

Final implementation and process evaluation report: Lancaster University – Lancaster Success Programme (LSP)

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1. Summary

This report offers a summary of the findings of the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) of the Lancaster Success Programme (LSP). The Lancaster Success Programme is a targeted widening participation (WP)¹ intervention, which supports undergraduate students from key WP backgrounds to achieve success in their degrees.

Lancaster University's project team for this report includes:

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1.1. Description of intervention being evaluated

The LSP is an award-winning social mobility and student success initiative.² It is a targeted, opt-in intervention that utilises a coaching-led approach to support students from WP backgrounds. It was launched in 2019-20 to support students transitioning into university, and then throughout their programme of study (including placement/study abroad years).

The programme takes a sustained, longitudinal approach to student support with each student allocated a Student Success Coach (who they retain throughout their participation in the programme) and up to two one-to-one coaching sessions each term (though engagement varies at an individual student level, see below). In addition, students can participate in the Prepare for Lancaster transitions event, Action Learning Sets (ALS), peer support sessions, and social and networking events and have access to an enrichment fund which students can use to contribute toward their studies.

The numbers engaged on the programme (after withdrawals) have steadily increased from 54 at the end of the pilot year in 2019-20 to a high of 340 in 2023-24 (see Table 1).

¹ Widening participation (WP) at Lancaster University (LU) aims to ensure that the higher education sector is an open and inclusive environment, representative of the society we live in. LU seeks to improve equality of opportunity for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access, succeed in, and progress onto graduate employment or further study. Lancaster's widening participation programmes and activities support under-represented groups to enter higher education. Support is offered through outreach and access programmes, schools and colleges, Lancaster Success Programme, and contextual admissions.

² Winner of University Student Success Initiative of the year 2022, Student Social Mobility Awards, by upReach.

1.2. Context and brief description of IPE

The following IPE is being delivered as part of the [TASO Institutional Data Use project](#). It accompanies an Impact Evaluation (IE) being delivered by a team of independent evaluators based at Staffordshire University. The IPE addresses:

- the operational features of the LSP,
- whether the programme has been implemented as intended, and
- the factors influencing these processes.

It offers context to the IE report, which consists of a quantitative analysis of the programme relating to whether it achieved its intended aims and objectives and indicate quantitative methodologies that could be used in the future. This IPE includes a top-level analysis of engagement data to aid in assessing the implementation of the programme. This document aims to provide insight to support knowledge sharing and best practice across the sector as well as the lessons learned in the process of delivering the programme.

Key findings

The findings presented here are intended to be read in light of the limitations of the available data referenced in the methodology section and the time constraints of the project. These constraints impacted the feasibility of more focussed data collection and qualitative evaluation within the timeline of the project. As such, the findings below point to key areas for further inquiry and interim findings based on a review of data evidence chiefly linked to engagement and student demographics. This work offers a starting point for subsequent research.

- The Lancaster Success Programme (LSP) has been delivered in line with its aims and objectives, providing a programme of tailored, coaching-informed support to students from widening participation backgrounds.
- Delivery has been consistent over time with average engagements across all activity remaining stable and in line with the parameters set by the programme. This was maintained even with the programme granting a considerable degree of agency to students to define their level of engagement according to their needs and preferences.
- Demographic evidence broadly shows that mature, disabled, commuter and female students were well-represented on the programme, whereas male and black students were not as well represented. There was some variance in the early years, where male students outnumbered female, but the significance of this was mitigated by the smaller intake numbers. These trends were also reflected in the subgroup analysis of engagement, which showed that the well-

represented student groups engaged more on average each year than the less represented groups.³

- The one-to-one coaching sessions are the most highly and consistently engaged element of the programme, representing 80% of on-programme engagement (not including pre-entry engagement and financial support). Engagement in the group activity was less consistent but proved particularly popular among certain groups of students, particularly mature, disabled and commuter students.
- Sufficient evidence was not available to assess whether the move toward a more coaching-informed approach had any causal impact on how the programme was implemented. More research into this specific question is necessary to test its effectiveness against other approaches, while taking into account the needs and preferences of different groups.

1.3. Key conclusions

While limited for the reasons described above and in the methodology section below, the analysis conducted in this report suggests that coaching as a method of student support is broadly effective and valued by students who participate in it. As with all widening participation activities (pre- and post-entry), demonstrating causal links is made difficult by the multiple intersecting and intersectional variables and factors at play that might impact a student's decision to continue with their studies or achieve academic success. Coaching is also non-directive, which means that students are empowered to define how they want to engage and what success means to them. That being said, the limited qualitative evidence available for this study, combined with demographic and engagement data, shows that for those who engage, the programme has proven a valuable source of support, which they engage with consistently throughout their degrees.

The data also suggests that coaching might not be well-suited to everyone. While there has been some variance in the demographic makeup of the programme, which may also link to the targeting approaches adopted at different stages, there do appear to be some groups for whom the coaching support is particularly appropriate, namely: mature, disabled, commuter and female students. While drawing any firm conclusions from the limited evidence analysed in this study should be guarded against, the data does suggest directions for further enquiry to explore the impact this approach to student support has on different groups, and to explore the reasons why some groups appear to engage and benefit more than others. It is important to note that these findings should also be considered as reflective of the institutional context in which the programme was delivered. More general conclusions can only be made through sector-level comparative studies of

³ There were categories that were not analysed as part of this study due to availability of data and time, for example: First in Family, low-income households, Free School Meals and Pupil Premium.

coaching programmes in different settings drawing on much larger sample groups and qualitative research.

2. Introduction

2.1. Programme team

The programme team structure at the time of writing is:

Roles and Responsibilities	Number
Student Success Manager	1
Student Success Assistant	1
Student Success Officer	4
Voluntary Coaches	9 (2023/2024 academic year)

2.2. Background and rationale

The LSP was launched in 2019 to address the institutional and wider sectoral strategic priority of supporting WP students through all stages of the student lifecycle.⁴ Research and policy at the time emphasised the importance of moving beyond a focus solely on recruiting more students from underrepresented backgrounds into HE, toward ensuring those same students also achieve success and progress onto positive student destinations (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018). Consistent with this thinking, the LSP was designed to sit alongside initiatives such as the [Lancaster Access Programme \(LAP\)](#), [Grow Your Future \(GYF\)](#)⁵ and a number of other targeted interventions and activities at LU, to provide WP students with a sustained and comprehensive offer of support throughout their educational journey.

From the academic year 2021-22 to the date of writing this report, the LSP targeted students from a WP background in receipt of a Lancaster University contextual offer (CO), which includes students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4 Quintile 1 (Q1) – to be replaced following the discontinuation of this measure in 2024), those who have completed an access programme (the Lancaster Access Programme and/or Realising Opportunities) and care experienced students. In addition, the programme is also offered

⁴ See, for example: [National strategy for access and student success in higher education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed December 2023), and Lancaster University's Access and Participation Plan: [TheUniversityofLancaster_APP_2020-21_V1_10007768.pdf](#) (accessed December 2023).

⁵ The Lancaster Access Programme is a pre-entry widening participation programme delivered by Lancaster University's Widening Participation team. Grow Your Future is a post-entry careers programme offered to widening participation students studying at Lancaster University.

to all UK undergraduate mature students as well as those students in receipt of a Sanctuary Scholarship.⁶ In-year, the programme operates a referral system to recruit students who meet at least two WP criteria as space becomes available. A more detailed breakdown of the key groups targeted and engaged is provided in the sections below.

Following consultation with staff and students at LU, it was decided that the LSP would adopt a targeted, student-led model with a focus on empowering students to achieve success, through the effective use of coaching practices (e.g. goal setting, non-directive conversations, open questions and action planning). The literature on coaching methods is extensive and the practice has become increasingly popular in higher education (HE), particularly in a continuous professional development (CPD) setting (Harding, Sofianos, Box, 2018). While its implementation in widening participation and student success is still emerging in the sector, there is an established research literature exploring the impact these methods of support can have on academic attainment and retention.⁷ While its growing popularity is indicative of its effectiveness, the practice has its own challenges, which is discussed further below (Section 2.3).

Mentoring and advising have been the more common approaches adopted in HE for one-to-one student support, for example: peer mentoring, academic advisors/mentors and career mentoring. While these approaches have their strengths and applications, research has also highlighted the risks that attend the mentor/mentee and advisor/advisee relationship (Andreanoff, 2016). The ‘unidirectional’ relationship that can emerge between mentor and mentee risks advice or guidance being given that is inappropriate, drawn from the specific experiences of the mentor, and can lead to the false assumption that the mentor/advisor should have all the answers. This can inhibit a student’s personal development, decision-making, and reflective thinking, while reinforcing power imbalances and creating unrealistic expectations. The adoption of nondirectional, facilitative approaches, such as coaching, can help to mitigate some of these challenges and potentially lead to better outcomes, particularly in terms of self-efficacy, motivation and locus of control (Crozier, 1997; Sander et al., 2009; Alivernini and Lucidi, 2011).

The coaching approach, though present from the LSP’s inception, has evolved over time (see Section 2.3 below). Ensuring the right balance between supporting students with their wellbeing needs, which might require a more directional mentor/advisory approach, and adopting the nondirectional, open questioning approach used in coaching, was a key consideration in the initial years. Three factors to success were identified:

⁶ [Lancaster Sanctuary Scholarship](#) offers support to prospective students from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds/communities who have an offer to study undergraduate or postgraduate taught degree (Masters) at Lancaster University.

⁷ See for example, source list available via TASO evidence toolkit for [Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models \(post-entry\) - TASO](#).

- The need to ensure that staff have the requisite training and support to deliver authentic, high-quality coaching, while remaining attuned and responsive to the wellbeing needs of students;
- The importance of ensuring students and staff are aware of and comfortable with the approach being adopted and understand the boundaries of the coaching relationship, including their respective responsibilities and duty of care;
- That the LSP is seen as part of a wider student support ecosystem at the university, where students can access the appropriate support required to meet their specific needs.

