

Attainment Raising: A Toolkit

Introduction and background

Evidence shows that academic achievement is the most important predictor of university progression, and also that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower attainment, and therefore reduced access to higher education (HE). The Office for Students (OfS) has recently asked Uni Connect partnerships and their HE partners to do more to raise the academic attainment of pupils through access and participation activities. This toolkit is intended to help them to do so. It was produced by Ceri Nursaw in partnership with Causeway Education. It focusses on engagement with schools, attainment raising for pupils in Year 7-11, and interventions which have proved to be impactful.

Key points

Needs analysis: understanding attainment gaps and developing a strategic plan

- The Education Policy Institute (EPI) produces an annual report on education in England highlighting national attainment gaps. Key findings from their 2020 report are outlined below.
- At secondary school, by the time they take their GCSEs, disadvantaged pupils (those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years) are 18.1 months of learning behind their peers. There are also widening gaps for some ethnic groups including Black Caribbean.
- The attainment gap at GCSE persists across all subject areas – it is highest in music and physical education. English (16.2) and mathematics (17.5) have largest disadvantage gaps compared to other subjects.
- There are also significant regional gaps with the largest in Blackpool, Knowsley, Plymouth, Derby, Reading, South Gloucestershire, Portsmouth, Peterborough, and Sheffield.
- All Uni Connect partnerships have access to a tracker service (HEAT, EMWPREP, or Aim higher West Midlands). The tracker services use publicly available data, such as school performance data, alongside information from the national pupil database. This is also combined with geo-demographic data such as TUNDRA and POLAR. The tracker databases can provide school-level information on Key Stage 4 exam results alongside other factors such as free school meal take up, or Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).
- HEIs can also use the Fischer Family Trust 'Schools Like Yours' dataset which has information on Key Stage 4 performance alongside pupil and school characteristics. This data helps HEs to identify local schools which can be prioritised for interventions.
- Progress 8 measures students' performance across 8 GCSEs or equivalent qualifications in order to see how students in one school have progressed in comparison to similar students in other schools. HEIs should also consider schools' Progress 8 schools when deciding where to target their resources.
- The Coverage Dataset shows the number of outreach providers that have delivered in each school for the last three years. This will enable HEIs to consider how their programme can contribute.
- Having identified the schools with which they may wish to work, HEIs can then work with these schools to further refine and develop their needs analysis.
- For strategic planning to be of value, HEIs must be intentional, clear, and pragmatic. Three questions need to be considered. Why are we doing this? How will we do it? Who will do it?
- The toolkit provides an example of a well-focussed strategic plan as follows. 1) Support 12 teachers to develop their classroom strategies to raise attainment in mathematics, achieving 2 months progression improvements by end of year 1 of delivery. 2) Deliver an academic summer school in July 2023 to 50 students resulting in greater confidence in effective learning and study skills.

Delivery models

- HEIs may choose to opt for self-delivery of a programme, to engage with higher education or further education providers who deliver the programme, or to commission external providers, including charities, to deliver it. Each model has pros and cons. These models can be combined.
- The delivery model which an HEI chooses will be determined by its objectives and resources. It should aim to build a sustainable programme which maximises resources.
- When planning delivery, an HEI should consider the capacity in its own team and that of its partners. They should identify gaps and consider external factors that are not under their control and internal factors which are.

Activities and interventions

- There is a growing body of evidence showing that university based interventions have an impact on pupils' attitudes and attainment.
- The Education Endowment Foundation suggest that summer schools can provide up to 4 months' progress. Recent analysis conducted by TASO (June 2022) suggests that participation in summer schools is



associated with higher GCSE grades and progression to higher education. To be effective, the activities need to be intensive, well-resourced, and involve small group tuition by trained staff.

