Access and participation plan: student submission template

Name of university or college:	University of West London
Date submitted:	26/07/2024
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Please ensure that you maintain independence from your university or college when completing this submission.

Summary

Are you satisfied that your university or college has provided you with access to sufficient information and data to complete the student submission?

Yes

As part of our collaborative approach with UWL, the Students' Union (SU) has a defined data-sharing agreement that allows us to effectively assess student demographics, trends, results in surveys, poll-based information and NSS.

Within the Access and Participation scope from UWL, the SU is part of the Group that analyses data associated with the implementation of APP interventions, within all major university departments such as Schools, the Library, Careers, Mentoring, Wellbeing, Counselling, Student Advice & Money, amongst others. This analysis looks at the numbers of engagements with programmes, measures to identify effectiveness (including efficacy, impact on grades, opinion surveys), lessons learned and qualitative feedback on improvements to the service.

The SU also has access to university NSS data that can be split by schools, course groupings and demographics. This NSS data is directly used to target specific courses (as groupings), schools, or demographics based on their responses – this is then used to assess and enhance APP related activity to positively improve the offer.

In addition, the graduate employability data, good degrees data, and progression & continuation data is also shared with the SU. Where the data indicates a potential risk of equality of opportunity by demographics, schools or courses again, the SU is given a platform to be a critical friend to appropriately challenge what the university is planning to do to address this. To support this, the APP Group has asked each department including the SU, to contribute to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, where the SU was able to confirm which areas across access; success,

continuation, completion and attainment risks were the greatest with particular demographics of students.

Overall, we have sufficient data and information that allows the SU to conduct this report effectively.

Approach

Can you tell us briefly how this student submission was put together, for example your approach to gathering the views of different students?

The SU regularly consult a range of student leaders and students in the process of understanding and articulating the views towards the APP. It is to be noted that the description of APP is tailored between the seniority of student leaders, as to best capture and focus their understanding (for example, sabbatical officers are consulted in regular APP terms, whilst course reps are asked about their experiences within specific interventions in the APP, such as student support programmes, which we feel is more comprehensible for them).

The SU regularly engages with School Representatives [10 in total] and Course Representatives [approx. 600, representing 100% UWL courses by each year of study]. As part of our engagement and outreach with these student leaders, we regularly consult with them about specific interventions or departments within UWL. For example, we ask Level 6 representatives for their experiences utilising any of the university support services, where 76% stated they have, with 88% of these noting it had helped them progress through university and help their future?

Sabbatical Officers are firstly, part of the APP group that gives active feedback and communicates the views of students they consult. One of the sabbatical officers new initiatives, the 'Buddy Scheme' has recently been added to the UWL's new APP plan for the next 4 years, which shows the effectiveness that their input has had on university decision making around APP.

As part of the APP plan itself, there are SU led programmes entitled the Big Conversation, and 'Equality Champions' that feeds directly into APP. Equality Champions are a network of students recruited and trained by the SU, to specifically feedback on the approach the university takes to APP and provide insights to improve their interventions and engagement from students. Originally, the term 'APP Champions' was proposed but the SU felt Equality Champions would be better understood, without relinquishing the prime purpose of the role being to feedback on APP. The Equality Champions network purposefully comprises of students from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, who can bring their unique understanding to the university, as well as provide insight to cultural norms, community stigma, and more that may impact the effectiveness of interventions for students. As part of this submission, their continued views and insights have been used to consolidate this viewpoint.

More descriptions of the impact of APP are available within the supporting video produced by UWLSU, which has been submitted alongside this

Evidence

Please list any evidence sources referred to in this submission:

A list of evidence sources below has supported this submission:

APP interim and end of year reports Lessons Learned; Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and B3 data; Departmental data and Reports across APP – Library, Careers, Student Advice, Wellbeing, Outreach, Finance, Study Support, Marketing, CELT [Centre for Teaching and Excellence], Global Partnerships and Student Experience.

Equality Champions meeting minutes & Equality Champions annual reports

APP Equality of Opportunity Risk Register
APP 4 accessyear strategy
APP presentations and reports from APP Group

University demographic data

School rep meeting minutes & views within outreach and engagement data

Course rep views within outreach and engagement data

Commentary

To what extent do the student body think that:

- Your university or college has identified and focused the plan on its greatest risks to equality of opportunity?

The APP plan is shared with many departments, including the SU, detailing which groups and demographics the university is choosing to target with interventions. The prioritisation is based on a number of factors, including specific university data on outcomes; attendance and retention; university and SU data on engagement (including SU and university department projects); sector knowledge; research and insight; and general feedback from student leaders (such as Sabbatical Officer and Equality Champions) and the student body.

Our view is that the university is credible on its reasoning pertaining to support for specific demographic groups or communities. The Equality of Opportunity Risk Register affirms this as do the specific interventions and programmes included in the APP. It is visible to see the rationale for such interventions, which groups of students they target, and what the methods are to evaluate the effectiveness of them. There is also an additional link to the OfS priorities, to specifically identify which interventions align to these priorities.

