

Lancaster Success Programme

OVERVIEW OF 2020/21

MATTHEW PAWELSKI – EVALUATION AND IMPACT OFFICER

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY | Social Mobility and Student Success



Introduction

The Lancaster Success Programme (LSP) is an initiative designed to offer targeted support, assistance and development for students from key widening participation (WP) backgrounds in their journey through Higher Education (HE) at Lancaster University.

It is now entering its third year and despite the extraordinary challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020/21 represented yet another successful and highly productive year, which significantly progressed the programme from its pilot year in 2019/20.

This document offers an overview of findings which can be read alongside the more detailed analysis found in the *Annual Review* document (contact author for access). Evidence was drawn from the LSP's own evaluations combined with university- and sector-level data to assess its impact on student participants on the programme.

Measures of Success

Defining success is critical to understanding impact and informing what evidence is sought and how it is measured.

From its inception, the LSP has had three clearly defined aims, which align with wider university and national widening access strategies, these are to improve retention, attainment and progression rates among key target student groups on the LSP. The programme also has a series of more refined outcomes, they are: to enhance the pre-arrival experience; to enhance the student experience; to

empower students to identify and enhance their strengths in order to plan for the future; and to assist students to feel part of a community.

These aims and outcomes underpin the entire programme, informing both its design and evaluation. At its core is the idea that the LSP should empower rather than direct students, to build confidence, independence and resilience and help them achieve their goals and reach their potential.

Methods of Evaluation

The LSP deploy a variety of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods to collate evidence and feedback on the impact of the various elements of the programme. These include initial and end of year surveys; post-event surveys; online feedback collated via MS Teams and social media; engagement or participation statistics; financial data; and macro-level data (particularly for retention, attainment and progression rates).

These distinct forms of evaluation are conducted for each intervention (see further page 2) and in each case reports are produced by members of the Student Success team. The findings have informed the contents of the *Annual Review* and this *Overview* document.

At the outset of the LSP a *Theory of Change* model was devised (contact author for access) which has informed the model or approach to evaluation just outlined and which ensures the evaluation links through to the programme's stated aims and outcomes.

OUTCOMES OF THE LSP

Outcome 1: to enhance the pre-arrival experience.

Outcome 2: to enhance the student experience.

Outcome 3: to empower students to identify and enhance their strengths in order to plan for the future.

Outcome 4: to assist students to feel part of a community.

As the LSP continues to evolve and adapt so too will these methods of evaluation with several areas for improvement already highlighted by the findings from 2020/1 – for more discussion of this see *Annual Review* and below.

OVERVIEW OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

- **138** active participants on the LSP in 2020/1
- **62** students returning for their second year (a retention rate of 91%)
- **105** new applicants (not accounting for drop-off)
- **69%** of participants from low income families; **53%** first in family; and **20%** mature students
- **40** students meeting **3 or more WP criteria**.

Numbers on the LSP

The LSP's 2020/1 cohort grew in line with projected figures devised at the outset of the programme in 2019/20. A total of 167 students applied to partake in the LSP in Michaelmas term 2020 – 62 students returning from 2019/20 and 105 new applicants from first-year students – of these around 138 went on to become 'active participants,' which means they partook in more than one LSP activity.

The majority engaged with the one-to-one personal development meetings (PDMs) though many also participated in other activities, such as the workshops and Action Learning Sets (ALS).

Around 32% of students on the LSP came from FASS departments; 35% from FST departments; 17% of students from LUMS; and no students from LMS.

Data also suggests that the LSP continues to target key WP groups, though there were some observed changes in the distribution of individual criteria. In 2020/1, 69% of students came from low income families, 53% were first in family to attend university, and 20% were mature students. There was an observed drop in the proportion of students from BAME, declared disability, mental health, and free school meal backgrounds, though these remain high in comparison with university-level statistics. Over 40 students from the 2020/1 cohort met 3 or more WP criteria, while the same figure was 29 for the 2019/20 cohort.

Widening Participation criteria of LSP students.

