improve.’ Senior tutor

Opinion varied as to whether the appointment of student support officers has decreased the extent of Personal Tutors’ direct contact with students and the consequences in relation to encouraging students to achieve more highly. It was not the purpose of the study to assess the new Personal Tutor system but interviewees were asked if the recent changes had made a difference to the support given to students. Opinion was very varied, around a quarter thought it was better but a similar number saw no change while the others believed it to be worse, or thought it too early to say or still dependent on the individual concerned.

Do WP-indicated students face more or different issues?

The previous sections have outlined the various issues for at least some WP-indicated students which were raised by staff. After discussing these specific aspects, the interviewees were asked the more general question whether they thought that WP-indicated students face more, or different, issues than do other students. Although a number of them had identified various challenges or difficulties that WP students might experience, when asked this overall question they were reluctant to state that WP students encounter more or particular issues compared with their peers. Others felt that they could not be definitive about this since they did not know which students are WP-indicated. As already noted, there was little systematic monitoring of students’ progress in relation to background factors including WP status:

‘... non WP  students may be having problems including family ones but I really feel I need to review the background of students coming to the […] committee to check this.’ Sr Personal Tutor

Responses tended to fall into three, sometimes, overlapping categories. One was that not all WP have particular issues or difficulties:

‘ the vast majority of WP students have the academic requirements, by no means all have problems’ Dean Pastoral care

‘Just because they’re LEAPS they can have straight ‘As’ so how useful is the categorisation?’ Senior lecturer

A second category of response was that other students as well as those who are WP indicated can have problems:

‘while different pockets of students might face certain issues, when you pick away at this, they might affect any student.’ Student support staff
‘...it’s a really pressurised environment, the WP issue isn’t as important as the individual response...how students deal with the pressure isn’t about being WP.’ Senior lecturer

A third type of response was that WP-indicated students may well experience more problems or do so on a more sustained basis with fewer resources or support on which to draw:

‘...not just the WP students but these sorts of problems are often particularly acute in these groups’ HOS

‘students from all socio-economic groups have problems but there may be assumptions being made about how much reserve students have to draw on to deal with the situation they have’ Sr Personal Tutor

Mental health issues, for example, were mentioned by staff in every School as a common problem for students regardless of their background but as was noted:

‘the waiting list for NHS psychology is year plus so it means a chunk of time off the course so students with parents who can afford to pay privately benefit, plus they have a nice home to recuperate in.’ Sr Personal Tutor

Several experienced members of staff highlighted the variation within the WP-indicated student group, suggesting that where the student is ‘from the extreme end of WP spectrum’ they may be likely have more and/or different problems:

‘... therefore various problems including mental health issues have greater prevalence...the social problems students present with can be concentrated in terms where students come from... poverty magnifies the problem’. HOS
Chapter 3. The institutional context

This chapter considers aspects of teaching, assessment and support more generally at the University of Edinburgh; these are not specific to WP-indicated students but are part of the environment they experience and the provision that they, as well as other students, can access.

Student support

The unanimous view amongst staff was that support should not be targeted at specific student groups but available to all; this underpinned the various developments and initiatives Schools were undertaking to support student performance and progression.

Considerable efforts were being made in all the Schools to develop study skills provision, albeit in different ways. It might be embedded into the compulsory courses for all students; expected to be taken by all; or offered to all students on a voluntary basis. Several Schools had appointed a specific member(s) of staff with an academic support remit and many staff also noted the growth in support material available to students on line. Some interviewees also mentioned the workshops and other provision of the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) but awareness of IAD was patchy: not all staff (even quite long-standing members), knew of its existence, or if they did, were aware of what it offers:

‘I’m having discussions with colleagues about offering essay writing workshops.... I don’t know whether IAD runs such workshops for undergraduates – if they do they need to publicise them better.’ Lecturer

The development of peer mentoring was more advanced in some Schools than others but the majority of Schools saw them as useful in helping to support students academically and in contributing to a sense of community.

Altogether Schools were putting a great deal of effort into creating a range of support but engagement and take-up by students was an issue commonly identified by interviewees, especially where provision was not embedded or not assessed and graded:

‘Even 21-year-olds who recognise that they will benefit still end up not attending workshops.’ Senior lecturer

‘They only have to pass study skills and research methods courses so they can be selective in how far to engage with content.’ Senior lecturer

In addition to the (perhaps) inevitable inertia of many students, part of the problem of take-up was that students can lack confidence or be reluctant to be seen to use support provision:

‘They need to ask questions, ask for help – this requires confidence.’ lecturer

‘The aim is to provide a minimum level [of support] for all but the problem is the ones who don’t take up provision... it’s not unique to disadvantaged students...students can feel using available provision is a sign of weakness’. Senior lecturer

Several Schools had embedded study skills in 1st year but this approach was not possible or difficult in other Schools, for example, in those where many students from other Schools access courses; this gives rise to questions about cross-School resourcing. There was considerable support for the strategy of making provision appear compulsory. Ensuring there were no timetabling classes could also help:
'If you think something will be of benefit, don’t give students a choice, tell them that they have to do it. You need to compel attendance or at least present it in such a way that it’s more hassle if they don’t go, for example, they have to go in to see their PT or course organiser to explain why they haven’t attended.’ Senior lecturer

‘Pals [peer learning scheme] isn’t compulsory but sold to students as if it were...it’s the first thing I suggest to students if they’re having problems.’ Student support staff

‘Drop-in sessions are voluntary but timetabled immediately after the tutorial group so students don’t need to hang about before they can attend the drop-in.’ Academic administrator.

In the two Schools which hand staff with a specific remit for the academic support of all students, their role involved teaching on the compulsory 1st year courses where study skills are embedded as well as being available for students to consult on an individual basis. It was suggested that this way of organising support means students are more aware of it and more inclined to use it because they are familiar with the staff through their teaching on the compulsory courses:

‘The way it operates means there’s a group of people visible to students, students know help is there.... it’s easier for them to approach me at the end of the practical and I can make an appointment.’ Student support staff

‘Losing the anonymity, that’s part of the support as well...other [Personal] Tutors students as well as my own come with queries so they obviously feel comfortable approaching me for advice.’ Student support staff

In line with University policy, Schools were developing feedback to students but take up, whether for essays, project work or exam scripts, was identified as a difficulty. Typically, staff commented that it is the higher achieving students who are more likely to seek feedback while those who would benefit most are more reluctant. This might be due to a lack of confidence or the desire to forget about a poor performance:

‘It’s the confident articulate students who come, most don’t, I would expect WP students to be reluctant.’ Senior lecturer

‘The take-up of students coming to staff for feedback is extraordinarily low...only if they’re getting 66/68% and want to get it to 70.’ Lecturer

Yet by seeking feedback, students might well improve their performance:

‘It’s often those between 40 – 50 who can benefit the most from feedback, if they tighten up their technique they can potentially get 10 marks more’. Lecturer

Some staff were unsure how students might be persuaded to take up the various opportunities for feedback:

‘It’s difficult to know how to encourage students to come – it’s on the website, they’re told in lectures. As a Personal Tutor I’ve written out with appointments but the people I really want to see don’t respond.’ Lecturer

Nevertheless, a number of staff identified certain factors that they thought might be contributing to low levels of take-up of feedback, at least in some Schools. These issues tended to be mentioned more often in the larger Schools and/or those with a high level of graduate students employed as tutors.