Therefore, the greatest risks can be identified as they are linked by data related to the access, progression, completion, continuation and graduate outcomes.

We would like to see the university outline and be more descriptive with how certain programmes are tailored for challenges associated with the identified groups, whether that be ethnicity, IMD or mental health amongst others – specifically in relation to socio-political contexts. For example, the university previously ran a Academic writing in HE programme that targeted specific groups (Black, IMD 1-2), however it is available for all students. Within the new APP approaches, it would be useful to continually outline how programmes will adapt, change or consider its approach to specifically benefit for example, Black students and those from IMD 1-2, as per the identified target group. This would challenge thinking into distinguishing how the programmes can be tailored to engage or support specific groups, as opposed to an approach that benefits all student groups.

Given this, the overall plan for APP is strong and the number of interventions that students can access will benefit their experience and positively impact their outcomes. There is a clear link between how the programmes will benefit the highest risk groups and there is an adaptable approach to continually change these.

- The intervention strategies outlined by your university or college seem a credible way to address these risks? For example, they are based on credible and relevant evidence and student insights.

Yes

As noted earlier, the University and SU have a strong partnership where student voice and insights are consistently analysed and used to determine interventions and programmes. The SU hold an intervention as parts of students' induction to university, called the Big Conversation, where every new enrolled student has a conversation with the SU where answers and insights are recorded. This includes demographic and living information, confidence, support requested and much more. All of this data is anonymised and shared with UWL in order to create a picture how students are feeling and thinking coming into university – this is directly used to shape existing and create new interventions based on the results. For example, recent international student cohorts have demonstrated more worries about speaking English as a 2nd language, therefore the university created English Language Café's as a direct response to engage students to practice English as they first start.This activity helps students engage in the social aspects of university life to enable them to feel part of the community which in turn addresses the equality risk associated with loneliness. The programme is open to all students which also encourages social interaction between cultural groups and supports cross cultural connections and awareness.

The university is particularly effective at utilising student representatives to aid their APP planning. Equality Champions have had direct impacts on APP interventions and we have adopted a co-creation ethos to future interventions. Each year since their inception, we have created an Equality Champions report that has detailed how each idea or contribution has led into either a new initiative, or developments of existing initiatives. For example, contributions supported the Extended Inclusive Induction following feedback that the current induction process didn't equitably support students who might feel less confident using university systems software (such as Blackboard) more challenging than others. To keep this approach, the Equality Champions have met with university department Head's to give their ideas and feedback – this ensures that students are directly speaking to decision makers (e.g. Head of Library, Head of Study Support).

- Your university or college's new plan represents a change in their approach?

Yes

  - o Please explain your answer:

The APP has several new interventions which were created with consultation with the students' union in addition to UWL staff members, particularly in the realms of psychology and using a theory of change approach. We're assured that the university adopts change in its approach given the new stages throughout the plan, including the 'Transition' stages – we feel these 'transition' approaches are effective as they address the less tangible aspects of students moving through difference stages of university life, including the confidence, feeling of belonging, and motivations.

The 'journey' approach to APP is aimed to allow analyses to assess whether a students' engagement in different interventions may impact their progression and success at university. It also allows an effective mapping process of how students move from one stage to another, at which interventions may be more effective than others. If this is identified, then we feel confident that the university will change or adapt its interventions based on the results. It also adds an effective level of change-approach as there is a possibility that we can assess a students' 'journey' from starting university, all the way through to graduation and identifying which interventions they got involved with on the way.

- Your university or college's access and participation plan is sufficiently ambitious in addressing the risks?

  Yes

Overall, the plan is ambitious given the volume and quality of interventions that are present. Whilst the life challenges of students remain high, the university is committed to offering a high volume of support to enable students to be able to choose the level of engagement they want to exert.

The main challenge with assessing any 'ambition' within programmes is the volume of analyses required to evidence that an intervention is effective. The administration of this can limit the ambition of any university APP. As a Students' Union, we would like to move towards models that encourage universities to explore and feel they can adopt APP's and interventions that are already evidenced to be effective (whether in research, existing analyses, or simply backed by appropriate academic studies such as in the fields of Education or Psychology) without the added administration of proving the each and every one valuable. However, we do still feel that appropriate data analyses and simplified assessments of engagement can support universities to determine whether they are effective, which we feel UWL continues to do.

- Your university or college has engaged you effectively in the design of its access and participation plan?

Yes, as noted in earlier responses.

The university has invited the SU to be part of the design of APP – this has included the SU's Head of Membership who has a direct supporting role in the ideas and the creation of the 'transition' stages. Student feedback and ideas have been specifically taken on board and adopted as part of the APP, including our SU Education Officer's buddy scheme as a new intervention.

The university's APP group meets approximately once a month where the SU and Education Officer give updates and feedback to the rest of the university departments on their APP initiatives and plans. Insights are shared from all other student leadership areas, such as school reps, course reps and society committee members. The Equality Champions' network's feedback is also consistently communicated, and the impact of the feedback can be evidenced to have supported the new plan

- You have confidence that your university or college will involve the student body appropriately in the delivery and evaluation of the access and participation plan?