The coaching-led approach is now an integral part of the programme. In each of the one-to-one coaching, group coaching and peer support sessions, the aim is to work with students to unlock their potential, explore their values and goals, and progress in their individual, authentic pathways to success – whether academic or personal. The programme places emphasis on student empowerment, motivation, aspiration, self-efficacy, confidence and belonging. These are the key ingredients that are considered vital to achieving the intended long-term impacts of the programme, namely: to support students from WP backgrounds to complete their degrees and achieve academic success (see programme Theory of Change).

The parameters of the coaching relationship are set out in a contract, which is agreed in the first one-to-one session the student has with their Success Coach. This helps manage expectations from the outset and provides clarity on the primary goals of the coaching sessions, which, as explained further below, focus on supporting the student to achieve success.

In addition to the one-to-one coaching sessions, the programme also provides a number of group experiences, including peer support, Action Learning Sets (peer coaching) and social events. The programme also delivered workshops covering specific subjects or skills, though these were discontinued in the 2022-23 academic year. These activities are described in more detail in Section 2.3, but as in the case of the one-to-one sessions, the approach adopted has evolved over time in response to ongoing service evaluation, resulting in a gradual shift toward a more nondirective, coaching-led approach. The focus of this report is on the coaching one-to-one and group coaching support, this is partly due to time and availability of data.

The rationale underpinning the LSP, and the approach it has adopted (see Theory of Change appendix I), is that a nondirectional, student-led, longitudinal and targeted programme of support will improve outcomes for WP students at Lancaster University. The lived experiences of students from underrepresented backgrounds can vary enormously, making assumptions about what success looks like from their vantage point and the steps needed to achieve it challenging. By placing the student in the driving seat

and accompanying them on their journey, coaching approaches have been found to be more conducive to achieving the LSP's intended outcomes and impacts.

2.3. Intervention aims and objectives

The overarching mission of the LSP is *to provide a space to reflect and develop personalised strategies for success*. This mission captures two important facets of the support offered. First, a space for the student to think and reflect on relevant subjects/areas of their life/study, and second, to empower them to pursue positive action toward their personalised vision of success.

While highly personalised, the rationale is that if a student is supported to be more reflective and goal-orientated, for example, this will be reflected in long-term success measured in terms of completion, attainment and career/postgraduate progression. The principal aims of the programme are as follows (2023-24):

1. To improve the retention of target students;
2. To enhance the pre-arrival experience (transitioning into HE);
3. To empower LSP students to develop strategies to achieve success (personal and academic);
4. To assist LSP students to feel part of a community.

The aims have evolved over the course of the programme's lifespan, but empowerment, community and success have remained constant features.

2.4. Detailed description of the intervention

The LSP was launched in 2019-20 following planning and consultation with a range of stakeholder groups at LU. The programme was devised to meet the strategic aim of the institution to provide support to students from WP backgrounds through all stages of the student lifecycle, prior to and during their time at LU.

The academic year 2019-20 was a pilot year for the project, a cohort of 54 students (end of year total, after withdrawals, see Table 1) engaged in the programme. Invitations were extended originally to students with BTECs or non-standard qualifications and who also met WP criteria, and those who had completed the Lancaster Access Programme. The COVID-19 pandemic became a factor toward the end of the 2019-20 academic year, all of 2020-21 academic year and the beginning of 2021-22, when delivery was switched to online. The impact this may or may not have had is discussed further below.

Table 1: Student Engagement on the Lancaster Success Programme 2019-2024⁸

⁸ * Total figure accounts for withdrawals and in-year referrals.

Year	Intake	Withdrawals in year**	Total end of year*
2019/2020	+71	-17	54
2020/2021	+105	-18	141
2021/2022	+141	-67	215
2022/2023	+117	-72	260
2023/2024	+168	-88	340

Over subsequent years, the numbers of students brought onto the programme have increased (Table 1). The first full cohort, comprising first-, second- and third-year participants, occurred in 2021-22, totalling 215 by the end of the year. It was in the same year that the first cohort graduated, though, given it was the 2019-20 pilot year cohort, and accounting for withdrawals, the numbers involved were comparatively small. It was also the year that targeting switched from non-standard qualifications to recipients of a CO. 2022-23 saw a marked increase in the total number of participants engaged on the LSP following an intake of 117. The intake was smaller than the 2021-22 intake (+141), to account for the previous year’s higher intake. 2023-24 has seen a substantial increase in the number of participants (+168) resulting in a current total of 340 participants (prior to yearend). The graduating numbers for 2022-23 and 2023-24 are noticeably larger than in 2021-22, offering the opportunity to conduct more detailed impact analyses.

The increase in participant numbers has been matched by an overall increase in delivery team capacity. Table 2 shows how staff numbers have changed over time. The full-time Student Success Officers (see also Table 1 above) deliver the majority of the one-to-one sessions and coordinate the delivery of the group experiences. They are supplemented by a wider pool of voluntary coaches some of whom have been engaged in the programme for a number of years. In addition to staff numbers, the skills and experience of the delivery team have been enhanced over time, with a sustained programme of coaching CPD and training, combined with regular peer reflection and support sessions (Peer Supervision Meetings) to support continuous improvement. These fortnightly meetings of Officers and coaches provide an opportunity for staff to reflect on the one-to-one sessions they have provided and share any challenges they may have encountered. In addition, each voluntary coach is paired with an Officer (buddy) who they can go to with specific challenges and to seek advice. The Peer Supervision sessions include presentations and training pertaining to wider student support services available to ensure

** Withdrawal occurs for a variety of reasons including students who signed up but never engaged, those who engaged a few times and stopped, and those whose engagement has fluctuated over the course of their degrees

they are aware of the relevant support students may require referral to, for example academic, student wellbeing and careers support.

Table 2: Staff supporting delivery of the Lancaster Success Programme

Year	Student Success Officers	Voluntary Student Success Coaches
2019-20	3	2
2020-21	3	4
2021-22	4	7
2022-23	4	7
2023-24	4	9

The activity delivered as part of the LSP has also evolved over time. Table 3 provides an overview of how this support has changed with a gradual shift away from directive toward increasingly non-directive, student led support. Underlying this change in activity has been an even more pronounced shift in approach with the integration of the coaching-led approach throughout all activities. Below is an overview of each year's activity.

Table 3: Activity delivered as part of the Lancaster Success Programme

Year	Activity
2019-20	Prepare for Lancaster (P4L), 1:1 coaching sessions, workshops, enrichment fund
2020-21	P4L, 1:1 coaching sessions, workshops, enrichment fund
2021-22	P4L, 1:1 coaching sessions, Action Learning Sets (ALS), workshops, enrichment fund
2022-23	P4L, 1:1 coaching sessions, ALS, peer support sessions (piloted in summer term), social events, enrichment fund
2023-24	P4L, 1:1 coaching sessions, ALS, peer support sessions, social events, enrichment fund

Prepare for Lancaster (P4L)

P4L is a pre-entry, transitions support event where students who have expressed an interest in participating in the LSP have the opportunity to experience university campus,

learn more about the support on offer, connect with other participants on the LSP, engage with academic and professional service members of staff, and meet the wider delivery team prior to the commencement of their studies. The literature on WP barriers to HE emphasises the importance of the transition phase into HE and on the benefits that supporting students to navigate this period can yield over the long term (Thomas 2017). P4L sits alongside other WP transitions initiatives organised by other teams across the university, for example Smart Start (a programme of transition support provided to neurodiverse students) and Ready for University (a more generalised online transition programme offered to all undergraduate students), to ensure students feel supported and have the tools needed to succeed during their studies. The event is also an opportunity to introduce LSP participants to the coaching-led approach adopted on the programme.

The analysis conducted in this report has focussed on post-entry support and so P4L does not feature prominently. It maps onto a very different set of criteria, consideration and challenges which could not be incorporated due to time restraints.⁹

Table 4: Engagement in Prepare for Lancaster

Year	In-person	Online
2019-20	31	-
2020-21	-	40
2021-22	41	38
2022-23	26	34
2023-24	33	39

One-to-one coaching sessions

The one-to-one coaching sessions are the core of the LSP delivery. These are the regular twice-termly, 30-40-minute sessions delivered by Student Success Officers or voluntary coaches. There are several core elements to these sessions:

- **Contracting:** in the first session the student and their coach talk through the structure and approach adopted during the sessions, their scope is discussed, the rights and responsibilities of the student and staff are shared, and the student is given the opportunity to consent to proceed with the sessions. The ‘contract’ is in no way binding and students do not sign any documentation. The

⁹ See for example TASO evidence toolkit: [Transition support into HE for disabled students \(pre-entry\) - TASO](#)

contract serves to inform students of the approach being adopted and what the sessions will require in terms of commitment from themselves and the coach.

- **Values exercise:** in the first or second one-to-one session, students also complete a values exercise supported by their coach. This serves to help students explore what motivates and inspires them in their lives and explore to what extent those values have informed their decision to pursue HE. The values exercise helps students be more conscious of their decision making and what is important to them. It also provides a starting point for future sessions.
- **Snapshot exercise:** during the first term of the academic year, participants also complete a reflective exercise using Qualtrics. The students are given space to reflect on where they are at the start of their degrees and to reflect on their progress at the end of each year and end of their degree. The exercise can be viewed by their coach and discussed in the sessions and is used to support with ongoing programme evaluation and monitoring. Due to its nondirective, student-led approach, coaching is notoriously difficult to evaluate. This exercise has been devised to account for individual student experiences while also capturing progress over time.
- **Regular one-to-one sessions:** Following the initial preparatory sessions in first-term, students then regularly meet with their coaches to discuss their experiences over the intervening period utilising a nondirective, open question approach intended to enable the student to reflect on their progress and devise short, medium and long-term plans to address challenges or achieve success. Within these conversations, the barriers that many students' face are brought to the fore, though within the confines of LSP sessions (assuming no risk to the student or staff is detected), the coach asks open questions to help students identify the problem, decide whether it needs addressing and then devise a strategy to do so.