The staff-student relationship was perceived to be an important factor influencing the likelihood of students approaching staff for feedback, that is, whether students feel they know them. However, a
common comment was that a heavy workload and consequently limited time meant that staff did not get to know their students, especially in 1st and 2nd years:

‘It’s [low take-up] partly because staff don’t have time to chat to students so they don’t know staff.’ Lecturer

‘It would be good if academic staff had more time to chat and build up a relationship, even if only not having to dash off at the end of seminar or lecture...it does make a difference if you don’t have to run off.’ Senior lecturer

‘it’s extremely frustrating to be told about improving feedback when there is no time to do it...I’d like to do more feedforward but this takes time but it does make a difference.” Teaching Assistant

In several Schools, the move to anonymous marking was also perceived to have had a negative impact on feedback:

‘I support the principle of anonymity in allocation of marks but it’s a barrier to feedback. Staff can’t connect with what else they know about the student [it] currently means it’s up to students to ask feedback but they generally don’t...before if I was marking and thought a student had an issue I’d ask them to come and see me.’ Senior lecturer

‘Since school moved to anonymous marking, it requires the student to come along for feedback but those who really need it don’t come...you could have anonymised marking but tutors then find out the name to be able to give feedback.’ Teaching Fellow

Compulsory attendance for feedback was being discussed in several Schools but the feasibility of doing is questionable: would staff be able to cope if they had to provide feedback to all their students? Equally it was thought that to use the Personal Tutor system to deliver feedback would also raise serious workload issues.

Teaching in the Edinburgh context

Staff reinforced the importance of good teaching to students’ outcomes in general and to helping weaker students improve:

‘The role of the teacher is important ...if someone isn’t good at writing essays at the beginning, if they get good teaching, if the tutor takes the time and the student responds to feedback then they]can improve enormously...I’ve had students increase marks from 50 to 70.’ Lecturer

‘It’s possible to foster critical thinking in the classroom by the way one asks questions.’ Teaching Assistant

‘I’ve a checklist about the little things they can do to move one grade...it comes back to knowing different techniques to use and the value of training.’ Senior lecturer

In discussing teaching, a number of staff highlighted the critical importance of small group teaching in tutorials or studios, especially in first year when students are trying to make the transition to university study:

‘1st year tutorials are the life blood of an institution... it’s where you get students coming in from secondary school and you realise that’s where the articulation faults are, that’s where you can help the most find their feet.’ Teaching Fellow
For these staff, one of the most valuable features of small group teaching is that it enables them to respond to individual student needs:

‘Small-group teaching is vital for tailoring learning to individuals so it’s central to responding to WP students.’ Senior lecturer

Nevertheless, several interviewees were concerned that the continuation of such teaching is under pressure:

‘in [name of School ] there’s an emphasis on retaining small-group teaching but there’s an impatience with this from other parts of the University.’ Senior lecturer

One School had a distinctive way of organising their first year tutorials whereby students are generally allocated to academic tutorial groups taken by their Personal Tutor (allowing for any need for a specific disciplinary expertise). This system was seen as central to looking after students, aiding their transitions and helping to develop familiarity and connection between students and academic staff:

‘...it’s the best way to develop a bond, to settle students in and develop a good working relationship.’ Sr Personal Tutor

This system only operates in first year due to the increasing requirement for disciplinary specialisation in subsequent years but interviewees in the School believed that its strategy of allocating first year students to their Personal Tutor for academic tutorial(s) made a significant difference to students’ transition and subsequent progress. Whether this approach could be adopted in other Schools depends, among other factors, on established academic members of staff being involved in tutoring first year students, an issue discussed below.

Interviewees were asked about the importance and status of teaching within the University. In most Schools, staff expressed strong views on this: that while they and their colleagues gave serious attention to their teaching, it is not valued sufficiently at institutional level. The following quotes are typical:

‘Within the Department, it’s taken seriously and we discuss how we can make it better. Beyond this it’s not valued e.g. for promotion and teaching isn’t a marker for esteem indicators.’ Lecturer

‘There’s 100% effort by staff on teaching. But it’s not valued highly enough institutionally - in promotions and with current emphasis on research.’ Senior lecturer

The predominant view was that the University and senior management give higher priority to research than teaching as witnessed by the activities that count most for promotion, in recruitment decisions and in the increasing use of doctoral students as tutors:

‘The University’s first goals are about research and [this]affects decisions about who is hired and why. Concerns about teaching come down the list and students probably get the message that they are not the University’s top priority.’ Senior lecturer

‘it’s research that matters for taking one’s career forward here ...there is rhetoric that teaching is also important but everyone is clear that it’s research that counts’ Senior lecturer

The research agenda has taken away from the significance of teaching... the teaching awards are great but they’re ornamental and don’t lead anywhere.’ Lecturer
One Head of School commented on the impact on staff of being committed to teaching in an environment where they are expected to maintain their research profile:

‘...because staff are so committed to giving students a good teaching experience, their research has slipped a bit and they are very stressed’.