- Attendance and recruitment remain problematic for summer schools. TASO's recent review of summer schools found that there may be a need for higher education providers to 'better target ... disadvantaged and underrepresented students' as they found many on the summer schools already saw higher education as a probable path.
- Patel and Bowes (2021) in their evaluation of Uni Connect found a positive correlation between summer schools and improvement in maths and English attainment as compared to predicted grades. They also found evidence that summer schools support the development of self-efficacy and interpersonal skills.
- The Sutton Trust (2011) found that 'for poor pupils the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is a whole year's learning'. There is additional research which supports this statement. It therefore makes sense for higher education providers to improve teacher quality by supporting the key characteristics of high quality teaching and running activities which support teacher retention.
- The Education Endowment Foundation has set up a network of Research Schools which share best practice and focus on the use of evidence-based teaching. Higher education providers may be able to set up similar collaborations using their research knowledge to support the implementation of new approaches.
- The Education Endowment Toolkit found that metacognition and self-regulation approaches have consistently high levels of impact, with pupils making an average of seven months' additional progress. Metacognitive strategies can, amongst other things, enable pupils to set goals and monitor their progress, identify effective learning strategies, and transfer knowledge from one context to another.
- Tutoring is a key intervention which is often offered by HEIs. The Education Endowment Fund found that one to one tuition can be effective, reporting that it delivers approximately 5 additional months progress on average. Quality of tuition is the critical factor. From the Education Endowment Fund's review of the literature, short, regular sessions (about 30 minutes, 3 to 5 times a week) over a set period (6 to 12 weeks) are most effective.
- Importantly for higher education providers, one to one tuition involving volunteers has been shown to have a valuable impact, but it can be less effective than using experienced and specifically trained teachers, who have nearly twice the effect on average. Where tuition is delivered by volunteers or teaching assistants there is evidence that training and the use of a structured programme is advisable.
- Resnjanskij et al (2021) found that a structured tutoring programme had significant positive effects on the educational attainment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Importantly, it also found that the qualitative factors of the mentor-mentee relationship mattered more for the effectiveness of the programme than the intensity of the sessions.
- The Access Project (described below) has yielded encouraging results. For GCSE tutored subjects, pupils made up to 5 months of extra progress. At A level, they made 3 months of extra progress.

- Mentoring programmes which have a clear structure and expectations, provide training and support for mentors, and use mentors from a professional background are associated with more successful outcomes.
- Bayer et al (2013) found that pupils who developed a close relationship with a mentor had better academic outcomes. Those pupils who were mentored but did not experience a close relationship showed no improvement. They also found that there is no evidence that mentoring programmes with an academic focus produced better academic outcomes than relationship-only programmes. It is therefore the mentor-mentee relationship which is key.

Emerging practice

- The toolkit provides examples of emerging practice for the areas outlined above, some of which are detailed below.
- The Urban Summer School at Brunel university offers a Saturday school for students aged 12-18 which provides research-based supplementary education. The programme works with 31 schools and 300 scholars, of which 250 students are drawn from 8 local authorities.
- The Teacher University Research Network (TURN) at Lancaster University brings together teachers in schools and colleges with academic and professional services staff at the University to offer training and development opportunities.
- King's College London's 'King's Scholars' programme works with 13 local schools and engages 900 pupils in Years 7-9 each year. Its primary aim is to raise attainment by teaching metacognition.
- The Access Project offers a comprehensive programme from Year 10 to Year 13, involving 20 or more hours of one-to-one academic tutoring per year in the subject the student needs most.
- Sheffield University works with local schools to identify young people who can benefit from mentoring support. Each student mentor is placed in a partner school/college and matched with 4-6 mentees. Each weekly one-to-one session lasts 30 minutes in school/college but outside of the classroom environment.

Evaluation

- Evaluation should be considered alongside a provider's strategic planning and the design and implementation of activities.
- Support for evaluation approaches will be published in autumn 2022 by TASO.
- Evaluations should consider the OfS Standards of Evidence which place evidence in one of 3 categories. Narrative evidence is when an impact evaluation provides a narrative or a coherent theory of change to motivate its selection of activities. In an empirical enquiry approach, the impact evaluation collects data on impact and reports evidence that those receiving an intervention have better outcomes, though does not establish any direct causal effect. Causality is when the impact evaluation methodology provides evidence of a causal effect of an intervention.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0969594X.2022.2121680>