Table 5: One-to-one coaching sessions delivered each year

Year	Total one-to-ones delivered
2019-20	201
2020-21	466
2021-22	730
2022-23	817
2023-24	455 (start of second term)

Implementation of the coaching approach remains an iterative process. Some students are not receptive to the approach, and it is not always appropriate in every situation. Students present with a plethora of challenges and lived experiences. While maintaining the role of coach, it is sometimes necessary to advise a student to seek relevant support where their wellbeing or the wellbeing of others is perceived to be at risk. It is also commonplace for students to grow into the coaching approach, with consecutive sessions building on from the last and students easing into it as they progress through their degrees. Others can connect immediately, or find the approach not suitable for them, potentially leading to withdrawals or low engagement on that basis.

Workshops

Workshops were delivered in the first three years of the LSP. They were intended to increase student awareness of support services, improve their knowledge, skills and competencies in core areas identified by student participants (e.g. time management, resilience, and socialising) and to create opportunities for students to connect. Evaluations conducted in 2019-20 suggested that while students valued the workshops and wanted more variety of subjects, engagement in the workshops remained comparatively low. By their nature, workshops are also more directive, which clashed with the broader direction of the programme toward a nondirective approach. The workshops were phased out in 2021-22 and discontinued in 2022-23.

Action Learning Sets (ALS)

ALSs are an opportunity for LSP students to meet twice a term with a small peer group (4-7 students) and a staff facilitator. Participants work through issues affecting their university life, studies and future ambitions. A member of the group presents an issue, and the other participants ask questions designed to prompt reflection and discussion. Guidance is given on how to frame questions utilising the coaching-led approach: open and nondirective. The aim is to come away with actions which will solve or help manage the challenge/s presented. The ALSs were first piloted in 2020-21 academic year and were delivered from 2021-22 onward. They were introduced as a space for mature students to engage in group coaching, which was something that had been raised in feedback, and to address common challenges identified among mature students in one-to-one sessions. The ALS were then offered out to all students, with mixed results among different groups.

Table 6: Action Learning Sets delivered

Year	Delivered
2019-20	None
2020-21	18

2021-22	42
2022-23	36
2023-24	36 (planned)

Peer support sessions

Peer support sessions are group activities that involve around 15 students with a number of staff members on hand to facilitate (including colleagues from other services, such as Careers or the Library). The sessions are usually themed and always based around a topic that students want to talk about, decided prior to the session or at the previous session. Some of the themes have included time management, study skills, exam preparation and searching for internships. These cover many of the topics that the workshops covered previously, but rather than taking the form of a facilitator lead information session, the sessions are student-led and take the form of a more informal conversation about the chosen topic.

These sessions offer a space for students to share their experiences and concerns and to seek advice where relevant. Though not strictly a coaching activity, the sessions are student-led and nondirective. The advice shared is often from the perspective of peers from similar backgrounds who have faced similar challenges, supported by members of staff with relevant knowledge and expertise. They were introduced in the current year (2023-24) and were intended to help address the needs of those students who referenced in feedback that they would appreciate opportunities to share advice or mentoring with their peers.

Table 7: Peer support sessions delivered

Year	Delivered
2019-20	None
2020-21	None
2021-22	None
2022-23	1 (piloted in the Summer term)
2023-24	6 planned (2 per term)

Social events

Social events have been introduced in response to student feedback suggesting a desire for a greater sense of community and belonging on the LSP. Belonging and community are subjective concepts that can take many forms (e.g. belonging to a friendship group, to a social group, to a college, to an academic department, to the university etc.). Service evaluation conducted each year consistently reveals a desire among some students to build a community connected as part of the programme. There was also a noted increase in the prevalence of this feedback post COVID-19 pandemic.

The events are hosted regularly, in term, and at different times, to accommodate the availability of different groups of students. Social events include pizza evenings, board game events, afternoon teas, quiz evenings and summer barbecues. These sessions are facilitated by members of the Student Success team.

Table 8: Social events delivered

Year	Delivered
2019-20	None
2020-21	None
2021-22	9 (across 3 terms)
2022-23	12 (across 3 terms)
2023-24	18 planned (across 3 terms)

Enrichment fund

Each year students can access a small fund that can be used to enhance their educational experience. It can be used to contribute toward equipment, resources or memberships that support participants with their studies. The fund has been in place since the commencement of the programme.

In summary, the LSP is unique in the regularity and intensity of support it provides. The programme also helps direct students to other support services that can cater for specific and specialist needs (e.g. counselling, careers or disability). The LSP has progressively moved away from providing mentoring or advisory support (which might include pastoral care and advice sharing) toward a coaching-led approach (Whitmore, 2009).¹⁰ That being said, students present with a variety of needs in one-to-one and group social settings, and the programme provides relevant support to students to navigate these challenges, whether developing strategies to overcome them or seeking specialist support where appropriate.

¹⁰ The transition toward coaching practice has been facilitated through training provided by Inclusive Futures and referral to the abundant literature on coaching practice, see references.

2.5. Brief description of the evaluation (including the IE) and what this report covers.

The evaluation conducted as part of this IPE considers the following topics:

- the operational features of the LSP,
- whether the programme has been implemented as intended, and
- patterns and trends in student population and engagement.

We combine qualitative findings and descriptive statistical analysis of secondary data to address the above points. With reflections on the lessons learned in the course of delivery.

3. Methodology

3.1. Statement of research questions.

Research questions explored in IPE
IPE-RQ1 Implementation: How was the programme implemented? What are the barriers and facilitators to implementation?
IPE-RQ2 Engagement: How did students engage with the LSP in line with the aims?

3.2. Overview of IPE design and methods.

This IPE examines secondary data (engagement, demographic and student outcomes data) and draws on extent and relevant general qualitative insights from historical service evaluations (which were not collated for the purpose of this IPE) to answer the research questions laid out in Section 3.2.1.

The IPE adopts a subgroup and comparative analytical approach to examine trends and patterns in engagement across activities and between different groups over time.

3.2.1. Specific research questions related to IPE

IPE-RQ1 How was the programme implemented? What are the barriers and facilitators to implementation?

- a) Has the LSP been implemented as intended each year?
- b) Which student demographic groups engage with the LSP? What are the patterns of engagement for these demographic groups?

- c) Has the implementation of the coaching-led approach affected overall engagement?

IPE-RQ2 How did students engage with the LSP?

- a) What are the patterns of engagement between different subgroups of LSP participants?
- b) What are the patterns of engagement across different activities delivered as part of the LSP?

3.2.2. Research methods and analytical approaches

While the time constraints of the study made conducting the kind of qualitative and mixed methods research that would ordinarily be adopted as part of an IPE not feasible, some answers to the proposed research questions have been possible, drawing on secondary data and historical evaluations. The LSP has been evaluated each year through the use of pre- and post-intervention questionnaires (see Appendix 2), including yearly reflections, and focus groups delivered at various intervals between 2019-23. Given that consent was not originally sought for the use of this evidence for current purposes and the design of these evaluations were not conducted with an IPE framework in mind, the usability of these evaluations has therefore been restricted.

Various types of descriptive statistical analyses have been conducted using historical demographic and engagement data. To perform this work and at the same time provide relevant comparisons to understand the LSP participant data in context, two non-randomised comparator groups were used: students with BTEC and BTEC mixed qualification and students from POLAR4 Q1 neighbourhoods. The reason for the selection of these groups is because they were the main groups from which the LSP recruited at different stages of the programme's delivery (see section 2.4 for more on targeting approach). The demographic analysis was conducted by comparing percentages of different subgroups engaged on the LSP across groups and over time, as well as with institutional percentages for the relevant comparator groups. To protect identity, these percentages were rounded, and have not been tabulated. In addition, engagement data drawn from historical administrative records have been analysed using descriptive statistics, primarily average engagements across different demographic subgroups of student, types of activity and engagement frequency levels. Standard deviation and other descriptive measures were used where relevant.

Though sophisticated statistical tests have not been adopted as part of this IPE due to limitations in the size of the groups involved and the limited timeframe of the project, useful insights were drawn from descriptive statistical analysis to address the proposed research questions and to identify areas for future research.

Furthermore, the specific historical evaluations this IEP also draws on consist of two post-intervention questionnaires for the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23. These questionnaires were designed by members of the LSP and were administered online anonymously. The anonymity of respondents made the questionnaire usable for the purpose of the IPE. Each questionnaire consists of a total of 18 questions, five of which are 5-point Likert type questions with each branching into 10-15 sub-questions; further four questions prompt a yes/no response, and nine are qualitative questions prompting respondents to comment on a range of why, how, and when questions. The questionnaires employ a wide range of questions focussed on encouraging the programme participants to reflect on their student experience as participants in the LSP and to provide feedback in relation to their engagement with various aspects of the programme in line with its aims.

While data from these questionnaires cannot necessarily provide specific measurable evidence to address the research questions, given they were originally designed to evaluate delivery and interventions of the programme, they nonetheless offer some useful insights that can inform the findings of this IPE. To this end, a multi-approach qualitative frame of analysis was employed, combining content analysis with keyword frequency for qualitative questions, and percentage analysis with thematic coding for Likert type and yes/no questions. All eighteen questions of each questionnaire were analysed, and the results are collectively used to inform the findings of the IPE.

3.2.3. Sample, data sources.

The IPE uses secondary data relating to students and graduates of Lancaster University who engaged in the LSP in the academic years 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 as well as comparative data linked to students who qualified to study at Lancaster University with BTEC and BTEC combined with other qualifications and with students from POLAR4 Quintile 1 neighbourhoods. In addition, where relevant, data pertaining to the wider UK undergraduate student population at Lancaster University have also been analysed. The overall size of the samples referenced can be found in Table 10 below. Demographic data was not available for the 2023-24 entry cohort and so they have been left out of Table 10 and all subsequent demographic analysis. For a more detailed exploration of the demographic makeup of the LSP student population see Section 4.1 below.

Table 9: Students included in the study 2019-20 to 2022-23¹¹

¹¹ Before withdrawals.