Yes

As the plan revolves around interventions, data driven analysis and transitions, the involvement of the student body is necessary to its success. This co-creation approach is supported through the various student networks and data used, in particular the Equality Champions. Other data sets used to determine the APP's success include the Big Conversation survey (which consistently captures the views and support requested from approximately 70% of every new student that starts University); outreach data; response to departmental reports and SU reports; and student staff reporting in SU and UWL roles.

We are confident that the university will continue to engage with the SU and invite us to be part of the conversation moving forwards with APP. This is evidenced within the robustness of the interventions, and that the specific membership structures of key academic boards and committees which continue include the SU as part of the membership.

The SU will be involved in the review of the APP toolkit and delivering a mentoring activity via the 'Buddy Scheme' on the success indicator, to address risks to equality related to a sense of acceptance, inclusion, identity and loneliness.

The SU will also continue to contribute to the lessons learned log to inform the University on what works and what needs improvement and will also continue to receive and comment on the interim and end of year evaluation reports developed by the University to evaluate how the plan is progressing.

The SU will continue to engage student Equality Champions in the review and design of work as a powerful way to ensure student voice is present in all of the work.

As further involvement, we would encourage the university to enhance its engagement with student networks and societies more, as they can be useful avenues to assess how particular communities may respond to APP initiatives or new programmes. Whilst engagement across campus in terms of attendance and within student networks and societies has declined since COVID, the SU plans to re-establish these as one of its focuses moving into the academic year 2024-2025. We anticipate that there will be better engagement with APP if condensed into simpler, easier to understand concepts where they support the delivery in a way that feels tangible.

How do you think your student body will hold your university or college to account for the delivery of their plan?

Through the student leadership and representation systems, there are multiple ways that students can give their views on existing services and programmes related to APP. Last year the University was recognised as the number one university in the country for student voice (by average of NSS questions related to student voice, excluding specialist institutions), and TEF Gold recipients for student experience, demonstrating the positive perspective of how UWL students feel about their voices being heard. Should students have concerns with anything related to APP (or more likely, any particular services or interventions within APP) they are ordinarily captured through our student voice processes. These include a sector-leading course rep scheme (with 96% of all courses represented); formal and anonymous university complaints routes; analyses of MES and NSS feedback and free questions which is shared with the SU; and overall department and student feedback.

The SU are represented in the APP Group and in all UWL committees where APP updates are presented.

We also have a strong relationship with the university professionally, driven by our critical friend approach. This has been developed by key SU staff members over the course of the last 10 years, and has enabled us to be respected and influential in the space.

We would like the university to consider how it can publish its APP to the student body in a format that is student-friendly and condensed. As policy documentation is not something we expect students to be aware, fully understand or desirable to engage with, we feel there could be a branding exercise for the university to give more insight to the wider student body on what they are currently undertaking. This would create feedback opportunities and we would advise that any publications focus on which parts of the APP tangibly affect students the most, particularly the specific interventions offered in student support.

Do you anticipate any negative outcomes will arise as a result of your university or college's new plan and any change in focus of their planned activities?

No negative outcomes expected

We feel that with new interventions proposed, there will be some that through a trial process, may not be as successful as others, but this is to be expected. Overall, the APP has a good and understandable rationale across its entirety.

Is there anything else the student body would like to add about access and participation at your university or college?

Overall, we feel that the relationship that UWL and UWLSU hugely contributes to the success of all major university plans, including the APP. There is a sense of a shared culture where there is an understanding that the SU is a valuable team and is able to be the critical friend of the university - balancing the abilities to support university initiatives we feel are beneficial to students, but also to appropriately challenge areas we feel the university can do more. The mutual respect and knowledge sharing that is required for this, is something that we feel is quite unique in the sector - a large reason why we have confidence in the university's approach to access and participation.

We also feel that the university and Students' Union new strategies align well, creating a sense of a collective approach to key areas such as student wellbeing, attainment and employability. We hope to continue to enhance the standard of good co-creation and collaboration throughout the duration of this APP

What do you think worked well, and what suggestions for improvement do you have for the OfS regarding the student submission process, materials and support?

The overall process is easy to understand – the main challenge is the administration or creating a submission that we feel is meaningful and evidence-based. It may perhaps be beneficial to consider submissions in interview or spoken format, so that the explanations of key concepts could be communicated in a way that was more time effective – although we feel this could be supported by a shorter written process that outlines the main principles of how the SU and students are involved.

We would also suggest that the outcomes of this review are more widely shared in student-friendly language, in similar ways where schools can market their OFSTED scores that are easier for students to resonate with. Perhaps a campaign that directly informs student populations (that could be shared with SU's to present) of the overarching view of the OfS as to what they think of the university APP's, could engage wider students in the interest of lobbying and advocating for further interventions.

Are you happy to be contacted by the OfS?

Please check the boxes if you are happy for us to get in touch:

☒ To provide further information about this submission, if necessary?

☒ About your experience as a student contact to support improvements to our future guidance and support for students and their university and colleges?

Thank you for your student submission.