Several interviewees compared the position and status of teaching at the University of Edinburgh with their previous non-Russell Group institutions:

‘there’s no incentive at Edinburgh for staff to teach really well, teaching isn’t valued in contrast with [names previous institution]. Things related to teaching aren’t important for career progression... I’ve time management issues because I try to be innovative and responsive ....but the work load model doesn’t include time for experimenting and change.’ lecturer

‘there’s a different teaching ethos at [previous institution]... staff had to go on a lot of courses... they’re essential to how I teach now and to the different teaching approaches I can employ... they need to change the teaching culture here.’ Senior lecturer

Overall, staff thought that the status of teaching within the University had repercussions for students:

‘Although teaching is taken seriously, it comes behind research and this has implications for the student experience.’ Senior lecturer

‘A lot of the poor scores [in the National Student Survey] in terms of feedback and assessment are actually about not feeling valued as a student, that teaching is an add-on and research is much more important.’ Personal Tutor

Five of the eight Schools involved in the research made considerable use of hourly paid staff, often doctoral students, as academic tutors. This was especially the case in first and second years. Few interviewees opposed the employment of doctoral (or post-doctoral) students in principle, recognising their need for such experience and noting that some might be able to relate well to undergraduates given their age profile. Nevertheless, many in these Schools were concerned about the extent of the employment of hourly paid staff, the degree of training and support provided to them and their conditions of service. They pointed to negative consequences for the teaching and support of students, especially in the vital first years at university, as well as students’ lack of direct contact with established academics:

‘Seven years ago when I first came, it was more common for established staff to teach but with the increase in under -grad and post- grad numbers, the response has been to hire more hourly staff. Now 1st and 2nd years have less support and contact from academic staff. They’re taught by post grads or post docs and aren’t confident about approaching academic staff and feel removed from the Department.’ lecturer

‘The reliance on part-time tutors isn’t necessarily bad but there should be a body of staff in [names subject] to teach the subject, the University isn’t properly investing in teaching.’ Senior lecturer

Both the hourly paid tutors and some other interviewees acknowledged that in the last few years there has been more recognition of the need to train and support teaching assistants and some developments:

‘We have a good system for selecting, training and supporting the PG tutors...selection is not automatic, they are monitored and have their marking checked.’ Senior lecturer
Critically, however, the training of part-time tutors varied as did the extent to which they are integrated into the course team and monitored and supported by the course organiser: this was seen as having an impact on their effectiveness. These aspects appeared to differ both across and within Schools:

‘The training in this department is very good but a friend in [x] School had no training...but there’s no payment for the time spent on training...’ Teaching Assistant

‘This year the course organiser met with me before the start of term to cover specific points on the course I’m tutoring... but it depends on the course organiser, it’s not compulsory’. Teaching Assistant

‘I’m treated as part of the course team and my input is valued but this doesn’t happen in [names related subject area within the School].’ Teaching Assistant

‘TAs aren’t on all the staff mailing lists and can miss out on important emails ... I missed one recently about the marking of work of students with disabilities.’ Teaching Assistant

‘A lot [of TAs] take it seriously and are innovative but it depends on the conscientiousness of the supervisor or course organiser, it’s easy to do badly.’ lecturer

As well as discussing the impact on the teaching provided to the general student body, a number of staff thought that post graduate tutors were likely to lack the experience and skills to support students in difficulty:

‘It’s very difficult for young post grads with not that much life experience to realise some of the problems that some students may be having.’ lecturer

‘The casualisation of tutoring means that the University is not putting the resource into the support that’s needed re-widening access...the less advantaged [students] are especially disadvantaged by this arrangement.’ Senior lecturer

‘Some [students] will have support from family and friends so can get help to improve but others don’t have access to these resources...in an ideal world they could rely on the tutors but the tutors have difficulty supporting them.’ Senior lecturer

Certain aspects of their employment arrangements such as being hourly paid and lack of accommodation were also indentified as factors limiting their ability to support students having difficulty:

‘If a tutor is paid by [certain number of] hours they are under pressure to get the marking done rather than providing support for students having difficulty.’ Senior lecturer

‘PG accommodation is communal so it’s not possible to have a private discussion with students... you can book a room but it means no flexibility in timing and it can be difficult trying to deal with students’ problems and being interrupted all the time.’ Teaching Assistant

This chapter and the previous one have considered staff’s views on the challenges faced by some WP-indicated students (and indeed other students) and how the context of the University impacts on this. One issue identified was staff’s lack of awareness of WP-indicated students and the next chapter examines this further, in particular, how utilising better data - on WP-indicated students and more generally- can help the University improve students’ experiences and outcomes.
Chapter 4 The role of data in improving the student experience

This chapter considers the extent of information and data on WP-indicated students currently available, how it used and the views of staff views on its potential uses. Student data may seem a purely administrative matter but it is essential to understanding the nature of the student body, identifying where problems might lie and planning appropriate responses in relation to teaching, learning, assessment and support.

Lack of information on WP-indicated students

It became evident that WP-indicated students are not generally identified either at an aggregate level or on an individual basis in seven of the eight Schools in the research. A very large majority of staff interviewed were unaware of the proportion of widening participation students in their School or, indeed, the University as a whole. Most Personal Tutors did not know whether or not their tutees were WP-indicated unless a particular student had informed them; similarly most academic staff were not aware of the status of students they taught apart from the occasional student who might have mentioned this.

In addition, there was very considerable uncertainty among staff about whether, in fact, such information exists and is available to them, for example, whether there is data in Euclid or EEMECs that they could access to find out if a student has WP status and the nature and extent of any such data. Only a small minority of staff knew that they could access a range of relevant information in Euclid including students’ entry qualifications, prior institution attended, home address, participation in one of the initiatives such as LEAPS and receipt of certain bursaries so they could check the student’s status or run reports. This was one of the areas where the research was helping to raise awareness.

Of course, the key issue is whether WP-indicated students should be identified and there were different views on this in the interviews. In considering the issue it is necessary to distinguish between aggregate level data where individuals are not identified and individual level information which does identify the individual student. Equally it is important to consider the different purposes that each types of data can be used for. These include:

i. Informing Schools about the composition and diversity of their student body; aggregate level data, individuals not identified

ii. Schools and programmes using data administratively to monitor student outcomes in relation to student characteristics; aggregate level data, individuals not identified

iii. using data to inform decisions about the allocation of students to Personal Tutors. Individuals’ status identified but restricted eg to Senior Personal Tutor and Academic Administrator

iv. informing Personal Tutors about the status of their tutees when allocated. Individuals’ status identified but restricted eg to Senior Personal Tutor, Academic Administrator and the individual’s Personal Tutor

v. Personal Tutors (and possibly other staff) being able to easily check a student’s status on EUCLID or other relevant system. Individuals’ status more widely identified but with some restrictions.
(i) Informing Schools about the composition and diversity of their student body

As already stated, interviewees generally did not know the proportion of WP-indicated students in their School and therefore were not aware of the diversity of their student body. I had requested information on the numbers and percentages of WP-indicated students in each of the Schools taking part in the research from Widening Participation team in Student Recruitment and Admission as background information before starting the interviews with staff. I had assumed that this information would be known in all the Schools, at least by senior academic and administrative staff. This was not the case: two Schools had quite a lot of information although partial while the others did not.