Year	LSP students entry	LSP students on programme each year*	POLAR4 Q1 students entry	BTEC and mixed with BTEC entry*	Students overall
2019/20	71	71	216	315	2624
2020/21	97	160	232	312	2969
2021/22	157	298	303	389	3154
2022/23	121	348	324	365	3493
Total	446	877	1075	1381	12240

3.2.4. Details of dosage, compliance, fidelity, and usual practice.

Engagement on the LSP is driven by the needs of the students, which can vary for many reasons, including but not limited to personal circumstances, their stage in the degree journey or individual goals/preferences. If students are not engaging in any LSP one-to-one sessions and/or social events, workshops or ALS for two or more consecutive terms, then a member of the Student Success Team (in the first instance their assigned coach) will contact them to check on their wellbeing and ascertain whether the student is still interested in engaging with the programme. If at that point they are not interested or do not respond, then their place is made available, and students can either be referred onto the programme or the space is allocated for the next academic year. Withdrawal might also occur due to a student not completing their degree, in which case their space is made available upon discovering this outcome.

For those students who meet this threshold, engagement ranges from low engagement (one or two sessions in a given year), moderate engagement (three to five), to high engagement (six to eight). The distribution of these engagements for LSP participants is analysed further in Section 4 below. Depending on the amount of support a student receives it might be expected that the impact increases, though it cannot be assumed that engagement in fewer activities means that the student is benefiting less, this can depend on the individual student and their circumstances.

The LSP is considered to have been ‘delivered as intended’ if students have access to the appropriate level of support, in the appropriate format, to meet their needs, which can exceed the standard allocation of two one-to-one sessions per term and might include other relevant support provided as part of the LSP. Evidence for whether and how this has been achieved is explored in Section 4.

3.3. Ethics

Ethical approval was sought to access and analyse secondary data relating to current or graduate students at Lancaster University and to disseminate findings via a project report.

Approval was provided by the Lancaster University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee. Consent was sought for use of questionnaire responses for evaluation and research purposes, which allows for its use in this project. However, ethical approval was not originally sought which therefore limits the extent of its use, nor was the evaluation conducted for the purposes of this study. It was feasible to use the questionnaires for the purpose of the IPE as they were originally designed to maintain the anonymity of respondents but discretion has been practiced in instances when the respondents shared information about themselves in their responses that could possibly put them at risk of being partially identifiable.

4. Findings

4.1. How was the programme implemented? What are the risks, barriers and facilitators to implementation?

Since its commencement, the LSP has witnessed a number of changes that have impacted how it has been implemented. There have been noticeable internal changes to the programme, particularly its size, its targeting methods and its overall approach to delivery, as well as external changes at the institutional and national level. A major external factor that has impacted the LSP has been the Covid-19 pandemic, with affects that have played out during and since the pandemic. Broadly speaking, the support offered by the LSP, which pairs tailored one-to-one support with facilitated group activities and sessions, have grown in demand. Students are presenting with more challenges and are seeking out opportunities to access coaching and mentoring style support (Catling et. al. 2022).¹² In the case of the LSP, the programme was delivered but the provision was delivered entirely online using Microsoft Teams.

A significant factor impacting the broader implementation of the programme has been the overall size of the population engaged on the LSP. From the pilot year in 2019, the total number of students engaged on the programme (including all year groups, and not including withdrawals) increased from 71 in 2019 to 348 in 2022-23 (+390%), while the number of one-to-one coaching sessions increased from 201 in 2019-20 to 817 in 2022-23¹³ (+307%), with 2023-24 likely to exceed 1,000 sessions, in addition to the portfolio of group support and activities delivered (see Table 4 above). The number of full-time Student Success Officers has increased by 1.0 FTE, while the number of voluntary coaches increased from two to nine (Table 3). This increased demand presents a risk to implementation linked to the capacity of the team and voluntary coaches and the challenges associated with managing increased volume of sessions per team member.

¹² See also: [Coronavirus - student mental health - Mind](#).

¹³ The number for 2022-23 likely understates the true figure due to non-inclusion of withdrawals.

The makeup of the students participating on the programme present another risk to implementation. Not only the overall size, but also how the programme is targeted has changed over time and who has taken up a place. Resource limitations mean that all widening participation programme/project teams are required to make decisions about how they are going to support students. Given the intensive and personalised nature of the support provided as part of the LSP this presents a limit on how many students can be engaged. Ensuring the LSP support is available to students who need it most, while at the same time addressing Lancaster University's equality gaps is therefore central to assessing its successful implementation. Different subgroup distributions will also have different needs, so in addition to the scale, the makeup of the population may present different risk factors for consideration.

The overall pattern of engagement, for different subgroups and at different stages of the degree lifecycle, are another risk to implementation. While engagement is not prescribed, each student is offered two one-to-one sessions per term, alongside other activities they engage with. Analysis of who engages and how, utilising the secondary data, helps to ascertain the extent of this risk and potential changes over time.

The decision to adopt a coaching-informed approach presents two principal challenges for successful implementation. First, the extent to which this approach has been effectively implemented, and second, the affect it may have had on who has engaged in the programme. The coaching-informed practice is not suited to everyone, and a number of students may withdraw or not engage for this reason. Qualitative evaluations to test this possibility have not been conducted due to time constraints, however, trends in the secondary data and insights from historical evaluation may indicate directions for future enquiry.

There are also a number of important, context-specific facilitators that have supported the implementation of the LSP. The first relates to the alignment of senior leadership buy-in with the requisite skills, ambition and commitment of personnel in the Student Success Team, both of which were essential to envision, design and successfully implement a pioneering programme of post-entry student support at a time where such programmes were few and far between. The success of the programme and the ambition of those involved has been widely acknowledged through the awards it has received, including most notably the University Student Success Initiative of the year at UK Social Mobility Awards 2022.

There are also institutional features that lend Lancaster University to the development and implementation of such a programme. First, the University's overall and widening participation populations are of a scale that such an intensive, sustained and rounded programme of support is financially and practically feasible. Second, the way the university's wider college and student support services are organised created the capacity

for a programme solely dedicated to widening participation student success. For many other institutions, with larger student populations and different student support infrastructures, an LSP-style programme may not be appropriate.

4.1.1. Has the LSP been implemented as intended each year?¹⁴

Data relating to overall engagement for the period 2019-2023, shows that despite considerable variability at an individual student level, there was a consistent pattern of engagement overall, including for the year most effected by COVID-19 restrictions (2020-21). The majority of students engaged 3 to 4 times with the programme, with a minimum of 1 and maximum of 15.¹⁵ Tables 10 and 11 show that the frequency of engagement for those who participated at least once in a given year varied significantly with a range of 10 for the period as a whole (including 2023-24). Despite this, the mean and median engagements observed varied little. The mean number of total engagements (which included all activity delivered each year) ranged from 3.77 to 4.31, and 3.36 to 3.50 for one-to-one sessions. The standard deviation scores were also stable and relatively low, especially for the one-to-one sessions (variance of 0.2 verses 1.04 for total engagements). Figure 1 shows the distribution of these frequencies for each year. Table 12 shows similar levels of consistency when engagement is looked at over the course of the degree lifespan. Those students that do engage appear to remain consistent into their second and third years averaging between 3 and 3.7, though this remains an emergent trend that can be monitored further in subsequent years as more student cohorts enter their final years.

Table 10: Gross numbers of all LSP engagement by academic year with mean, median and standard deviation¹⁶

Number of engagements*	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23**	2023-24 ***
1	9	12	42	23	96
2	7	23	37	39	92
3	10	23	38	53	50
4	14	18	36	40	32
5	9	24	30	51	10
6	7	13	16	18	5
7	3	6	8	7	1
8	-	4	6	6	-

¹⁴ Intended: in relation to the aims and objectives of the LSP.

¹⁵ For this analysis we have not included those who did not engage at all in a given year. These are considered further below.

¹⁶ * This includes all activity delivered as part of the LSP.

** Calculations provided do not include 0, as this denotes an absence of engagement.

*** Number of engagements artificially low for 2022-23 due to non-inclusion of withdrawals, this will impact the lower brackets of engagement: 0, 1 and 2.

9	1	4	7	2	-
10	-	2	6	2	-
11	-	2	4	2	-
12	-	2	3	1	-
13	-	-	2	-	-
15	-	-	1	-	-
0	7	35	72	8	58
Total engagements	226	573	968	952	645
Mean**	3.77	4.31	4.10	3.90	2.26
Median**	4	4	4	4	2
Mode**	4	5	1	3	1
Range**	8	11	14	11	6
Standard Dev**	2.13	2.94	3.17	2.09	1.47

Table 11: Gross number of LSP one-to-one engagements by academic year with mean, median and standard deviation¹⁷

Number of 1:1s	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23*	2023-24
1	9	16	32	25	132
2	6	27	48	51	101
3	14	24	48	58	39
4	17	27	36	46	1
5	5	24	41	48	-
6	5	10	17	13	-
7	1	4	1	2	-
8	1	1	-	-	-
0	9	35	85	9	71
Total 1:1s	201	466	730	817	455
Mean	3.47	3.50	3.27	3.36	1.67
Median	4.5	3	3	3	2
Mode	4	2 and 4	2 and 3	3	1
Range	7	7	6	6	3
Standard Dev	1.62	1.64	1.54	1.44	0.73

Table 12: Average one-to-one engagements for students in their first, second and third years

Year of study	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
1 st Year	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.4	1.7
2 nd Year	-	3.2	3.3	3.4	1.5

¹⁷ * See note 9, regarding withdrawals.