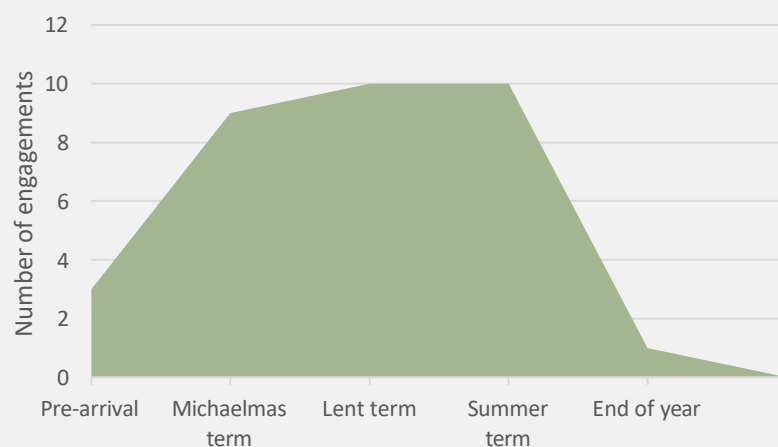
Criteria	2019/20	2020/21
Low Income	42%	69%
Low Participation Neighbourhood	31%	27%
1st in Family	61%	53%
Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME)	34%	26%
Declared Disability	13%	3%
Mental Health, SPLD, Autism	24%	9%
Free School Meals	13%	7%
Pupil Premium	2%	7%
Estranged	3%	5%
Refugee/Asylum Seeker	2%	1%
Caring responsibilities	0	5%
Military family	3%	1%
Mature student	16%	20%

Features of the LSP

The LSP organises a range of interventions over the course of the academic year, some like the Prepare for Lancaster Day and Workshops are one-off discreet interventions that occur at specific points in the calendar. Others such as the PDMs, ALSs and Online Community are sustained over the course of the entire year and represent regular points of contact and support for students.

2020/1 saw the introduction of some new interventions (the ALS and Buddy Scheme), while others were expanded (the number of workshops increased from 1 to 6, the funding allocated for the Enrichment Fund increased, and the number of PDMs almost doubled). Of the new introductions the ALSs have proven a success, while the Buddy Scheme faltered due to a lack of take up. Likewise, other elements such as the Newsletter and Workshops struggled to sustain interest.

Distribution of engagements over the course of the academic year



LSP engagements	Description
Pre-arrival communications and materials	Email correspondence with potential/interested candidates for the LSP
Prepare for Lancaster day	Orientation/welcome event designed to give students an introduction to the university, its facilities and support systems.
One-to-one personal development meetings (PDM)	A series of regular meetings organised twice a term with students to offer mentorship, ongoing guidance and support, and to help coach students in effective learning and organisational strategies.
Student Advocate and Staff-Student Committees	A committee devised to offer students the opportunity to feedback on the support provided by the LSP and to pilot proposed changes prior to implementation.
Workshops and group events	Organised regularly to provide targeted support and mentorship related to key challenges that students face over the course of the academic year.
Action Learning Sets	A series of targeted student-led peer support sessions organised on a termly basis with a staff facilitator to help students address specific challenges and support one another in their educational journeys.
Buddy scheme	A scheme of pairing students to provide support, companionship and mentorship commenced in response to student feedback at Student Advocate meetings. <i>(Discontinued)</i>
Focus Groups	An opportunity for groups of students to provide more detailed feedback on various features of the LSP and to share their experiences of studying at Lancaster and being part of the Programme. <i>(Discontinued)</i>
Enrichment fund	A fund designed to help students access resources critical to their education (eg. computers, study materials and other wellbeing related support).
Newsletter	Circulated each term offering information regarding opportunities, support services and a timetable of events/initiatives hosted by the LSP.
Online community	Organised via Microsoft Teams and Facebook this community offers a place for students to interact, socialise and seek support where required.

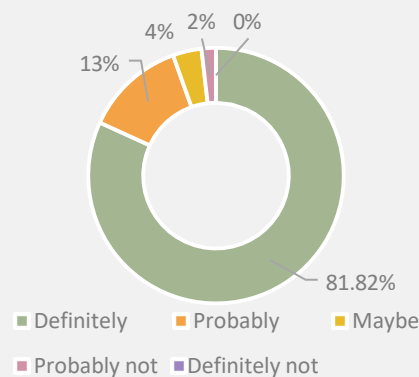
Perceptions of the LSP

When asked 82% of respondents to the end of year survey felt that being part of the LSP had 'enhanced their time at Lancaster.' By far the most popular element of the LSP were the PDMs 96% of students named it as their 'most' or 'second most' useful feature of the programme. The second most popular was the enrichment fund which was named as first or second choice by 53% of participants, followed by ALSs with 26% and Prepare for Lancaster Day with 12%.

The PDMs remain the flagship of the LSP. Around 91% of participants who signed up to the programme attended at least one meeting, with a total of 476 meetings organised over the course of the academic year. 95% of participants expressed feeling happy with the support it offered, and many commented on goal setting, confidence building and time management as key aspects they found particularly useful. The enrichment fund represents another important aspect with a total of £13,329 worth of grants distributed (compared with £9,174 in 2019/20) and applications totalling 252. The ALSs represented another successful addition to the programme with all of the respondents to the survey (30) stating that they found them useful and really helped them tackle some of the challenges they faced.

The other elements, while not achieving the same level of popularity were still considered effective in their own ways.