In two Schools, one of the senior administrators requested information each year from the College central admissions team and/or Student Recruitment and Admissions on the number of entrants who had participated in one of the WP initiatives such as LEAPS, Pathways or Swap but they did not have comprehensive data on all WP-indicated entrants. Several administrative staff would have welcomed more precise information:

‘The information from College this year only indicated whether entrants are “LEAPS eligible”...this is meaningless...we don’t know whether they were actually admitted via contextualised admissions or they just took part in LEAPS or Pathways ‘ Academic administrator

The six other Schools did not have data on the number of WP-indicated students and did not know the proportion they made up of their student body. A large majority of staff were surprised at the proportion of WP students in their School, guessing a lower figure than was the case.

The general reaction from staff interviewed was that they would find the data that I had extremely useful, and a substantial proportion asked me for a copy. As one Head of School commented ‘I never get that [information]’ while another remarked ‘it would be an excellent idea if Schools were given this’.

Several staff pointed out that they had sought data on widening participation students or other information such as the proportion of Scottish domiciled students in their School but had not been successful:

‘They haven’t been able to sort it out.’ Senior lecturer

‘Trying to get information [on students] can be excruciatingly hard.’ Student support staff

‘It’s very difficult to get clear information from this College... there is a little bit of stuff that’s drifting through but it’s not terribly good around who’s been admitted.’ Personal Tutor

A number of those most familiar with Euclid questioned the accuracy of the data held on it and its completeness.

Overall, interviewees supported the idea of Schools receiving a breakdown each year of the composition of their student body across their various programmes so that staff could have an overview of the nature and diversity of their students. It was felt that such information should not be restricted to WP-indicated status which is only one of a range of student characteristics of interest in the context of an increasingly diverse student population. The growing diversity was a feature that staff remarked on and the extent to which they perceived that their student cohort had changed in recent years, for example, with a higher proportion of RUK students, and/or international students but noted that they lacked detailed figures on this. As one member of staff commented:

‘It’s about knowing the different pockets of students... recognising student diversity in all respects and some of the issues they might face.’ Student support staff
Knowing the overall percentage of WP-indicated entrants was very much perceived as part of having a more accurate picture of the nature and diversity of their total student body.

(ii) Using data administratively to monitor student outcomes in relation to student characteristics

Lack of systematic monitoring

There appeared to be little systematic monitoring in most Schools of students’ progression and outcomes in relation to widening participation status or, indeed, any other student characteristics. In a context where Schools are concerned about failing students and failure to progress, such monitoring would provide very useful information. However, most of the Schools involved in the study did not examine student outcomes in relation to their status:

‘Failure to progress is a major issue for the School….Admissions do send information on whether new entrants are LEAPS entrants but we haven’t done anything with this [re monitoring performance].’ Academic administrator

Only a very few of the staff interviewed had run reports on EUCLID to check about a student or tutee when they had some concern about the individual, for example, to find out their entry qualifications, home location, school or college attended previously. In several Schools, it was felt that WP-indicated students were more likely to go through special circumstances or come to progression committees but this was based on perception or the case of a specific student rather than any more systematic evidence.

One School had gone further by investigating whether there were certain categories of students more likely to experience difficulties in progression and found that Access and LEAPS students as well as direct entrants and those coming from 5th year at School were more likely to have problems. This had informed the School’s practice in several respects including allocating LEAPS and Access students to more experienced Personal Tutors:

‘I decided to try and provide a better experience for these students…so I allocated them to people who understood the Scottish education system, and so understood the qualifications that they had or hadn’t done…and used PTs who would be more willing to keep a track of their progress.’ Academic administrator

It might be noted that in doing so the School only identified Access and LEAPS students and not all WP-indicated entrants.

The need for improvements to the data

It was clear, however, that there are major issues with the data itself that seriously inhibit Schools from monitoring the progress and outcomes of their students. In one School a member of staff trying to examine student failure rates was being hampered because, as he commented the data “is unwieldy”. In another School, because of the way that information is recorded in the admissions process, students are sometimes not flagged in the correct way so that it was difficult to have an overall picture of entrants:

“"We’ve never got a simple straightforward answer of how many WP students have come in because there is [sic] all sorts of different ways of recording that information and looking at it". Personal Tutor

This School had previously carried out a tracking study of the retention and performance of WP-indicated students because it had found that a disproportionate number of the students coming to
special circumstances committee were WP-indicated. The School had found this to be a complex, time-consuming and difficult exercise. It had proved to be far more work than expected to get the necessary data together, requiring the staff concerned to go into individual student records manually. It was extremely difficult to track retention and performance across each year of a student’s degree programme, with the need to take account of students having authorised interruptions, taking resets, repeating years or taking a part-time catch up year.

The problems that this School had encountered mirror those that the quantitative study by Croxford et al carried out for REACH had experienced. Issues included lack of certain data, the way in which the data is collected and managed and the extent of work that is required to manipulate the data into a format to make analysis possible, in particular, to enable longitudinal analysis tracking student retention and performance across each year.

This tracking study, however, had provided important evidence that had helped change opinion in the School about widening participation.

If Schools are to undertake systematic monitoring of students’ progression and outcomes, this requires significant improvement in the accessibility and comprehensiveness of the student data. As one Head of School commented:

‘It’s a lot of work to get the information then to get it into a usable form to do analysis…if the University systems were better… it’s the data management and the data they collect, someone could do a better job.’ HOS

Which are the most important WP Indicators?

Only a minority of interviewees were aware of the full range of WP indicators used as part of the contextualised admissions process. Among those who did, a question that emerged was whether certain of the indicators are more relevant than others in respect of students’ likely progress and outcomes. It was suggested that data on student progress and attainment should be broken down by individual WP indicators:

‘I wouldn’t expect all WP students to behave the same way.’ HTO

‘Is it coming from a deprived background or being first in family that makes the difference?’

Student support staff

The quantitative research by Croxford et al on student progression, suggested that of the WP indicators, the two most significant ones were: coming from an area with a high level of deprivation (SIMD) and having attended a school from which a low proportion of leavers go on to higher education (Croxford et al 2013). It would be timely to update this analysis and investigate whether these remain the most important factors.

The value of a systematic monitoring

Most staff interviewed saw the value of a more systematic and regular monitoring of student outcomes by a range of characteristics. Senior academics and academic administrative staff were most likely to be interested in such a strategy, recognising the value of such data in providing insights into issues and informing their decisions:

“It would be fascinating to be able to map, particularly at the end of our first year and current end of second-year, which of the students are WP -indicated since it may help to explain a number of issues”. HOS
‘To have the facts even if they are not what one hoped for, and then dealing with it, this is what makes the difference’ HOS

Staff were anxious that any such system should not be limited to the identification and monitoring of WP-indicated students but should include other student characteristics such as gender, race, disability, entrants from 5th year at school, direct entrants and EU and international students.