3 rd /4 th Year	-	-	3.0	3.3	1.7
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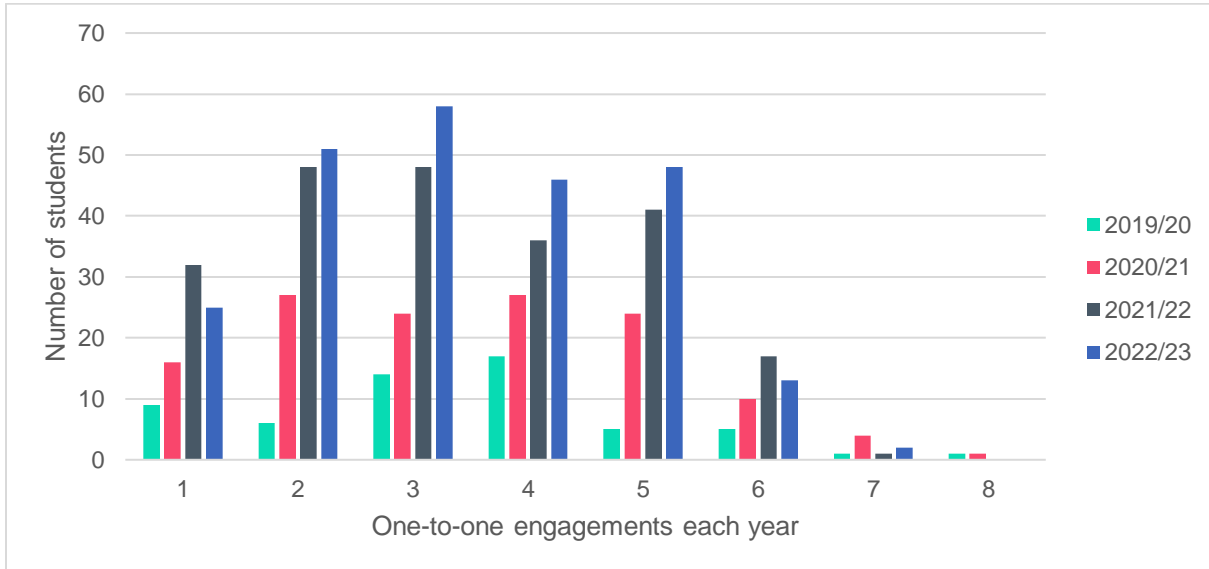


Figure 1: LSP one-to-one engagements 2019-20 to 2022-23¹⁸

Students who disengage or withdraw entirely from the programme have not been historically surveyed to ascertain the cause for disengagement. Due to the time constraints of this study, targeted research was not possible. Embedding a systematic offboarding process to identify the reason for disengagement is a core recommendation arising from this analysis and is important for any similar intervention. Many positive reasons exist for a student choosing to stop engaging in the programme. A student who is feeling they no longer require personalised support can be a sign the support is effective in assisting with personal growth and resilience. The demographic breakdown for those who withdrew from the programme show some surprising trends. Males were more likely to withdraw than females, though there was even number for both (57). Asian students were the most likely to withdraw from the programme, followed by Black students, while White students were significantly less likely (just 11% compared with 17% and 15% respectively). Commuter students were the most likely to withdraw (21% of total withdrew between 2019 and 2023), and mature students were more likely than younger students. While disabled students were less likely than students without a disability (10% compared with 12%). The cause behind these figures is difficult to ascertain due to lack of offboarding evaluation, though it is interesting to note that the patterns of withdrawals does not mirror perfectly wider demographic and engagement trends with some of the most engaged groups also being more likely to withdraw.

¹⁸ The year 2023-24 was not included as data received only linked to the first term’s engagement.

As previously mentioned, the size of the student population presents a risk to the implementation of the LSP in two ways: the increasing volume of activity to deliver and the effects on consistency in the quality and consistency of support. Both of these link to staffing capacity (time and skills/expertise). Table 13 (combined with Table 2) illustrates the increased demands posed by the programme as it has expanded. The majority of the increased number of one-to-ones has fallen to the full-time officers, while the number of voluntary coaches has increased to help reduce the number of students each voluntary coach works with. This solution has helped ensure that voluntary coaches can focus their time and effort on a smaller number of students, but with the consequence that each Success Officer has a higher workload. The impact this has had on delivery is not clear from the evidence available. A staff questionnaire exploring how this affects the ability of staff to deliver high-quality support and related questions shared with students to identify whether there are any variances in the support offered by Success Officers and voluntary coaches would provide useful evidence.

Table 13: Number of one-to-one sessions delivered by Student Success Officers and voluntary coaches¹⁹

Year	Student Success Officers		Voluntary coaches	
	Students	One-to-ones	Students	One-to-ones
2019-20	44	178	5	8
2020-21	133	375	29	100
2021-22	138	485	77	229
2022-23*	132	454	46	105
2023-24**	280	404	45	51

Overall, the trends observed indicate that the programme has been implemented successfully and in accordance with the programme’s aims and objectives. This is also evident in the questionnaire responses to the qualitative questions for the two consecutive academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23. Keyword frequency analysis combined with thematic mapping reveals that the majority of respondents (97%) have indicated (without being explicitly prompted) how one or more of the interventions of the LSP have helped them in relation to two or more of the intended objectives of the programme. Engagement, while encouraged, was not enforced and the number of engagements differed markedly between students. However, despite this, the analysis indicates that the programme is operating as intended.

¹⁹ * Withdrawals were not included for this year.

** 2023-24 figures refer to engagement in just first-term.

Additionally, the analysis points to students who want to engage are able to access an appropriate level of support that meets their individual needs²⁰ and that there is consistency in the level of support accessed between each year and the observed impact this has had on programme outcomes. An area for consideration especially if the programme continues to grow in numbers, is managing staffing capacity and ensuring consistency in the quality of support provided by Student Success Officers and voluntary coaches. This has so far been achieved through regular CPD and training. Staff questionnaires and integrating questions into annual service evaluations can help monitor this going forward.

4.1.2. Which student demographic groups engage with the LSP? What are the patterns of engagement for these demographic groups?²¹

Analysis of the data available for those engaged on the LSP compared with BTEC and BTEC+, POLAR4 Q1 and the overall student population shows that the LSP has been broadly successful in reaching some of the core groups of students it aims to support.²² There is variance in the level of engagement between subgroups, with some appearing in noticeably higher proportions and some in smaller, but across the key groups analysed representation generally matched or exceeded comparable figures for BTEC and mixed BTEC, POLAR4 and the UK undergraduate student population at Lancaster University.

BTEC and BTEC mixed qualifications

For the first two years of the programme, UK undergraduate students who qualified with BTEC and BTEC combined with other qualifications (BTEC+) were invited to participate in the programme, alongside students who were care experienced. BTEC and BTEC+ were by far the largest of these groups, comprising 76% and 68% of the LSP in 2019-20 and 2020-21. Following the switch in targeting to CO holders, their proportions fell to 42% and 29% in 2021-22 and 2022-23 respectively. However, due to increases in the overall size of the LSP population during this period, the number of BTEC and BTEC+ students engaged on the programme continued to increase, reaching a peak of 238 in 2021-22 and was sustained in 2022-23. The maintenance of this higher number is partly a legacy of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 cohorts, but many were also recruited through the new criteria. In total, 44% of BTEC and BTEC+ students on the LSP were also from a POLAR4

²⁰ This has also been reported in the qualitative questions of the questionnaires.

²¹ Student institutional demographic data was not available for the 2023-24 student entry cohort; therefore, analysis has been limited to 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 cohorts.

²² Not all of the categories the LSP considers were included in the analysis for this report. Two particularly significant categories were First in Family and low-income backgrounds of below £30,000. These are important socio-economic indicators (constituting between 50 and 60% of the overall student population based on administrative data) that could be examined further in future analysis. The figures provided have also been rounded to the nearest whole number to protect student identity.

Q1 neighbourhood (the principal qualifier for the CO, see below), while the figure for the overall BTEC and BTEC+ population varies from 19 to 15% between 2019-20 and 2022-23.

POLAR4 Quintile 1

The switch to targeting students in receipt of a CO and completion of an access programme from 2021-22, brought a larger proportion of students from POLAR4 Q1 neighbourhoods onto the programme. In 2019-20 they only made up 11% of the LSP student population, by 2022-23 this had increased to 45%. The proportions remained below 50% due to the lingering impact of the previous targeting approach and students qualifying via access programmes (which recruit using a wider range of WP criteria), which in 2023-24 had reached 20%.²³

Sex

While sex is not a widening participation criterion, their relative proportions provide important context to the findings of this study. Table 14 shows the male/female split for total student population engaged on the LSP each year. The trend is noticeable, shifting from a male to female majority. This trend may be a result of the change in targeting from BTEC and BTEC+ to CO (of which POLAR4 Q1 is the largest constituent). There is a male majority among the wider BTEC and BTEC+ student population and female majority for POLAR4 Q1 students.²⁴ These imbalances may therefore be due to the targeting approach, though further qualitative and quantitative research is required to identify what other factors might have caused this change.

Table 14: Percentage of male and female students engaged on the LSP²⁵

Sex*	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Male	61%	56%	47%	36%
Female	39%	44%	53%	64%

Ethnicity

The proportion of Black, Asian and mixed ethnicity students on the LSP have changed over the course of the programme's history. Ethnicity is not targeted directly through the recruitment process and so the differing proportions represent one or a combination of

²³ This figure was provided by the Student Success team from their administrative record.

²⁴ Which is the main qualifier for the CO.

²⁵ *To protect individual student identity only male and female have been compared in this analysis.

the following causes: a student's decision to engage or not in the programme, the visibility of the programme to different groups and their representation within the target groups and student body as a whole (see criteria for targeting in the introduction above). The data available as part of this study does not show which of these or any other potential factors explain the variances, but it does point to areas for future enquiry.

The number of Black students engaged on the LSP has remained constant during the years covered by this study, with a 38% increase in the total between the first and second year of the programme. However, their proportion of the overall LSP population has fallen in percentage terms due to the faster increase in overall population. The percentage has fallen from 25% in 2019-20 to below 10% in 2022-23.²⁶ The overall percentage for the period covered was higher than the institutional proportions and in line with the comparator groups (BTEC and BTEC+ and POLAR4 Q1).

The number of Asian students has steadily increased since the programmes origins. As a percentage of the LSP student population it achieved a high in 2020-21 of 18% and then fell to 13% in 2022-23. While the percentage fell, the proportions remain consistent with institutional figures for BTEC and BTEC+ and are higher than those for the UK undergraduate student population at LU and POLAR4 Q1.

