



Progression to Postgraduate Study at LU 2021-22 Project Report¹

Project Name: Progression to Postgraduate Study at LU (PPS LU)

Project Lead: Dr Ann-Marie Houghton

Staffing: **Researcher:** Dr Jo Armstrong;

Postgraduate Researcher Helpers: Ross Dalziel; Lorrae Fox; Yemi Oluwaleye; Andrew White

Briefing Papers and presentations:

1. An Overview of PPS LU
2. Reviewing provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in your department
3. Presentation by PG Research Helpers Lorrae Fox and Yemi Oluwaleye recording and slides (available upon request)
4. Presentation of initial findings by Jo Armstrong (18.8.2022) recording and slides (available upon request).

Additional Outputs

The following resources will support future aspects of the project and will be made available to the wider WPAG Forum to reduce the time spent reinventing the wheel and to add to the resource bank that can be used by future projects.

1. Undergraduate online survey and interview schedule
2. Postgraduate online survey and interview schedule
3. Student (undergraduate and postgraduate) information sheets regarding research process
4. Staff information sheets which will be used during 2022-23
5. List of references which other projects exploring progression to postgraduate progression may find useful.

1. Background

The PPS LU research project (2021-24) is funded by Widening Participation Advisory Group as part of Lancaster University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) contributing to theme 3: Researching the barriers faced by WP students when accessing and succeeding in postgraduate study (PGT and PGR).

The research built on previous postgraduate information, advice and guidance research by Houghton (2003) exploring the notion of 'Helpers' and 'Planners' used by students seeking to apply for a Part Time PhD. This phased research will focus on students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPN), low income backgrounds or first in family HE entrants; Black Asian and Ethnic Minority students²; and Disabled students, collectively described here as 'WP' students.

- Year 1: 2021-22 Student perspective on Helpers and Planners
- Year 2: 2022-23 Staff perspective on Helpers and Planners
- Year 3: 2023-24 [Build on year 1 and 2 findings, interventions and academic preparedness]

¹ This is an edited report submitted to Lancaster University's Widening Participation Advisory Group (WPAG) that provides a summary of key findings for 2021-22

² When originally submitted terminology used at the time Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) was used.

2. Key actions undertaken during Year 1

1. Reviewing the literature and good practice reports about widening participation initiatives and research exploring the barriers relating to progression to postgraduate study as well as activities that support the application and transition processes.
2. Prepared ethics materials using the new (2021-22) Research Ethics Application Management System (REAMS) system including information sheets, online surveys and interview schedules for Lancaster Undergraduate students thinking about PGT, Postgraduate students reflecting on progression to and experience of PGT and PGR and transition from Undergraduate studies at Lancaster and elsewhere
3. Meetings with relevant staff to discuss project and gain approval for ethics, circulation of online survey, student comms, ERS recruitment processes and careers.
4. Attendance at the NEON Postgraduate Network meetings which has proved a useful networking opportunity.
5. Recruitment and training development materials for Postgraduate Research Helpers covering mandatory online training, workshops on interviewing and ethics, and the co-creation of systems for Teams recording and transcribing to ensure consistency in interviewing applicants.
6. Distributed online surveys and undertook initial analysis of helpers, planners, undergraduate hopes for the future, postgraduate reasons for progressing to Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and Postgraduate Research (PGR) (March – April)
7. Undertook interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the progression to postgraduate study journey and identify any specific barriers or enabling factors that influence decision making which might form the basis of future interventions. (May – July)
8. Preparation of transcriptions and initial analysis of the interviews. (June – August)
9. Preparation of briefing papers and presentations to support dissemination of ideas. (May – ongoing)

3. Data collected: online survey and semi-structured interviews

	Online Survey	Semi-structured interviews
Undergraduate students	97	8
Postgraduate students	150	19

There were 95 (64.19%) Level 8 postgraduates and 53 (35.81%) Level 7 postgraduates. Of the 53 Level 7 postgraduates only eleven (20.75%) were planning to progress to PGR, 26 (49.06%) were undecided or did not know and 16 (30.19%) were not currently planning to progress.

There were 6 undergraduate students and 21 Postgraduate students who were interviewed. 9 self-identified as Black Asian and Ethnic Minority (B); 8 as Disabled (D); 4 as Disabled and Socio-economic disadvantaged (D/S) and 6 Socio-economic disadvantaged (S).

We are still analysing the interview data but what is noticeable is that many of the issues raised by students do not relate to these particular widening participation characteristics.

Using the framework of helpers and planners is proving useful for discussing who and what informs their journey and decision-making process.

4. Key Findings

The Sutton Trust (Wakeling and Mateos-González, 2021: 9) details the inequalities that exist in access to PG study and suggests: *‘There is scope for significantly increased and co-ordinated efforts to further widen postgraduate participation by universities and funding bodies.’* More specifically, on the need for research in this area: *‘While there may be improved transition rates for those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minority students, the reasons for and consequences of these changes are not clear.’* (Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling 2020: 713).