Similarly, staff thought that while better aggregate level data on WP-indicated students would be useful, it should not be used to develop special provision only for them which would be stigmatising and potentially isolating:

‘Some might find it [special provision] helpful but others “insulting”, they would feel they’ve got past being thought of as LEAPS student.’ Senior lecturer

‘It’s intentional by the School not to single out WP students, we want them to mix with others… students learn by mixing.’ Senior lecturer

Moreover, if the support in question was deemed to be useful, it should be available to all students:

‘I’m not a fan of special activities, if it’s worth giving it should be offered to everyone.’ Senior lecturer

A common view was that a more appropriate strategy is for the Personal Tutor to highlight provision to WP-indicated students and encourage them to take up relevant opportunities that are on offer:

‘The University is here to give the same education to all but if we’re taking in the students from these backgrounds then we have a duty to be aware of this …but certainly not to isolate them – we want them integrated, not to offer sessions for WP students – like a remedial class! Whatever is done needs to be offered to all but the way to target it is through PTs, they could give them an extra push and encourage them to take up whatever is on offer without being isolated as a group, this is absolutely the last thing that’s needed!’ Student support staff

‘Maybe PTs could do more to help WP students make the jump from 2:2 to 2:1 or 1st they could encourage them even more to access available resources.’ Lecturer

(iii) using data to inform decisions about the allocation of students to Personal Tutors

Overall, the staff interviewed supported developments that would provide better, more easily accessible data on students and their various characteristics but their reactions were more mixed when asked about the provision and use of data on individual students. One possible use of individual data is in making decisions about the allocation of students to Personal Tutors – of relevance since Personal Tutors are the staff members most likely to have an overview of students’ progress and in a position to encourage and support them.

Three Schools already used information such as students’ participation in LEAPS or Access programmes or entry with minimum qualifications to inform their allocation to Personal Tutors. This was done on a fairly informal basis with decisions made by the academic administrator on the basis of how ‘student oriented’ and ‘easy to interact with’ the member of staff was seen to be as well as their familiarity with the Scottish state secondary education system. In at least one of these Schools, the Personal Tutors concerned were informed of the students’ WP status.
Opinion among staff was divided on the merits of such an approach but it was also evident that most of the Schools did operate, albeit informally, some degree of targeting when allocating students to Personal Tutors, for example, in respect of international students or, as one Senior Tutor noted:

‘We already allocate sensitive students to certain Personal Tutors.... there’s already quite a lot of moving around of Personal Tutors for the very delicate ones.’

It seemed that although staff were happy with these more ad hoc arrangements, some were less sure about making it explicit and formalising such an approach.

Nevertheless there was interest in two Schools in exploring the approach:

‘I’m happy to put this on the agenda of the PT end of year review and maybe experiment with it next year.’ Senior Tutor

(iv) informing Personal Tutors about the status of their tutees

and

(v) enabling Personal Tutors (and possibly other staff) to easily check a student’s status.

These were the issues that generated the most debate and aroused the strongest responses from staff in terms of the use of data. It is worth noting that some of those initially against the idea, saw some merit in it after discussion or concluded that it should be further debated.

A common response among those against identifying a student’s WP status was simply that having been accepted for entry they should not be treated any differently from other students:

‘They are all our students when they are here.’ Senior lecturer

‘In what way we would you treat them differently? You’re trying to help all students.’ Senior lecturer

‘As Personal Tutor I try not to look at where people have come from so that everyone gets the same steer.’ Lecturer

But other staff questioned this standpoint:

‘There’s a view of equity that all students are treated the same but if we accept a more diverse range [of students], it’s about what the University can do to provide support to enable them to achieve their potential.’ Senior lecturer

Many of those opposed to WP-indicated students being identified as such to their Personal Tutors were concerned about the danger of labelling and separating them out from the main student body:

‘There’s a danger of labelling especially when LEAPS covers a very wide range of ability.’ HTO

‘They are students not the ‘widening participation students’‘. Sr Tutor

‘People often don’t realise it [WP] encompasses a very wide range of ability, some people might take the wrong interpretation of the label.’ HOS
In discussing the possible risks of labelling WP-indicated students, the point was made that we all make quick judgements about people on a more or less conscious basis so it can be useful to be more explicit:

‘It is labelling but can be very helpful... Sometimes open categorisation can help counteract intuitive or implicit assessments.... It makes explicit what is happening anyway.... If you think about the labels you are giving to different groups, then you are not unconsciously doing certain things.... you may not let it affect you in the same way [if explicit].’ lecturer

This is a very pertinent point - in the absence of official information about students’ WP status, it was common for interviewees when asked about widening participation to make certain assumptions about the characteristics of a WP-indicated student. Typically WP status was conflated with attendance at a Scottish comprehensive secondary school or it was assumed from students’ appearance or accent that they were likely to be WP indicated.

Another type of response from some staff was that information on a student’s WP status is, in any case, unnecessary since a good teacher or tutor should be able to respond appropriately to the individual in question:

‘A good teacher shouldn’t have to know the student’s background... they should be reacting to how the person is behaving.’ Teaching Assistant

‘I hope that I can assess how much assistance someone needs and I wouldn’t want to presume that someone from a certain background needs help.’ Senior lecturer

Other staff, however, did support the idea of Personal Tutors being informed of their students’ WP status or being able to see this easily on EUCLID. A few said that if they had students experiencing difficulties they sometimes checked their entry qualification and school attended and could ‘read between the lines’ if they were WP-indicated. Others, however, were not aware of this possibility or found the system cumbersome and so would welcome a specific WP flag. A related issue, discussed below, is what would be the most useful indicators for any such flag to include.

The interviewees who were in favour of knowing if students are WP-indicated were very clear that it is not about singling them out in any way, or making assumptions about their abilities, but in raising their awareness that this might be a relevant factor and ‘as something just to bear in mind’:

‘More information would be useful but I wouldn’t want to prejudice someone but I could tailor advice more if an issue did emerge.’ HOS

‘if I knew ... I might be more attentive to certain issues like their expectations of University, what it’s like to be a university student.’ Senior lecturer

‘If [Personal Tutors] were informed of students’ status it would make them more aware from the beginning that maybe these students need more pointing in the direction of available resources... encourage them to take part in peer group learning, how to approach academics ...tho all students need prodding.’ Student support staff

‘It would be better to be aware of it...I might not spot something or appreciate that there was more behind something because the student was diffident.. it may be possible to be able to help the student without spelling it out. It may make me more aware if someone is making an excuse that doesn’t add up, then I could tactfully try and manage the situation.’ HOS
A number of staff highlighted the fact that WP-indicated students entering from school are not visible in the way that some other student groups are and so a flag would alert Personal Tutors to the possible need to adapt their approach and advice to meet the individual student’s situation:

’Some issues are obvious, if English is a second language then the tutor knows they might have to explain certain things more, but other issues may be hidden.’ HOS

‘The LEAPS students are not so obvious [as mature students]... they come through the school system so they don’t stand out to me....as a Personal Tutor it would be helpful to know all LEAPS students so I can keep an eye on them and pre-empt things a little.’ HTO

The staff who were in favour of a WP flag in EUCLID were overwhelmingly of the view that this should not be obvious to the students and were very clear that access to this information should be restricted to certain staff such as their Personal Tutor, senior tutor and student support.