The proportion of students of mixed ethnicity meanwhile managed to keep pace with the overall increase of the LSP student population, increasing by 2% between 2019-20 to 2022-23.²⁷ The proportion of White students increased at the highest rate, from 67% to 74% in that same period, which in part can be explained by the demographic makeup of POLAR4 Q1 from which the programme was acquiring many of its new participants post 2021-22.

Disability

Disability is a widening participation criterion, though, as in the case of ethnicity, it is not targeted directly during the recruitment process for the LSP. Data shows that this group constitutes a significant proportion of the overall LSP population, varying from a low of 27% to a high of 39%. Of this group, the majority are students with non-physical disabilities (e.g. mental health and neurodiversity).²⁸ These figures are significantly higher than for the comparator groups, which suggests that students from this group are drawn to the LSP and the support it provides.

Mature

Mature students (students aged 21 or over at the commencement of their undergraduate studies) represent a high proportion of the LSP population, increasing from 17% to 21%

²⁶ The percentage has been rounded to protect anonymity.

²⁷ Percentages each year for mixed and all other ethnicity groups not included due to low numbers.

²⁸ Exact percentage not included to protect identity.

between 2019-20 and 2022-23. These percentages are significantly higher than their proportions for the LU student population and the comparator groups. Institutional data suggests that the LSP captures a significant proportion of the overall mature student population (40 to 50%). These figures provide a strong indication that the LSP and the support offered are particularly appealing to this group.

Commuter

A commuter tag was used for the purposes of this study to denote if the student's term time postcode matched their home address. While this is not a perfect indicator, the data does indicate that this group has been well-represented on the LSP. Between 12% and 13% of the LSP population fall into this category for the years covered, whereas the figure is below 10% for the LU UK undergraduate and POLAR4 Q1 populations.

Regionality

Over half of the LSP cohort in any given year are from the Northwest (low of 50%, high of 59%). These proportions mirror those of BTEC and BTEC+ and POLAR4 Q1 and is higher than the percentage for Lancaster's UK undergraduate student population as a whole.

Overview

The above analysis, while not complete or including all relevant groups,²⁹ highlights several areas for further enquiry. Some groups, notably Black students, and to a lesser extent, Asian students, and since 2021-22, male students, are not as well represented on the programme as other groups. In contrast, disabled students (particularly non-physical), mature, commuter and female students are well represented on the programme.

The cause of these differences is not obvious from the demographic data. Additional research engaging with those groups is required. There is some indication from the data that changes in representation on the programme may be a result of changes to the targeting approach (for example, the male/female split and ethnicity reflecting the equivalent proportions for BTEC and BTEC+ and POLAR4 Q1), though other causal factors that might be at play are not possible to infer from the evidence currently available.

4.1.3. Has the implementation of the coaching-led approach affected overall engagement?

Evidence available has not been sufficient to answer this question. It is dependent on the ability to baseline previous practice and experiences and compare with changes over time. The change in practice has been gradual and to some extent responsive, both to the needs of students and the emergent evidence base to support the idea that coaching

²⁹ See notes 12 and 13.

practices offer a potentially valuable means of supporting students that differs from mentoring or advising.

The pace of change has also been reflective of the gradual improvement in skills and experiences of the team. Training and CPD have been delivered consistently over the course of the period leading to a growing expertise among team members that has continued even with changes in personnel. Several of the newer members of the Student Success team had been voluntary coaches and those who have been hired have been able to demonstrate experience in similar practices. As the evidence from Table 13 above shows, the volume of one-to-ones being delivered by the Success Officers compared with voluntary coaches has increased significantly. This raises a potential risk to implementation of differentiated levels of expertise in coaching practices between the Student Success Officers and the voluntary coaches. While the evidence to demonstrate this is not available and cannot be assumed, it is something to consider in future enquiry and operationally for other equivalent programmes.

Engagement data shows that further embedding the coaching-led approach appears not to have affected average engagement levels on the programme in a positive or negative direction. Though it must be noted that the size of the engaged population increased significantly during this period, which means the overall level of engagement (number of students benefiting from support) has expanded significantly (see Table 13 above). There are also a number of relevant insights that can be drawn from how different subgroups of students have engaged, see section 4.2.1. below.

While demographic and administrative data do not provide sufficient evidence, both post-intervention questionnaires of 2021-22 and 2022-23 indicate that the group of students who responded to these questionnaires view coaching as most helpful and useful, only second to socialising and social events. Interestingly, a comparative analysis of the qualitative open-ended questions of the two questionnaires reveal an overall increase in the number of students who reported that coaching was helpful or useful in 2022-23 in comparison to 2021-22.

- For instance, in responding to the qualitative question “what helped you feel a sense of belonging” on the 2021-22 questionnaire, coaching was mentioned 5 times in 30 responses as opposed to 9 times for various forms of “socials and socialising.”
- In the 2022-23 questionnaire, coaching was mentioned 8 times in 23 responses in contrast to 11 times for “socials and socialising.” 2021-22 responses to the question “what helped you remain at university and complete your degree” reported 3 responses (out of 15) indicating the role of coaching in helping them remain at the University and complete their degree. In 2022-23, this number has doubled in a total of 10 responses to this question.

- Similarly, responses to the question “how has the Lancaster Success Programme helped you improve your grades this year,” reveal a high frequency of coaching.
- Remarkably, the question asking respondents to “name up to 3 things you liked about the Lancaster Success Programme” reported the highest frequency of the recurrence of coaching in responses with 32 respondents out of 51 in 2021-22 and 36 respondents out of 45 in 2022-23 coming ahead of all other interventions.

While the keyword frequency analysis cannot be claimed to be representative of the entire LSP student population due to the relatively small percentage of respondents, the analysis still points to the popularity of coaching in comparison to other interventions and to the reported positive impact it is having on participants in relation to transition, progression and success.

4.2. How did students engage with the LSP?

4.2.1. What are the patterns of engagement between different sub-groups of LSP participants

Table 15 provides an overview of the patterns of engagement across all activity for different subgroups each year. The data shows some variance in the yearly average engagements of different subgroups over time. While it is difficult to discern any clear trends, there does appear to be an emergent relationship between the groups that are well-represented on the LSP (see demographic analysis in section 4.2. above) and the average number of engagements for those groups. The data shows that female students participate in more engagements on average than male students on the LSP. Black student engagement was relatively low in 2019-20, 2020-21 and reached its lowest in 2021-22, then recovered in 2022-23. In 2023-24, Black students have engaged in the second highest number of engagements on average of all subgroups. Asian students engaged at a comparatively high levels in 2019-20 and 2020-21, the average then fell in 2021-22, before recovering in 2022-23. Commuter students show higher average number of engagements compared with non-commuter; likewise, disabled students engaged more on average than non-disabled students. Mature-student engagement has been the highest of all subgroups across all years except for 2019-20.

Except for a few outliers, average engagements for all subgroups broadly sit within the 3 to 5 range, and so conclusions about relative engagement levels should be tempered, not least by the limits of the data. While not conclusive, this data does indicate that the LSP’s current package of support may be particularly well-suited to some students and less so for others. Further qualitative research could supply more evidence to test these trends as well as helping to identify activity/support that might appeal to some of the less well-represented groups.

Table 15: Average number of engagements by subgroup³⁰

Subgroups	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24*
Sex					
Female	4.43	4.78	4.33	4.00	1.81
Male	3.35	3.92	3.81	3.76	1.87
Ethnicity					
Asian	4.11	4.17	3.65	3.80	1.73
Black	3.25	3.30	2.67	3.91	2.11
Mixed	4.00	3.00	4.11	3.38	1.67
White	3.92	4.62	4.37	3.94	1.83
Commuter					
Non-commuter	3.73	4.21	4.09	3.83	1.89
Commuter	3.91	4.69	4.17	4.31	1.43
Disability					
Disability	3.92	4.39	4.88	3.96	1.73
Non-physical disability	3.88	4.38	5.02	4.31	1.83
No disability	3.67	4.28	3.75	3.87	1.86
Age					
Young	3.86	4.13	3.85	3.54	1.73
Mature	3.36	5.00	4.88	5.17	2.12

³⁰ The averages are for students who have engaged in at least one engagement in the year analysed.
*2023-24 includes only first term's engagement totals.

4.2.2. What are the patterns of engagement across different activities delivered as part of the LSP?

Table 16 shows the annual patterns of engagement in activities other than the one-to-one coaching sessions. Descriptions of each can be found section 2. above. It shows that total engagement levels are more variable than in the case of the one-to-one coaching sessions. Participation in these activities is entirely voluntary. It is only if they do not engage in any one-to-one sessions that they are removed from the programme. The group activities are generally intended to provide LSP students with the opportunity to connect with other students, participate in a wider LSP community, build their confidence in social settings and learn new skills and competencies (see Theory of Change appendix 1).

The enrichment fund offers small grants to all LSP students to contribute toward the cost of their studies. Students can access this grant once a year throughout their degree. The take up of the grant has changed over time with a significant increase in the post-pandemic return to in-person study. Prior to this, take up was far less widespread. It has not been considered in great depth in this report as it does not constitute active engagement in the same way the one-to-one and group support does. That being said, historical service evaluation has shown that students do value the financial assistance, particularly at a time where cost of living is such a challenge.

Table 16: Total engagements in support/group activities

Activity	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24*
Workshops	24	27	-	-	-
Social events	-	-	28	51	87
Action Learning Sets	-	22	57	25	34
Peer Support	-	-	-	-	17
Enrichment fund	18	38	131	140	26

The focus of the LSP is very much on the one-to-one coaching sessions. They represent 80% of the post-entry engagements delivered (not including pre-entry and financial support) and occupy the majority of the time and capacity of the Student Success Team. The wider portfolio of activities is intended to address the needs of those students who seek additional support in a group setting supporting with the development of skills and competencies, helping to enable networking and socialising in a safe and accessible space, and to nurture a sense of belonging and community among students and staff

engaged on the programme. Demographic combined with engagement data (Table 17) mirrors the patterns of engagement observed above, with white, female, commuter, disabled and mature students showing higher levels of engagement on average, and male and black students showing lower levels. Given the aim of these group activities is to nurture a sense of belonging and building a community to help students socialise and share their experiences, these differences in engagement represent another area for consideration.

