

Evaluating a teacher-focused widening participation intervention as part of a broader evaluation framework; methodological development and preliminary findings (0296)

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Abstract (150 word summary)

This methodological paper describes the development of the evaluation of a teacher-focused intervention designed to widen participation in HE for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Data collection and analysis is ongoing and preliminary findings will be presented. The evaluation is part of a larger research project, the Sutton Trust Research and Evaluation Framework, which aims to monitor and evaluate the impact of a number of interventions. Teacher summer schools offer residential training to teachers with the aim of increasing attendance at research intensive universities for disadvantaged students. As part of the framework, we also track applications to a student summer school programme and will report on whether engagement with the teacher intervention affects applications to the student intervention. We present geographical mapping of the reach and impact of the programme. The evaluation also includes surveys and interview-based case studies; we present initial survey findings and discuss the developing evaluation methodology.

Research outline (max 1,000 words)

Our research centre has received a grant from the Sutton Trust to develop a Common Research and Evaluation Framework for a number of their programmes. The Sutton Trust¹ is an organisation which funds a number of access and widening participation programmes that aim to increase social mobility. This research evaluation uses a range of methods, such as programme observations and focus groups, measures of educational attainment, longitudinal tracking of students through administrative datasets, attitudinal, aspiration and demographic survey data, and the utilisation of publicly available school and LA level data.

A key reason for developing an evaluation framework is the opportunity it provides to bring together data from different programmes; both in linking data to ascertain whether programmes impact on one another, and in drawing comparisons between programmes.

Engagement with teachers as promoters of access and widening participation for HE is a growing area of interest, especially as teachers are often best placed to help identify and engage students who would benefit most from outreach programmes and meet targeting criteria. There are also potential cost efficiencies as a single teacher can impact upon a large number of students. These considerations have been important in designing our evaluation of the Sutton Trust Teacher Summer Schools and linking it with evaluation of the student summer schools programme.

1 <http://www.suttontrust.com/>

The Teacher Summer Schools were launched in 2014 at three universities in collaboration with the Sutton Trust (expanding to eight in 2015) in England and Scotland. They offer subject-specific residential training to teachers, with the central aim of increasing the number of low- and middle-income young people, particularly from the poorest schools and communities, studying at research intensive universities. The teacher summer schools are therefore targeted at teachers from schools and colleges with low educational attainment, progression to HE, and low progression to the 'top third' of HEIs (as defined by Department for Education league tables). In 2014 teachers from 161 schools took part in the programme and in 2015 this will increase to around 400 schools.

An objective of the teacher summer schools is to increase engagement with another Sutton Trust programme, UK student summer schools, particularly from students meeting multiple eligibility criteria. With two years of data collection, we are able to begin preliminary investigation into the impact of the teacher summer school attendance on applications to UK student summer schools.

Linking teacher summer school data from 2014 with students' data from 2015 we will discuss initial findings related to:

- Changes in 2015 student application rates from schools where a teacher has attended a teacher summer school
- Where student applications have been made from these schools, how closely applicants have met the eligibility criteria
- Where a number of student applications have been made from a school, the number of successful applications

We will also present geographical illustration of the reach of the teacher summer school programme and associated student summer school participation. Both interventions cover all travel costs for participants, but mapping of participant location in relation to the institution they engage with demonstrates that local patterns of participation remain. We will illustrate whether students are more likely to apply to their nearest summer school institution, and the same institution the teacher attended.

This mixed methods evaluation also involves surveys of teachers. Sutton Trust teacher summer schools provide a unique opportunity to engage with and survey teachers from around the UK. In 2014 we trialled a baseline and post-programme survey to investigate teachers' attitudes and understanding of HE, and their understanding and opinions on students' transitions between different levels of education and careers. We have repeated a version of this survey in 2015, delivered at post-event and follow-up. We will discuss whether this approach has improved response rates and information quality. A number of items within the teacher survey have 'parallel' items in student surveys used on other programmes in the framework, some of which are also used in national longitudinal surveys. We will discuss the similarities and differences between student and teacher responses.

In 2015/16 surveys will be followed up with interviews of a purposive sample of respondents. Surveys will ask about the changes that teachers hope to make following the intervention, and a follow-up survey at six months will ask teachers to reflect on how successfully they have been able to make these changes. Interviews will be conducted with a sample those who feel they have been particularly successful or unsuccessful and we will attempt to achieve variety in the range of factors that have influenced this. By December initial survey results will be available and we will discuss emerging themes and the developing methodology for follow-up interviews, along with further future directions and outcomes for the research.

There are increasing calls for robust evaluation in widening participation practice; for example the joint national strategy from OFFA, HEFCE and BIS (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014) calls for a “national evaluation framework of common measures and effective evaluation practice”. The research presented here, utilising common measures and other links between programmes under evaluation, is well-placed to inform this developing agenda.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2014). *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London.