In discussing the question of how much information Personal Tutors should have about their students, several drew attention to the fact that they now have less under the Personal Tutor system than under the previous Director of Studies arrangements. These interviewees commented that as a Director of Studies they had routinely received a paper copy of their students’ UCAS application and so were more aware of their background. This was useful, for example, one Head of School recounted the instance of knowing from the UCAS information that a student had previously suffered from anorexia and was therefore alert to the fact she might have confidence issues. The staff concerned did not know why they no longer received a copy of the UCAS application and would welcome the reintroduction of this:

‘This information [on UCAS form], their interests, school and geographical information, can be basis for a conversation in the introductory meeting as PT, it’s more welcoming.’ HTO.

The training of Personal Tutors

Much of the discussion about the identification of the WP status of individual students was focused on whether or not their Personal Tutors should know or be able to readily find out. This led some of the Heads of School, senior tutors and academic administrators interviewed to wonder how best to raise awareness about widening participation with Personal Tutors and how far to sensitise them to the possible issues that some WP-indicated students might face. Overall, it seems that WP is not covered in the training for Personal Tutors, at most mention might be made of the University’s and possibly also the School’s policy on widening participation but no information is made available about the number of WP–indicated students in the School or consideration given to any implications for their role as Personal Tutors. In discussing this, senior staff were concerned about the risk of stereotyping WP-indicated students and leading Personal Tutors to make assumptions or use it as an excuse for any difficulty. Discussing this, several suggested that a helpful strategy with Personal Tutors (and other staff) would be to set the issue of WP within the context of student diversity more generally, the wide range of issues and pressures that students now face and, therefore, the need for staff to be aware of this.

Certainly, any changes by which Personal Tutors would be told about or able to check their tutees’ WP status would make additional training essential:

‘But it would need to be accompanied by training so that PTs don’t simply use this [WP status] as the reason for any issue.’ Sr tutor
Irrespective of whether there are developments about the information Personal Tutors have on the status of their tutees, these senior staff wondered if their School should do more as part of their current training and development. They were interested to know the approach being taken in other Schools and very open to the idea of discussing the issue and perhaps trying out different approaches.
Chapter 5 Conclusions and recommendations

Whether or not WP-indicated students encounter more or different issues than traditional entry students is not the issue, more relevant is that a proportion of them and some other students are likely to experience challenges in their university life due to a number of factors that have been described in this report. These challenges may mean that they are less likely to achieve their potential. A successful widening participation policy therefore needs to go beyond the admissions stage.

Individual factors

The report has given some insight into some of the factors that are likely to be inhibiting success: a lack of confidence; feeling out of place and difficulty integrating; being less familiar with the expectations of university study; having less social and cultural capital on which to draw as well as less practical support. Other aspects such as the time spent commuting if living at home or in part-time work (especially if to contribute to family finances) may also have an impact on their progress. These are all issues that have been identified in a range of other research in the UK and elsewhere as having a negative effect on the experience and outcomes of non-traditional students in higher education. In the specific context of a Scottish University, another important factor is that WP-indicated students are more likely to have entered university with qualifications at Higher (SCQF level 6) rather than Advanced Higher or A level (level 7), both of which are perceived as offering a better preparation for university study.

Considering these factors against staff’s description of what makes a successful student one can see why some WP-indicated students may well encounter challenges and be less likely to achieve a good degree.

Institutional factors

It is essential to recognise that individual factors are only part of the explanation as to why the outcomes of some WP-indicated students were found to be less positive than expected (Croxford et al 2012). The other part is the institutional context, aspects of which may not be helping some WP-indicated students or indeed many other students to achieve their potential. Even the issue of entering with Highers rather than Advanced Higher - an individual factor- has an institutional dimension in that the University has to decide how it should respond to the range of qualifications that entrants have. While the University does not require Advanced Highers in admissions (other than Medicine and Veterinary Medicine), entering with only Highers is associated with poorer outcomes which raises the question how should the University respond to this.

Certain aspects of the teaching environment at the University of Edinburgh may be inhibiting the performance of WP-indicated students. These stem partly from the apparent lack of status of teaching compared with the importance accorded to research and the considerable use of hourly paid staff, often doctoral students, as academic tutors and their conditions of employment. The staff-student relationship is critical to student engagement and success but achieving a good relationship was seen as being undermined by heavy staff workloads.

Considerable efforts were being made in all the Schools to develop feedback and academic support for students and the University has invested in a new student support and Personal Tutor system to improve the student experience. In practice, the system tends to focus on students with problems and/or at risk of failing and is not able to identify and support those who are ‘getting by’ but who could do better; in the case of WP-indicated student those who could achieve their potential and gain more than a 2:2 degree. The move to anonymised marking was identified as inhibiting feedback to students.
Lack of information and awareness

Staff were supportive of the University’s commitment to widening participation but their awareness and knowledge was very varied and often limited. Most commonly it was taken to refer to specific initiatives, in particular, the LEAPS scheme and/or Access and Swap courses.

The University’s commitment to widening participation was generally perceived as being focused on pre-entry activities and the admissions stage; few saw it as an on-going process.

This is reflected in the fact that information about WP and the WP status of students did not figure in the operation of most Schools. A very large majority of staff were unaware of the proportion of WP students in their School, most Personal Tutors did not know whether their tutees were WP-indicated; and similarly most academic staff were generally not aware of the status of the students they taught. WP-indicated students were not identified either at an aggregate level or on an individual basis in seven of the eight Schools in the research. There appeared to be little systematic, regular monitoring in most Schools of students’ progression and outcomes in relation to widening participation status or, indeed, any other student characteristics.

While several Schools did take some account of WP factors in deciding on the allocation of students to Personal Tutors, this was on an informal basis and other Schools did not do so. The topic of widening participation and possible implications for their work did not feature in the training for Personal Tutors.