Table 17: Average number of engagements in group activities by subgroup³¹

Subgroups	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24*
Sex					
Female	1.10	2.60	3.00	2.29	1.38
Male	1.00	2.47	2.24	2.17	1.17
Ethnicity					
Asian	1.00	2.86	1.83	2.20	1.25
Black	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.67	1.67
Mixed	-	-	2.80	2.25	1.00
White	1.06	2.73	3.06	2.21	1.33
Commuter					
Non-commuter	1.00	2.41	2.54	2.26	1.39
Commuter	1.33	3.00	3.67	2.23	1.00
Disability					
Disability	1.00	2.07	3.41	2.67	1.25
No disability	1.08	2.79	2.30	1.97	1.37
Age					
Young	1.00	2.42	2.07	1.77	1.25
Mature	1.20	2.91	4.14	2.73	1.45

³¹ Engagements exclude one-to-one sessions, financial support and Prepare for Lancaster. Averages exclude 0 engagements.

* 2023-24 shows just first term engagements.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of findings

The analysis conducted in this IPE has aimed to explore how and to what extent the LSP has been implemented as intended. This represents a first step toward developing a deeper understanding of the role that widening participation success programmes, such as the LSP, can play in supporting student outcomes, what works in terms of the activities and approaches being taken, and how these findings might help support continued improvement of the LSP and how other programmes delivered in different institutional settings can approach similar challenges.

The evidence explored suggests that the LSP has been implemented successfully, achieving its core aims and objectives delivering tailored, coaching-informed and longitudinal support to students from widening participation backgrounds and to *‘provide a space to reflect and develop personalised strategies for success’*. The data shows that despite changing internal and external factors, the LSP was delivered in a consistent manner, with overall average engagement in post-entry support of between 4 and 5, and one-to-one coaching sessions between 3 and 4. These averages remained constant each year (except for 2023-24 which at the time of collating data had only completed its first term) even with the impact of the pandemic and of a rapidly growing LSP student population. Though the averages are stable, individual student engagement varied significantly. With some engaging in just one session and others as high as 10 or 15. For one-to-one coaching sessions the highest numbers recorded were 7 to 8.

Keyword frequency analysis combined with thematic mapping of the questionnaire responses to the qualitative questions demonstrated that the majority of respondents (97%) have indicated that one or two of the interventions of the LSP have helped them in relation to two or more of the intended outcomes and aims of the programme, particularly, transition, progression, academic success, student experience, opportunities and acquiring skills facilitating success, belonging and sense of community, and empowerment with an overall average of 85% of those who responded to the questionnaires indicating that the LSP had a significant role in their transition, progression or success, and not withdrawing. The highest total frequency of interventions mentioned across all questions of the questionnaire was the one-to-one coaching with 36% respondents indicating that coaching was mostly responsible for their “good grades,” “not withdrawing when things got difficult,” and having the support to balance complex “life circumstances” with study.

The demographic data revealed a number of trends that, while not offering conclusive evidence, suggest avenues for future research. While proportions changed over the course of the programme’s history, particularly following the change in targeting approach

in 2021-22 (see section 2 for more on targeting), taken as a whole, a number of groups stand out as more or less represented. Among the better represented include mature, disabled, commuter and female students, while black and male students were less so. Male and black students were better represented in the first two years (2019-20 and 2020-21), which appears to have been a reflection of the demographic makeup of the target group in those years (BTEC and BTEC mixed); however, in subsequent years the programme sees an increasingly significant female majority and black student numbers struggle to keep up with the increases in the overall size of the population.

Subgroup analysis of students that withdrew from the programme highlighted some consistent, but also some variant trends, though the small numbers involved and the lack of a formal offboarding process historically means that a clear understanding of why students chose to withdraw is not possible from the analysis. That being said, males were proportionately more likely than females to withdraw, Asian and Black students were more likely than White students, and commuter students were more likely than non-commuter students to withdraw. All of these trends point in the direction of future enquiry to understand the causes of these withdrawals and highlight the importance of implementing effective monitoring of those who withdraw and moreover those who never engage but were eligible.

The impact that the transition to a coaching-informed approach had on the programme has been difficult to discern within the confines of this study. The available data indicates that engagement has remained high despite the significant increase in the number of students engaged and the change in practice, indicating that it has not had a negative impact. Evidence from historical service evaluations meanwhile suggests that coaching has broadly had a positive impact on a subset of anonymised, non-randomised participants who completed the post-intervention questionnaires of 2021-22 and 2022-23. Both sets of responses show that participants in the questionnaires considered coaching to be the most valuable and beneficial intervention provided as part of the LSP. A comparative examination of the qualitative open-ended questions in both questionnaires also reveals an overall increase in the number of students who reported finding coaching helpful or useful in 2022-23 as compared to 2021-22.

Whether the changes in demographic makeup of the programme are a consequence of this transition to a coaching-informed approach or a result of different targeting is also difficult to discern from the evidence available. Further qualitative research will need to be done to explore the impact of the coaching practice on students. It might also require comparative work with programmes or projects that focus more on mentoring and advice. Evidence from the research literature points to positive impacts resulting from engagement with coaching programmes (Capstick et. al., 2019) though comparisons with mentoring and advice support could generate more detailed evidence.

Subgroup analysis of engagement has identified a number of trends worth noting. Engagement levels broadly reflect the demographic makeup of the programme, with those groups that are well-represented also engaging in higher average numbers of engagements. This may provide some indication of which groups the coaching approach is particularly suited to. Mature, disabled, commuter and female students as well as being well-represented were also the most engaged on average (Table 15), whereas black and male students were not as well engaged and less well represented.

Additionally, some noteworthy trends the analysis showed were related to the likelihood of withdrawal rates in relation to student subgroups when examined across gender, ethnicity, age, and disability. For instance, males were found more likely to withdraw than females, Asian students were the most likely to withdraw, followed by Black students, in comparison to White students who were significantly less likely. Commuter students were the most likely to withdraw and mature students were more likely than younger students. On the other hand, disabled students were less likely than students without a disability (Table 17).

Firm conclusions should not be drawn from this analysis, the range of variables at play have not been systematically reviewed, for example, whether communications (style and timings etc.), staff composition, institutional demographics, appeal of coaching methods, intersectionality and other factors also played a role. Qualitative research could help explore these additional variables alongside further quantitative analysis.

5.2. Limitations of the research

Due to the time allocation for this project, the research conducted as part of this IPE has relied on secondary data and historical evaluations, neither of which were originally collated/conducted for the purposes of this study. As a result, a variety of limitations apply. The data is dependent on historical administrative practices, is susceptible to human error, systems errors and to limitations in the availability of data. Discrepancies and inconsistencies in the data may exist that have not been accounted for and so these limitations should be born in mind when assessing the findings.

Likewise, the evaluations that have been used were not conducted for the purposes of answering the questions raised in the IPE. They have been deployed in a sensitive and cautious manner to provide additional information where relevant, relating to specific aspects of the research questions presented.

5.2.1. Internal validity

There is very low internal validity due to limitations of the timeframe, data and evaluation designs (see IE for more details). The lack of randomisation and test/control groups alongside the use of historical evaluations/secondary data mean that any causal relationships discussed in this report will not generate a high degree of confidence.

Moreover, more research is needed to better understand the variables at play in programmes such as the LSP. For example, differences in coaching vs mentoring/advice, whether some groups find the support more appealing than others, the impact of differing levels of engagement, the impact of engagement intensity, the use of a student-led approach and the value of group activities. This report provides ample avenues for future research and key questions for consideration.

5.2.2. External validity

Given the low internal validity of the IPE findings, its external validity carries the same mitigations. That being said, the reflections produced, and the questions raised are of relevance to all similar programmes being delivered in a HE setting. Core considerations around targeting and engagement, alongside elements of practice and programme design will hopefully prove useful to other HE providers delivering or commencing similar post-entry interventions.

5.3. Reflections

Though the work conducted as part of this study has produced a number of valuable findings that help inform future planning and directions for research, the short duration of the project has limited the depth and rigour of the work undertaken.

Some of the initial delays around establishing data sharing agreements and ethics approval could be streamlined for future projects of a similar nature, this would provide more time to devise relevant evaluation and research designs to generate qualitative evidence. Conducting primary research to inform the IPE would also carry additional ethical approval requirements that would further delay the process, so being able to progress at the very start of the project would help address some of the time constraints.

The dependence on historical evaluation and secondary data has meant that the analysis is able to draw on evidence arising from change over time and provide contextual variables that make the insights more informative. However, the data is not aligned to the needs of the IPE or the research questions that arose. Therefore, inferences have been made from incomplete or not perfectly matched data. This presents limitations in terms of veracity and validity of the findings, particularly in relation to causality.

Despite these limitations, the narrative and empirical evidence that has been generated from this process has yielded insights that are of practical use for teams looking to deliver a programme like the LSP. The approach taken to targeting, its impact on demographic makeup and the subsequent insights provided in terms of engagement are all pertinent. Moreover, the lessons learned around acquiring institutional data, seeking ethics, establishing research teams and organising the evaluative research design, implies that any future attempt to use institutional data in this way and to conduct an IPE and IE will be more successful in future.

6. Conclusions

This report has highlighted some fruitful avenues for how institutional data can be used to support evaluative research of post-entry widening participation support. The LSP provides a particularly useful test bed for these methods, due to its longevity and the different points of transition that provide the opportunity to test different hypotheses. The report suggests that the LSP has been a successful programme demonstrated through the analysis of consecutive years of service evaluation which indicate a strong association between participation in the programme and student success, particularly evident in retention rates. Additionally, narrative evidence drawn from qualitative evaluation, attests to the impact the programme has had on its participants' attitudes, behaviours and competencies. The way the programme has evolved over time was informed by this body of evidence and has resulted in a well-defined and adaptive programme. To date, the LSP has proven highly successful in addressing LU's strategic priorities and needs. The report provides an evidence-based indication of the efficacy of the programme and suggests that it has been successfully implemented, though further research is needed to make conclusive assertions.