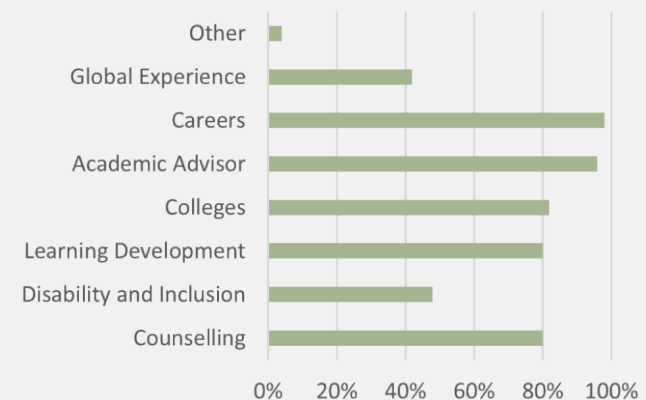
Has being a member of the LSP enhanced your time at Lancaster?



Signposting support services

- **+29%** of respondents to the end of year survey knew about the different support services provided by Lancaster University compared with the start of the year.
- **+18%** reported feeling confident to seek out student support compared with the start of the year.
- **88%** of students on the LSP stated that they either 'definitely' or 'probably' knew which support service to contact if they had a problem.
- **38%** felt they knew 'a lot' about the student support services.

Which Lancaster University student support service have you heard of:



Impact of the LSP

Retention and attainment

The use of retention and attainment rates as measures of success for WP activity have become firmly established in HE. Both measures feature in the guidance from the Office for Students, the Lancaster University and UK-wide Access and Participation Plan (APP), the WPAG funding policy documents and in the aims of the LSP.

Despite this neither measure offers a perfect account of the impact of discreet WP activity given the plethora of external factors that can influence macro-level changes in retention and attainment, these include: government policy, changes in educational practice, new assessment criteria or methods, changes in learning context and alterations in the composition of different student cohorts (all of which have featured in 2020/1 due to the extraordinary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic).

<i>Non-completion rates among LSP students</i>			
Year of Entry	Number of Students	Total non-completions	% Non-completions
Comparator Group¹ (UK UG 'BTEC' and mixed qualification students (<u>years of entry 13/14 to 20/21</u>), Law, LUMSUG Office and SCC, not necessarily WP).	886	159	18.4%
19/20 (predominantly 'BTEC' or mixed qualification students, predominantly Law, LUMSUG Office and SCC, all WP)	68	6	8.8%
Comparator Group 2 (UK UG 'BTEC' and mixed qualification students (<u>2020/1 only</u>) Law, LUMSUG Office and SCC, not necessarily WP).	131	10	7.6%
20/1 (Same departments as 19/20 with addition of Sociology)	79	3	3.8%

¹ For method of calculating original comparator group, see: B. Edwards, *Lancaster Success Programme (LSP): 2019/20 Evaluation Report*, pp. 36-7.

Even so, an attempt has been made using the data collated by the Student Success team and a control group comprising students from similar backgrounds but who were not subscribed to the LSP. The results are shown in the tables below. As can be seen, the biggest impact attributable to the LSP is the marked improvement in retention rate, in 2020/1 with just 3.8% of LSP students with BTEC qualifications not completing their year of study versus an average of 7.6% for the comparator group. Attainment was more difficult to assess. Overall grades improved by 11.32%, but this was not as large as the increase for non-LSP BTEC students of 12%.

Retention and attainment rates at Lancaster are improving across the board (due both to the wider educational context discussed above and to active improvements implemented by the University) and so teasing out the impact of the LSP within this wider context is difficult. Some illustration of these broader trends is also given by average 1st year entry grades which have increased across the board and by a sizeable margin, when 2019/20 and 2020/1 cohorts are compared (see table below).

<i>Change in average mark between years 1 and 2 for 2019/20 cohort.</i>				
Year of Entry	Number of students	Average Year 1 mark	Average Year 2 mark	Percentage improvement
19/20 LSP BTEC students	20	13.52	15.05	+11.32%
19/20 Non-LSP BTEC students	104	13.26	14.85	+12%

<i>Average 1st year entry grade 2019/20 and 2020/1</i>					
Year	All LSP students	Student with BTEC LSP	Students with BTEC Non LSP	UK students LSP	UK students non-LSP
19/20	14.27	13.87	13.46	14.40	15.61
20/21	15.44	14.57	14.45	15.37	16.16
Change	+1.17	+0.69	+0.99	+0.97	+0.55

Development of skills and confidence

One of the main objectives of the LSP is 'to empower students to identify and enhance their strengths in order to plan for the future.' To explore the extent to which this was achieved students were asked to self-assess their capability in several key areas at the beginning and end of the year, these were: reflection, resilience, teamwork, communication, digital skills and global awareness.