Increased awareness amongst all staff about widening participation and WP-indicated students in the context of the increasingly diverse nature of the student body should be the basic starting point to help improve the experience not only of WP-indicated students but students more generally. Unless staff have an accurate picture of the composition of their student body they are unlikely to be able to be fully responsive to all their students. For example, while it might be obvious to staff that they cannot make assumptions about the cultural and language awareness of many international students, this is not obvious in the case of young WP-indicated students – knowing the proportion of WP-indicated students in their department or School would therefore be helpful. During the research, it was common for interviewees to request a copy of the data I had on the WP status and domicile of students in their School. Schools should be provided with an overview of the characteristics of entrants each year, not only of their WP status but also including other characteristics such as gender, race, disability, entry qualifications, entrants from 5th year at school, direct entrants and EU and international students to provide an overview of the nature and diversity of entrants.

The consensus was that part-time work is the norm for students but the University does not have any data on the incidence of such employment or on students’ working hours. This is important information, research has demonstrated that employment rates are higher than the average for students who live at home, who come from lower socio-economic groups and also those whose entry qualifications were Highers (Carnery et al 2005; Callender 2008). These studies highlight the different reasons among students for working part-time work: students from the lowest social classes were more likely than others from the highest social classes to do so because their families could not support them financially (Callender 2008). This research also demonstrates the negative impact of at least some part-time employment on degree results and that this has longer-term consequences on students’ employment prospects (Purcell 2005). The University needs to know more about the extent of part-time employment (especially during term–time). It needs to collect data on this and examine if certain students are working to a disproportionate extent. This would provide the basis for discussion of how the University might respond, for example, whether there should be changes to current teaching and assessment scheduling if it is found that certain groups of students are systematically disadvantaged by the impact of their part-time employment.
Lack of systematic, regular monitoring of students’ progression and outcomes

There was little systematic, regular monitoring of students’ progression and outcomes in relation to WP status or other student characteristics but where two Schools had done so (on an ad hoc basis), the results had been extremely enlightening and useful in practice. Carrying out such regular monitoring matters. Without this Schools and the University lack insight into the progress and performance of different groups of students, the extent to which provision and practice is meeting the needs of all students or whether certain students are systematically performing less well than others. However, better data is required to allow Schools to carry out regular monitoring. Improvements to data are even more necessary to enable Schools to conduct longitudinal tracking of student retention and performance across each year of their degree to their eventual degree outcome. The research points to a need to improve the comprehensiveness and accuracy of student data as well as the way it is collected and managed so that it can be readily accessible for Schools to use for monitoring and tracking purposes. Schools should be asked to carry out annual monitoring of student progress in respect of a number of key student characteristics.

The role of Personal Tutors

The Personal Tutor was seen as the person in the best position to be able to support WP-indicated students, perhaps by providing extra guidance if the student is first in his/her family to attend university, or by encouraging him/her to take up academic development support provision or opportunities to help them integrate with other students. Personal Tutors were also viewed as the member of staff most in the position, at least in theory, to have an overview of students’ progress and therefore to be able to encourage those who are ‘getting by’ but who could achieve more.

However, the question of whether in practice they have the time to do so was raised and this is an issue that should be looked at in the staff workload model and in determining their caseloads. Certainly the issue of student diversity- including widening participation- and the implications for their role should be included in the training of Personal Tutors. Whether students’ WP status should be taken into account in decisions about which Personal Tutor they should be assigned to is something that all Schools should be asked to consider.

The question of Personal Tutors being routinely informed of the WP status of their tutees or being able to easily check this aroused considerable debate among staff in the study. It is notable that some of those initially against this idea were more prepared to consider it as a possibility after discussing how it might be done and the likely benefits of doing so.

It is also relevant to note that while a common objection was wishing not to ‘label’ students, in the absence of knowledge about students’ WP status some staff were making assumptions about this based on whether the student had attended a Scottish comprehensive school or from his/her accent and appearance. This reveals a degree of stereotyping about widening participation and WP-indicated students and reinforces the need for accurate information and awareness raising. It would be useful if the University and Schools consulted on the question of identifying WP-indicated students to their Personal Tutors and/or including a flag in EUCLID or other relevant system that certain members of staff would be able to access.

It was pointed out that under the previous Director of Studies system, Directors received a copy of their students’ UCAS application which provided them with useful background information on all of their students. Could this arrangement be reinstated?
The importance of the everyday teaching and learning experience

The importance of the everyday teaching and learning experience to students’ progress and especially small group teaching emerges from the research. Small group teaching is where staff can respond and adapt to meet the needs of individual students – clearly of central importance in relation to widening participation but also to the experience of all students. Additional academic and other support provision has a valuable role to play but it is the everyday teaching experience of students that is likely to be most influential on their progress and outcomes. This is where the apparent lack of status accorded to teaching at the University becomes relevant. An experienced member of staff interviewed in the study commented:

‘There’s got to be a re-think in the University about how to maintain research excellence and how to retain world-class undergraduate teachers, whether this is post grad or staff.’

This may be strongly stated but it captures a feeling expressed by many interviewees. There are different aspects to such a re-think such as the relative importance given to research and teaching activities for promotion and career prospects, the workload model and training. Several staff who had previously worked at non-Russell Group institutions pointed to their quite extensive training in different methodologies and the value of having a repertoire of skills and techniques to draw on to respond to the particular nature of their different teaching groups.

A key element of a review of teaching in the University is consideration of what constitutes the optimum use of hourly paid staff rather than established academics in tutoring. Although there have been developments in the training and support of hourly paid staff, including post-graduate students, their situation varies considerably within and across Schools. The research suggests both a need to assess what is the best balance of hourly paid and established staff in teaching and also improvements in the recruitment, training, monitoring and support of hourly paid tutors. For example, should training be compulsory but with payment (perhaps at a reduced level) for attendance and achievement? Payment for all aspects of tutoring ie preparation and marking as well as teaching should be considered. This could be done as part of a College-wide if not University-wide approach to the employment, training, monitoring and support of hourly paid, including post graduates as a way of addressing the current variation.

Critical time points

First and third years were identified as critical time points for many students. While all students find the transition to university challenging, the research has identified a number of factors that are likely to make 1st year more challenging for some WP-indicated students.