Despite the limitations of the research, which have been widely discussed, this report provides several insights that can be of relevance to any team or institution looking to implement a similar programme. The core findings around engagement, demographics and subgroup analysis, alongside analysis drawn from historical evaluations around the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its intermediary outcomes, point to a programme that is demonstrating good practice and forging new pathways in post-entry widening participation support.

The evidence explored also highlights some of the defining characteristics of this approach and the students for whom an intensive, coaching-informed approach are appropriate. Such patterns in engagement are difficult to anticipate when launching such a complex programme, and while this report offers no firm answers, it does provide indication of where future enquiry should be focussed. Engaging with those groups that are less well-represented or who are missing entirely should be a priority, particularly given the risks to inequality of opportunity some of these group's face. The answer appears to lie in a mixture of intelligent targeting, which considers the makeup of the target groups within institutional contexts, and tailoring support in a manner that makes it appealing to diverse groups of students.

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Also look at:

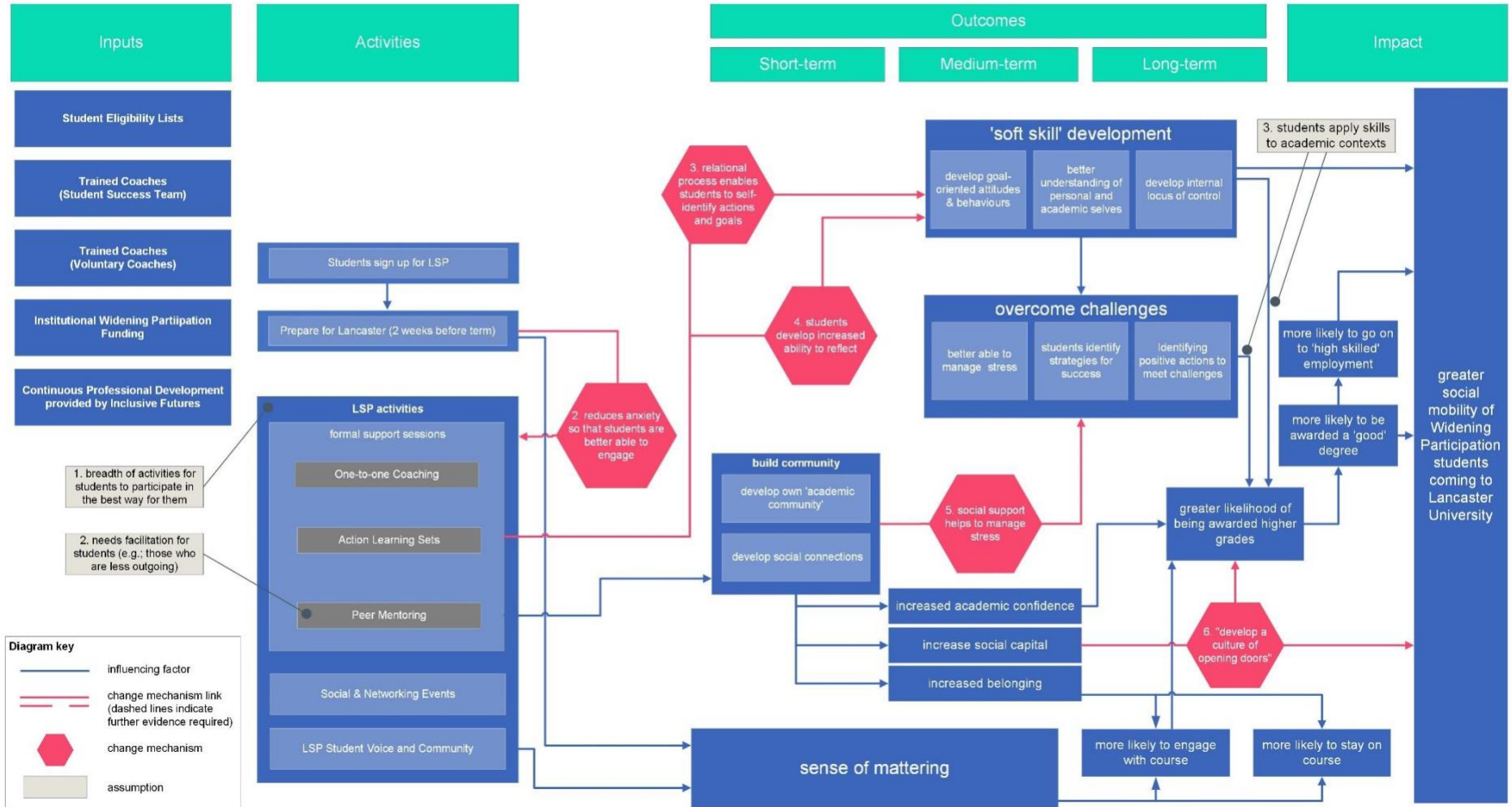
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Appendix 1: Enhanced Theory of Change Lancaster Success Programme

Lancaster Success Programme
Enhanced Theory of Change



S^{Co}LPP
Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice



Appendix 2: Description and copy of the post-intervention questionnaire 2022-23

The post-intervention questionnaires for the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23 were designed by members of the LSP and were administered online anonymously. The questionnaire consists of a total of 18 questions, five of which are 5-point Likert type questions with each branching into 10-15 sub-questions; further four questions prompt a yes/no response, and nine are qualitative questions prompting respondents to comment on a range of why, how, and when questions. The questionnaires employ a wide range of questions focussed on encouraging the programme participants to reflect on their student experience as participants in the LSP and to provide feedback in relation to their engagement with various aspects of the programme in line with its aims. Some of the questions encourage students to demonstrate the impact the programme has had on their attitudes, behaviours, competencies and experience generally.

Copy of the questionnaire:

Lancaster Success Programme (22/23) End of Year Exercise

Many thanks for your engagement with the Lancaster Success Programme (LSP) this year.

This survey is designed to give you the chance to reflect on your experiences. We would like you to answer the following questions to help us understand how you have engaged with and benefited from the programme, how much you know about the University and available services, and your thoughts on any changes that we could make.

The survey will take you approximately **5-10 minutes** to complete. On completion, you will receive a transcript of your answers to your nominated email account. Your name will be added into a prize draw - there are 3 x £20 Amazon vouchers to be won. **If you wish to enter the prize draw please follow instructions on the final page after the survey.**

Privacy Statement

By completing this form you acknowledge that we will use the information provided for monitoring, evaluation and research purposes. We are processing your data so that we can provide a contractual service. Lancaster University takes collecting your personal information seriously and will use the information you provide in line with our Student Privacy Notice. For more information about how Lancaster University uses and secures your personal data, including your rights over your data, please visit the University's Student Privacy Notice here: <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/privacy/student-privacy>

0 I understand

* Required

Student Experience

With the following questions we would like to find out how the Lancaster Success Programme has impacted on your university experience this year.

1. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please select one option for each

statement.

The Lancaster Success Programme has helped me.*

Strongly
agree.

Agree.

Neither
agree nor
disagree.

Disagree.

Strongly
disagree.

Overcome challenges I have faced.

Transition to University life and study.

Know who to go to for help.

Increase my self-belief.

Solve problems proactively.

Feel valued at university.

Improve my motivation.

Feel at home.

Make the most of my time at university.

Build social connections and make friends.

Be more resilient when facing challenges.

Feel included at Lancaster University.

Become connected to the university.

Become more independent.

Feel happy at university.

2. Do you feel a sense of belonging at Lancaster University? *

Q Yes

Q No

Q Maybe

3. Is there anything in particular that has helped you feel a sense of belonging at Lancaster University?

4. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have got to know other members of the LSP this year. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

5. At any point this year, did you think about withdrawing from your course? *

- Yes
- No

6. When did you consider withdrawing from your course? *

7. What factors made you consider withdrawing from your course? *

8. What helped you remain at university and complete your degree?

9. With the following questions we would like to find out how the LSP has affected your academic performance and overall attainment.

10. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please select one option for each statement.

Strongly agree. Agree. Neither agree nor disagree. Disagree. Strongly disagree.

- Feel confident in my ability to do my degree.
- Set and achieve goals.
- Identify areas for improvement.
- Plan my time effectively.
- Reflect on my progress.
- Improve my study skills.
- Have a more positive mindset.
- Improve my performance in exams and coursework.
- Have the confidence to start and complete difficult tasks.
- Remain productive.
- Work effectively with others.
- Have the confidence to contribute in lessons.
- Seek out support with academic problems.
- Manage competing deadlines.
- Devise strategies to manage the demands of my course.

11. Overall, do you feel the Lancaster Success Programme has helped you improve your grades this year? *

Yes

No

How has the Lancaster Success Programme helped?

Your Future

12. With these questions we would like to learn how the Lancaster Success Programme might have effected your future plans.

13. Which of the following options best describes you at the moment? *

- Q I am certain of what I want to do after university
- Q I am actively exploring my options
- Q I have some ideas I want to explore
- Q I have started thinking about my future a little
- Q I have not thought about my options after university

14. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please select one option for each statement.

The Lancaster Success Programme has helped me *

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Decide what my next steps are

Plan for the future

Develop my interview skills

Seek out work experience

Acquire career advice

Identify my skills and strengths

Feel confident in interviews and job applications

Find out what my options are after graduating

Complete job or further study

Feel positive about my future.

15. Overall Thoughts

With the final questions we would like to find out your overall thoughts about the Lancaster Success Programme and any suggestions you might have.

Would you recommend the Lancaster Success Programme to other students? *

Q Yes

Q No

Please name up to 3 things you liked about the Lancaster Success Programme. *

Please name up to 3 things you would improve on the Lancaster Success Programme? *

How would you describe your experience on the Lancaster Success Programme? *

Please contribute any other thoughts or comments you might have about the Lancaster Success Programme...