Although interview data is still being analysed there are a number of messages which are emerging which will be used as a basis for year 2 discussion with staff and some follow up interviews with students who are still studying,

The briefing papers and presentations at the Inclusive Learning Network (ILN) and to a group of interns involved in the undergraduate internship programme have shared core messages from the project, some of which we summarise below.

Briefing Paper 1: Overview of the Progression to Postgraduate Study at LU

This paper provides a summary of the project, its focus on widening participation students, the wider context for why the study is important, our research questions, methods and overall plan. In addition to the focus on helpers and planners (Houghton, 2003) there are a number of related factors and theoretical explanations within the literature.

As a sector the need to move beyond access to UG study to address inequalities within PGT and PGR is growing. Existing research suggests various factors that may underlie differential progression to PG study, these fall into three broad areas of consideration which are explained further in the briefing paper:

Finance	Engagement	Capitals
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Attitudes toward loans and debt➤ Access to funding linked to attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Student experience and sense of belonging➤ Connecting to their personal context➤ Happenstance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Cultural capital shaping use of resources ‘planners’➤ Social networks shaping ‘helpers’➤ Economic

Briefing Paper 2: Reviewing provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in your department

As an important source of ‘helpers’ and ‘planners’, academic departments clearly help to raise awareness, encourage students to consider postgraduate study, support them with the application process as well as through their transition into a PGT or PGR programme of study. In this briefing paper we outline some of the reasons why departments can and do play an important role.

Drawing mainly on existing research but revised in light of feedback from PhD Research Helpers and taking account of interview feedback, this paper provides and explains current research relating to ten reflective questions to support departments in reviewing their own IAG.

To reflect the different context in which departments are working, the 10th question invites further suggestions from departments, we intend to update this briefing paper following engagement with departments.

Reflective questions

1. How easy is it to access information about PG courses in your department?
2. When is IAG provided within your department?
3. How is IAG provided in your department?
4. Who provides IAG in your department?
5. What is the content of the IAG provided by your department?
6. How are the practicalities of studying at PGT / PGR covered?
7. Do you know what proportion of UG students from your department progress to PG study at Lancaster?
8. Are you aware of any specific opportunities or support that is available for underrepresented or disadvantaged students in your discipline?
9. How does your department work with other staff around the university in relation to supporting student progression?
10. This question is one for you to write... From your experience what would you add as a helpful question for your colleagues to consider when reviewing IAG in their department?

Briefing Paper 3: Interventions

Although we had drafted an initial interventions paper this is still under revision following feedback. This will focus on specific types of interventions so that it will be more useful for specific groups of staff and students. These will cover factors relating to four types of intervention:

- Information - Awareness raising, access to resources or planners (e.g. Briefing Paper 2 Information, Advice and Guidance)
- Finance - Support needed to progress (e.g. University webpages – central and departmental outlining scholarships)
- Mentoring / bridging - access to informed helpers and raising awareness of issues
- Internships - providing experience of research

Each of these topics is unpacked with a combination of examples of best practice from across the sector and quotations and feedback from student interviews. A summary of the key points about information is provided below to illustrate the content of the briefing paper.

Information

From student feedback, when providing information it is important to:

- ensure information is embedded as part of a programme;
- consider issues of inclusion offering representation of diverse pathways and relevant for particular groups of students;
- achieve a balance in terms of quantity of information whilst ensuring quality.

Depending on the type of information issues of:

- where it can be found, its **location**,
- when the information is needed,
- its **timeliness** and
- the extent to which the messages are clear addressing issues of **transparency**

➤ and from a wider guidance perspective its **impartiality** are also important.

Within the literature and analysis of the student interviews we have identified three specific foci namely support, awareness raising and gaining practical experience. These foci complement and interact with the helpers and planners. Together it would appear interventions will typically cover the following:

1. **Support** for progression (e.g. funding; fee waivers / having own “cheerleaders”)
2. **Helpers** to assist in considering options and guiding through the processes of applying for courses or funding.
3. **Awareness** about the range of opportunities and what is entailed.
4. **Planners** to have access to information on courses, sources of funding.
5. **Experience** of research and higher level study

5. Year 2 Future Plans

In reflecting upon the activities in the project’s first year, there are several aspects of the focus on students which we believe it would be valuable to explore further. In particular the linkages with the BAME research project and evaluation of the Internships project as both are likely to provide complementary information to that collected in the PPS LU project.

The focus for year 2 will be on gathering staff feedback and further details on existing initiatives and activities. The reviewing IAG briefing paper will support discussion with departments and we have already drafted interview questions and prepared ethics paperwork for gathering data from services already supporting students.

Following further discussion with the team responsible for the research interns we would like to explore ways of gaining further insights on the impact of their experience.

About us: REAP Researching Equity, Access and Participation. We are a small team of researchers based in the Department of Educational Research.

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<https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/reap/pps-lu/>