This gives further weight to the need to make sure that students’ teaching and learning experience in 1st year is as positive as possible. One interviewees described 1st year tutorials as ‘the life blood of an institution’ which provides the opportunity to ‘help the most find their feet’. Yet it is in 1st year (and also 2nd year) that students are most likely to have hourly paid staff as their tutors rather than established academics. This is not to suggest that these staff necessarily do a bad job or that they should not be employed but rather that their conditions of employment inhibit how well they can do their job. One response is to improve their position as suggested in the previous paragraph. But other strategies are possible to ensure WP-indicated and other students make a successful transition and have a solid basis from which to build. In one School, for example, in 1st year students are allocated to academic tutorial groups taken by their Personal Tutor to aid their transitions and develop familiarity and connection between students and academic staff. Could such an approach be used in other Schools? It certainly would require more established academic staff to be involved in 1st year tutoring than is currently the case in some Schools.
Third year was the other critical year identified: this is particularly relevant in relation to a key finding of the quantitative study of the outcomes of WP-indicated students that, on average, they are more likely to obtain a class 2:2 degree (Croxford et al 2013). It may be the case that some WP-indicated students may have difficulty in responding to the jump in demand in 3rd year. The current focus of attention in respect of widening participation is at the pre-entry and admissions stage, consideration of the situation of (some) WP-indicated students at the 3rd year stage is rare but is an area that is worth exploring. One response might be that Personal Tutors could make a point of encouraging students at the beginning of 3rd year to take up opportunities for feedback or to make use of the various workshops and courses on offer. Another strategy might be for Schools to provide an induction to 3rd year for all students.

The issues raised and the suggestions put forward in this chapter arise from a study of WP-indicated students but they are relevant to the general student body. The position and experience of WP-indicated students throw into sharp relief some of the limitations of the current system of teaching, learning and support and improvements will benefit all students: an outcome that other research has documented.

**Summary of proposals/recommendations**

1. There is a need to recognise both the individual and institutional factors influencing WP-indicated students’ progress and outcomes.

2. The University should consider how best to support students entering with only Highers (SCQF level 6).

3. Staff awareness and understanding of WP needs to be improved, especially to highlight it as an on-going strategic commitment. As part of this Schools should be provided annually with data giving an overview of the characteristics of entrants, including WP status but also other student characteristics.

4. There is a need to improve the collection, comprehensiveness and accuracy of student data to enable Schools to use it for monitoring and tracking purposes.

5. Schools should be asked to carry out annual monitoring of student progress in respect of a number of key student characteristics including WP status.

6. The training of Personal Tutors should cover issues of student diversity, including WP, and the implications for their work.

7. The University and Schools should consider whether students’ WP status should be taken into account in decisions about allocation to Personal Tutor.

8. The University and Schools should consider whether Personal Tutors should routinely be informed of the WP status of their tutees or able to easily check this in EUCLID (or other system). Any decision to do so would need to be accompanied by information, advice and guidance to support appropriate use of such data.
9. Personal Tutors should have easy access to their students’ UCAS application.

10. Schools should consider how to develop support for WP-indicated and other students at critical time points such as at induction, during 1st year and the move into 3rd year.

11. In its review of teaching, the University should consider what constitutes the optimum use of hourly paid staff rather than established academics in tutoring.

12. Improvements in the recruitment, training, monitoring and support of hourly paid tutors are required to achieve better and more consistent provision across all Schools.

13. It would be useful to collect data specific to the University of Edinburgh on the extent of students’ part-time work and examine the impact of part-time work on the progress and outcomes of different student groups.

14. The earlier quantitative research on WP-indicated students’ progress and outcomes should be updated.
References


Appendix 1 Widening Participation (WP) at the University of Edinburgh.

Widening Participation (WP) to higher education is a strategic priority for the UK and Scottish governments, the higher education sector in general and the University of Edinburgh in particular. WP aims to address the discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different social groups.

The University therefore works to raise aspirations and educational attainment among prospective students from under-represented groups, to:

- prepare them for higher education
- ensure success on their programme of study
- improve their employment prospects
- open possibilities for postgraduate study
- give them opportunities to return to learning throughout their lives

it is aimed at:

- Under-represented groups:
  - lower socio-economic groups
  - low-participation Schools and neighbourhoods

The University is engaged with prospective students, their families and advisers in a wide range of Widening Participation awareness and aspiration raising projects and activities aimed at students who are:

- first generation to consider higher education
- from low socio-economic groups
- attending Schools of low progression
- living in low-participation neighbourhoods
- mature students from the above groups

The University of Edinburgh believes that diversity is educationally as well as socially desirable, enriching the educational experience for all. It therefore seek to attract a wide range of applicants from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds.

The University works with schools or colleges where relatively few students progress to higher education and those who will be first generation of their families to go to university.

The University has developed a range of WP activities and projects including LEAPS and Pathways to the Professions.

Contextual admissions

The University recognises that applicants have differing backgrounds and experiences and that not everyone has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their potential with their school or college qualifications alone.
For this reason the University considers certain data and information in its selection process to help identify applicants whose academic grades to date may not be a true reflection of their potential to succeed at the University.

This is known as contextual admissions as it enables admissions staff to consider achievements in the context of whether an applicant:

- attends a school in the UK where the level of performance in examinations is below the average
- is a care leaver
- has participated in a recognised access programme such as Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), the School for Higher Education Programme (SHEP), or the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP)
- lives in an area of relative deprivation as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation or ACORN UK postcode data

Even for programmes in high demand, some applicants to whom contextual information applies may therefore receive an offer at the minimum entry requirement.

A briefing explaining contextualised admission at the University is available at: http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.149028!/fileManager/201408%20Contextual%20Data%20briefing.pdf

**Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS)**

LEAPS is an outreach Schools programme aimed at raising awareness of opportunities in higher education. It was developed from the University of Edinburgh’s University Special Entrance Initiative (USE) in 1995 to become a collaborative partnership with the other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Edinburgh and the four local authorities in Edinburgh and the Lothians who also fund the project from core funds.

LEAPS promotes higher education amongst young people whose School careers have been affected by adverse economic or social circumstances or who come from communities with little or no experience of higher education.

It comprises an outreach Schools programme aimed at raising awareness of opportunities in higher education (HE), with different elements of the programme offered to Schools according to their designation as group 1 (lowest HE participation) to group 2 (higher HE participation); and a pre-entry summer School.

The summer School is genuinely multi-exit and students progress not only to partner HEIs but to HEIs all over Scotland and beyond.

The universities Widening Participation staff recruit student volunteers, contribute to School workshops, shadowing, interviews and committees as well as organising on-campus activities on behalf of LEAPS.

In S6, LEAPS and Pathways to the Professions integrate re pre-application guidance and admissions liaison.

LEAPS has received South East Forum and Scottish Funding Council funding to expand into Scottish Borders and Forth Valley.
Pathways to the Professions

The project encourages progression by under-represented School students into professional courses in Law, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Architecture.

All students from the 46 local secondary Schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians are eligible to register with Pathways. Over 500 School students are registered, from S4 to S6.

Some elements of the programme are available only to Pathways Plus students who are students whose parents or carers have not previously attended university.