The findings were perhaps not quite what was expected. Broadly speaking students had a very high estimation of their competency in all areas except resilience on arrival at university. Their average score was 8 out of 10 at the beginning of the year compared with 7.6 by the end, with high scores of 9.5 for reflection and 8.5 for communication and digital skills. In contrast, by the end of the year they scored these skills 7.92, 7.42 and 7.5 respectively. The reason for these results may lie in the wording of the questions. As presently assessed these questions only tell us the students' relative awareness of their ability in certain areas, not their absolute improvement in competency. As a student becomes more knowledgeable of an area, such as digital skills or communication, it is perfectly possible that their perception of their relative capability will drop.

A key learning from the report is to continue to hone evaluative methods to assess student competency in these key areas, which might involve integrating competency tests and more direct questions that address key skills development in the initial and end of year surveys.

A more effective set of questions were directed toward students' development in academic skills and competency. Students were asked directly whether the LSP had helped improve their performance in academic work, their approach to academic challenges, and their awareness of who the key points of contact were in their department. In each of these areas the overwhelming majority responded positively (see table below).

Again, such direct questions, while more likely to engender the responses desired, do not necessarily tell us a great deal about the way that the LSP has empowered students. A principal recommendation of this report is to do a full review of evaluation practices deployed by the LSP in preparation for future years.

For more detailed analysis of these and other recommendations, please see the full *Annual Review* document.

Sentiment	Statement		
	I feel more confident about academic work now than at the beginning of the year:	The LSP contributed to my academic approach and performance this year:	I know who the key contacts are in my academic departments:
Strongly agree	44%	50%	56%
Somewhat agree	40%	40%	28%
Neither agree or disagree	10%	6%	8%
Somewhat disagree	4%	2%	8%
Strongly disagree	2%	2%	0%

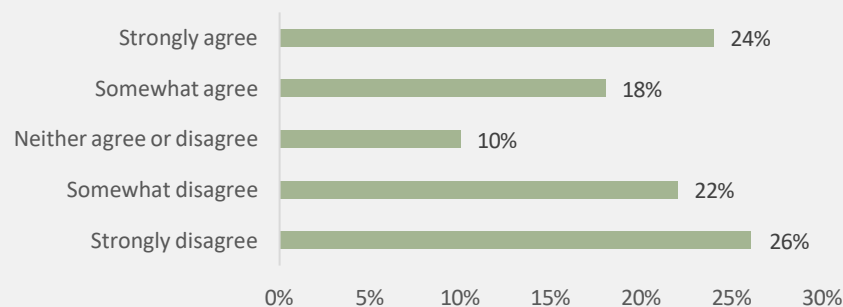
Sense of community

Another key objective of the LSP is to help nurture a sense of community among student participants on the programme. Given the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the disruption caused to in-person teaching and socialising this objective has arguably never been more important or difficult to achieve.

Overall, students have struggled to feel connected to the university, meet new people and develop a sense of belonging. Evidence from evaluation suggests that for a large portion of the participants the LSP offered a place to connect and build lasting relationships. Of those surveyed 42% felt they got to know other members of the LSP, 10% responded neutrally and 48% responded negatively.

Though these figures could have been better, given the exceptional circumstances of 2020/1, helping just under half of student participants to meet others and make new friends while relying entirely on online media represents an achievement albeit one tempered by the awareness that over half of participants struggled to engage.

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



Conclusion

The LSP continues to offer a valuable and impactful service to students from underrepresented groups. It's mission, articulated through the stated aims and outcomes and in its *ToC*, remain deeply embedded in everything the LSP do and in each related area there have been positive developments and demonstrable impacts. The LSP has had particular success in developing a culture of personal growth and self-improvement among its participants. Students are encouraged through the PDMs, ALSs and Workshops to devise effective strategies to overcome challenges and to improve their skills and competencies in key areas. The evaluation conducted by the LSP shows that these efforts have had an overwhelmingly positive impact on students' experiences of university life. This has been realised in observable improvements in retention and attainment among LSP students (though as explained there are limitations in the data) and through the responses to internal evaluation conducted by the coordinators on the LSP.

The LSP is now entering its third year, which from the perspective of evaluation is a critically important year. It will see the first cohort of students complete their undergraduate degrees and it is also the first year in which all years of undergraduate study are represented with participants totalling 269 (49 third-year students; 81 second-years; and 139 first-years). The challenges faced in 2020/1 were in many ways unique, but the Covid-19 pandemic has not yet been fully resolved. If many of the lessons from this year can be applied, then the LSP will be better placed to overcome any future disruptions to ordinary practice. Evaluation plays a critical role in the development of this resilience as well as demonstrating the incredible impact the LSP has on students. It is important then for the LSP to maintain the high standards of evaluation it currently upholds and where possible to continue to make adaptations to ensure it is capturing the most relevant and valuable information possible.